Critical Realism: An Ethical Approach to Global Politics

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate School of Duke University

2009
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

My dissertation, Critical Realism: An Ethical Approach to Global Politics, investigates two strands of modern political realism and their divergent ethics, politics, and modes of inquiry: the mid- to late 20th century realism of Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr and the scientific realism of contemporary International Relations scholarship. Beginning with the latter, I engage in (1) immanent analysis to show how scientific realism fails to meet its own explanatory protocol and (2) genealogy to recover the normative origins of the conceptual and analytical components of scientific realism. Against the backdrop of scientific realism’s empirical and normative shortcomings, I turn to Morgenthau and Carr to appraise what I term their critical realism. I map out the constellation of their political thought by reconstructing the interrelations between (1) the historical crises motivating their writings, (2) their philosophical and methodological criticisms and commitments, (3) their political prescriptions and ethics. My dissertation demonstrates how reading realist texts through the lens of contemporary methodological conventions decisively shapes our theoretical purview, empirical knowledge, and political judgments. Beyond illuminating the underappreciated radical, critical, and historical dimensions of political realism, my dissertation has implications for contemporary debates on international ethics and foreign policy as well as research in political science and political theory.
Dedication

To my parents and my brother.
Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iv

Dedication ..................................................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... ix

Introduction .................................................................................................................................... 1

The Return of Realism .................................................................................................................. 1

A Road Map .................................................................................................................................... 7

Strategies of Exposition and Genealogies .................................................................................... 9

Relevance and Stakes .................................................................................................................... 21

1. Systematic Normativity in Scientific Realism: An Immanent Critique ....................................... 24

1.1 Neorealism as Value-Neutral Scientific Theory ....................................................................... 25

1.2 Do Neorealists Meet Their Own Standards of Value-Neutral Social Science? ....................... 28

1.2.1 Aiming for Scientific Explanation… and Missing ............................................................... 29

1.2.2 Neorealist Responses to Empirical Anomalies: Assessing the Claim of Value-Neutrality .... 36

1.2.3 Explanatory Theory, Value Judgments, and their Systematic Interrelations ....................... 60

1.3 From Failure to Exploration: A Call to Examine the Ethical and Political Judgments of Scientific Realism ......................................................................................................................... 66

2. The Normative Construction of Scientific Realism: A Genealogical Analysis ......................... 73

2.1 Kenneth Waltz and the Levels of Analysis ............................................................................. 74

2.2 From a Defense of Balancing Power to Balance of Power Theory: Reconsidering Waltz’s Man, the State, and War.. 77

2.2.1 The Politics of Ontology: What the Political World is Like… When It’s Convenient .......... 85

2.2.2 From Prudence to Prediction: The Case of the Missing Rationality Assumption ............... 90

2.2.3 From Political Theory to Scientific Theory ......................................................................... 93

2.2.4 Scientific Realism’s Circular Development: From Values to Ontology and Back Again ...... 96

2.3 The Normative Limitations of Scientific Realism ..................................................................... 99

3.3.1 Grounds for Moral Judgment ............................................................................................ 99

3.3.2 Realism’s Exile from Political Theory ............................................................................... 109

2.4 Beyond Ontological Realism .................................................................................................. 114

3. Historical Change and Crisis: Diagnosing 20th Century Political, Economic, and Social Disorder 119
3.1 E.H. Carr's Vision of Revolutionary Crisis ................................................................. 120
  3.1.1 The Twenty Years' Crisis: An Introduction to the Twentieth Century Crisis .................. 120
  3.1.2 Crisis of Laissez-Faire Economics ......................................................................... 121
  3.1.3 Crisis of (Liberal) Democracy ................................................................................. 124
  3.1.4 Crisis of Political Organization: Nationalism and Self-determination ......................... 126
  3.1.5 A Crisis of Moral Purpose ....................................................................................... 130
3.2 Hans Morgenthau and the Changing Faces of Power in Transformative Times ................... 131
  3.2.1 The Crisis of Democracy in a Scientific Age: Technocracy and the Evisceration of Politics ............................................................................................................. 133
  3.2.2 The Crisis of Democracy in a Capitalist Age: New Feudalism and New Despotism ........ 136
  3.2.3 Crisis of Political Organization: The Nation-State System in a Nuclear Age ............... 138
  3.2.4 The Crisis of American Foreign Policy in the Post-World War Period ....................... 145
  3.2.5 The Loss of Transcendent and Objective Principles: Crisis of Moral Purpose ............... 149
3.3 The Threat of the Old and the Promise of the New ....................................................... 152

4. To Abate, Not to Abet: Modes of Inquiry in Times of Crisis ........................................... 154
  4.1 Morgenthau's Quest for a Science of Politics: The Ideology of Scientism and Political Science as Ideology Critique 154
    4.1.1 Scientism and the Rationalization of Politics ......................................................... 155
    4.1.2 The Moral Crisis of Scientism and the Political Danger of Value-Freedom ............... 161
    4.1.3 The Purpose and Orientation of Political Science Properly Conceived ......................... 166
    4.1.4 Political Thought, Crisis, and Transformation ..................................................... 171
  4.2 The Politics of Knowledge and Carr's Realist Utopia: Ideology Critique and Prophetic History .................................................................................................................. 173
    4.2.1 Clearing the Ground: Realism as Sociology of Knowledge and Anti-Utopianism as Ideology Critique .......... 175
    4.2.2 Future-Oriented Historical Inquiry and Emergent Utopias ...................................... 188
    4.2.3 Carr's (Anti-)Utopianism Reconsidered .................................................................... 199
  4.3 A Political Appraisal of Political Inquiry ..................................................................... 202

5. Critical Realism and Visions of Radical Transformation ................................................... 206
  5.1 Rethinking Sovereignty and Self-Determination .......................................................... 208
    5.1.1 Transforming Political Authority: From Diplomatic Accommodation to World State ...... 208
    5.1.2 Functional Sovereignty, Dispersed Political Authority, and the Moral Foundations of International Order .......... 216
  5.2 Rethinking Ends and Means: The Insufficiency of a Politics of Limits ........................... 224
    5.2.1 Servants That Overtook Their Masters .................................................................... 224
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Radicalism, Reason, and the Rehabilitation of Ends</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 The Radicalism of Critical Realism</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Realism Versus Neorealism and its Successors</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Opportunities in Neorealism</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the New Reveals about the Old: Neo(classical) Realism and Democratic Nuisances</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and Scientific Theory, Values and Ontology</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realism and its Others</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem of Ahistorical Political Science</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Realism and Political Inquiry in the 21st Century</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Introduction

The Return of Realism

In 2006, against the backdrop of the quagmire in Iraq, Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman crossed partisan lines and joined forces to co-author a book called *Ethical Realism*. The book, for which the Heritage Foundation fired Hulsman, begins with a controversial pronouncement: “What has failed in Iraq has been not just the strategy of the administration of George W. Bush, but a whole way of looking at the world.”¹ That way of looking at the world, marked by preeminent faith in American might and benevolence, is neoconservatism. And its failures and dangers, Lieven and Hulsman assert, necessitate a return to realism. Paul Starobin makes a similar claim, also in 2006, contending that post-war Iraq and American disillusionment presaged a realist moment, a moment “not so much of moral but of conceptual clarity.”²

But what is this clarity that Lieven, Hulsman, and Starobin believe realism provides? And what is it about how the Iraq War played out that vindicates realism? On the face of it, the answer is deceptively straightforward. Iraq demonstrated the perils of surveying the world as if it were completely mutable, simply waiting to be molded into the right shape. The brutal internecine strife of post-invasion Iraq was, on some cosmic level, the world snapping back into its natural shape, the full force of history and reality thumbing its nose at America’s arrogant belief that it could reconstitute the world at will. So much for visions of a new Middle East. So much for the liberal proponents of the war too intoxicated by the appeal to human rights and democratic flourishing to realize that reality, governed by a logic of its own, neither countenances nor exonerates naïveté and incompetence. Realists, with their appreciation of the “laws of the political universe” and the lessons

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² All the quotes from Starobin are from Paul Starobin, "The Realists," *National Interest* 38, no. 37 (2006).
of history, understood the folly of the Iraq War.\(^3\) Despite the fact that their pre-war warnings were largely ignored, the reality of post-war Iraq issues a definitive judgment: the neoconservative moment is over,\(^4\) and in our chastened state we must, once again, return to realism.

If this vindication of realism seems suspect, it is. Starobin’s claim that realism brings clarity, conceptual or otherwise, is almost immediately undermined by the host of troubling questions raised by his analysis. How can realism be a “predictive” science trying to get as close as possible to “immutable laws” while still appreciating the richness of history? How can realism’s belief in “the supreme value of maintaining order” and its traditional associations with the theory and practice of statecraft be reconciled with realists’ ostensible delight in thinking “unconventionally”? How do their values relate to their science? And most of all, why should we accept Starobin’s judgment that Iraq vindicates realism when he himself acknowledges Mearsheimer’s and Walt’s own admission that the Iraq War “contradicted basic realist logic”?

If Starobin had been aware of the ongoing debates surrounding realism in international relations scholarship, he probably would not have exclaimed that “no other model has done better” in “predicting and accounting for some of the most important trends in global politics over the past decade.” Against the backdrop of devastating critiques against realism by scholars of almost every political and epistemological persuasion, Starobin’s accolades lose their persuasive force. Realism’s claim to conceptual clarity, political efficacy, and moral superiority notwithstanding, the American academy – though speaking in disparate voices -- has issued a fairly damning indictment: realism is logically incoherent, explanatorily weak, morally impoverished, politically counterproductive or, even worse, complicit in the very sort of totalizing, ideological anti-realism it condemns. Despite the ease

\(^3\) Ibid.: 27.
with which realists play the part of the underdog, there are good reasons behind the dismay and contempt provoked by realism’s persistence in both the study and practice of international relations.

Yet it seems that taking realism’s weaknesses seriously situates us, quite inconveniently, between a rock and a hard place. It puts us right between a self-righteous, crusading, militant unilateralism and a callous, impoverished, and even incoherent realism. In their worst instantiations, neoconservatism and realism are both historically inattentive and destructive of the very values they espouse, whether of virtue or prudence. Fortunately, I do not think we are forced to choose between two bad options. But rejecting this choice and its unfortunate theoretical, political, and moral consequences requires taking the concerns voiced in the Iraq debate seriously.

Bracketing the critiques of realism for a moment, we should take the realist call for sober reflection, robust diplomacy, clear-sighted prudence, a concern for consequences and a humble appreciation of limits as more than a Trojan horse from which the cunning politics of Realpolitik are bound to emerge. For all its rhetorical and political dubiousness, there is a sense in which the return to realism is motivated by the same moral and political indignation of Realpolitik’s harshest critics. Moreover, the realist resurgence does seem to manifest sincere and serious concerns about responsibility, legitimacy, and respect for others, regardless of whether realism can actually sustain these values.

At the same time, isn’t Condoleezza Rice right when she insists that we need to interrogate our belief in the fundamental irreconcilability of power and principle, of interest and a commitment to democracy and social justice? And if not, is Barack Obama right when he effectively repeats the same thing (albeit as an immanent criticism of the Bush administration), namely that we ought to

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5 John Mearsheimer repeatedly takes this line, seeing realism as subject to unwarranted hostility and liberal intolerance. For example, see John J. Mearsheimer, "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," in Realism and Institutionalism in International Studies, ed. Michael Brecher and Frank P. Harvey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002). See also Drezner’s empirical finding that the American public is not particularly hostile to Realpolitik in Daniel Drezner, "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion," Perspectives on Politics 6, no. 1 (2008).
“reject the false choice between our security and our ideals”?

6 If we can, at least for a moment, create space between actual policy and some of the statements made by neoconservatives and members of the Bush administration, then we should reflect on Rice’s and Lawrence Kaplan’s comments about long-standing American support for authoritarian regimes for order’s sake. At a minimum, we should take note of the contrition implicit in these confessions of the failure of expediency. Reciting a litany of what America has turned a blind eye to -- corruption, military occupation, the human costs of sanctions, etc., Rice warns: “let us not romanticize the old bargains of the Middle East – for they yielded neither justice nor stability.”

7 We can certainly appraise Rice’s penitence as too little, too late, and too blatantly self-serving; the principled rejection of expediency, motivated mostly by the judgment that it did not pay off, is itself expedient enough to prompt suspicion. Yet to completely dismiss Rice and Kaplan would be unfortunate, for they raise serious concerns about the economic, social, and political circumstances that ought to inform our understanding of international relations, for the formation of foreign policy or otherwise. These concerns are elided by the reactionary march towards pragmatism and the resurgence of a realism that would prefer to err on the side of cynicism (“stability first,” “divide and conquer,” and the imprudence of antagonizing “friendly dictators”) and relativism (the “arrogance” of imposing “our” democratic and liberal values on others).

8 Our ability to avoid swinging violently between a self-effacing realism that aims too low and an overzealous moralism that ends up making a mockery of morality hinges on our ability to answer two questions. First, can we take the intellectual and moral concerns of the various supporters of the Iraq War seriously without embracing the dispositions and judgments that made the war seem necessary and bound to succeed? Second, can we take the insights of political realism seriously

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6 See Barack Obama’s 2009 Inaugural Address at http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/.
8 Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for a New World,” 13.
9 See Kaplan’s analysis of how this sort of realist sensibility is bipartisan in Kaplan, “Springtime for Realism.”
without falling prey to the very contradictions and deficiencies that make naïve forms of neoconservatism and liberalism so attractive in the first place?

Paradoxically, I want to argue that returning to realism can do both, but this requires a rigorous reappraisal of the failures of contemporary realism and the retrieval of a realism that is able to avert those problems. My dissertation attempts to do this by investigating the divergent ethics, politics, and modes of inquiry of the critical realism of Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr and the scientific realism of contemporary International Relations scholarship. Against the backdrop of scientific realism’s empirical and normative shortcomings, I argue that we need to move beyond realism understood as a set of core propositions about the nature of humans, states, and political structures. I turn to the two most influential and primary exponents of 20th century realism to retrieve an ethically robust, historically attentive realism capable of informing contemporary politics.

It might seem that focusing on realism, especially scientific realism, in the context of international relations scholarship is beside the point; it appears to move us away from the American foreign policy context where debates over realism arguably matter the most. Yet, there are crucial links between the policy and academic community (historically and now), and, if anything, the ascendency of realism in the foreign policy domain precisely at a moment when realism is all but discredited amongst scholars demands that even more links be forged.10

Let me conclude these initial remarks by previewing four reasons why we should revisit rather than reject realism. My comments are primarily targeted at realism’s academic critics, but with the Iraq War in mind. First, neorealists constitute the largest group of political scientists opposed to the Iraq War. By examining the ways in which their theoretical and political commitments undermine each other, I aim to show that scholars as well as foreign policy interlocutors need to appreciate the inextricable relationships between empirical claims, normative judgments, and

10 Even if realism weren’t ascendant, the persistent appeals to ostensibly realist categories like national interest and security would still pose a problem.
theoretical presuppositions about the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality. If this seems too abstract or too much to demand of non-academics, then let me rephrase: the foreign policy community needs to acquire whatever intellectual tools that would allow it to recognize that realist presuppositions cannot sustain realist prescriptions. With regard to the new generation of realist scholars, my genealogical analysis will demonstrate why greater scientific rigor is an insufficient response to neorealism’s failures.

Second, while realism’s harshest scientific critics, wary that its ideological proclivity endangers the socio-scientific enterprise, might be more than willing to throw realism to the wolves, there are good reasons not to. As I will show, by seeing earlier realists merely as precursors to neorealists, both neorealists and realism’s positivist detractors get the politics and theory of thinkers like Morgenthau and Carr wrong; and they do so in a way that renders them unable to see what might be problematic about their own theoretical and political commitments, claims to value-neutrality notwithstanding. To the extent realist’s positivist, albeit emotivist, critics share their opposition to the war, they are equally incapable of addressing two of the major challenges raised by the Iraq debate: the ideological appeal to security and interest and the question of how values, visions, and ends should inform politics.

Third, while the postmodern detractors of realism might see little difference between neoconservatism and a “totalitarian” (neo)realism, their criticisms of the latter risk reinforcing the dominant discourse of realism that so easily engenders its opposite. Their critiques of realism’s fundamentalism might be compelling, but they also leave much to be desired. Ultimately, both realism’s positivist and post-positivist critics need to consider the seductions of a reductionist and totalizing realism and whether there are resources within the realist tradition to restrain or redirect these, perhaps legitimate, desires.

Finally, if we take the arguments voiced by proponents of the Iraq War as more than just ideology, we might redeem a worthy challenge for those who seek to understand the political world.
We certainly ought to be skeptical of Rice’s attempt to draw links between repressive regimes and terrorism, between injustice and the lack of institutions for political expression, on the one hand, and political violence and transnational instability on the other. Yet despite her ideological motivations and her failure to appreciate tensions (e.g. between economic development and democracy or democracy and stability), I think her regard for connections is warranted. My hope is that underscoring the radical dimension of realist thought, that is, the realist concern with basic principles, can demonstrate the importance of thinking big and validate inquiry into the interrelations between economy, society, polity, culture, technology, and science, despite the ideological dangers of such intellectual and political ambition.

