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Realist conceptualisations of power and the nation-state

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The University of Edinburgh
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a project of intellectual history which focuses on the development of notions of power and the nation-state in realist thought. The main aim of the thesis is to offer a comprehensive account of how different conceptions of power in the work of various realist thinkers influence their perceptions of the nation-state. Although both power and the state are considered as central to realism, their connection has not been adequately discussed and remains largely implicit. The thesis aims at illuminating such a connection.

The authors under examination are both key realist thinkers and representative of the diversity of realist thought as well as of the development from classical to structural realism. As such, the thesis focuses on the works of E.H. Carr, H. Morgenthau (as classical realists), J. Herz (as a transitional figure) and J. Mearsheimer (as a structural realist). The thesis engages with each realist's theory in a three-step process. First, it analyses their conceptualisation of power and the role it plays in their ontological and epistemological assumptions. Then, using that conceptualisation of power as a starting point, it discusses its impact on the way the realist under examination understood the nation-state. Finally, the way the aforementioned realists engaged with the foreign policies of given nation-states is employed as an illustration of their theoretical framework.

The thesis identifies a close interplay between power and the nation-state in all realists examined. Power plays a central role in each realist's ontology and as such influences profoundly the way they conceptualised the nation-state. The latter can thus be approached as a manifestation of power which is unfixed in time. The realists examined approach the state as a historically conditioned entity. As such, it is argued that it is power that constitutes the core analytical category of realism rather than the state whose very conception is dependent upon that of power. In terms of the development of realism, a process of gradual narrowing down of the concept of power from classical to structural approaches is observed. The multifaceted conception of power advanced by early realists is abandoned in favour of an approach which understands power as material capabilities. While this approach is compatible with a scientific vision of politics as manifested after the second debate it

reduces significantly realism's analytical purchase both in understanding power and the nation-state. This is evident in the precarious balance that neorealists have to attain when theorising nationalism, the ideological corollary of the nation-state, which can more fully be accounted for by classical realists. Finally, by removing power from the field of epistemology, structural variants of realism lack the reflexivity of earlier realists and as such find it difficult to engage in foreign policy debates without compromising the core assumptions of their theory.

The thesis is structured as follows: In the introduction, the thesis is put in the context of existing literature on realism and the way questions of power and the nation-state have been addressed in the past. Questions of methodology and selection of authors are also addressed in the introduction. The following four chapters are dedicated to analysing the theories of the selected realists. The concluding section summarises the findings and main argument of the thesis.

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Στη Ρούλα και τον Θανάση

Ευχαριστώ για όλα

INTRODUCTION

In his defence of realism against emerging tendencies in international theory in the 1990s, Colin Gray made special reference to the enduring legacy of the realist tradition. Such a tradition, and more specifically classical realism, he claimed, might look unattractive in the wake of the Cold War but this does not necessarily make it less accurate: “much that is apparently boring and old-fashioned happens also to be true, or true enough”.¹ It is the eternal truths of realism, he claimed, that can aid the student of international relations to avoid confusing what is ephemeral for what is lasting.² It is the interrelation of two concepts central to realism, one of them ephemeral and the other one lasting that this thesis seeks to elucidate. The lasting concept is that of power, while the ephemeral one is the nation-state.³ Of course the question of what is lasting and what is ephemeral does not necessarily have a straightforward answer, especially within the context of a diverse tradition like that of realism.

In the first part of this chapter, I will focus on the different ways that scholars in the field have tried to tackle the diversity of the realist tradition. I identify two broad approaches, one focusing on distilling a set of core assumptions common to all realists and one emphasising the complexity of the school and the contrasts between its different strands. While I do not aim to resolve the question of “what is realism” the discussion of such approaches is essential for answering the key question of the thesis. It is in the framework set by those two distinct attitudes that the discussion on realism and its core concepts currently happens. As such, the role of power and the nation-state in realism has been examined in the literature under both of the different lenses outlined. In the second section of the part I examine the different ways power

¹ C. Gray, “Clausewitz Rules, OK? The Future Is the past: With GPS” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, Special Issue, Dec 1999, pp. 161-182: p. 182

² Ibid. p. 164

³ The nation-state is for the purpose of this thesis understood as a distinctly modern manifestation of the sovereign state, one that is associated with nationalism. The differentiation between the nation and the state is essential since the two are distinct. Indeed, as Connor suggests, the very coining of the term ‘nation-state’ “illustrated an appreciation of the vital differences” between the two. As such the term ‘nation-state’ “was designed to describe a territorial-political unit (a state) whose borders coincided or nearly coincided with the territorial distribution of a national group”. W. Connor, “A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a...” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1978, pp. 377-400: p. 382.

and the nation-state have been conceptualised in literature on realism. In the third section, I identify the gap in the literature that I will try to address in the thesis and explain my approach to realism. I claim that rather than trying to fit realism within the narrow confines of a paradigm, it is more fruitful to approach it as a ‘family resemblance’.

The second part addresses issues of methodology and provides an outline of the thesis. More specifically, in the first section I explain my approach to intellectual history and the way it is applied in this thesis. I claim that an approach that focuses both on the text itself and its context is the most balanced way to address the question. In the second section I justify the selection of the key realist authors under examination, namely E.H. Carr, H. Morgenthau, J. Herz and J. Mearsheimer. The three criteria employed are that the authors under examination should be important for the realist tradition; representative of its development; and that said realists were willing to apply their theories to foreign policies pursued by specific states. Finally, in the third section, I will explain the structure of the thesis and offer an outline of the argument.

I. Realism, power and the state: the gap in the literature and the research question

Preliminary remarks: Approaching realism(s)

When John Mearsheimer responded to his critics in an article titled “the more –isms the better” he most probably did not have in mind more *real*-isms.⁴ Recent scholarship by and about realists abounds and there is a marked proliferation of realisms. Apart from the traditional categories of ‘classical’ and ‘structural’ realisms, the debate between ‘defensive’ and ‘offensive’ realists within the latter camp, or the introduction of ‘neoclassical’ realism, there is a continuing process of invention and

⁴ Mearsheimer was referring to –isms such as institutionalism and constructivism: J. Mearsheimer, “The more isms the better” in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2005, pp. 354-359

re-invention of new categories of realism.⁵ As a result, the same realist can be now classified under several, often overlapping, subcategories of realism.⁶ Fortunately the number of realist labels has not so far exceeded the number of realists available for categorisation, but the literature on realism has become vast. The necessity to somehow deal with what Gilpin, rather modestly, described as the ‘richness’ of realist tradition has triggered two main responses.⁷

Both reactions can be traced back to the period following the publication of Waltz’s seminal *Theory of International Politics* and his self-professed break with ‘classical realism’.⁸ One response was to try and distil a set of core assumptions, common to all realists, which can form the basis of a coherent realist tradition while glossing over the existing tensions.⁹ Various efforts to approach realism as a paradigm fall within this category. The number of core assumptions identified might vary from just one, namely power optimisation in the model forwarded by Fozouni, to several as displayed in the efforts of Vasquez, Legro and Moravcsik, Keohane and others.¹⁰

⁵ Writing in 2006, S. Molloy, counted a few realisms that could be added to the 49 already identified by J. Der Derian in an earlier work. Der Derian’s realisms were not all related to international relations, but given recent developments in the effort to recover older variants of realism the overall number has most likely further increased. S. Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: a Genealogy of Power Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 149-150. The term ‘neoclassical realism’ was introduced by G. Rose in a review of works by R. Schweller, F. Zakaria, W. Wohlforth and others to describe a variant of structural realism which integrates intervening variables at the domestic level. G. Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” in *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1998, pp. 144-172; for a summary of offensive vs defensive realism see: J. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy” in *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2000, pp. 128-161. Brooks attempted to introduce the label of ‘postclassical realism’ in 1997 which, however, has not gained significant traction. S. Brooks “Dueling Realisms” in *International Organisation*, Vol. 51, no. 3, 1997, pp. 445-477.

⁶ Indicatively, Carr apart from a ‘classical’ realist is also a ‘critical realist’ for Babik and Falk, a ‘progressive realist’ for Scheuerman, and a ‘utopian realist’ for Howe.

⁷ R. Gilpin, “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 301-321

⁸ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979. For the differences between his variant of realism and classical realism see: K. Waltz, “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory” in *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1990, pp. 21-37, *passim*

⁹ B. Buzan, C. Jones and R. Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 2-5

¹⁰ For Fozouni, the key tenet of realism as derived from Morgenthau’s work is the claim that “power optimisation is the *only* (i.e. a necessary and sufficient) determinant of international political behaviour”: B. Fozouni, “Confutation of Political Realism” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1995, pp. 479-510: p. 481. Vasquez, based also on Morgenthau, identifies nation-state centrism, distinction between domestic and international politics, and the identification of international politics as the domain of struggle for power and peace as the three main assumptions of the realist paradigm: J. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 52-59; J. Vasquez, “The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative Vs Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz’s Balancing Proposition” in *The American Political Science*

The second response was originally identified with early criticisms of neorealism such as the ones coming from R. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, who emphasised the differences between the two schools and, at least initially, represented a minority position.¹¹ R. Cox for instance attempted to recover a historicist realist tradition as represented by E.H. Carr and explore its affinities to critical theory as opposed to the gradual transformation of American realism to what he called a ‘problem-solving theory’.¹² Walker highlighted the tensions inherent in realism by focusing on the distinction between historicism and structuralism and in a similar fashion Ashley advocated a return to some of the insights offered by classical realists as part of a model that “would more than surpass neorealism”.¹³

This tendency was continued in the early 2000s perhaps even more successfully than previously due to the more favourable environment in IR theory by that time, as Steele claims, by a number of authors he described as “reflexive realists”.¹⁴ What unites authors like Lang, Lebow, Williams is for Steele their attempt to shift focus from the explanatory theories offered by neorealism or neoclassical realism and recover “classical realist principles of agency, prudence, and the recognition of limitations”.¹⁵ One could add here the various efforts in recent scholarship that aim at recovering important aspects of the thought of classical realists, often in direct

Review, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, pp. 899-912: p. 899. In response to the latter, despite emphasising the diversity in realism that Vasquez neglects, Walt also identifies some key assumptions that all realists subscribe to, namely state-centrism, international anarchy, and the centrality of power. S. Walt, “The Progressive Power of Realism” in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, pp. 931-935: pp. 932-933. Keohane’s three realist fundamental assumptions are similar to Walt but he substitutes anarchy for the rationality assumption. R. Keohane, “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 158-203: pp. 163-170. Legro and Moravcsik offer a version of the realist paradigm that comprises of three core assumptions: rational, unitary political units in anarchy, fixed and conflictual state goals, and primacy of material capabilities. J. W. Legro and A. Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” in *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1999, pp. 5-55: pp. 9-18. For a critical evaluation of paradigmatic approaches to realism see S. Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 15-34. For the responses to the argument proposed by Legro and Moravcsik see P. Feaver et al. “Brother, Can you Spare me a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody ever a Realist?)” in *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 165-193

¹¹ B. Buzan et al, *The Logic of anarchy*, pp. 3-5; J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 45

¹² R. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 204-254

¹³ R. Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 255-300: p. 297; R. Ashley. “Political Realism and Human Interests” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1981, pp. 204-236; R. B. J. Walker, “Realism, Change, and International Political Theory” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1987, pp. 65-86

¹⁴ B. J. Steele, “Eavesdropping on honoured ghosts’: From classical to reflexive realism” in *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2007, pp. 272-300: pp. 291-292

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 273

opposition to the main premises that are represented by contemporary realists. Revisionist historiography is not limited to realism but the latter is singled out as its main beneficiary.¹⁶ Some of those efforts concentrated on re-investigating neglected insights in the works of realists that by now are considered classics. The renewed interest on realists like Carr, Morgenthau and Herz which was displayed in monographs or edited volumes is an example of such efforts.¹⁷ Others are focused on recovering the contribution of classical realists in the study of specific themes. Here Scheuerman's work on realist visions of global reform and Molloy's challenge of the paradigmatic reading of realism come to mind.¹⁸ Finally, there are collective efforts that combine both approaches.¹⁹

Revisionist scholarship on realism certainly managed to reinterpret realism as "a sophisticated, albeit amorphous body of political thought" as Bell claims, but the recovery of this complexity comes at a cost.²⁰ If realism is indeed as amorphous as recent efforts have demonstrated and there are "nearly as many realisms as realist protagonists" as Guzzini claims, then the question arises whether it makes any sense to continue applying the label at all.²¹ Indeed some authors seem to believe that realism is in fact *too* rich for its own good. The general label 'realism', they claim, obscures so many differences that it would be preferable to abandon it altogether or use its categories very cautiously and only as starting points.²² In the following section, I will discuss how the key concepts for this thesis, power and the nation-state, have been understood by those two broad approaches.

¹⁶ D. Bell, "Writing the World: disciplinary history and beyond" in *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, 2009, pp. 3-22: pp. 6-8

¹⁷ For works on Carr and Herz, Ibid: p. 7; fn 16. For Morgenthau see indicatively M. Williams (ed), *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; W. E. Scheuerman *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009

¹⁸ W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, Cambridge: Polity, 2011; S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*

¹⁹ D. Bell (ed), *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. For a more recent attempt see the relevant special issue in *International Politics*: H. Behr and S. Molloy (eds) "Realism Reconsidered: New Contexts and Critiques" in *International Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2013, pp. 735-894

²⁰ D. Bell, "Writing the World", p. 7

²¹ S. Guzzini, *Power, Realism and Constructivism*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 111

²² W. Scheuerman, "The (classical) Realist vision of global reform" in *International Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2010, pp. 246-282

Power and the nation-state in the literature about realism

As mentioned in the previous section, even within the approach that tries to identify core elements of realism the identification of such elements varies from author to author. The examination of the core assumptions collected in paradigmatic readings of realism reveals that power is central to all of them and state-centrism to most.²³ As such, both concepts are considered central for the realist intellectual agenda for most of the relevant literature. In this section I offer a summary of the way power and the state have been approached in the existing literature. I claim that the concepts themselves are often theorised insufficiently in an effort to fit realism into a paradigmatic reading and examine how revisionist literature has contributed in forming a more nuanced approach. First, I examine the notion of power since this is present in virtually all secondary readings of realism. Second, I examine the assumption of state-centrism.

The concept of power has been associated with realism in IR for so long that the former is often interpreted as the exclusive domain of realism.²⁴ For some commentators it is precisely this centrality of power that accounts for the very “continuity of the realist tradition”.²⁵ Identifying power as the key element of realism poses, however, a problem for the coherence of the tradition due to the indeterminacy of the concept. Power is an essentially contested concept and, while Ringmar’s insistence that IR scholars are particularly prone to displaying a poor understanding of it based on intuition might have some merit, it does not imply that other fields of political science have managed to tackle the elusiveness of power conclusively.²⁶ A

²³ From the paradigmatic readings outlined above it is only Fouzouni who singles out power optimization as the core realist assumption whereas all other views include state-centrism in one form or another. See, *supra* fn. 10

²⁴ M. Barnett and R. Duvall, “Power in International Politics” in *International Organization*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2005, pp. 39-75: p. 40; F. Berenskoetter, “Thinking about power” in F. Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams (eds), *Power in World Politics*, London: Routledge, 2007, pp. 1-22: p. 1

²⁵ B. Buzan, “The timeless wisdom of realism?” in S. Smith, K. Booth, M. Zalewski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 47-65: p. 51; also see S. Molloy’s claim that the emphasis on power is perhaps the only thing that the paradigmatic reading of realism got right. S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 145-147; Williams too claims that “power is central to any understanding of realism”: M. Williams, *The realist tradition and the limits of international relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 6

²⁶ For power as an essentially contested concept see S. Lukes, “Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds: On the Bluntness of Soft Power” in F. Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams (eds), *Power in World Politics*, pp. 83-97:p. 83. Since Dahl’s attempt to define power the inadequacy of previous efforts to capture the elusive character of power is best demonstrated by the continuous addition of

second problem arises with placing power alone at the core of realism. Despite some authors' lamentations that realism's monopolisation of power is preventing other scholars from developing alternative discourses of power, the focus on power is not exclusive to realism.²⁷ As such, having not only an elusive concept at its core but also not uniquely so, can bring to question the distinctiveness and coherence of realism as a tradition.

The elusiveness of the concept of power often goes unnoticed in debates about its role in realist thought. Most of the debate about realist conceptions of power, and indeed most paradigmatic representations, focuses on the repetition of the idea that realists approach power in terms of material capabilities with a particular emphasis on military capabilities.²⁸ Furthermore, it is often associated with R. Dahl's famous formulation that "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do".²⁹ Indeed, if one summarises realist conceptualisations of power as "the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not", as Barnett and Duvall do, the connection between realism and Dahl's formulation seems natural.³⁰ Whilst the

'faces' to the concept. See R. A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power" in *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1957, pp 201-215; P. Bachrach and M. S. Baratz, "Two Faces of Power" in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 1962, pp. 947-952; S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; P. Digeser, "The Fourth Face of Power" in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 1992, pp. 977-1007. Yet the concept remains controversial and elusive. Lukes attributes the controversy around power to the fact that it is a 'primitive' concept i.e. a concept whose analysis would involve the utilisation of other also controversial concepts: S. Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds", p. 93. For Ringmar's claim that IR scholars possess poor understandings of power see: E. Ringmar, "Empowerment among nations: a sociological perspective" in F. Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams (eds), *Power in World Politics*, pp. 189-203: p. 190

²⁷ For the complaint that domination by realist conceptions of power hindered the development of alternatives see indicatively: F. Berenskoetter, "Thinking about power", p. 1; M. Barnett and R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics", pp. 40-42. There are however other approaches to international relations that are centred around power. Buzan mentions feminism and Marxism as other schools that focus on power: B. Buzan, "The timeless wisdom of realism?", p. 51. Power, albeit in its productive rather than coercive function, is also of cardinal importance for poststructuralism: A. Neal, "Michael Foucault" in J. Edkins and N. Vaughan-Williams (eds), *Critical theorists and international relations*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 161-170; J. Sterling-Folker and R. E. Shinko, "Discourses of power: traversing the realist-postmodern divide" in F. Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams (eds), *Power in World Politics*, pp. 244-264

²⁸ M. Barnett and R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics", p.40; J. W. Legro and A. Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?", pp. 16-18; D. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations" in W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse and B. Simmons (eds) *Handbook of International Relations*, London: Sage, 2013, pp. 273-297: *passim*; S. Guzzini, "The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations" in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 2004, pp. 533-568: pp. 535-538

²⁹ R. Dahl, "The Concept of Power", pp. 202-203

³⁰ M. Barnett and R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics", p. 40, pp. 49-51; F. Berenskoetter, "Thinking about power", pp. 47; E. Ringmar, "Empowerment among nations", pp. 190-191

connection of realism to Dahl is somewhat inaccurate and should not be overstated, the temptation to narrow down the concept of power in realism is understandable.³¹ In fact, some realists themselves have often contributed to this entrenchment by favouring conceptualisations of power that focus exclusively on material capabilities and their accurate measurement.³²

The diversity of realist conceptualisations of power, however, has not gone entirely unnoticed. Schmidt for instance cautioned against conceiving realist conceptualisations of power in a monolithic way that does not do justice to the diversity of the tradition.³³ Molloy discussed the different conceptualisations of power in classical realists to demonstrate that they do not fit the paradigmatic reading of realism and that power is not for all realists analogous to money or synonymous to coercion.³⁴ And even within the body of literature that claims that the dominant role of realist conceptualisations of power should be challenged, it is often recognised that realists' views on power often transcend the narrow interpretations normally attributed to them.³⁵

The second commonly associated with realist assumption is state-centrism. Bell correctly observed that regardless of distinctions between classical or structural realism, the school "is routinely defined in terms of its state-centrism".³⁶ Indeed one

³¹ Baldwin in particular has contrasted the realist "elements-of-power" approach to the relational one forwarded by Dahl: D. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations", *passim*. While realists such as Mearsheimer have rejected Dahl's conceptualisation, there are those who claim *contra* Baldwin that realists are in fact attentive to the relational aspects of power. J. Sterling-Folker and R. E. Shinko, "Discourses of power: traversing the realist-postmodern divide", p.263: fn. 3; also Schmidt's claim that different realists can subscribe to either of the broad approaches Baldwin outlined or both: B. Schmidt, "Realist conceptions of power" in F. Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams (eds), *Power in World Politics*, pp. 43-63. For Mearsheimer's views on Dahl see *infra*, Chapter IV.

³² This is revealed by the debate about the fungibility of power between realists and their critics. For a summary see: S. Guzzini, "The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations", pp. 537-544; for a more detailed overview: D. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies" in *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1979, pp. 161-194. Realists that are more prone to emphasise the measurability of power derive the analogy largely from the construction of neorealism as a theory of international relations based on microeconomics. See: K. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", *passim*; and *infra* Chapter IV, for Mearsheimer who also employs the analogy.

³³ B. Schmidt, "Realist conceptions of power", pp. 43-63

³⁴ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 29-34

³⁵ See for instance Barnett and Duvall's comments on E.H. Carr's realism and the comment of Guzzini on classical realists in general: M. Barnett and R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics", pp. 66-69; S. Guzzini, "The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations", p. 544

³⁶ D. Bell, "Introduction: Under an Empty Sky – Realism and Political Theory" in D. Bell (ed), *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 1-25: p. 10

point raised often by critics of realism is its tendency to take states as given.³⁷ This is not to assume that realists ignore the variety of forms that political units can take throughout history. As Waltz himself and several commentators of realism acknowledge, units can take various forms ranging from empires or city-states to modern states but they are ‘like units’ in that they diachronically perform similar functions due to the external constraints imposed to them by anarchy.³⁸ As such, realism’s alleged state-centrism could be better defined as group-centrism as Gilpin suggests.³⁹ Of course, this proposition can too be challenged to the extent that it assumes that all units will behave in the same way under a condition (anarchy) that is presumed to be static. Much of the conversation about realism and the state has thus been concentrated around questions about the validity of such a generalisation and whether it is capable of effectively accounting for structural change.⁴⁰ Under this light, the criticism of realist state-centrism can be reformulated more realistically to the criticism that realists tend to anachronistically universalise the experience of the modern state.

The alleged state-centrism of realism has gained some attention in revisionist literature. Works by revisionist scholars contributed significantly in recovering classical realist visions of the state and challenge the dominant approach. Molloy identified incompatibilities between conceptions of the state as displayed in the works of Carr and Morgenthau and the paradigmatic reading of state-centrism.⁴¹ Scheuerman engaged with a wide range of classical realist authors in order to demonstrate that not only they were sceptical about the nation-state but also that they embraced the prospect of global reform.⁴² Bell observed that even for contemporary

³⁷ See indicatively: M. Griffiths and M. Sullivan, “Nationalism and International Relations Theory” in *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1997, pp. 53-66; R. Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism”, pp. 268-273. Also, the discussion in: W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 39

³⁸ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 93-97; see also J. W. Legro and A. Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”, pp 12-13; for Mearsheimer’s similar take on states see *infra* Chapter IV

³⁹ R. Gilpin, “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism”, pp. 313-318

⁴⁰ See the excellent summary in B. Buzan and R. Little, “Waltz and World History: The Paradox of Parsimony” in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2009, pp. 446-463; also G. Sørensen, “‘Big and Important Things’ in IR: Structural Realism and the Neglect of Changes in Statehood” in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 223-239; J. Ruggie, “Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 131-157

⁴¹ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 139-143

⁴² W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, in particular Chapters 2 and 3

realists the state should not be a core concept. What follows from assumptions of anarchy and power, he claims, is not necessarily state-centrism but, rather, sovereignty-centrism.⁴³ To these works one can add the pioneering work of J. M. Hobson who tried to transfer the ‘second state debate’ from sociology to IR. Through his distinction between the domestic agential power of the state and its international agential power he managed to offer an alternative angle of the way the state is approached in realism. More specifically he claimed that there is a sharp distinction between neorealists, who grant the state very high domestic agential power but no international; and classical realists, who see domestic agential power as varying and allow the state sufficient international agential power. This, he claims, allows classical realism to engage more seriously with the state while neorealism actually marginalises it.⁴⁴

The present project: research question and approach to realism

In the previous sections, I outlined the two broad approaches employed in the literature to engage with realism and how they have been utilised to understand the key concepts of power and the nation-state. In this section, I will first identify the gap in the literature and the research question I seek to address with the present thesis, namely to spell out the presently largely implicit connection between power and the nation-state. Second, I will situate the present project within the two broad approaches discussed. Although I do not purport to offer a concise definition of realism I claim that the paradigmatic version cannot do full justice to the diversity of the tradition and thus I situate the thesis within the revisionist literature.

As has been discussed in the previous part, both power and the state have been the subjects of extensive discussion in the literature about realism both in its conventional variant and in the efforts of revisionist scholars to challenge the former. By demonstrating the mostly peripheral importance of state-centrism, revisionist

⁴³ For Bell the state *became* so important for contemporary realism because of its increased prominence, which led to its conflation with sovereignty in the relevant literature. D. Bell, “Anarchy, power and death: contemporary political realism as ideology” in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2002, pp. 221-239: pp. 230-234. He repeated a similar point when addressing state-centrism in classical realism where he concluded that “realism is not theoretically committed to any particular type of political association”. D. Bell, “Under an Empry Sky”, pp. 10-11; p. 10

⁴⁴ J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 1-14, pp. 17-63

scholarship has helped demonstrate that Buzan was accurate in claiming that it is power that is probably the most persistent theme in realism. The precise relationship between those two concepts however, has not been directly addressed. At the most basic level, Buzan's claim that the state is important for realism insofar as it "is the dominant wielder of power in the international system" summarises the most obvious connection between the two concepts.⁴⁵ Power can be understood as something that states possess and can exercise "over" other states. Supremacy in terms of power accumulation can lead to state adaptation which mostly accounts for transformations in the form of political units.⁴⁶ This view, however, presupposes a conception of power in terms of capabilities as represented by the conventional view of realism. The connection becomes much less clear in existing literature when one takes into account the diversity of realist conceptualisations of power. Hobson's work, while persuasively making the case for different levels of international agential power of the state between classical and structural realism does not focus on the conceptualisations of power underpinning the theories of the realists under examination.⁴⁷ Molloy recovered the complexity of realist visions of both power and the state but his primary focus is to demonstrate the difficulty of realism to be accommodated within a paradigm and as such does not deal with the connection between the two extensively.⁴⁸ The most detailed account of classical realism and the nation-state comes from the work of Scheuerman. Not only does he focus on the nation-state specifically (rather than the 'state' in general), but he also identifies the importance for power both for the successes and for the expected downfall of the nation-state in the work of classical realist authors.⁴⁹ Scheuerman is mostly concerned with demonstrating what classical realism has to offer in terms of discussions in cosmopolitan theory and the potential of a world state. As such, while he elucidates aspects of the connection between power and the nation-state, he does so without focusing on the variety of realist conceptualisations of power. Secondly, given the focal point of global reformism in his work, he does not examine any

⁴⁵ B. Buzan, "The timeless wisdom of realism?", p. 51

⁴⁶ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 73-78, 127-128

⁴⁷ J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 17-63

⁴⁸ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, *passim*

⁴⁹ W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, *passim* but in particular pp. 39-97

structural realists since their scepticism towards the latter is grounded on a presumed perpetuity of international anarchy.

In the present thesis, I aim at making explicit the connection between power and the nation-state, a connection which is largely implicit or unidirectional in existing literature. For that purpose, I employ as a starting point the diverse conceptualisations of power found in realist authors. The recovery of realist conceptualisations of power is, I claim, an essential requirement in order to understand the different approaches to the nation-state offered by them. As such, I will build on the insights gained by revisionist scholarship both on the complexity of realist visions of power and the role of state-centrism in realism and develop them on a direction that this scholarship has not so far focused on. Before outlining the methodology of the thesis and the structure of the argument I will position the present thesis within the two broad approaches outlined in the previous section.

The main argument in support of a paradigmatic reading of realism is that “realism has become just one box in the typologies of the Inter-Paradigm Debate”.⁵⁰ As such, realism must be clearly demarcated in order to be distinct from competing paradigms.⁵¹ I argue that this position is unsatisfactory. Guzzini’s claim that “all classical realists have travelled on institutionalist or constructivism-inspired terrain” is indicative of the problems associated with efforts to define realism narrowly.⁵² The problem with this statement is not primarily that Guzzini, anachronistically, caught the classical realists trespassing on ‘enemy territory’. For the classical realists themselves, given the comparative novelty of constructivism and institutionalism in IR, the claim would probably mean as much as it would to the ancient Romans if someone accused them of trespassing on the territory of the Italian Republic. The main problem is, rather, the implications of such narrow definitions for any meaningful engagement with international relations’ theory.

Narrowing down realism or any other tradition for that matter, to only a few core assumptions, can only aggravate the academic tribalism that is deplored by some authors.⁵³ Lake aptly summarised some of the pathologies associated with such an

⁵⁰ S. Guzzini, “The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations”, p. 537

⁵¹ Idem. Also in J. W. Legro and A. Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?”, pp.48-53

⁵² S. Guzzini, “The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations”, p. 544

⁵³ See indicatively: D. Lake, “Why ‘isms’ Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2011,

approach. In their effort to identify “easily recognisable schools”, he claims, IR scholars have of necessity to reduce subtlety and oversimplify; the need to innovate encourages them to take more extremist positions; they mistake traditions for theories and try to pit them against each other; they will be partial to evidence that supports their own theories; and finally, they will strive for intellectual hegemony.⁵⁴ While Lake paints a particularly bleak and somewhat exaggerated image, his remark that such tendencies “transform research traditions into insular ‘sects’ that eschew explanation in favour of theology” is revealing of the implications of such an oversimplification for the sake of paradigmatic rigidity.⁵⁵ The result of such a process is a division of the discipline into warring tribes that often talk past each other.⁵⁶ A second and related implication is the encouragement of the tendency to caricature traditions one is critical of. This applies to all traditions and realists for their part are not innocent of the practice as revisionist scholarship on the first debate demonstrated.⁵⁷ There are of course, practical reasons for the tendency to caricature, especially given the broad scope of the discipline and the available literature. As Scheuerman observes, “critics of realism have made things too easy for themselves by embracing a simplistic and occasionally caricatured interpretation”.⁵⁸ Given the amount of existing literature illustrating the diversity of realist tradition, such a position is untenable. Scheuerman is thus right to claim that, despite its obvious practical merits, the replication of conventional wisdom is unsatisfactory for “anyone who is committed to intellectual integrity”.⁵⁹ For those reasons for the purposes of this project I will not employ a paradigmatic reading of realism.

pp. 465-480; also K. Booth’s introduction in J. Mearsheimer et. al., “Roundtable: The Battle Rages On” in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2005, pp. 337-360: p. 337

⁵⁴ D. Lake, “Why ‘isms’ Are Evil”, pp. 467-471

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 468

⁵⁶ J. Mearsheimer et. al., “Roundtable: The Battle Rages On”, p. 337

⁵⁷ W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 3-4; for the myth of the first debate see P. Wilson, “The Myth of the ‘First Great Debate’” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24 (special issue), 1998, pp. 1-15; L. Ashworth, “Did the Realist-Idealist Great Debate Really Happen? a Revisionist History of International Relations” in *International Relations*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2002, pp. 33-51; and more recently B. Schmidt, “Introduction” in B. Schmidt (ed), *International Relations and the First Great Debate*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 1-15 and P. Wilson, “Where are we now in the debate about the first great debate?” in B. Schmidt (ed), *International Relations and the First Great Debate*, pp. 133-151. Guzzini, despite advocating a narrow definition of realism, recognises that such an approach might be criticised for being “consciously skewed in favour of realism’s critiques”. See S. Guzzini, “The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations”, p. 537

⁵⁸ W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 4

⁵⁹ Idem

This thesis is a project that is complementary to existing revisionist efforts such as the ones discussed in the previous parts. As such, particular emphasis will be placed on the diversity of realism and the authors will be examined on their own merits rather than subsumed to a pre-conceived set of assumptions. That said I am also sceptical of the extreme manifestation of this way of approaching realism i.e. the claim that the label is meaningless and it might be better to dispense of it altogether. In their paradigmatic manifestation “isms” have been problematic, but as some authors note, they still facilitated intellectual debate about theoretical assumptions and commitments.⁶⁰ One does not need to return to the rigidity of a paradigm in order to salvage the utility of general labels such as ‘realism’. I rather propose to approach realism here under a framework that allows for the use of the term but still keeps intact the diversity of the authors that belong to the school.

As Hellmann notes in his response to Legro and Moravcsik, what realist scholars share is not a set of assumptions, but *family resemblances* as defined by Wittgenstein.⁶¹ For Wittgenstein, family resemblance does not require a predetermined set of similarities since the latter can “crop up and disappear”. Similarities form a “complicated network” and are “overlapping and criss-crossing”. If one succumbs to the temptation of drawing a boundary for the term one tries to define, that can only be valid for “that special purpose” for which the definition was designed and corresponds to.⁶² As such, family resemblance can be employed to signify that “*individuality and similarity* can be thought of as useful surrogates for *generality and identity*”.⁶³ When it comes to realism, the concept has been applied to it by some authors in an effort to transcend the limits of a paradigmatic version.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Jackson and Nexon for instance observed that “Participants may have overplayed... claims about incommensurability, but their debates made clear that different theoretical and analytical commitments can generate different conclusions about world politics” and added that critics of “isms” often “tend to obscure the degree to which their own commitments are far from neutral when it comes to studying world politics”. P.T. Jackson and D. Nexon, “International theory in a post-paradigmatic era: From substantive wagers to scientific ontologies” in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2013, pp. 543-565: pp. 545-547. See also H. Nau, “No Alternative to ‘isms’” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2011, pp. 487-491

⁶¹ D. Feaver et al. “Brother, Can you Spare me a Paradigm?”, p. 173

⁶² See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1968, paragraphs 65-69

⁶³ D. Feaver et al. “Brother, Can you Spare me a Paradigm?”, p. 173

⁶⁴ Idem. Also in: D. Bell, “Under an Empty Sky”, p. 3; M. Williams, *The realist tradition and the limits of international relations*, p. 16; and particularly Jones’ paraphrase of Wittgenstein’s passage on games to account for realism: C. Jones, *E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 5-6; p.6, fn 8

The flexibility inherent in such an approach allows for a study of different realists that does not try to marginalise aspects of their thought that do not fit with preconceived sets of assumptions. Furthermore, it allows for the reoccurrence of core themes without having to limit them conceptually.

II. Methodology and structure of the thesis

On intellectual history: methodological issues

This thesis is a project of intellectual history which aims to examine the development of the interrelation between the notions of power and the nation-state in realist thought. In order to trace that development I focus on four realist authors that are considered important figures in the discourse of realism and representative of the development from classical to structural realism. Before outlining the structure of the thesis, there is a series of methodological questions that ought to be addressed. First, I explain how I approach intellectual history for the purposes of the present thesis. Second, I discuss some issues faced by interpretative projects such as the present one and how I will address them in this thesis. Finally, I justify the reason for selecting to approach the question through individual authors.

In one of his early engagements with the topic, Skinner identified two conflicting methods for approaching the history of ideas and found them both wanting. On the one hand, the historian of ideas can focus solely on the *text* itself in an effort to identify universal meanings regardless of the historical or social context of its production. Conversely, the approach that focuses on the *context* of a text's production be it historical, social or cultural is placing more importance in that context rather than the text itself.⁶⁵ The problem with intellectual history, as Minogue observed while criticising Skinner's work, lies with the dualism inherent in ideas. Ideas can be "abstract and universal" but at the same time, when uttered by a

⁶⁵ Q. Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas" in *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No 1, 1969, pp. 3-53; for a discussion of the applicability of Skinner's framework in the study of international relations see: G. Holden, "Who contextualizes the contextualizers? Disciplinary history and the discourse about the IR discourse" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2002, pp. 253-270

particular thinker they also become “a specific occurrence which has a spatio-temporal location and a social context”.⁶⁶ While philosophers are interested in the first aspect of ideas and historians in the second, the intellectual historian is in the unenviable position of having to identify the via media between the two.⁶⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly, efforts to identify an ideal balance or provide the ‘right’ methodology for engaging with intellectual history, including Skinner’s own contextualism, have not been conclusive.⁶⁸ The attempt to adopt the ‘right’ methodology might, as Minogue’s overview of different such methodologies reveals, be problematic in that it commits the intellectual historian to a philosophical background that is not necessarily helpful in addressing the question set.⁶⁹ This, however, does not mean that the insights gained through such debates should be ignored. The most honest position seems to be one advocated in recent overviews of the debate and hints to the direction that “either a pure universalism or a pure contextualism” should be rejected in favour of the middle ground which allows for a more pluralistic view of politics.⁷⁰ As such, any effort to engage in intellectual history should be able to take into account both the text and its context.⁷¹

For the purposes of the present thesis thus, both the intellectual background of each author examined and the historical context of the period in which they were working will be taken into account. I do not claim to offer the only valid reading of the authors I am about to engage with. As Welch’s discussion of text interpretations revealed, the reader “inevitably contributes something to a text that affects what he or she gets out of it”.⁷² The authors examined here can be said to present a less acute problem than the one discussed by Welch, namely that Thucydides is separated by

⁶⁶ K. R. Minogue, “Methods in Intellectual History: Quentin Skinner’s Foundations” in *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No 218, 1981, pp. 533-552: p. 544

⁶⁷ Idem.

⁶⁸ D. Bell, “International relations: the dawn of a historiographical turn?” in *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2001, pp. 115-126: p. 116

⁶⁹ He summarises his views as follows: “Even if he merely flips a coin in order to choose between these and other forms of methodological salvation being marketed, the historian will find that he has taken on board a cargo of philosophical theory on whose validity-not easily testable-his work as a historian will be dangerously dependent”. K. R. Minogue, “Methods in Intellectual History”, p. 546; pp. 544-549

⁷⁰ S. Lawson, “Political Studies and the Contextual Turn: A Methodological/Normative Critique” in *Political Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 2008, pp. 584-603: p. 586

⁷¹ D. Bell, “The dawn of a historiographical turn?”, p. 116

⁷² D. A. Welch, “Why International Relations theorists should stop reading Thucydides” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2003, pp. 301-319: p. 312

modern international relations' scholars not only by time but also by belonging to a different 'interpretative community', but the core of the issue remains. While it is impossible for the reader to extract the precise meaning of the text they study, awareness of this limitation can help the reader to at least try and minimise the projection of their own ideas upon the author under examination.⁷³

The first aspect of the thesis thus entails a close examination of the original writings and their background in an effort to recover the writers' take on the question addressed. Such an examination however does not merely aim to reconstruct neglected aspects of the realists' works but also to critically evaluate them in order to identify their merits but also their limits and what they can contribute to current debates about power and the nation-state. For that purpose, engagement with the secondary literature on those authors, whether favourable or critical, is as essential as the attention placed to the original texts. The approach followed in that context, does not differ significantly from the "explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgement" and the "scientifically imperfect process of perception or intuition" that characterised what Bull described as the 'classical approach' some decades ago.⁷⁴

The last methodological issue to be addressed regards the selection of the appropriate way to engage with realists. In the first section of this introduction I outlined two conflicting views about how we are to understand realism and claimed that, given the limits of paradigmatic approaches, an engagement with a catch-all and oversimplified version of realism is to be rejected. Other ways to offer a narrative of the discipline that have been recently identified by Bliddal et al are 'great debates' and the study of classic texts. The first, as the authors claim, are problematic in that they are often historically inaccurate. The second, based as it is on the study of individual texts, can only offer snapshots of the development of the discipline and is not applicable to a project of intellectual history that is focused on the development of the interplay between two key concepts.⁷⁵ As such the only option left is to follow the fourth strategy of engaging with individual authors rather than paradigms or

⁷³ Ibid. pp. 308-312

⁷⁴ H. Bull, "International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach" in *World Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1966, pp. 361-377: p. 361

⁷⁵ H. Bliddal, C. Sylvest and P. Wilson, "Introduction" in H. Bliddal, C. Sylvest and P. Wilson (eds) *Classics of international relations: essays in criticism and appreciation*, Oxon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-12: pp. 6-7

particular texts. This too, is an imperfect approach since it is “particularly predisposed to hagiography”.⁷⁶ It is the only approach, however, that can be followed if one is to keep both the idea of a realist tradition (even if in the broad sense outlined in the previous part) and being attentive to the diversity of that tradition. Furthermore, the problem of bias in favour of the authors examined can be at least somewhat mitigated through critical engagement with the original texts as well as by taking into account the work of other authors who often challenge said texts.

The selection of authors under examination

The examination thus of individual authors has been selected as the most appropriate way to engage with the question of the thesis. In this section I will explain the criteria for the selection of authors, namely why I restricted my focus to four authors and why I selected the specific ones from the wide range of high-quality realist sources available. In that sense, as I will explain in the following paragraphs, this project has to deal with some problems that are common amongst efforts in the field of intellectual history and the solutions selected are not dissimilar to those favoured by other authors engaging in such efforts.

The first problem is the range of authors discussed. Ashworth outlined the limits of a maximalistic endeavour which would entail the study of a wide range of authors succinctly. Such an effort, he claims, “would give only a cursory understanding of the various authors, while leaving no room for discussing the influences on, and the contexts of, these authors”.⁷⁷ Since the aim of the thesis is to recover the impact of different conceptualisations of power on notions of the nation-state as displayed in the more than 70 years of realist scholarship in IR, the only way of allowing an in-depth engagement with said concepts is to restrict the number of authors under examination. Such a restriction would also be compatible with the methodological premise outlined above, namely that engagement with intellectual history presupposes that adequate attention is paid to both the texts and their context. Having established that in-depth engagement with a limited range of authors is preferable to

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 6

⁷⁷ L. Ashworth, *Creating international studies: Angell, Mitrany and the liberal tradition*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, p. 7

superficial engagement with a wide range of authors, at least for a project of intellectual history, the question of *which* authors needs to be addressed.

A set of three criteria was employed to identify the specific authors to engage with. Similarly to the effort undertaken by Ashworth, the first criterion is that the combination of their writings can reveal the development of realism.⁷⁸ As such, the authors selected should belong to different strands of realism and be representative of different stages in its development. The second criterion is one of importance. The realists under examination should be important figures that had considerable influence on the development of the tradition. Things such as ‘importance’ or ‘influence’ of a certain author, however, are neither self-evident nor static in time. There are of course, realist authors whose status as seminal is demonstrated by the profound impact of their work on the discipline as well as from the continuous engagement with such work and the general acknowledgement of that work as groundbreaking in the literature. There are, however, others who despite being neglected in contemporary discussions have been influential in earlier periods or contributed key ideas that then attained a life of their own in the discipline’s vernacular.⁷⁹

A final, third criterion was employed in light of the effort to engage critically with the realists in question. The way realists applied their theories to empirical cases is not only indicative of the context in which those theories were developed but also can help reveal inconsistencies, flaws or strengths of their respective theories that an engagement with their theoretical premises alone would not take into account. As such, the third criterion employed was whether the realist in question applied their theory extensively in order either to understand the policies of specific states or influence them (or most commonly, both). The selection of the authors to be examined was based on the combination of all of the above criteria.

The authors selected for this thesis are E.H. Carr, H. Morgenthau, J. Herz and J. Mearsheimer. The former two need little justification in terms of their importance. They have been described as “towering figures” in realism and their work still

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 8. Ashworth applies this method to liberal internationalism

⁷⁹ Perhaps the typology of classics developed by Bliddal et al despite being designed for texts has some applicability to the authors of such texts too. For instance their ‘undisputed classic’ would describe the first element of the discussion presented here whereas the ‘overlooked classic’ corresponds to the latter. H. Bliddal et al, “Introduction”, pp. 4-5

triggers vivid intellectual debates.⁸⁰ J. Mearsheimer is one of the most important contemporary realists and his *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* is already considered by some as a classic in the field.⁸¹ The case of J. Herz is less straightforward. Until recently, he was a relatively neglected figure who did not get the same attention as Carr and Morgenthau in the revival of classical realism.⁸² As such, he is often described as a secondary figure.⁸³ There is, however, indication of a tendency to reconsider Herz's importance for the field and recover his insights as regards various, and often unexpected, aspects of international politics.⁸⁴ In addition to the renewed interest on Herz in recent literature his importance for the purposes of the present project is two-fold. First, like all aforementioned realists, Herz placed particular emphasis on understanding the nature of the nation-state as part of one of his most influential works.⁸⁵ Second, despite being approached as a classical realist, Herz was less sceptical than other mid-century realists as regards the turn to systems' theory and was willing to embrace some of its aspects. He can thus be understood as encapsulating a moment of transition between classical and structural realism, sharing elements with both worlds.