**A Road Map**

My dissertation begins by employing immanent analysis to elucidate how the two main progenitors of scientific realism, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, fail to meet their own standard of value-neutral, causal theory. I do this by analyzing their responses to four empirical anomalies: NATO expansion, the Iraq War (2003), US engagement policy towards China, and Cold War nuclear behavior. Instead of engaging in theoretical re-assessment, I find that scientific realists respond to anomalies in patterned ways, namely with normative disapprobation and non-realist explanatory accounts. Using Charles Taylor’s critical insights into value-neutrality, I argue that this dual reaction, despite its ultimate incoherence, is a logical consequence of how realist theory is constructed. The analysis developed here has vital implications for the social scientific credentials of neorealism. I conclude with a discussion of why immanent criticism is necessary and why it directs us toward genealogical examination of the neorealist enterprise.

Given the importance of Kenneth Waltz’s texts in revitalizing realist analyses of, and judgments about, international relations and foreign policy, my second chapter assesses and
challenges the conventional reading of Waltz’s exposition of scientific realism contained in *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics*. I argue that the dominant reading of the former work as an *analytical* precursor to the second invites a revisionist history of the development of scientific realism, which prevents us from seeing the theoretical, political, and ethical judgments implicated in the constitution of scientific realism. I offer an alternative reading that lays out *Man, the State, and War* as a political defense of *Realpolitik*. I trace how the normative and political ideals in this text (e.g. balance of power, anarchy) become scientific explananda and analytical assumptions in *Theory of International Politics* and discuss the significance of this transition. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the normative sufficiency of contemporary realism.

The second part of my dissertation revisits Morgenthau and Carr to appraise what I term their ‘critical realism.’ I map out the constellation of their political thought by reconstructing the interrelations between (1) the historical crises motivating their writings, (2) their philosophical and methodological criticisms and commitments, (3) their political prescriptions and ethics. I begin by detailing Morgenthau’s and Carr’s vision of a world beset by overlapping economic, social, and political crises. Though their writings elucidated a series of ostensibly unrelated global and domestic crises, I show how each crisis rested upon the disjunction between 20th century historical conditions and inherited political principles and institutions (e.g. national self-determination/sovereign organization of states; liberal democratic principles; economic liberal orthodoxy). Detailing how each crisis reinforces and re-describes the others, I bring coherence to Morgenthau’s and Carr’s extensive political writings. In so doing, I am able to locate the essential source of their various concerns about social disintegration, democratic/authoritarian totalitarianism, increasingly virulent warfare and possible nuclear catastrophe.

Moving on to Morgenthau’s and Carr’s methodological writings, I demonstrate how their understanding of crisis shaped their philosophy of science and history, notably how their identification of the persistence of *anachronistic* thought and practice as the linchpin of crisis prompted
their criticism of ahistorical, positivist methodologies. I further extract two distinct modes of inquiry from critical realism: (1) ideology critique, a method used to illuminate the historical origins, socio-economic conditioning, and political/ethical implications of anachronistic thought and (2) prophetic historical inquiry, a form of future-oriented, historical inquiry deployed to prefigure the novel changes required to align political thought and practice with historical developments. I discuss how Morgenthau’s and Carr’s diagnosis of crisis led them to insist on radical change in political thought and practice and how their political inquiry sought to aid this task by gesturing at the direction and nature of future transformation.

The last substantive chapter examines Morgenthau’s and Carr’s views on political transformation, paying special attention to their respective reconceptualizations of sovereignty and the strategies they outlined to redistribute political and moral authority in global politics. I address the apparent incongruity between conventional understandings of Carr and Morgenthau as prudential realists who endorsed a politics of limits and more critical readings (including mine) that emphasize their radical and utopian dimensions. I argue that these interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Both thinkers embraced the values and dispositions associated with pragmatism and prudence, but primarily as a means to achieve to achieve revolutionary purpose, not as vision of the ultimate end of politics. I conclude with an analysis of why Carr and Morgenthau believed radicalism and a robust vision of ends to be necessary by explicating one of the major problems implicit in their diagnoses of crisis: the modern reduction of reason to instrumental rationality.

Strategies of Exposition and Genealogies

Although the first and second half of the dissertation are structured differently, my genealogical examinations of both neorealism and the realism of Morgenthau and Carr aim to clarify the links between their empirical preoccupations, their philosophy and methodology, and their
political and ethical judgments. With regard to Morgenthau and Carr, my work is informed by, and
engages with, recent critical reinterpretations of classical realist texts, mainly from the UK and
Australian IR communities.\(^{11}\) My theoretical orientation and substantive focus most closely
resembles Michael Williams’s exegesis of what he calls the willful Realist tradition of Hobbes,
Rousseau, and Morgenthau in *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations*. Although I
agree with William’s broader claim that Morgenthau’s political theory and its major concepts are
political and ethical constructions, I think his claim that their overarching purpose is to sustain a
liberal order and a politics of limits occludes the more radical dimensions of Morgenthau’s thought.

While I share many of William’s conclusions, I take his work to be reflective of an
overemphasis on the tragic, skeptical, prudential, conservative, and anti-utopian dimensions of
realism, even amongst critical re-readings.\(^ {12} \) I think the exaggerated prominence of these features is
closely related to a second weakness of conventional as well as critical readings of realist texts: the
failure to take the strategic dimensions of realist writing seriously. Although Williams doesn’t make
this mistake, the fact that so many interpreters of Carr and Morgenthau neglect the political and
rhetorical functions as well as fluidity of realist categories might explain why they fail to see how
concepts like rationalism, power, interest, realism, or utopianism serve critical and radical purposes.
Taking realist writing at face value, especially out of context, is what leads Jim George to conflate
Realism with conservative “postulations about recurrence and repetition”\(^ {13} \) and what leads Sean
Molloy to understand *Politics Among Nations* as committed to rational objectification of the world and

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to take Morgenthau for an anti-revolutionary conservative who comes to renounce his own rationalism in the 1970s. The fact that scholars of all theoretical and political predilections tend to interpret realism through its major categories without investigating their respective context, content, function, and interconnections is one reason why the conventional view that realists are concerned with state power, national interest, and universal laws has so much traction. Similarly, critical re-readings that concentrate on different categories – e.g. the dialectic between realism and utopianism, power and morality – without taking their constitution, substance, shifts, and functions seriously risk misinterpreting the politics and theory of the realists they read.

My aim of illuminating the often overlooked strategic, critical, and radical dimensions of realism shapes my strategy of exposition in a few ways. First, I engage in close readings of a wide range of Morgenthau’s and Carr’s major works on international politics and historical, political inquiry. This sort of reading is required to grasp the strategic nature of their work as well as connections between their philosophy and politics. Moreover, both Morgenthau and Carr are explicit about adapting their theoretical emphases to their historical circumstances, for instance accentuating power when it is dismissed and, in turn, stressing the importance of morality when it is depreciated. To the extent that Morgenthau and Carr are (wrongly) presumed to be setting forth ontological claims or empirical propositions, these shifts in emphases are registered as contradictions. It is only from a perspective that encompasses the extensive terrain of their political thought that these strategic alterations begin to reveal their underlying coherence.

Given my purposes, I also deem it important to acknowledge that I will over-read Morgenthau and Carr, although in a way that is sustainable on the basis of their texts. I intentionally

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make their writings more consistent to highlight the structural underpinnings of their thought and
the nature of their radical concerns. My analysis articulates a largely coherent and parallel narrative
across Morgenthau’s and Carr’s theorizing while necessarily occluding various aspects of each
author’s writings – e.g. much of Morgenthau’s policy writings and Carr’s editorials, prolific account
of Soviet history, and biographies of a handful of 19th Russian intellectuals.16 I do not assume the
absence of contradictions, changes, and tensions between the two thinkers or even within each
writer’s oeuvre, but by accentuating coherence I hope to underscore two things missed by
contemporary realists as well as critics and interpreters of realism. First, each component of
Morgenthau’s and Carr’s thought – their political preoccupations, theory, methodology, and
normative judgments – is related to the others. This insight, at the very least, problematizes
contemporary attempts to divorce substantive realist insights from realist methodologies or the belief
that positivist methodologies can be used to study any aspect of politics. Second, I consider Carr and
Morgenthau together to highlight the striking similarities between their thinking despite the divergent
political labels usually attached to them (i.e. Carr the socialist and Morgenthau the liberal). Although
I engage in close readings, I concentrate on the analytic components of their thought, which is crucial
in light of the fact that even scrupulous and critical readers of Carr often reaffirm the conventional
reading of Morgenthau.17

In this sense, it should be clear that my analysis is by no means an attempt at intellectual
biography. I do point out some of the intellectual influences on Morgenthau (Nietzsche, Arendt,
Jaspers) and Carr (Marx, Mannheim), but only to help clarify substantive aspects of their thought.

My work has been informed by serious engagements with Carr’s and Morgenthau’s intellectual debts,

16 Carr wrote books on Dostoevsky, Herzen, Bakunin as well as a biography of Marx. In his autobiography, Carr noted that
it was his encounter with 19th century Russian intellectuals, rather than Marx that aroused his interest in “western ideology”.
Moreover, it was the Russian Revolution that aroused his interest in history. See xvi-xvii and xv of ’An Autobiography’ in
Cox (ed.).

17 For instance, Jones and Germain reaffirm the conventional views about Morgenthau’s preoccupation with human nature.
See Jones, E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie, Randall Germain, “E.H. Carr and the Historical Mode of
including William Scheuerman’s various writings on Morgenthau,¹⁸ Christophe Frei’s *Hans Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography*, the contributions in Michael Williams’s edited volume, *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau in International Relations*, M. Benjamin Mollov’s *Power and Transcendence: Hans J. Morgenthau and the Jewish Experience*, Charles Jones’s *E.H. Carr and International Relations*, Jonathan Haslam’s *The Vices of Integrity: E.H. Carr, 1892-1982*, and the contributions in Michael Cox’s *E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal*. I have benefited from greatly from these insights, although I think it important to emphasize some of the limits of reading Morgenthau and Carr through their intellectual influences. For example, I do not think it is a coincidence that those who emphasize the influence of Max Weber on Morgenthau tend to miss the latter’s radicalism, his critical views on sovereignty, or the importance of ends and values to his inquiry.¹⁹

While I think it is important to appraise, for instance, how the Weimar Republic and Morgenthau’s preoccupation with Schmitt’s notion of the political, affected his political preoccupations and theorizing, I largely read Morgenthau’s and Carr’s writings on their own terms. Even though I do this out of concern for contemporary politics and inquiry, I try not to read present debates and categories into them. Instead, I read Morgenthau’s and Carr’s politics in terms of their own methodological views, and so on. By drawing out their internal coherence, the underlying structure that holds Carr’s and Morgenthau’s divergent writings together, I aim to demonstrate that the apparent contradictions in their texts, which generate contradictory accounts of their theoretical and political views, are partly a consequence of inattention to context. Ultimately, however, the

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¹⁹ For instance, see Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger*, Ido Oren, “The Unrealism of Contemporary Realism: The Tension between Realist Theory and Realists’ Practice,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 7, no. 02 (2009). Williams’s account of Morgenthau also focuses heavily on his debts to Weber. Although his is a more nuanced account, Williams still misses the more radical dimensions of Morgenthau’s thought. See Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations*. Another example of how intellectual debts can be misleading might be Molloy’s analysis of Carr in Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics*, 61. Perhaps it his emphasis on Hegel that leads him to conclude that Carr considered the clash of ideologies the primary motor of change in international politics without scrutinizing the technological and economic revolutions Carr identified as driving those ideological battles.
purpose of my re-reading is to show how reading Morgenthau and Carr on their own terms might alter the way we approach contemporary global politics and political inquiry.

Finally, it is impossible to undertake immanent critique or genealogy without saying something about where those terms came from. Somewhere lurking in the background of this dissertation are figures like Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, Foucault, and Nietzsche, and since I am not a professional philosopher, I am happy to leave them lurking after making a few remarks. There are notable intersections between Morgenthau and Carr, the concerns that animate my analyses of them, and the writings of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, especially on the nature of theory, the inseparability of method and subject matter, the status of reason in modernity, the problem of ideology, and the centrality of history for inquiry into society. No doubt some of the concerns shared by Morgenthau and Adorno, for instance that inquiry ought to be oriented by a concern for the whole, for the essential questions “crucial to the survival and freedom of the human species,” are informed by their shared experience as Jews forced to flee Nazi Germany.  

Although there are many suggestive affinities between Morgenthau and Carr and the Frankfurt School, I do not make any explicit connections; however, the parallels are suggestive enough to make one wonder about the conventional interpretations of realist theory and politics.

I am much more ambivalent about Foucault. I am with Foucault in so far as my reading of Morgenthau and Carr challenges the dominant myth of realism’s origins, its timelessness, its seamless progression and its essential homogeneity. I also accentuate the divergent discursive structures of modern and contemporary scientific realism and their implications, both in terms of the kinds of

20 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 25. See Lectures 2 and 3 for Adorno’s discussion of the essential, its connection to Auschwitz, and the threat to it posed by positivism, which seeks to consign it to the “hell of metaphysics” (26).


actors they make possible and the kind of world those actors can inhabit. My analysis gestures toward the depth, complexity, capaciousness, and paradoxical nature of concepts like power and interest in modern realism in contrast to their crude, reductionist counterparts in neorealism as well as the different constituents they serve. Moreover, my genealogy of neorealism partly accounts for the political interests implicated in the construction of scientific realism and its theoretical components, which cannot be explained purely on the basis of a concern for “empirical power.” However, I cannot claim to systematically trace the conditions of emergence, displacement, or change in the discourses of realism, which requires disciplinary history, political history, and various forms of institutional analyses way beyond the scope of this project.

I address my primary concerns about claiming Foucault by way of Wendy Brown’s account of genealogical politics and its indeterminacy:

The politics of Foucault’s body of political, philosophical, and genealogical studies, I am arguing, cannot be linked to or inferred from Foucault’s explicit political values, views, or attachments. The latter are a matter of contingent predilection; the political work his philosophical thinking can be made to do is relatively detachable from his preferences and could be attached to others. More generally, the politics of genealogy, as Nietzsche and Foucault craft them, are at best indeterminate. Genealogy aims to unfix the terms of the contemporary political situation, and it does so from a particular normative set of investments; but it doesn’t tell us what is to be done, or even what is to be valued. It does not replace the truths and convictions it renders historically contingent and discursively containing; rather it questions whether truths and convictions make up the right ethos for critical political consciousness.

And in the aftermath of genealogy, Brown insists,

It becomes thinkable to distinguish between the political possibilities that a certain body of theory affords, the political uses to which it can be put, the political positions of the theorist, and a particular political deployment of the theory.23

First, I want to discuss Brown’s claim that genealogy “doesn’t tell us what is to done.” Earlier in the text, Brown argues that Foucault’s inattention to policy can be explained by the normative purpose

of genealogy, namely to show the contingency of, and thus to free ourselves from rather than to abet, a certain kind of political rationality. Morgenthau, who had intellectual debts to Nietzsche, conducted a genealogy of scientism and rationalism for a similar objective: to free us from the logic of positivism and its political baggage. Paradoxically, the fact that Morgenthau’s and Carr’s radicalism and criticisms of instrumental rationality are often eclipsed by their ostensible commitment to rationalism or conservatism might in fact be a consequence of their interventions in the policy community. In this regard, I think Brown has a point. Nevertheless, I am wary of the self-serving quality of such a justification for neglecting prescription, not to mention its practical consequences. While I ultimately share Brown’s reluctance to tie intellectual inquiry to policy reform (which by no means exhausts prescription), for instance by trying to extrapolate specific foreign policy recommendations from the ghosts of Carr and Morgenthau, my reasons are less because I think doing so would undermine genealogy and more because I am suspicious of the eagerness with which scholars respond to this demand, despite the huge chasm that separates them from the context in which their policy will play out. That is to say, I am concerned that the imperative to policy relevance pushes scholars into a position where they are subject to delusions of mastery and, more likely than not, fated to act irresponsibly.

This brings me to Brown’s rejection of truths and convictions, whether this is the sort of political ethos we ought to embrace, and the detachability of genealogy. Carr and Morgenthau might have agreed with Brown given their anti-moralism and their concerns about the dangers and limits of an ethos of truth and conviction that fails to take history and contingency seriously. In fact, even the neorealists and their positivist critics might concur with Brown, the neorealists because they dislike the moralism of utopian ideologues and the positivists because they resent the unquestioned, ideological commitments of the neorealists. This presents us with an interesting dilemma: critical realists, neorealists and positivists all seem to be contemptuous of the appeal to truth and conviction; yet all of them implicitly stand by their own truths and convictions. I take this as an indication of a
deep need for truths and convictions despite their historical contingencies, on the one hand, and the capacity of those truths and convictions to morph into fundamentalist ideology on the other. I believe that Carr and Morgenthau, at their very best, recognized this. After all, they criticized 20th century liberalism and positivism precisely because they refused to recognize their own historical contingency. Nevertheless, it is arguably the case that both thinkers held fast to truth and conviction, despite their historicism and their attentiveness to the challenges posed by mystification and moralism. To the extent that their concerns for the powerless, for justice, and the necessity of radical political change arise out of a commitment to truth and conviction, I am not sure that the credulity or bad faith with which they are associated with warrant their complete eradication. Perhaps Carr and Morgenthau both called for a rethinking of objectively rational ends and human purposes precisely because it was the strongest intellectual and political response to the formidable threat posed by the irrational tyranny of instrumental rationality in modern life.

With this concern in mind, I am suspicious of Brown’s attempt to divorce Foucault’s “political values, views, or attachments” from his philosophical, political, and genealogical projects. For this too closely resembles the positivist claim that intellectual inquiry is a value-neutral technology to be attached to any purpose, a claim that Carr and Morgenthau found untenable and politically dubious. Indeed, one of the implications of my genealogy of neorealism is that positivists who believe they can use Waltz’s theoretical apparatus without adopting his political judgments are sorely mistaken; it is not a coincidence that the judgments about the nature of politics and state behavior from Waltz’s normative tract, *Man, the State, and War*, make their way into neoclassical realist scholarship or Patrick James’s more rigorous attempt to re-theorize structural realism, or that these latter scientific works have a limited understanding of change and implicitly sanction the sovereign state system. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why I focus on (realism and) Waltz and Mearsheimer, whose unabashed forthrightness emphasizes just how deeply their political judgments are implicated in their science. Carr’s and Morgenthau’s rejection of liberalism and its methodological offspring
stemmed from precisely the fact that, through their lens, novelty was unrecognizable and political
transformation seemed both impossible and undesirable. If political interests are invariably
implicated in modes of inquiry (indeed in their very constitution as genealogy would alert us to), then
this is as true of positivism as it is of genealogy. If this seems like an unfair analogy, let me again
stress that Brown’s assertion that Foucault’s theoretical apparatus is “relatively detachable from his
preferences and could be attached to others” is exactly what a positivist, who sees values as preferences,
would say in reference to their own theoretical and philosophical “tools.” Not to mention how
expedient this would be for those who might welcome the opportunity to “unfix” the political values
and commitments of others.

Ultimately, I do accept Brown’s account of what genealogy makes possible: the ability to
think about the relationships between theory and political possibility, how theory is deployed and for
what purposes, and the politics of the theorist. But I have to demur one last time to emphasize that
we do not need Foucault to do these things. While I am preoccupied with the questions Brown
raises, I am comfortable leaving Foucault behind because I think that, for all their flaws, Carr and
Morgenthau engaged all of these questions in a way that is more easily accessible and more
compelling, not least because they did want to “tell us what is to be done [and] even what is to be
valued.”

Finally, I should note that one of the reasons Foucault does not play a more prominent role
in my genealogy is because many of those who have embraced his thought, and postmodernism
more generally, in order to criticize realism tend to reaffirm precisely the mythological history
genealogy is meant to undercut. James Der Derian’s “A Reinterpretation of Realism: Genealogy,
Semiaology, and Dromology” and Jim George’s *Discourses of Global Politics* are two examples. Der
Derian completely misreads Carr’s critique of “idealist” in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* and, ironically,

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24 Of course, we still have Nietzsche speaking through the voice of Morgenthau.
uses A.J.P. Taylor’s contention that appeasing Hitler was the most realist policy in the 1930s to chastise Carr. The problem is that Carr did advocate appeasement, and for this he has been duly chastised since the first edition of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis.* Der Derian goes on to trace how Carr’s realism transforms into the “scientific” realism of Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations.* He suggests that it was realism’s nascent scientific identity, against the backdrop of behavioralism, that accounted for Morgenthau’s ability to assert that politics is “governed by objective laws” while criticizing “contemporary efforts ‘to reduce international relations to a system of abstract propositions with a predictive function.’” The next sentence is about Kenneth Waltz. In a little more than a page, Der Derian has traced modern realism from Carr to Morgenthau, all the way to Waltz. Der Derian not only seriously misinterprets both Carr and Morgenthau, but also fails to see the incredible distance between their realism and Waltz’s. If he had understood the context of either of those claims, not to mention the rhetorical and pedagogical function of *Politics Among Nations,* he might have come to appreciate their similar preoccupation with technocracy, deterritorialization, and “alternatives to the present.” Given that Der Derian calls for a “new language” right after he acknowledges Niebuhr’s, Morgenthau’s, and Kennan’s concerns about technocracy, new feudalism, and the dangerous connections between calculative logic and political violence from the 1950s to the 1980s, it seems odd that he does not explore how earlier realists might be able to articulate a new political imaginary he so clearly desires. After all, it is Morgenthau who said: “‘Political imagination’ is [the] key word. If the West cannot think of something better than nationalism, it may well lose the opportunity to think at all.”

George’s analysis is even more problematic. For his treatment of realism as a totalitarian unity, a “dominant Tradition of International Relations” that represents “the dominant approach to

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modernity – as the philosophical pursuit of objectivity, omnipotence, and control,” is as domineering and reflective of the kind of closure and reification he sees in realism.28 Even more ironically, George invokes Foucault to warn against intellectual detachment or presumption and beckons us to “disavow one’s (modernist) Godlike status and seek not to speak for others but to utilize one’s capacities to help others speak for themselves.”29 Yet it is George who fails to let the realists speak. Had he followed Foucault’s advice, he might have learned something from Carr, the “practitioner”. For even in Carr’s most “realist” work, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, it is noteworthy that he gives voice to those who bear the cost of a commitment to economic liberalism; for instance, Carr excerpts from official transcripts detailing the Yugoslav Foreign Minister’s concerns about the social and political costs of economic liberalization (who in turn gives voice to the villagers he represents) at a 1931 European trade meeting and critically explicates the President of Columbia’s indictment of the hypocrisy of strong states in 1937.30 Despite his privileging of elite statesmen, Carr does at least make the effort, as his theorizing demonstrates, to “utilize ones capacities to help others speak for themselves.” Ultimately, by drawing an imaginary link between the “Realist-positivist phase,” (represented by Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*), the Cold War “positivist-Realist phase” (represented by Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations*), and neorealism,31 George disfigures the realist tradition too badly to appreciate the fact that Morgenthau and Carr prefigured his invocation of Vaclav Havel’s post-Cold War appeal “for serious critical reflection upon the fundamental premises of Western modernity.” George’s discussion is worth quoting at length:

[Havel’s proposition that the West must confront its own complicity with the Soviet Union as the last citadel of modernity against change] appeals to the most powerful Western societies (particularly the United States), at the moment of their greatest triumph, to reflect upon not just the great achievements of modern political life but also upon the dangers, costs, silences, and closures integral to it. Indeed, suggests Havel, the prospect of meaningful democratic change taking place in the wake of

29 Ibid., 231.
30 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 57-60.
31 George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re) Introduction to International Relations*, 70.
the Cold War depends, to a significant extent, on the capacities of the most powerful global actors to confront those aspects of their theory and practice that continue, in the 1990s, to restrict their understanding of a complex, changing global environment. Most significant, they must address the ‘technocratic, utilitarian approach to Being’ that characterized Cold War power politics, while confronting the most profound of modernity’s philosophical illusions, centered on ‘the proud belief that man, as the pinnacle of everything that exists, is capable of objectively describing, explaining, and controlling everything that exists, and of possessing the one and only truth about the world.’

It is a pity that George does not see how easily one can mistake those sentiments for Carr’s and Morgenthau’s. Crucially, Der Derian’s and George’s failure to engage in the meticulous scrutiny of text and historical context suggests the ease with which genealogy can undermine its own intent, though this is not to say we should dismiss their theoretical and political concerns. Their desire to open up “thinking space” is one that I share and one that I contend Morgenthau and Carr share, as evidenced by their serious concern for the connections between politics and theory, power and knowledge.

**Relevance and Stakes**

There is much at stake in challenging the dominant misinterpretations of realism, not only for the realist tradition, but more importantly for our understanding of politics and our appraisal of political and ethical possibilities in international relations. In both the academic and real world, realism’s power as a legitimating discourse that tends to exhibit hostility towards social justice, economic inequality, democratic participation, and robust ethics makes it worthy of serious scrutiny. The misappropriation of earlier realists by neorealists as well as their positivist and post-positivist detractors raises some provocative questions. If these interpreters fail so egregiously in their reading of texts, can we trust their reading of the political world? If their misinterpretations symptomize an inability to grasp the political (in theory, rhetoric, or realist objects of criticism – e.g. utopianism,

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32 Ibid., 8-9.
positivism); subtle but meaningful distinctions (between Morgenthau’s and Carr’s rationalism and anti-rationalism); the capaciousness and sundry functions of power and interest; the difference between ontological, historically contingent, not to mention strategic claims, might it also suggest an inability to grasp those features in the real world? Perhaps it is too presumptuous to assume that realism’s interpreters have actually read realist texts, although this does not exonerate anyone. For those whose misreadings are a consequence of only having read the most well-cited excerpts from Morgenthau and Carr, is it not reasonable to question the motivation for a way of reading realist texts that flattens them out or leads one to mistake appearances for reality? And to the extent that such readings are motivated by pragmatic or instrumental objectives, what are the implications for the understanding of politics that is generated, which is, after all, the platform upon which political judgments and actions will be built?

Ultimately, although I aim to provide a more tenable account of the ethics and politics of 20th century realism, I wish to go beyond realism by drawing out critical realism’s astute warnings and constructive insights for methodological controversies and substantive research in contemporary political science and political theory. In particular, my analysis suggests implications for how we ought to judge the epistemic principles and methodological commitments of political inquiry. My genealogies of neorealism and critical realism also suggest the importance of appraising the normative ends that govern both foreign policy and the global organization of political, economic, and social life. Substantively, my examination of Carr and Morgenthau raises the question of how relevant their preoccupations with nationalism, nuclear weapons, private economic power, bureaucracy, technocracy, and democratic impoverishment are in the 21st century. These are some of the issues that I aim to flesh out in the conclusion. Finally, since I began my discussion of realism in a parochial way by focusing on American foreign policy, I will conclude the dissertation by loosening the constraints that have bound realism to the domain of statecraft in order to consider how realist
thought might inform and buttress, rather than dismiss, thinking about global justice and utopian politics.
1. Systematic Normativity in Scientific Realism: An Immanent Critique

Structural realists, or neorealists, claim to capture the international system as it really is: an anarchic, materialist world of conflicting states where distributions of power are decisive, norms are epiphenomenal, and ethical progress is nothing but a utopian myth. Moreover, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, two of the most prominent scholars in the study of International Relations (IR), contend that theirs is a scientific understanding of the structural necessities emanating from anarchy. Though they differ on particulars, both claim to provide value-free causal explanations of state behavior. But do structural realists meet the standards dictated by their own assertions? Are their theories really explanatory and scientific, and are they value-free?

This chapter employs immanent analysis to elucidate how the two main progenitors of scientific realism, Waltz and Mearsheimer, fail to meet their own standard of value-neutral, causal theory. I do this by analyzing their responses to four empirical anomalies: NATO expansion, the Iraq War (2003), US engagement policy towards China, and Cold War nuclear behavior. Instead of engaging in theoretical re-assessment, I find that scientific realists respond to anomalies in patterned ways, namely with normative disapprobation and non-realist explanatory accounts. Using Charles Taylor’s critique of value-neutrality, I argue that this dual reaction, despite its ultimate incoherence, is a logical consequence of how realist theory is constructed. Ultimately, realist responses to empirical anomalies reveal systematic linkages between positivist claims and normative commitments. Despite the fidelity to empirical reality implied by the realist nomenclature, I demonstrate how Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s normative commitments take precedence over and govern their shifting ontological and empirical claims. Challenging the notion that greater conceptual, meta-theoretical, and empirical rigor are sufficient to address scientific realism’s failures, this chapter concludes with a call for genealogical inquiry into the normative judgments implicated in the theoretical construction of scientific realism.
1.1 Neorealism as Value-Neutral Scientific Theory

Neorealism is distinct from classical realism primarily by virtue of its scientific status.\(^1\) Whereas neorealist thinkers usually claim to be working in the tradition of classical realism, regularly invoking canonical theorists like Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, E.H. Carr, and Hans Morgenthau, neorealists see themselves as engaging in a distinctly scientific enterprise. In Theory of International Politics, Waltz's intellectual innovation is not only substantive but more importantly methodological. In denigrating those who "use the term 'theory' [too] freely, often to cover any work that departs from mere description [instead of referring] only to work that meets philosophy-of-science standards,"\(^2\) Waltz elucidates his desire to reconceptualize what qualifies as theory in more rigorous and systematic terms. Specifically, he outlines his definition of theory as statements that explain the causal relationships that inhere in law-like associations. In other words, theory offers conceptual explanations of why particular empirical correlations obtain, moving beyond mere description to hypotheses about the processes that give rise to observable facts.\(^3\)

In spite of their differences, Mearsheimer seems to agree with Waltz that the heart of the theoretical enterprise of neorealism is to elucidate "the causal logic" that underpins how states, and great powers in particular, behave in international politics.\(^4\) He provides a definitive understanding

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\(^1\) I use neorealism and structural realism interchangeably and locate them under the umbrella of scientific realism. While the concluding chapter will discuss other variants of scientific realism, e.g. neoclassical realism, this chapter and the next will concentrate on neorealism. Some might argue that the primary distinction between classical and neorealism is not the latter's scientific status but its structuralism. The problem with this interpretation is that it presumes too much already; in order to make this analytical distinction, one has to accept the neorealist claim that classical realists were also primarily engaged in explanatory projects, thus reducing classical realists to first-image theorists who posit human nature as the main cause of political phenomena like war. The latter half of the dissertation will argue that reading the scientific, causal project back into the classical realist texts is a misreading that obfuscates the specific normative and political projects of the classical authors. More generally, to reduce the dispute between classical realists and neorealists to one of independent variables, as it were, is to divert attention from the (conflicting) normative commitments motivating both category of theorists and leads to the misleading and untenable conclusion that realists are driven by a disinterested desire to explain the world as it really is.


\(^3\) Ibid., 5-7.

of the purpose of empirically orientated, scientific theory, stating clearly that explanatory power is the key criterion by which theories are to be adjudicated.\textsuperscript{5} Crucially, both Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer conceptualize the objective of realist theory as explaining law-like behavior in the autonomous realm of international politics.

Indeed, this particular understanding of theory leads both Waltz and Mearsheimer to assert that their realist predecessors did not engage in theory in the proper sense of the term. Mearsheimer argues that E.H. Carr and George Kennan are examples of realist thinkers who share a substantive focus with contemporary neorealist scholars (namely in their anathema towards liberalism and in their contention that states desire power), but nevertheless do not "have a story to tell about the causes of security competition."\textsuperscript{6} Thus Mearsheimer declares that "there is no theory" in either thinker's oeuvre.\textsuperscript{7} Similarly, Waltz argues that Morgenthau believes international political theory to be an impossible enterprise. According to Waltz, Morgenthau was fond of repeating Blaise Pascal's remark that the history of the world would have been different had Cleopatra's nose been a bit shorter, and then asking, 'how do you systematize that?' His appreciation of the role of the accidental and the occurrence of the unexpected in politics dampened his theoretical aspirations.\textsuperscript{8}

Waltz argues that Morgenthau's recognition of and concession to the power of contingency entails theoretical defeat. Theory, which only has jurisdiction over repetition, is reduced to silence in the face of the accidental, contingent, or unexpected. The theoretical reticence Waltz believes to be characteristic of the classical political thinkers owes itself ultimately to their skepticism towards conceptualizing the political realm in an autonomous and systematic fashion. Significantly, Waltz's juxtaposition of the classical thinkers, who are ostensibly devoid of theory, and neorealism, which offers the first true theory of international politics, highlights the latter's stringent demand on theory:

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{5} Mearsheimer, "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," 25.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{———}, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, 18.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\end{quotation}
theory provides causal explanations for the law-like. Conceptual enterprises that do not engage in
this scientific enterprise are thus not theoretical.

While neorealism is understood as scientific theory, which is presented by Waltz and
Mearsheimer as the only kind of theory worth its name, it is also understood to be explanatory rather
than normative. In asserting that “realist theories seek to explain politics as it really is, as opposed to
normative theories that offer prescriptions for how politics ought to be,”9 Stephen Walt invokes the
long-standing realist claim to seeing “the world as it is, not as we would like it to be”10 as well as the
more specific Weberian notion of value-freedom implied by the division between positive and
normative. In painting the distinction so starkly, Walt intimates that realist knowledge is agnostic to
the desirability of the empirical truths it elucidates. Mearsheimer reiterates the same dichotomy,
juxtaposing realism’s explanatory objectives against the ethical objectives of normative theory:
“Realism is not a normative theory[,] and it provides no criteria for moral judgment. Instead,
realism merely seeks to explain how the world works.”11 By differentiating itself from normative
theory, neorealists suggest that the theoretical enterprise, though it may be conducted by individuals
with particular normative inclinations, is nevertheless devoted primarily to objective explanations of
structural political phenomena. As such, realism as scientific, causal theory contains neither
standards for adjudicating ethical tensions nor systematic normative theorizing.

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Katznelson and Helen Milner (Norton, 2002), 199.
10 Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 4. Note how this echoes Machiavelli’s famous distinction in Chapter 15 of
The Prince: "It has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it.
And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far
from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin
rather than his preservation" (61).
footnote 182
1.2 Do Neorealists Meet Their Own Standards of Value-Neutral Social Science?