Perhaps the most obvious omission is the exclusion of K. Waltz from the list of authors to be studied. Booth claimed in 2009 that Waltz was "the discipline's commanding theorist of the past half-century" and with this comment he certainly captured the sentiment of many more IR scholars.⁸⁶ The reason for this exclusion is that Waltz subscribed to a strict methodological commitment which presupposed the analytical separation between a theory of international politics and foreign policy.

⁸⁰ W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 5

⁸¹ B. Schmidt, "A modest realist in a tragic world: John J. Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*" in H. Bliddal, C. Sylvest and P. Wilson (eds) *Classics of international relations*, pp. 230-239

⁸² A notable exception was the special issue dedicated to J. Herz in *International Relations: J. Puglierin* (ed), "A Universalist in Dark Times: John H. Herz, 1908-2005" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No.4, 2008, pp. 403-528

⁸³ As Scheuerman put it, Herz is a "relatively neglected today but widely respected at mid century figure". W.E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 6

⁸⁴ See for example Scheuerman's emphasis on Herz's work on technology and social acceleration: W. E. Scheuerman, "Realism and the critique of technology" in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2009, pp. 563-584

⁸⁵ C. Sylvest, "The conditions and consequences of globality: John H. Herz's *International Politics in the Atomic Age*" in H. Bliddal, C. Sylvest and P. Wilson (eds) *Classics of international relations*, pp. 89-98

⁸⁶ The statement belongs to the introduction of a two-part special issue dedicated to the work of K. Waltz in *International Relations*. K. Booth, "Introduction" in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 179-181: p. 180

This is not to claim, as is often assumed, that he neglected the latter; in fact as Williams demonstrated, this was not the case.⁸⁷ It is rather, Waltz's insistence that the same theory cannot account for both and therefore that different theories are necessary that is problematic for the purposes of this project.⁸⁸ Due to this position, Waltz self-consciously lacked the unified framework that the other realists examined here employed in order to examine the policies pursued by certain countries.⁸⁹ As such, his inclusion would not fit with the third criterion outlined above. Of course the fact that Waltz is not the subject of a separate chapter does not imply that he can be overlooked. His impact on the study of international relations is such that this would have been impossible. He rather assumes the role that Ashworth assigned to "the other protagonists" in his own project of intellectual history, namely that they "appear, but in supporting roles that underscore their connections to both the background events and the main characters".⁹⁰ Waltz is indeed in the background both in the shift from classical to structural realism discussed in the third chapter, and even more so in the fourth chapter.

Structure of the argument and thesis outline

In this final section I explain the structure of the thesis and offer an outline of the argument. First, I provide an overview of the sequence of the four main chapters of the thesis and why this particular approach was taken. Second, I explain the organisation followed for each particular chapter. Finally, I offer an outline of the thesis and the argument.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters, one for each of the authors examined. The sequence of the chapters is intended to display the development of realism from its early formulation by Carr to Mearsheimer's variant of structural realism. The pattern followed corresponds broadly to the actual sequence in which the most important works of the authors under examination appeared, with Carr's *Twenty*

⁸⁷ M. Williams, "Waltz, Realism and Democracy" in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2009, pp. 328-340

⁸⁸ K. Waltz, "International politics is not foreign policy" in *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996, pp. 54-57

⁸⁹ A more extensive discussion of this issue is located in the first parts of Chapter IV.

⁹⁰ L. Ashworth, *Creating international studies*, p. 8

Years' Crisis appearing in 1939, Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* in 1948, Herz's *Political Realism and Political Idealism* in 1951 and Mearsheimer's *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* in 2001. It would have been, however, misleading to base the organisation of the chapters solely on such a periodisation. With the partial exception of Mearsheimer, who belongs to the present generation of realists, all three remaining thinkers were intellectually active for roughly the same period i.e. the middle of the 20th century.⁹¹

Even if one excludes Carr, who both made his debut earlier and then shifted his focus to history, the careers of Morgenthau and Herz were largely overlapping. It is in their case that the focal point of the thesis as a project of intellectual history plays a crucial role. While Morgenthau can be solidly placed within the traditional approach to international politics and opposed vocally the behavioural revolution, Herz was more open to new approaches. As explained in the previous part, he can be understood as a transitional figure between classical and structural realism. Consequently, despite being a contemporary of Morgenthau, his examination follows that of the former and serves as a bridging point between early realists and the work of Mearsheimer. It must be clarified here that this order of authors, despite revealing some tendencies, does not imply a linear progression.⁹² Despite, for instance a gradual transition from intuition to more deductive approaches in terms of broad assumptions the same trajectory is not evident when it comes to the central concepts discussed. As such, this quasi-chronological ordering of authors does not necessarily imply that in every aspect of the examined realists' thought there was a clear progression to a pre-determined endpoint.

Each of the four substantial chapters of the thesis is organised according to the same pattern. This was deemed essential in order to make parallels or differences between different authors more apparent. Each chapter is thus organised into four main parts. In the first part, I offer some information on the intellectual background and influences of each author in order to put their work in context. Then I proceed to

⁹¹ Mearsheimer is only a 'partial' exception because his early career overlapped with the late careers of Morgenthau and Herz, especially Herz.

⁹² I am here in agreement with the caveat of Williams in a similar project: "I am most certainly not arguing that they represent a linear progression in which each successive thinker incorporates and supersedes preceding ideas" M. Williams, *The realist tradition and the limits of international relations*, p. 16

examine the role of power in their ontological and epistemological assumptions. The second part examines their conceptualisations of power, its nature and the role it is expected to perform in their respective theories as well as its limits. In the third part I examine the connection of said conceptualisation of power to the concept of the nation-state. Finally, in the fourth part I demonstrate how the realists under examination applied their theory in order to analyse past or present policies of specific nation-states.

In the first chapter, I discuss the multi-faceted and flexible conceptualisation of power in the works of E.H. Carr and how it led to an account that views the development of the nation-state through the interplay between domestic and international factors. I examine how his historical work on the Soviet Union exemplified the practical application of his theory. In the second chapter, I discuss H. Morgenthau's view of power as a psychological relationship and how he projected the *animus dominandi* to the collective level to account for the nation-state. The empirical element comprises of the application of his theory retrospectively to Germany during the two world wars and to American foreign policy during the second half of the twentieth century. In the third chapter J. Herz is examined as a transitional realist between classical and structural realism. I examine his understanding of power as a protean concept and its interplay with his account of the territorial state. The empirical aspect focuses on his engagement with the foreign policies of Germany and the United States. In the fourth chapter, I examine the role of power and the nation-state in J. Mearsheimer's offensive realism. His engagement with the foreign policy of the United States is employed in order to illustrate both the consistency and the limits of his theory. Finally, a fifth concluding chapter identifies the main contributions of the thesis to the study of realism, power and the nation-state.

CHAPTER I

E.H. Carr and the resilience of flexibility: the three facets of power and the nation-state⁹³

Introduction

Carr was once described as a “modern renaissance man” with an immense range of interests and an enduring legacy as an international relations theorist, a historian, a biographer and a journalist (and a controversial one for that matter).⁹⁴ When it comes to his contribution to international relations theory, the discussion is most often focused on his *Twenty Years’ Crisis* or -in the case of more detailed studies- on his writings until 1951.⁹⁵ After that, Carr is considered as lost for international relations, since he then started working on his *History of Soviet Russia* which occupied him for the next three decades of his life. The neglect of this –and other relevant- works of Carr on behalf of international relations scholars is understandable. For the Soviet Union is no more and Carr’s alleged preoccupation with its study as an agent of change seems now irrelevant.⁹⁶ Yet when read with one eye fixed on Carr’s assumptions on international politics, this later work illuminates a considerable level of consistency with respect to his understanding of international relations and the cardinal factor that power is for domestic and international politics alike.⁹⁷ Themes

⁹³ Parts of this Chapter have been included in the following publications: D. Kenealy and K. Kostagiannis, “Realist Visions of European Union: E.H. Carr and Integration” in *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2013, pp. 221-246 and K. Kostagiannis, “Mind the gap between nationalism and international relations: Power and the nation-state in E.H. Carr’s realism” in *International Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 6, 2013, pp. 830-845

⁹⁴ M. Cox, “Will the real E.H. Carr Please stand up?” in *International Affairs*, Vol. 75, No 3, 1999, pp. 643-653: p. 645

⁹⁵ The year of the publication of his *New Society* that marks his shift of interest from international politics to history. According to Wilson, despite the existence of prior efforts that approached Carr’s work as a whole, it was Bull’s influential article of 1969 that “did much to compound the view... that Carr’s contribution to international relations begins and ends with *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*”. P. Wilson, “Radicalism for a Conservative Purpose: The Peculiar Realism of E. H. Carr” in *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2001, pp. 123-136: p. 125; H. Bull “The Twenty Years’ Crisis Thirty Years On” in *International Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1969, pp. 625-638

⁹⁶ M. Cox, “Will the real E.H. Carr Please stand up?” pp. 652-653.

⁹⁷ The overlap between the *Twenty Years’ Crisis* and his work as a historian of the Soviet Union has not gone entirely unnoticed. See D. F. Duke “Edward Hallett Carr: Historical Realism and the Liberal Tradition” in *Past Imperfect*, Vol. 2, 1993, pp. 123-136

that are so familiar to students of IR such as the dialectics of power and morality and their uneasy compromise, as well as the role of ideologies and purposeful thinking underpin Carr's historical work inasmuch as they underpin his early work in international relations.

In the first part, I explore the role of power in Carr's theory of international relations. First, I discuss the philosophical background of his work. There the figures of Marx and Mannheim are of prominent importance. Carr embraced the sociology of knowledge developed by Mannheim and integrated it into his peculiar dialectics of power and morality. I claim that this move, placed power at the heart of Carr's epistemological and ontological assumptions. In the second part I explore Carr's conceptualisation of power and its nature and role. I claim that, rather than representing a weakness of his theory, his fuzzy and multi-faceted conceptualisation of power allows for considerable flexibility by taking into account both material and ideational aspects of power. I also explore the role of morality as a factor that mediates power but is ultimately conditioned upon it.

In the third part I examine the way Carr employed his understanding of power in order to explain the rise, development and eventual decline, as he saw it, of the nation-state. The nation-state emerges from this analysis as a political entity which reflects the interplay of all facets of power both internationally and domestically. I claim that Carr's historically nuanced account of the nation-state and its transformations is solidly based upon his conceptualisation of power and his views on the conditionality of thought. His views about its political and moral bankruptcy and the need to transcend it, are also based on that framework. In the fourth part, I examine the *History of Soviet Russia* and the other works of Carr on the Soviet Union under the light of the preceding analysis. I claim that the struggle between the formal ideology of the Soviet Union and the realities of world politics as well as the uneasy steps to address the question of nationalism represent for Carr a clear manifestation of the complexities of politics and the uneasy compromise between the forces of power and morality.

I. Carr's theory of International Relations

The philosophical foundations of Carr's approach

E. H. Carr has attained, as Molloy observed, “iconic status” in the discipline of international relations.⁹⁸ The devastating onslaught against idealism he supposedly delivered with the publication of his *Twenty Years' Crisis* during the first Great Debate of the discipline probably played some role in achieving that status. Yet, despite recent scholarship that questioned both the debate itself and the devastation it caused on Carr's targets, his work retains its attraction to scholars of international relations and is the subject of renewed interest.⁹⁹ As a result of the continued interest on Carr, the –somewhat inconspicuous- philosophical foundations of his theory of international relations have been uncovered to a sufficient extent.¹⁰⁰ Carr has been an eclectic scholar but there are two figures that are prominent in his thought: K. Mannheim and K. Marx.¹⁰¹

Of crucial importance for understanding Carr's philosophy, is his indebtedness to the sociology of knowledge of Mannheim. In more than one instance Carr recognised the influence of Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* on his own work.¹⁰² For Jones Carr's debt to Mannheim was great not only with respect to the rhetorical structure of the *Twenty Years' Crisis* but also –and to a greater extent- to methodology. Thus the conditionality of thought which is prevalent in Carr's critique of the utopians i.e. the rationalisation on behalf of the powerful of their own position is a concept borrowed from Mannheim.¹⁰³ The critical technique of the sociology of knowledge is then - Jones continues- twisted and displayed as the ‘realist’ extreme opposite to ‘utopia’, allowing Carr to create a set of dichotomies to be resolved by his own propositions,

⁹⁸ S. Molloy, “Dialectics and Transformation: Exploring The International Theory of E. H. Carr” in *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2003, pp. 279-306: p. 279

⁹⁹ For a summary of recent scholarship on Carr see: D. Kenealy and K. Kostagiannis, “Realist Visions of European Union”, p. 222: fn 1; for the myth of the first debate see Introduction: *supra* p. 21: fn 57

¹⁰⁰ As regards the inconspicuous character of his foundations, Carr displayed a “powerful, though unobtrusive, command of modern philosophy”. S. Molloy, “Dialectics and Transformation”, p. 281

¹⁰¹ The first author who identified those influences was, according to Wilson, Johnston back in 1967: P. Wilson, “Radicalism for a Conservative Purpose”, pp. 125-126; W. Johnston “E.H. Carr's Theory of International Relations: A Critique”, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 29, No 4, 1967, pp. 861-884

¹⁰² See E.H. Carr “An Autobiography” in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, pp. xiii-xxii: p. xvii and E. H. Carr *The Twenty Years' Crisis: an Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. cvii

¹⁰³ C. Jones “Carr, Mannheim, and a Post-positivist Science of International Relations” in *Political Studies*. XLV, 1997, pp. 232-246: p. 236

artificially presented as the middle ground.¹⁰⁴ This assessment, however, does not do full justice to Carr.

Carr indeed identified the sociology of knowledge with consistent realism, as Jones claims, when he discussed the dead end to which the latter leads. Realism can be sterile, thus necessitating the uneasy compromise between reality and utopia.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the sociology of thought might be irreplaceable in “unmasking” absolutes, but unless it proposes a “sort of middle ground” it is at risk of degrading to an “intolerably negative relativism”.¹⁰⁶ If Carr identified the sociology of knowledge with the one extreme of his theory this does not necessarily imply that it represents merely part of a rhetorical device. It rather indicates the acute awareness of Carr to the further implications of the consistent application of the method i.e. the omnipresent risk of relativism. The question is thus to find a new “standard of value” and as Carr examined the two possible answers that Mannheim gave i.e. “a nakedly pragmatical belief in power” and a “supra-temporal Reason” he ironically echoed the criticisms his own approach received.¹⁰⁷ Carr thus delegated the sociology of knowledge to the one extreme of his dialectics because he was fully aware of the implications of its consistent application.

Second, the dialectical scheme Carr used is much more than a rhetorical device employed to make the moderate reader sympathetic to his view. It is rather a mode of analysis that Carr utilised consistently regardless of whether he wrote about international relations, the philosophy of history or about the history of the Soviet Union. In historical works such as his massive *History of Soviet Russia* Carr was also interested in the interaction of reality and utopia and the possible compromises between them. And it is in *What is History?* where Carr employed a set of dialectical opposites in approaching historiography and once more suggested a middle approach.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps unsurprisingly, as when dealing with international relations, he

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. pp 236-239.

¹⁰⁵ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ E.H. Carr, “Karl Mannheim” (1953) in E.H. Carr *From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 177-183; similar ideas are discussed in E.H. Carr, *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, London: Macmillan, 1947, pp. 92-97

¹⁰⁷ E.H. Carr, “Karl Mannheim” pp. 181-183. I discuss Carr’s relativism more extensively in the following section.

¹⁰⁸ Determinism vs free will, society vs individual, circular vs linear history are only some of the pairs he utilises. E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, London: Penguin, 1987, *passim*

also evoked the criticism of creating ‘false oppositions’.¹⁰⁹ As regards international relations, as Molloy demonstrated, the dialectics of utopia and reality is not used as merely ‘camouflage’ but constitutes the basis for a “positive theory of IR”.¹¹⁰ Indeed Carr’s efforts to make sense of international relations and change in the works that followed the *Twenty Years’ Crisis* were constantly informed by his anxiety to suggest ways of overcoming the antithesis between the forces of morality and power.¹¹¹

As such, Carr’s dialectics can be better understood through his preference for an inductive methodology which allowed him to employ eclectically elements from different perspectives to tackle concrete problems without having to resort to deductive reasoning. A dialectical scheme such as the one he employed was an essential vehicle for that flexibility.¹¹² It must be clarified that given Carr’s eclecticism, his dialectics is influenced by but not strictly modelled after Marx or Hegel. Carr might have authored a biography of Marx and he was positively inclined towards socialism, but was no Marxist.¹¹³ His fascination was not grounded on Marx the prophet of social transformation but on Marx the methodological innovator in the development of tools to “uncover the sources of social behaviour” and to dissect historical processes.¹¹⁴ Unlike the dialectics of Marx where thesis and antithesis give their place to an entirely new synthesis, this is not the case in Carr’s dialectics where synthesis entails a merger between the two worlds. Consequently, Carr’s dialectics was a curious construct, rather eclectic in nature, that drew freely on “Hegelian,

¹⁰⁹ A. Stephanson “The Lessons of *What is History?*” in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 283-303, p. 287.

¹¹⁰ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 55-57

¹¹¹ *Conditions of Peace* (1942), *Nationalism and After* (1945) and *the New Society* (1951) were all works intended both to analyse the international context and to prescribe ways to resolve the contradiction between the forces of reality and utopia.

¹¹² S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 52-57

¹¹³ A good overview is offered by Ticktin. Carr, he claims, was an honest student of Marx but one whose understanding of Marxism was limited. H. Ticktin, “E.H. Carr, the Cold War and the Soviet Union” in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 145-161: pp. 152-154. Carr published a biography of Marx in 1934, but he certainly was not happy with the outcome, calling it “a foolish enterprise”: E. H. Carr, “An Autobiography”, pp. xvii-xviii; as Haslam remarks, the outcome was in fact less significant than “the impact of the research on the author”: J. Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity: E. H. Carr, 1892-1982*, London: Verso, 1999, pp. 53-54

¹¹⁴ E.H. Carr, “The Left Today: An Interview” (1978) in E.H. Carr, *From Napoleon to Stalin*, pp. 261-275: pp. 270-271; E.H. Carr, “An Autobiography”, pp. xxi-xxii

Marxist, and Jamesian methodologies, with a Freudian twist” and should be read in a more “non-progressive, Heraclitean” way.¹¹⁵

At the heart thus of Carr’s theory lie on the one hand the application of the sociology of thought in order to unmask the conditionality of purported absolutes, and on the other hand a dialectical scheme which attempts to identify compromises to practical problems in an effort to correct the sterility of the former. Both elements are of crucial importance for understanding the role power plays in Carr’s ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Power in Carr’s epistemology and ontology

The sociology of thought Carr borrowed from Mannheim makes power central for his epistemology. One of the main implications of its application, is that thought itself is conditioned by the position of the thinker in time and space. As such the process of thinking is not only relative to the interests of the thinker but also pragmatic since it forwards his purposes. The duty of the realist when theorising, does not stop at unveiling the conditional thinking of the utopians. He must go further as to demolish the whole utopian edifice and reveal that the moral absolutes are not absolutes at all but instead products of a dominant group that imposes them on the subordinate groups as a means of perpetuating its predominance.¹¹⁶ In short, the reality of power conditions not only the process of thinking but also morality as the product of that process, and the duty of the realist scholar is to reveal that underlying reality.

This position has important epistemological and ontological ramifications for Carr’s theory. As Oren demonstrated, Mannheim was worried of the potential of the sociology of knowledge to transform politics into “a chaotic contest in annihilating opponents’ utopias” and attempted to insulate its study by attributing a special role of apolitical detachment to intellectuals.¹¹⁷ Carr, however, was not persuaded since he believed that analytical impartiality vanishes from the very moment the political

¹¹⁵ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, p. 56

¹¹⁶ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p. 68-75.

¹¹⁷ I. Oren, “The Unrealism of Contemporary Realism: The Tension between Realist Theory and realists’ Practice” in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 7, no. 2, 2009, pp. 283-301: p. 294, pp. 294-296

theorist decides to actively participate in political debates.¹¹⁸ The political theorist thus occupies a peculiar role, which is tied to the inseparability of purpose and analysis. Ultimately, “political thought is itself a form of political action”.¹¹⁹ Given the inevitably purposive character of political science, the researcher is bound not only to understand the forces that formulate modern society but also to propose policies accordingly by anticipating the ideal balance between utopia and reality.

The second implication is that the conditionality of thought and thus morality, of necessity grant the latter a secondary importance in Carr’s dialectics. His is a peculiar dialectics of power and morality or reality and utopia and their uneasy but necessary reconciliation that lies at the heart of sound political thought.¹²⁰ This dialectical scheme is central in Carr’s understanding of power, since the weaker side of the equilibrium i.e. morality plays a mediating role at the functions of power. Power is for Carr constituting the ‘political’ more than any other factor. Although he employed a set of opposites in order to better describe the dialectics inherent in politics –i.e. utopia and reality; ideal and institution; morality and power- it is clear that power has the principal role. Politics is not solely restricted to power, yet it entails power nevertheless. What differentiates an administrative from a political issue is that the latter involves a conflict of power.¹²¹ When it comes to morality, the second element of politics, although it is deemed necessary for any sort of politics to operate its role is significantly restrained. Morality is conditioned by power but the equation does not work *vice versa*. Thus although morality might be essential for politics the only way for its successful operation is that it is adequately grounded on reality i.e. the domain of power.¹²² Morality thus remains the weak part of the equation in such an understanding of international politics, always dependant upon power and even more relative in international politics than it is in domestic.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Idem

¹¹⁹ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis* pp. 4-6.

¹²⁰ Carr emphasises the essential compromise between power and morality as the basis of sound politics repeatedly in the book. See indicatively: E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, pp. 10, 11, 84-88. For the dialectics of utopia and reality in Carr see S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 55-57 and C. Jones, *A duty to lie*, pp. 54-60.

¹²¹ E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p 97.

¹²² Ibid. pp. 135-153.

¹²³ Molloy observes that Carr recognised the existence of an objective morality but also considered it to be inconceivable and he rightly reminds us of Carr’s distinction between individual morality and that of group-persons like the state: S. Molloy, “Hans J. Morgenthau Versus E.H. Carr: Conflicting

Power, consequently, plays a central role for both the epistemological and the ontological foundations of Carr's work. The unequal relationship between power and morality in Carr's dialectics, however, makes his theory vulnerable to charges of relativism. In the following part, after examining the nature of role and nature of power in Carr's theory of international relations I will address the question of its connection to morality and relativism in more detail.

II. Carr's conceptualisation of power

The multifaceted nature of power

For Carr the importance of power stems from the "dual character of political society" which is based on two "conflicting aspects of human nature", namely self-assertion and solidarity. As a result, politics is always going to be in flux and the best outcome one could hope for would be a precarious compromise between power and morality.¹²⁴ This part of Carr's work has often been interpreted as encapsulating assumptions about human nature that are either informing his "ambivalent realism" or offering evidence for his predominantly realist orientation similar to other classical realists like Morgenthau.¹²⁵ Whilst indeed Carr grounded his approach on some general observations about how human societies operate, the connection with Morgenthau for that matter should not be overstated.

In contrast to Morgenthau, Carr was not concerned with exploring the *animus dominandi* as an anthropological condition. He would also have been at odds with Morgenthau's preference for the insulation of different spheres of human activity for analytical purposes. For Carr any effort to study man in isolation from society and the abstraction of the *homo politicus* as someone who pursues power alone is a meaningless exercise.¹²⁶ His insistence to engage with all aspects of politics at the

Conceptions of Ethics in Realism" in D.Bell (ed), *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 83-104: pp. 87-90.

¹²⁴ E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 91-96

¹²⁵ For the first claim see A. Chong, "Lessons in International Communication: Carr, Angell and Lippmann on human nature, public opinion and leadership" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2007, pp. 615-635: pp. 620-621. For the second see S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 56-57

¹²⁶ E. H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 91-92

same time and his tendency to favour power over morality in his dialectics certainly made him vulnerable to Morgenthau's criticism that he lacked a "transcendent point of view from which ... to appraise the phenomenon of power."¹²⁷ At the same time however, his emphasis on the study of man as a social being allowed him to avoid the determinism often associated with realist visions that are grounded on assumptions about human nature.

For Carr individual and society are mutually constitutive and this means that such an "elusive entity" as human nature can only with difficulty be understood in terms other than "as a historical phenomenon shaped by prevailing social conditions and conventions".¹²⁸ As such, it should be borne in mind that when Carr grounded his approach to politics on human nature, this represents the bare minimum of empirical observation about how societies operate diachronically. His is a notion of human nature that is flexible and unfixed. As such, as Charles Jones observes when examining his indebtedness to Mannheim, Carr differed significantly from "continuity realists" like Hans Morgenthau and Herbert Butterfield and their a-historical perspectives of human nature.¹²⁹

Carr then grounded power loosely in a human nature which is malleable. His conceptualisation of power itself is equally flexible. He never offered an explicit definition of power as such and thus the closest his reader can get to his ideas about the essence of power is his analysis of its three facets in the *Twenty Years' Crisis*. Drawing from and adapting Bertrand Russell, Carr presented the three facets of power in international politics.¹³⁰ Those were military power, economic power and power over opinion. In the few lines preceding their analysis he offered crucial information of his understanding of power. First, "power is in its essence an indivisible whole": the three manifestations of power are thus employed "for

¹²⁷ H. Morgenthau, "The Political Science of E.H. Carr" in *World Politics*, Vol. 1, No 1, 1948, pp 127-134: p. 134

¹²⁸ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 33

¹²⁹ C. Jones, *A Duty to Lie*, pp. 132-133

¹³⁰ For a recent engagement with Russell and his connection to realism see C. Sylvest, "Russell's Realist Radicalism" in *The International History Review* (forthcoming); the adaptation of Russell's conceptualisation of power by E.H. Carr is traced by Hirst: P. Hirst, "The eighty years' crisis, 1919-1999— power" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 1998, pp. 133-148, *passim*

purposes of discussion” and are “closely interdependent”.¹³¹ As he maintained when elaborating on each form of power, neither of them can exist without the others.

Carr went to great pains to dispel the identification of power with military might. By insisting on the indivisibility of power he maintained that it is an illusion to separate economics from politics.¹³² So far Carr does not seem to be far from contemporary realists of the structural variant who tend to conceptualise power in terms of, preferably measurable, material capabilities.¹³³ It is, however, in the third facet of power where Carr went beyond his successors and which merits particular attention. Power over opinion, he claimed, “is not less essential for political purposes” than the other two forms of power.¹³⁴ Power over opinion is inextricably woven to the other two forms of power and follows them closely. An ideology of international character thus remains ultimately impotent unless connected to national power and therefore propaganda is ineffective until it establishes clear linkages with national military and economic power.¹³⁵

There is, however, a limitation of power over opinion that is of crucial importance. In contrast to military and economic power, when engaging with ideational power we have to “remember that we are dealing no longer with purely material factors, but with the thoughts and feelings of human beings”.¹³⁶ What limits power over opinion even more significantly than the discrepancy between facts and propaganda, which deems any propaganda that does not correspond at least to an extent to reality futile, is the fact that human beings “in the long run reject the doctrine that might makes right”.¹³⁷ The need for national propaganda to be camouflaged in the form of international ideologies with broader appeal is for Carr the ultimate manifestation of this limitation.¹³⁸ In short, power over opinion is the facet of power where it meets, and is limited by morality.

¹³¹ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 102

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 102-120

¹³³ B. Schmidt, “Realist conceptions of power”, pp. 52-60; see for example the discussion about latent and military power in J. Mearsheimer, *infra*, Chapter IV

¹³⁴ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 120

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-130

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 129; for a more detailed account of the role of emotions in Carr see S. Molloy, “Spinoza, Carr, and the ethics of *The Twenty Years' Crisis*” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2013, pp. 251-271: pp. 264-265

¹³⁷ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 130

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-130

It must be clarified here, that given the focus of Carr in the *Twenty Years' Crisis*, he examined primarily the importance of power for international politics. It is not difficult to imagine that the three forms of power operating at the international level can also be applied to domestic politics with slight modifications like substituting military power with the coercive functions of the state. In fact prior to examining power in the international domain Carr focused on the nature of politics, where his main theme was the domestic society and the coercion exercised by the state. Even when dealing with the international level, he easily shifted from examples derived from domestic politics to similar ones in international affairs.¹³⁹ As will be shown subsequently, despite the differences between the domestic and the international levels and the inapplicability of the domestic analogy, for Carr the two are closely interrelated and when examined historically their distinction becomes blurry.¹⁴⁰

In a generally well-informed review of Carr's notion of power Hirst claims that the three facets of power discussed above, are limited in that they solely concentrate on a "capacity-outcome" conception of power. Such a conception is agent-centric, quantifies power, identifies capacities *post hoc* through outcomes and, most importantly, is largely outdated.¹⁴¹ While it is accurate that in the discussion of the three facets Carr emphasised the importance of them for national policies, his understanding of power was far broader than that. For instance his conception of international law as a meeting point of power and ethics and as a function of the community of nations, despite anchoring law to politics is not easily reducible to a capacity-outcome view.¹⁴² As Barnett and Duvall have shown in their taxonomy of power, Carr did not only see the compulsive traits of power. He was also attentive to the institutional, structural, and even discursive facets of power.¹⁴³ As will be

¹³⁹ Ibid. pp. 91-95; pp. 97-102

¹⁴⁰ For the inapplicability of the domestic analogy in Carr see G. Evans, "E. H. Carr and international relations" in *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1975, pp. 77-97: pp. 86-87

¹⁴¹ P. Hirst, "The eighty years' crisis, 1919-1999— power", p. 133, pp. 138-148. Interestingly and tellingly for Carr's complex views, he raised Fox's criticism for exactly the opposite reasons i.e. that his notion of power implies a total disregard of agency forcing states to adapt to external circumstances. W. Fox, "E. H. Carr and political realism: vision and revision" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1985, pp. 1-16: p. 6

¹⁴² E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 159-167

¹⁴³ While Carr's "explicit discussion of power was largely limited to its multiple instruments... that could be used to overcome resistance" for Barnett and Duvall Carr was also aware of the ability of international institutions to "institutionalise the interests of the powerful and work against those of the weak". He also, due to his indebtedness to Marx, identified the role of dominant ideologies in indoctrinating states who then could more easily "submit to their own domination". Finally, due to his

discussed in the third part, the three facets of power offered by Carr, cannot be reduced to an agent-centric 'capacity-outcome' view that artificially separates developments in international politics to those at the domestic level.

Power, morality and change

Power might be the most important factor in international relations but, as mentioned already, Carr was acutely aware of the problems associated with the consistent application of realism. Thus in his *Twenty Years' Crisis* after demolishing the utopian structure, Carr turned against the realist sterility which contradicts the very nature of politics as the field of the struggle and uneasy reconciliation of the forces of realism and utopia.¹⁴⁴ Given, however, the primacy of power in his theory, there remains the question of where Carr could look for the utopian element that can complement realism. For several of his commentators, Carr had nowhere to turn to because of his moral relativism.

The unequal relation between power and morality has been debated ever since the *Twenty Years' Crisis* was published. This was an issue that occupied several of the first responses to the book raised by some of the 'utopians' Carr offended.¹⁴⁵ The main characteristics, however, of much of the discussion to follow Carr and his notion of power were foreshadowed by Morgenthau with his review of the former's works on international politics. Morgenthau, after celebrating Carr's efficacy in demolishing the utopian structure of the nineteenth century, described his effort to synthesise power and morality as the "Odyssey of a mind which has discovered the phenomenon of power and longs to transcend it".¹⁴⁶ For Morgenthau, Carr failed to offer a satisfactory synthesis due to his relativistic conception of morality, which led him back to power. Lacking a transcendent moral standard, Carr ultimately becomes a "utopian of power".¹⁴⁷ Much of the ensuing debate which surrounded Carr's approach to power has been exhausted to examining whether Carr was a relativist.

indebtedness to Mannheim, he was aware of discursive aspects of power in the establishment of "acceptable practices and goals". M. Barnett and R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics", pp. 68-69

¹⁴⁴ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 87-88

¹⁴⁵ P. Wilson, "Carr and his Early Critics: Responses to the *Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1939-46" in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 165-197: pp. 181-193

¹⁴⁶ H. Morgenthau, "The Political Science of E.H. Carr", p. 129

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 133-134

Favourably disposed scholars tend to advocate that Carr never fully succumbed to relativism, whereas less-favourably disposed scholars tend to repeat the verdict of relativism.¹⁴⁸

According to Wilson, even in this more realistic of his works, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr compromised his relativism by accepting that on occasion the interests of the dominant group *do* coincide with those of the community as a whole and that, although never being too elaborate about it, he did “smuggle ethical foundations” in his work.¹⁴⁹ This view is partially supported by Carr’s later works on history. When discussing the role of the historian Carr claimed that “his aims and purpose will ultimately be derived from values which have their source outside history”.¹⁵⁰ There is then a set of abstract ideas that one can refer to and that may constitute “indispensable categories of thought”.¹⁵¹ They, however, not only represent the bare minimum but also -and perhaps more importantly- are *empty shells* lacking a pre-determined meaning. Meaning is only given to them through their translation to concrete policies that are inevitably conditioned by space and time.¹⁵² For Carr thus, rather than looking in vain for extra-historical standards with which to pass judgement on societies or historical phenomena, it is much more meaningful to approach them “in their relation to one another”.¹⁵³ Such views reveal, as Scheuerman claims, that Carr was perhaps more attentive to the complexities of modern morality than his critics who were fixed on traditionalist notions of ethics. At the same time, however, due to this attentiveness he often failed to ask “tough moral questions”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ For examples of the former see P. Howe “The utopian realism of E.H. Carr” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1994, pp. 277-297. For examples of the latter see H. Bull “The Twenty Years' Crisis Thirty Years On”, pp.628-630; W. Johnston “E.H. Carr’s Theory of International Relations”, p. 884. Also M. Smith as quoted in Howe describes Carr’s realism as an “agnostic relativism of power” in P. Howe, “Utopian Realism”, p. 278

¹⁴⁹ In his autobiographical note, Carr described the realism displayed in the *Twenty Years' Crisis* as “harsh”. E.H. Carr, “An Autobiography”, p. xix; P. Wilson, “Carr and his Early Critics”, pp. 187-189

¹⁵⁰ E. H. Carr, *The New Society*, London: Macmillan, 1951, p. 18

¹⁵¹ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 82

¹⁵² E. H. Carr, *The New Society*, p. 18; also in E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 75-84; E.H. Carr, *Soviet Impact*, pp. 92-97

¹⁵³ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 83

¹⁵⁴ Scheuerman claims that, despite the “philosophical demerits” of the traditional notions of morality they embraced, Morgenthau and Niebuhr due to their commitment to transcendental moral standards were immune “against some of the most disturbing political illusions of the last century” in a way Carr failed to. Scheuerman has in mind Carr’s advocacy of appeasement and his enthusiasm for the Soviet Union. W. E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 25-27

As such, Carr's mere recognition of the existence of an objective morality cannot provide sufficient grounds to conclusively absolve him of relativism.¹⁵⁵ When combined with his views about progress and change, however, it adds credence to the view that his relativism was at least somewhat qualified. Carr believed firmly in progress; not in a teleological sense that would imply an uninterrupted line towards an end outside history but in "the progressive development of human potentialities".¹⁵⁶ Progress rather involves the "transmission of acquired skills" through subsequent generations, can face setbacks, and heads "towards goals which can be defined only as we advance towards them" in a history with no clear end in sight.¹⁵⁷ This belief, that even in times that look desperate, there are always going to be "new forces and movements" under the surface so that humanity still progresses was Carr's own "unverifiable Utopia".¹⁵⁸ It is this optimistic side, as evidenced in his belief that humanity was gradually moving towards genuine mass democracy combined with his awareness of the risks of relativism, which according to Howe signified that far from being a relativist himself, Carr actually possessed an "evolutionary theory of moral progress".¹⁵⁹

This emancipatory aspect of Carr's thought has found favour amongst scholars who often make reference to his moral project in order to display his affinity with critical theory.¹⁶⁰ Such scholars, however, as Babík correctly observed, tend to often overcorrect towards the direction of critical theory.¹⁶¹ Carr's pragmatism should not be overlooked when dealing with his moral project because it is precisely the realist

¹⁵⁵ S. Molloy, "Hans J. Morgenthau Versus E.H. Carr", pp. 89-90

¹⁵⁶ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 119

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 109-132; E.H. Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 116-118; see also the discussion in A. Heath, "E.H. Carr: Approaches to Understanding Experience and Knowledge" in *Global Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Current Affairs and Applied Contemporary Thought*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2010, pp. 24-46: pp. 43-46

¹⁵⁸ E.H. Carr, "An autobiography" p. xxi

¹⁵⁹ P. Howe "The utopian realism of E.H. Carr", pp. 284-287; similarly, Jenkins ascertains that the epistemological scepticism attributed to Carr with respect to historical studies is ultimately unattainable due to his belief in progress. K. Jenkins, *On 'What is History?' From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 44-52

¹⁶⁰ See A. Linklater, "The transformation of political community: E. H. Carr, critical theory and international relations" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1997, pp 321 – 338; A. Linklater, "E.H. Carr, Nationalism and the Future of the Sovereign State" in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 234-257; J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 59-61; R. Falk, "The critical realist tradition and the demystification of interstate power: E. H. Carr, Hedley Bull and Robert W. Cox" in S. Gill and J. H. Mittelman (eds), *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 39-55

¹⁶¹ M. Babík, "Realism as Critical Theory: The International Thought of E. H. Carr" in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2013, pp. 491-514: pp. 499-514

side of his approach that can determine which moral purposes are worth pursuing at any given time. The ends towards which humanity strives arise within history, “not from some source outside it”.¹⁶² As such, the task of the politician lies not only with identifying which end is “morally or theoretically desirable” but also which part of this moral purpose is politically feasible through the direction of “the forces which exist in the world”.¹⁶³ And, given the purposeful nature of political thought, the task of the political thinker is to point towards the direction where power and morality can be uneasily and temporarily reconciled.

This is precisely what Carr set to do with the works that followed the publication of the *Twenty Year's Crisis*. It is in these works, starting with *Conditions of Peace* that, as Molloy claimed, the dialectical scheme of Carr fully materialises through the advocacy of “systemic transformation through power to achieve a moral end”.¹⁶⁴ Carr's complex views about historical development, the interplay between power and morality, the attempt to strike workable compromises between the two, and the malleability of values according to conditions of space and time are all on display in the way he tried to understand, and transcend, the nation-state.

III. Power and the nation-state

Power and the transformations of the nation-state

In the final pages of the *Twenty Years' Crisis* Carr reflected on the potential of the survival of nations as the main units of power in the future.¹⁶⁵ There he dealt with problems such as the optimum size of the units of power, the historically conditioned

¹⁶² E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, p. 119

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 128

¹⁶⁴ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, p. 163; fn. 30

¹⁶⁵ Although Carr used the terms ‘nation-state’ and ‘nation’ interchangeably, he was particularly attentive to their differences. In *Conditions of Peace* he made special mention to the confusion between the two. The state, he maintained, is the “unit of political power” while the nation is a community of people and the view that the two should coincide emerged only at the wake of the French Revolution. In his later *Nationalism and After* he repeated a similar observation, while adding some of the diverse definitions of the ‘nation’ in different parts of the world. He observed, however, that “since the 16th or 17th century ‘nation’... has been the most natural word throughout western Europe for the major political unit” and as such he often employed it to mean ‘nation-state’. E. H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, London: Macmillan, 1942, p. 39; E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, London: Macmillan, 1945, pp. 1-2. For purposes of clarity in this chapter I use the term ‘nation-state’ when referring to the political unit.

character of national states, and the tendency towards integration; problems which are clearly anticipating the arguments that followed in his subsequent work.¹⁶⁶ In the preface to the Second Edition Carr suggested that the reader consults his future work on the subject since, according to his view, he accepted the nation-state as the main unit “too readily” in this early engagement.¹⁶⁷ In the years following the publication of this first engagement, Carr went on to publish two other major contributions to international relations, *Conditions of Peace* and *Nationalism and After*. A characteristic of these further works is the gradual shift from a focus solely on international relations to an account that is also attentive to developments at the domestic level, or to follow Evans, the transplanting of the same core assumptions in a different level of analysis.¹⁶⁸

Carr’s periodisation of modern international relations into “three partly overlapping periods, marked by widely differing views of the nation as a political entity” provided a systematic account of the transformations of the post-medieval state.¹⁶⁹ This transformation was displayed in terms of the interplay between the three facets of power both domestically and internationally but also through the closely associated prevailing ideas and notions of international morality. In the first period, the modern nation-state gradually emerged from the ruins of the “medieval unity of empire and church”.¹⁷⁰ Political power was centralised to the person of the monarch and economic power, in the form of mercantilism, worked alongside it to consolidate the nation-state through imposing uniformity domestically and expanding its markets through war externally. The purpose of these policies was “to augment the power of the state” but at the same time they were consistent *national* policies, for the nation was still identified with its rulers.¹⁷¹

The second period, starting from the end of the Congress of Vienna and lasting until the outbreak of the Great War, was characterised by a remarkable compromise between political nationalism and economic internationalism. Political power passed to the middle classes and the tendency of the previous period “in asserting the claim

¹⁶⁶ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, pp. 209-213

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. cvi

¹⁶⁸ G. Evans, “E. H. Carr and international relations”, pp. 79-87

¹⁶⁹ E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 1

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 2

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp. 2-6

of the nation to statehood” was further intensified. At the same time *laissez-faire* economics, based on the expansion of the pie associated with industrial production, replaced mercantilism as the dominant credo. The level of economic interdependence achieved, however, lay for Carr not with the infallibility of liberalism but with British economic and political supremacy throughout the 19th century. It was the opening of the British market and the concentration of financial services in London that allowed the delicate system to operate in a relatively impartial manner which obscured the close interconnection between political and economic power.¹⁷²

It is with this second period that the element of ideational power became increasingly important. The passing of political power domestically to the middle classes signified a crucial transition that Carr called the “democratisation” of the nation. At the level of ideas, the identification of the nation with the “people”, gave nations a “popular connotation” and the personification of the nation replaced the person of the monarch in international relations as a necessary convenience. This move according to Carr was of profound psychological importance since henceforth human traits and behaviours were to be collectively attributed to nations.¹⁷³ As long as the fragile compromise of the nineteenth century persisted, however, the implications of this move were not fully felt. When British economic and political supremacy crumbled, the system which was founded upon it started disintegrating.¹⁷⁴ The new nationalism of the twentieth century would operate under an entirely new background.

The nation-state of the second period, serving the aspirations of the middle classes, could comfortably be accommodated with economic interdependence through its limited functions and the artificial separation of political from economic aspirations.¹⁷⁵ The transition from middle class democracy to mass democracy, or the “socialisation” of the nation brought about a radical transformation of its character. The newly founded political power of the masses meant that their economic considerations such as social welfare gained in prominence.¹⁷⁶ As such, the third period was characterised by the alliance between nationalism and socialism which re-established the unity between politics and economics. The main prerogative was now

¹⁷² Ibid. pp. 6-17

¹⁷³ Ibid. pp. 7-11

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 17

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 21

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 16-19

the welfare of the members of the nation-state and the augmentation of its power and the world economy of the second period was replaced by the increasingly protectionist national economies of the *interbellum*.¹⁷⁷ Internationally, an originally western European idea expanded globally through the proliferation of independent nation-states as a result of the application of the principle of self-determination and the benefits expected in terms of economic nationalism and industrialisation.¹⁷⁸

In Carr's narrative of nationalism thus, the concept of the nation changed to reflect changing access in political power domestically, but at the same time was in close interplay with international power as witnessed by the elaborate system maintained under British supremacy. His analysis also reveals the increasing importance of ideational power in the form of nationalism and its impact on the international system and the moral edifice it supported. Any sense of international community that existed during the first two periods was based on a common framework shared between sovereigns initially and middle classes later. In the age of socialised nations and exclusive nationalism, however, this framework vanished. Henceforth the wars between nation-states were characterised by an unprecedented ferocity since the target was now the whole nation. The purpose of war was also transformed to a means of securing economic benefits for the victor and inflicting economic pressure to the defeated. Finally, the very way modern democratically accountable statesmen conducted and understood their obligations had changed, the ultimate obligation being towards one's own people and not towards an international society.¹⁷⁹

What emerged from that 'climax' of nationalism then, was an ideology that gradually became so powerful as to undermine the foundations of international morality and ultimately determine the way that power itself was understood and employed. This final phase in the development of nationalism illustrates the implications of both the indivisibility of power and the continuous interaction between its different facets. The description of propaganda in the *Twenty Years' Crisis* as a modern weapon and the prerequisites for its effective use bears remarkable resemblance to the social setting of the third period of nationalism. Although power over opinion itself is old enough, its impact in modern politics depends upon the increase in political

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. pp. 21-24

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 24-26

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 26-34

participation that mass democracy allowed.¹⁸⁰ Yet this characteristic is only peculiar to the modern nation-state after its third period, and thus historically conditioned. At least one manifestation of power, then, is in fact determined in its present and particularly potent form by nationalism, demonstrating the power that an idea that becomes entrenched can convey.

This is not to assume that a successful ideology can indeed substitute power in its complexity. For the particular value of Carr's insistence on the indivisibility of power is precisely that the other two forms of power are imposing restraints to the operation of the third. This allowed him to make the claim that the burdens imposed on the modern nation-state by developments in the fields of military and economic power would eventually signal the end of the age of nationalism.

Moving beyond the nation-state

For Carr the political unit is not to be conceived as a category outside history; and neither are the forms of political organisation. "The structure of society at any given time and place", he claimed, "as well as the prevailing theories and beliefs about it, are largely governed by the way in which the material needs of the society are met".¹⁸¹ The question is whether a form of social organisation is able to meet those needs. In Carr's view the nation-state was increasingly incapable of doing so. He believed there was a clear tendency in the fields of military and economic power that would eventually make the nation-state, and particularly a small one, incapable of performing its main functions. Matched with the moral bankruptcy of nationalism, these tendencies created for Carr the necessity to contemplate ways to transcend the nation-state.

Mechanised warfare demanded the backing of enormous industrial capabilities, in which small nations could not hope to follow the great powers. Thus while even as late as the Great War they stood a chance for playing a role in the final outcome, by 1940 their resistance had "no more than a nuisance value".¹⁸² The option of

¹⁸⁰ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*, pp. 120-122. Carr added more about the contemporary form of propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy in his later *Soviet Impact*. There he maintained that although propaganda "in the broad sense" is not new, its organised use is a result of the First World War. E.H. Carr, *Soviet Impact*, p. 71

¹⁸¹ E.H. Carr, *The New Society*, p. 19

¹⁸² E. H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, p. 53

neutrality was also closed, since the great powers realised that it was more convenient to violate it rather than give their opponents a possible advantage. Small states in response, tended to surrender voluntarily their neutrality by relying more and more on the military capabilities of great powers to ensure their defence.¹⁸³ With respect to the limitations imposed by economic power Carr claimed it played a more important role than military power, even though its importance was often neglected due to the outdated belief that the 19th century division between politics and economics was natural. He emphasised the point that at a time when modern industrial conditions in fact deemed concentrations of economic power inevitable, the world was becoming politically even more fragmented thus accumulating economic problems and insecurity. Put simply, the small nation-state could no longer provide the level of prosperity expected by its population.¹⁸⁴

Carr here observed a paradox in that the world was becoming even more politically fragmented while the realities of power rendered the nation-state obsolete, an issue also raised by other mid-century realists.¹⁸⁵ For Carr the problem lay with the application of Wilsonian principles in the aftermath of the Great War. By applying the principle of self-determination uncritically, the peacemakers created a whole number of small independent nation-states at the exact moment when the independence of small units was becoming more nominal than real. Here the conditionality of thought that Carr borrowed from Mannheim is of crucial importance. For the identification of the principle of self-determination with that of nationality though corresponding to the circumstances prevailing in Western Europe where the two were identical, was completely irrelevant to the situation where multi-national empires hitherto ruled. The main error thus of the peacemakers was their failure to realise that a moral principle becomes inapplicable when regarded as absolute and isolated from the political context that created it.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid. pp. 50-56

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 56-60. Scheuerman spots an interesting, albeit superficial parallel, with Hayek in Carr's criticism of economic nationalism. The similarities stop in this criticism though, since Carr believed that the resurrection of 19th century liberalism was an illusion and was sympathetic to socialism. W. E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 55-58

¹⁸⁵ For similar arguments in this thesis see *infra* under Chapters II and III. For an overview drawing from a more extensive sample of realists: W. E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 54-66.

¹⁸⁶ E.H. Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, pp. 38-48. Carr's argument here can help clarify allegations about his eurocentrism. Hobson for example, claims that the "ultimate irony" for Carr was that by

The transplantation of nationalism to “new and unfamiliar soils”, where the European traditions could not limit it to the same extent, had catastrophic consequences. For Carr however the moral challenge facing nationalism was not only restrained to societies outside of its birthplace but a broader one. Insofar as nationalism in its climax signified the “exaltation of the nation over the individual as an end in itself” it was morally problematic.¹⁸⁷ For Carr rights such as freedom and equality were meaningful only for individuals and could only be approached as metaphors, and dangerous ones for that matter, when applied to nation-states.¹⁸⁸ As some commentators have noticed, Carr indeed overlapped with critical theory in his quest to discover a new moral framework upon which a new international society could be built.¹⁸⁹ Yet to go as far as to claim, as Hobson does, that in his effort to transcend the nation-state Carr “ascribed a full autonomy to global moral norms” and that it was the “realities of global morality rather than global power” that would shape the new international order, is to underplay the significance of both his realism and the dialectics of power and morality.¹⁹⁰

Even in his most ambitious blueprints, Carr’s emphasis on the centrality of power never vanished. What partially triggered the moral attack on nationalism, he claimed, was precisely the failure of the nation-state to adequately provide for the security and welfare of its citizens.¹⁹¹ The forces then, which brought about the nation-state in its socialised form, were still active; what changed was the capacity of the nation-state to address their demands.¹⁹² In his quest to identify ways to address those demands,

“conflating intra-European politics with the universal” in his account of nationalism, he echoed the utopians he challenged in his early work. J. M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 193. There is, however, no irony here. Carr’s account of nationalism was self-consciously Eurocentric precisely because he considered the phenomenon to be geographically and historically conditioned. His account of nationalism never purported to lay claims to universality, as Hobson claims, because he considered it incompatible even to realities in the east of Europe (let alone the rest of the world). Gellner, who drew on Carr in developing his own theory of nationalism, was aware of that conditionality and modified it by applying an additional layer of ‘time-zones’ to his own model. E. Gellner, “Nationalism reconsidered and E. H. Carr” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1992, pp. 285-293

¹⁸⁷ E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 32-34

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 38-51

¹⁸⁹ J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 59-61

¹⁹⁰ J. M. Hobson, *The State and International Relations*, pp. 59-61. Falk’s analysis, despite also exploring the connections with critical theory, is much more attentive to Carr’s realist side. R. Falk, “The critical realist tradition and the demystification of interstate power”, pp.45-49

¹⁹¹ E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 38

¹⁹² Ibid. pp. 46-47

Carr embraced functionalism as the way forward. But his was not the functionalism of the world state advocated by Mitrany.¹⁹³ He cautioned against the “sentimental and empty universalism” implied in such a solution and gravitated in favour of regionalism which he deemed more “practical and workable”.¹⁹⁴ His preference for regional integration stemmed from his belief that the realities of power would ultimately determine the form of the unit of organisation to replace the nation-state in the same way they previously conditioned the development of the former.¹⁹⁵

IV. Carr’s ‘showcase’ of realism: The Soviet Union

Carr and the History of the Soviet Union: some preliminary remarks

Russia played a cardinal role in Carr’s intellectual development even before he became interested in the revolution and its impact. It was his involvement with nineteenth century Russian literature during his career as a diplomat that made him sensible to the relativity of thought and the challenge towards the liberal moral framework that originated from those “outside the charmed circle”.¹⁹⁶ According to his own account, his interest shifted to what was happening in Russia with its entry in the Second World War and the dramatic change from the impotence of 1917.¹⁹⁷ The outcome of Carr’s involvement with the Soviet Union was a massive set of work, not restricted to his 14 volumes of the *History* but including several other essays and books.

In a period so polarised as the Cold War, Carr’s mode of thought and his insistence to avoid moral judgements when writing history gained him several criticisms. A notable and often repeated criticism was that his determinist view of history resulted

¹⁹³ On Carr’s functionalism and the European Integration see D. Kenealy and K. Kostagiannis, “Realist Visions of European Union”, pp. 233-242; a very interesting discussion of Carr’s functionalism and its connection to Mitrany with whose work he was most likely familiar is offered in: W. E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 76-81

¹⁹⁴ E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, pp. 44-45

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 51; pp. 51-60

¹⁹⁶ E.H. Carr, “An Autobiography”, pp. xvi-xvii; also in K. Nishimura, “E. H. Carr, Dostoevsky, and the Problem of Irrationality in Modern Europe” in *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2011, pp.45-64

¹⁹⁷ E.H. Carr, “An Autobiography”, pp. xvi-xx

in his siding with the victors.¹⁹⁸ Although partially right, since from very early Carr claimed that “what was, is right”¹⁹⁹ this assessment is unfair. Carr was never an ardent determinist and this is apparent in his handling of determinism in *What is History?*.²⁰⁰ What he was sceptical of, was the theoretically conceivable but unhelpful for a historian engagement with what might have been if things took another, more favourable course, especially with respect to recent events.²⁰¹ Haslam does him more justice when describing this attitude as a “deep-seated fatalism” closely related to Carr’s brand of realism.²⁰²

Carr’s attitude towards the Soviet Union changed through time –naturally according to his own standards of historiography.²⁰³ Davies, who collaborated with him in the writing of the *Foundations of Planned Economy*, described the latter’s changing attitudes towards the Soviet Union until they were crystallised in the general assessment of “a great achievement and a historical turning-point” from 1941 on.²⁰⁴ This is not to assume, as several critics have done, that Carr viewed the Soviet Union as offering an alternative to western capitalism. Despite his belief in planned economy as expressed in *The New Society*, Carr was aware of the peculiarity of the Russian case and faced the Soviet achievements rather as a challenge that the western world ought to answer.²⁰⁵ As some of his commentators already noticed, the motive behind his interest on the Soviet Union was not the projection of the soviet experiment as a successful utopia. He rather, and similarly to his previous endeavours, saw the Soviet Union as a showcase of the necessary blending of utopia and reality in politics, as demonstrated by a state that gradually abandoned its initial

¹⁹⁸ I. Berlin criticised Carr for his “view of history as the story of the big battalions, and of progress as being whatever those in power will in fact achieve”, a criticism repeated by Trevor-Roper. See J. Haslam, *The Vices of Integrity*, pp. 200-204

¹⁹⁹ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, p. 64

²⁰⁰ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 91-108

²⁰¹ He summarised his criticism, especially as regards contemporary history, as follows: “the trouble about contemporary history is that people remember the time when all the options were still open”. *Ibid*, p. 96-98

²⁰² J. Haslam, “E.H. Carr and the History of Soviet Russia” in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1983, pp. 1021-1027: pp. 1023-1024; see also the excellent discussion by Duke who makes a similar argument: D. F. Duke, *Historical Realism and the Liberal Tradition*, *passim*

²⁰³ See E. H. Carr, *What is History?* pp. 34-42 whence the quote “two books cannot be written by the same historian”.

²⁰⁴ R. W. Davies ‘Carr’s changing views of the Soviet Union’ in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 91-107

²⁰⁵ For planned economy see: E.H. Carr, *The New Society*, pp. 19-39; for the Soviet experience as a challenge towards the western world to change see the concluding paragraph of: E.H. Carr, *Soviet Impact*, pp. 115-116

revolutionary rhetoric and became normalised.²⁰⁶ In the following sections I focus on the traces of Carr's peculiar realism with respect to the development of the Soviet Union and its attitude towards nationalism.

Utopia and Reality: The Soviet Union and the World

The initial impulse of the Bolsheviks with respect to foreign affairs was to treat their condition as the first step to world revolution. Thus their first moves were the issuing of the 'peace decree' and the publication of the secret treaties concluded by the previous government, both intending to demonstrate their contempt towards traditional diplomacy and their self-image as a force substituting national divisions for class ones. Since the decree failed to evoke any reaction in western governments it gave its way to a foreign policy that Carr described as "dual and in some respects self-contradictory" i.e. the simultaneous effort to negotiate with capitalist governments and thus ensure the survival of the soviet state *and* overthrow them and spread the revolution.²⁰⁷ The tendency towards normalisation can be traced back to that first period when the instinct of survival forced the Bolshevik to contemplate a series of ideological concessions such as maintaining the authority of the state and behaving as one.²⁰⁸ Yet the adjustment to the realities of international politics was a very gradual process and at the first stages the Soviet Union suffered the consequences of its dual policy.

The first test-case appeared within the first year of the establishment of the new regime. The first priority of the Bolsheviks was to conclude peace with Germany and although an armistice was signed at Brest-Litovsk from as early as December 1917, the Soviets stalled while waiting for the German proletariat to rise. After some weeks of negotiations the German generals, unimpressed by Trotsky's formula of "no peace no war", resumed operations and advanced towards Petrograd. Facing elimination the new regime finally accepted terms even harsher than those initially proposed and peace was secured at February 1918. This failure, however, increased the feeling of vulnerability and helplessness of the new regime and resulted in a hasty rebuilding of

²⁰⁶ M. Cox, "E. H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher: a Very 'Special Relationship'" in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 125-144: p 127; also: J. Haslam, *Vices of Integrity* p 144

²⁰⁷ E.H. Carr, *A history of Soviet Russia: The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol. 3, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, pp. 21-33

²⁰⁸ *Ibid* p. 32

a tactical army that ideally ought to have been abolished.²⁰⁹ Relations with Germany represent a classical example of the dual policy followed by the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of Brest-Litovsk the Bolsheviks found themselves negotiating with the German government and at the same time inciting revolutionary activity to overthrow it, a contradiction only obscured by the increasing ineffectiveness of German authorities during the collapse of 1918. Bolsheviks saw Germany through a “haze of ideological preconceptions” and heavily misjudged its politics. Yet only a year after the failed communist rising of 1919 in Germany, Lenin could speak of a natural alliance between the latter and Russia.²¹⁰

A demonstration of that evolution is given by the way Carr understood the Comintern. In the *Twenty Years' Crisis* he briefly mentioned it as an exemplification of the close association between national power and international propaganda.²¹¹ He later engaged systematically with the institution not only in the volumes of his *History of Soviet Russia* but also in two separate works: *The Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935* and *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, published posthumously. Through those works the reader observes the gradual fading of an organisation aiming at coordinating the communist parties towards the expected revolution. As the Soviet Union entered the 1930s with the doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’ already consolidated, the prospect of world revolution was becoming not only distant but also annoying for the Soviet leadership. As a result the Comintern after its seventh congress in 1935 was already simply identifying its aims with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.²¹² The way Carr examined the Spanish Civil War is indicative of the new tendency: a party with marginal if any role before the war (the Spanish Communist Party) gained gradually in importance and participation in government because of the increasing dependency of the Spanish

²⁰⁹ All three elements of the sentence constitute ideological concessions. The army as an institution of the old regime should be abolished in accordance to the Marxist doctrine; the militia that would replace it should be recruited voluntarily; and finally the recruitment of members of the old officer corps did not correspond to the ideal of a ‘class army’. Ibid pp. 69-78.

²¹⁰ E. H. Carr, *German – Soviet Relations 1919-1939*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1951, pp. 25-47

²¹¹ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis* pp. 124-125

²¹² E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, pp 403-427. In a review covering the topic, Carr claimed that given that the Third International was effectively “a partnership between a single victorious party and a bevy of unsuccessful... aspirants for power” it was only a matter of time before the former became identified with Soviet power. E.H. Carr, “The Third International” (1952) in E.H. Carr, *From Napoleon to Stalin*, pp. 82-92: p. 90

republican government upon soviet aid. This process according to Carr “seemed to have less and less to do with communism”; communism was now employed as a façade for the forwarding of the Soviet foreign policy.²¹³

This is not to assume that the Soviet regime ever quit from the aspirations for world revolution. Carr observed that from such an early stage as the allied intervention the ideological element of world revolution in soviet foreign policy was intensified, yet informed by “the interest of national self-preservation”²¹⁴. For Carr this dual balance although gradually leaning towards the side of normalisation would never stop haunting soviet politics. He thus described the dilemma faced by the soviet leadership during the Sino-soviet schism as the persistent original dilemma between beliefs in international socialism and national interest, ultimately between the revolutionary principles and reality.²¹⁵ Consequently, Carr viewed the Soviet Union as an exemplification of the constant interaction between the forces of utopia and reality that is the very “stuff of politics”. The balance between the ideal and the institution will always be an uneasy one, as the soviet case demonstrated.²¹⁶

Ideologies and power: communism and nationalism

The leadership of the Soviet Union then, had from quite early to adapt to the realities of power in order to ensure its survival. What is also of particular interest, given Carr’s approach to ideational power, is the interplay between the ideologies of communism and nationalism in soviet policy. The doctrine officially embraced by the Bolsheviks upon their ascendance to power was that of Marxism whose programme of international socialism was incompatible with nationalism, the aphorism of *The Communist Manifesto* that “the working men have no country” being quite explicit. It would therefore require a great deal of ideological flexibility to reconcile the two doctrines. The way that the soviet doctrine of self-determination was developed by Lenin to reconcile the nationalism emerging from the ruins of a formerly multi-national empire and the socialism of the Bolshevik programme is an

²¹³ E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, London: Macmillan, 1984, pp. 66-85

²¹⁴ E.H. Carr, *History of Soviet Russia*, Vol. 3, p. 98

²¹⁵ E. H. Carr, “Unfinished Revolution” in E. H. Carr, *1917: Before and After*, London: Macmillan, 1969, pp. 174-175

²¹⁶ E.H. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis*, pp 88-95

indicative example of the necessary blending of utopia with reality in Carr's thought.²¹⁷

Despite the variety of nationalities it encompassed, in pre-revolutionary Russia the preconditions for active national agitation were limited: the local elites -as the most likely bearers of nationalism- not only enjoyed a privileged position in the Russian administration, but Tsarist authority also protected them from the revolutionary potential of their respective peoples. The disintegration of this centralised system that followed the revolution allowed for the removal of the fabric of common interests that held the periphery anchored to the centre. The case of a permanent break-up like in Austria-Hungary was averted according to Carr due to two peculiarities of Russia. The first was the predominance of the Great Russian population *vis à vis* the other nationalities; the second was the summoning of nationalism as a force eventually reinforcing bolshevism. This paradoxical achievement is attributed to Lenin that "recognised the revolutionary factors in nationalism, and had foreseen that the only safe course would be to welcome and harness the torrent".²¹⁸ Thus by developing a "conditional and dynamic" doctrine of self-determination allowing for secession, the Bolsheviks were able to go through the civil war with considerable advantages over their 'White' opponents. Russian patriotism was easily evoked against forces supported by foreign powers and the connection of nationalism with social reform resulted in the support of the agricultural population whose nationalism was mainly characterised by economic grievances. The 'Whites' on the contrary represented the old Russian tradition, not only hostile to social reforms but also to concessions towards nationalities. Hence the Bolsheviks by way of recognising the right to secede in a period when no one had the power to keep the state united, proved to be more flexible and capable of "making a virtue of a necessity" than their opponents.²¹⁹

The description of the process of disintegration and re-integration of the Russian Empire is presented by Carr in a way that echoes the assumptions outlined in his previous works on nationalism. Thus the success of each nationalism is viewed as

²¹⁷ As regards Lenin's realism in particular, Deutscher claimed that Carr was somewhat overstating the case. In an otherwise favourable review of Carr's work on the Soviet Union, Deutscher observed that Carr was too eager to appreciate Lenin the statesman rather than Lenin the revolutionary, reserving only "condescending irony" for the latter. I. Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades, and Other Essays*, London: Cape 1969, pp. 91-110

²¹⁸ E.H. Carr, *History of Soviet Russia*, Vol. 1. p. 263

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 259-281

dependent upon the roots and social base of said nationalism and, equally importantly, upon the regional power setting. Poland and Finland are presented as the only two nations that possessed from the outset a native ruling class capable of both leading the national movement and to run the nation once independence was gained. Furthermore they both had substantial German support in their beginnings that precluded their forceful re-integration into the Soviet Union.²²⁰ Ukraine and White Russia on the contrary accounted for a quite different story. In the first, the nationalism of the peasantry constituting the majority of the populace maintained mainly anti-Jewish and anti-Polish characteristics. Furthermore, the economic interdependence with Russia was much closer than in the cases of Finland or Poland. As a result, the national movement of Ukraine, mainly evoked by a small group of intellectuals without broad popular support, was never consolidated. Its leaders, when faced with pressure from Petrograd, turned first to the French, then to the Germans and finally to the Poles for support. This final move was to remove any popular support that remained for the national movement, since it evoked the hostility towards the Polish landowners. Bolshevik rule was thus re-established by 1921.²²¹ The brief survival of the Transcaucasian Republics until 1920, suggested Carr, was maintained by the fact that the power vacuum left by Russian collapse was covered by them only with foreign support. When the latter withdrew, Russia was ready to recover them.²²²

What one can infer from Carr's account is the close interdependence between the eventual success of a nationalist endeavour and the realities of domestic and international power. Carr observed that the Bolshevik regimes established in several of the republics after their secession would not be able to succeed without the support of Moscow and the case was similar with their opponents. The ultimate issue was thus not one of independence but whether the dependence would be on Moscow or on a western capital.²²³ The underlying argument here is the same as in the *Conditions of Peace and Nationalism and After*, although clearer since illuminated

²²⁰ German support proved more decisive in the case of Finland -where a civil war erupted between Bolshevik-backed social-democrats and the government- and helped consolidate "the bourgeois regime in Finland". Ibid, pp 292-295

²²¹ Ibid. 295-312

²²² Ibid 350

²²³ Ibid. 273

by practical examples. The principle of self-determination had a very limited applicability in regions east of Vienna, and was contingent upon the existence of a set of preconditions that were similar to those in Western Europe. Furthermore the realities of power and its regional distribution imposed limits to the independence of small units, to such an extent that they could determine their very survival *qua* independent units. Even when the Soviet Union developed its own variant of nationalism, Carr approached it as being qualitatively different from the exclusivist nationalism of the third period.²²⁴

Concluding remarks

Power then, informs crucially Carr's assumptions about what constitutes the 'political' and thus can be traced in almost all his works including those that are classified as historical. It is the fact that power lies at the core of Carr's methodology and his epistemological and ontological assumptions which allows it to underpin consistently such a diverse set of works. The implicit, multi-faceted and elusive conceptualization of power that Carr developed in the Twenty Years' Crisis is an important factor for this consistency. The three facets of power, distinct from each other yet inescapably woven to each other, allowed Carr to employ his conceptualization in order to investigate complicated social phenomena such as ideologies, whose analysis would not fit in a conventional understanding of power in terms of material capabilities. This flexibility allowed him to offer a compelling account of the historical development of the nation-state.

His was an account that saw the nation-state emerging in the wake of the collapse of the medieval order and transforming gradually to adapt to new political and economic conditions. The main factor behind the transformations of the nation-state was the interplay between domestic and international power. The strength of Carr's

²²⁴ See for instance the discussion in *Nationalism and After* where he claimed that none of the victorious powers was "nationalist in the old sense". E.H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 36. Soviet nationalism, he claimed later, always professed to differ "on the ground that it is built up on the brotherhood of the many nations and races composing the Soviet Union". Although Carr here seemed too willing to take the soviets' word for it, his criticism of western nationalism as resting "on the unspoken assumption of the superior right of the white man" and his warning for the resonance of the soviet appeal with anti-colonial movements seems rather fair. E. H. Carr, *Soviet Impact*, pp. 100-101. Carr was not entirely consistent on the question of the novelty of Soviet nationalism. Indeed, his discussion of Stalin after the latter died, credited him with resurrecting "the *Russian* national tradition" (emphasis added). E.H. Carr, "Stalin" in *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1952, pp. 1-7: pp. 3-4

approach was that he realised that the nation-state was not a static entity. Its character changed to reflect the increased access to political power of new social strata until it encompassed the whole of society. The same was also true of economics with the nation-state transforming to adapt to new economic conditions and to accommodate the demands of those that wielded political power. Nationalism, as the ideological corollary of the nation-state, also transformed to reflect changes in the field of power. Yet ideas have a power of their own and as long as they keep corresponding to the underlying social conditions this power is going to be potent.

Carr's views on the conditionality of thought and morality allowed him to see the nation-state as a historically and geographically conditioned entity. He, however, never saw power as the only factor that determines political life, although probably he saw it as the most important. He approached nationalism as an ideology that attempted to strike a balance between power *and* morality, but such a balance can only be precarious. When realities at the field of international power challenged the defensibility of the nation-state both economically and politically nationalism too, Carr thought, would become bankrupt. Its moral bankruptcy had already been demonstrated when in its third phase it eliminated any surviving notion of international morality. This belief led Carr, consistently with his insistence that a compromise between power and morality is an essential condition for sound political life, to contemplate ways to realistically transcend the nation-state.

Given his belief that sound political thought lay with providing a blueprint for balancing, temporarily and uneasily, reality and utopia it is of no surprise that Carr always tried to identify possible solutions. Of course, the diagnosis is always easier than the prescription of a treatment and as Haslam noted Carr was often "too eager to prescribe".²²⁵ It is under the lens of the balance between the irreconcilable forces of utopia and reality that Carr's *History of Soviet Russia* remains particularly important for international relations theory. For it clearly displays the process of normalisation a revolutionary power has to undergo if it hopes to survive, while struggling to maintain something from the utopia that gave rise to it. The experiment that Carr hoped that might suggest possible ways out of the crisis or challenge the western world to find new ways out might have failed. Carr's volumes however, remain as an

²²⁵ J. Haslam, "Carr's Search for Meaning" in M. Cox (ed.) *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*, pp. 21-35: p. 26

excellent demonstration of his understanding of power and its functions, the restraints it imposes on ideals, and the compromises reached in order to accommodate the ideal with reality.

CHAPTER II

Hans Morgenthau and the tragedy of the nation-state²²⁶

Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is the role power plays in Morgenthau's approach to politics as tragedy and its connection to the nation-state. I begin by putting Morgenthau's theory of international relations into the context of a critique of rationalism that he first launched with *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*. There is a tendency in recent literature to uncover Morgenthau's hidden motivations and intellectual roots, which the author apparently camouflaged appropriately to make his ideas appealing to his new audience after he settled in America.²²⁷ While mindful of the contribution of such approaches, in this chapter I propose to take Morgenthau on his own terms not the least because hidden motives are rather hard to verify. I thus argue that Morgenthau's eclecticism allowed him to draw from a broad range of sources to create his version of realism. It is particularly the classical tradition, which Morgenthau himself described as encapsulating the 'eternal truths' of politics, which is of cardinal importance for understanding the core of his theory.

The contribution of the classical tradition on Morgenthau's theory is twofold. Firstly, it provides him with a clear distinction between different spheres of human activity, exemplified by the distinction between the transcendental and the actual that is central for his moral project. Secondly, that tradition offers Morgenthau the core assumptions he employed about the nature of man and politics, namely the awareness of the tragic element in human nature and the recognition that power politics is an inalienable element of social life. The association of power with human nature, based on the anthropological assumption of an inescapable lust for power, forms the core of Morgenthau's ontology and underpins his proclamation that interest defined as power is the 'timeless key concept' in politics. Power has however a role to play

²²⁶ Parts of this chapter are published in a modified version which focuses more on tragedy in: K. Kostagiannis, "Hans Morgenthau and the Tragedy of the Nation-State" in *International History Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2014, pp. 513-529

²²⁷ This applies particularly to thinkers like Nietzsche and Schmitt that, is assumed, would make Morgenthau uncomfortable in his new environment, had he admitted his indebtedness to them.

in his epistemology too. It is its identification as the 'central concept' of politics which helps delineate the borders of the field and establish the autonomy of politics. In the second part I focus on Morgenthau's conceptualisation of power. I argue that the explicit definition of power as a psychological relationship that stops short of violence serves the purpose of insulating the political sphere from other social spheres and at the same time defines the distinction between ends and means in politics. If, however, the assumption that power constitutes the core of politics is followed to its logical consequences then an unmitigated anarchy defined by unlimited power drives would actually materialise. This, according to Morgenthau, is not only prevented due to the mediating role of forces that oppose power such as morality but also due to power itself, and particularly the operation of balance of power. The latter he understood not in solely a mechanistic way but rather as a concept that constitutes both an element of a pluralistic international society and a normative prerogative. The common moral framework of the nineteenth century was thus essential for the effective operation of the balance of power, but for Morgenthau that framework was dissolved due to the rise of modernity and nationalism.

In the third part I examine the interrelation between power and the nation-state. The nation-state, as the current mode of political organisation, has a twofold significance for Morgenthau's theory. Firstly, it provides the framework through which the *animus dominandi* is transferred from the individual to the collective level. Secondly, it provides Morgenthau the concept around which to anchor the central for his theory notions of interest and power. The role of nationalism as the ideological corollary of the nation-state permeates the fields of power and morality. With respect to the former, nationalism is both an element of national power and the main culprit behind miscalculations of national power. I claim that despite his criticism of the nation-state Morgenthau's theory is on occasion *too* closely connected to it due to the important functions the concept is expected to play within the theory. Finally, I discuss the limits imposed upon the nation-state and nationalism by power in general and by power in the nuclear age in particular, which led Morgenthau to start contemplating the idea of a world state.

In the fourth and final part of the chapter I examine the exemplification of Morgenthau's approach in the cases of the foreign policies of Germany in the first

half of the twentieth century and that of the United States during the Cold War. Drawing from the themes discussed in the first three parts, I examine Germany as an exemplification of an actual national tragedy triggered by self-defeating nationalism. I approach the United States as the potential tragedy of a nation that succumbed to idealism, a tragedy that Morgenthau sought to avert with his advice. Finally, with the concluding remarks I bring the chapter in the context of the aims of the thesis and relate Morgenthau's views on power with those of E.H. Carr that I covered in the previous chapter.

I. Morgenthau's theory of international relations

The critique of rationalist philosophy

With *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* Morgenthau launched a fierce critique against the rationalist philosophy of the last three centuries and its fundamental assumptions. He claimed rationalism, as the backbone of modern political thought, to be fundamentally flawed.²²⁸ It is flawed ontologically since "rationalism has misunderstood the nature of man, the nature of the social world, and the nature of reason itself".²²⁹ It is also flawed epistemologically since its blind belief in the scientific approach, modelled after the natural sciences, offers neither a full understanding of nor a remedy for the problems of the social world.

The anthropological assumptions of rationalism suggest that reason can be used to understand both man and the world and bridge the gap between knowledge and action.²³⁰ This assumption has profound implications. For it presupposes a false identification of natural and social worlds under reason in the form of causality. The methodological outcome is to model social sciences after the more advanced natural sciences and emulate their methods. Morgenthau treated the result as one of utter

²²⁸ Morgenthau considered rationalism to underpin both liberalism and Marxism, and thus both camps of the Cold War, despite their differences, shared -and suffered from- the same flawed philosophical background. Hence when Morgenthau was referring to the dilemmas facing the scientific man, his critique did not only aim at the western world but was a universal critique of modernity. This is particularly apparent in H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, New York: New American Library, 1972, p. 4

²²⁹ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 5

²³⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 122-123

failure not only because the social world is essentially different from the natural world, but also because even in natural sciences the hitherto accepted degree of certainty was gradually undermined.²³¹ Morgenthau's issue with rationalism was thus that its "scientific dogmatism" failed to grasp the real attributes of human nature, a sentiment he shared with contemporary American realists or even with some non-American non-realists like Oakeshott.²³²

Liberal international relations' theory, as the modern embodiment of rationalism, suffers from the same vices. Liberalism in international relations, by combining the experience of its domestic success and the philosophy of rationalism sees international politics in terms of the domestic analogy. Thus international politics as a domain defined according to pre-rationalist systems of thought by the struggle for survival and power is essentially altered. Since states are modelled after individuals in domestic politics, international relations are to be governed by the same rationalist principles. The predominance of economics and trade over politics and the harmony of interests over the struggle for power lead to a system of thought that negates politics and replaces political conflicts with mere technical issues.²³³

Yet rationalism is not only flawed philosophically. It also suffers from historical insensitivity. Even if rationalism's philosophic premises are not flawed *per se*, they do not correspond to the experiences of modernity. Taken as they are out of their original historical context and treated as eternal truths they are utterly irrelevant to reality. Thus, a philosophy originating in the clash between the rising middle classes and the feudal state and mirroring the formers' interests continues to inform a world that has long since departed from this setting.²³⁴ In the resulting question whence should modernity find inspiration to overcome the deficiencies of rationalism,

²³¹ Ibid. pp. 122-136; In *Science: servant or master?* Morgenthau added to his critique of modern science the moral shortcoming of failing to attain a meaning by either of the two historically available options i.e. relation to transcendental values or immanent justification. H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, pp. 11-24

²³² Interestingly, although Oakeshott agreed with Morgenthau's verdict of rationalism, he considered the latter's views as a mirror image of that rationalism. If rationalism saw erroneously a bright future, Morgenthau committed a similar error by looking nostalgically backwards: N. Rengger, "Realism, tragedy, and the anti-Pelagian imagination in international political thought" in M. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 118-136. For the common "theologico-political" and anti-rationalist background of several of the early American realists see N. Guilhot, "American Katechon: When Political Theology Became International Relations Theory" in *Constellations*, Vol. 17, No 2, 2010, pp. 225-253

²³³ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 70-121

²³⁴ Ibid. pp. 19-40

Morgenthau turned to the pre-rational philosophies, which he often invoked as a sharp contrast to rationalist assumptions.²³⁵

The return to pre-modern verities: Politics as tragedy

According to Morgenthau's verdict the liberals have been "forgetful of the historic relativity of all political thought".²³⁶ Yet not *all* political thought he treated as historically relative.²³⁷ For political science presupposes the "existence and accessibility of objective general truth"; and the continued relevance of classical texts demonstrates their ability to transcend their historical context and express that truth.²³⁸ Morgenthau thus, while denying universality to liberal values, was anxious to dispel any notion of relativism such as the one he criticised Carr for displaying.²³⁹ Hence in his quest to identify the eternal truths of politics, Morgenthau turned to the wisdom of the pre-rationalist philosophy, a philosophy he often contrasted to the rationalist assumptions he was challenging. His attachment to pre-rationalism is neither superficial nor, as Frei suggests, a mere act of camouflaging his real philosophical roots.²⁴⁰

Pre-rationalism is on the one hand employed to demonstrate the clear distinction between different spheres of human activity. Liberalism identifies politics, ethics and science implying that a political action is ethically justified insofar as it follows a scientific solution. On the contrary, pre-rational philosophy treats the convergence of

²³⁵ Although Morgenthau often invoked the pre-rational tradition in *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* it is in his *Science: servant or master?* that he employed pre-rationalism and discussed extensively the "shock of wonderment" which reveals the limits of human experience but can also found the basis for meaningful science. H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, pp. 24-34

²³⁶ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 20

²³⁷ Philosophies representing "eternal verities" are able to guide theory and practice irrespectively of time and although rationalism is not one of them "there have been philosophies which were at least partly of this kind". Ibid. pp. 4-5

²³⁸ H. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 36

²³⁹ S. Molloy, "Aristotle, Epicurus, Morgenthau and the Political Ethics of the Lesser Evil" in *Journal of International Political Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2009, pp. 94-112: pp. 96-98

²⁴⁰ Frei, perhaps too eager to trace Morgenthau's thought back to Nietzsche, claims that the use of pre-rationalism merely cloaks ideas he borrowed from Nietzsche in a language acceptable for the American audience, given the latter's hostility to Nietzsche. See C. Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: an intellectual biography*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001, pp. 189. The same line of argument is also followed by Neacsu: M. Neacsu, *Hans J. Morgenthau's Theory of International Relations: Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment*, Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 50-56. Morgenthau's eclecticism allowed him to accommodate both pre-rationalism and modern critiques to rationalism in his approach, as will be shown in this section.

politics and ethics as a goal to be reached through virtue.²⁴¹ What is more important, the moral criticism of politics in pre-rationalism relies on a clearly conceived and distinct notion of ethics. Thus, it denies the moral value of power politics without having to deny the existence of power politics altogether as does liberalism.²⁴² This very distinction between the transcendent and the actual, which can never be overcome due to human imperfection, is philosophically rooted to Plato and Aristotle as shown by Pin-Fat.²⁴³ Such notions of distinct ethics, along with the moral value of prudence, are explicit demonstrations of the impact of the pre-rational tradition on Morgenthau.²⁴⁴

On the other hand, it is with respect to the very nature of both man and politics that this philosophy offers the eternal verities Morgenthau sought. The first truth of the pre-rationalist philosophy is the awareness of the tragic element in human nature. The understanding of the existence of irreconcilable forces like evil and good, reason and passion, peace and war, and the inconclusive struggle between them; the experience of transformation of good intentions into evil deeds; and the glaring gap between man's understanding and the enigmas of the world are all experiences that manifest the tragic element in human nature.²⁴⁵ For Frei and Gismondi this

²⁴¹ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* pp. 35-40

²⁴² Ibid. pp. 42-46

²⁴³ V. Pin-Fat, "The metaphysics of the national interest and the 'mysticism' of the nation-state: reading Hans J. Morgenthau" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 31, 2005, pp. 217-236

²⁴⁴ Frei correctly points out that although influenced by the analytical faculties and iconoclasm of Nietzsche, Morgenthau refused to follow the normative connotations of his philosophy. C. Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: an Intellectual biography*, pp. 107-108. Morgenthau drew eclectically from a corpus of classical sources for his ethical projects. Lang demonstrated the Aristotelian implications of his notion of prudence and the aristocratic universal morality he nostalgically recalled when lamenting about the collapse of international morality in the age of nationalism. See A. Lang, "Morgenthau, agency, and Aristotle" in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 18-41: pp. 26-33. The importance of Aristotle is also prominent in Molloy's analysis: S. Molloy, "Aristotle, Epicurus, Morgenthau", *passim*. For the impact of the Judaeo-Christian tradition see M. B. Molloy, *Power and Transcendence: Hans Morgenthau and the Jewish Experience*, Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002, pp. 15-75 and A. J. H. Murray, "The Moral Politics of Hans Morgenthau" in *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 58, No 1, 1996, pp. 81-107

²⁴⁵ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 205-208. In his review of the book Oakeshott challenged Morgenthau's decision to approach tragedy as a category of life rather than simply one of art: M. Oakeshott, "Scientific Politics" in *Cambridge Journal*, Vol. 1, 1948, pp. 347-358: p. 356. In his reply, Morgenthau refused to concede this "fundamental point". The gap between duty and ability is, he insisted, "a quality of existence": H. Morgenthau, letter to Oakeshott, 22 May 1948. This exchange has gained some attention in the relevant literature: N. Rengger, "Realism, tragedy, and the anti-Pelagian imagination in international political thought", *passim* and R. N. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 308

understanding of politics as tragedy is to be attributed to Nietzsche.²⁴⁶ Nietzsche was by no means a stranger to tragedy, but his creative approach thereof was alien to Morgenthau.²⁴⁷ That the latter was familiar with notions of tragedy established in the pre-modern world, rather than a secondary loan from Nietzsche, becomes apparent both in terms of form and –perhaps more importantly- of ethics.

Morgenthau’s “self-conscious” link with tragedy, to borrow Lebow’s phrasing, is most clearly present in the works where he explicitly dealt with the tragic quality of human existence.²⁴⁸ But the reader of most of his works cannot fail to realise that Morgenthau’s very language and grammar very often followed the outlook of tragedy. Hence the same “melancholy of wisdom that is informed by an awareness of the irremediable folly of mankind, evoking the memory of Thucydides” that Morgenthau once attributed to Louis Halle, echoes strikingly familiar to the reader of his own works.²⁴⁹ When it comes to the ethical dimension, here too Morgenthau differed profoundly from Nietzsche. The Nietzschean “gaiety in the face of the unhuman”, as aptly put by Steiner, was foreign to Morgenthau’s notion of the tragic, imbued as it is with a very distinct notion of ethics.²⁵⁰ In describing the tension

²⁴⁶ C. Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: an intellectual biography*, p. 187. Gismondi’s examination of realist notions of tragedy relies heavily on Frei’s claims for the section on Morgenthau. M. Gismondi, “Tragedy, Realism and Postmodernity: *Kulturpessimismus* in the Theories of Max Weber, E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Henry Kissinger” in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 15, No 3, 2004, pp. 435-463

²⁴⁷ As Lebow noted, Nietzsche’s interpretation of tragedy tells us more about Nietzsche than it does about tragedy: R. N. Lebow, *Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 53-54. On Nietzsche, tragedy and international relations see B. A. Schupmann, “A Pessimism of Strength? Tragedy and Political Virtue” in T. Erskine and R. N. Lebow (eds), *Tragedy and International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 129-143; T. Strong, “Nietzsche and Questions of Tragedy, Tyranny and International Relations”, *ibid.* pp. 144-157

²⁴⁸ R. N. Lebow, *Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 48-50. Also, see indicatively Morgenthau’s own works: H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, pp. 24-34; H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 205-208

²⁴⁹ H. Morgenthau, “Arguing About the Cold War” (1967) in H. Morgenthau, *Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-1970*, London: Pall Mall Press 1970, pp. 349. As an Athenian born before the death of Aeschylus and whose education comprised almost exclusively of reading the poets, Thucydides was no stranger to tragedy. On the contrary, as Cornford demonstrated, the “tragic theory of human nature” was deeply embedded in his work and his history balances between the quest for objectivity and the form and psychology of drama. Interestingly the infamous Melian dialogue with its *hubris* and tragic irony, is attributed not to Thucydides the historian but to Thucydides the dramatist. See F.M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, London: Edward Arnold, 1907, pp. i-xv; pp. 174-187. For a more recent and detailed account of the importance of the “tragic vision of politics” in the work of Thucydides see: R. N. Lebow, *Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 40-46; pp. 126-141

²⁵⁰ For the quoted passage see: G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture*, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, p. 106. For a discussion of tragedy and ethics in Morgenthau and the gap with Nietzsche in that respect see W. E. Scheuermann, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, pp. 40-69 and particularly fn 11

between the “ethics of our minds and the ethics of our actions” as tragic, Morgenthau subscribed to the view that tragedy arises from an ethical clash, a moral dilemma that involves “inescapable wrongdoing”.²⁵¹ And since in his ethical project political action necessarily entails doing evil, statesmen must select from a series of options the one that accounts for the lesser evil.²⁵² Such an approach to political ethics, with a clear understanding of tragedy in ethical terms and the Aristotelian remedy of prudence to *hubris*, can more persuasively be claimed to be a direct influence from pre-rationalist thought, as Morgenthau himself claimed.²⁵³

The second truth, also manifesting the tragic element of human nature and deriving from this very nature, regards the nature of politics. Power politics is an irreducible element of social life, rooted in the lust for power, inherent in all human beings. Therefore power is inseparable from politics, the latter being essentially always power politics.²⁵⁴ This prevalence of power and its association with human nature does not only derive from the tragic element of that nature but also reinforces it, since each human being is both “the exponent and victim of that force”.²⁵⁵ This final contribution of the pre-rationalist mode of thought is, according to Morgenthau, the point where the re-interpretation of politics should begin. It also forms the core around which Morgenthau’s own assumptions about the nature of politics are crystallized.