Despite its centrality to the study of international relations, neorealism has continually been criticized for its logical, empirical, and normative insufficiencies. Some scholars have questioned the fruitfulness of the neorealist research program in terms of its capacity to generate empirically insightful scientific knowledge, either arguing that Waltz’s conceptualization of structure must be supplemented by an invigorated understanding of unit-level processes and international institutions or concluding that realism is simply a degenerative paradigm.12 More radical critics have problematized the positivist, utilitarian, statist, and structuralist foundations of neorealism as well as connections between scientific realism’s theoretical preoccupation with continuity and its political conservatism.13 Absent in all of these critical perspectives is sustained immanent analysis of whether neorealism lives up to its own scientific standards. To correct this oversight, the following sections engage in systematic, immanent examination of how neorealist practice fares against its ideal of explanatory and value-free scientific inquiry. I demonstrate how neorealists fail to meet their own standards and assess the significance of this shortcoming, focusing in particular on what it indicates about the relationship between neorealist science and value judgments.


13 In particular, see the contributions by Ashley and Cox in Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. 
I begin my immanent analysis by outlining and expanding upon two criticisms of scientific realism in the existing literature, namely its conflation of description and explanation as well as its failure to specify clear conditions under which its hypotheses are to be rejected. While Ioverview these arguments to accentuate scientific realism’s most elementary errors, I do so only as a part of my immanent analysis. I do not accept the meta-theoretical commitments of the authors whose arguments I use; nor do I affirm their judgments that the solution to neorealism’s failures is either to embrace an alternative paradigm, e.g. constructivism, institutionalism, neoclassical realism, or to render scientific realism rigorous enough to meet criteria for progressive scientific knowledge laid out by Imre Lakatos or other philosophers of science. After illustrating neorealism’s failure to meet its own professed standard of causal theory and scientific explanation, I move on to assess how Waltz and Mearsheimer, in particular, respond to empirical anomalies. Once again, I do so not to measure their responses against an external meta-theoretical standard, but as part of an immanent analysis of neorealism’s explicit commitments to value-neutrality.

1.2.1 Aiming for Scientific Explanation… and Missing

Despite the contention that neorealist theory is explanatory and primarily concerned with determining causality, realist scholarship betrays some essential flaws that prove damaging to its scientific credibility. In particular, realists persistently finesse the distinction between description and explanation, evading the latter’s stricter demands for generating observable implications that allow for systematic testing and adjudication between rival hypotheses. In Mearsheimer’s major theoretical exposition, he notes that "offensive realism is mainly a descriptive theory. It explains how great powers have behaved in the past and how they are likely to behave in the future." Accurate description of an explanandum, that is, the phenomenon to be accounted for, is certainly a prerequisite for causal

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explanation, but description does not exhaust the burden of and is hence insufficient for causal explanation. A theory that explains phenomena well will, of course, have some descriptive leverage on it, but the latter does not necessarily entail the former. In other words, good description does not necessarily imply correct explanation.\textsuperscript{15}

Both Waltz and Mearsheimer fail to take this distinction seriously. Waltz mistakenly deduces that because structural realism provides an explanation of the persistence of \textit{Realpolitik}, the very existence of recurrent patterns automatically proves realist theory correct.\textsuperscript{16} Mearsheimer argues that the ubiquitous presence of security competition and great power conflicts "means that realist theories are likely to have much to say about international politics in the 21st century."\textsuperscript{17} By conflating description of how the world works with explanation of why particular behaviors and outcomes obtain, both theorists commit a dubious leap from the existence of political phenomena (e.g. security competition, power politics) to the epistemological power of realist theory. By presuming that \textit{Realpolitik} behavior necessarily verifies realist theory, both in effect deny the necessity of testing how structural realist theory fares against alternative explanations (e.g. constructivist, domestic politics, bureaucratic, interest group, etc.) of the same phenomena. As Alexander Wendt puts it:

\textit{the relative frequency of /R/\textit{ealpolitik}... has nothing to do with 'realism.' Realism should be seen as an explanation of /R/\textit{ealpolitik}, not a description of it. Conflating the two makes it impossible to tell how well the one explains the other, and leads to the tautology that war makes realism true.}\textsuperscript{18}

The tautology that Wendt identifies is significant not only because such a basic inferential error undercuts the realist claim to science, but also because it illuminates the danger of


\textsuperscript{16} See his linking of structural realism with persistent and recurrent patterns in international politics in Waltz, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, 66, 110, 17.

\textsuperscript{17} Mearsheimer, "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," 29.

\textsuperscript{18} Wendt, "Constructing International Politics," 76.
realist theorists becoming invested in the empirical phenomena that ostensibly give their theories explanatory credibility.

The failure to test competing causal explanations of the same phenomena is a criticism that extends to scientific realists more generally. Stephen Brooks makes this error in his attempt to adjudicate between neorealism and what he calls postclassical realism. While he derives observable implications that allow him to judge the relative explanatory power of his two categories of realism, his conclusion that post-Cold War German and Japanese behavior, Ukraine’s renunciation of nuclear power, and economic cooperation in the developing world prove neorealism wrong and postclassical realism right is premature. The fact that the observable implications he derives in each case study are consistent with alternative institutionalist and constructivist explanations remains conspicuously unacknowledged.

The relative gains literature, which claims to explain why states care about relative gains in ways that impede interstate cooperation, is plagued by the same problem. Realists contend that the dangers of anarchy force states to reject cooperation that may benefit other states in ways that alter the power distribution to their disadvantage because of subsequent security implications. However, as Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik note in their criticism of Joseph Grieco’s empirical investigations of trade policy in the aftermath of the Tokyo Round, a variety of rationalist and non-rationalist explanations predict conflict and bargaining failures. Rather than deriving divergent observable implications to facilitate empirical assessment of competing realist, interest group, institutional, and epistemic explanations, Grieco infers that the presence of cooperative failures confirms the explanatory power of realism. The lack of systematic tests by realists is especially puzzling since Mearsheimer explicitly acknowledges that there are "non-realist (i.e., non-security) logics that might explain why states worry about relative gains," including strategic trade as well as

Indeed, he even admits the existence of cases where relative gains considerations mattered when security was not at stake, e.g. in economic relations among OECD countries during the Cold War. Although Mearsheimer confesses that states may care about relative gains "not for material reasons, but because it is human nature to compare one's progress with that of others," realist scholars have not devised systematic tests to appraise the relative explanatory power of realist and equally plausible non-realist explanations of relative gains-seeking. The significance of relative gains-seeking behavior for cooperation in international relations notwithstanding, realists have hardly satisfied the explanatory burden of proof. Despite their professed adherence to causal specification, realists have curiously neglected the task of subjecting competing explanations of the same phenomena to methodical empirical scrutiny. Such an omission, which goes hand in hand with the automatic presumption of realism’s explanatory primacy, does not sit well with realism’s ostensible commitment to scientific rigor.

In addition to paying insufficient attention to non-realist accounts of the phenomena realists seek to explain, realists have been criticized for inadequately specifying the conditions under which their own hypotheses are to be rejected. Waltz, in particular, fails to measure up to his own criteria regarding theory specification and theory testing, despite the fact that Theory of International Politics very clearly adumbrates what a commitment to scientific explanation entails. He notes that the first challenge is to state a theory “with enough precision and plausibility to make testing worthwhile,” that is to “define terms” and to specify the connections between variables clearly such that logical expectations can be derived and empirically assessed. At first glance, Waltz’s own structural theory appears to meet such a standard; it gives rise to a specific set of macroeconomic hypotheses predicting the greater stability of bipolar systems as well as a host of expectations regarding the

22 See p.21 of Ibid. on Krasner, Grieco, Mastanduno.
23 Ibid.: 20.
24 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 13-14.
balance of power, notably that states will engage in balancing behavior and the system will tend towards balance. Nevertheless, it is significant that Waltz issues the following caveat in *Theory of International Politics*: “[T]hough balance of power theory offers some predictions, the predictions are indeterminate. Because only a loosely defined and inconstant condition of balance is predicted, it is difficult to say that any given distribution of power falsifies the theory.” 25 Ironically, Waltz’s admission lends credence to the devastating criticisms leveled against realist theorizing on balance of power, which point out its conceptual ambiguity as well as its theoretical and predictive indeterminacy. The confusion over what Waltz’s theory predicts and what constitutes balancing behavior indicates that Waltz’s realism fails to live up to his own account of the first and primary challenge of scientific explanation: to specify precise theories that generate clear expectations amenable to empirical testing. 26

The specific dispute over what evidence would disconfirm Waltz’s theoretical expectations on balancing behavior highlights the extent of the explanatory conundrum. As Elman notes, it is unclear how much balancing behavior Waltz’s theory predicts. Yet Waltz’s own remarks and Elman’s and Elman’s shifting views reveal more than ambiguity; they suggest at least a little prevarication. Waltz denies that Schroeder’s historical evidence that states have not, in the aggregate, balanced against potential hegemons constitutes falsifying evidence, arguing specifically that:

Structural theory, and the theory of balance of power that follows from it, do not lead one to expect that states will always or even usually engage in balancing behavior. Balancing is a strategy for survival, a way of attempting to maintain a state’s autonomous way of life. To argue that bandwagoning represents a behavior more common to states than balancing has become a bit of a fad. Whether states bandwagon more often than they balance is an interesting question. To believe that an affirmative answer would refute balance of power theory is, however, to misinterpret the theory and to commit what one might call ‘the numerical fallacy’ – to draw a qualitative conclusion from a quantitative result. States try various strategies for survival... Balancing theory does not predict uniformity of behavior but rather the strong tendency of major states in the system, or in regional subsystems,

25 Ibid., 124.
26 These criticisms are debated in Vasquez and Elman, *Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate*. 33
to resort to balancing when they have to. That states try different strategies of survival is hardly surprising. The recurrent emergence of balancing behavior, and the appearance of the patterns the behavior produces, should all the more be seen as impressive evidence supporting the theory.27

Waltz’s equivocation contravenes his ostensible commitment to precision: his theory does not predict that states will “usually” balance, only that they will exhibit a “strong tendency” to do so.

Even Elman and Elman, who seek to defend realism against Vasquez’s and Schroeder’s onslaught, understand Waltz’s theory as predicting that, “in the aggregate, states are constrained by the system and will tend to balance.” Thus, they acknowledge that Schroeder’s historical findings pose a problem for Waltz’s theory.28 Colin Elman’s 2003 retraction and detailed explication of automatic balance of power theory, regardless of whether such a move lends credence to Vasquez’s criticism of realism’s degenerating problem-shifts, ultimately fails to help Waltz. In fact, by specifying five types of negative feedback that tend to move the international system toward equilibrium, he makes it impossible to falsify balance of power theory on the basis of balancing behavior. Given the presence of other types of negative feedback, even “little or no balancing” behavior on the part of states may be consistent with realist theory.29

Waltz’s particular response to his critics regarding the most specific and readily testable hypothesis on balancing behavior in Theory of International Politics signals a general reluctance to specify what empirical data would invalidate realist theory.30 He rejects tout court the notion of a critical or

27 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," International Security 25, no. 1 (2000): 38-39. Italics mine. 28 Elman, Elman, and Schroeder, "History Vs. Neo-Realism: A Second Look," 192. Waltz’s dismissal of Schroeder’s historical research as “a mélange of irrelevant diplomatic lore” is certainly ironic given his admission in Theory of International Politics that the ambiguity of balance of power theory’s predictions necessitate hard confirmatory tests, which in turn calls for meticulous historical and diplomatic research. See Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," The American Political Science Review 91, no. 4 (1997): 914, Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 125. 29 See Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, 11-12. See footnote 52 for Elman’s retraction. 30 In general, both Waltz and Mearsheimer shy away from specifying the conditions under which realist theory would be falsified, while confidently referring to empirical evidence that confirms or supports their respective theoretical expectations. See John J. Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," International Relations 20, no. 1 (2006): 111. Both theorists have also implied that failure of neorealist predictions to be validated may simply mean not enough time has passed. Crucially, neorealist hypotheses do not specify a time frame. Regarding the formation of balances of power, Waltz notes that his "theory cannot say how long the process will take" in Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," 916. Regarding the prediction of retrenchment of U.S. forces in Europe in the absence of Soviet threat, Mearsheimer argues "too little time has passed since the Cold War ended… to make a judgment." See John J.
conclusive test, asserting specifically that "falsification is untenable" as the sole scientific standard.31 Instead, theories are to be assessed by a combination of methods, including falsification, verification, and consistency between empirical outcomes and theoretical expectations.32

Interestingly, Waltz contends that ambiguity is central to theory testing, warning that "what is to be taken as evidence for or against a theory is always in question" is always subject to the vagaries of interpretation.33 In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz contends:

> Testing theories is a difficult and subtle task, made so by the interdependence of fact and theory, by the elusive relation between reality and theory as an instrument for its apprehension. Questions of truth and falsity are somehow involved, but so are questions of usefulness and uselessness. In the end, one sticks with the theory that reveals most, even if its validity is suspect.34

Waltz’s recognition of the lack of clear, well-defined borders between theory and reality and the intimation that systematic testing may not yield decisive results is in tension with his attempt to render theory, and presumably its assessment, more rigorous. The tenor of his comments on the indeterminacy of testing theory is at odds with his polemical remarks at the beginning of *Theory of International Politics* against those who use the term “theory” too loosely and without regard to stringent scientific standards. To then suggest that the epistemological validity of theory is only part -- and it is hinted, more trivially than one might expect -- of its overall evaluation undermines the claim that neorealism is primarily interested in explaining causal relations. It is unclear what Waltz intends by suggesting that one accept theory for its revelations even if its validity is doubtful. If validity refers to the ability of a theory to explain the cause of a particular phenomenon (i.e. explanatory validity), then it is ambiguous what revelations beyond a theory’s explanatory power

Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001): 48, Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 390. Mearsheimer, especially, treads dangerously close to expounding the unfalsifiable claim that states are always revisionist; in the face of inaction or lack of aggressive policy, states are allegedly waiting for more favorable conditions to unleash their hegemonic aspirations. See footnote 14 in ———, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2, footnote 14 on 415.

33 Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," 916.
ought to inspire loyalty to it in the face of weak empirical support and/or disconfirming empirical evidence. What is clear and of significance, however, is that Waltz's vague criterion for theory acceptance (i.e. if it is revelatory) does not refer to scientific knowledge, but rather some sort of "useful" insight which compensates for precisely its questionable explanatory power.35

1.2.2 Neorealist Responses to Empirical Anomalies: Assessing the Claim of Value-Neutrality

The failure of neorealism to meet the most basic standards of causal explanation undermines its own professed adherence to science. At a minimum, the controversy over neorealism’s logical, theoretical, and empirical sufficiency should elicit some skepticism over the claim that its primary objective is to advance scientific knowledge of the world as it is without regard to how it ought to be. While Vasquez’s turn to philosophy of science takes neorealism’s commitment to testable empirical knowledge at face value, I take this claim as something to be appraised rather than presumed. Moreover, I contend that neorealism’s empirical shortcomings provide crucial evidence not only of its failure to meet its own explanatory standards but also its professed commitment to value-neutral knowledge. In other words, how neorealists respond to empirical reality when it disconfirms their theoretical expectations provides a unique opportunity to examine their notions of how the world should be.

Despite the lack of clear standards of falsification, there are a number of salient cases where empirical evidence contravenes the theoretical expectations of explanatory realism, for instance in the failure of the U.S. to act as an offshore balancer36 -- most clearly evidenced by the invasion of Iraq in

35 See also Waltz’s specific contention that theories gain credibility “by unsuccessfully attempting to falsify, by successfully attempting to verify, by demonstrating that outcomes are produced in the way the theory contemplates, and by the intellectual force of the theory itself” in Keohane, ed. Neorealism and Its Critics, 336. It is unclear what intellectual force entails, but it is notably distinct from the three preceding methods of empirical assessment.

36 Mearsheimer claims that the structure of the international system causes all great powers to seek hegemony, with the exception of those who have attained regional hegemony (e.g. 19th century Britain and contemporary America). These
2003, U.S. support for NATO expansion, the continuation of U.S. troop deployment abroad after the fall of the Soviet Union, as well as U.S. engagement policy towards China -- or in U.S. non-proliferation policy and nuclear behavior during the Cold War. What is significant is not the existence of anomalies per se, but rather the systematic way in which both Waltz and Mearsheimer have reacted to particular U.S. foreign policies that are inconsistent with predictions deduced from their theories. In every case, the presence of an empirical anomaly leads to normative criticism of precisely the behavior that falsifies realist theory instead of an attempt to re-specify the theory to generate more accurate predictions. If realist theory were value-neutral, then there should be no systematic bias with regard to the desirability of what happens in the world. Similarly, if realist theory were primarily explanatory, then the proper response to empirical falsification would be to reassess the theory.

To clarify what the following analysis is intended to show, let me begin by stating what I am not doing. Any mention of the term ‘anomaly’ raises the specter of Kuhn and the philosophy of science. I do not intend to deploy Kuhn to provide a sociological account of neorealist responses to anomalies, which I find counterproductive for reasons that will become clear. Furthermore, unlike Vasquez, I do not investigate responses to anomalies for the purpose of demonstrating neorealism’s failure to meet standards for scientific knowledge espoused in the philosophy of science literature. To the extent that my analysis unearths empirical shortcomings, I concentrate primarily on their implications for neorealist claims to value-neutrality. However, I deem it important to emphasize

states are then predicted to behave like offshore balancers, i.e. relying on regional powers to check rising powers, because of the geographic difficulties associated with projecting power across large bodies of water, which makes global hegemony improbable, if not impossible. See Chapter 7 of Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.