²⁵¹ H. Morgenthau, “The evil of politics and the ethics of evil” in *Ethics*, Vol 56, no. 1, 1945, pp. 1-18: p. 11; For a broad typology of tragedies in international relations which encompasses as many takes on tragedy as possible and the position of moral dilemmas in that typology see C. Lu, ‘Tragedies and International Relations’ in T. Erskine and R. N. Lebow (eds) *Tragedy and International Relations*, 158-171

²⁵² H. Morgenthau, “Evil of politics”, *passim*; S. Molloy, “Aristotle, Epicurus, Morgenthau”, *passim*

²⁵³ According to Lebow “Morgenthau was intimately familiar with the corpus of ancient and modern literature and philosophy”. See R. N. Lebow, “The Ancient Greeks and Modern Realism: Ethics, Persuasion, and Power” in D. Bell (ed.) *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 26-39. The claim that tragedy is all about moral lessons is met with scepticism by some authors. Euben for example thinks that tragedy cannot be self-evidently transferred from its original context to modern politics and be interpreted as representing a clash of ethical commitments. Such an interpretation is for him “too much the product of Aristotelian and Christian moralising” in which Morgenthau also played his part: P. Euben, “The Tragedy of Tragedy” in T. Erskine and R. N. Lebow (eds), *Tragedy and International Relations*, pp. 86-96: pp. 86-92

²⁵⁴ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 9-10, 215-219

²⁵⁵ H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, p. 31

Ontology, epistemology and power

Inspired thus by the pre-rational tradition Morgenthau understood power in terms of human nature. The central anthropological assumption that informs this understanding is that the lust for power or the *animus dominandi* is an inalienable element of human nature.²⁵⁶ The lust for power thus, is an existential condition of human beings, generated by their futile efforts to overcome their loneliness since love is unable to succeed in that goal. The tragic element of human existence is that power is equally impotent in accomplishing that goal.²⁵⁷ This inability of the urge to dominate to be satisfied reflects the limits of the human experience as explained in the “imperfectability thesis” of Pin-Fat.²⁵⁸ It is this imperfectability, deriving from what Bell calls Morgenthau’s “metaphysical” and “theological claims” about human nature, that dooms the power drives of men to frustration.²⁵⁹ As such, the lust for power stems from a particular vision of human nature rather than constituting a concept akin to Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power’ which should be treated as “ontologically prior to any definition of human nature and self”.²⁶⁰ What reinforces this tragic element is the evilness of all politics; for every political action is rooted in the inherent lust for power and selfishness of human beings. Thus, the political man is eventually trapped in a precarious balance between the opposing but inescapable

²⁵⁶ Of course here Pichler is right to comment that “Morgenthau delivers no proof for his anthropological statement”. H. K. Pichler, “The godfathers of ‘truth’: Max Weber and Carl Schmitt in Morgenthau’s theory of power politics” in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, 1998, pp. 185-200: p 196. For a recent effort to discuss Morgenthau’s claims about human nature in terms of natural science see B. A. Thayer, “Bringing in Darwin: Evolutionary Theory, Realism, and International Politics” in *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2010, pp. 124-151

²⁵⁷ H. Morgenthau, “Love and Power” in *Commentary*, Vol. 33, No 3, 1962, pp. 247-251: pp. 250-251

²⁵⁸ V. Pin-Fat, “The metaphysics of the national interest”, pp. 221-224

²⁵⁹ D. Bell, “Anarchy, power and death”, pp. 221-239: p. 228

²⁶⁰ For an indicative view that treats Morgenthau’s ‘lust for power’ as identical to Nietzsche’s ‘Will to Power’ see U. E. Peterson, “Breathing Nietzsche’s air: New reflections on Morgenthau’s concepts of power and human nature” in *Alternatives*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1999, pp. 83-118. Peterson’s view neglects the pluralistic view Morgenthau has of a human nature that incorporates different and often conflicting elements. Thus the lust for power might be the central aspect of his vision of ‘political man’ but the latter is meant to be an abstraction such as the ‘moral man’ that might be meaningful in analytical terms but does not imply the universality suggested by Peterson. Cozette thus remarks correctly that Morgenthau’s conception of human nature cannot be “reduced to this [the lust for power] impulse”. M. Cozette, “What Lies Ahead: Classical Realism on the Future of International Relations” in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10, 2008, pp. 667-679

“perennial poles” of evil and ethics.²⁶¹ The inescapability of the urge to dominate plays in Morgenthau’s theory a significant role with respect both to his ontological and his epistemological assumptions.

Firstly, he considered power and especially the concept of interest defined in terms of power to be the main characteristic of domestic and international politics alike.²⁶² The fact that interest defined as power is the timeless key concept of politics, “an objective category which is universally valid” does not, however, imply that its meaning is “fixed once and for all”. Different circumstances lead to different attitudes to power in various periods in history. Political science while demonstrating the central role of power is to adapt its emphasis accordingly.²⁶³ Given his explicit renunciation of the scientific approach and his agreement with Weber for that matter, Morgenthau’s claim to objectivity seems paradoxical. He overcame the value-determinacy problem raised by Weber by means of modifying Schmitt’s notion of ‘the political’ so as to incorporate his anthropological assumption. If the essence of politics is reduced to a simple, elemental in human nature urge, then there is at least one value that all statesmen share: the choice between survival or peril.²⁶⁴

Secondly, power offers political science with the “central concept” that is essential to delineate the borders of the field and establish its independence. Morgenthau employed the analogy with economics and its central concept of “interest defined as wealth” to describe the similar functions of “interest defined as power” for political science.²⁶⁵ The autonomy of the political sphere is an important analytical tool Morgenthau borrowed from Weber. As such, it serves the methodological purpose of distinguishing different spheres of human activities as ideal types that can in turn be analysed in isolation.²⁶⁶

This central concept has, however, profound epistemological implications beyond the mere independence of the political sphere. It also provides political science with “a

²⁶¹ H. Morgenthau, “Evil of Politics”, pp. 1-18

²⁶² H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973, p. 35

²⁶³ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 4-9; also in H. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, p. 38

²⁶⁴ H. K. Pichler, “The godfathers of ‘truth’”, pp. 190-192

²⁶⁵ H. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, pp. 38-40

²⁶⁶ M. C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics” in *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 2004, pp. 633-665: p. 641

rational outline” of politics, having distinguished the timeless features of politics apart from the circumstantial. This enables not only the comprehensive understanding of political action irrespective of historical or geographical conditions but also offers a stepping stone for meaningful political action.²⁶⁷ Far from thus being just a mere analytical convenience, the identification of power with the central concept of an autonomous political sphere fulfils an important role in the normative side of Morgenthau’s theory. It is thus also a “moral and political project”.²⁶⁸

Finally, power, lying at the core of Morgenthau’s political philosophy, allows for a better understanding of his notion of rationality. Despite the ferocity of his attack against rationalism Morgenthau maintained that the faculties of reason are essential for sound politics. Although Morgenthau’s early writings were influenced by anti-enlightenment figures, their impact is often exaggerated and the process of his intellectual development neglected.²⁶⁹ Hence, his attack on rationalism does not imply an embrace of irrationality.²⁷⁰ For Morgenthau reason is indispensable for politics insofar as it ameliorates the destructiveness of power, yet this reason is not the scientific one of rationalism.²⁷¹ It is reason in the form of political intuition rather than the deductive reason of positivism that has the primacy. It is this intuition of the platonic philosopher-king that according to Pin-Fat allows for the re-introduction of reason into politics by reconnecting the transcendental to the actual in line with Morgenthau’s metaphysics.²⁷²

²⁶⁷ H. Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics*, pp. 38-39

²⁶⁸ M. C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations” pp. 650-653

²⁶⁹ W. E. Scheuerman, “A Theoretical Missed Opportunity? Hans J. Morgenthau as Critical Realist” in D. Bell (ed.) *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 41-57

²⁷⁰ In his final years, however, Morgenthau was disillusioned by the failure of policy makers to pursue rationally the national interest. This led him to reconsider his theory and examine the possibilities of an irrational theory of international relations or a theory of misunderstanding. D. Fromkin, “Remembering Hans Morgenthau” in *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1993, pp. 81-88

²⁷¹ H. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, pp. 9-10. In his critique of *Scientific Man* Oakeshott identifies the confusion between ‘scientific enquiry’ and ‘scientism’ as well as between ‘reason’ and ‘rationalism’ as “fatal to the argument”, since it conveys the false impression that Morgenthau opposes reason in general and not merely rationalism. In his letter to Oakeshott Morgenthau admitted the validity of that critique. M. Oakeshott, “Scientific Politics” in *Cambridge Journal*, Vol. 1, 1948, pp. 347-358: pp. 354-355; H. Morgenthau, letter to Oakeshott, 22 May 1948

²⁷² V. Pin-Fat, “The metaphysics of the national interest”, pp. 230-231

II. Morgenthau's conceptualisation of power

Power in International Politics: its nature and role

Morgenthau's analysis of international politics is founded upon an explicit definition of power as a form of "psychological relationship". Power can thus be defined as the "control over the minds and actions" of others.²⁷³ Since the concept of power is treated as being dependent upon the political and cultural context, it might entail *any* social relationship, insofar as it establishes or maintains that control.²⁷⁴ The spectrum, therefore, of power may cover all the range of possible relationships between physical violence and love.²⁷⁵ The fact, however, that power might approximate physical violence does not imply that it can be identified with it. For political power is essentially a psychological relationship. Armed strength may indeed be the most important element of political power as long as it remains a potentiality. When the threat of the use of force in international politics materialises, we are no longer in the domain of political power but in that of military power as naked force.²⁷⁶ This emphasis on the psychological character of power helps also to distinguish the essence of power from its elements. The latter represent merely the components of national power; and while ideally they should be added up in any power assessment of relative power such a calculation is impossible.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p.28

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9

²⁷⁵ Although love is considered as the opposite of power, for Morgenthau they both try to address man's existential loneliness and contain elements of each other. As a result each relationship may be corrupted by the other. See H. Morgenthau, "Love and Power", pp 247-251

²⁷⁶ This statement from *Politics Among Nations* (see following footnote) is also repeated in "The Commitments of Political Science" (1958). "Thus, when the times conceive power in military terms, it [political science] must call attention to the variety of factors (...) and, more particularly, to the subtle psychological relation..." H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962, p 47

²⁷⁷ Baldwin classified Morgenthau in the elements-of-power approach according to which "it was possible to add up the various elements...in order to calculate the power distribution" and which conflates capabilities to power. D. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations", pp. 274-277. Morgenthau's list of elements of power indeed includes some elements that are relatively stable such as geography, resources, level of industrialisation and military preparedness. But he also included what he called "human factors" such as population, national character, morale, quality of government and diplomacy. The latter are much more elusive than material capabilities and Morgenthau claimed that the task of evaluation is ultimately "incapable of achievement". The best statesmen can hope for is to commit fewer mistakes in the evaluation than their opponents. As such, Morgenthau did not

The way Morgenthau thus approached power presupposes a clear distinction between political and military power. A further distinction is that between power and influence, the first being founded upon compulsion and the latter upon persuasion.²⁷⁸ Hence both the psychological element and that of compulsion are central in Morgenthau's understanding of power. In contrast to Carr, whose understanding of power was implicit, Morgenthau made sure to conceptualise it. This approach is understandable given the role power is expected to play in his philosophy both with respect to its analytical and its normative sides. Williams correctly observes that in Morgenthau's theory "power and interest are actually remarkably flexible and indeterminate concepts".²⁷⁹ This conception of power allows for the establishment of politics as an "indeterminate sphere", whose limitless nature encompasses both destructive and creative possibilities. At the very same time, the clear distinction between power –as defining the political- and other forms of power help insulate the political sphere from other social spheres and their respective notions of interest and power.²⁸⁰ Finally the exclusion of violence from his notion of power is essential for insulating the political sphere from its most dangerous potential i.e. the intrusion of physical violence.²⁸¹

Consequently the struggle for power plays a central role in Morgenthau's political theory since its existence is the enabling factor for an action to be considered as 'political'. Power might be sought after to achieve various objectives and in this sense it is a "means to the nation's ends". Since it is selected as the appropriate means however, power also becomes an end in itself, at least temporarily.²⁸² Based on the concept of the struggle of power as defining politics, Morgenthau claimed that "all political phenomena can be reduced to one of three basic types".²⁸³ Having defined the nature of political power and isolated its role in politics Morgenthau then proceeded to employ this role to support a three-fold typology of policies. It should

assume that elements of power can be added up accurately, let alone substitute for power. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 112-154

²⁷⁸ Other distinctions drawn by Morgenthau but between different forms of power are that between usable vs. unusable and legitimate vs. illegitimate power. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 29-30

²⁷⁹ M. C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations", p. 638

²⁸⁰ For the distinction between political and non-political power see H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, pp. 30-34

²⁸¹ M. C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations" pp. 639-649

²⁸² H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 27-28

²⁸³ *Ibid.* pp. 40-41

be noted that, despite the misleading language in *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau's typology is not intended to apply to international politics alone, but instead encapsulates an independent logic of political power.²⁸⁴

Since a 'political policy' that would imply an abdication from power is out of question, the three patterns of policies are the following. Firstly, a policy of the *status quo* is a policy that aims at maintaining power. The part that advocates such a policy aims at keeping the distribution of power as it is, with only minor adjustments that are not affecting the relative strength of the parts involved been acceptable.²⁸⁵ Secondly, a policy of imperialism is a policy that aims at increasing power and thus altering the existing distribution of power. A significant characteristic of Morgenthau's notion of imperialism is that it is a catch-all concept that aims at describing *any* policy whose purpose is to overthrow the existing balance of power. Thus this policy includes not only empire-building but also policies that aim at local preponderance.²⁸⁶ Finally, the policy of prestige is one that aims at displaying power, a policy that might be pursued in itself but most commonly its objective is to support either of the two previous policies.²⁸⁷

Order and chaos: limitations of power

The assumption that power constitutes the core of politics has far-reaching implications. For if it was to be followed without qualifications, it would ultimately imply that international relations correspond to a state of complete anarchy and unlimited power drives.²⁸⁸ The aspirations of power are thus restrained in two partially overlapping ways: the first lies within the domain of power and is the mechanism of the balance of power, and the second is the role of forces inherently opposed to power such as morality and law.

²⁸⁴ In *Science: servant or master?* Morgenthau discussed how science can be manipulated to serve the "powers that be –public and private" (emphasis added) in acquiring, defending, and demonstrating power". H. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?*, p. 14

²⁸⁵ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 40-44

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 45-72

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 73-87

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 225

The balance of power is for Morgenthau a necessary corollary of any social order that comprises of a number of autonomous units.²⁸⁹ As such, it is bound to operate in an international system that comprises of independent political units. The binary purpose of all equilibria is “to maintain the stability of the system without destroying the multiplicity of the elements comprising it”.²⁹⁰ The international society cannot differ since its main elements are multiple and mutually antagonistic nations that struggle for power.²⁹¹ The operational principle of the balance of power is that every time the equilibrium is threatened by a nation or group of nations, other nations would try to restore it. As a result the system is inherently unstable and precarious, since the relative power of the parts is not fixed.²⁹² Another feature of the power of states that jeopardizes the normal functioning of the balance of power is its immeasurability.²⁹³ Statesmen should be able to calculate the power of friends and foes alike in order for the balance to operate effectively yet this is virtually impossible.²⁹⁴

Although Morgenthau’s vocabulary gives an occasionally scientific guise to the balance of power, the concept has an equally important normative aspect.²⁹⁵ For its cardinal role in most realist approaches cannot be justified in terms of its explanatory force alone. As Bell argued, the concept is not essential for the “core-determining structure of realism” and power politics are certainly imaginable without balancing. He treats the concept instead as a ‘peripheral’ concept, a normative prescription to avert the “mortal dangers” that an unqualified quest for power would imply.²⁹⁶ As such, the function of the balance of power is dependent not only upon the capability

²⁸⁹ An interesting point about the function of the balance of power *beyond* politics can be found in Williams’ interpretation about the role it plays in maintaining the independence of different social spheres –including that of politics- in Morgenthau’s theory. See M. C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations”, pp. 651-652

²⁹⁰ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 167-169

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 172. For the process according to which the struggle for power is transferred from the individuals to the nations see *infra*: part III.

²⁹² *Ibid.* pp. 172-177

²⁹³ The immeasurability of power also features prominently in Guzzini’s critique as one of the main weaknesses of realism. S. Guzzini, “The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations”, pp. 533-568

²⁹⁴ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 202-213

²⁹⁵ Besides Bell that is discussed here, Williams persuasively explains how, given Morgenthau’s philosophical background, the balance of power is only effective if treated as “a principled strategy, not a mechanistic process”. M. C. Williams, “Why Ideas Matter in International Relations”, pp. 649-653

²⁹⁶ D. Bell, “Anarchy, power and death”, p. 229

of the parties involved to exercise it but also on whether its normative aspect is incorporated in the dominant moral system of the given historical period.

Bell's assumption seemingly contradicts Morgenthau's mechanistic vocabulary of the balance of power. Yet this contradiction can be overcome if Little's interpretation of the balance of power is taken into account. According to that interpretation, Morgenthau in fact incorporated two different but interconnected dynamics of balance of power in his system. The first dynamic is the one which stems from balance of power as a universal phenomenon that is an inalienable element of a pluralistic society and includes the aforementioned perils. Even that dynamic cannot be treated as describing a principle of engineering but rather as an ideal type in the Weberian sense.²⁹⁷ The second dynamic is related to the "self-conscious attempts to 'regulate and restrain' the power drives" thus minimising their potentially catastrophic escalation.²⁹⁸ It is mainly the latter thus that by embodying a normative prerogative can limit significantly the dangers of an unlimited quest for power.

Indeed, the fact that the balance of power has been more successful in the previous centuries than in the twentieth is attributed by Morgenthau to the parallel operation of a universal moral code that institutionalised the former.²⁹⁹ The moral consensus between the European states of the eighteenth century and the sense that they belonged to the same community allowed them to develop restraints and establish rules in the conduct of politics that preserved "the overall stability of the European republic".³⁰⁰ Even the mechanistic vocabulary of the period, borrowed from the natural sciences and intended to give to the balance of power a rationalist outlook became internalised. Even though only a "serviceable metaphor", as Molloy puts it, the balance of power became associated with qualities it never really possessed thus obscuring how essential a common moral framework was for its operation.³⁰¹

Although it should not be overestimated, Morgenthau claimed that morality plays an important role in international politics, since the revolt of human mind against power

²⁹⁷ Turner rightly mentions that Morgenthau's theoretical constructions do not predict unconditionally as scientific laws would, but rather represent causal processes. See S. P. Turner, "Hans J. Morgenthau and the Legacy of Max Weber" in D. Bell (ed.) *Political Thought and International Relations*, pp. 63-82: p. 74

²⁹⁸ R. Little, "The balance of power in *Politics Among Nations*" in M. Williams (ed.), *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 137-165: pp. 138-141

²⁹⁹ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* pp. 213-217

³⁰⁰ R. Little, "The balance of power in *Politics Among Nations*", pp. 140-141

³⁰¹ S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 90-92

is “as universal as the aspiration for power itself”.³⁰² Moral values thus limit the extremities of power politics, since they restrain statesmen from considering some means and ends as more ethically justifiable than others.³⁰³ The model period of modernity for Morgenthau was that of aristocratic rule in Europe, when the balance of power operated at its full effectiveness. Then, diplomats and statesmen shared a universal moral code that imposed rules for political action.³⁰⁴ The dual shift from aristocratic to democratic responsibility and from universal ethical standards to those prescribed by nationalism, would have a profound impact on the restraining role of morality as will be discussed in the following part.

III. Power, the nation-state and nationalism

The nation-state as the current mode of political organisation

Concepts such as ‘national interest’ or ‘national power’ are central in Morgenthau’s understanding of international politics. As such, before engaging with the relation between power and the nation-state in his thought it is important to clarify how he approached the ‘nation’. Throughout his works Morgenthau used the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nation-state’ interchangeably without always drawing a clear distinction between the two. This is not to suggest that Morgenthau was negligent of the differences between a state and a nation, but rather – and similarly to Carr for that matter – that he conceived the two as identical only insofar as the age of nationalism is concerned.³⁰⁵ I claim that the nation-state performs two main functions in

³⁰² H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 225

³⁰³ H. Morgenthau, “The Twilight of International Morality” in *Ethics*, Vol. 58, No. 2, 1948, pp. 79-99; pp. 79-80

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-99

³⁰⁵ Morgenthau’s account of the ‘nation’ is a rather intuitive one and less sophisticated than the one offered by Carr. The ‘nation’ is thus understood as “an abstraction from a number of individuals who have certain characteristics in common”. The ‘state’, as related to the ‘nation’, is understood in legalistic terms as “a legal organisation... whose agents act as representatives of the nation in international affairs”. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 103-104; for the domestic functions of the state Morgenthau, echoing Weber, claimed that it is “the legal order that determines the conditions under which society may employ its monopoly of organised violence...”. *Ibid.* pp. 485-487

Morgenthau's theory both of which are important in order to connect power to international relations.

The first important function of the nation-state in Morgenthau's theory is the bridging of the central concept of the lust for power with international politics. For the *animus dominandi* is an anthropological assumption meant to describe an inalienable element of human nature, and thus in principle is applicable only to individuals. It is essential then to identify a process by which the longing for power is transferred from the individual to the collectivity, in this case the nation-state. As politics occupy a separate sphere so does morality. Man is a moral being inasmuch as he is a political being and morality keeps his aspirations of power under check.³⁰⁶ The deplorability of aspirations of power as immoral combined with the capabilities of society to limit them through institutional and disciplinary measures, result in the inability of most individuals to satisfy them *within* the community. This satisfaction however is to be found through the mechanism of projecting one's aspiration to the collective power drive of the 'nation'.³⁰⁷ The breakdown of the moral order of feudal and early modern Europe on the eve of modernity intensified this projection. For it disturbed irreversibly the internal balance of power between social spheres. With the belief in the power of the divine collapsing, and the modern state asserting an increasing level of control over its citizens, the individual power drives faced unprecedented frustration.³⁰⁸ Hence the projection of the power drives collectively is the only open option. An option facilitated by the ideology of nationalism that not only undermined the hitherto universal moral values and replaced them with particular ones, but also sanctified the pursuit of power as long as its aim is the nation itself.³⁰⁹

The second function is that the nation-state, as the main form of political organisation, offers Morgenthau the concept to which he can anchor in a comprehensible way the core for his theory notions of power and interest. Yet the

³⁰⁶ H. Morgenthau, "The evil of politics and the ethics of evil", pp. 1-18

³⁰⁷ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 103-105. Schuett connected the mechanism of projection that Morgenthau discussed to the Freudian defence mechanism of "displacement" and "identification": R. Schuett, *Political realism, Freud, and human nature in international relations: the resurrection of the realist man*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 32-34

³⁰⁸ M. C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations", pp. 650-651

³⁰⁹ For morality, power and nationalism see also the following subsection of this part. H. Morgenthau, "The Twilight of International Morality", *passim*

fact that the nation-state is currently the central political conglomeration around which power and interest revolve, does not imply that it is either “the last word in politics” or an eternal category outside history. For Morgenthau interest is indeed the timeless essence of politics but its connection to the nation is a product of history as is the nation-state itself. Thus, as long as the nation-state remains the prevalent mode of political organisation, it is *national* interest that counts.³¹⁰ Consequently it is the notion of “interest defined as power” that occupies the cardinal role in Morgenthau’s theory, the national character of this interest being historically conditioned.

Notwithstanding Morgenthau’s reservations about the historical character of the nation-state, the way he chose to employ it as a means for bringing his core concepts to the foreground reveals a significant shortcoming of his approach. In her compelling critique of Morgenthau, Pin-Fat argues that his philosophical commitment to the distinction between the transcendent and the actual led him to allocate to the national interest the function of giving concrete meaning to transcendental moral principles. The result is that the nation-state is turned into a “mystical entity that has alchemical powers of transmuting the transcendent into the actual”.³¹¹ Pin-Fat is well aware of Morgenthau’s reservation about the nation-state and the risk it poses to international morality but believes that his grammar tragically leads him to either of the extremes he hoped to avoid i.e. utopianism or nationalistic universalism.

Power, morality and nationalism

Nationalism, as the ideological corollary of the nation-state, plays a significant role in modern politics for Morgenthau. Not only does it constitute one of the main elements of national power but also it has a disintegrating effect on international morality. The eternal category of politics being power however, even nationalism and the nation-state are ultimately in peril by modern developments in the domain of power as I will discuss in this section.

³¹⁰ H. Morgenthau, “The Problem of the National Interest” (1952) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 92-93

³¹¹ V. Pin-Fat, “The metaphysics of the national interest”, pp. 232-236

When discussing the elements of national power, Morgenthau considered the “national character” to be one of the qualitative elements that defies the accurate calculation of power.³¹² Nationalism is considered as responsible for one of the single-factor fallacies when trying to evaluate national power. Thus, under its erosive influence national character is ‘deified’ and the result is an overestimation of its impact on national power. The converse mistake of underestimating the importance of national character, results also in an erroneous evaluation of power.³¹³ Nationalism then distorts the rational faculties of statesmen and might lead them to overestimate the capabilities of their respective nations while underestimating the capabilities of their opponents. The most important, however, role nationalism plays in international politics is to be found in its corruption of universal morality.

Morgenthau’s moral critique of nationalism was concentrated against the “universalistic nationalism” of the twentieth century rather than the “liberal” nationalism of the nineteenth.³¹⁴ For Morgenthau, the emergence of nationalism after the French Revolution was not problematic *per se*. Early nationalism was not only well-suited to address the problems of post-feudal Europe and industrialisation better than the order that preceded it.³¹⁵ It also had a progressive quality. The old, liberal nationalism of the nineteenth century was synonymous with emancipation from oppression, and despite delegating loyalties to the nation it was limited in the sense that it recognised that beyond one’s own nation there were “other nationalisms with similar and equally justifiable goals”.³¹⁶ There was the hope then, among early liberal champions of nationalism, that international morality would not be undermined but rather strengthened by its prevalence. What happened instead was a gradual disintegration of international morality for the most part of the nineteenth

³¹² H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 128-134

³¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 160-162

³¹⁴ H. Morgenthau, “World Politics in the Mid-Twentieth Century” in *The Review of Politics*, Vol 10, No 4, 1948, pp 154-173

³¹⁵ H. Morgenthau, “Nationalism” (1957) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 181-195; For the positive functions of nationalism for Morgenthau –and other classical realists- see W. Scheuerman, “Realists Against the Nation-State”, *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 20, 2011, pp. 67-105: pp. 71-82; W. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, pp. 65-69

³¹⁶ H. Morgenthau, “Nationalism”, p. 187

century, which reached its climax when liberal nationalism was replaced by the new, universalistic nationalism of the twentieth century.³¹⁷

In sharp contrast to the aristocratic moral code that preceded it, the moral code of the age of nationalism limits significantly the ethical restraints of statesmen and thus imposes an important burden on morality's role as a regulator of power politics. Hence democratic accountability makes the political actors ultimately responsible towards their own nation rather than towards a group of similarly trained individuals. Additionally, the universal moral code of ages past is replaced by the particular moral code of the nation, which in turn claims universal value triggered by the inherent need of human beings to obey universal moral standards.³¹⁸ The culmination of this process is the transformation of nationalism into a political religion, whose purpose it is to "impose its own values and standards of action" to other nations.³¹⁹ In such a configuration, the struggle for power is no longer limited but is given instead "a ferociousness and intensity not known to other ages".³²⁰ It follows that nationalistic universalism is incapable of restraining the foreign policies it is identified with, since "it is itself in need of restraint".³²¹ Nationalism has a similar impact on another safeguard against the struggle for power i.e. public opinion. World public opinion can only operate under the universal moral standards that nationalism deprived it of, and as a result when nations appeal to the public opinion they only appeal to something non-existent.³²²

This critique which isolates only the modern variant of nationalism as representing a profound threat for international morality is indicative of Morgenthau's scepticism about the role of democracy in the rational formation of national interest. The fact that Morgenthau was at odds with democracy was spotted early by Oakeshott, but it was in the case of mass democracy and its close association with nationalism that he saw the greatest risk.³²³ The parallels with Carr's association of nationalism and mass

³¹⁷ H. Morgenthau, "The Twilight of International Morality", pp. 93-94

³¹⁸ Ibid. pp. 88-99

³¹⁹ H. Morgenthau, "Nationalism", p. 187

³²⁰ H. Morgenthau, "The Twilight of International Morality", p. 99

³²¹ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 329

³²² Ibid. pp. 262-267

³²³ In his review Oakeshott observed that Morgenthau, influenced by the continental European experience erroneously believed that "parliamentary institutions were the offspring of rationalist policies". M. Oakeshott "Scientific Politics", p. 357; for a detailed account of the anti-democratic element in Morgenthau's thought see W. E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, pp.

democracy in the age of the “socialised nation” are clear here. Unlike Carr’s approach, however, for Morgenthau the rise of universalistic nationalism is not clearly associated with developments in economic power and the demands for welfare.

Nationalism thus presented modern man with a formidable challenge since it offered a distorted view of power, it undermined the functions of the balance of power and it incapacitated the restrictive role morality had always played to power politics. Morgenthau’s moral critique of nationalism is compelling and appeared much earlier than his critique of the viability of the nation-state in terms of power. Yet at the same time his notion of morality is bound to the state. In a world now devoid of a universal moral standard the state can be the only place that can guarantee a degree of existential security to the individual and “thus constitutes the only moral space in an amoral world”.³²⁴ The only other option left for Morgenthau appeared to be nostalgia for an older, more orderly world.

Indeed for a period in his intellectual life Morgenthau’s attitude, similarly to that of Schmitt, was one of lamentation for a bygone era and an almost uncompromised pessimism about its potential for recovery.³²⁵ It would appear that for Morgenthau it was difficult to disassociate himself from that era. As a result the only remedy he was initially able to produce to the “empty skies” of modern international morality was a “desperate plea” to re-establish the aristocratic diplomacy and balance of power of the early modern European system.³²⁶ Yet this conventional portrayal of Morgenthau as “provocative but ultimately conservative” is misleading in that it neglects the distinct stages of a long career.³²⁷ Hence Morgenthau’s insights in the 1960s can hardly be described as backward-looking given his favourable treatment of

176-179. For a different reading of Morgenthau’s critique of modern nationalism as a masked critique of secularism in the trail of Schmitt see N. Guilhot, “American Katechon”, pp. 240-243

³²⁴ H. K. Pichler, “The godfathers of ‘truth’”, p. 198. Pichler, although correctly pointing out that this claim belongs to early Morgenthau, erroneously describes Morgenthau’s international system as ‘anarchic’ and devoid of morality. This observation appears accurate only with respect to the modern international system, which of course is for Morgenthau historically conditioned. For the idea of the state in Morgenthau as “container of domestic values” see also: T. Barkawi, “Strategy as a vocation: Weber, Morgenthau and modern strategic studies” in *Review of International Studies*, vol. 24, 1998, pp. 159-184: p. 176

³²⁵ C. Brown, “‘The Twilight of International Morality’? Hans J. Morgenthau and Carl Schmitt on the end of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*” in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 42-61

³²⁶ W. E. Scheuerman, “Carl Schmitt and Hans Morgenthau: Realism and beyond” in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 62-86: p. 79

³²⁷ W. E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, p.3

Mitrany's functionalism and the "qualified optimism" that characterised his contemplation of a world state in the time of nuclear warfare as will be discussed in the following part.³²⁸

Power as the nemesis of the nation-state

Notwithstanding the peculiar relation between nationalism and power and the latter's glorification by the former, the shifting realities of the second half of the twentieth century led Morgenthau to the assumption that both nationalism and the nation-state have had their days. As I will explain in this section, Morgenthau believed that power checks nationalism in any case; but it is in the nuclear age in particular that nation-states would become obsolete.

The main problem with nationalism as a principle of political organisation is that there are no inherent limits to its application. Thus, if taken by its own terms nationalism is in fact "a principle of disintegration and fragmentation". The disintegration of the old European empires in the aftermath of the First World War offers a first-rate example. If the principle of nationalism has been evoked by the nations that emerged from that disintegration, nothing could stop populations within those nations to invoke the principle in turn. The continuous fragmentation is only halted "not by the logic of nationalism but by the configurations of interest and power between the rulers and the ruled and between competing nations".³²⁹ Power thus plays an important role in limiting nationalism's potential for a chain-reaction that would lead to continuously shrinking in size states.

Power, moreover, with the essential but unattainable calculation thereof is singled out by Morgenthau as the main factor that contributed to the decline of nations diachronically. Since the success or failure of a foreign policy depends upon a correct evaluation of power, if that evaluation is erroneous the nation that committed

³²⁸ C. Brown, "'The Twilight of International Morality'?", pp. 56-59. Scheuerman attributes Morgenthau's inability to address the question of the world state adequately to his intellectual affinity with Schmitt: W. E. Scheuerman, "Carl Schmitt and Hans Morgenthau: Realism and beyond", pp. 77-85. In his illuminating book, Scheuerman examines in detail the different stages in Morgenthau's career and is making an excellent case for the latter's "uneasy realism". For Scheuerman Morgenthau would only fit comfortably within the realist paradigm in the 1950s, the decade during which his most influential works were published. W. E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*. For Morgenthau's view of functionalism as the "only rational reply" to the obsolescence of the nation-state see: H. Morgenthau, "Introduction" in D. Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966, pp. 7-11

³²⁹ H. Morgenthau, "Nationalism", pp. 184-185

it might well fall. The belief that power is absolute rather than relative; the failure to project power in time and thus treat it as permanent; or the fallacies of single-factor that tend to overstate a particularly advantageous element of national power, are all errors of evaluation that can lead to the decline of a nation.³³⁰ Nationalism itself, as mentioned already, not only is the main culprit of such a single-factor fallacy but by distorting the rational faculties of statesmen makes them more prone to overestimating the power of their own nation-state and thus committing *hubris*.³³¹ If power in general restrains nationalism's inclination towards anarchy and can bring the collapse of certain nations, power in the nuclear age jeopardises the survival of the nation-state itself. The possibility of an all-out nuclear war would prevent nation-states from performing even the most elementary of their functions i.e. defend the life of their citizens and their civilisation.³³² The solution according to Morgenthau would be a political organisation that better reflects the new technological and economic developments. However the increase in size of the political organisations would not suffice. As his examination of multiethnic states or regional conglomerations revealed, the substitution of the nationalism of the nation-state by the nationalism of the regional unit would change nothing.³³³ What Morgenthau deemed appropriate was not only a political organisation of larger size, but also a supranational principle of order that would replace nationalism and eliminate its anarchic tendencies.³³⁴

To claim that Morgenthau's attitude with respect to the prospects of a world-state to replace the obsolete nation-states was consistently held would ignore not only his

³³⁰ H. Morgenthau, "Why Nations Decline" (1959) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 201-211

³³¹ According to Lebow, *hubris* is a "category error" that results from a disproportional inflation of traits that normally lead to political success. The outcome is "overconfidence in one's judgement and ability". R. N. Lebow, "Tragedy, Politics, and Political Science" in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2005, pp. 329-336: p. 330. Morgenthau of course, was by no means the first to find in tragedy a concept that is also applicable to the level of the political unit. Thucydides used a similar approach in his history and even some of the original playwrights are often interpreted as metaphors that reflect the political organisation of the days. R. N. Lebow, *Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 128-141. I have engaged in more detail with how Morgenthau transplanted tragedy as part of the human existential condition to the level of the nation-state as a metaphor that could provide useful moral guidance in: K. Kostagiannis, "Morgenthau and the tragedy of the nation-state", pp. 514-518

³³² H. Morgenthau, "Nationalism", pp. 189-190

³³³ See H. Morgenthau, "Government and Private Enterprise" (1964) in H. Morgenthau, *Truth and Power*, pp. 276-278

³³⁴ *Ibid.* pp 277-278; also see "The Political Problems of Polyethnic states" (1961) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Restoration of American Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, pp. 342-347

intellectual development but also a series of well researched arguments that suggest otherwise. Indeed Morgenthau's initially conservative view that looked nostalgically to the revival of the old diplomacy of his model period was gradually replaced by an embrace of the possibility of change.³³⁵ That change entailed a more favourable attitude towards the need for a world-state, directly related to the profound impact of the possibility of a nuclear war upon his thought. To spot Morgenthau's inconsistencies thus with respect to that matter has indeed some merit, as has the attribution of those inconsistencies to the specific historical context i.e. the rapidly changing circumstances nuclear warfare brought about.³³⁶

Yet to claim that the change was as profound as to "demand a renunciation of traditional state-centred realism and advocacy of an immediate world state"³³⁷ does not do Morgenthau full justice. For his variant of realism did not revolve around the nation-state even in its early stages. It is true that Morgenthau's insights on the nation-state developed gradually, but he certainly was at odds with the modern state from quite an early stage in his career.³³⁸ His critique of the modern state and the associated nationalism identifies the former as the main culprit of the horrors of the twentieth century earlier than the potential of nuclear warfare was apparent. And this critique was, as was his future amendments to policy prescription, underpinned consistently by his understanding of politics as a domain inseparable from power but also not devoid of ethics, even if the latter are only the minimalistic ethics of necessity.³³⁹ It is ultimately the same ethics of necessity that led Morgenthau to advocate the world state as an ideal worth striving for despite his own scepticism about its possibilities of realisation.³⁴⁰

³³⁵ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 96-97

³³⁶ For a critique of Morgenthau's views of the world state on philosophical grounds see J. P. Speer II, "Hans Morgenthau and the World State" in *World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1968, pp. 207-227. For an examination of the "dilemma between philosophical consistency and public relevance" that Morgenthau faced under the context of thermonuclear revolution see C. Craig, "Hans Morgenthau and the world state revisited" in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 195-215

³³⁷ C. Craig, "Hans Morgenthau and the world state revisited", p. 195

³³⁸ W. E. Scheuermann, "Was Morgenthau a Realist? Revisiting *Scientific Man Vs. Power Politics*" in *Constellations*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2007, pp. 506-530

³³⁹ For a discussion of Morgenthau's ethics of necessity see S. Molloy, "Hans. J. Morgenthau Versus E.H. Carr", pp. 83-104

³⁴⁰ M. Cozette, "What Lies Ahead: Classical Realism on the Future of International Relations", pp. 673-674

IV. Tragedies that were and tragedies that might be

The tragedy of Germany and self-defeating nationalism

The tragedy of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century is an indicative case of how Morgenthau applied his thoughts about the limits of enlightenment and the perils that nationalism and the unlimited power drive reserve to nations to a concrete historical case. As a German Jew Morgenthau was unfortunate enough to witness the early stages of the rise of Nazism in Germany, an experience that influenced his intellectual development profoundly.³⁴¹ In a passage echoing his *Scientific Man Vs. Power Politics* Morgenthau discussed the tragedy of the German Jews.³⁴² With their majority belonging to the middle classes, they embraced not only the philosophy and institutions of liberalism but also its fundamental flaws. Consequently they failed to realise –similarly to the liberals in *Scientific Man*- that their emancipation was a result of the rise of the middle classes and that the liberal philosophy did not represent eternal verities but was dependant upon the predominance of the middle classes. When thus the middle class in Germany collapsed in the aftermath of the First World War, they could not grasp the profound social implications of this collapse, namely the rise of National Socialism.³⁴³

The rise of Nazism could only be understood according to Morgenthau as a reaction to the “economic, social and moral collapse of the German middle classes”.³⁴⁴ Yet the radicalisation of the former middle classes did not follow the Marxist assumptions that implied an embrace of communism, a political philosophy that shared the same rational outline with liberalism.³⁴⁵ Instead Nazism demonstrated not only a repudiation of rationalism but also an explicit embrace of irrationality bearing the characteristics of a political religion rather than those of a political philosophy.³⁴⁶ As a counter-enlightenment movement, Nazism would demonstrate both the moral

³⁴¹ See C. Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: an intellectual biography* (part one); also in M. B. Mollov, *Power and Transcendence* (chapter three)

³⁴² For the similarities and their background see M. B. Mollov, *Power and Transcendence*, pp. 92-96

³⁴³ H. Morgenthau, “The Tragedy of German-Jewish Liberalism” (1961) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 247-256

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 250

³⁴⁵ H. Morgenthau, “Naziism” (1946) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 227-240; p. 227

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p 228

bankruptcy of modernity and the extremities of an unrestrained lust for power revealing thus the dark side of the modern world.

Instead of repudiating power or denying its existence Nazism glorified it, and in thus doing substituted its own *hubris* for that of rationalism. Where rationalism lacked restraint in its belief that science and reason can overcome power politics, Nazism lacked restraint in the opposite direction. The racial doctrine it embraced provided a way for the individual, suffocating under the limitations to his aspirations for power imposed by the increasingly centralised modern state, to actually realise those aspirations at the expense of the 'inferior' races. As a result "the man in the street, by experiencing his superiority vis-à-vis a Jew by actual deeds, could prove to himself... that he was actually superior".³⁴⁷ As such, Nazism made an explicit albeit extreme point about the paramount moral significance Morgenthau's views about the independence and insulation of spheres of social activity. For it demonstrated the destructive potential of the sphere of politics if left without limits to its own devices.³⁴⁸ This glorification of power related as it is to the emergence of universalistic nationalism, has also grave international implications.

For the new nationalism of the twentieth century, in contrast to the liberal nationalism that preceded it, is unrestrained in its goals and has the traits of a political religion. It is this nationalistic universalism that gives modern international relations its ferocious character painted in dark colours in the "Twilight of International Morality". Morgenthau considered Nazi Germany to be a distinctive example of that form of nationalism whereupon one nation not only stands alone above the rest but also has a mission to transform them into its own image.³⁴⁹ By translating all social and political conflicts to racial ones Nazism obliterated the distinction between domestic and international politics.³⁵⁰ By denying the tradition of Western civilisation as regards the rational pursuit of power limited by a moral code and substituting it with unlimited aspirations of power, Nazism's doctrine of world organisation was no different, Morgenthau claimed, to that of the likes of Xerxes,

³⁴⁷ H. Morgenthau, "The Tragedy of German-Jewish Liberalism", p. 254

³⁴⁸ M. C. Williams, "Why Ideas Matter in International Relations", p. 651

³⁴⁹ H. Morgenthau, "The Tragedy of German-Jewish Liberalism", p. 252

³⁵⁰ H. Morgenthau, "Naziism", pp. 235-236

Alexander, and Napoleon.³⁵¹ Thus the collective power drives of the nation, are not only unlimited domestically but also internationally.

As mentioned already, Morgenthau was particularly concerned with the distortion of the rational faculties of statesmen when evaluating power. Those errors he considered as the most important factor for the demise of nations and it is with respect to those that the tragedy of Germany unfolds. Morgenthau's verdict of Germany after Bismarck was that her foreign policy was determined by "three fatal propensities".³⁵² Both Imperial and Nazi Germany lacked a sense of proportion when assessing their relative power towards that of their opponents. They also overemphasised the importance of military strength and through a distorted sense of mission they identified might with right.³⁵³ A typical example of this attitude was the disregard on behalf of German leadership during the First World War of the impact an American entry would have for the course of the war.³⁵⁴ For Morgenthau then, always willing to attribute specific gifts or vices to 'national character', Germany had the sad privilege of possessing "the one fatal weakness" that is most likely to provoke *hubris*: lack of moderation.³⁵⁵ Such was his approach when he examined "The Political Philosophy of Prussianism" and he attributed the last disasters that befell upon Germany to this tradition.³⁵⁶ These characteristics made Germany a special case only inasmuch as they accentuated the pre-existing problems of nationalism.

As happens often in the sequence of tragic cycles, this so characteristic of *hubris* lack of moderation was followed by *hamartia*. The scope of German imperialism expanded from its localised variant under Bismarck to the continental imperialism of William II and finally exploded out of proportion with the unlimited imperialism of Hitler.³⁵⁷ And like any other country that failed both in its appreciation of its own power as well as that of others and set unattainable goals, Germany undid her own

³⁵¹ H. Morgenthau, "National Socialist Doctrine of World Organisation" (1941) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 241-246

³⁵² H. Morgenthau, "The Conquest of the United States by Germany" (1950) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Impasse of American Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1962, pp. 152-167; p. 152

³⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 152

³⁵⁴ H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 134

³⁵⁵ *Idem*

³⁵⁶ H. Morgenthau, "The Political Philosophy of Prussianism" (1945) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Decline of Democratic Politics*, pp. 220-226

³⁵⁷ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 58

power.³⁵⁸ The lesson to be drawn for other states is for Morgenthau crystal clear: overconfidence and the ensuing miscalculation or *hubris* and *hamartia* will lead to *nemesis*, a lesson Germany learned the hard way twice in a century. Morgenthau's examination of the German tragedy incorporates all the main elements of his political philosophy. Most of all, however, it demonstrates the importance of his moral project and the paramount moral value of prudence. For to understand the centrality of power in politics is one thing, to 'surrender to its immanence' is quite another, as his old criticism of Carr demonstrated. The fall of Germany is but another reminder to the self-destructing possibilities of an unconditional surrender to that immanence.

A tragedy in the waiting room: American foreign policy and the hubris of idealism

The tragedy of Germany was employed by Morgenthau for 'pedagogical' reasons. His main objective was not to advise German foreign policy makers, for it was already too late for that, but to make the fall of Germany an example that the United States ought to avoid. He made sure to make the connection between German delusions of the past and contemporary American policy explicit as early as 1950 in an essay tellingly titled "The Conquest of the United States by Germany".³⁵⁹ Unlike Carr, Morgenthau never attempted to stay detached from the two opposing camps of the Cold War or to find a medium ground between them. Even though not a "simple-minded cold warrior", Morgenthau's loyalties lay clearly with his adopted country.³⁶⁰ His intellectual career was thus underpinned by an effort to influence American foreign policy. He understood realism as a compass that would help that policy navigate through the perils of idealism and avert a potential tragedy from materialising.

If in the German case it was mainly the Jewish middle classes that failed to realise the insufficiency of rationalism to understand the nature of politics, in the American case, due to its own exceptionality, the danger was equally grave. As Williams demonstrated, Morgenthau was attentive to the exceptionality of American politics

³⁵⁸ Ibid. p.p. 134, 144

³⁵⁹ H. Morgenthau, "The Conquest of the United States by Germany", *passim*

³⁶⁰ M. Cox, "Hans J. Morgenthau, realism, and the rise and fall of the Cold War" in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 166-194: pp. 171-176

and saw it at least to some extent in a positive light.³⁶¹ Not only did he appreciate the greatness of the “national purpose” of America, but he also considered her social setting to have some redeeming qualities –such as the predominance of the middle classes- that resembled of the old, benevolent nationalism of the nineteenth century and made it harder to the nation to succumb to nationalistic universalism.³⁶² At the same time, however, he demonstrated an acute awareness of the risks inherent in such exceptionality such as the potential of patriotism to degenerate to nationalism.³⁶³ Furthermore, the fact that the rise of the middle classes was almost unchallenged in America led to the identification of power politics with aristocracy and the fallacy of treating power politics as a “historical accident”. For Morgenthau there was no other country in the western world that held the conviction of the feasibility of a foreign policy devoid of the struggle for power more than the United States.³⁶⁴

There was indeed a “historical accident” at play for Morgenthau but that was hardly the identification of politics with power. That accident was the historical context that brought about American exceptionalism, namely the geographical isolation from the European struggles for power and the unopposed continental expansion of the United States due to the lack of adversaries that could pose a serious threat. The danger thus for American foreign policy stemmed from the fact that this particular historical accident was taken out of context and understood as an “endowment of nature”.³⁶⁵ Combined with a “sense of mission”, rooted in American uniqueness, it created the preconditions for what Morgenthau called the “intellectual errors” of American foreign policy, namely utopianism, legalism, sentimentalism, or isolationism.³⁶⁶ As a result, even when the United States actually pursued their national interests, that was done with the wrong reasoning and thus success was almost accidental.³⁶⁷

³⁶¹ M. C. Williams, “Morgenthau now: Neoconservatism, national greatness, and realism” in M. Williams (ed.) *Realism Reconsidered*, pp. 216-240

³⁶² H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 110-11

³⁶³ M. C. Williams, “Morgenthau now”, pp. 230-235

³⁶⁴ H. Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy: a critical examination*, London: Methuen & Co, 1952, p. 13

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 7-13

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 91-138

³⁶⁷ Examples such as the Truman Doctrine and Wilson’s intervention in the First World War represent cases that for Morgenthau the United States served their national interests well, but erroneously associated the selected policy to universal moral principles. *Ibid.* pp 26, 116-118

Such a foreign policy was particularly dangerous in the context of the Cold War where the United States was faced with a potent opponent. Morgenthau's critique of the Soviet Union on philosophical grounds resembles the one he directed against the United States. Not only its underlying philosophy of Marxism shared the same flawed foundations as western liberalism but in its bolshevist –and utterly unrelated to Marxism³⁶⁸- incarnation it attained the traits of a 'political religion'. As such Bolshevism, at least in principle, shared the characteristics of nationalistic universalism and embarked upon a quest to impose its own political philosophy on the world. In the new international context, however, where the conflict for power was erroneously identified with that of "ways of life" Bolshevism was met "by Western democracy at least halfway".³⁶⁹ Morgenthau dreaded the consequences of the potential clash between two superpowers that supported mutually incompatible ideologies. In his effort thus to influence American foreign policy towards a rational calculation of the national interest, he portrayed the Soviet Union as possessing this quality to a greater extent than the United States and being able to "coldly calculate" the issues at stake.³⁷⁰ Indeed Morgenthau for most of his career viewed Soviet foreign policy as being essentially realist.³⁷¹

As such the major problem of the United States was to understand the type of challenge presented by the Soviet Union. For Morgenthau that challenge was clearly Russian imperialism, using the ideology of communism and world revolution as an instrument of and as a rationalisation for its policies. The confusion of communism with Russian imperialism, married with the American peculiarity of viewing politics in moral terms, not only obscured the real nature of the antagonism but also created the preconditions for embarking upon a moral crusade.³⁷² What made the situation really desperate for Morgenthau was that in contrast to most nations that lacked the power to embark upon such a project, a superpower armed with nuclear weapons actually *had* the power to start a moral crusade, provided it succumbed – and indeed

³⁶⁸ H. Morgenthau, "The Fortieth Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution" (1957) in H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century: The Impasse of American Politics*, pp. 139-142

³⁶⁹ H. Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, pp. 62-63

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 162

³⁷¹ The exception being a "momentary flirtation with alarmist thinking in the late 1950s" M. Cox, "Morgenthau and the rise and fall of the Cold War", pp. 176-177

³⁷² H. Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, pp. 69-80

it seemed to be doing so - to nationalistic universalism.³⁷³ In its unqualified anti-communism thus American foreign policy was negligent of the national interest and overstretched in its aims. For Morgenthau this ultimately paralysed American power because “our moral, intellectual and political judgment has gone astray”.³⁷⁴

In addition to the risk of moral crusading, American foreign policy faced a challenge from the impact of nationalism to the rational faculties of policy makers; a danger that was aggravated due to American exceptionalism. The fact that throughout its history the United States faced many victories but only a few defeats was according to Morgenthau misinterpreted as American omnipotence.³⁷⁵ This fallacy did not only affect perceptions about American power leading to an overestimation thereof, but also informed a tendency to underestimate the power of the Soviet Union.³⁷⁶ American foreign policy and public discourse during the Cold War was, for Morgenthau, riddled with examples of such a fallacy. It is in this spirit that he approached official reactions to the first nuclear explosion of a Soviet device in 1949. What was at stake for Morgenthau was the realisation of the importance of the development, and the readjustment of a foreign policy hitherto based on a monopoly of atomic weapons. The fact that not only such a development was not expected but also that when it happened its significance was underplayed, meant for Morgenthau that American officials continued to underestimate the Soviet Union by falling victims to the “fatal propensity” of nationalism.³⁷⁷ Almost two decades later he similarly criticised Brzezinski’s doctrine of “American paramountcy”. This doctrine attributed erroneously Soviet restraint to American conventional superiority, something that for Morgenthau was “an illusion, born of nationalistic blindness”.³⁷⁸ What really restrained the Soviets, he claimed, was fear of escalation to nuclear war. Instead of being equally afraid -as they ought to have been- the United States were about to embark on a reckless new doctrine. By assuming the non-usability of

³⁷³ H. Morgenthau, “Nationalism” pp. 187-188 and in *Politics Among Nations*, p. 329.

³⁷⁴ H. Morgenthau, “The impotence of American power” in *Commentary*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 1963: pp. 384-386

³⁷⁵ H. Morgenthau, *American Foreign Policy*, pp. 128-132

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 164-189. Also in H. Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy for the United States*, London: Pall Mall 1969, pp. 15-19

³⁷⁷ H. Morgenthau, “The Conquest of the United States by Germany”, pp. 152-167

³⁷⁸ H. Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy for the United States*, p. 22

nuclear weapons, the new doctrine denied the risk of escalation altogether and as such exposed American foreign policy to a fatal danger.³⁷⁹

A combination thus of the negation to recognise power politics as such; the understanding of politics in moral terms; the ensuing tendency for moral crusading; and a belief in American omnipotence, constituted what Morgenthau understood as the *hubris* of American idealism. This understanding in terms of imminent tragedy was apparent in Morgenthau's much discussed opposition towards the war in Vietnam.³⁸⁰ For Morgenthau the point was not containing communism as such, especially in cases when it was blurred with nationalism and anti-colonialism like in the case of Vietnam. Containment should not represent a moral crusade but should target communism insofar as it was the ideological cloak of Soviet imperialism, whose balancing was in the American national interest. Morgenthau often invoked the tragic vision of politics and the *par excellence* case of *hubris* i.e. the Athenian expedition in Sicily to warn the American government about the danger of 'self-delusion'.³⁸¹ A passage from his 1966 "Truth and Power", reflecting upon the relations between the Johnson administration and the intellectuals is quite telling:

What the President needs, then, is an intellectual father-confessor, who dares to remind him of the brittleness of power, of its arrogance and blindness, of its limits and pitfalls; who tells him how empires rise, decline, and fall, how power turns to folly, empires to ashes. He ought to listen to that voice and tremble.³⁸²

Here Morgenthau was trying to talk 'truth to power' and in so doing he was reminding the powers that be of the perils arising from the *hubris* of perceived omnipotence. Morgenthau's shift in language after 1965, from a discussion in terms of national interest to one in terms of morality hardly indicates an abandonment of

³⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 15-29

³⁸⁰ For Morgenthau and the war in Vietnam see indicatively: W. Bain, "Deconfusing Morgenthau: moral inquiry and classical realism reconsidered" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2000, pp. 445-464; S. Recchia, "Restraining imperial hubris: The Ethical Bases of Realist International Relations Theory" in *Constellations*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2007, pp. 531-556; E. G. Rafshoon, "A realist's moral opposition to war" in *Peace & Change*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2001, pp. 55-77; J. W. See, "A prophet without honor: Hans Morgenthau and the War in Vietnam, 1955-1965" in *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 3, 2001, pp. 419-448; L. B. Zimmer, *The Vietnam War Debate: Hans J. Morgenthau and the Attempt to Halt the Drift into Disaster*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011; L. Zambenardi, "The impotence of power: Morgenthau's critique of American intervention in Vietnam" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2011, pp. 1335-1356

³⁸¹ J. W. See, "A prophet without honor", pp. 434-441

³⁸² H. Morgenthau, "Truth and Power: The Intellectuals and the Johnson Administration" in *The New Republic*, Vol. 155, 1966, pp. 8-14: p. 14

his realism as Rafshoon suggests.³⁸³ For as discussed above, the moral value of prudence was a persistent element in his engagement with politics and the only antidote that could help policy makers to avoid the pitfalls of nationalism.

Concluding remarks

The main objective of this chapter was to uncover the importance of power in Morgenthau's theory of international relations. The centrality of power in his work is inseparable from an understanding of politics as tragedy which follows from a critique of rationalism as being unable to trace the essence of the nature of human beings or politics. Based on the anthropological assumption of a lust for power and the tragedy of its inescapability, Morgenthau placed power at the core of his theory. Drawing thus eclectically from a wide range of both 'pre-rational' and anti-enlightenment sources, Morgenthau developed a conceptualisation of power that is explicit and narrow and therefore constitutes *and* insulates the political sphere. As such, power permeates his theory both ontologically and epistemologically. Morgenthau formed a strict analytical framework within which he placed power as the core of politics which is separated by other spheres of human activity like morality. This approach is in sharp contrast to that of Carr with his different theoretical background and dialectical understanding of politics.

The different backgrounds of Carr and Morgenthau account largely for their significant differences in approaching the nation-state as the main 'unit' of power in modernity and nationalism as its ideological corollary. Carr's wide range of interests paired with his flexible conceptualisation of power allowed him to offer a nuanced understanding of the nation-state and its development in terms of shifts in the domestic and international distribution of power. Morgenthau's account on the other hand is less elaborate and mainly intuitive since he never focused on the historical development of the nation-state or paid attention to its careful conceptualisation for that matter. Furthermore, the nation-state plays a central role in Morgenthau's effort to translate his *animus dominandi* to international politics meaningfully and in overcoming the division between the transcendental and the actual. Carr's flexible understanding of a power that is disassociated from human nature and his dialectical

³⁸³ E. G. Rafshoon, "A realist's moral opposition to war", pp. 55 – 72

view of politics as opposed to Morgenthau's distinct spheres of human activity allowed him to avoid such shortcomings. Yet despite their profound differences there are also striking similarities to be found in the two realists' approaches of the nation-state.

First and foremost, neither of them treated the nation-state as an objective category outside history. Nor did they see the nation-state as an ossified, eternal 'power unit'. Morgenthau's tragedy was that his intuitive understanding of the nation and his restrictive methodology did not allow him to elaborate adequately on its historical development and thus effectively disassociate a historically conditioned notion from a theory that purported to capture timeless elements of politics. This, however, does not imply that Morgenthau was not mindful of the limitations power imposed to the nation-state and nationalism as its ideological corollary. In fact both realists examined thus far identified the nation-state as an unfixed manifestation of power conditioned upon the latter, since it is power that lies at the heart of their ontological assumptions. A further similarity is that, despite their very different assumptions about morality, both were acutely aware of the risk posed by any notion of international society anchored morally in the premises of nationalism.

CHAPTER III

John Herz and realism's moment of transition

Introduction

The chapter begins with an examination of the main characteristics of John Herz's approach to international politics. I claim that, mindful of the limits of both traditional and positivist approaches, he favoured the median way of the study of structures and systems. At the same time, however, his analysis differed significantly from that of neorealists especially with regard to the most static aspects of their approach. As such, Herz can be approached as a realist that cannot be placed comfortably within either classical or structural realism.³⁸⁴ His efforts to make sense of international politics revolved around the concept for which he is –rightly– most known, the security dilemma. I then examine the centrality of the security dilemma for both his ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Ontologically, I claim that the primacy he attributed to the security dilemma allowed Herz to approach power as rooted to it. By grounding power on a social condition Herz avoided some of the pitfalls usually associated with a conceptualisation of power deriving from human nature. This move in turn allowed him to better account for variations in the centrality of the role of power in different historical periods. After establishing the centrality of the security dilemma in Herz's ontology, I examine the implications of such an approach for his epistemology. Herz's efforts to engage with the two ideo-typical reactions of the human mind to the realisation of the dilemma, namely realism and idealism, led to an attempt to synthesise them through the advancement of 'realist liberalism'. The latter, being Herz's particular brand of realism, comprises of an effort to utilise the knowledge attained by realism

³⁸⁴ I discuss differences and similarities between Herz and both forms of realism throughout the chapter. In most of the secondary literature Herz is approached as a classical realist. A point similar to the one I develop in this chapter is raised by Schuett. He claims that, despite being closer to classical realism, Herz's contribution of the concept of the security dilemma which became the "foundational conceptual framework for subsequent generations of realists" makes him the "perfect entrée into post-classical realism". R. Schuett, *Political realism, Freud, and human nature*, p. 53

about the centrality of the security and power dilemma, while avoiding the fatalism implied in such a realisation.

In the second part, I examine the nature and role of power in his theory. I claim that Herz, by connecting power to security and by conceiving it broadly as the possession of means of security or the perception of such a possession, offered an account of power that is flexible and can accommodate the different needs resulting from different historical settings. The importance he attributed to the impact of technological developments is indicative of this malleability since what counted as strength in the pre-atomic age could become a liability by the development of nuclear weapons. As such, for Herz power while maintaining its essence is in need of constant re-evaluation and re-definition. When it comes to the role of power, Herz's account is indicative of his effort to forward realist liberalism. He dismissed both the naivety of idealism's belief that one can get rid of the struggle for power once and for all but he equally castigated the extreme realism that degenerates to an apology of power politics. Herz refused to subscribe to the most pessimistic reading of the security dilemma as implying an eternal struggle for power and focused on the importance of the fact that realisation of its existence is the first step for a conscious effort to mitigate the struggle for power. It is under this light that he examined the importance of the balance of power in the classical international system as mitigating power politics.

In the third part I examine the connection between this conceptualisation of power and the nation-state. The common ground here is the security dilemma and the efforts to mitigate it. For Herz the form a political unit takes in any given international system depends on its capacity to perform its protective functions. By examining the rise of territoriality as the underlying structure of the modern international system, Herz exposed the relationship between power and the form of the political unit as a dialogical one. On the one hand, technological developments make available new weapons that increase the vulnerability of the existing political units. Herz traced the emergence of the territorial state to the gunpowder revolution that had such an effect. By their ability to employ their newly-acquired power, territorial lords managed to establish the new unit of impermeability. On the other

hand however, the very way power is understood and employed in international relations is bound to change as soon as the new structure is established.

Given the importance he attributed to military technology and the nation-state as a unit of protection it is no surprise that Herz was particularly alarmed by the development of nuclear weapons. In the second section of the third part I examine the impact this development had on Herz's thought and its culmination in his account of the 'demise' of the territorial state. The new developments seemed to be signalling a radical departure that for the first time in history made the accumulation of power meaningless and the existing political units vulnerable. For Herz, believing that mere territorial expansion of the units of defence was useless against the destructiveness of such weapons the only solution would be first a 'holding operation' and secondly, a universalist approach. His worst fears however had not materialised and the territorial states seemed to be retrenched despite the unfavourable conditions. In the concluding sections of this part I thus examine Herz's revisiting of the nation-state. I claim that his modified account, by somewhat de-emphasising military power and integrating more elements in the functions performed by the nation-state, offered a more accurate image of the condition of the nation-state and was more faithful to his broad conceptualisation of power.

In the fourth part I examine how the main tenets of Herz's theory are displayed in his analysis of Nazi Germany and the United States. I claim that Herz approached Nazism as the exemplification of the extreme, power-glorifying realism that sound politics must try to avoid. While such realism is insatiable to efforts of accommodation, Herz genuinely believed that in the case of the Cold War this was not the case and that mutual fear could be mitigated by common effort. His approach to American foreign policy was characterised by an effort to raise awareness of the security dilemma on the other side so that conscious efforts could be made for it to be mitigated. The concluding section summarises the main findings of the chapter and connects them to the thought of the realists examined so far.

I. Herz's theory of International Relations

Herz and international relations: intellectual curiosity and methodological pluralism

One of the most recognisable characteristics of Herz was what Karis described as an extraordinary breadth and depth of academic interests, indicative of which was his early habit of attending classes in a variety of faculties thanks to the free tuition of universities in Germany.³⁸⁵ This example was but an early demonstration of an intellectual curiosity that was to stay with Herz for the better part of almost half a century that he remained intellectually active. Most accounts of Herz's career in the relevant literature offer vivid illustrations of his intellectual odyssey right from its beginnings when he studied international law with Kelsen, through his engagement with international relations and comparative politics, to his plea for establishing an interdisciplinary field of 'survival research' in his final years.³⁸⁶

As a result, in his works on international politics Herz was always willing to take seriously and engage with fields as diverse as -to name but a few- zoology, psychology, social anthropology, international law, criminology, and Lorenz's studies on aggression. Such a breadth of interests however, was not without its risks. While reviewing the *Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics* Thompson claimed that one of the main reasons that prevented Herz from being considered a first-rank scholar in international relations was precisely the fact that he did not "devote himself unreservedly" to the field.³⁸⁷ Yet this diversity is responsible for both the richness of his insights but also his characteristic methodological pluralism.

³⁸⁵ T. Karis, "A Life of Passionate Scholarship" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp.405-409: p. 407

³⁸⁶ All following articles contain longer or shorter intellectual biographies of J. Herz: T. Karis "A Life of Passionate Scholarship"; J. Puglierin "Towards being a 'Traveler between All Worlds'" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp.419-425; P. Stirk, "John H. Herz: realism and the fragility of the international order" in *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 31, 2005, pp. 285-306; C. Hacke and J. Puglierin, "John H. Herz: Balancing Utopia and Reality" in *International Relations*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2007, pp 367-382. For the early Herz, Kelsen and international law see P. Stirk, "John H. Herz and the International Law of the Third Reich" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 427-440. For the plea to establish a new field of 'survival research' see J. Herz, "On Human Survival: reflections on survival research and survival policies" in *World Futures*, Vol. 59, 2003, pp. 135-143 and K. Graham, "'Survival Research' and the 'Planetary Interest': Carrying Forward the Thoughts of John Herz" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 457-472

³⁸⁷ K. Thompson, "Review: The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics" in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 73, No. 3, 1979, pp. 941-942

Given this immense diversity of interests then, it is no wonder that Herz demonstrated a remarkable openness in his approach to international politics, of which his methodological pluralism is indicative. A peculiar trait of this pluralism was Herz's attempt to synthesise his German intellectual heritage of a theoretical and historical tradition with the empirical and pragmatic political science that he encountered in America.³⁸⁸ In formulating his own approach Herz actively sought to take the best elements from both worlds.³⁸⁹ As such Lebow is right to observe that although Herz never wrote about the Greeks, he had the mindset of one, at least as regards his preference for the 'middle way'.³⁹⁰ Although Lebow here has in mind the median way in terms of realism and idealism, his comment is also applicable to Herz's methodology. His position in the debate between traditionalism and positivism is indicative of this approach.

In *International Politics in the Atomic Age* Herz briefly contrasted two opposite extreme approaches on methodology, clarifying he was dealing with them as ideal-types that do not appear frequently in their pure form, and found them both wanting.³⁹¹ The "abstract" approach, in its effort to generalise and deduce patterns is at risk of reducing international relations to "typology or phenomenology".³⁹² Further risks are associated with its 'scientific' incarnation that Herz examined in his later work. Thus he was also sceptical of the 'scientific' approach to international relations, which in neglecting that political science is problem-oriented expends itself in accumulating and analysing data for the sake of it. The results of such an approach are often trivial or irrelevant and often do not add more to our understanding of a concrete situation than the intuition offered by the traditionalists.³⁹³ The recognition that traditionalists are more appreciative of the special historical, cultural and other particular characteristics of each concrete case, however, implies that they tend to err in the opposite direction. In the universe of the "overconcrete" or "historical"

³⁸⁸ J. Puglierin, "Towards being a 'Traveler between All Worlds'", pp. 419-423

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 422

³⁹⁰ R. N. Lebow, "Identity and International Relations" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 473-492: p. 473. Lebow is not entirely right to claim that Herz never wrote about the Greeks. See indicatively J. Herz, "Prologue as Epilogue: Aristotle's dream" (1973) in J. Herz, *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, New York: David McKay, 1976, pp. 303-307

³⁹¹ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1962, pp. 5-12

³⁹² Ibid. p. 6

³⁹³ J. Herz, "Relevancies and Irrelevancies in the Study of International Relations" in *Polity*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1971, pp. 25-47: pp. 26-37

approach, generalisation is impossible since international politics are conceived as a continuous “flux of changing concrete situations” whereupon “everything... is always new and incomparable, and nothing whatsoever repeats itself”.³⁹⁴ For Herz this position is unsatisfying since any meaningful study of international politics must be able to attain at least some level of generalisation.

What for Herz constitutes the ‘middle way’ of engaging theoretically with situations that might be in flux but are stable enough so as not to represent merely “fleeting events” is the study of structures and systems.³⁹⁵ He was thus much closer to Waltz’s structural realism than other classical realists, a point he also made when he claimed that their approaches are not incompatible in response to Ashley’s interpretation of his work.³⁹⁶ Yet he was not willing to accept the structural approach unconditionally. For Herz, theoretical model-building is valid insofar as its models are “distillates from life” rather than “products of abstract speculation”, an assertion that would place him at odds with Waltz’s heavily deductive approach.³⁹⁷ A further *caveat* is the risk of ossification of the approach, whereupon the student of international relations views structures and systems as static when they are constantly changing. Apart from the obvious danger in terms of a theory’s validity, when parallels are drawn between dissimilar situations and are used to infer standards of action the results can be “deadly”. Constant re-evaluation of the framework is therefore essential if a structural approach is to be workable.³⁹⁸

Herz’s methodological pluralism, his openness to interdisciplinary approaches and his preference for the middle way between different epistemological positions

³⁹⁴ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 6

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 7

³⁹⁶ See R. Ashley, “Political Realism and Human Interests”, pp. 204-236; J. Herz, “[Political Realism and Human Interests]: Comment” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1981, pp. 237-241; pp. 239-240. The contrast between this attitude and Morgenthau’s dismissive comments about similar approaches and their emphasis on methodology is glaring. H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. ix-x

³⁹⁷ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 8; although induction is not discarded completely by Waltz, he thinks that it is more suitable for testing hypotheses and laws rather than theories. In fact he thinks that although both induction and deduction are indispensable for theory formation, realism was *too* close to induction whereas neorealism was leaning more towards deduction. K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 7-11; K. Waltz “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory”, p 33

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 9. For an illustration of how wrong parallels can be drawn from superficially similar but essentially different cases see Herz’s own contribution on the discussion about détente in the 1970s: J. Herz, “Détente and Appeasement from a Political Scientist’s Vantage Point” (1974) in J. Herz *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, pp. 279-289

informed consistently his efforts to make sense of international relations. More than every other classical realist perhaps, Herz concentrated his efforts around a reoccurring problem that he struggled with from early on and was to form the core of his political philosophy. This problem is, as Karis reminds us, his “obsession” with survival: “His most influential concept, the ‘security dilemma’, was defined in answer to the question, ‘why have we been slaughtering each other on end?’” he notes by quoting Herz’s autobiography, which tellingly is titled *Vom Überleben* i.e. “of survival”.³⁹⁹

Survival in an irrational world: the ontology of the ‘security and power dilemma’

Herz believed we inhabit an irrational world that is home to a fundamental antagonism between the need of cooperation and the inescapability of conflict.⁴⁰⁰ Both elements are central to Herz’s ontological assumptions about social life. On the one hand human beings are fully aware that their survival depends upon fellow human beings. On the other hand, awareness of their vulnerability *vis-à-vis* the very same persons they rely upon for their survival gives rise to mistrust and hostility.⁴⁰¹ This paradox of cooperation and conflict, both equally necessary for survival, gives rise to the security dilemma.

Faced then with a constant threat to their survival, human beings – or groups for that matter - are locked in a perpetual struggle to attain more power as a means of security. Where the ‘dilemmatic’ element of the concept enters, is that this effort creates insecurity to others who in turn embark upon a similar effort to accumulate power.⁴⁰² What makes the security dilemma such a core concept for Herz’s ontology is the perpetual character and the inescapability implied in it once the process is initiated. For as long as human competition for security begins, a vicious circle is

³⁹⁹ T. Karis, “A Life of Passionate Scholarship” p. 408; Stirk mentions the connection between Herz’s academic interest and the title of his autobiography and points to a biographical connection too: the fact that Herz’s own survival as a German Jew was threatened during the Nazi regime. See P. Stirk, “John H. Herz: realism and the fragility of the international order”, p. 287.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism: A study in theories and realities*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 16

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.* pp. 3-5

⁴⁰² J. Herz, “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma” in *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1950, pp. 157-180: pp. 157-158

entered whereupon full security, while never fully attainable, increases the necessity for further accumulation of power.⁴⁰³ The centrality then of power in Herz's ontology depends upon its role as a means of overcoming the security dilemma.

By competing for and securing power individuals or groups are merely trying to address this perennial problem. Although representing one of the possible reactions to the security dilemma, power plays so important a role in Herz's theory of international politics, that he often did not distinguish them and instead referred to them collectively as the "security and power dilemma". That said, Herz was not willing to ascribe to power properties of a *pass-partout* which could unlock all secrets of social life. Indeed, he was very cautious not to base his theory of international politics upon such 'unproved' and 'metaphysical' foundations as assumptions about human nature.⁴⁰⁴ Here the contrast with Morgenthau is glaring, and Herz identified the *animus dominandi* as one of the main weaknesses of the former's theory.⁴⁰⁵ He for one made sure to clarify his own position time and again: "The condition that concerns us" he maintained, "is not an anthropological or biological, but a social one".⁴⁰⁶ Consequently there can be no "innate power instinct" as such: the quest for power simply stems from the instinct of self-preservation that is activated by the 'security dilemma'.⁴⁰⁷

By removing the power drive from the rather flimsy and unverifiable foundations of human nature and founding it upon a social condition, Herz did not only succeed in covering his 'ontological flanks' so to speak, but also in disassociating realism from a fatalistic worldview.⁴⁰⁸ As Sylvest correctly points out, social structures might be solid but they are not as unchangeable as human nature.⁴⁰⁹ Such a move then implies

⁴⁰³ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 24

⁴⁰⁴ J. Herz, "[Political Realism and Human Interests]: Comment", p. 239.

⁴⁰⁵ J. Herz, "Reflections on Hans Morgenthau's Political Realism" in *American Foreign Policy Newsletter*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1984, pp. 1-10: p. 7; Scheuerman, however, notes that "Herz's allusions to fundamental psychological propensities occasionally blurred the divide" between his approach and that of Morgenthau. W. Scheuerman, *Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 34

⁴⁰⁶ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 3

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4

⁴⁰⁸ Scheuerman, however, observes that the divide between Herz and Morgenthau was "occasionally blurred" by the former's "allusions to fundamental psychological propensities". W. E. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, p. 34. Schuett, quoting Wolfers, claims that Herz's theory too included assumptions about human nature, albeit different assumptions that make "people look less vicious": R. Schuett, *Political realism, Freud, and human nature*, p. 57

⁴⁰⁹ C. Sylvest, "John H. Herz and the Resurrection of Classical Realism" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 441-455: p. 448. Indeed, as will be discussed in subsequent parts, Herz often

far more increased possibilities of accommodation and understanding between competing powers.⁴¹⁰ It also allows for the occasional prevalence of power-alien elements such as economic interests or moral and religious circumstances, which Herz interestingly calls “a-political”, in the formulation and execution of policies “from time to time”.⁴¹¹ It does not however, imply a complete marginalisation of power in his theory of international relations.

After the qualification that power does not *a priori* define international relations for Herz is taken into account, one must still arrive at the conclusion that its implications remain paramount for his realism. Thus the fact that “power, in modern international relations, has been the ultimate means of deciding issues”, becomes an inevitable outcome from the moment power “has entered the field at all”.⁴¹² The account here is evolutionary: power competition among states marginalises power-alien considerations in the same way economic motivations marginalised non-economic ones domestically.⁴¹³ Herz implied a historical transition whereupon power gained significantly in importance for international politics. The importance he ascribed to the specific notion of power that arises from the territorial character of the modern state i.e. national power, gives a clear indication about when that transition should be placed. It is national power that enabled nations to assert themselves against the world and “*became* the chief instrument of so-called power politics”.⁴¹⁴

Hence the centrality of power in Herz’s ontology is conditional upon an understanding that firstly it stems from the main theme which is the ‘security dilemma’ and secondly its character and role is shifting according to the historical

contemplated the possibility of either mitigating or overcoming the security dilemma. He was also well aware about what an approach founded upon a social condition implied when displaying skepticism about grounding territoriality to a biological instinct. If competition for resources is conscious –as opposed to instinctive- then political units will not be eternally bound to fight each other. J. Herz, “The Territorial State Revisited: Reflections on the Future of the Nation-State” in *Polity*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1968, pp. 11-34: pp. 30-32

⁴¹⁰ J. Herz, “Reflections on Hans Morgenthau’s Political Realism”: p. 7

⁴¹¹ J. Herz, “Power Politics and World Organization” in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 36, No. 6, 1942, pp. 1039-1052: p. 1040

⁴¹² *Ibid.* pp. 1939-1940

⁴¹³ *Ibid.* p. 1040.

⁴¹⁴ J. Herz, “International Politics and the Nuclear Dilemma” (1962) in J. Herz *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, pp. 124-147: p. 128 (emphasis is added). Of course that does not imply that power appeared out of nowhere: “power considerations have always ruled the ‘international’ relationships of whatever units constituted the basic units”. J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 76. The transition is one of intensity and not one from power-alien to power-centered considerations.

context. This conditionality by no means reduces its importance however, since for Herz as long as the international system is based upon territorial units, the compulsion it exerts upon them means no-one of them can abandon power politics in favour of other considerations without increasing its vulnerability and thus reducing its chances of survival.⁴¹⁵

On epistemology: The 'security dilemma' and political thought

If power, through its close connection to the security dilemma plays an important role in Herz's ontology, through the very same connection it plays an equally important role in his epistemology. For Herz, it is the very irrationality of the world and its apparent conflict with human reason that gives rise to all political thought.⁴¹⁶ Thus he anchored the two ideo-typical theories of political realism and political idealism to the reaction of human mind to the realisation of the 'security and power dilemma'.

For Herz the conventional distinction between political idealism and political realism as representative systems of "what ought to be" versus "what is" respectively, is unsatisfactory.⁴¹⁷ Instead, he understands both approaches as two extreme attitudes towards the security and power dilemma. On the one hand, political realism recognises the implications of this basic condition and understands politics as "fundamentally determined by the struggle for power".⁴¹⁸ Although this is an ontological statement it has important epistemological implications. Having identified the centrality of power, political realism then often falls prey to a single-factor fallacy and disregards all other factors that might be at work alongside or *against* power.⁴¹⁹

Political idealism on the other hand, is ultimately unsatisfied by the mere examination of the political phenomena that derive from the security and power dilemma.⁴²⁰ It seeks to transcend them and connect the ideal with reality either by

⁴¹⁵ J. Herz, "Power Politics and World Organization", p. 1040

⁴¹⁶ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 16

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 17-18

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. pp 24-25

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 24-30

⁴²⁰ Ibid. pp. 31

claiming the potential of future realisation of the ideal or by claiming that the ideal is actually being realised at the present.⁴²¹ In the first case, political idealism fulfils a revolutionary function whereupon it rationalises the interests of the oppressed groups. In the latter, it idealises the status-quo and justifies the predominance of the powers that be.⁴²² Here the similarities with the conditionality of thought discussed by Carr are striking, and certainly Herz was aware of the work of Mannheim.⁴²³

Another commonality with Carr is Herz's preferred type of political thought which he called "Realist Liberalism". Very much like the dialectics of utopia and reality in Carr, Herz's own approach is trying to synthesise the best elements of the two worlds.⁴²⁴ Sound political thought should aim to avoid both the naivety of idealism and the fatalism of realism. As such, the epistemology of "Realist Liberalism" should be firmly based on the "utilisation, without compromise or euphemism, of any and all knowledge of political realism".⁴²⁵ Realist observations of the security and power element in human societies constitute the "facts", the hard ground upon which political thought can be built. They also delineate the limits of the attainable by highlighting the restraints imposed by those facts upon human action.⁴²⁶ At the same time, ethical guidance can only be given by accepting the main advantage of political idealism, namely the "realisation... that man can act".⁴²⁷

Realist Liberalism then does not represent a mere combination of elements from political idealism and political realism. More importantly, it represents the dialectical synthesis that follows from the 'thesis' of the first and its contradiction by the 'antithesis' of the second.⁴²⁸ This synthesis lies also at the basis of Herz's notion of rationality in a world that is, as already noted, far from rational. Herz understood

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 33

⁴²² Ibid. pp. 36-39

⁴²³ Ibid. p. 144

⁴²⁴ The similarity has not gone unnoticed in secondary literature. See: C. Hacke and J. Puglierin "John H. Herz: Balancing Utopia and Reality", p. 377; W. Scheuerman, *Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 37-38. Jones also spots this similarity and interprets it as an employment of the same rhetorical 'trick' by both authors in order to manipulate their readership: C. Jones, *A duty to lie*, p.12. Booth despite discussing the commonalities also notes that Herz was less sceptical than Carr as regarded the prospects of finding a middle way between realism and idealism: K. Booth, "Navigating the 'Absolute Novum': John H. Herz's Political Realism and Political Idealism" in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 510-526: pp. 520-521

⁴²⁵ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 132-133

⁴²⁶ Ibid. pp. 131-133

⁴²⁷ Ibid. p. 132

⁴²⁸ Ibid. pp. 132-133, p. 146

idealist rationalism not merely as a belief in “reason” but rather as a blind belief in the possibility of the opposing instincts of pity and survival to be reconciled. Since however for Herz rationality is not inherent in the world, sound political thought should begin with the assumption that “rationality is morality to be aimed at”.⁴²⁹ The recognition of rationalism as a normative rather than epistemological position should be matched by the acceptance of the ‘realist facts’ as the raw material which creates the preconditions for whatever rationality can be attainable.⁴³⁰

II. Herz’s conceptualisation of power

Power and international relations: its protean nature

Given the primacy of the security dilemma in Herz’s theory of international relations, it follows that whatever importance power holds in such a theory can only be derivative. As such, his conceptualisation of power is anchored to the security dilemma. Having rejected the assumptions about an innate power drive in human nature, Herz treated the struggle for power as a means to satisfy the need for security, paving thus the way for contemporary realism. Power then to begin with, is to be understood as the possession of means of living and of weapons that can be used to safeguard one’s own life and secure the possession of said means.⁴³¹ This intimate connection between power and security is echoed in his later assessment of the “power of protection” as the main source of legitimacy for any given political unit.⁴³² The closest then he offered to a notion of the essence of power is its broad understanding as the possession of means of protection or the perception of such a possession.

The latter relates to the importance he attributed to the subjective element of power in line with what Sylvest calls Herz’s “perspectivism” or –anachronistically-constructivism.⁴³³ Writing three decades after the publication of *Political Realism*

⁴²⁹ Ibid. pp. 127-128

⁴³⁰ Ibid. p. 128

⁴³¹ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 5

⁴³² J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 41

⁴³³ C. Sylvest, “Herz and the resurrection of classical realism”, pp 449-451

and Political Idealism Herz described power as “the most fundamental but also most elusive of realist concepts”.⁴³⁴ One element of this elusiveness that concerned Herz right from the beginning was the importance of non-material forms of power, namely prestige. He made sure to include the subjective element of prestige alongside the otherwise brief and basic formulation of power he offered in his earlier work. There, he described prestige as an equally important to military and economic power element, since its possession “confers power upon its possessor”, irrespectively of the fact that it might not reflect actual power.⁴³⁵ Morgenthau too paid attention to the same element, while cautioning to the perils of not only downplaying but also overplaying one’s own power through prestige policy.⁴³⁶

Herz’s conceptualisation of power, however, is not exhausted in its understanding as material capabilities or even in the perception of the existence or lack thereof. For him the importance of the subjective element goes beyond its role in the calculation - or miscalculation as the case might be - of power. It affects the very core of our understanding of power itself. Unlike geography, population or the armed forces of a nation-state that are verifiable “givens”, its power cannot be treated as such because its estimation is totally dependent upon the actor’s interpretation of the former. That power and power relations thus are understood as givens is a result of actors’ or observers’ perceptions of reality.⁴³⁷ In fact, Herz claimed, power is a metaphor and as such it is “in the eyes of the beholder”.⁴³⁸ And the vision of the beholder differs “according to historical memories or cultural or social traditions”.⁴³⁹

This final statement is revealing of one of the main characteristics of Herz’s notion of power: the components of power cannot be conceived to be independent of conditions of space and time. This, as stated already, applies to the subjective element of power. Herz indeed claimed that prestige or image-making gained so much in importance during the Cold War compared to the past that it came to account for “half of ‘power politics’”.⁴⁴⁰ It also applies to the material or objective

⁴³⁴ J. Herz, “Political Realism Revisited” in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1981, pp. 182-197: p. 186

⁴³⁵ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp 5-6

⁴³⁶ H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 73-87

⁴³⁷ J. Herz, “Realism revisited”, p. 184

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 186

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 185

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 187

element of power. For Herz the traditional notion of power could be used as a standard of comparison between different units because it was “measurable, to some extent, graded, and calculable”.⁴⁴¹ The elements of national power in this traditional understanding could be ‘added up’ to allow for an estimate of the cumulative power of a nation-state. They do not differ much from those presented by Morgenthau for the same purpose and include “size, location, configuration of territory, quantitative and qualitative aspects of population, economic and above all industrial development, and... military strength, actual as well as potential”.⁴⁴²

This measurability of power however, resulted from the particular historical setting that gave birth to the classical international system. Power, in its current understanding as capabilities, is but a derivative concept that takes its meaning from the underlying structure of territoriality. It is only through this structure which established the modern state as the main impenetrable unit that “these capabilities can be made use of in international politics”.⁴⁴³ Once this structure withered away, as Herz believed to be the case with the rise of bipolarity and the development of thermonuclear weapons, the very concept of power would be bound to lose its traditional meaning.⁴⁴⁴ While before the development of the new weapons it still seemed reasonable to understand power as “something radiating from one centre... until it finds an equilibrium with that of similar geographically anchored units” as per Russell, in the atomic age power could bypass the hard shell of the territorial unit and destroy power “from centre to centre”.⁴⁴⁵ As such, the development of the new weapons represented a far more radical change than the emergence of bipolarity because at its heart lay a paradoxical condition: power, both traditional and atomic, would become at the same time both an asset and a liability. Possession of traditional factors of power such as the level of industrialisation or location, as well as nuclear weapons themselves, would render their holder more vulnerable than with their

⁴⁴¹ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 41-42

⁴⁴² Ibid. p. 170; for Morgenthau’s elements of power see *supra* Chapter II, pp. 74-75

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p. 49

⁴⁴⁴ Here Herz’s concerns run parallel to those of Morgenthau who displayed similar thoughts about the radical departure signified by the development of nuclear weapons. For the similarities and differences see W. Scheuerman, “Realists against the nation-state”, pp. 97-103; W. Scheuerman, “Realism and the critique of technology”, pp. 563-584

⁴⁴⁵ J. Herz, “Rise and demise of the territorial state” in *World Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1957, pp. 473-493: p. 489

absence, and power would become synonymous with impotence.⁴⁴⁶ The implication for the concept of power itself, as traditionally understood, would be an urgent need for its re-definition since it would now be rendered meaningless.

Similarly to Morgenthau, Herz displayed scepticism about the prospects of humanity's survival in the face of developments in nuclear warfare. To be fair to him, however, writing in the late 1950s he was merely trying to capture the uncertainty of a transitional age and outline prospects for the future. As such, his assessment that with the development of nuclear weapons power equals impotence belongs to the sphere not of prediction but of mere identification of tendencies that might or *might not* materialise. After reviewing extensively the risks involved in conceptions of deterrence at the time he concluded that the main characteristic of the transitional period was an unprecedented uncertainty that rendered any redefinition of concepts almost impossible. For him the only meaningful way to approach international structure and politics would be to accept the precarious coexistence of two contradictory realities: on the one hand the traditional or "preatomic" power relations whereupon old concepts retain partially their validity and on the other hand the "constellation in which permeability... is the underlying condition".⁴⁴⁷ The paradoxical outcome is a situation in which power is "'measurable' and 'comparable', and no longer measurable and absolute, all at the same time".⁴⁴⁸

Despite being merely the outline of a tendency, Herz's approach to power in this case provides with a good indication about his view of the concept as essentially protean in its character. Nuclear weapons aside, the emergence of bipolarity offered for Herz a clear example of how historical development calls for a constant re-evaluation of the central concepts. Paraphrasing Marx, Herz emphasised time and again that developments at the level of international relations "constitute a superstructure over the developments of the means of *destruction*".⁴⁴⁹ Herz had always been concerned with the impact of technological developments on international politics and human

⁴⁴⁶ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 168-172

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 221-223

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 222

⁴⁴⁹ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 200; also repeated in J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p 233 and J. Herz, "Technology, Ethics and International relations" (1974) in J. Herz, *The nation-state and the crisis of world politics*, p 290

survival generally, as recent works by Sylvest and Scheuerman demonstrated.⁴⁵⁰ He emphasised particularly the role of military technology when accounting for changes in the international system.⁴⁵¹ His analysis on the emergence of the territorial state in place of the medieval unit thus was centred on the role of gunpowder, and his assertion that the prospects were bleak for the nation-state was equally based on the developments that rendered the hard shell of nation-states permeable.⁴⁵² As a consequence –and notwithstanding the nuclear weapons that render the measurability of power “doubtful as such”- the increased complexity and sheer number of power factors to be taken into account when calculating power has increased so much and so rapidly during modernity that any effort to calculate power is even more complex than it used to be. This increasing uncertainty which followed rapid technological developments, with the addition of the subjective element of power made the measurability of power in the bipolar world precarious.⁴⁵³

Here Herz’s realism lies somewhere between classical realism and neorealism. For even though the essence of power as the bare minimum of means of security remains unchanged in Herz’s theory, the same does not apply to the *form* of power. The latter is in constant flux throughout history and reflects changes in the international system. This fluidity of both power and the international system distinguishes Herz’s approach from later incarnations of structural realism despite their similarities. For Herz power cannot be fungible because it does not possess the same external traits at any given time. Yet for neorealism, trying to model a theory of international relations after microeconomics, power is expected to play the role of money and thus be

⁴⁵⁰ Herz prepared in the 1960s a manuscript under the title *International Politics in the Technological Age*, and although it never saw publication, some parts of it found their way to a later collection of articles: J. Herz, “The Civilisational Process and its reversal” in *The nation-state and the crisis of world politics*, pp. 195-225. See the excellent discussions in W. Scheuerman, “Realism and the critique of technology”, pp. 569-582 and C. Sylvest, “Technology and Global Politics: The Modern Experiences of Bertrand Russell and John H. Herz” in *The International History Review*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2013, pp. 121-142. Scheuerman focuses mostly on Herz’s account of social acceleration and its contemporary relevance. As such the emphasis is mostly on negative aspects of technology. Herz, however, displayed –on occasion- some optimism too; especially when discussing the prospects of technology to provide the means of overcoming the perennial security dilemma. See for instance the concluding remarks in J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* and J. Herz, “Territorial State Revisited”.

⁴⁵¹ “The very nature of the prevailing unit... depended on military technology” J. Herz, “Technology, Ethics, and international relations”, p 291

⁴⁵² J. Herz, “Rise and demise of territorial state”, pp 476-489

⁴⁵³ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 143-146

fungible, at least to some extent.⁴⁵⁴ The important difference is not one of degree: despite the differences between various neorealists they would agree with Herz that to measure power accurately is a daunting endeavour.⁴⁵⁵ The main difference is rather a qualitative one: Herz's power is in flux and in need of constant re-evaluation, in line with his warning of the risk of ossification associated with structural approaches. Hence, whereas for neorealism power is something static, for Herz's variant of realism this is not the case.