My claim differs from Vasquez’s since we are dealing with different domains. Vasquez considers neorealism as a coherent research program or a series of related theories. He argues that realists reformulate hypotheses and rely upon auxiliary propositions to salvage explanatory credibility in the face of anomalies. For instance, he considers Walt’s balance of threat and Schweller’s balance of interest to be ad-hoc attempts to save Waltz’s theory in the face of anomalous alliance patterns; as such, they constitute degenerating problem-shifts according to Lakatosian standards. My analysis, alternatively, examines how Waltz and Mearsheimer, individually, respond to empirical anomalies. Though our analyses are not incompatible, they are oriented towards different purposes. Vasquez’s evidence could be deployed as part of an immanent assessment of all neorealist scholars, but as it stands his criticism is meant to demonstrate neorealism’s failure to live up to Lakatosian criteria. I will address why I think Vasquez’s turn to meta-theory is misguided later in the chapter.
that my claim is not that neorealists are normative, which is as banal as it is unhelpful. What the patterned response to anomalies illustrates is that neorealist theory itself demands the type of explanatory repositioning and overtly normative argumentation practiced by neorealist scholars, despite their negative consequences for explanatory and normative credibility. In other words, normativity is not a product of scholarly laxity; it inheres in the structure of neorealist theory. As will be explained later, my immanent analysis diverges from the critical work of neorealism’s positivist detractors and ultimately suggests the necessity of inquiring into the political and ethical judgments implicated in the theoretical constitution of scientific realism.

In the first chapter of *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz provides a seven-step program for testing theories. The last step is as follows: "If a test is not passed, ask whether the theory flunks completely, needs repair and restatement, or requires a narrowing of the scope of its explanatory claims." While the empirical examples discussed here are not from explicitly systematic tests devised by neorealist scholars, each one constitutes an empirical anomaly for neorealist theory. Thus, while one would not necessarily recommend rejecting theory because of one, or even a few, anomalies, their existence ought to invite the general reflexivity implied by Waltz. It does not seem unreasonable or antithetical to the spirit of Waltz’s rule to modify it such that in the face of a number of striking empirical anomalies which contravene neorealist hypotheses, neorealist scholars ask what these empirical outcomes suggest about whether and how the theory ought to be modified in order to improve its explanatory capabilities. Mearsheimer explicitly recognizes that the accumulation of anomalies poses a problem for realist theory. Significantly, empirical anomalies rarely generate Waltz’s suggested response. Instead, neorealist scholars are more likely to recommend changing the offending, real-world policy in question than to try to improve the theory.

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Before discussing empirical anomalies, it is necessary to clarify what each theory claims to explain. In particular, although both theorists claim to offer structural theory, they differ on what outcomes or behaviors their theories can adequately account for. Waltz argues that structural or systems theories identify a set of relevant constraints that face all states, without predicting how each state will react. Structural pressures simply imply that dissimilar units may behave similarly (e.g. liberal democratic and authoritarian states embrace Realpolitik) in response to the environment, without making specific predictions about how each state will react at any given time. In drawing a distinction between a theory of foreign policy and a theory of international political outcomes, Waltz claims neorealism qualifies as the latter. Systemic theory cannot explain particular reactions to systemic constraints, which requires unit level analysis and investigation of state characteristics.

Waltz warns:

Structurally we can describe and understand the pressures states are subject to. We cannot predict how they will react to the pressures without knowledge of their internal dispositions… A theory of international politics bears on the foreign policies of nations while claiming to explain only certain aspects of them. It can tell us what international conditions national policies have to cope with. To think that a theory of international politics can in itself say how the coping is likely to be done is the opposite of the reductionist error.40

Waltz does not claim that his theory is irrelevant to foreign policy; he simply argues that to infer what foreign policy will be solely on the basis of an appraisal of systemic pressures -- that is, to make deterministic predictions on the basis of indeterminate structural “constraints” -- is an analytical error. Despite this caveat, Waltz does claim to account for broad patterns in international relations, notably the recurrence of balancing and the relative stability of bipolar systems.41

Crucially, Mearsheimer rejects and is highly critical of Waltz’s distinction between foreign policy and international outcomes. He asserts that the theory of offensive realism explains both

40 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 71-72. See also p. 122 for Waltz’s claim that balance of power theory is not a theory of foreign policy.
41 The controversy over what is predicted by Waltz’s theory does not pose a formidable problem for my analysis since my primary objective is not to assess the strength of his science, but rather what his responses reveal about the links between realist’s positivist claims and its normative judgments.
general political outcomes and specific foreign policy behaviors. Mearsheimer's erasure of Waltz's distinction implies that structural pressures are strong enough on their own to outweigh any conflicting domestic pressures and hence to single-handedly determine the foreign policy of states. What is relevant here is that Mearsheimer's claim to explain foreign policy outcomes makes his theory more readily falsifiable in the face of foreign policy decisions that contravene realist expectations. It also causes him to respond differently on an explanatory level than Waltz, which is why Waltz and Mearsheimer will be treated separately in the analyses that follow. While both theorists engage in normative critique of particular phenomena that contravene realist expectations, the different explanatory claims of their theories -- namely that Waltz only accounts for international political outcomes whereas Mearsheimer accounts for both outcomes and foreign policy decisions -- lead them to slightly different explanatory responses to the "anomaly" in question. While Mearsheimer always offers a non-realist explanation of an anomaly, Waltz -- although often intimating the same -- usually claims that realism is still epistemologically sound. Neither engages in any systematic re-appraisal of how the accumulation of empirical anomalies suggests realist explanatory hypotheses ought to be revised or if these anomalies imply that particular boundary conditions, under which the hypotheses are operable, need to be specified.

1.2.1.1 The War Against Iraq

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq has engendered vocal opposition from realists in general and Mearsheimer and Walt in particular. The explicitly critical response and the unequivocal

42 Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," 112,———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 422., footnote 60,———, "Reckless States and Realism," 244-46.
connection made by scholars between realism and an oppositional politics begs the question of the relationship between realist explanatory theory and politics in the world. Specifically, it calls us to evaluate whether the normative judgments against the war are related to realist theoretical and empirical analyses in systematic ways. If we shift the emphasis to what the war implies about realism’s explanatory sufficiency, then we can understand that the realist response to the Iraq War – which is considered an empirical anomaly – is twofold. On an explanatory level, realists offer a non-realist account of the anomaly, despite the fact that such causal claims are inconsistent with the theoretical and ontological framework of realism. On a normative level, they criticize precisely the failure to abide by the behavior predicted by explanatory realism. Importantly, the presence of an empirical anomaly does not entail theoretical revision, only normative disapproval.

First and foremost, given that Mearsheimer purports to provide a general theory of great power foreign policy, it is important to ask whether the U.S. invasion of Iraq validates or disconfirms the theoretical expectations of offensive realism. Ostensibly and contrary to what Mearsheimer claims, the U.S. invasion would seem to confirm his theory. After all, Mearsheimer's argument that states maximize rather than balance power is the most substantive difference between his theory of offensive realism and Waltz's theory of defensive realism: "Great powers will continue looking for opportunities to increase their share of world power, and if a favorable situation arises, they will move to undermine that stable order." In other words, states have hegemonic aspirations and will exploit favorable opportunities to increase their share of world power, as acknowledged by Mearsheimer's own insights on the continuity between the first Bush administration's explicit

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45 John J. Mearsheimer, "Power and Fear in Great Power Politics," in One Hundred Year Commemoration to the Life of Hans Morgenthau (1904-2004), ed. G.O. Mazur (New York: Semenenko Foundation, 2004), 193. Mearsheimer argues that maximizing power renders states less likely to be attacked, more likely to win a conflict if deterrence fails, and less dependent on unreliable allies in Mearsheimer, "Reckless States and Realism," 252.

46 States do so by going to war, according to Mearsheimer: "War is the main strategy states employ to acquire relative power." Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 138.
intention to preserve its preeminent position of power in 1991 and the 2002 National Security
Strategy's position on preemptive war, checking rising powers, and maintaining hegemonic status.\textsuperscript{47}

While the U.S. decision to invade Iraq may seem to support Mearsheimer's primary theoretical claim, it violates his subsidiary theoretical expectation that regional hegemons will behave as offshore balancers, only intervening in other regions if necessary to prevent the rise of a hegemon. Because the U.S. chose to engage in a preventive war rather than “buckpass” until the last minute and rely upon the help of regional powers, the case of Iraq falsifies the prediction that U.S. foreign policy will abide by the logic of offshore balancing. Overall, however, whether the U.S. invasion of Iraq confirms or falsifies realist expectations is unclear because of the ambiguities and contradictions within Mearsheimer's theory. On the one hand, the U.S. invasion of Iraq might provide confirmatory evidence that states do aggressively maximize power to maximize security and that, in spite of the liberal rhetoric of foreign policy, factors related to security and power are the true motivations behind rational policy. On the other hand, the U.S. invasion falsifies Mearsheimer's general presumption that states correctly anticipate the costs of their actions as well as his specific offshore balancing hypothesis. The logical coherence of the offshore balancing hypothesis -- based on the assumption of the “stopping power of water” -- notwithstanding, Mearsheimer and Walt clearly believe that Iraq empirically disconfirms the theory of offensive realism and are invested in this explanatory failure for reasons that will become clear.

Rather than conceding the possibility that realism's rationality assumption is mis-specified and that strategic logic can lead to suboptimal outcomes, Mearsheimer argues that U.S. foreign policy -- which violates the offshore balancing hypothesis -- is due to non-realist causes, namely those related to liberal political culture or perverse domestic politics.\textsuperscript{48} In the case of Iraq, Mearsheimer and Walt


\textsuperscript{48} See Mearsheimer, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, 402. By arguing that liberal ideology somehow trumps structural pressures of the international system, Mearsheimer ironically embraces the very gap between systemic pressure and state behavior he criticizes Waltz for upholding. Further note that Mearsheimer's resorting to a non-realist explanation where
offer an interest group explanation (centered around the influence of the Israeli lobby in U.S. politics) of the conditions under which the war became rationally intelligible and thereby possible. What is notable is not the Israeli lobby argument per se, but rather that a non-realist argument is offered to explain an empirical anomaly that is pathological according to explanatory realism.

The Israeli lobby argument is antithetical to the presuppositions of realism in at least two distinct ways. First, in making an interest-group based argument Mearsheimer ironically gives weight to the very domestic political considerations he criticizes other scholars for focusing on. According to his own work, contemporary realist theory is distinguished (from, say, comparative politics) by its structuralism, which justifies treating states as billiard balls and implies the relative unimportance of “domestic political and economic factors” in explaining foreign policy outcomes and state behavior. 49

Second, the Israeli lobby argument is precisely the same type of work Mearsheimer considers at odds with offensive realism’s theoretical premise of rational, strategic behavior. Indeed, Mearsheimer is very critical of the work of defensive realists who turn to domestic politics to explain foreign policy behavior:

[S]elf-defeating behavior…cannot be explained by strategic logic but must instead be the result of misguided policies pushed by selfish interest groups on the home front. Defensive realists often adopt this line of argument. Their favorite examples of self-defeating behavior are Japan before World War II, Germany before World War I, and Germany before World War II: each state suffered a crushing military defeat in the ensuing war. I challenge this general line of argument [via offensive realism], paying careful attention to the German and Japanese cases, where the evidence shows that they were not engaged in self-defeating behavior fueled by malign domestic politics. 50

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liberal ideology is decisive contradicts his statements elsewhere that while liberal discourse may dominate American politics, realist motives determine foreign policy. See ———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 25-26. 
49 Mearsheimer, ”The False Promise of International Institutions,” 49., footnote 183
50 ———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 171. See also pp. 209-212. This chapter will make clear that Mearsheimer disagrees not so much with the pairing of strategic/optimal with non-strategic/sub-optimal, but with the normative evaluation of what constitutes optimal and foolish behavior; in general, Mearsheimer believes self-defeating behavior is fueled by malign domestic politics. Thus his critique of the defensive realists boils down to his belief that expansionary and aggressive behavior (e.g. Imperial Japan, Imperial and Nazi Germany) is optimal for the purpose of achieving state security.
In claiming -- and criticizing-- links between the Israeli lobby and the foreign policies of both the U.S. and Israel, Mearsheimer undermines the theoretical underpinnings of offensive realism. In asserting the “self-destructive” nature of Israeli policy and occupation, Mearsheimer merely begs the question: how can a state pursue self-destructive policies in a world where states maximize survival above all else? Equally puzzling: how can “the occupation [be] a threat to the existence of the state of Israel” when offensive realism alleges that occupation and aggressive foreign policies are rational and commonplace behaviors throughout the history of sovereign states? Mearsheimer’s normative judgments about the (ir)rationality and (sub)optimality of foreign policy call into question the empirical accuracy of his theory’s key operating assumptions and ontological claims.

Similarly, Mearsheimer often blames liberal ideology for what he considers disastrous foreign policy decisions. Yet such an explanation is inconsistent with the core ontological assumptions of realist theory. To clarify, realism’s ontological assumptions regarding the causal primacy of materialist factors and the epiphenomenalism of discourse, specifically “liberal” rhetoric, implies that democratization and human rights-based justifications for the invasion of Iraq are disingenuous: mere rationalizations of policy decided on the prior basis of “true” materially-based power considerations. Offensive realism as structural, explanatory theory deduces from the state of anarchy the importance of power distributions and the imperative to maximize relative power. According to Mearsheimer’s theoretical premises, the conditioning powers of anarchy and its attendant environment of uncertainty and fear are strong enough to essentially trump other domestic or ideational considerations in the formation of foreign policy.

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51 This is especially puzzling given Mearsheimer’s conceptualization of states as optimally rational over the long-term. See p. 31 of The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.
53 This is problematic for Mearsheimer since, unlike Waltz, he claims theoretical assumptions are useless unless they reflect the world accurately.
By implication (and explicitly argued by Mearsheimer), the language of democracy promotion and the tribute paid to liberal values do not speak to the true causes of foreign policy or state behavior. That is, one ought not confuse justifications with causes. In his theoretical work and general analyses of U.S. foreign policy, Mearsheimer is acute to the disjunction between the rhetoric of liberalism and the “real” power-based causes of foreign policy. Mearsheimer’s insight into how foreign policy is often masked in “the language of liberalism” but is thoroughly “guided by realist logic, although the public pronouncements of its leaders might lead one to think otherwise” seems to be a compelling possibility in the case of Iraq. Elsewhere, Mearsheimer echoes the distinction between principled language and realist logic, boldly asserting that

We behave in the world according to Realistic [sic] dictates on almost every occasion… we act according to the dictates of Realpolitik, but we justify our policies in terms of liberal ideologies. So what is going on here is that in many cases, elites speak one language [in public], and act according to a different logic and speak a different language behind closed doors.

Mearsheimer’s confidence that national security policy abides by the logic of realism, in spite of being overlaid by a veneer of liberal rhetoric, suggests that to be consistent with his own ontological claims, he would have to see Iraq as precisely a case where appeals to human rights or democratization masquerade real security-based attempts to maximize power. Such an interpretation would cohere with Mearsheimer’s broad interpretation of U.S. foreign policy from the 19th century onwards and his discussion of the causes of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in particular. Mearsheimer acknowledges that ideological motives, a sense of moral duty engendered out of the belief in American exceptionalism, and baser economic objectives all played a role in expansionism, but he emphasizes that these diverse motives (still relevant in the case of Iraq) “did not contradict the

security imperative; in fact, they usually complemented it.” The primary theoretical expectation of Mearsheimer's offensive realism is that states, despite the principled nature of their public pronouncements, aggressively maximize power in order to maximize security. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in a post-9/11 setting seems, on the face of it, to confirm at least this major tenet of offensive realism. Yet Mearsheimer is adamant that the Iraq War, in a temporary suspension of the forces of structural realism as it were, is due to non-realist, non-strategic causes.