The role of power in politics and its limits

For Herz then, so long as the security dilemma is not resolved, power is going to lie at the core of politics. The fatal problem with political idealism is, as mentioned already, the belief that the struggle for power can be abandoned in favour of a new, ideal order. The identification of power as a means of overcoming the security dilemma meant for Herz that those who attempt to abandon the struggle for power unilaterally increase their vulnerability *vis-à-vis* others.⁴⁵⁶ Whenever thus an idealist project manages to overcome a pre-existing order, its success is going to be short-lived. For in conditions of insecurity and struggle for power, the only way it can survive is on a power basis.⁴⁵⁷ As a result, once new rules and institutions are in place, they are doomed to be corrupted by those very phenomena they sought to overcome. This is the tragedy of idealism and Herz noted that history is riddled with abortive efforts to create a better world, the examples of the French and Russian revolutions being typical of how an internationalist movement degenerates to self-serving national policies.⁴⁵⁸

Realist cynicism is born out of disillusionment for the fate of such efforts, but it does not fare any better in addressing the problems of social life. While political realism can understand the constraints the security and power dilemma imposes on human action better than idealism, it “fails to gain the minds of men for any length of

⁴⁵⁴ K. Waltz, “Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A response to my critics” in R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*, pp. 323-345: p. 333

⁴⁵⁵ For a brief overview of different conceptions of power in structural realism see B. Schmidt “Competing Realist Conceptions of Power” in *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2005, pp 523-549: pp 536-542. For Mearsheimer's conceptualization of power as currency see *infra* Chapter IV, Parts I and II.

⁴⁵⁶ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 24

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 169

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 27 ; pp. 65-102

time’.⁴⁵⁹ At best, realism simply neglects everything apart from power considerations and becomes fatalistic; at worst it glorifies power and its paraphernalia such as war, aggressive nationalism and imperialism.⁴⁶⁰ Herz realised that in the field of international relations the observations of realism carry more weight than in domestic politics because of the prevailing conditions of international anarchy. Here, the refuge of an overarching authority that might control the power of the dominant members of the group is absent as are the various institutionalised checks and balances of domestic politics.⁴⁶¹ The logical conclusion of such a realisation would be that the struggle for power in international relations is endless and unchecked, a conclusion often followed by structural realists of the offensive variant.⁴⁶² For Herz however, this view is not justified by historical experience. Despite differences with domestic politics, international anarchy has not always been unconditional, the struggle for power has often been limited and the security dilemma mitigated.⁴⁶³

In his early formulation of realist liberalism Herz opted for the minimalist mediating factor of the balance of power and its modified variant of collective security. He recognised the existence of other mitigating factors such as international law or ideologies of unity but was very sceptical about their potential to inform realist liberalism in the context of modern international relations.⁴⁶⁴ A self-conscious system of balance of power like the one that flourished in Europe until the nineteenth century, was based on the belief of those participating in it that they shared an

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 126

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 203, pp. 24-30

⁴⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 200-203; J. Herz, “Introduction” in *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, pp. 1-56: p. 9

⁴⁶² Wheeler observes that it is such a reading of the security dilemma, for which Herz’s early formulations are partly responsible, that “led John Mearsheimer to claim Herz as a progenitor of the theory of offensive realism”. N. Wheeler, “‘To Put Oneself into the Other Fellow’s Place’: John Herz, the Security Dilemma and the Nuclear Age” in *International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2008, pp. 493-509: p. 494. For Herz himself however, such a position was representative of the ideo-typical political realism he was trying to overcome with his realist liberalism. J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 203. A similar point is raised by Scheuerman who claims that the mere existence of the security dilemma is not sufficient reason for Herz to reject outright ‘idealism’. Statesmen who are able to understand its logic can mitigate the security dilemma. W. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 35-37

⁴⁶³ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 203-204; J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 235

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. pp. 204-205. For a detailed account of Herz’s gradual disillusionment with international law, despite him beginning his career as a disciple of Kelsen see C. Sylvest, “Realism and international law: the challenge of John H. Herz” in *International Theory*, Vol. 2, no 3, 2010, pp. 410-445

interest in maintaining a system comprised by a plurality of political units. Such a system represented for Herz a middle-way between “individualism” and the “general interest” of preventing a single power from dominating the system.⁴⁶⁵ With the development of bipolarity Herz came to believe this system could no longer perform its limiting functions as will be discussed in the following section. Yet one particular aspect of his analysis remained crucial for his understanding of efforts to mitigate power competition: his treatment of the balance of power as a conscious effort, informed by an understanding of a general interest.

In periods of history when the balance of power was almost an accidental outcome of the existence of a system comprising of multiple units like that of the ancient Greek city-states or of the Hellenistic kingdoms, units succumbed to an “undiluted ‘power and security dilemma’” and thus failed to “break the vicious circle and to pursue any policy of mitigation and restraint, relying instead on the pure principles of power politics in the narrower sense”.⁴⁶⁶ The lack of realisation that the maintenance of a pluralist system guaranteed the continued survival of its units eventually led to the inability to check Rome and avert its hegemony.⁴⁶⁷ Awareness of the fact that there is a common interest in sustaining a system that allows for the co-existence of independent units meant that the security dilemma can at least be alleviated through conscious effort.

It is this aspect of Herz’s thought that for Wheeler distinguishes his notion of the security dilemma from the more pessimistic one forwarded by Butterfield, namely the belief that by comprehending its dynamics, actors “can act upon this knowledge to promote mutual security”.⁴⁶⁸ In an era when the two superpowers faced each other with unprecedented suspicion and with the survival of humanity at risk, his plea to policy makers to approach the nature of the conflict in a detached way, realise the true nature of the conflict and the common interests in avoiding nuclear war, and to “put oneself into the other’s place” aimed at offering a way to mediate the security dilemma.⁴⁶⁹ As mentioned in the previous section, the centrality of power for Herz lay with its importance as a means to addressing the security dilemma. As such, the

⁴⁶⁵ J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 207-208

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 208-210

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 210

⁴⁶⁸ N. Wheeler, ““To Put Oneself into the Other Fellow’s Place””, p. 495

⁴⁶⁹ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 249-250

limitation of the struggle for power ultimately relies on how successful efforts to mitigate the security dilemma are going to be. Herz often displayed a “guarded optimism”, to borrow Stirk’s expression, towards the possibility of somewhat mitigating the security dilemma through a combination of conscious effort and technological developments.⁴⁷⁰

III. Power and the nation-state

The nation-state as the unit of power

In his quasi-autobiographical introduction to the *Nation-state and the Crisis of World politics*, Herz reflected on his main objectives in his early engagement with international politics. One of the issues that troubled him was why the security and power dilemma played such a prominent role in the relations between units that were “in their respective historical setting... the highest ones, that is, not subordinate to any higher authority”.⁴⁷¹ The second issue was related to the character of those units: “What accounts in history for the emergence of the great variety of units which are, in different periods, the highest ones?”⁴⁷² From the very way the questions are framed some first conclusions about the way he tried to tackle the problem can be inferred. Herz was going to approach the nation-state as a ‘unit’ of security, and he was going to approach it as a *historical* unit.⁴⁷³

For Herz the formation of political units results from the effort to strike a compromise between the two opposing forces of cooperation and insecurity in human societies. Human beings, he noted, feel more secure in groups, and particularly so in groups that appear as ‘natural’. Competition within the group does not disappear totally but there is at least a degree of solidarity especially when the security of the group is threatened by other groups. As such, the tendency of human

⁴⁷⁰ For Herz’s guarded optimism see P. Stirk, “realism and the fragility of the international order”, p. 287; for the help of technology in attenuating the security dilemma by reducing scarcity of resources through modernization see J. Herz, “Territorial State Revisited”, p. 32

⁴⁷¹ J. Herz, “Introduction”, p. 9

⁴⁷² Ibid. p. 12

⁴⁷³ Despite his affinity with structural realism, Herz was aware of the limits of treating the political unit as a billiard-ball. He was critical of the variant of realism that advocated the primacy of foreign policy because it neglected the fact that “‘units’ of power... are usually not coherent groups, but units based on internal power relationships”. J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, p. 28

beings to organise themselves in social groups cannot eradicate the struggle for survival which is now projected at the level of the group.⁴⁷⁴ Here, despite their differences in what constitutes the roots of the struggle for power, Herz employed a similar mechanism of projection to Morgenthau.⁴⁷⁵ The same condition applies to all groups but in the particular case of the state it becomes much more acute due to fact that being the highest unit, it “cannot rely on any higher authority” for purposes of security.⁴⁷⁶

The form of the political unit is determined primarily by its capacity to offer protection to its members, both internally and externally.⁴⁷⁷ What allowed nation-states to perform this function, and what thus for Herz constituted the main underlying structure of the modern international system, was “territoriality”. It is the organisation of the state on a territorial basis with “impermeable”, defensible boundaries that turned it into the basic political unit.⁴⁷⁸ Herz’s account of the evolution of the territorial unit is a historical one. As when examining power, his main focus was on technological development and in particular the development of military technology. In his account, the territorial state emerged at the aftermath of the “gunpowder revolution” and from the rumbles of the previous “unit of impermeability”, the medieval castle, which had become vulnerable and unable to fulfil its protective function any longer.⁴⁷⁹ Technological progress, then, determines what sort of political unit will emerge next by rendering previous forms of organisation indefensible and thus obsolete. This can be illustrated clearly by the factors that Herz considered more important for explaining the transition to the modern international system.

In the medieval setting, a combination of a common set of values and the lack of destructive weapons provided for the minimum of internal and external security essential for the survival of the system.⁴⁸⁰ The medieval system however was

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 10-13

⁴⁷⁵ Roots of the problem are different but the outcome is the same. The condition is projected to the level of the group. Schuett notices some parallels with Freudian defence mechanisms such as identification, similar to those he attributed to Morgenthau. R. Schuett, *Political realism, Freud, and human nature*, pp. 53-59

⁴⁷⁶ J. Herz, “Introduction”, p. 10; J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 231-233

⁴⁷⁷ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 40-41

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 49-75

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 43-48

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 45

challenged by the collapse of the previous moral order and the emergence of new weapons. In Herz's variant of "strategic determinism" major revolutions in military technology can challenge the whole "superstructure" of economic, social, and political relationships" by undermining the foundations of the "units of protection", and certainly the gunpowder revolution was one of them.⁴⁸¹ The collapse of medieval order was followed by a period of insecurity and turmoil which was characterised by internal and external conflict amongst the various units. The character of the new units to emerge was not predetermined but would depend on the outcome of this conflict.

It was thus a question of which of the rulers engaged in the conflict could most effectively exploit this newly-acquired military power and how far could they extend their control through the use of such power.⁴⁸² Here the ability to employ the new technological means for the dual purpose of internal pacification and external protection proved crucial. The rulers of the emerging territorial states were able to accomplish the first task by employing power in order to remove the last remnants of feudal power and dissolve the obsolete units of impermeability such as castles and fortified cities domestically.⁴⁸³ At the same time, lining the borders with fortifications, controlled and manned by the centralised government, formed the new 'hard shell' of the territorial unit which afforded it increased protection from external interference.⁴⁸⁴ The two processes developed in parallel and reinforced each other: external forces that would otherwise aid some of the pockets of resistance increasingly found it hard to do so due to the newly-formed hard shell.⁴⁸⁵ By the end of the seventeenth century the territorial unit had been consolidated as the main political unit. Power then, mostly military but also economic -through the increased ability of the territorial rulers to fund their efforts through the newly-emerged money economy instead of relying on their vassals⁴⁸⁶- played a major role in forging the territorial unit.

⁴⁸¹ Herz mentions that it was not his intention to 'indulge in a "strategic determinism"' in J. Herz, *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, p. 13; J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 45-46

⁴⁸² J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 46

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.* p.p. 47, 57

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 43-61

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 51

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 45

The relation between power and the nature of the political unit, however, is not one-directional. In Herz's approach they exist in a dialogical relationship that is determined by their close connection to the question of security and how it is best addressed at a given historical setting. Where the dialogical element becomes apparent is in the changing conception of power *after* the territorial unit is established as the main form of political organisation. Herz observed that the use of concepts such as "power" or "sovereignty" often obscures the fact that they are intimately related to territoriality and are in fact derivative of it.⁴⁸⁷ As mentioned in the previous part, for his variant of structuralism territoriality is the underlying structure and once it is consolidated, the form of power and the very way its functions for international politics are understood is bound to change. The main change the emergence of the territorial state brought to power was through the process of centralisation.

In contrast to the pre-modern system where power was "diffused among various power-holders with jurisdiction over the one and same group of people" power was now centrally organised and has become measurable.⁴⁸⁸ This particular understanding of power could not be employed in international relations without reference to "something pre-existing, namely, the territorial state itself".⁴⁸⁹ In an international system where international anarchy "has not always been complete" the establishment of the territorial unit, largely immune from external interference, is the factor which granted power an increased role.⁴⁹⁰ For it is only through the purposeful use of power after the collapse of medieval unity that international anarchy can be mitigated to some extent. The balance of power as a conscious attempt to prevent hegemony from materialising, as it was exemplified in the classical modern system, was significantly different to the coincidental balance of power of bygone ages. What differentiated it was a combination of material conditions, such as an adequate

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 49

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 58

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 49

⁴⁹⁰ For Herz international relations, or put more accurately: relations between units national or otherwise, are characterised by anarchy but very rarely this anarchy is unmitigated and can be translated to unlimited conflict. The geographical separation of self-sufficient units in the distant past or the existence of overarching ideologies of unity are used as examples of such mitigation of conflict. The establishment, however, of "larger and more interrelated" power units will of necessity relegate law, ideologies or other power-alien considerations to only secondary importance. J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 203-205

number of great powers of similar capabilities and the existence of an insular holder of the balance, and dynastic diplomacy.⁴⁹¹ The latter, free from “‘power-alien’ influences, could devote itself to balancing policies as to a cool and detached game of chess”.⁴⁹²

This close interaction between territoriality and the newly-found power of the territorial state is on display in Herz’s account of the institutions associated with the modern international system. His account of the development of the concept of sovereignty is one of conflict between empire and territorial rulers resolved in favour of the latter due to their ability to employ power to pacify and defend their domains.⁴⁹³ Similarly, the substitution of modern international law for “natural law” is examined as an attempt to regulate relations between sovereign nations which reflected the underlying structure of territoriality.⁴⁹⁴ The principle of legitimacy and nationalism that followed it, which further contributed in stabilising the system, both required the defensible units established by territoriality to flourish.⁴⁹⁵

Even the community character of the European system with its principles of limited war and non-conquest was tied to the territorial character of the units. Despite the fact that this community was restricted to the continent of Europe itself while allowing European powers to pursue imperialistic goals overseas, its essence was not merely ideological for Herz. He noticed that the impermissibility of conquest was extended beyond Europe as soon as territoriality expanded and similar, impermeable units were formed elsewhere.⁴⁹⁶

Consequently, in Herz’s theory it is not only power that is in flux due to changing conditions, as mentioned in the previous part, but also the international system itself as well as its underlying structure and its units. In the case of the modern international system, it is the very structure of territoriality that for Herz gave it its peculiar characteristics. The success of the territorial state lay in its ability to offer a satisfactory answer to the question of security. Political units however, are always historical units, replaced by other forms of organisation when they can no longer

⁴⁹¹ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 65; J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 207-221

⁴⁹² J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 65

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.* pp. 51-57

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 58-61

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 73-75

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 66-70

perform their basic functions. Herz, often by drawing parallels to how previous political units gradually disappeared, was sceptical about the potential of the modern state in the twentieth century.

The 'demise' of the territorial state?

When discussing Herz's account of the challenges facing the nation-state and its foundation of territoriality it should be borne in mind that Herz returned to the question of the nation-state several times in the course of his career, often reconsidering or reframing earlier assertions. As such, a degree of inconsistency is to be expected, especially given the fact that his area of interests expanded significantly in the decades that followed to encompass a notion of security that incorporated environmental factors, welfare, demographics and development. What remained constant in his analysis of the nation-state however, was its binary conceptualisation as a unit of protection and cooperation. It is with respect to those closely interconnected themes that the core of his examination of the limits of the nation-state can be exposed.

Given the emphasis Herz placed on developments in –mainly military- technology for the emergence of the territorial state as the unit of protection, it is of no surprise that in his early engagement with the nation-state it was this particular field that concentrated his attention. His account of the “demise” of the territorial state was mainly focused on developments that were undermining its foundations of territoriality and the impermeability associated with it.⁴⁹⁷ Similarly to Carr, he examined a series of factors that from the 19th century on increasingly allowed for the impermeability of the territorial states to be bypassed. The development of economic warfare and the increased effectiveness of blockades, ideological penetration and air warfare were all factors that although not being decisive in the two world wars, enabled competing units to penetrate each others' hard-shell in a

⁴⁹⁷ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 96; J. Herz, “Rise and demise of the territorial state”, *passim*; J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 235-238; In his *Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics* Herz discussed his account of the “demise” of the nation-state and he claimed that it created some confusion in that some readers assumed that with this term he predicted “the impending disappearance of the nation-state” whereas he did not. J. Herz, “Introduction”, pp. 16-17

way that was impossible under the classical system.⁴⁹⁸ By the First World War it was becoming apparent that small nation-states were increasingly incapable of defending themselves and in the aftermath of the Second World War even some of the great powers “*qua* territorial states, were on the way to becoming obsolete”.⁴⁹⁹

Despite the importance of those challenges however, territoriality could still be salvaged. Surprisingly for a realist, Herz saw collective security in a positive light despite the abortive effort of the League of Nations. In an era when the balance of power was disrupted and territorial states were becoming increasingly vulnerable, a system of collective security appeared to him a plausible solution and Herz oriented some of his early efforts in proposing ways to make it workable.⁵⁰⁰ The organisation of the post-war world on the basis of bipolarity, characterised by an ideological split between the two sides and the existence of nuclear weapons signified for Herz the loss of whatever hopes there might have been for a genuine collective security system.⁵⁰¹ The very rise of bipolarity however, could also be interpreted as an effort to safeguard territoriality by extending the hard-shell of defensibility to the level of the bloc. Bipolarity was seen by Herz as representing the culmination of tendencies of extending the territorial state to ameliorate the effects of economic interdependence and the increased vulnerability to military technology.⁵⁰² The most radical challenge to the territorial system thus lay not with the rise of bipolarity but with the development of nuclear warfare which happened to coincide with it.

Although initially not too alarmist about the role of nuclear weapons, Herz came by the late 1950s to believe that their development signified a revolution with potentially similar consequences for the nation-state that the gunpowder revolution had for the medieval unit of protection.⁵⁰³ Whereas under bipolarity old concepts of power and sovereignty needed to be readjusted to be maintained, the nuclear

⁴⁹⁸ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 96-108

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 98-99; p. 107

⁵⁰⁰ See for instance his outline in J. Herz, “Power Politics”, pp 1043-1051

⁵⁰¹ Collective security’s effectiveness was determined by the existence of a plurality of territorial units without any commitments towards other powers in the form of alliances. It was thus to be a refinement of the balance of power, albeit organised on a legalistic basis. For Herz this system was still workable in the interwar period, but states came to realise its necessity only “when the preconditions for a genuine collective security system had vanished”. J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 93; pp. 76-95

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* pp. 111-166

⁵⁰³ For his initial and somehow ambiguous position on nuclear revolution see the conclusions in J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*

revolution signalled the need for their radical re-invention since it undermined their very foundation of territoriality. The problem was not only that the hard-shell of the states could now be penetrated vertically with much more destructive means than previously. A much graver implication was that nuclear weapons could potentially signal the obliteration of the dialogical relationship between power and territoriality and its replacement by a paradox. Instead from conferring security to its holder, power in this arrangement created vulnerability.⁵⁰⁴ The outcome is the transition from the mitigated security dilemma of the classical system to the unmitigated and absolute security dilemma of the bipolar world.⁵⁰⁵

Considering the fact that power, and nuclear power in particular, could no longer play its protective function, Herz proposed a short-term “holding operation” plan based on mutual accommodation of the superpowers and advocated a “realistic universalist” approach as a long-term goal based on the common interest of all humanity on survival.⁵⁰⁶ The latter would for the first time override national interests and power competition which could serve the territorial states well but proved unable to provide any protection at the face of nuclear annihilation.⁵⁰⁷ Such an approach would involve nation-states realising the primacy of their common interest to survival and either delegating their nuclear weapons to a supranational authority or dismantling them. This in turn would allow them to regain part of their protective functions and continue to exist as territorial units, albeit no longer as “ultimate units of control”.⁵⁰⁸

For this universalism to stand any chance however, nation-states ought to abandon particularistic values that traditionally worked against it, namely what Herz called

⁵⁰⁴ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 167-223

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 231-243

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 244-357

⁵⁰⁷ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 310; Also when discussing similar notions in Morgenthau: “The choice is... between various kinds of national destruction, on the one hand, and survival through temporary accommodation and eventual prevalence of moral-political universalism, on the other”. *Ibid.* p. 335

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 338-349; the loss of status as “ultimate units of control” would not only come through the voluntary abandonment of national nuclear arsenals but also because of the delegation of powers to supranational functional agencies that would address several of the global issues that the states could not solve alone any longer. At this point Herz was already concerned with issues such as demographic explosion, scarcity of resources, and the inability of nations to provide economic welfare to their populations. *Ibid.* pp. 314-320; pp. 341-342. For a discussion of Herz’s views on functionalism vis-à-vis those of other realists see W. Scheuerman, “The (classical) Realist vision of global reform”, pp. 264-268

“exclusivist nationalism”.⁵⁰⁹ The necessity of such a move despite the resistance to be expected was, at least for Herz, clear and it relied on the way he understood the connection between allegiance to a political unit and the protective functions this unit could accomplish.⁵¹⁰ Since the nation-state could no longer offer the minimum of protection required, continued attachment to nationalism was merely an exercise in futility. Paradoxically, for the nation-state to survive it ought to abandon its ideological corollary. A decade later, Herz had to return to the question of the nation-state in an effort to address its apparent resilience and a series of trends that were moving exactly to the opposite direction of universalism, towards a “new territoriality”.⁵¹¹

The first factor that contributed to this outcome lay with the “unavailability of force” in the bipolar world. The superpowers proved to be more interested in maintaining their spheres of influence and the status quo and, despite not abolishing their nuclear weapons, they kept them only as a final resort. The result was not only that nuclear power became “unavailable” but also conventional power due to the risk of escalation.⁵¹² Ironically, this stabilisation was in part due to the fact that some of the ideas Herz discussed in his earlier plan for a “holding operation” actually materialised.⁵¹³ The shortcoming of his long-term outline lay with the fact that “holding operation” was a necessary but not sufficient condition for universalism. In reality, when the risk of a nuclear holocaust moved to the background, nation-states did not feel particularly compelled to contemplate more radical solutions.

Operating parallel to the developments in the field of power were other forces that contributed to the retrenchment of nation-states. Old-style empires, founded upon

⁵⁰⁹ Herz’s reading of nationalism was very close to Morgenthau’s. Similarly to the latter’s distinction between liberal and universalistic nationalism, Herz too distinguished between two types of nationalism namely idealist and integral nationalism. Here, by “exclusivist nationalism” he refers to the same “nationalistic universalism” of Morgenthau. J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, p. 339; for the distinction between idealist versus integral nationalism as an exemplification of what happens to an idealist movement when it meets facts see Herz, J. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, pp. 65-102

⁵¹⁰ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 340-344; also his discussion in J. Herz, “Legitimacy: Can we retrieve it?” in *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1978, pp. 317-343, *passim*

⁵¹¹ J. Herz, “Territorial State Revisited”, pp. 11-34

⁵¹² *Ibid.* pp. 18-22

⁵¹³ The short-term solutions he outlined in *International Politics in the Atomic Age* proved very close to the ones actually followed: delimitation of spheres and non-intervention on each others’ sphere, limitation of ideological antagonism, and the avoidance of a major war became constant, rather than temporary as Herz believed, characteristics of the Cold War. J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 244-299; pp. 302-305

imperialistic policies that aimed at securing self-sufficiency and established on the basis of military superiority and the absence of nationalism among the colonised people were by then crumbling. This development was brought about by a combination of technological developments, which rendered reliance on raw materials less important for survival, and the rise of nationalism in the former colonies.⁵¹⁴ Through the close association of legitimacy with the fulfilment of the main functions of the state and the impact of technological development, Herz managed to provide an interesting account of the qualitative difference between defensive nationalism and the aggressive one that preceded it. Nationalism proved very effective in marshalling the power of the nation when faced with an existential threat. The cases of Israel and Vietnam demonstrated its potency even when faced with superior power. At the same time however, it could not be employed for purposes of conquest because it would firstly meet fierce resistance from a hostile and equally nationalistic population, and secondly because through modernisation and economic development the protective functions of a unit could be more easily fulfilled without the need of territorial expansion.⁵¹⁵

For Herz then, the nation-state has secured its existence and retained its position as the main political unit “providing group identity, protection and welfare”.⁵¹⁶ Herz of course was mindful that not all new nation-states were well-placed to fulfil their main functions.⁵¹⁷ He was also mindful of the fact that despite its survival, the nation-state could not return to the territoriality of old. The reason he talked about a “new territoriality” was the perpetuation of what he initially conceived as a transitional stage i.e. the coexistence of permeability and impenetrability.⁵¹⁸ This permeability was not only referring to nuclear weapons or air power but also to the newly available means of indirect penetration that technology facilitated. Additionally, states had to “assert themselves in an environment of vastly and rapidly increasing technological, economic, and general interrelationships of a shrinking

⁵¹⁴ J. Herz, “Territorial state revisited”, pp. 15-18

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. pp. 13-15; p. 22; pp. 31-32

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. p. 34

⁵¹⁷ He often raised doubts about the viability of the ‘artificial’ states that followed the dismantling of old colonial empires both in terms of legitimacy and of their capacity to modernise. For a reconsideration of the importance of modernisation in decreasing dependency see: J. Herz, “Introduction”, pp. 18-19

⁵¹⁸ See J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, pp. 221-223; also Part II in this chapter

world”.⁵¹⁹ This reformulation of his position on the nation-state may appear as inconsistent to his classical work on territoriality. By de-emphasising the role of military power however, Herz managed to offer a more nuanced account of the nation-state and the challenges it faced, that still remained close to his broad conceptualisation of power outlined in the previous part.

IV. Realist Liberalism and foreign affairs: Nazi Germany and the United States

Herz never produced a monograph on the history of a single nation in the way Carr did, or an extensive commentary like Morgenthau’s engagement with American foreign policy. Having been uprooted from Germany due to the rise Nazism and never fully assimilated in the American intellectual tradition, he remained at odds with both worlds. Yet, as Pluglierin notes, this distance allowed him to approach both his native homeland and his adopted one in a detached and critical way.⁵²⁰ In his engagement with German and American politics the main threads of his thought are on display: the need to balance between and avoid the excesses of extreme realism and idealism, and the necessity of conscious effort to mitigate the security dilemma. From the beginning of his career Herz tried to make sense of Nazism and its implications for domestic and international politics. On the one hand, his study of Nazi doctrines of international law alerted Herz to the limitations of Kelsen’s theory of pure law and contributed to his shift towards a more politically-oriented interpretation of international law.⁵²¹ On the other hand, however, the gradual evolution of those doctrines from the initial ‘natural law’ theory when Germany was in need to reassert legal parity with the rest of European powers to the ‘racial law’ corresponding to the era of assimilation of territories with German population signified for Herz something more than the mere manipulation of law as a justification for German foreign policy. The tendency in the development of German international law was for him clear, and nodded to the eventual prevalence of a view

⁵¹⁹ J. Herz, “Territorial state revisited”, p. 23; for indirect penetration see *ibid.* pp. 26-30.

⁵²⁰ J. Pluglierin, “Towards been a traveler”, p. 423

⁵²¹ P. Stirk “John H. Herz and the International Law of the Third Reich”, pp. 427-440; C. Sylvest, “Realism and International Law”, pp. 426-432; J. Herz, “Introduction”, pp. 5-7

which would maintain only the “realistic parts of the theory” and achieve consistency with Nazi worldviews in the embracement of a dogma which accounts for the very negation of international law and its replacement by continuous conflict.⁵²² Here Herz, similarly to Morgenthau for that matter, had in mind the extreme realism that goes beyond the realisation of the role of power to its glorification, a realism that was exemplified by Nazi Germany.⁵²³

Herz later confirmed these insights and broadened them to cover every aspect of life in Nazi Germany. Faced with similar economic and social problems as other Western Societies, Nazism opted for the “easy solution” of “always cutting the Gordian knot”: in essence solution amounted to non-solution but mere evasion of the problem by relapsing to pre-civilisational means of resolution through force.⁵²⁴ From the series of contradictions that Herz examined alongside their resolution on behalf of Nazi in terms of naked power, perhaps the most relevant to the question of the nation-state is that of international order. At a time when the territorial state was faced with increasing interdependence the main problem was the reconciliation of the need for integration with the maintenance of cultural autonomy. The two opposite answers in post-war Germany were either extreme nationalism or pacifist internationalism, and Nazism by initially posing as a champion of anti-imperialism and equality among nations seemingly accommodated both. In reality however, as its racial doctrine had implied from early on, Nazism demonstrated contempt for all traditional aspects of international politics that used to limit the struggle for power. In a world comprising according to Nazism of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ races the only option with which other powers were left was either continuous struggle or acceptance of Nazi domination.⁵²⁵

For Herz, the quest had always been to avoid precisely this extreme realism and the ensuing unlimited struggle for power. In the conditions of the Cold War with its two superpowers “armed with conflicting ideologies and annihilating weapons”, this

⁵²² J. Herz, “The National Socialist Doctrine of International Law and the Problems of International Organisation” in *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4, 1939, pp. 536-554: quotes in pp. 553-554

⁵²³ See for instance his discussion on Schmitt’s one-sided realism: J. Herz, “Looking at Carl Schmitt from the Vantage Point of the 1990s” in *Interpretation*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1992, pp. 307-314

⁵²⁴ J. Herz, “Alternative Proposals to Democracy: Naziism” in *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1941, pp. 353-367: p. 354

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 359-361

quest had become imperative.⁵²⁶ His efforts to propose ways to mitigate the security dilemma in such a setting, such as the plan for ‘holding operation’ discussed in the previous section, so as to ensure human survival informed constantly his engagement with American foreign policy for the duration of the Cold War (and beyond). The main problem with détente, that Herz advocated as a means to limit the insecurity on both sides of the conflict, was that it superficially resembled the very appeasement that failed to prevent the Second World War. Herz’s answer to the problem is particularly interesting since, contrary to Carr and due to the closer attention he paid to Nazism, he fully realised the risk posed by Hitler and was in no need to learn the “lessons of Munich”.⁵²⁷

After outlining his plan for ‘holding operation’ Herz had to defend it by means of dispelling the parallels between appeasement and détente. The world of the Cold War, he maintained, was essentially different than Europe in the 1930s; and the Soviet Union, unlike Nazi Germany was a power more interested in maintaining the status quo. For Herz, the charges of appeasement by extremists on both sides posed a greater risk to international security than the actual steps taken by the two superpowers for mutual accommodation.⁵²⁸ The situation was aggravated by the increased importance of the security dilemma in conditions of ideological polarisation. Writing in the early 1970s he observed that the almost symmetrical views of the other side as expansionist advocated by extremists were misleading and that it was actually more possible that both sides were “defensive-minded”. The way he chose to illustrate this statement was crucial. By presenting the Soviet viewpoint he asked whether by expanding to Eastern Europe, a “much invaded country” was seeing this expansion as merely the establishment of a defensive zone “particularly when the Americans engaged to what looked to them as encirclement”.⁵²⁹ Here Herz was actively trying to raise awareness of the security dilemma and its implications and to persuade his audience to pause and ‘put themselves in the other fellow’s

⁵²⁶ J. Herz, “Introduction”, p. 12

⁵²⁷ P. Stirk, “Herz and the International law of the Third Reich”, pp. 428-429; Carr, in his autobiographical sketch admitted that being preoccupied with the horrors of the Soviet Union, he was caught off guard about the real risks posed by Hitler, E. H. Carr, “An autobiography”, pp. xviii-xix

⁵²⁸ J. Herz, “The Relevancy and Irrelevancy of Appeasement” (1964) in J. Herz, *The Nation-State and the Crisis of World Politics*, pp. 148-171

⁵²⁹ J. Herz, “Détente and Appeasement” p. 283

shoes' or more precisely "in Moscow's shoes".⁵³⁰ Having realised the implications of the security dilemma the two superpowers could actively try to mitigate it through détente.

It is with this mitigation of the security dilemma through conscious effort in mind that Herz was particularly critical of the disregard for international law often to be found in American policies. In a series of letters to the editor of *New York Times*, he made the case that "more or less clandestine operations" like those orchestrated by American intelligence services in order to undermine or remove unfriendly governments were in violation of the most basic rules of modern international law.⁵³¹ The rules Herz had in mind were those creating the framework for a minimum of co-existence between territorial states, namely the "inviolability of their territories in peacetime and of non-interference".⁵³² Of course during the Cold War this attitude still entailed the risk of escalation in a crisis and eventually nuclear annihilation, as Herz claimed when discussing the invasion of Grenada.⁵³³ For him however the problem was more fundamental. In a time when international cooperation and mutual understanding was increasingly essential for survival given the global problems now facing humanity, the United States seemed to be moving closer to unilateral policies. Herz thus maintained his criticism of post-Cold War American policy in terms of disregarding international law and institutions and abstaining from cooperation in facing environmental challenges.⁵³⁴ He moreover saw American policy as unenlightened in terms of traditional security concerns. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States as the only remaining superpower no longer faced any credible threat to her security. This new environment allowed in principle for the

⁵³⁰ J. Herz, "Foreign Policy in the Framework of an Open-Society Bloc" in *American Foreign Policy Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1982, pp. 2-7: p. 3

⁵³¹ J. Herz, "Iran-Contra hearings may help to cleanse foreign relations" (1987, 14 June) in *New York Times*

⁵³² J. Herz, "The president's error on covert action" (1983, 26 October) in *New York Times*. Also in J. Herz, "Iran-Contra hearings" and J. Herz, "U.S. must join world in the rule of law" (1988, 23 April) in *New York Times*

⁵³³ J. Herz, "International law bent beyond recognition" (1983, 24 November) in *New York Times*. When discussing the necessity of awareness about the horrors of nuclear war a decade later, Herz claimed that "Since Reagan became president, policies have not reflected a sense of awareness". J. Herz, "On human survival", p. 137

⁵³⁴ J. Herz, "Reflections on my century" in *International Journal of Applied Economics and Econometrics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2002, pp. 151-163: pp. 155-162; J. Herz, "The Security Dilemma in International Relations: Background and Present problems" in *International Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2003, pp. 412-416

possibility of taking steps to alleviate the security dilemma of other powers but this never materialised. On the contrary, American foreign policy was characterised by a series of decisions that intensified the security dilemma in others. This attitude culminated in the ‘war on terror’ during Bush administration which turned several countries into potential targets for pre-emptive strikes. Herz, however, observed that the tendency was clear from earlier decisions such as the maintenance of NATO despite its apparent uselessness in the new environment and the choice to expand it eastwards which further intensified the security dilemma of Russia.⁵³⁵ Such an orientation for Herz, signified a return to the same extreme realism he was so desperately trying to avert by devising Realist Liberalism in the first place.

Concluding remarks

Herz’s attempt to appraise power and the nation-state is founded upon the central role the security dilemma plays in his theory. It is the security dilemma that lies at the root of the struggle for power. Herz here differs from both Carr and Morgenthau. In contrast to Carr who merely observed that power is there, he tried to ground his account of power somewhere. In contrast to Morgenthau, he picked a social condition instead of an anthropological one as the main cause for the struggle for power. When it comes to his conceptualisation of power, his identification of elements of power is reminiscent of that offered by Morgenthau. His understanding of power and its role however as being in flux and his emphasis on the need to constantly re-define is much more radical not only from Morgenthau’s but also from Carr’s flexible conceptualisation.

Herz, like Carr and Morgenthau, saw the nation-state as a historically-conditioned political unit whose existence is closely connected to power. His account of revolutions in military technology and their impact on the defensive functions of the state is far more detailed than those offered by the other two realists examined so far. It represents, however, one of the main weaknesses of his approach in that he tended to over-emphasise this single-factor. By taking into account factors such as the

⁵³⁵ J. Herz “The Security Dilemma in International Relations”, pp. 412-416. A similar line of argument was also followed by Waltz: K. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War” in *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, pp. 5-41, *passim*

potency of nationalism as a force and the need of the nation-state to provide for the welfare of its citizens Herz's revisiting of the nation-state is more nuanced than his initial account. He also moved closer to Carr's interpretation that incorporated all the aforementioned aspects, albeit with a more basic discussion of military power. One significant difference is that since Herz's reformulation aimed at accounting for the survival of the nation-state the discussion of the elements that contributed to its resilience are better framed than in Carr who believed it to be on its way out. The two accounts can be largely seen as complementary.

Herz, while conventionally classified as a classical realist, could more accurately be described as a transitional figure that belonged to both the classical and the structural realist world. His adamant removal of power from human nature, the emphasis on the security dilemma as a social condition and his appreciation of structural approaches are all elements that connect him to structural realism, and in particular the defensive realism of Waltz. At the same time however, his insistence for the constant re-evaluation of concepts, and the perception that systems and structures are in constant flux does not allow for his classification as a structural realist either. Perhaps the most telling characteristic of his approach that distinguishes him from structural realists and offensive realists in particular is his refusal to subscribe to the most pessimistic implications of the security dilemma. His insistence on what constitutes sound political thought and the need to balance reality and utopia, whose similarity with Carr has been promptly been noted in the relevant literature, allowed him to contemplate and actively promote ways to mitigate the security dilemma. Mearsheimer, as will be discussed in the following section, followed the security dilemma to its most pessimistic implications, as would have done the ideo-typical realism that Herz tried to avoid.

CHAPTER IV

John Mearsheimer's offensive realism

Introduction

If Herz represented a transitional version of realism that displayed elements of both traditional and structural approaches, with the emergence of Waltz's neorealism the transition to a purely structural theory of international relations was completed. In his effort to create a parsimonious and elegant structural theory, however, Waltz had to "retreat from the real", as Molloy put it, and he disassociated his theory from foreign policy which would need a separate theory.⁵³⁶ John Mearsheimer's offensive realism represents an attempt to overcome the gap between international structure and foreign policy by providing a unifying framework that while preserving the main features of Waltz's structural approach also claims to be able to account for state behaviour.

In the first part of the chapter, I examine the foundations of Mearsheimer's approach. He remains generally faithful to the structural framework developed by Waltz but he draws different conclusions from it. Where Waltz sees security maximisers, Mearsheimer sees power maximisers. He further modifies the framework to include a rational actor assumption which he claims is enabling him to transcend the gap between foreign policy and international structure. As regards Mearsheimer's faithfulness to structural realism, it has profound implications on the role power plays in his epistemological and ontological assumptions. Epistemologically, his theory is neatly separated from power in a way alien to the reflexivity displayed by realists examined thus far. Ontologically, power remains of paramount importance but since it is expected to play a role analogous to money its conceptualisation must of necessity be narrow.

As regards Mearsheimer's claim that his modification of structural realism can help to account for state behaviour and can be employed to both predict and prescribe, I

⁵³⁶ S. Molloy, *Hidden History*, pp. 115-129. For an overview of Waltz's realism and some of the fundamental criticisms it faced, *Neorealism and its Critics* remains indispensable: R. Keohane (ed), *Neorealism and its Critics*

claim -drawing on Oren's and Barkin's criticisms- that this creates a significant tension to his theory. This tension is underlying Mearsheimer's efforts to engage with the foreign policy of the United States.

In the second part I explore Mearsheimer's conceptualisation of power. This is particularly narrow, as one would expect from the function power is expected to perform in his theory. More specifically, his notion of power is reduced strictly to material capabilities of which military power and land power in particular are deemed to be the most important. When it comes to the limits of power, offensive realism's image of states striving to achieve hegemony becomes significantly watered down. Apart from structural constraints and nuclear weapons Mearsheimer introduces the first important qualifier of offensive realism, the stopping power of water. The result is a moderated version of offensive realism whence great powers become satisfied when attaining regional hegemony.

Mearsheimer's engagement with the nation-state is examined in the third part. Despite treating the modern state as a billiard ball, he is attentive to the historical developments that brought about its emergence. The primary focus is, consistently with his theory, the role of military power. Mearsheimer, however, also attributes to nationalism an important role in the establishment and expansion of the nation-state. In this part thus, I also examine how his approach to nationalism tries to balance between a structural theory on the one hand and a phenomenon that, being ideological in nature and belonging to the domestic domain, should lie outwith its scope on the other. The third part ends with an examination of Mearsheimer's thought on the future prospects of the nation-state and the possibility of taming nationalism.

In the final part, I focus on Mearsheimer's approach as illustrated by his analysis of American foreign policy. Both his analysis of that policy until the end of Cold War and his efforts to project its trajectory to the future, as well as his engagement in the debates about its formulation as a public intellectual after his predictions failed to materialise, are examined. In this part, Mearsheimer's engagement with American foreign policy is examined as illustrative not only of how he translates his theory into prescriptions but also of the tension between prediction and prescription outlined in the beginning of the chapter.

I. Mearsheimer's theory of international relations

Foundations of Offensive Realism

There is a marked difference between John Mearsheimer's philosophical background and that of the classical realists and Herz examined in the previous chapters. While the aforementioned realists occasionally commented on each other's works and exchanged views, the formulation of their respective variants of realism was by and large independent from each other. Mearsheimer, belonging to a later – the third according to Vasquez - generation of realists, is both aware of and has engaged with the work of classical realists as well as that of the founding father of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz.⁵³⁷ As such, his variant of realism is primarily founded upon earlier realists in contrast to the variety of intellectual backgrounds that influenced the realists examined so far.

Before turning his attention to international relations' theory Mearsheimer published works on strategy with a particular emphasis on deterrence.⁵³⁸ Although he initially did not self-identify as a realist, Mearsheimer soon became one and he unreservedly lists K. Waltz as the most important realist to having influenced him.⁵³⁹ Mearsheimer developed his own variant of realism, offensive realism, gradually with its definitive statement being the *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Elements of his theory, however, were already visible in earlier works.⁵⁴⁰ Mearsheimer's offensive realism

⁵³⁷ For Vasquez early realists include Carr and Morgenthau and the second generation neorealists such as Waltz and Gilpin. J. Vasquez, *Power of power politics*, p. 2; Mearsheimer offers accounts of his early engagement with international relations and the authors that influenced him in J. Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John. J. Mearsheimer (Part I)" in *International Relations*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2006, pp. 105-123: pp. 107-109 and in J. Mearsheimer, "Power as the Currency of International Relations, Disciplining US Foreign Policy, and Being an Independent Variable", interview with *Theory Talks*, 2012, accessed from <http://www.theory-talks.org/2012/06/theory-talk-49.html> p. 3.

⁵³⁸ His first monographs were a book about conventional deterrence and a critical biography of the British strategist Liddell Hart. J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History*, London: Brassey's, 1988

⁵³⁹ J. Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations (Part I)" p. 109

⁵⁴⁰ According to Toft, they are traceable back to the late 1980s and in particular his critical biography of Liddell Hart. P. Toft, "John J. Mearsheimer: an offensive realist between geopolitics and power" in *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 8, 2005, pp. 381-408: p. 382. Mearsheimer confirms this when he states that the decision to write the *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* and present his own realist theory dated back to the late 1980s. J. Mearsheimer, "Power as the Currency", p. 3

superficially appears as a synthesis of the theoretical framework developed by Waltz and the logical conclusions of ‘classical’ realism.⁵⁴¹ He agrees with the starting assumptions of Waltz and as such he is clear that his theory is a structural one, very much like Waltz’s neorealism.⁵⁴²

Where he disagrees with Waltz, however, is in the conclusions he draws from said assumptions and most importantly the answer to the question whether states act as power or as security maximisers. He believes *contra* Waltz that states seek to increase their power and traces his claim back to Morgenthau’s variant of classical realism. More precisely, Mearsheimer’s reading of classical realism is one according to which states are inherently aggressive, since they are “naturally endowed with Type A personalities”.⁵⁴³ Consistent with such a reading, Morgenthau is classified as an offensive realist since the *animus dominandi* is interpreted to be automatically applicable to states.⁵⁴⁴ Despite being in agreement, however, with what he considers to be the logical conclusions of classical realism, Mearsheimer does not subscribe to an explanation that is founded upon assumptions about human nature.⁵⁴⁵

Mearsheimer then, while disagreeing with the “benign world” of Waltz’s defensive realism remains attached to the latter’s theoretical framework.⁵⁴⁶ He makes, however, a significant modification to this framework in that he is willing to engage with the historical record in an effort to validate his theory. The structural theory of K. Waltz was intended as a highly abstract theory that shied away from accounting for foreign policy, which needed a separate theory. As a result, those defensive realists drawing on Waltz and aiming at offering comprehensive accounts of state behaviour, like Snyder and Van Evera, had to develop a “unit-level component” to supplement their

⁵⁴¹ It should be noted here that when speaking of ‘classical realism’ or ‘human nature realism’ Mearsheimer has in mind mainly Morgenthau. Other realists such as Carr and Kennan, who are often classified under the same grouping, are not included in his account since “they do not offer their own theory of international politics”. J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: Norton, 2001, pp. 18-19

⁵⁴² J. Mearsheimer, “Conversations in International Relations (Part I)” p. 110; J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 21

⁵⁴³ Ibid. pp. 17-22; p. 21

⁵⁴⁴ For the claim that for Morgenthau the lust for power is hardwired in states see Ibid. p. 19. For Morgenthau as an offensive realist see J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions” in *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1995, pp. 5-49: p. 12 fn 27

⁵⁴⁵ J. Mearsheimer, “Conversations in International Relations (Part I)” p. 110

⁵⁴⁶ As Molloy points out, Mearsheimer’s reformulation of realism “possesses the language of classical Realism but is still dependent upon Neorealist categories for ‘theoretical’ validation”. S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, p. 132

theories of international relations.⁵⁴⁷ Mearsheimer, however, despite also drawing heavily on Waltz's neorealism is willing to apply his theory to real-world problems without feeling obligated to develop a separate theory which explains unit-level factors. He sets to achieve the unity between systemic and unit-level analysis by introducing an assumption of rationality to his theoretical framework.

The major differentiation then of Mearsheimer's framework from that of Waltz and his followers is the inclusion of state rationality as the fifth and final of his "bedrock assumptions".⁵⁴⁸ Such an addition, he claims, allows realist theories to account not only for outcomes but also for state behaviour. By delegating misguided calculations to the level of the exceptional, such a realist theory would not need a separate theory of foreign policy to account for state behaviour. Instead, domestic considerations would have little if any role in influencing the making of foreign policy. The remaining few cases where "domestic pathologies lead states to act in suboptimal ways" can be explained away as anomalies to the theory.⁵⁴⁹

Of course a side effect of such a choice that Mearsheimer is fully aware of and critics have been quick to exploit, is the fact that his theory becomes vulnerable to criticisms both in its own terms and for its verifiability vis-à-vis the historical record, a problem that Waltz never had to face.⁵⁵⁰ Hence Mearsheimer's realism is

⁵⁴⁷ J. Mearsheimer, "Realists as Idealists" in *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2011, pp. 424-430: p. 426

⁵⁴⁸ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 31

⁵⁴⁹ J. Mearsheimer, "Reckless States and Realism", in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 241-256: pp. 244-246

⁵⁵⁰ See for instance his comment that "In effect, Waltz has created an escape hatch in his theory that mine does not have" in J. Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations (Part I)" p. 112. Theoretical challenges to Mearsheimer are discussed throughout the present and the following section. As regards his engagement with the historical record, Snyder suggested that Mearsheimer's selection of case studies that comprised of "as aggressive a collection of states as could be imagined" leave his theory vulnerable to "a suspicion of selection bias". G. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World – Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security: A Review Essay" in *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2002, pp. 149-173: p. 161. An edited volume on history and neorealism has sought to engage with the historical record in order to challenge realists' claims that their theories are vindicated by history. Despite some of the contributors' tendency to engage with a catch-all realism that is often reduced to the power maxims of the Melian dialogue, the volume includes some insightful engagement with the cases that Mearsheimer covered in the *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics* as well as cases that he omitted. Schroeder examined the 17th and 18th centuries in an effort to demonstrate that both struggle for power and a quest for order stemmed out of the structure of anarchy and that it would be fallacious to concentrate only on the former: P. Schroeder, "Not even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: power and order in the early modern era" in E. May, R. Rosecrance, and Z. Steiner (eds), *History and Neorealism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 78-102. As regards the cases that Mearsheimer omitted, Williamson examined the case of Austria-Hungary before the Great War and claimed that without taking into account the domestic situation, the steps taken towards the

influenced profoundly by this core theoretical commitment to structural realism and its modification to include the rational actor assumption. The way this framework affects the conceptualisation of power in Mearsheimer's realism will be examined first through the examination of his epistemology and then through the ensuing ontological assumptions.

Power vacuum: Mearsheimer's epistemology

Mearsheimer has indicated that he has a preference for elegant and simple theories and he believes realism to be such a theory.⁵⁵¹ Theories, he maintains, are essential tools for simplifying complex realities. In fact the more complex the reality one tries to comprehend is, the greater the need for a "mental map" which helps to simplify it by isolating the most important forces at play.⁵⁵² As such theories are of necessity simplifications of reality whose explanatory power is restricted by the fact that some of the omitted factors can occasionally influence state behaviour. A few such 'anomalies', however, constitute part of the "price to pay for simplifying reality" and should not pose a significant problem to a theory's overall credibility. Of course, when a theory faces too many anomalies then its foundations are undermined since it cannot adequately explain reality.⁵⁵³

war could not be fully accounted for, and even if it were so then defensive realism seemed to offer more plausible an explanation for Austro-Hungarian foreign policy than Mearsheimer's theory: S. Williamson, "Austria-Hungary and the coming of the First World War", in E. May et al (eds), *History and Neorealism*, pp. 103-128. Apart from the essays that discussed US foreign policy and which will be covered under Part IV, contributions by Steiner, Ferguson, Welch Larson and Shevchenko, and Haslam in the same volume engage with great powers that Mearsheimer discussed like Nazi Germany, the UK and the Soviet Union. The policy of Japan in particular seems to be particularly troubling for Mearsheimer since as an insular state it should be expected to act as an offshore balancer. Its case is discussed in M. Barnhart, "Domestic politics, interservice impasse, and Japan's decisions for war" in E. May et al (eds), *History and Neorealism*, pp. 185-200; J. Haslam, "John Mearsheimer's 'elementary geometry of power': Euclidean moment or an intellectual blind alley?" in E. May et al (eds), *History and Neorealism*, pp. 322-340: pp. 324-325; P. Toft, "Offensive realist between geopolitics and power", pp. 395.

⁵⁵¹ J. Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations (Part I)", p. 107

⁵⁵² J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, "Leaving theory behind: Why simplistic hypothesis testing is bad for International Relations" in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2013, pp. 427-457: p. 435

⁵⁵³ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, pp. 10-11. The role of anomalies, or 'error terms' as Oren describes them, becomes problematic for Mearsheimer according to critics, because they occur that often as to undermine the theory's soundness. See I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", pp. 288-289. For a collection of such anomalies and a very good, albeit somewhat combative, overall criticism of Mearsheimer's theory that parallels Oren's in some respects see also: J. Haslam, "John Mearsheimer's 'elementary geometry of power'", *passim*

This interpretation of theory as a mental map of reality which should then be verified in the ‘laboratory’ of the real world represents an epistemological commitment to positivism that resonates little with the approaches discussed so far.⁵⁵⁴ The notion of power has been central for those realists’ epistemological assumptions, whether through the importance of the sociology of knowledge in Carr, the separation of spheres for analytical purposes in Morgenthau, or the fundamental motivation behind political thought in Herz. Mearsheimer, despite his scepticism towards a particular brand of positivism that he calls “simplistic hypothesis testing”, remains committed to a positivist methodology according to which a theory should comprise of clearly defined variables and the examination of the causal connection between them, and should be ultimately falsifiable.⁵⁵⁵ Such a theory is epistemologically impenetrable to power and as a result is missing not only part of the complexity of the phenomenon of power, but also the self-awareness that previous realists carried.

This disassociation of power from realist epistemology means that it is no longer possible for the observer to be mindful, and as a result also guarded, of the ways in which different aspects of power influence the process of theorising itself. By claiming objectivity, as Barkin points out, the contemporary realist analyst is deviating from the classical realist call for reflexivity and succumbs to exactly the same fallacy that Morgenthau attributed to idealism in *Scientific Man*.⁵⁵⁶ He is correct in that sense to conclude that classical realism, “to the extent that it explicitly won the first debate, implicitly lost the second”.⁵⁵⁷ In Mearsheimer’s positivist epistemology power does not enter the field of theory-formation at all. The theorist has to develop a set of clear and sound assumptions, define their key concepts and identify causal mechanisms. The theory can then be tested against the facts and “yield unambiguous predictions”.⁵⁵⁸

A sound theory then is one that at the same time is able to describe, predict and prescribe.⁵⁵⁹ There is however, an important problem with this purported unity

⁵⁵⁴ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics* p. 8

⁵⁵⁵ On the variant of positivism to which Mearsheimer subscribes as well as the main characteristics of theory and theory-testing see: J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, “Leaving theory behind”, pp. 431-435.

⁵⁵⁶ S. Barkin, “Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy” in *Foreign Policy analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2009, pp. 233-246

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 237

⁵⁵⁸ J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, “Leaving theory behind”, p. 432

⁵⁵⁹ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, pp. 8-12

between prediction and prescription. As several authors noted, contemporary realists, including Mearsheimer, are often at odds with the policies followed by American administrations and do not hesitate to express their opposition to them in an effort to influence the public discourse.⁵⁶⁰ Yet their effort to influence policy is fundamentally opposed to their positivistic epistemology which presupposes a neat separation between object and subject of analysis.⁵⁶¹ The problem with Mearsheimer's theory then is that it cannot overcome the incompatibility between predictive and prescriptive approaches. The former, being pattern-focused and based on self-replicating systems, leave no space for agency and "serve to obviate politics" while the latter, being problem-focused emphasise contingency and the resulting necessity to be prudent both when making policy recommendations *and* when analysing power.⁵⁶² This reflexivity, so characteristic of classical realism, cannot be reconciled with an approach that claims to be predictive.⁵⁶³ In such a theory of international relations, power is of necessity restricted to the sphere of ontology, where it is expected to play the role of currency.

On power and ontology: a currency for international relations?

For Mearsheimer, as for all other realists examined, power "lies at the heart of international politics".⁵⁶⁴ The *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* is structured around questions regarding this key concept and deriving from the epistemological commitments mentioned above. More specifically, for Mearsheimer a theory that has isolated power as its central concept must be able to explain why states seek power in the first place and how much power they want. Furthermore, it must be able to define clearly power and to offer a list of indicators that can be measured to rank individual states and estimate the distribution of power between them. Finally, a clear definition

⁵⁶⁰ I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", pp. 283-290; S. Barkin, "Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy", pp. 233-246; R. A. Payne "Neorealists as Critical Theorists: The Purpose of Foreign Policy Debate" in *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2007, pp. 503-514

⁵⁶¹ This separation would mean not only that prediction alone would make prescription unnecessary but also that prescription is meaningless since the observer's wishes cannot influence the object of their analysis. See I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", pp. 286-290

⁵⁶² S. Barkin, "Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy", pp. 237-242

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.* pp. 242-245

⁵⁶⁴ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 55

of power is required for the patterns of state-behaviour to be more easily identified.⁵⁶⁵

Consistent with his epistemological commitments to structural realism, Mearsheimer founds his theory on a set of bedrock assumptions. Despite being formed deductively, those assumptions differ from Waltz's efforts in one important aspect. Whereas for Waltz the bedrock assumptions of a theory are of necessity radical simplifications which convey "a false impression of the world", Mearsheimer rejects this approach.⁵⁶⁶ For him theories should be based on sound assumptions that offer "reasonably accurate representations" of important factors for international politics.⁵⁶⁷ Apart from the assumption of state rationality that has already been mentioned, Mearsheimer's set of assumptions is comprised by the following: international anarchy, possession of offensive capabilities by states, uncertainty of intentions, and survival as the main motivation of states.⁵⁶⁸

Although if treated in isolation they do not explain why states seek to maximise power, their combination, Mearsheimer maintains, makes a persuasive case for why great powers will struggle for power and aim for hegemony.⁵⁶⁹ As regards the first part of the argument, that is, the reasons why states seek power in the first place, Mearsheimer's logic does not seem to differ significantly from that of other structural realists. The possession of offensive capabilities by states, combined with uncertainty about other states intentions and the existence of international anarchy means that states fear each other and try to accumulate power to ensure their survival.⁵⁷⁰ The identification of fear as the main factor behind states' motivation to strive for power is a plausible conclusion that can be logically drawn by the combination of Mearsheimer's bedrock assumptions. To claim, as Pashakhanlou does, that the centrality of fear amounts to the introduction of a "psychological unit-level variable" which undermines his theory, would be to put too fine a point to a

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 12-14

⁵⁶⁶ K. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", p. 27

⁵⁶⁷ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 30. Mearsheimer further clarifies his position on why theories should be based on realistic assumptions when favouring the epistemology of scientific realism over that of instrumentalism: J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, "Leaving theory behind", pp. 432-434

⁵⁶⁸ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 30-32

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 29-30

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 32, 42-43

narrow understanding of fear which Mearsheimer does not seem to share.⁵⁷¹ The answer, however, that Mearsheimer gives to the second part of the question i.e. how much power states want, is more controversial.

Despite beginning from a set of assumptions that are very similar to those entertained by defensive realists, Mearsheimer reaches the exactly opposite conclusion.⁵⁷² For him, given the extremely high stakes in competition between states, the uncertainty over other states' intentions, and the unpredictability of future developments in the distribution of power, states can only behave as relative power maximisers.⁵⁷³ The discrepancy thus between offensive and defensive realism, as Snyder correctly observes, is not attributable to disagreements about the constraints imposed by the international system as one would expect from structural theories, but on different interpretations of a "unit-level factor" i.e. the amount of security states seek.⁵⁷⁴ Snyder is further correct to point out that Mearsheimer's marshalling of Herz's formulation of the security dilemma as reflecting "the basic logic of offensive realism" and as implying that "the best defence is a good offence" is misplaced.⁵⁷⁵ The problem with Mearsheimer's reading of the security dilemma is not only that Herz understood its implications differently.⁵⁷⁶ It is also that since in Mearsheimer's theory all states are "revisionist and believe (correctly) that others are too", there is no room left for any effort to address hypothetical threats and thus the 'dilemmatic' element of the security dilemma is eliminated.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷¹ Pashakhanlou understands fear as an emotion and claims that its use would be incompatible with a "materialist and systemic theory" such as offensive realism. A. H. Pashakhanlou "Back to the Drawing Board: A Critique of Offensive Realism" in *International Relations*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2013, pp. 202-225: p. 207. Given, however, the fact that Mearsheimer assumes state rationality and often uses the term 'fear' to signify 'worry' it would be fallacious to assume that he understands fear so narrowly. Besides, a scared state would still have to rationally evaluate the situation and formulate its policy accordingly without having to respond in the instinctive manner implied by Pashakhanlou's psychological reading of fear. For a more nuanced discussion of fear in realism see N. Crawford, "Human Nature and World Politics: Rethinking 'Man'" in *International Relations*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 2009, pp. 271-288

⁵⁷² G. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World", p. 154; P. Toft, "Offensive realist between geopolitics and power", p. 390

⁵⁷³ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 32-35

⁵⁷⁴ G. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World", pp. 154-155

⁵⁷⁵ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p.p. 35, 36

⁵⁷⁶ See relevant discussion in Chapter III: *supra* p. 115: fn 462

⁵⁷⁷ G. Snyder "Mearsheimer's World", pp. 155-156. Booth and Wheeler raise a similar point when they claim that "Mearsheimer replaced any dilemma of interpretation with a rule of fatalism, and abolished any dilemma of response by a rule of offensive potential": K. Booth and N. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 35

The final role that power plays in Mearsheimer's ontology is related to the importance he attributes to its accurate definition and measurement. Building on the analogy with economics he claims that power is the equivalent of money in the realm of international politics: "power is the currency of great-power politics and states compete for it among themselves".⁵⁷⁸ The analogy to money implies that in the same way that utility maximisation is "expressed and measured in terms of money" so is "the national interest (security)... in terms of (relative) power".⁵⁷⁹ The necessity to treat power like money stems from the expectation that power can be used as an indicator which can be measured and that allows states to be ranked.⁵⁸⁰ Mearsheimer's notion of power resonates well with such a view. The development of "good indicators of power" is important for the accurate appreciation of "the power levels of individual states", which can be employed by the observer to rank them and determine whether they qualify as great powers or not. The identification of the number of great powers can in turn be utilised for the distribution of power and polarity of the system to be determined.⁵⁸¹

II. Mearsheimer's conceptualisation of power

The nature of power

Since power is expected to play the role of currency in Mearsheimer's theory, it has to be measurable and as such a narrow definition of the concept is warranted. He thus proceeds to approach power in terms of material capabilities, or "tangible assets... that each great power controls".⁵⁸² Mearsheimer is echoing – albeit distantly- Carr's facets of power when he distinguishes between two forms of power that are interconnected but cannot be equated.⁵⁸³ He differs, however, from Carr in some important aspects the first of which is that he establishes a clear hierarchy between the two forms of power. It is military power that counts most in Mearsheimer's theory, and from its various ingredients it is land power that is of paramount

⁵⁷⁸ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 12

⁵⁷⁹ S. Guzzini, "The enduring dilemmas of realism in International Relations", p. 539

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 537-540

⁵⁸¹ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 12

⁵⁸² *Ibid.* p. 55, p. 57

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 55

importance.⁵⁸⁴ The reason why naval, aerial or even nuclear power can only play a supplementary role is that land forces are indispensable for “conquering and controlling land, which is the supreme political objective in a world of territorial states”.⁵⁸⁵ This overemphasis on military might and particularly land power, despite being logically solid offers little if any flexibility when dealing with other forms of exercising power or power maximisation outwith the scope of territorial conquest, as Toft correctly observes.⁵⁸⁶

The second form of power, latent power, “refers to the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power”.⁵⁸⁷ From the various elements of latent power Mearsheimer distinguishes population size and wealth as being the most important. And since a large population is a necessary but not sufficient condition for generating significant amounts of wealth, Mearsheimer opts for using “wealth alone to measure potential power”.⁵⁸⁸ Given that whatever importance latent power holds is conditional upon its ability to be translated to military power, Mearsheimer rejects indicators of wealth such as the GNP which might be misleading.⁵⁸⁹ Instead, he emphasises the importance of identifying indicators that can capture “a state’s mobilisable wealth and its level of technological development”.⁵⁹⁰ Here Mearsheimer makes a similar to Herz point regarding the dependency of measuring power on historical conditions.⁵⁹¹

A second important difference with Carr’s facets of power is that Mearsheimer does not allow for ideational power in his formula. For him any realist conceptualisation

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. pp. 55-56

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 86; pp. 83-114, 128-133. This view is hardly surprising given that Mearsheimer claims that conquest actually pays and helps augment the aggressor’s power: Ibid. pp. 148-151. Also in G. Snyder “Mearsheimer’s world”, p. 153. It should be noted, however, that in later works Mearsheimer although maintaining that conquest generally pays, adds a qualifier as regards the age of nationalism: *infra* under Part III.

⁵⁸⁶ Toft traces Mearsheimer’s “preoccupation with military power and especially with land power” to his earlier engagement with strategy and deterrence. P. Toft, “Offensive realist between geopolitics and power”, p. 384

⁵⁸⁷ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 55

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 60-62

⁵⁸⁹ For Mearsheimer wealth forms the foundations of military power but it cannot always be translated to the latter neatly. The reasons for what he calls the “gap between latent and military power” are diminishing returns, differences in efficiency and differences in the type of military forces that each great power chooses to develop with the wealth available. Ibid. pp. 67-82.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 62

⁵⁹¹ It must be noted, however, that Mearsheimer’s preposition is anchored on the assumption that power is ultimately measurable and that the observer should modify their indicators according to the historical context. Herz’s views, as mentioned already, are more radical in that he believes the very measurability of power to be historically conditioned.

of power must of necessity emphasise material aspects of power. Ideologies are indeed included in the list of non-security goals that states can pursue insofar as they do not require the state to act against its national interest i.e. the pursuit of relative power.⁵⁹² Mearsheimer clarified that non-material aspects of power are of no consequence for his version of realism when challenged by K. Booth on grounds that several of his 'idealists' were actually attentive to the role of power.⁵⁹³ In his response to Booth's commentary, Mearsheimer maintained that authors who focus primarily on the power of ideas differ "fundamentally... from how realists understand this concept. Realists focus mainly on material power, be it economic or military...".⁵⁹⁴ This position is unsurprising given the function that power is expected to play in his theory of international relations and the necessity for it to be measurable.

The function of power as currency also explains Mearsheimer's inclination to favour a 'traditional' power-as-capabilities approach to more recent developments in the discussion about power such as Dahl's notion of power as being relational.⁵⁹⁵ This is not to suggest that he neglects such discussions. When appraising power and its role, Mearsheimer begins with a discussion of the distinction between power-as-outcomes and power-as-capabilities approaches. He disagrees with approaches that conflate assets with outcomes since the two are qualitatively different: the former only cover material capabilities and the latter add to the equation non-material factors that often affect outcomes.⁵⁹⁶ For Mearsheimer power cannot be equated with outcomes.

Firstly, an outcome-centred approach would deem any effort "to assess the balance of power before a conflict" futile because the assessment could be performed only *after* the conflict was resolved in one way or another. If this were the case, it would

⁵⁹² According to Mearsheimer, states do occasionally pursue such goals but "offensive realism has little to say about them" unless of course their pursuit conflicts with "balance-of-power logic" in which case they are trumped by security considerations. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 46

⁵⁹³ Booth's comment was part of his contribution to the discussion about Mearsheimer's 2004 Carr Memorial Lecture. K. Booth, "Offensive realists, tolerant realists and real realists" in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2005, pp. 350- 354

⁵⁹⁴ J. Mearsheimer, "The more isms the better", p. 356

⁵⁹⁵ According to Baldwin, who strongly supports Dahl's view of power, the shift from traditional "elements of national power" approaches that understood power as a "property concept" to approaches understanding it as a relational one, as advocated by Dahl, "constituted a revolution in power analysis". D. Baldwin, "Power and International Relations", pp. 274-275

⁵⁹⁶ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 58

pose significant problems for any theory of international relations based on the assumption of the state as a rational actor such as Mearsheimer's. Secondly, he raises the point that a conceptualisation of power based on outcomes would imply that the side that prevails in any given conflict is always the most powerful one. This is, however, not always the case as the examples of United States' defeat in Vietnam and Napoleonic France's in Russia demonstrated. Finally, since power represents means and outcomes ends, their identification would deem any distinction between means and ends meaningless.⁵⁹⁷

Limits of power

Given that Mearsheimer's states can only be secure only when they have attained hegemony, his vision of international politics seems superficially to be one of continuous and unlimited competition between states. Yet, as Snyder correctly points out, the implications of his theory are watered down if one takes into account the various qualifiers that he integrates into it.⁵⁹⁸ What limits the quest for power in offensive realism however, is not morality as in the case of classical realists. Morality does not play a prominent role in Mearsheimer's theory.⁵⁹⁹ It can -and should- only be taken into consideration when a state has the luxury to do so, namely when it does not conflict with "balance-of-power logic".⁶⁰⁰ The fact that it is often employed to justify a selected foreign policy is considered by Mearsheimer as convenient masking of realistically formed policies.⁶⁰¹ With morality taken out of the equation, what remains to moderate the quest for power are mainly structural and geopolitical forces.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid. pp. 57-60

⁵⁹⁸ G. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World", p. 153

⁵⁹⁹ Realism is a "fundamentally amoral theory" as he claimed in his *Theory Talks* interview in 2012: J. Mearsheimer, "Power as the Currency", p. 8

⁶⁰⁰ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, p. 47. Mearsheimer offered a further elaboration on this idea in his Carr Memorial Lecture. There, in a rather simplistic reading of Carr's dialectics, he claims that Carr might have been exaggerating the conflict between morality and power given the fact that states sometimes can pursue both goals simultaneously. Additionally moral goals might be pursued when they are not seriously affecting the logic of realism. But when the two are in conflict, power considerations will trump everything else. J. Mearsheimer, "E.H Carr vs Idealism" in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2005, pp. 139-152: pp. 142-143.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid: 143; J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 25-27. Such lies, employed when there is a contrast between liberal values and realist policies, or "liberal lies", are considered by Mearsheimer relatively harmless compared to fearmongering and strategic cover-ups that can seriously misfire. J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics*, London: Duckworth Overlook, 2011, pp. 81-86, p. 101

Although in Mearsheimer's theory states have, in principle, no motivation to limit their quest for power they are not "mindless aggressors" striving endlessly to dominate the system.⁶⁰² The states in his theory in addition to being power maximisers are also rational calculators and as such they soon figure out that their behaviour should match their capabilities lest they find themselves in a position worse than the one they began in. As a result states calculate carefully the perceived costs and benefits of every action and pursue it only if the former outweigh the latter.⁶⁰³ Their moderation is therefore a result of an, as humanely as possible, accurate evaluation of the external constraints imposed to their quest for power.

The first such constraint comes from the international system itself and more specifically from the distribution of power. Its importance lies with the way it influences the levels of fear and balancing behaviour. The more asymmetries in the distribution of power, the more unstable a system is, and the more great powers fear each other. Mearsheimer ranks the possible systems from the more stable bipolar one to the most unstable unbalanced multipolar, with balanced multipolarity somewhere in between.⁶⁰⁴ The reading of the distribution of power can help states to modify their behaviour accordingly and anticipate whether other states are more likely to balance or pass the buck. An accurate reading thus should be enough in most cases to persuade a potential hegemon that the costs of attempting to dominate the system are far greater than the slim chances of success.

The expected counterbalancing that a potential hegemon will face from worried great powers is further aggravated by an important geopolitical factor. The predominance of land power in Mearsheimer's theory means that in order for such power to be employed effectively, a state should be able to project it when it so needs. For Mearsheimer, this prospect is severely limited by the stopping power of large bodies of water that hinder the capacity of great powers to attack each other with land forces.⁶⁰⁵ The inclusion of a geopolitical variable helps Mearsheimer to better account for cases of insular powers as well as the operation of regional systems that

⁶⁰² J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 37

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.* pp. 37-40

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 337-347

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 114-128

could otherwise be treated as anomalies to his theory, but at the cost of making his overall theoretical framework somewhat more blurry.⁶⁰⁶

The final limitation to a power achieving hegemony is nuclear weapons. Mearsheimer sets a high threshold for hegemony: a power that attains this position must in essence be “the only great power in the system” with any other powers being unable to seriously challenge it.⁶⁰⁷ In the age of nuclear weapons, because of their immense destructive capability, attaining hegemony would require the dominant state in the system to establish a clear advantage either by monopolising the possession of nuclear weapons or by establishing a refined defence system that would neutralise an opponent’s arsenal. Given, however, that such a development is unlikely, Mearsheimer believes that effectively no global hegemony is attainable.⁶⁰⁸

Consequently, the best result one state can hope to achieve is regional hegemony and maintenance of this position by preventing other regional hegemons from emerging.⁶⁰⁹ The latter point is however, as Layne noted, logically problematic. If regional hegemony is the best possible position attainable *and* the stopping power of water prevents global hegemony from materialising, then a regional hegemon should not be seriously worried about a peer emerging in another region of the world since the stopping power of water would also apply to them.⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁶ Toft claims that with the introduction of location Mearsheimer is creating an ambiguity with the levels of analysis and thus makes his theory very hard to challenge on his own terms: “Only if the theory fails at both the regional and system-wide level is the theory in serious trouble”. A connected problem is that due to the lack of a hierarchy between location and the distribution of power “both variables can individually account for the empirical outcomes” and as such location can supplement the distribution of power for cases that would otherwise be “obvious anomalies”. P. Toft, “Offensive realist between geopolitics and power”, pp. 393-394. While Toft is right that this modification is allowing Mearsheimer more flexibility, his second argument is contradicting his own claim in the same article that “although location plays an important role... this variable is wholly subordinate to the structural balance of power variable since different power constellations determine the impact of location...” Ibid. p. 389. In fact, the latter claim seems to be closer to Mearsheimer’s position since he deals with the stopping power of water as being important only when facing a defending great power, and one that is not distracted for that matter. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 114-119

⁶⁰⁷ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 40

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. pp. 128-133 and pp. 224-232 where he claims that despite the unlikelihood of attaining nuclear superiority, great powers will still try to attain it.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. pp. 41-42

⁶¹⁰ C. Layne, “The ‘Poster Child for offensive realism’: America as a global hegemon” in *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, pp. 120-164: pp. 126-127

III. Power and the nation-state

The nation-state in offensive realism

Mearsheimer's view of the state comes very close to the one offered by Legro and Moravcsik in their paradigmatic reading of realism.⁶¹¹ Since his theory is a structural one, the domestic setting of each particular state is of no significant consequence for its behaviour. As such, states cannot be meaningfully differentiated by anything other than their relative power, at least for the purposes of a theory of international relations. "In essence", maintains Mearsheimer, "great powers are like billiard balls that vary only in size".⁶¹² As happens often with billiard balls, their direction and their collisions are determined by factors other than themselves. In the case of Mearsheimer's billiard balls the external factor that compels states to act in a specific way is international anarchy. It follows that in his version of realism it is not the state that is the central element. What realism requires, he maintains, is not the state itself but the existence of international anarchy. As long as the structure of the international system is anarchic it will impose constraints upon whichever political unit happens to be the prevalent form of political organisation in any given period.⁶¹³

It is clear then that when Mearsheimer approaches the states as the main actors in international relations he does not engage with the notion of the state as encompassing an eternal category outside history. Although the idea that the main political units change throughout history is present in earlier works, Mearsheimer started placing particular attention on the emergence of the modern state in recent, and largely still ongoing, research.⁶¹⁴ In his recent work he pays attention to the transition from a 'stateless' Europe in the fifteenth century, to the emergence of the

⁶¹¹ J. Legro and A. Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?", pp. 12-13

⁶¹² J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 18

⁶¹³ Ibid. p. 365

⁶¹⁴ Apart from the *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* mentioned already, Mearsheimer examined in his earlier "False Promise" article how feudal political units behaved vis-à-vis realist assumptions. Even though his main focus was to make the case for realism being a timeless theory, it is clear from his discussion that he was mindful of the various macro-historical transformations of political units. See Mearsheimer, "False Promise of International Institutions", pp. 44-46. More recently, Mearsheimer presented a paper at the *Yale Workshop for International Relations* in which he engages with realism and nationalism. The paper represents his "preliminary thinking on the subject" and is cited here with the author's permission: J. Mearsheimer, "Kissing Cousins: Nationalism and Realism", Prepared for Yale Workshop of International Relations, 5 May 2011. Accessed, 21 December 2013. Available from mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/recent.html

dynastic state and its eventual replacement by the nation-state.⁶¹⁵ Mearsheimer cites C. Tilly approvingly and he attributes the prevalence of the state as a form of political organisation to its superiority over the other political units of the time. Consistently with the core assumptions of offensive realism about power, the crucial advantage for the emerging state was provided by its efficiency in translating latent to military power vis-à-vis the various alternatives to it such as the city-states of Italy.⁶¹⁶ As a result the prevalence of the state in Europe was largely determined by its competence “on the battlefield”.⁶¹⁷ Here, Mearsheimer’s narrative does not differ significantly from that of other realists examined as regards the interplay between power and the emergence of the modern state and bears a particular resemblance to Herz’s emphasis on military power and the rise of the territorial state.

Power politics thus is the first of the “two main driving forces” which led to the establishment of the modern state system. The second one, surprisingly for a structural theory, is nationalism.⁶¹⁸ For Mearsheimer, the dynastic state might well have been more effective than its competitors in marshalling power, but it did not enjoy the loyalty of its population. When nationalism came to the forefront however, in the aftermath of the French revolution, the allegiance of the population to the state could be marshalled and employed as a “huge force multiplier”. The success of France’s national armies quickly led its neighbours to adopt nationalism themselves and by “the early twentieth century, every state in Europe was effectively a nation-state”.⁶¹⁹ Mearsheimer’s narrative here is based solidly on the predominance of military power and the idea of state socialisation. States adapt to new circumstances

⁶¹⁵J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, pp. 15-16

⁶¹⁶Ibid. pp. 17-18

⁶¹⁷Ibid. p. 17

⁶¹⁸Ibid. p. 16

⁶¹⁹Here, Mearsheimer’s account of the transition from dynastic to popular sovereignty parallels Carr’s account of the phases of nationalism. Especially since the emergence of popular sovereignty is connected to both increased political power domestically and increase in loyalty for the population. Ibid. pp. 9-10, 18-19. Mearsheimer, however, does not connect extensively the evolution of nationalism to that of democracy in the same way Carr did. In fact, in a later comment on Kennan he claims that “total wars had little to do with democracy and much to do with nationalism”. J. Mearsheimer, “Introduction” in G. F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, (extended ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. Vii-xlvi: p. xxxix. A further difference with Carr, and Gellner for that matter, is that Mearsheimer is not attentive to the differences between Western and Eastern Europe.

and adopt successful behaviour in order to improve their odds of survival.⁶²⁰ This view of nationalism is common amongst neorealist theorists that provided accounts of the phenomenon and on whose works Mearsheimer draws, such as Posen and Van Evera.⁶²¹ As Kadercan correctly observes, however, such a linear interpretation fails to explain why states instead of happily embracing such a handy power multiplier they actually tried to strangle nationalism in its cradle.⁶²²

There is however a further problem or, more accurately, two interconnected problems with the importance Mearsheimer attributes to nationalism. Nationalism is a phenomenon of ideological nature, and Mearsheimer recognises it as such.⁶²³ The fact then that he singles it out as one of the crucial factors that led to the prevalence of the nation-state might prove problematic for his theory. First, the importance attributed to nationalism would imply the introduction of an ideational element of power in a theory whose understanding of power is claimed to be materialistic. Second, an ideology is of necessity a factor that influences states at the domestic level and as such it should not be able to alter state behaviour significantly. In the following section, I evaluate the way that Mearsheimer addresses those challenges.

Nationalism and power politics

Since Mearsheimer has repeatedly treated nationalism as an ideology and he claims that the “nation-state system is largely the product of the inter-play between nationalism and power politics”⁶²⁴, the first problem that needs to be addressed is whether by granting such an important role to nationalism he undermines his explicitly materialistic theory by re-introducing an element of ideational power. After all, not only has he excluded the power of ideas from his framework but he approaches ideologies in general as non-security goals that are lower in the hierarchy of state goals than survival. This point has been picked by critics of Mearsheimer

⁶²⁰Mearsheimer is generally in agreement with Waltz’s views on state socialisation to successful practices, but he extends such practices beyond balancing to include successful offensive behaviour and innovation. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 166-167

⁶²¹B. Kadercan, “Military Competition and the emergence of Nationalism: Putting the Logic of Political Survival into Historical Context” in *International Studies Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2012, pp. 401-428: pp. 402-406

⁶²² *Ibid.* p. 406

⁶²³Indicatively, Mearsheimer refers to nationalism as an ideology, and indeed as “the most powerful ideology” in J. Mearsheimer, “Introduction” p. xxxix. Also in J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 365; J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, pp. 100-101

⁶²⁴J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, p. 23

who claim that he is not faithful to the model he developed by maintaining the importance of nationalism i.e. of an ideology.⁶²⁵

Yet for Mearsheimer, nationalism is not *any* ideology. When he discusses the hierarchy of state goals he makes special reference to goals that are complementary to the pursuit of power and tellingly lists national unification amongst them.⁶²⁶ As long as an ideology is compatible with the premises of offensive realism, there is no problem with a state pursuing it. And in Mearsheimer's view, as his later engagement with the topic demonstrated, nationalism is the *par excellence* compatible to realism ideology. This compatibility is attributed by Mearsheimer to the fact that nationalism and realism share core assumptions at the foundational level, namely that they are both particularistic and both focused on the state and survival.⁶²⁷ The marriage of the state to the nation in the late eighteenth century had profound implications for both. Those nations that were associated with a state by the time of the transition to popular sovereignty, had to worry about the survival of their respective state since the fates of the two were now interwoven. And, those that did not possess their own state acquired a powerful incentive to aspire for one to ensure their survival.⁶²⁸

The reason for nations' preference for their own state is explained by the impact of nationalism in the functioning of a state. Drawing from relevant literature in the field of nationalism studies, Mearsheimer observes that the nation-state is much more intrusive than its predecessor as regards the lives of its members. The process of cultural homogenisation, while making sense for the nation-state for both economic and military reasons poses a fatal threat to minority nations. The ensuing risk of assimilation or even annihilation is what triggered nations to have a strong preference for their own state and also led to the expansion of the nation-state globally through the process of decolonisation.⁶²⁹

Mearsheimer seems to approach in a similar fashion the second potential problem with the importance he attributes to nationalism as a domestic force in an otherwise structural theory. The problem is aptly summarised by Oren who, when discussing

⁶²⁵See for instance R. Little, "Turning back the clock: Mearsheimer resurrects the first great debate" in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2005, pp. 341-344: p. 343; A. H. Pashakhanlou, "Back to the drawing board", pp. 210-211

⁶²⁶J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 46

⁶²⁷J. Mearsheimer "Kissing Cousins", p. 4

⁶²⁸*Ibid.* p. 10

⁶²⁹*Ibid.* pp. 20-23

the conflict between prediction and prescription in Mearsheimer's approach, claims that the latter introduces an "error term" in his theory. The error term, is a factor excluded from the theory, such as domestic politics, that occasionally accounts for foreign policy. The realist scholar can then try to "expose the error and try to minimise it"⁶³⁰. What is problematic about this approach empirically is for Oren the fact that the "error term" seems to be accounting for the rule rather than the anomalies in American foreign policy.⁶³¹ Mearsheimer for his part certainly approached nationalism as a domestic factor in one of his early engagements with international relations theory, right at the wake of the Cold War. There he claimed that domestic factors are not of equal importance to structural constraints in explaining the stability of post-1945 Europe. And the most important of such factors, 'hyper-nationalism' was by and large a consequence of security competition rather than its cause.⁶³² Writing a decade later, despite adding the qualifier that domestic factors are limiting the ability of offensive realism -or any structural theory for that matter- to accurately predict in detail when and how often conflict occurs, he maintained their secondary importance. Focusing on structural factors alone, he claimed, "should tell us a lot about the origins of great-power war".⁶³³

His treatment of nationalism as a domestic factor notwithstanding, Mearsheimer's approach of nationalism can get him beyond the "error term" as a result of the close interconnectedness he identifies between it and realism. There is certainly a degree of compatibility between nationalism, as Mearsheimer approaches it, and his variant of realism. After all, his treatment of nationalism as a power multiplier can easily be, at least in theory, accommodated with his approach of power as material capabilities. The employment of nationalism allows states not only to build mass armies but also to mobilise their citizens to maintain such armies and provide them with resources. Even the non-material aspect of the increased motivation and thus reliability displayed by national armies can be accommodated in Mearsheimer's existing notion

⁶³⁰I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", p. 288

⁶³¹Here Oren is not talking about nationalism but about domestic factors generally. Ibid. pp. 288-289

⁶³²J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future", p. 12; pp. 20-21

⁶³³Interestingly, the domestic factor employed as an example in this case was, again, nationalism. See J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 334-336

of power since he allows for a qualitative element in assessing military forces.⁶³⁴ The main problem with his approach to nationalism is therefore not one of logical consistency in terms of his theory, at least insofar as the incorporation of nationalism does not undermine the main logic of such a theory.

Mearsheimer, however, goes beyond this interpretation of nationalism and attributes to it even more importance, and in so doing he seems to be dealing with nationalism as an *ad hoc* qualifier of offensive realism. After discussing the interplay between power-politics and nationalism in his most recent engagement with the topic, Mearsheimer moves on to discuss the ways in which nationalism has impacted upon “aspects of international politics that are of central importance to realism’s intellectual agenda”.⁶³⁵ In so doing, however, he is awarding to nationalism a transformative role which is inconsistent with the function it could possibly perform in a structural theory. When discussing the impact of nationalism to the character of war, Mearsheimer observes that conflicts between states in the age of nationalism tend to escalate quickly to the absolute form described by Clausewitz in contrast to the limited war that dominated the early modern European system. With a limited war to attain limited aims being out of the question, states have less of an incentive to start one. Furthermore, nationalism makes it now very difficult “for the victor to occupy the vanquished state”.⁶³⁶ Ironically here, despite his disregard for ideational power, Mearsheimer seems to be more attentive than Carr to the potency of nationalism as an ideology when faced with opponents who possess superior power.⁶³⁷ This conclusion, however, would mean that conquest, does not after all pay as much as Mearsheimer originally assumed, or at least not in the age of nationalism.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, pp. 23-24; J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, pp. 69-80; for the indicators of measuring power see J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 133-135

⁶³⁵J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, p. 23

⁶³⁶Citing, however, the example of the Nazi’s exploitation of conquered territories Mearsheimer claims that “occupation can succeed under special circumstances”. Ibid. p. 30

⁶³⁷Mearsheimer’s account is similar to Herz’s discussion of the potency of defensive nationalism. The similarity is remarkable and is in sharp contrast with early engagements in both Carr and Herz regarding the vulnerability of nation-states in the face of superior economic and military power as well as new forms of warfare such as aerial bombardment or economic blockades. It seems that, despite his bias towards land power, Mearsheimer’s account alongside Herz’s modified views are better than earlier ones at capturing the resilience of nationalism when employed for defensive purposes as well as its limits when marshalled for offence.

⁶³⁸This is a noteworthy modification compared to the previous engagement with the subject in the *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. There he mentions nationalism in passing as a potential obstacle for conquest but the discussion that follows does not address it in detail. J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of*

Of course offensive realism is a general theory that cannot be expected to illuminate everything and Mearsheimer is clear that often non-structural factors influence state behaviour. For the theory to operate smoothly, however, these anomalies should be rare exceptions. Yet there is hardly an instance in which Mearsheimer, when engaging with foreign affairs, has not cautioned against -and most likely rightly so- attempts to engage in social engineering abroad or conquest on grounds of the resistance one is to expect by nationalism.⁶³⁹ Furthermore, when discussing the possibility of transcending the state, Mearsheimer is connecting its survival in the foreseeable future to the appeal of nationalism and its glorification of the state.⁶⁴⁰ In claiming that nationalism not only influences the likelihood of war alongside structural factors, but also that it is connected to the resilience of the state as a form of political organisation Mearsheimer does, eventually, allow a non-structural factor to further qualify the main premises of offensive realism.

Taming the nation-state?

From the preceding discussion it is clear that Mearsheimer does not display the same deep-rooted scepticism towards nationalism as his mid-twentieth century predecessors. Neither does he share the same anxiety so indicative of Herz and Morgenthau about the future survival of not only the nation-state but also humanity itself in the face of nuclear weapons. The nation-state seems to have weathered some of the challenges that earlier generations of realists anticipated and, for Mearsheimer, it does not seem to be going anywhere in the foreseeable future. As a result, he does not try to devise a blueprint for transcending the nation-state as earlier realists did. For Mearsheimer, the key question is not how to go beyond the nation-state but how to tame it for the period that it is going to remain the dominant form of political organisation.

In evaluating generally nationalism, Mearsheimer approaches the phenomenon

Great Power Politics, pp. 148-152, p. 488. Rosecrance, however, in his review of the book anticipated the potential implications of such a position when he claimed that “the ‘stopping power’ of modern nationalism... may be greater than the water barrier”. R. N. Rosecrance, “War and Peace” in *World Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 2002, pp. 137-166: p. 148

⁶³⁹ He summarised his views on the subject when commenting on American efforts to attempt social engineering in the 21st century: “Washington seems to have an uncanny ability to take a bad situation and make it worse” in J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged” in *The National Interest*, No. 129, 2014, pp. 9-30: p. 22

⁶⁴⁰ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 365-366

macro-historically. He claims that, although in the short term nationalism with the dissolution of multinational states and irredentism that come with it is increasing instability and the likelihood of war, in the long term it can increase the prospects of peace. Since nationalism makes the success of conquest less likely the more “pure nation-states” there are, the less likely they are to fight over minorities or attempt to conquer each other.⁶⁴¹ His commentary during the conflicts in the Balkans, where Mearsheimer suggested redrawing of borders and transferring populations so that homogeneous entities are created, makes clear that this idea has been with him long before it was crystallised theoretically.⁶⁴² What Carr once deplored as the “mass sacrifice of human beings to the idol of nationalism” is for Mearsheimer a necessary evil in order to avoid further conflict.⁶⁴³

This rather benign view of nationalism bears a superficial resemblance to the liberal nationalism of the 19th century discussed by Carr, Morgenthau and Herz. Mearsheimer, however, unlike liberal nationalists is aware of the darker side of nationalism or “ugly hyper-nationalism” as he prefers to call it. This form of nationalism, similarly to Morgenthau’s nationalistic universalism, is borne out of the belief that other nations “are both inferior and threatening”.⁶⁴⁴ For him, however, hyper-nationalism does not represent a distinct phase in the development of nationalism but rather a possible transformation of benign nationalism. Mearsheimer identifies security concerns and the resulting sense of vulnerability as one of the main reasons behind the emergence of hyper-nationalism. An additional reason is the tendency of governments to cultivate nationalism in an effort to marshal support for

⁶⁴¹ J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, pp. 31-32

⁶⁴² He proposed for instance a three-way partition of Bosnia in several opinion pieces in *New York Times* during the 1990s: J. Mearsheimer, “Shrink Bosnia to Save it”, *The New York Times*, 31 March 1993; J. Mearsheimer and S. Van Evera, “Hateful Neighbours”, *The New York Times*, 24 September 1996; J. Mearsheimer, “The Only Exit From Bosnia”, *The New York Times*, 7 October 1997. Similarly, he proposed Kosovo to be granted independence from Serbia before the war in J. Mearsheimer, “A Peace Agreement That’s Bound to Fail”, *The New York Times*, 19 October 1998. He returned to the same topic in 1999 and proposed a partition of Kosovo with Serbia maintaining the North and the rest gaining independence, suggesting that this should also be the formula to be followed in neighbouring Macedonia in case the ethnic conflict on that country persisted: J. Mearsheimer and S. Van Evera, “Redraw the Map, Stop the Killing”, *The New York Times*, 19 April 1999. All opinion pieces are available through the author’s website: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pub-affairs.html>

⁶⁴³ E. H. Carr, *Nationalism and After*, p. 34

⁶⁴⁴ J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future”, p. 21

their security policies.⁶⁴⁵ The risks of hyper-nationalism, however, are not sufficient reason for Mearsheimer to contemplate ways to go beyond nationalism and the nation-state.