Moreover, the alleged deviation from the prediction of realist theory is precisely what elicits realist disapprobation. In explaining realist opposition to the war, Mearsheimer argues:

The decision to invade Iraq was predicated on arguments that made no sense to most realists. Indeed, [A] many of the claims of the neo-conservatives who drove the U.S. to war contradicted basic realist logic, [B] which is why almost every realist opposed the war. Of course, states occasionally act in non-strategic ways, which is why realism confronts anomalies from time to time.57

Mearsheimer's response is indicative of realism's lack of genuine value-neutrality. If realism were value-neutral, then Mearsheimer's argument linking normative disapproval of the war to its violation of "realist logic" would be untenable. For it is tantamount to saying that the war in Iraq is an empirical anomaly that realism as explanatory theory has failed to explain; therefore, realists oppose the war. Without a judgment of the normative value of rational, strategic action -- as Mearsheimer specifies it -- this logical inference is untenable: the leap from explanatory failure to normative disapprobation is logically indefensible. It remains unclear why an explanatory theory that is wrong empirically ought to nevertheless serve as guidance for foreign policy.58

57 ———, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," 114.
58 Mearsheimer goes on to argue that "when states violate realist precepts, they invariably get punished, often severely, for their errors." This might be an argument for why realist injunctions ought to be followed in spite of the fact that states often ignore the imperatives of *Realpolitik*. Nevertheless, it does not relieve the explanatory burden of proof carried by realism, which still has to account for the causes of actual state behavior. Moreover, the normative viability of Mearsheimer's argument depends upon greater theoretical explication and empirical proof, which has yet to be provided. Peter Feaver's comments in P. D. Feaver et al., "Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm?(or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)," *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000)." are relevant here. Feaver argues that realism is characterized not only by the oft-
Yet the neorealist response to the Iraq War is overwhelmingly normative. Significantly, the normative prescriptions offered by realists are systematically related to their explanatory framework. While realists entertain a variety of arguments against the war -- e.g. invasion would be costly and ineffective, that even the pre-war status quo of containment would be a cheaper and effective alternative, etc. -- they all reduce to one simple argument consistent with the main premise (and prediction) of Mearsheimer's theoretical work: acting as an offshore balancer is the most efficient means to guarantee U.S. security (regional hegemons maximize security by choosing the strategy of offshore balancing). Hence before the war, Mearsheimer argues that instead of invading Iraq or even sanctioning it, the U.S. ought to get Iran and Iraq to balance and thereby contain each other, which "would allow the United States to withdraw its forces from Saudi Arabia and act as an offshore balancer in the region, as it did from 1947 until 1990." Elsewhere, Mearsheimer repeats his policy prescription: "The United States acted as offshore balancer in the Middle East during the Cold War, and there is no reason it could not pursue that same policy today." Instead of asking how empirical reality suggests his theory ought to be revised to attain greater explanatory power, Mearsheimer's repeated claim that structural, strategic factors drive policy but also by the oft-neglected claim that the failure to abide by *Realpolitik* leads to punishment. However, as Feaver notes this claim is under-theorized and has not been subject to rigorous empirical testing. Realists may indeed be right about the effects of foreign policy. Yet it is notable that this claim has not been framed as a hypothesis to be scientifically adjudicated. Instead, it is a claim that is allegedly inherited from classical realists, who ostensibly offer anecdotes revealing the tragic consequences of ignoring *Realpolitik* (e.g. Machiavelli's *The Prince*). This alleged continuity between classical and neorealists, reaffirmed by Feaver, is oversimplified if not simply false. While neorealists presume failing to abide by *Realpolitik* leads to punishment, the classical realists were never this clear. Famously, Machiavelli recognized the power of *fortuna*, whose mark on fate can be decisive: after all, Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli's exemplar of *Realpolitik* at its finest, acquired and lost his state through the fortune of his father and his own illness. Indeed, it says something about Machiavelli's faith in *Realpolitik* that in the face of the contingency, particularity, and radical flux of political life, he ultimately appeals to hope instead of *virtu* (*Discourses on Livy*, 372). It is even more difficult to make the case with Thucydides. If Machiavelli highlights the luck required for *Realpolitik* to succeed, Thucydides lays bare an unpleasant reality: *Realpolitik* often leads to disaster, as demonstrated by the paradoxical juxtaposition of the Athenian brutality towards Melos and the Sicilian expedition immediately following, where Athens' demise is considered the "greatest reversal that ever befell a Hellenic army" (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 473). Thucydides' concern with the importance of shared discourse in maintaining civilization, his intimations of the limits of calculation in the Athenian decision to ally with Corcyra (in a move that suggests expediency over justice), his authorial comments on the motivating emotions, fundamental irrationality, and disastrous consequences of the Athenian attempt to subdue Sicily (256) suggest that he was far from advocating acting solely on the basis of power. Instead, Thucydides' work suggests that interest cannot be constituted outside of a discourse of justice, and that the Melian Dialogue and the Sicilian expedition, the most "realist" parts of *The History*, are in fact tragic illustrations of the pathology of the logic of *Realpolitik*.


60 Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," 115.
response is to reaffirm that offshore balancing is the most effective way to guarantee U.S. security and to recommend that policy be formulated according to such logic. In other words, Mearsheimer advocates what his theory (mis)-predicts, namely that the U.S. behave rationally by adopting the behavior he has designated as optimal.

Ultimately, it is important to emphasize that despite Mearsheimer's admission and insistence on explanatory failure, he does not systematically assess what Iraq empirically suggests about the logic or boundary conditions of his theory. He further courts suspicion by arguing that “Iraq is not an anomalous case,” comparing it to the disaster of Vietnam. One is left to ponder the explanatory implications of this analogy, given that the comparison begs the question of what domestic political argument Mearsheimer would offer to explain the “suboptimal” policy of the American war in Vietnam. In the face of professed explanatory failure, the response that does not arise is revealing: Mearsheimer does not engage in an appraisal of the conditions under which the offensive realist or offshore balancing hypotheses are true or false. The presence of a crucial empirical anomaly does not lead to an attempt to reflect upon the theoretical premises of realist theory.

1.2.1.2 American Engagement Policy Towards a Rising China

Just as Mearsheimer's response to Iraq, which appears to falsify the theoretical expectations of explanatory realism, is to offer a non-realist explanation and normative critique of the empirical anomaly in question, this same pattern can be seen in reference to another key policy concern of realist thinkers: the rise of China. The policy of engagement and the retention of troops in Northeast Asia clearly contravene the expectations of Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism as well as the auxiliary hypothesis that a regional hegemon (read: the U.S.) will behave as an offshore balancer. Mearsheimer argues that the cause of engagement policy, in particular, is liberal ideology, namely “the

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liberal belief that if China could be made both democratic and prosperous, it would become a status
quo power and not engage in security competition with the United States.”62 This belief in the
transformative and pacific powers of liberal economic integration is incompatible with the structural
logic of the international system, which -- according to Mearsheimer's theory -- renders all states
revisionist and aggressive seekers of hegemony.

Hence Mearsheimer calls the policy of engagement and the American failure to act as an
offshore balancer “misguided” and counterproductive: “the United States is… exposing itself to
trouble rather than taking sensible precautions in advance of future conflict.”63 Mearsheimer's
normative indictment of the imprudence of U.S. policy stems directly from the main premise of his
explanatory theory: all great powers are inexorably driven by the logic of hegemony because
maximizing power is the most effective way of guaranteeing survival. This theoretical expectation
underlies Mearsheimer's prescriptions for containment. According to Mearsheimer, China's
economic growth will necessarily be channeled towards developing military capabilities and pursuing
regional hegemony. Whether China is integrated into the liberal trading system or has a democratic
government has no effect on its inevitable hegemonic aspirations and its behavior; after all, all
powers are forced to seek hegemony in order to survive. The inexorable logic of state behavior
means that “China and the United States are destined to be adversaries as China’s power grows.”64

As is true in the case of Iraq, the explanatory framework of realism gives rise to certain
normative positions. Mearsheimer's critique of the policy of engagement is derived from the
theoretical premises of offensive realism, which by dictating the uniform logic of state behavior
implies something about the worth of particular foreign policies. More specifically, if states are
unavoidably revisionist and hegemony-seeking due to structural imperatives, then a policy which

63 Ibid.: 58. Italics mine.
64 ———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 4.
assumes they can be persuaded to become satisfied with the status quo on the basis of norms would be evaluated as misguided or suboptimal, *given the facts of reality.*

While Mearsheimer’s normative positions on China are derived from and thus consistent with his explanatory framework, they also reveal a serious problem, namely that they are a response to empirical falsification. According to Mearsheimer, containment is the foreign policy behavior predicted by his theory, given that regional hegemons will not tolerate the rise of other regional hegemons. If his theory is wrong in explaining the behavior of a great power (the U.S.), then the normative positions he espouses lose their analytical basis. If the U.S. can and does ignore structural imperatives to maintain its preeminence and prevent other states from attaining hegemonic status because of the power of ideational phenomena, then there is no reason why other states cannot behave similarly. The presence of empirical anomalies suggest that realism's brute materialism is more reliant upon mediation than its theorists are wont to acknowledge, rendering its theoretical determinism less convincing.

Mearsheimer's prolific writings on the danger of a rising China along with his criticisms against U.S. policy with regard to China reveal two crucial points. First, Mearsheimer's heavily prescriptive writings disclose the extent to which explanatory frameworks make certain normative judgments more tenable and obvious in relation to others. If the explanatory framework of offensive

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65 Brzezinski and Mearsheimer, *Clash of the Titans.*
66 Moreover, from a more systematic reading it is unclear whether the normative judgment that the U.S. must try to contain a rising and invariably threatening China can actually be sustained on the basis of the explanatory framework of offensive realism. Recall that Mearsheimer's auxiliary hypothesis of offshore balancing is rooted in a claim about geography. If we take the soundness of Mearsheimer's argument for granted, the "stopping power of water" actually undermines the strength and coherence of offensive realist theory. If we accept that the "stopping power of water" prevents states from attempting to project power into other regions, then Mearsheimer's offensive realism falls apart. The claim that existing regional hegemons (Mearsheimer's only case is the U.S.) are likely to act as "offshore balancers" for security reasons is untenable. For there is no reason to prevent the rise of another regional hegemon if they are already deterred and confined to their own regions by the "stopping power of water." If geography is truly a constraint, then why would the rise of a peer competitor lead to "fierce security competition," as claimed on p. 187 of "Power and Fear in Great Power Politics"? If geography impedes a rising regional hegemon from attempting to become a global hegemon, then how is this rising regional hegemon a mortal threat to the existing hegemon? If water is indeed formidable, then logically such a geographical barrier would attenuate the threat of rising powers and security dilemmas between regions. As such, there is an irreconcilable tension between the claim that water makes conquest difficult (if not impossible) and its pacific implications, on the one hand, and the intense security competition deduced from anarchy, on the other.
realism is empirically accurate, then these facts of reality suggest something about the normative worth of certain foreign policies. Thus Mearsheimer's materialist, structural explanatory framework renders engagement as a response to an aspiring hegemon normatively misguided from the perspective of the reigning hegemon. At the same time, Mearsheimer's evaluative and strongly polemical responses are suspect precisely because they indicate explanatory failure. Significant empirical anomalies contravene the theoretical expectations specified, thereby undermining the analytical foundation of Mearsheimer's normative judgments. Ultimately, the persistence of these normative injunctions signifies both an ongoing project of persuasion -- with unevaluated ethical implications -- and a puzzling neglect of what empirical anomalies imply about realism's ability to accurately account for the real world.

1.2.1.3 NATO: The Alliance That Failed to Dissolve

The persistence of NATO and U.S. support for expansion of the alliance, contrary to realist expectations, offers us another example of the tendency for realist scholars to respond to empirical disconfirmation with normative disapprobation. Despite some prevarication by Waltz, it is clear that realist theory, either in its prediction that states balance power or Walt's revision that states balance against threat, expected the demise of NATO after the Cold War. Because alliances are seen as direct responses to threats, they are expected to unravel if the threat disappears. Hence, in 1993 Waltz claims that although "NATO's days are not numbered… its years are." Likewise, Mearsheimer predicts that NATO will slowly diminish over time because of the disappearance of the Soviet threat, which erases the organization's raison d'être and makes European powers, especially a strong Germany,

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67 In the context of Mearsheimer’s criticism that Waltz’s own theory buttresses the rationality of maximizing power, he extrapolates a policy prescription for contemporary foreign policy: the United States should scrupulously maintain its power advantage vis-à-vis China. The fact that Mearsheimer’s own theory predicts this maximizing behavior, which is contravened empirically by engagement policy, makes his criticism that Waltz’s theory offers good prescriptions but fails to explain state behavior especially ironic, not to mention logically unsustainable. See Mearsheimer, “Reckless States and Realism,” 252.

less inclined to accept NATO’s continuance. With regard to NATO's demise, there is no essential
difference between the expectations of Waltz and Mearsheimer. Indeed, it is precisely because
NATO persistence is an anomaly for explanatory realism that scholars have turned to institutionalist
and constructivist theories to explain the alliance's maintenance and expansion.

Nevertheless, Waltz equivocates on the issue of whether NATO persistence falsifies realist
theory. On the one hand, Waltz reiterates that he “expected NATO to dwindle at the Cold War's
end and ultimately to disappear,” which he asserts has in reality happened since, although ostensibly
NATO still persists and expands, it is no longer a military alliance against a clear threat. On the
other hand, he seems to revise the generality of realist theoretical expectations in order to make the
claim that the empirical persistence of NATO does not undermine the epistemological power of
realist theory:

Far from invalidating realist theory or casting doubt on it… the recent history of
NATO illustrates the subordination of international institutions to national
purposes. The survival and expansion of NATO tells us much about American
power and influence and little about institutions as multilateral entities. The ability
of the United States to extend the life of a moribund institution nicely illustrates
how international institutions are created and maintained by stronger states to serve
their perceived or misperceived interests…NATO lasted as a military alliance as
long as the Soviet Union appeared to be a direct threat to its members. It survives
and expands now not because of its institutions but mainly because the United
States wants it to.

Waltz's implied revision of the theoretical expectations of realist theory is problematic in two
ways. First, Waltz abandons the precise theoretical predictions deduced from realist theory that
states balance power to maximize security and that alliances are temporary forms of external
balancing against a salient threat in favor of the general and almost meaningless prediction that states

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71 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 19.
72 Ibid.: 18-25.
formulate policy in their interest (i.e. states are procedurally rational decision-makers), despite the fact that subjective perceptions may not correlate with objective interests. Every major U.S. foreign policy will be seen as or defended on the basis of serving the national interest, regardless of whether it actually does or not, which implies that Waltz's revised realism would claim to explain every foreign policy. In essence, Waltz's revision reduces to the assertion that states behave rationally by coordinating means and ends, without specifying a range of probable outcomes or likely behaviors.

Second, Waltz's attempt to salvage the explanatory capability of realist theory is dealt a blow by the fact that he commits an inferential error in arguing against institutionalist scholars. Just because the United States perceives NATO to serve a purpose in the national interest and therefore wants the institution to persist does not necessarily mean that this intention is the cause of NATO resilience and expansion. The cause must be determined by empirical assessment, and it is notable that Waltz does not attempt to systematically test realist theory against well-specified institutionalist and constructivist alternatives.

Overall, Waltz's response is puzzling since he meticulously clarifies in *Theory of International Politics* that structural theory is not a theory of foreign policy; in light of this distinction, it is unclear why Waltz concedes the persistence of NATO to be contrary to (at least his) realist theory instead of simply asserting that structural realist theory, as outlined in *Theory of International Politics*, offers indeterminate predictions with regard to NATO. In other words, why concede “the error of realist predictions” if structures are merely the equivalent of a budget constraint in an optimization problem? In some ways, Waltz does revert back to this more tenable position:

The error of realist predictions that the end of the Cold War would mean the end of NATO arose not from a failure of realist theory to comprehend international

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73 Note that if this interest is composed of ideational components, it poses a problem for structural realism, which relies on the distribution of material capabilities to do most of its explanatory lifting.

74 Waltz himself says it best: “Everyone is for ‘the national interest.’ No policy is advanced with the plea that, although this will hurt my country, it will help others. The problems are the evaluative one of deciding which interests are legitimate and the pragmatic one of deciding what policies will best serve them” See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*, 2001 ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 38.
politics, but from an underestimation of America’s folly. The survival and expansion of NATO illustrate not the defects but the limitations of structural explanations. Structures shape and shove; they do not determine the actions of states.  

Waltz echoes Mearsheimer’s tendency to attribute suboptimal outcomes to non-realistic, domestic variables – in this case connoted by “America’s folly.” He thus provides a non-realistic account for NATO expansion whilst defending realism’s continued relevance. What the NATO anomaly does not evoke is systematic reflexivity on the part of neorealists with regard to the explanatory problems posed by empirical reality. NATO's persistence implies that the rationality assumption in realist theory is mis-specified, thereby leading to erroneous predictions. In the case of NATO, states do not abide by the implied converse of balance of power/threat theory, that is, end alliances when a threat subsides. Or more specifically in light of Mearsheimer's theory, the U.S. does not necessarily act to maximize its security by behaving as an offshore balancer. Waltz unsuccessfully attempts to bypass this problem by arguing that state behavior still abides by a general rationality, in the sense of efficiently matching means to ends. In general, however, neorealist critique implies explanatory failure, which incidentally yields no effort to ascertain what ramifications this anomaly has for the epistemological status of realist theory.

Instead, both Waltz and Mearsheimer respond to the empirical problem posed by NATO with polemical indictments of the imprudence of NATO expansion. The tenor of their comments imply that it is not that explanatory realism is mis-specified and therefore generating inaccurate predictions; it is empirical reality, specifically the fundamental irrationality of American foreign policy, that fails to live up to the normative injunction to adhere to "realist principles." The language with which Waltz and Mearsheimer react to the empirical anomaly of NATO persistence is that of advocacy, not of scientific value-neutrality. Indeed, it is clear that both are engaged in a persuasive

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75 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 24.
project dedicated to highlighting misguided, illogical U.S. support for NATO in the post-Cold War period. Arguing that an enlarged NATO will antagonize Russia, causing it to draw closer to China and to undermine U.S. non-proliferation policy elsewhere in the world, Waltz and Mearsheimer are keen to illustrate the counterproductive aspects of NATO expansion.76

The thrust of Waltz and Mearsheimer's polemical responses suggest that they are more interested in persuading policy-makers to act according to the "predictions" deduced from realist theory than in re-specifying the theory to achieve greater accuracy in its causal inferences. That realist scholars are uniformly critical of precisely the empirical outcomes that contravene realist explanatory theory suggests their commitment to political and normative investments that violate the principle of value-neutrality. Ultimately, the value judgments that inhere in neorealism are elucidated in Waltz's assertion that: "Political leaders may be astigmatic, but responsible ones who behave realistically do not suffer from myopia…"77

1.2.1.4 Nuclear Behavior: The Case for Behaving Rationally

Neorealist writings on nuclear behavior and the salutary effect of nuclear weapons on stability/peace, in light of real-world empirical behavior, also reveal an inordinate amount of attention placed on persuasion as opposed to explanation.78 At first glance, the debate between

77 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 40. Italics mine.
78 One might argue that structural theory and the literature on nuclear deterrence are unrelated, in spite of the fact that Waltz writes about both. However, Waltz specifically rejects the claim that deterrence is a theory in its own right; instead, he argues, "deterrent policies derive from structural theory, which emphasizes that the units of an international political system must tend to their own security as best they can. The means available for doing so shape the policies of states and, when nuclear weapons become available, lead them to take deterrent stances even though they may still talk about the need to be able to defend and fight for their nations' security." Kenneth N. Waltz and Scott Sagan, The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 154.
Kenneth Waltz and nuclear pessimists (e.g. Sagan, Feaver) appears to be strictly explanatory. What are the effects of nuclear weapons on the likelihood of war and on stability in the international system? Nuclear optimists and pessimists offer different responses based on whether their explanatory perspective is rooted in unitary actor and rational choice assumptions or organizational theory, respectively. Waltz offers an explanatory hypothesis accounting for why nuclear weapons decrease the probability of conflict and hence why the gradual spread of nuclear weapons is expected to render stability and peace more resilient. So long as proliferators have a secure second-strike capability, deterrence is expected to be effective due to the possibility of immense damage posed by nuclear weapons, which necessarily induces caution: “Uncertainty about the course that a nuclear war might follow, along with the certainty that the destruction would be immense, strongly inhibits the first use of nuclear weapons”; likewise, uncertainty with regards to the possibility of escalation to the nuclear level also deters a “major conventional attack on a nuclear country's vital interests.”

Nuclear pessimists disagree with such a sanguine view of the effects of continued proliferation, basing their more pessimistic predictions on explanatory frameworks rooted in organizational theory, perspectives on bureaucratic politics, and the politics of civil-military relations.

Without rehearsing the pessimists' arguments here, it is important to draw our attention to what pessimists fail to recognize in their current explanatory disputes with the optimist position. Sagan and other pessimists may indeed offer more convincing analyses of the likely effects of nuclear weapons (i.e. more convincing hypotheses), but in turning so abruptly to organizational theory to emphasize the omnipresence of pathological, suboptimal decision-making in the nuclear realm, a clear indictment of Waltz's allegedly positivist assumption that states behave rationally, is to miss a crucial point: Waltz is less interested in explaining actual behavior than he is in inculcating a certain kind of rationality. In fact, the latter project presupposes -- and in some places, Waltz acknowledges

79 Ibid., 15, 143.
this very explicitly -- that actors are not behaving accordingly. Waltz's ultimate objective is to elucidate the “strategic implications of nuclear weapons” such that nuclear policy can be framed according to such logic. If the strategic implications were obvious, indisputable, and inexorable, then states would already be behaving accordingly, and it would thus be unnecessary to clarify the logic at all or to spend so much effort trying to dismantle widely held “nuclear myths”.  

Evidence of Waltz's persuasive project is clear in the tension between his arguments about the clarity or inexorability of the logic of nuclear weapons, on the one hand, and actual nuclear behavior -- characterized by convoluted logic, strategic absurdity, and pathological anxiety -- on the other. The opposition between the almost simple-minded clarity of nuclear logic and the allegedly misguided nuclear build-ups and obsession with nuclear superiority and effective deterrence (especially during the Cold War) appears throughout Waltz's nuclear writings. So on the one hand, “with nuclear weapons, stability and peace rest on easy calculations of what one country can do to another [such that] the problem of the credibility of deterrence… disappears.” Yet on the other hand, "the credibility of deterrence has been a constant U.S. worry"; "imagined difficulties of deterrence multiply apace"; and scenarios positing possible self-deterrence in the case of imagined Soviet first-strikes “based on faulty assumptions, unfounded distinctions, and preposterous notions about how governments behave” abound. The uncomplicated deduction that even small (invulnerable) forces are enough to deter sits uncomfortably alongside the actual nuclear policy of

81 Mearsheimer also implicitly acknowledges that rationality must be cultivated in his discussion of dangers posed by nuclear proliferation that is not “well-managed”: "elites and publics of the emerging nuclear European states might not quickly develop doctrines and attitudes that reflect a grasp of the devastating consequences and basic unwinnability of nuclear war…” See Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," 38. Mearsheimer’s warning echoes Waltz’s argument that policy-makers have not yet come to understand and appreciate the strategic and logical implications of nuclear weapons. While both defensive and offensive realist writings on nuclear weapons reveal that rationality must be inculcated, Waltz pursues this normative project most systematically.


83 Ibid.: 734-35.
both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, which Waltz calls “pointless,”
“bizarre,” and “worse than irrelevant.”

Oddly enough, Waltz is explicit about the fact that actual behavior betrays a lack of
understanding of the strategic effects of nuclear weapons, thereby leading to perverse nuclear policy.
He cites the obsession over nuclear superiority, escalation dominance, and general arms racing as
evidence of “the failure to appreciate the strategic implications of nuclear weapons” and surmises
that domestic bureaucratic and political pressures are partially responsible. The disjunction between
the normative injunction Waltz advocates and actual empirical behavior, which is considered to be
irrational and misguided, is striking. If Waltz were only interested in explaining behavior the
phenomena he criticizes would simply be considered empirical anomalies, and the pessimists would
be warranted in their skepticism; after all, these polemics entail an admission of explanatory
weakness. Yet Waltz's primary objective is not to explain actual behavior; instead it is to clarify what
he believes are the obvious, strategic implications of nuclear weapons, which if understood and
appreciated would necessarily alter nuclear policy and strengthen the pacific-inducing effects of
nuclear weapons. That is, “appreciating” the logical implications of nuclear weapons arguably entails
behaving rationally in light of their strategic effects. By juxtaposing the easy logic -- which though
easy must be elucidated systematically by Waltz! -- of nuclear stability against the analytically “weak”
but “widely accepted” notions about the necessity of nuclear superiority, the need to prepare for
nuclear war-fighting, and the fragility of nuclear deterrence, Waltz attempts to undermine the
credibility of certain views that have led to what he considers absurd nuclear policy.

85 Ibid.: 739. See also pp. 738, 741.
86 Ibid.: 737.
88 One might ask: if Waltz's project is primarily persuasive, why doesn't he just concede that actors do not behave this way, but that they ought to? Although Waltz does in some ways say exactly this, he still claims to account for the relationship between nuclear weapons and peace/stability on an explanatory level because his normative claims rely heavily upon the accuracy of certain empirical claims. That is, Waltz's explanatory framework has to be somewhat accurate or at least resonate with empirical reality to justify his normative evaluations; if agents could never be expected to behave rationally, as
Indeed, it is the entrenched nature of these views -- nuclear policy characterized by “decades of fuzzy thinking” and the apparent fact that “the language of strategic discourse [read: rationality as specified by Waltz] has deteriorated over the decades” -- that fuels Waltz’s persuasive project, which is to dismantle “nuclear myths” and to inculcate the logic of “political reality”.\(^8^9\) The rhetorical exhortation is apparent through the juxtaposition of the mythical and imaginary against the real and the inexorable:

Political, military, and academic hard-liners imagined conditions under which we would or should be willing to use nuclear weapons. None was of relevance. Nuclear weapons dominate strategy. Nothing can be done with them other than to use them for deterrence.\(^9^0\)

The logic of nuclear deterrence is so compelling that it vitiates the need for strategy. Likewise, the rationality of deterrence is so evident that it no longer requires any sort of calculation.

[D]eterrence does not rest on rationality, whatever that term might mean. By a simple definition, one is rational if one is able to reason. A little reasoning leads to the conclusions that to fight nuclear wars is impossible and that to launch an offensive that might prompt nuclear retaliation is obvious folly. To reach these conclusions, complicated calculations are not required, only a little common sense. Deterrence does not depend on rationality. It depends on fear. To create fear, nuclear weapons are the best possible means.\(^9^1\)

The overall validity of Waltz’s argument in comparison to his interlocutors notwithstanding (he certainly may offer the more convincing case vis-à-vis supporters of SDI, etc.), Waltz’s argument here is egregious in its logical incoherence. To assert that deterrence does not depend upon rationality – similar to the equally indefensible claim made in *Theory of International Politics* as it relates to balance of power – right before invoking common sense is shameless rhetoric.\(^9^2\) Ultimately, the very

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\(^8^9\) Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,” 731-32.
\(^9^1\) Ibid., 154.
\(^9^2\) Waltz raises an interesting question regarding the relationship between fear and rationality. One could argue that rationality and fear are not alternatives. Fear may simply be a factor that affects calculations and as such implies nothing about whether actors are rational or not. Fear is not necessarily inconsistent with rationality given that it implies aversion
fact that Waltz’s opponents include elites such as McNamara, Kennedy, Nitze, McCain, Reagan, and Rumsfeld reveals the extent to which the strategic implications of nuclear weapons and hence what qualifies as rational behavior exceed common sense and are uncomfortably ambiguous and subject to alternative interpretations.

### 1.2.3 Explanatory Theory, Value Judgments, and their Systematic Interrelations

A clear pattern emerges in analyzing neorealist responses to empirical phenomena that ostensibly contradict the theoretical expectations deduced from its explanatory framework. Cumulatively, the aforementioned cases constitute a range of salient examples that suggest neorealist logic is in need of theoretical revision. Yet realists consistently respond to empirical disconfirmation by criticizing the relevant outcome or behavior as normatively undesirable rather than re-assessing how realist explanatory theory could be improved in light of empirical anomalies. Individually or collectively, none of these anomalies elicit theoretical re-assessment. Crucially, such a response, which undermines realist claims to value-neutrality -- neutrality implies there shouldn't be systematic commentary on the desirability of what happens in the world -- and explanatory precision, suggests that neorealist scholars are more interested in changing phenomena in the world than in explaining their existence accurately.

Neorealist responses to empirical phenomena allow us to unearth the nature of their value judgments; in particular, it alerts us to a general conflation of rationality and optimality in explanatory realism, as well as a significant normative inflation of these concepts beyond their analytic use in decision theory. Waltz’s condemnation of behavior that contravenes neorealist predictions as “folly” and his intimation that to act according to the rational behavior dictated by his theory is to be

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toward certain consequences or costs that one wishes to avoid, as evidenced by the prominent role fear plays in Mearsheimer's rational choice-based theory of offensive realism. However, if fear is inconsistent with rationality, then this would seem to pose a more serious problem for the realist project.

“responsible” and “realistic” reveals the normative valuation of what is predicted. Likewise, in Mearsheimer’s main theoretical work, he claims that “only a misguided state would pass up an opportunity to be the hegemon in the system because it thought it already had sufficient power to survive.”

That is, if states are assumed to be rational, then they are theoretically expected to seek power in order to maximize security, according to Mearsheimer, precisely because this strategy is alleged to be optimal. Assuming that Mearsheimer’s notion of rationality is specified correctly, if states fail to behave as specified by the theory, then they are deemed irrational. Thus, the theory of offensive realism predicts that states will abide by strategically optimal decision-making, and “any time a state behaves in a strategically foolish fashion, it counts as a clear contradiction of [offensive realism].” Mearsheimer’s claim that irrational behavior falsifies his theory reveals the extent to which normative judgment is inextricable from the explanatory framework of realism. To call a particular decision irrational, misguided, or strategically unwise is neither simply nor primarily to highlight empirical phenomena that contravene the predictive expectations of realist explanatory theory; more significantly, it is a normative indictment of the substantive decision being made.

Charles Taylor’s scholarship on value-neutrality suggests that value-judgments in neorealist thought are neither accidental nor idiosyncratic; instead, they are systematically interwoven into its theoretical framework. Taylor argues that one cannot accept an explanatory framework without accepting certain value-judgments that are built into its very premises. Each framework is like a map that provides a topography of the phenomenon in question; and in detailing and demarcating the geography of variation, "a given map will have, as it were, its own built-in value slope." A description of the dimensions along which phenomena vary, especially noticeable in dichotomous alternatives (e.g. anarchy vs. tyranny in Waltz; appeasement vs. maximization of power in

95 ———, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," 112.
Mearsheimer\textsuperscript{97} or Taylor's examples: juridical vs. tyrannical/arbitrary), already bears substantive normative judgments because of an implied relationship between the empirical variation in question and a conception of the human good. These normative valuations arise from the explanatory framework and cannot be undermined without a concomitant rejection of the framework itself.

Indeed, any theoretical framework that relies upon rational choice assumptions in relation to the maximization of some human good (or something arguably necessary for human good) is subject to this problem:

There are... a whole range of theories in which the connection between factual base and valuation is built-in, as it were, to the conceptual structure. Such is the case of many theories which make use of the notion of function. To fulfill a function is to meet a requirement of some kind, and when the term is used in social theory, the requirement concerned is generally connected with human needs, wants, and purposes. The requirement or end concerned may be the maintenance of the political system which is seen as essential to man, or the securing of some of the benefits which political systems are in a position to attain for men - stability, security, peace, fulfillment of some wants, and so on. Since politics is largely made up of human purposeful activity a characterization of political societies in terms of function is not implausible. But in so far as we characterize societies in terms of their fulfilling in different ways and to different degrees the same set of functions, the crucial dimension of variation for explanatory purposes is also a normatively significant one. Those societies which fulfill the functions more completely are \textit{pro tanto} better.\textsuperscript{98}

In relation to neorealism, the functional value to be maximized is state security (or even the maintenance of anarchy for Waltz\textsuperscript{99}), which is connected to a schedule of human needs or purposes.\textsuperscript{100} Seen through this lens, Mearsheimer's judgment that states that fail to fulfill the function

\textsuperscript{97} See p. 139, p. 162, p. 164, p. 463 (footnote 58) in \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}.
\textsuperscript{98} Taylor, "Neutrality in Political Science," 42. Although Taylor focuses on functionalism, his analysis is equally relevant to rational choice explanations. In rational choice terminology, Taylor's "function" would be called a "preference" to be maximized. Functional theories explain causes by way of their effects. Rational choice theory can be seen as one category of functional explanation. Keohane argues that the rationality assumption provides a possible link necessary for effect to explain cause. That is, rational choice theory assumes that the effect is a product of rational anticipation. See Robert O. Keohane, \textit{After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 80-83.
\textsuperscript{99} Waltz's normative defense of anarchy will be investigated in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{100} In Mearsheimer, the link between state security and the human good is implicit. My genealogy in the next chapter retrieves Waltz's explicit arguments on how anarchy and state security serve as the necessary foundations of human security, political freedom, and the very possibility of ethical life (\textit{Man, the State, and War}, 215).
of maximizing security by maximizing power are misguided is no longer a random, ungrounded value-judgment that is unscrupulously introduced into an otherwise value-neutral explanatory framework. The descriptive criteria of whether states maximize/balance power in order to maximize security—taking this link for granted at the moment—that is, whether they behave in a strategically wise or misguided fashion according Mearsheimer and Waltz, respectively, is thus as much descriptive as it is normative. “The dimension of variation” (in this case, whether states abide by or ignore the imperatives of Realpolitik, however conceptualized) “leaves only one answer to the question, which is better?, because of the clear relation in which it stands to men's wants and needs.”¹⁰¹ That is, rational behavior, which is indistinguishable from Realpolitik in the framework of neorealism, is normatively optimal precisely because of the implied ethical valuation of the ends in question, e.g. state security or stability. As such, normative judgments are built into the explanatory framework itself; the seeds of realist polemic are engendered by its explanatory theory.