As regards the state, he does not believe that the present or foreseeable developments at the field of power are threatening its existence. Even if the state is replaced by another entity in the future, there will be no significant difference in their behaviour for as long as the international system remains anarchic. The only development in the international system that could possibly challenge the explanatory power of realism is, for Mearsheimer, the establishment of a hierarchical system.⁶⁴⁶ When it comes to nationalism, despite his generally positive view of the phenomenon, Mearsheimer believes that some moderation is required in order to limit the possibility of its degeneration to hyper-nationalism and suggested two ways to achieve that end back in 1990. His first suggestion on the moderation of nationalism is one that resonates well with his theory. The development of small professional armies and reliance on “high-technology military organisations” such as the one normally accompanied by the acquisition of nuclear weapons, should be able to reduce the need for mass armies and the cultivation of nationalist sentiments associated with them.⁶⁴⁷

The second proposal was somewhat more ambitious since it involved nothing less than the “teaching of honest national history” on behalf of the elites.⁶⁴⁸ What remained unaddressed in this proposal was why, given the emphasis Mearsheimer places on nationalism as a power multiplier, governing elites would voluntarily dispense with such a useful tool. In his later work Mearsheimer seems to be retreating from this suggestion when he claims that although nationalism is a potent force and “a major cause of war”, its myths are of only secondary if not tertiary importance. It is foreign policy behaviour that causes nationalist myths and not the other way around.⁶⁴⁹ As such, elites can still safely engage in nationalist myth-making without risking too much. This rebuttal, however, appears strange given the emphasis that Mearsheimer places even in his recent work on how nationalist myths

⁶⁴⁵Ibid. pp. 20-21, pp. 25-26

⁶⁴⁶J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 363-366

⁶⁴⁷J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future”, p. 21

⁶⁴⁸Ibid. p. 56

⁶⁴⁹J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, pp. 100-101

help nation-states forge identities and motivate their citizens to make sacrifices.⁶⁵⁰

IV. Mearsheimer and American Foreign Policy

US Foreign policy until 1989: a poster child for offensive realism?

According to the premises of offensive realism outlined in the previous sections, the ideal American policy should be one of establishing regional hegemony in the Western Hemisphere and then, since global hegemony is unattainable, make sure that no other regional hegemon emerges by acting as an offshore balancer. For Mearsheimer, this is the course that the United States actually followed up to the end of the Cold War. His engagement with this period demonstrates clearly not only how he approaches the workings of the international system but also how he understands the interplay between domestic factors and nationalism.

For Mearsheimer, after its establishment and for the duration of the 19th century the United States acted according to the theory of offensive realism and attempted to establish regional hegemony. It pursued this aim by following consistently two interconnected policies: on the one hand it sought to expand territorially and on the other it tried to limit the influence of European powers in the Western Hemisphere.⁶⁵¹ For Mearsheimer, there was no need for the United States to occupy the whole of North America for security reasons since Canada and Mexico were not powerful enough to pose a serious threat. The fact that the United States restrained from attempting to assimilate those states is explained by Mearsheimer by the difficulties posed to conquest by nationalism.⁶⁵² After the United States achieved hegemony in the Western Hemisphere its main purpose according to offensive realism should be to

⁶⁵⁰In *Why Leaders Lie*, Mearsheimer seems to be suggesting that nationalist myth-making is intensified *after* wars or violent state formation and mostly for white-washing. Ibid. p. 69-80. As such, the “rhetoric of nationalism is tailored to suit the behaviour of states, which is driven largely by other calculations”. Ibid. p. 100. This of course is in clear contradiction to his statement in “kissing cousins” where he claims that in trying to motivate their public, elites will “portray the adversary as the epitome of evil” which in turn “makes it almost impossible to negotiate an end to a war short of total victory”. J. Mearsheimer, “Kissing Cousins”, p. 28. Here Mearsheimer is attributing to myth-making the ability to change the character of wars between nation-states and approaches it as an inalienable part of nationalism rather than one of its insignificant paraphernalia.

⁶⁵¹ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Powers Politics*, pp. 238-249

⁶⁵² Ibid. p. 244 and in particular fn 18, p. 488

ensure that no local state forms an alliance with an overseas great power and to prevent any other regional hegemony from emerging in other regions of the world.

Although in its initial decades the United States had no power to implement the Monroe doctrine, the European colonial empires were dissolved due to the disintegrating influence of nationalism. Further efforts on behalf of European powers to intervene in America such as French and German involvement in Mexico or the Soviet alliance with Cuba were met with hostility by the United States and every effort was made to contain them.⁶⁵³ As regards the role of the United States as an offshore balancer, Mearsheimer believes that in that case too its practice vindicates his theory. Although inclined to pass the buck to local powers to balance against a potential hegemon, the United States did not hesitate to actively intervene when the former failed. As such, the United States intervened in Europe when the entente powers failed to check Germany in World War I, again in World War II for the same reasons, and once more during the Cold War since no European power was able to check the Soviet Union. Similarly, in Asia the United States tried to prevent first Japan from gaining hegemony when the Soviet Union faced defeat at the hands of Germany, and subsequently to contain the Soviet Union after no significant power was left to check it.⁶⁵⁴

Mearsheimer's overview of the foreign policy of the United States for the better part of the past two centuries as being essentially realistic, however, comes as a contrast to the views of mid-twentieth century realists. Realists such as Morgenthau and Kennan were often critical of what they considered to be the surrender of American foreign policy to idealism.⁶⁵⁵ Mearsheimer accepts that the society of the United States is characterised by a "deep-seated sense of optimism and moralism".⁶⁵⁶ He thinks, however, that the real influence liberal principles had on American foreign policy rarely went beyond rhetoric. He thus disagrees with Kennan's criticism and claims that there is a marked gap between liberal rhetoric and realist practices in American foreign policy. What might occasionally obscure the gap is that realist policies do not always conflict with liberal values and as such can easily be

⁶⁵³ Ibid. p. 249

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid. pp. 252-261

⁶⁵⁵ For Morgenthau see Chapter II, Part IV. Mearsheimer discusses extensively Kennan's views in J. Mearsheimer, "Introduction", pp. xxiii-xxxiii

⁶⁵⁶ J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 22-25

explained away by reference to moral principles alone. And when there is conflict between the pursued policies and liberal values, “spin doctors” can be trusted to invent a story that rationalises the policy.⁶⁵⁷

Of course, Mearsheimer’s engagement with the historical record and his claim that it vindicates his theory can -and has been- challenged on various grounds. One of the most common challenges to Mearsheimer’s engagement with American foreign policy, and one raised quite early, relates to his insistence that the United States had not in the past and would not in the future try to reach for global hegemony. Layne raised the issue in his review of the *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Although he agrees with Mearsheimer that the United States *should* try to be an offshore balancer he claims that it actually entertained hegemonic aspirations even before the end of World War II and that the foundations for American primacy were laid already from the 1950s before it was actually achieved in 1990.⁶⁵⁸ As will be discussed in the following section, Mearsheimer in his later engagements with the topic came closer to Layne’s position that the United States are enjoying primacy in the current international system. The reverse point, that the United States has actually underused their power for the better part of the twentieth century was raised by May.⁶⁵⁹

Competing interpretations of historical periods, however, are unlikely to pose a serious threat to any engagement with history that does not seriously distort the historical record. When it comes to his commentary on ongoing debates about American foreign policy, however, Mearsheimer’s approach faces more challenges. It is one thing to claim retrospectively that a theory can account for state behaviour in the past and it is quite another to claim that it can accurately predict future behaviour. Mearsheimer claimed both for offensive realism and as a result his engagement with post-cold war American foreign policy found his predictions to be at odds with the policies actually followed. In his effort to offer advice on such issues Mearsheimer found himself much closer to the classical realists’ arguments about the perils of moral crusading and the influence of domestic factors than his structural approach would allow.

⁶⁵⁷Ibid. pp. 25-27; Mearsheimer, “Introduction”, pp. xxvii-xli

⁶⁵⁸C. Layne, “The Poster Child of offensive realism”, pp.135-158

⁶⁵⁹E. May, “The United States’ underuse of military power” in E. May et al (eds), *History and Neorealism*, pp. 228-245

After the Cold War: The conflict between prediction and prescription

In the decade following the end of the Cold War, Mearsheimer examined the likely courses of American foreign policy for the years to come. He concluded that the most likely scenario would be for the United States to replicate the approach they followed in the past i.e. that of an offshore balancer. Given that the threat of the Soviet Union was now gone, Mearsheimer expected the United States to gradually withdraw from both Europe and Asia, and pass the buck to the great powers of those regions in the hope that they will balance each other.⁶⁶⁰ If regional powers fail to catch the buck and a potential regional hegemon emerges amongst them, then the United States would be expected to intervene to prevent them from dominating the regional system. As such, the more significant worry for the United States seemed to be China's economic rise, which -if continued unchecked- would lead to the accumulation of unprecedented latent power.⁶⁶¹ The alternative of pursuing global hegemony seemed to Mearsheimer to be out of the question: there was "hardly any evidence", he claimed in the final pages of *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, "that the United States is about to take a stab at establishing global hegemony".⁶⁶² In the years that followed the publication of the book, Mearsheimer found himself claiming that this is precisely what the United States ended up doing.

One year after the September 11 terrorist attacks, Mearsheimer wrote an article about the Bush administration's response to them and noted some disturbing developments. In its anxiety to make the United States secure again, he claimed, the administration seemed to be contemplating a quest for global hegemony. He warned that an effort to

⁶⁶⁰This point was repeated in several publications in the 1990s and early 2000s. See indicatively: J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of America's Continental Commitment" in G. Lundestad (ed.), *No End To Alliance: The United States and Western Europe*, New York: St. Martin's, 1998, pp. 221-242; J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 5, 2001, pp. 46-61; J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 380-386

⁶⁶¹For an early discussion of China as a potential regional hegemon in Asia see: J. Mearsheimer, "Future of American Pacifier", pp. 53-56. Mearsheimer returned to the theme with J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise" *Current History*, Vol. 105, No. 690, 2006, pp. 160-162 and J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia" in *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2010, pp. 381-396

⁶⁶²J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 382. For Mearsheimer, despite being by far the most powerful state in the system after the Cold War, the United States was not a global hegemon and was unlikely to become one even if it wanted, because it did not have the capacity to project power across the oceans. *Ibid.* p. 381; also in J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of America's Continental Commitment", *passim*

use American military might to forge an empire, even if a benign one, would not only be unrealistic but also more likely to aggravate the risk of terrorism. He was particularly critical of any attempt to remove unfriendly governments abroad and promote democracy and warned that nationalism and the difficulties of social engineering are huge impediments for such efforts.⁶⁶³ This line of argument was repeated consistently by Mearsheimer as the United States was preparing to invade Iraq. He insisted time and again that the war was unnecessary since Iraq lacked the capability to pursue regional aspirations and even if it so attempted, that it could be easily contained.⁶⁶⁴ He also tried to expose what he considered the militant Wilsonianism of neoconservatives, a mixture of idealism and a blind belief in power, which neglected the difficulties imposed by nationalism on efforts to impose friendly political systems on other countries.⁶⁶⁵ In his criticism of the pursued policy was not alone. Indeed most prominent realists opposed the war in Iraq too.⁶⁶⁶

Mearsheimer's persistent opposition to the war in Iraq, as well as his analysis thereof, however is revealing of the tension between prediction and prescription outlined in the first part. His advice is consistent with what his theory would require the United States to do, but the foreign policy the latter actually followed is at

⁶⁶³J. Mearsheimer, "Hearts and Minds" in *The National Interest*, No. 69, 2002, pp. 13-16

⁶⁶⁴J. Mearsheimer et al., "War with Iraq Is Not in America's National Interest" in *New York Times* (paid advertisement), 26 September, 2002; J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, "An Unnecessary War" in *Foreign Policy*, No. 134, 2003, pp. 50-59; J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, "Keeping Saddam Hussein in a Box" in *New York Times*, 2 February, 2003.

⁶⁶⁵Mearsheimer drew parallels with Morgenthau's opposition to the Vietnam War and claimed that had the latter been still alive, he would too have opposed the war in Iraq. His engagement with the strand of neo-conservatism that focuses on the superiority of American military power and assumes that states will tend to bandwagon is particularly important, since some commentators have conflated realism's emphasis on power as condoning such policies. J. Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism versus Neo-Conservatism" *opendemocracy.com*, 2005, available through the author's webpage: <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/all-pubs.html> For an example of an author misidentifying the 'war on terror' and the invasion of Iraq as a realist endeavour see P. Rogers, "Missing the point" in *International Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2005: pp. 337-340. Similarly, despite recognising that Mearsheimer has a strong preference for offshore balancing, E. May drawing from an identification of realism with the power maxims of the Melian dialogue claimed that after the end of the Cold War and including the war in Iraq the United States behaved "as hard realism would have predicted". E. May, "The United States' underuse of military power", p. 244

⁶⁶⁶Excellent summaries of their arguments are provided in the following works: M. Lacy, "A History of Violence: Mearsheimer and Walt's Writings from 'An Unnecessary War' to the 'Israel Lobby' controversy" in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2008, pp. 100-119; B. Schmidt and M. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists" in *Security Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008, pp. 191-220

variance with that theory.⁶⁶⁷ Neither was the war in Iraq an isolated case that could be claimed as an anomaly. As Mearsheimer noted in 2011, since the end of the Cold War, the United States found itself in war “two out of every three years” by pursuing the erroneous policy of making the most of the “unipolar moment” to embark on an imperial project and export democracy.⁶⁶⁸ This policy that found the United States entangled in prolonged and largely unwinnable conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq was not particular to neoconservatives. Mearsheimer believes that the quest for global domination was also pursued, albeit more cautiously, by the Clinton administration. He identified the same tendency for “liberal imperialism” in Obama’s administration, a tendency he confirmed when discussing the latter’s involvement in Libya and willingness to go to war in Syria.⁶⁶⁹

For Mearsheimer the policy-makers in Washington can still afford to act foolishly in the international arena because the United States enjoys an unprecedented predominance which is unlikely to be challenged in the near future.⁶⁷⁰ As such, when he is chastising the *hubris* of the “indispensable nation”⁶⁷¹, he is not doing so with the sense of urgency that characterised earlier realists during the fierce competition of the Cold War. In fact, for Mearsheimer, despite risking failure and extreme human and economic costs, the biggest risk from United States folly is not losing its position in the world but rather the undermining of democracy at home.⁶⁷² Mearsheimer identified lying, and in particular fearmongering, as particularly perilous for domestic policy since it reveals a disturbing contempt for the public on behalf of the leadership which can easily spill over to national issues.⁶⁷³ This is for Mearsheimer part of a broader issue: in its quest for global hegemony, and by remaining constantly in a state of war or in anticipation of war, the United States is gradually becoming a “national-security state”. Such a development, he claims, erodes the inherent checks and balances that were built in American democracy and challenges the very

⁶⁶⁷Toft summarised the discrepancy succinctly when, in 2005, he commented that “although Mearsheimer’s policy advice was undoubtedly correct in most people’s view today, US foreign policy seems not to conform to the dictates of offensive realism and anomalies... are mounting by the day”. P. Toft, “Offensive realist between geopolitics and power”, p. 400

⁶⁶⁸J. Mearsheimer, “Imperial by design” in *The National Interest*, No. 111, 2011, pp. 16-34

⁶⁶⁹Idem. Also, in his more recent article: J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged”, pp. 9-30

⁶⁷⁰J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged”, p. 23

⁶⁷¹J. Mearsheimer, “Introduction”, pp. xxiii-xxviii

⁶⁷²J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged”, p. 23-29

⁶⁷³J. Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie*, pp. 94-96 ; J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged”, pp. 25-26

principles that lie at the core of liberal order.⁶⁷⁴ In that respect, Mearsheimer's efforts appear –to an extent- similar to Williams' reading of mid-twentieth century realism as an effort to insulate rather than undermine American liberalism.⁶⁷⁵

As such, for Mearsheimer, the primacy of the United States allows it to behave in a strategically unwise way without risking much, at least in terms of the balance of power. This primacy, however, does not explain why the United States do not simply return to offshore balancing as Mearsheimer's theory predicts. In trying to explain this behaviour Mearsheimer developed arguments that invariably focus on domestic factors. Be it the influence of the Israel Lobby, the ideology of elites, or their inability to select the right strategy from the toolkit Mearsheimer's explanation is based on developments within the United States themselves rather than systemic constraints.⁶⁷⁶ Of course, the past 25 years might be one of those anomalies that offensive realism cannot explain adequately, albeit a rather long one. In the meanwhile, however, Mearsheimer's insightful commentary on the interplay between American foreign policy and domestic factors seems to be doing justice to Snyder's call to abandon parsimony in order to reclaim realism.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ J. Mearsheimer, "America Unhinged", pp. 25-29

⁶⁷⁵ The parallel should not be overstated since early realists had a dual aim of protecting liberalism from the perils of "rationalist liberalism in the guise of facile pluralism... or naïve scientism and rationalism". M. Williams, "In the beginning: The International Relations enlightenment and the ends of International Relations theory" in *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 19, no. 3, 2013, pp. 647-665: p. 655. Mearsheimer not only subscribes to the scientism that earlier realists opposed but also does not seem particularly concerned with the legacy of the Enlightenment. The parallel is thus valid only with respect to Mearsheimer's concern about the deterioration of liberalism domestically as a result of liberal crusading internationally.

⁶⁷⁶ Mearsheimer's controversial engagement with the Israel Lobby merits here particular attention. His collaboration with Waltz on the subject produced several articles and a monograph. See indicatively: J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy" in *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2006, pp. 29-87 and J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. In their engagement with the subject Mearsheimer and Walt are claiming that Israel transformed from being a strategic asset during the Cold War to a strategic liability after the latter's end. They isolate the influence of the Israel Lobby, a clearly domestic parameter, as the main reason for the continuing support of Israel by the United States, a support they also associate with American adventurism in the Middle East. Lacy commented that the shift of attention from neo-conservative self-deception to foreign penetration as exemplified in Mearsheimer's engagement with the Israel Lobby represented an effort to postpone "an interrogation of the domestic, internal problems of democracy and war". M. Lacy, "A History of Violence", *passim*; quote in p. 104. Given Mearsheimer's return to those issues in later works, Lacy's concern seems to have been unwarranted.

⁶⁷⁷ Snyder, after commenting that Mearsheimer sacrifices too much to the altar of parsimony suggested a couple of modifications to the power maximisation assumption that could make his theory "more plausible". Either Mearsheimer could water down the hypothesis by a "marginal utility calculation" or maintain it as an ideal-type, a "point of departure for more 'realistic' estimates". J. Snyder, "Mearsheimer's World", p. 172. Oren too points towards ideal-types as a way for Mearsheimer to

Concluding remarks

Mearsheimer's offensive realism represents an effort to reconnect Waltz's structural theory to reality by accounting for foreign policy while maintaining the core assumptions and the parsimony of the theory intact. Consistently with such an approach, Mearsheimer offers a clearly defined and narrow definition of power which is expected to perform the role of currency in international relations. Compared to the realists examined so far, he offers the most rigid conceptualisation of power. This clarity is also evident in his account of the emergence of the nation-state which is predominantly focused on the impact of military power. Nationalism, the ideological corollary of the nation-state, can be accommodated with such an approach inasmuch as it is dealt with as a power multiplier.

Yet the balance that Mearsheimer attempts to form between his structural theory, the development of the nation-states and the role of nationalism remains uneasy. Through his writings nationalism does not only acquire a transformative role in the international system, but also is identified as a key factor behind the survival of the state in the foreseeable future and is limiting the premise of offensive realism that conquest generally pays. Nationalism then appears to be moderating the implications of his structural theory in a way that a non-structural force should not be able to. Neither is nationalism the only qualifier that Mearsheimer integrates to his theory. Apart from the stopping power of water that was playing a moderating role even in the initial formulation of the theory, Mearsheimer's engagement with American foreign policy as a public intellectual seems to be increasingly taking into account domestic factors such as pressure groups, ideological commitments or miscalculations.

It is this engagement of Mearsheimer with American foreign policy that is most illustrative of the tension between prediction and prescription in his theory. In his effort to influence the policy of the United States and change its direction, Mearsheimer echoed the criticisms raised by mid-century realists. Back in 1990, Waltz warned that the addition of "elements of practical importance" would signify

overcome the gap between prediction and prescription in his theory, even though he believes they too are problematic: I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", pp. 290-294.

the relapse from neorealism to realism: “The rich variety and wondrous complexity of international life would be reclaimed at the price of extinguishing theory”.⁶⁷⁸ In his effort to understand why the United States actually followed policies not accounted for by his model, Mearsheimer had to take seriously non-structural factors. In so doing he seems to be following, albeit very hesitantly it should be noted, the direction that Waltz cautioned against.

⁶⁷⁸ K. Waltz, “Realist thought and neorealist theory”, p. 32

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This thesis sought to address and make explicit the connection between realist conceptions of power and the nation-state. Both elements are of paramount importance for any realist research agenda since they are both perceived to represent key tenets of realism. While existing efforts which focused on the recovery of classical realism have dispelled the alleged state-centrism of realism, the connection between power and the nation-state has not been adequately explored. By focusing on the central for realism concept of power, this thesis aimed at exploring how different conceptions of power influenced the way different realists understood the nation-state. For that purpose, I focused on four key authors, E.H. Carr, H. Morgenthau, J. Herz and J. Mearsheimer that are representative not only of the diversity of realist tradition but also of the various stages in realism's transformation from a traditional to a positivistic approach.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. First, I offer a summary of the findings of the thesis. Second, I identify the distinct contribution of the thesis to our understanding of realism, power and the nation-state. This part is divided into three sections. In the first section, I examine the contribution of the thesis to our understanding of the role of power in realist thought. In the second section, I highlight what the thesis contributes to our understanding of the relationship between power and the nation-state and by extension, the role of the nation-state in realist thought. In the third section I offer an account of the theoretical implications of the thesis for the study of realism in international relations. A short final part summarises the conclusions drawn from the thesis.

I. Findings of the thesis

The first focal point of the thesis was to identify the role of power within the theory of international relations of each realist and more specifically their ontological and epistemological assumptions. Ontologically, despite the variety of intellectual

backgrounds displayed by the authors under examination, power plays a central role for all of them. In the peculiar dialectics of power and morality which underpins the work of E.H. Carr it is power that plays the dominant role, with morality being largely derivative. Similarly, in H. Morgenthau's approach to politics as tragedy the lust for power is inseparable from politics, rooted as it is in the anthropological assumption of the *animus dominandi*. While rejecting assumptions about human nature, Herz still granted to power great importance as a means of overcoming a persistent social condition, namely the security dilemma. Finally, in Mearsheimer's offensive realism power is also grounded on the security dilemma, albeit differently understood, and is expected to play the function of currency in international relations.

The diversity of realist visions of power is more pronounced when it comes to its role in epistemology. In the sociology of knowledge employed by Carr, power conditions the very process of theorising and therefore political thought cannot be neatly separated by power. Morgenthau's approach is narrower in that he employs power as a means to analytically insulate the political sphere for the purpose of its study in isolation by means of ideal types. For Herz the epistemological importance of power is founded upon the reaction of the human mind to the security dilemma. His eclecticism places him between the two classical realists. He employed ideal types, like Morgenthau, but instead of using them to create an abstraction of politics as the exclusive domain of power he sought to achieve a dialectical synthesis through "realist liberalism". In the case of Mearsheimer's offensive realism, however, his heavily deductive epistemology is devoid of any entanglement with power. As such, it misses some of the reflexivity and self-awareness displayed to a varying degree by older realists.

The second focal point of the thesis was the examination of the realist conceptualisations of power derived from the assumptions outlined above. If one takes Carr's multi-faceted and malleable conceptualisation as a starting point, there is a considerable narrowing down of the notion of power by the time Mearsheimer's minimalist understanding of power as material capabilities is reached. Carr's inexplicit conceptualisation of power was focused on its three interconnected facets of military, economic and ideational power. Morgenthau was more explicit in that he

defined power as a psychological relationship which establishes and maintains control and listed various elements of power that can be evaluated by policy makers. In moving closer to deductive approaches and systems' theory Herz would be expected to continue this tendency.

By disconnecting power from Morgenthau's anthropological assumptions and connecting it to a social condition he certainly paved the road for structural realism. Yet his notion of power is essentially protean and its meaning is bound to change as the world moves from one form of underlying structure to the other. As such, the elements of power and its measurability cannot be understood as static but can only make sense in the context of territoriality. In Mearsheimer's variant of realism the move initiated by Morgenthau is completed. Power is reduced to a conceptualisation that equates it with material capabilities, and such capabilities are clearly organised in hierarchical order. Military power is more important than latent, and land power is its most important aspect.

Such diverse conceptualisations of power have a profound impact on the way realists understood the nation-state. Starting from a fuzzy notion of power, Carr was able to produce a detailed account of the emergence of the nation-state as a result of the interplay between domestic and international factors. His emphasis on the multi-faceted character of power and the power of ideas in particular allowed him to understand nationalism as a dynamic ideology in constant dialogue with shifts in realities of economic and military power. Morgenthau, drawing from a narrower conceptualisation of power, approached the nation-state as the main vehicle for the projection of the lust for power at the international level. Despite being, like Carr, mindful of the historically conditioned nature of the nation-state and studying the interaction between nationalism and power, Morgenthau never produced a nuanced account of the emergence of the nation-state. As such, he faced difficulties in disassociating the timeless from the ephemeral. Both realists, however, were sceptical about the prospects of the nation-state to survive intact developments in the field of power and sought to theorise beyond it.

The account of the nation-state offered by Herz is informed by his concern with the security dilemma. For him the variations throughout history in what constitutes the higher political unit can be accounted for by technological developments and most

importantly those in the field of military power. What makes a political unit the dominant one in any given time is its capacity to protect its subjects and the nation-state is no exception having been established at the wake of the gunpowder revolution. Similarly to Morgenthau, Herz initially believed that developments in the field of power and more specifically the emergence of nuclear weapons would make the nation-state obsolete since they amounted to the obliteration of its protective shell. Faced with the apparent resilience of the nation-state, Herz provided a more nuanced account of its characteristics as a unit of protection, one that somewhat de-emphasised military power and focused on additional factors such as nationalism and welfare.

Herz might have nuanced his account of the nation-state on the way but his emphasis on the close connection between military power and the nation-state was revealing a tendency that was to be followed by subsequent realists. Given the primacy he attributes to military power, it is of little surprise that Mearsheimer's approach to the nation-state is remarkably similar to the initial formulation of Herz. The establishment of the modern nation-state came about through its capacity to better translate latent power to military might and the ability of nationalism to function as a power multiplier. The role of nationalism as a power multiplier is in theory compatible with Mearsheimer's emphasis on a materialistic understanding of power and his structural approach. The balance, however, remains an uneasy one since Mearsheimer attributes to nationalism transformative functions that qualify the rigidity of his theory.

The final element of the thesis comprised of an examination of the way the aforementioned realists engaged with the policies pursued by various states as an exemplification of their theories. Whether they sought to understand the history of a particular state, like Carr after he lost interest to international relations as a discipline, or combined historical accounts with a conscious effort to influence the foreign policy of the United States like the remaining three realists, all authors displayed significant consistency in employing their core theoretical assumptions to such an engagement. As regards the realists that tried to influence the foreign policy of the United States, their efforts have in most cases been unsuccessful. This however does not pose a significant problem for their theories with the exception of

Mearsheimer's offensive realism. The problem with his variant of realism lies with his subscription to a methodology influenced by natural sciences in which prediction and prescription are artificially merged. Whenever a state fails to behave in the way that the theory predicts, this behaviour can only be registered as an anomaly that weakens the theory. Interestingly, Mearsheimer's own account for such failures led him to explore in detail and provide nuanced arguments about non-structural factors that should have been excluded from his theoretical framework as inconsequential.

II. Theoretical contribution of the thesis

The role of power in realist thought

As explained in the introduction, power plays a central role in realist theories of international relations.⁶⁷⁹ With the present thesis I sought to recover the diversity of realist conceptualisations of power in various authors representing different stages in the development of the tradition. I claim that such recovery is important for approaching realism in two interconnected aspects. First, I claim that different conceptualisations of power developed gradually in a way which reveals the trend to replace traditional approaches with positivism in contemporary realism. Second, I claim that the way different realists conceptualise power has profound implications for the success of their theory. I claim that the gradual replacement of multi-faceted and flexible conceptualisations of power with narrower ones signifies an impoverishment of realism in terms of analytical purchase.

Ontologically, the thesis affirms and expands on the insights offered by some of the more nuanced commentators of realism. The centrality of power in realism's ontology seems indeed to be the only element which the paradigmatic reading of realism actually got right, as Molloy observed.⁶⁸⁰ Whether power is grounded on anthropological assumptions as in the case of Morgenthau or on a social condition such as the security dilemma as in the cases of Herz and Mearsheimer it remains at the core of any realist ontology. Despite this similarity which signifies the bare

⁶⁷⁹ See *supra* "Introduction", especially pp. 14-16

⁶⁸⁰ S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 145-147

minimum of agreement between realists, however, there is a large variety of realist conceptualisations of power. In fact none of the examined realists offers a vision of power, its nature and its functions that is identical to another's.

This diversity has been mostly taken into account by existing literature on realism. Schmidt for instance took it seriously when he classified different realist conceptualisations of power in the three broad categories of classical, structural and modified realism.⁶⁸¹ What this thesis revealed, despite its limited scope of four key authors, is that even a careful categorisation such as Schmidt's is bound to be imperfect. Even between realists belonging to the same broad category there are significant differences. Both Carr and Morgenthau are classical realists but they did not both ground their analysis of power on human nature as is commonly assumed.⁶⁸² The same applies to realists who subscribe to systemic approaches and try to disassociate power from anthropological assumptions. Even though both Herz and Mearsheimer explicitly reject assumptions about human nature and connect power to the security dilemma, their conceptions of power as well as the role it is expected to perform in their theories are at variance with each other.

Most existing accounts of power in realism focus on its ontological assumptions. By taking into account the role of power in realist epistemology, the thesis offers a synthesis of such accounts with works from authors who placed a particular emphasis on the importance of power in realist methodology. Authors like Oren and Barkin have already demonstrated the advantages of classical realist epistemology vis-à-vis its scientific counterpart in neorealism as regards the formers' attentiveness to power and its influence on the process of theorising.⁶⁸³ Indeed as the present thesis demonstrated, despite the fact that the role of power was markedly different in each realists' epistemology, there is a clear-cut distinction between the epistemologies of Carr, Morgenthau and Herz on the one hand, and Mearsheimer on the other.

⁶⁸¹ B. Schmidt, "Realist conceptions of power", *passim*. Molloy too, in the same section as above, provided a discussion of the variety of realist notions of power: S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 145-147

⁶⁸² The view that classical realism relates the struggle for power to human nature while structural realism distances itself from such assumptions is widespread. See B. Schmidt, "Realist conceptions of power", p. 50

⁶⁸³ I. Oren, "Unrealism of Contemporary Realism", *passim*; S. Barkin, "Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy", *passim*

Between classical realists like Carr and Morgenthau or the transitional realism of Herz the epistemological variation is noteworthy. The role power is awarded in realist epistemology seems to be organically connected to the conceptualisation of power with which each realist starts as well as its place in their ontology. As such, Carr's indeterminate and broad conceptualisation of power with its overlapping with post-structural interpretations permeates every aspect of his theory of international relations. The importance he attributes to the sociology of knowledge is indicative of an understanding of power that is attentive to its complexities and signifies self-awareness on behalf of the theorist. In a similar fashion, Herz's approach to power as being an essentially protean concept and in a state of constant flux is connected to an epistemology according to which the theorist must be able to appraise power at any given instant and at the same time try to devise attainable compromises between power and power-alien considerations.

Morgenthau did not share the explicitly dialectical framework of Carr and Herz and represented one of the early efforts to isolate analytically the concept of power. In his effort to define power and its elements clearly, Morgenthau offered a narrower and less flexible conceptualisation than Carr or Herz. Yet despite his similarity to later efforts to narrow down the concept of power, Morgenthau's epistemological choice rather than signifying a step towards positivism demonstrated a conscious effort to insulate the political sphere from the intrusion of violence. It is only with the adoption of positivism by realists, as exemplified by Mearsheimer in the present thesis, that the concept of power is restricted to the sphere of ontology. Mearsheimer's positivistic epistemology is impenetrable by the concept of power and as such cannot account for any influence the theorist can possibly play in the formation of foreign policy.

The primacy of power is indeed the core tenet of realism. Yet power means different things to different realists and performs different functions in their theories. The transition from a broad and multifaceted vision of power that permeates realism both ontologically and epistemologically, to a narrow conception of power as measurable material capabilities which can only perform the role of currency in a heavily deductive theory is by no means a linear one. Classical realists like Morgenthau for instance might be closer to the latter than transitional to neorealism figures like Herz.

It is only with the explicit and unreserved embrace of a scientific approach to politics, as with the case of Mearsheimer, that the full implications of this transition can be felt. This transition left realism with a more easily manageable concept of power, but also a concept of power which is crippled and devoid of much of its analytical purchase. This is evident in the way different conceptualisations of power translated to different understandings of the nation-state as will be discussed in the following section.

The interplay between power and the nation-state

When it comes to the question of the nation-state the main contribution of the thesis is that it makes explicit the connection between the two important for realism concepts of power and the nation-state. By approaching the nation-state through the lens of the ontological primacy of power, the thesis established the close dependence on power that all realist conceptualisations of the nation-state share. As such, the thesis not only supplements recent works on realism that disassociated realism from its alleged state-centrism but also expands their findings to also include structural realism as will be explained in the following paragraphs. Second, through examination of the differences between realist views of the interplay between power and the nation-state, the thesis identifies the cardinal importance that a broad conceptualisation of power plays for any realist project aiming to meaningfully engage with the concept of the nation-state.

Recent efforts to recover the insights of classical realists, notably by Molloy and Scheuerman, have effectively dissociated those realists from their alleged state-centrism.⁶⁸⁴ The study of realist approaches to the nation-state through the lens of power confirmed this previous research, and in particular Scheuerman's overview.⁶⁸⁵ Changes in the domestic and international distribution of power played a crucial role in bringing about the nation-state in the narratives offered by Carr, Morgenthau and Herz. Such changes in the middle of the twentieth century also led them to assume that the nation-state would no longer be able to perform its main functions and

⁶⁸⁴ W. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 39-66; S. Molloy, *Hidden History of Realism*, pp. 139-143

⁶⁸⁵ W. Scheuerman, *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, pp. 39-66

should give way to other forms of political organisations. Scheuerman, however, is only concerned with classical realists. Mearsheimer, whilst not sharing the latter's scepticism about the prospects of the nation-state, shares their view that it is developments in the field of power that paved the way for the emergence and predominance of the nation-state. Consequently, even for Mearsheimer's variant of neorealism the nation-state is a historically conditioned entity. The nation-state then, due to its dependence upon the ontologically central concept of power, is for all realism but an unfixd manifestation of power.

This does not imply, however, that the relationship between the two concepts is the same for all realists. Scheuerman is primarily concerned with 'progressive realists' and their efforts to transcend the nation-state. As such, he tends to group them together and provides an account of the relation between the nation-state and power which emphasises their similarities rather than their differences.⁶⁸⁶ In fact realists produced a variety of approaches of the interplay between power and the nation-state, ranging all the way from a unit of protection in military terms to broad accounts that include the interplay between military, economic and ideational factors both domestically and internationally. The present thesis thus goes beyond Scheuerman's analysis through the exploration of that relationship to reveal that approaches to the nation-state that are backed by more flexible conceptualisations of power are in a better position to account both for the emergence of the nation-state and the characteristics that differentiate it from previous forms of political organisation.

In the heavily deductive model of Mearsheimer it is international anarchy that creates the preconditions for the behaviour of the political units. The latter, being essentially treated as billiard balls that can only react to external constraints, can vary in form but are always expected to behave in the same way.⁶⁸⁷ In such a model, power as a sum of material capabilities is always expected to perform the role of currency and can only account for variation between different historical units in terms of capabilities. As a result, whatever characteristic differentiates the nation-state from preceding forms of organisation – like, say, the ideology of nationalism - has to be subsumed to such a conception of power and be understood as a force multiplier.

⁶⁸⁶ *Idem*

⁶⁸⁷ Similar to the paradigmatic reading outlined in the Introduction. See *supra* pp. 16-18

Mearsheimer follows broadly this path but not entirely consistently. For he eventually approaches nationalism as a phenomenon that can not only transform the international system but can also influence the odds of survival of the nation-state. As such, he is forced to be more attentive to ideational power than his theoretical framework would allow.

This uneasy, even contradictory at places, relationship between the key concepts of power and the nation-state is less pronounced or even absent in the rest of the realists who possessed broader conceptualisations of power and whose notion of power was not as strictly analytically separated from the nation-state as in Mearsheimer's offensive realism. Despite having too a relatively narrow conceptualisation of power Morgenthau managed to somewhat overcome this analytical separation by organically connecting the political unit to power through the mechanism of projection of the *animus dominandi*. Furthermore, by having a distinct notion of ethics he produced a narrative of nationalism that could account for the qualitative differences between the nation-state and the units that preceded it. Similarly Herz, despite sharing at places with Mearsheimer an emphasis on the role of military power and military technology in the development of political units as well as favouring a structural approach, offered a more nuanced account because of his reliance on a volatile conceptualisation of power.

His interpretation of the political units and power as existing in a dialogical relationship allowed him to account for variation through history in a way that an approach focused solely on the impact of international anarchy cannot. For Herz, power might have influenced the emergence of the territorial state, but after the latter prevailed the very way power was organised and understood also changed. This flexible framework allowed Herz to account for variation both in the behaviour of different historical units and the implications of international anarchy at any given period.

For Mearsheimer, Morgenthau and Herz, nationalism as the ideological corollary of the nation-state operates mainly in two forms, one benign and defensive and one aggressive and the prevalence of each form might or might not be associated with a particular historical period. It is in the realism of Carr, however, that the intimate connection between nationalism as an ideology and the concept of power is more

carefully explored and he was supported in this quest by a flexible and broad conceptualisation of power. The most important aspects of such a conceptualisation were his insistence that power is multi-faceted but also indivisible on the one hand and that it is in a dialectical relation with morality on the other. As such, Carr was able to produce an account of the nation-state that although attentive to the protective functions performed by the political unit is not reducible to their operation alone. By looking at the developments in political power both domestically and internationally, he was able to understand the establishment of the nation-state and its transformation through the interplay of the two. By approaching the nation-state in an evolutionary fashion and connecting nationalism to both power and morality, he provided a nuanced account of the development of the phenomenon and its impact on international and domestic politics.

It is thus, Carr's conceptualisation of power with its remarkable flexibility that offers the richer background for a distinctively realist perspective of the nation-state and nationalism. Such an approach of course cannot substitute for and is not superior to the wide range of research that has been already conducted on the nation-state by scholars whose focus it is to study the state and nationalism. When it comes to international relations and realism in particular, however, Carr's nuanced approach can form a good starting point that can get realism beyond the subordination of nationalism to a materialistic notion of power and its reduction to a force multiplier, as recent commentators complained.⁶⁸⁸ Despite its premature assumptions about the future of the nation-state, such a framework can provide a vision of the nation-state and nationalism that integrates both domestic and international factors and as such carries more analytical purchase than structural approaches that dominate contemporary realism.

Implications of research on the study of realism

In the previous two sections I claimed that, based on the findings of the present thesis, classical realists offer approaches to power and the nation-state that carry more analytical purchase than modern variants of realism such as Mearsheimer's offensive realism. This section examines the broader implications of the conducted

⁶⁸⁸ B. Kadercan, "Military Competition and the emergence of Nationalism", *passim*

research for realist theorisation. I argue that, as some of the commentators of contemporary realism already suspected, the claims of scientific enquiry that most modern realists subscribe to create for realists more problems than they solve. As such, the main epistemological contribution of the thesis is to complement existing research that calls for a return to the more reflexive epistemologies displayed by classical realists.

The ‘practical’ component of the thesis, which comprised of an examination of the selected realists’ engagement with the policies followed by states that were of particular importance for their agenda, highlights this point. As has been shown in the present thesis it is Mearsheimer’s theory that faces the most significant challenges in terms of its practical application. The main reason for those problems lies with the fact that his ontology is often at odds with his epistemological commitment to positivism. Not only when he tries to prescribe policies that are at variance with the policies actually pursued as Barkin and Oren observed, but also when he is trying to make sense of the nation-state and nationalism by expanding his ontological assumptions, Mearsheimer has to go beyond his epistemology. Conversely, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of classical realists seem to be operating more harmoniously.

This is not to suggest that the tendencies they outlined and the predictions they made always materialised. The Soviet Union did not after all represent the agent of change that Carr hoped would inspire the Western World to navigate through its multiple crises or transcend the nation-state. But such an analysis was comfortably accommodated within the framework of purposeful thinking that for Carr characterises all political science and resonated well with the necessity for the political scientist to propose uneasy compromises between reality and utopia he suggested. In a similar fashion, Morgenthau’s warnings against the risks of *hubris* resonated well with his insistence that sound political thought entails speaking “truth to power”. Herz’s effort to make sense of international politics was characterised by a concern about the security dilemma that permeated both the ontology and epistemology of his theory. As such, when he proposed policies that could consciously alleviate the security dilemma he was not acting at variance with his epistemological commitments.

This harmony between epistemology and ontology is the more important in an age when the nation-state remains the main form of political organisation because of its particularistic morality. Barkin touched upon the crucial importance of such a factor in his call for more reflexivity on contemporary realism, when he claimed that the recognition of the fact that there are no universal moral standards allowed realists to “reflect on how foreign policy is likely to look through the eyes of relevant others”.⁶⁸⁹ The classical realists examined here challenged this particularistic morality of the nation-state and identified it as the culprit behind what Bell described as the “horrors of the twentieth century”.⁶⁹⁰ At the same time, however, by not disassociating artificially morality from their theories of international politics as Mearsheimer does, they demonstrate an acute awareness of the importance different worldviews play in the formulation of foreign policy.

Conclusion

In this chapter I summarised the findings of the thesis and identified its contribution to the study of realism. I claimed that the primacy of power in realist theorising is of profound importance for understanding realist conceptions of the nation-state. In all realists examined, the nation-state is understood as an unfixed in time manifestation of power. The success of each realist theory in accounting for the emergence of the nation-state and its characteristics largely depends on its underlying conceptualisation of power. As such, I found that flexible and multi-faceted conceptualisations of power like the one offered by Carr offer better ground for a nuanced account of the nation-state. Neorealist formulations of power, in contrast, while offering a more manageable concept of power lack in analytical purchase. Future realist scholarship will certainly benefit by returning to the reflexivity and richness of insights displayed in earlier realists.

Perhaps the most encouraging development in that direction comes from contemporary realists themselves. In his effort to engage with foreign policy and approach the question of the nation-state Mearsheimer had to at least partially compromise the narrow framework of his structural theory. In so doing, he might

⁶⁸⁹ S. Barkin, “Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy”, p. 244

⁶⁹⁰ D. Bell, “Introduction”, p. 7

have added some additional anomalies to his theory but at the same time he recovered some of the nuance and attentiveness to complexity that earlier realists displayed. This move, I believe, is in the right direction. It is through the recovery of classical realist insights on the complexity of power and its intricate relation with the nation-state and nationalism, that contemporary realists can turn to in order to strengthen and complement their approaches.

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