That the framing of reality constructed by realist theory contains a "value-slope" which renders certain behaviors and outcomes -- namely, those behaviors designated as Realpolitik -- more normatively defensible than others elucidates why non-realist causal explanations are always given to account for empirical outcomes that are anomalous from the perspective of structural realism, i.e. normatively suboptimal outcomes. The consequence of this confluence between explanandum and normative ideal is that explanatory failure and normative critique imply each other. As such, the hypothetical coexistence of a realist explanation of the U.S. invasion for Iraq and normative critique of such a policy is a logical impossibility. Because any realist explanation of a phenomenon implies the normative desirability of that phenomenon, realist disapproval of a policy or outcome must entail a non-realist explanation.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Taylor, "Neutrality in Political Science," 43.
¹⁰² In this sense, the ambiguity of what falsifies realist theory is significant not only because it allows realist scholars to argue that certain historical outcomes confirm their theory, but also because it allows realist scholars to deny that certain outcomes they deem to be normatively undesirable can be explained by their theory. Notably, most of these non-realist
Using Taylor to apprehend the neorealist framework seems to put us into conflict with Michael Desch’s view that, though “most realists are not really value-free,” “their ethical agenda is not derived from their theory of international politics.” If Desch is correct that the normative commitments of realists are not a necessary derivation from their explanatory framework, then the concurrence of neorealist explanation and prescriptive \textit{Realpolitik} is coincidental and a result of the idiosyncratic beliefs of particular scholars. Instead, Taylor’s analysis provides a very clear explanation of why the relationship between the facts of reality and the norms of state behavior are systematically related. If the positivist claim that norms are epiphenomenal is shown to be epistemologically sound, then the normative injunction not to base policy on these norms is almost a logical given. The realist move from the “fact” of the inefficacy of norms to the prescription of action based on material power and interest is the only reasonable conclusion in light of the implied (but empirically unproven) link between state security and human needs.

The confluence of explanandum and normative ideal along with the fact that explanatory realism is rooted in rational choice theory -- or is, using Taylor's terminology, a functional theory -- renders every realist critique part of a larger project to inculcate the very rationality specified by the theory. Both theorists urge policymakers to behave according to their respective theoretical frameworks, maximizing security by balancing power or maximizing power, behaving as an offshore balancer, or engaging in self-help more generally. In this sense, the analytical assumptions of realism


\footnote{This echoes Desch’s argument elsewhere, when he claims that contemporary realists “aspire… to make realism a ‘value-neutral’ science of state behavior,” and “\textit{based on this skeptical view of the potential of shared ethical norms to transform interstate relations, realists regularly advice policymakers to operate on the basis of power and interests}” (418). Italics mine. Schweller also acknowledges that realism is a scientific research program as well as a pessimistic political philosophy or worldview. However his invocation of a tradition of political realism from Thucydides to Waltz and Mearsheimer is questionable. Moreover, he does not systematically or critically assess the relationship between realism’s pessimistic worldview and its science. See his chapter in Vasquez and Elman, \textit{Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate}, 75.}
are simultaneously normative injunctions.\textsuperscript{105} For instance, self-help is not simply a neutral descriptive category; it is a prudential imperative: "states operating in a self-help world \textit{should} always act according to their own self-interest, because it pays to be selfish in a self-help world."\textsuperscript{106} This normative injunction has ramifications for alliances and international institutions and if abided by would then confirm the predictive accuracy of explanatory realism. Crucially, the commitment to the normative ideal is often more apparent than the desire to attain empirical accuracy (although the latter is necessarily a by-product if the persuasive project is successful), as evidenced by realist critiques of a variety of empirical behavior judged to be misguided or irrational according to the theoretical framework. Waltz's critique of Japan for its perceived over-reliance on the U.S. to guarantee its security is a case in point: "The great powers of the world must expect to take care of themselves."\textsuperscript{107} Similarly, Waltz's discussion of why the United States should not engage in NATO expansion\textsuperscript{108} is rooted in the assumption and judgment that self-help, rather than reckless expansion of an anachronistic alliance, is the most rational means to achieve state security.\textsuperscript{109}

Finally, while the above analysis shows that realist prescriptions and critiques are intimately related to their explanatory frameworks, it also reveals a potential problem for realist scholars. While the inextricable link between explanatory and normative means that explanatory failure and normative disapprobation entail each other, the accumulation of empirical anomalies is a threat to the realist enterprise as a whole, whether it is primarily positivist or evaluative. As empirical anomalies accrue, it becomes more difficult to divert attention from the weakness of the explanatory framework in accounting for the given facts of reality. The less accurately an explanatory theory accounts for the

\textsuperscript{105} In the next chapter, I conduct a genealogical analysis of the origins of neorealism; I trace how prescriptive injunctions become abstract theoretical concepts and are stripped of their normativity in the process.

\textsuperscript{106} Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 11.

\textsuperscript{107} Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," 66.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.: 76.

\textsuperscript{109} Notably, Waltz's writings here engage in the reification of analytical concepts (e.g. self-help, rationality) in ways that directly contravene his explicit prohibition of such ontological claims in \textit{Theory of International Politics}. Waltz's various polemics reveal self-help and rationality, originally adopted for their utility as fictional theoretical assumptions, to be both \textit{real} and \textit{good}. 

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real world, the less viable are its attendant normative claims. The evaluations that stem from an explanatory framework are convincing only if that analytical framework provides a compelling understanding of how reality operates. Consequently, by undermining explanatory power empirical anomalies ultimately challenge the normative evaluations engendered and bolstered by the analytical framework under consideration. The dependence of realist normative claims on the realist explanatory framework explains why realists must equivocate; they must offer non-realist explanations for suboptimal outcomes whilst affirming the unmitigated explanatory power of realism.

1.3 From Failure to Exploration: A Call to Examine the Ethical and Political Judgments of Scientific Realism

One might think that realism is irrelevant or outdated in the face of today’s global realities, but its continued dominance and prominence as a theoretical framework and discourse makes reassessment vital. The repeated invocations of realism by both supporters and detractors of the Iraq War demonstrate the accuracy of Walt’s observation: “the real world has paid scant attention to [realism’s] academic obituaries.” Indeed, even academia has refused to give up on realism, as demonstrated by continued efforts to test realist propositions and the rise of a new generation of scholars dedicated to recasting realist theory in the hopes of realizing its untapped explanatory potential. Although the field of IR has largely leaped past Waltz and Mearsheimer in its deployment of increasingly sophisticated methodological techniques, it has not departed much from the political vision adumbrated by these two thinkers. Realist presuppositions and premises maintain a profound grip on the field's theoretical and political imagination. Likewise, it is important to

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recognize that neorealism’s shortcomings have engendered even greater determination to live up to the scientific procedures and ideal of value-neutrality it simultaneously espouses and violates.

So what does it say that the two thinkers who have done the most in terms of constituting our vision of the international system fail to live up to their own claims of value-neutrality and systematic causal analysis? What does it say that their arguments turn into their opposites when expedient, or that their ontological claims are held and abandoned not for their empirical insightfulness but for their strategic utility in justifying certain political judgments? What does it say that the claim to represent the political world faithfully is found to be suspect in the face of overtly normative projects of persuasion to change that very world?

Some scholars may simply call for greater discipline or adherence to stricter standards. However, this response evades the most crucial questions raised by Waltz’s and Mearsheimer's failures. The move to neoclassical realism and the turn to meta-theoretical debates, which share a preoccupation with explanatory power and scientific progress, completely overlook the normative and political dimensions of explanatory realism. The turn to philosophy of science proves particularly unsatisfactory, and the debate following Vasquez’s Lakatosian critique clarifies why it raises more problems than it resolves.\footnote{Vasquez’s earlier work, \textit{The Power of Power Politics}, provides a “Kuhnian” history of IR; it attempts to prove the disciplinary dominance, and insufficiency, of realism as a paradigm. The rest of the dissertation challenges Vasquez’s 3-stage intellectual history (i.e. idealist stage, realist stage, behavioralist modification of realism), as well as the way he unproblematically treats realism from Morgenthau to neorealism as a Kuhnian paradigm. I agree with Brian Schmidt that Vasquez’s presentist account substitutes reified constructs for an actual history of the discipline’s development in Brian Schmidt, \textit{The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History of International Relations} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). I think Vasquez’s “Kuhnian” intellectual history is intellectually untenable and politically suspect. Vasquez certainly does not exhaust the potential critical uses of philosophy of science to illuminate the problems and pitfalls of neorealism. Nevertheless, the responses elicited by his Lakatosian critique suggest that resorting to philosophy of science is doomed to be either ineffectual or counterproductive and politically irresponsible. It is for this reason that my analysis of neorealist responses to anomalies omits any mention of Kuhn. Sean Molloy highlights the abuse of Kuhn’s paradigm by IR scholars in Sean Molloy, "Realism: A Problematic Paradigm," \textit{Security Dialogue} 34, no. 1 (2003), Molloy, \textit{The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics}. Although Kuhn’s historical insights on scientific practice might afford a better understanding of how a scientific community defends itself from the accumulation of anomalies (oddly, Vasquez does not use Kuhn this way), the deployment of Kuhn, like Vasquez’s deployment of Lakatos, unwittingly buttresses the neorealist claim to value-neutral scientific knowledge. Crucially, this claim is called into question by neorealists’ paradoxical admission of explanatory failure in the face of anomalies, a price realists seem more than willing to pay to in order to polemicize against bad policy. In Kuhn’s account, physical scientists defend against the threat of anomalies until their accumulation}
of realism’s theoretical and evidentiary laxity, his narration of the “realist research program” in Lakatosian terms unintentionally corroborates realism’s claim to scientific knowledge, diluting the force of his own conclusion that realism does not even come close to scientific rigor. Ultimately, the Elmans’ claim that Vasquez mis-states Lakatos’s criteria as well as the outright rejection of Lakatosian standards by Waltz, Walt, and Wohlforth demonstrates the futility of criticizing neorealism’s deficiencies on the basis of meta-theoretical criteria in the philosophy of science. At best, Vasquez is able to demonstrate that neorealists fail to live up to a standard they never aspired to in the first place. At worst, he provides realist defenders with even more powerful ammunition, for instance, by allowing Elman and Elman to assert that on the basis of Lakatosian criteria, “only a better theory can replace a theory.”

Significantly, Vasquez’s unproblematic deployment of philosophy of science criteria obfuscates the political dimension of nearly every domain he is dealing with: the politics of neorealism, of political science, and of the philosophy of science. As a result, he fails to apprehend the more interesting insights offered by the history and politics of philosophy of science and makes his own appropriation of Lakatos vulnerable to charges of credulity and/or insincerity. In practical terms, as Wohlforth argues, Vasquez’s reliance on Lakatos risks exacerbating existing tendencies that prove devastating enough to elicit crisis. In the case of neorealists, ostensible scientists resort to competing explanations to account for anomalies despite undermining their own theoretical presuppositions, a response necessitated by the fact that scientific realism, in its original formulation, only explains what is normatively desirable. Furthermore, as his response to Feyerabend shows, Kuhn speaks approvingly of his observations of scientific practice in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions and contends that the success of science owes itself to seemingly “aberrant behavior” and the persistent violation of “accepted methodological canons.” See Kuhn’s “Reflections on my Critics” in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 236-7. Schweller’s defense of realism demonstrates the ease of exonerating dubious scientific practice on the basis of Kuhn’s categories; he contends that “normal science” would lead one to expect precisely the theoretical revisions, reformulations, refinements and amendments that Vasquez considers troubling. See Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, 75. Given the ideological ripeness of Kuhn’s account, it is important to emphasize the pre-paradigmatic status of social scientific research as well as Kuhn’s explicit rejection of the (mis)appropriation of his work by social scientists in Lakatos and Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, 245. In short, I deem it intellectually misleading and strategically unwise to automatically privilege Kuhn because of his work on anomalies; his thinking is, in my view, simply inapplicable to neorealism or international relations scholarship more generally.

113 Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate.
already privilege theory development over rigorous empirical research. Vasquez’s failure to recognize that the professional incentives governing political science are partially responsible for the lack of empirical testing he locates in realist scholarship betrays an under-appreciation of the extra-scientific dimensions of science.

While Wohlforth rightly directs our attention toward the politics of research, Vasquez’s neglect of the political matrix in which philosophy of science debates are embedded poses even greater problems. First, the appeal to scientific criteria outside of their original context masks the contestability of those criteria even amongst scientists and philosophers of science. Second, it also occludes what was historically, and still is, at stake in philosophy of science disputes. It is not enough to recognize that Lakatos aims to reconcile Popper’s and Kuhn’s contradictory accounts of science. Lakatos is too explicit about political stakes to justify the political indifference of Vasquez and his detractors. He warns: “The clash between Popper and Kuhn is not about a mere technical point in epistemology. It concerns our central intellectual values, and has implications not only for theoretical physics but also for the underdeveloped social sciences and even for moral and political philosophy.” Lakatos is doing more than outlining what constitutes good science. He is trying to save Popper from Kuhn’s onslaught, that is to say, to rescue rational criticism and progress from the threat of relativism, where truth dissolves into power and intellectual commitments are subject to the vagaries of mob psychology, dogmatic irrationality, and mystical conversions. This preoccupation with fixing the boundaries between established scientific knowledge and speculation or theology is inextricable from the question of what intellectual values and commitments make an open society possible and keep totalitarianism at bay. Crucially, Vasquez elides the question of how the

115 See Wohlforth’s contribution in Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, 259-64.
116 This is an unfortunate consequence of embracing Lakatos and dismissing Kuhn and Michael Polanyi.
117 See Lakatos’s “Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes” in Lakatos and Musgrave, eds., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, 93.
118 See Lakatos’s and Popper’s contributions in Ibid. This suggests that Popper’s philosophy of science must be read in the context of Popper’s The Open Society and its Enemies and The Poverty of Historicism.
competing visions of scientific community and its constitutive standards proffered by philosophers of science are related to their visions of political and social order.\textsuperscript{119}

Perhaps it is Vasquez’s inattentiveness to the interconnections between philosophy of science and political philosophy that explains his disregard for the analogous relationship between scientific realism and realist political philosophy. Failure to investigate the latter renders him unable to answer the key question posed by his analysis: why does neorealism command such devotion in the face of its scientific failures? By forcing the debate over neorealism into the locution of metatheory, Vasquez turns the spotlight away from the very position it should be focused on, namely the extra-scientific dimensions of realist science. The normativity of science becomes even more opaque, for instead of unearthing the normative and political judgments concealed by neorealism’s scientific discourse, Vasquez in effect shrouds both beneath the authoritative veil of philosophy of science.

At first glance, it may appear as if Vasquez deftly outwits realists by using the philosophy of science to undermine their scientific credibility. Indeed, given the political orientation of Lakatosian (and Popperian) philosophy of science, it might seem to be a particularly fitting scaffold upon which to deconstruct realist ideology. Yet to the extent that the unproblematic turn to philosophy of science is confused for an historical account of science, it mythologizes precisely the narrative of neorealism Vasquez wants to debunk, namely that it originated to generate scientific knowledge and has evolved over time in response to epistemological demands. Moreover, without an explicit account of the political backdrop of Lakatosian philosophy of science and without acknowledging

the historical place of philosophy of science in modern ideological struggles and political contests,

Vasquez’s project risks being disingenuous. For Vasquez’s turn to Lakatos follows an account of the
dangers of postmodern relativism -- indeed re-enacts Lakatos’s refutation of Kuhn’s alleged
relativism – and goes hand in hand with a privileging of positivism. Vasquez believes that the
solution to neorealism’s failures lies in methodological rigor. He notes that

much of the concern of critical theorists over the issue of political bias of
quantitatively oriented scholars is misplaced, for it is not the case in the West that
those who take a scientific (i.e., data-based) approach are the main advisors to
foreign policy makers; traditionalists have occupied this role, and their excoriating of
evidence has made them more prone to ideological influences.

While Vasquez is correct that refusal to take rigor and empirical demands seriously ought to alert us
to ideology -- though this is to be assessed rather than presumed, his remarks on quantitative
research are empirically questionable and exhibit remarkable credulity. To the extent that
preoccupation with methodological precision and rigor gives the illusion of neutrality and justifies the
neglect of historical and cultural context, the quantitative research Vasquez privileges as the solution
to what he calls neotraditionalist (read: ideological) research carries its own dangers.

While I think many of Vasquez’s criticisms of neorealism are compelling, I do not agree with
his conclusion that the answer is simply to become more rigorous, more scientific. In light of
Vasquez’s political blind spots and liabilities, it is crucial to ask why Waltz and Mearsheimer choose

120 See Chapter 10 and 11 of Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*. To be fair, Vasquez does acknowledge the contributions of postmodernism, though given his admission of the impossibility of value neutrality it seems he fails to take the relationship between power and knowledge seriously enough.


122 Morgenthau’s criticism of quantitative research in the 1960s and Robert Gates’s 2008 speech on the Minerva Consortia highlight a long history of cooperation between government and social science. Given the links between scholars like Bruce Buena de Mesquita and the CIA/Defense Department, the Defense Department’s regular recruitment of quantitative researchers, as well as the types of research discussed by Gates, it is clear that rigorous social scientific research (e.g. formal modeling/game theory, statistics, computer simulations) is becoming more relevant to foreign policy-making and the national security apparatus. See Clive Thompson, “Can Game Theory Predict When Iran Will Get the Bomb?,” *The New York Times*, August 16 2009. Robert Gates’s speech to the Association of American Universities can be accessed online at http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1228.

123 E.g. Colin Elman and John Vasquez, “Realism and the Balance of Power: A New Debate,” (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003), James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered*. The concluding chapter overviews the most recent attempts to render scientific realism more rigorous and shows how they continue to suffer from the same empirical blind spots and normative shortcomings indicated in this chapter and the next.
to speak in the language of science in the first place; how this scientific discourse and its attendant presuppositions function to buttress their less explicit normative projects; and more generally what value-judgments any analytical framework, scientific or not, stems from and gives rise to. For this chapter's insights into the political judgments implicated in explanatory realism imply that methodological rigor is ultimately an inadequate response. What is required is systematic investigation of the valuations undergirding scientific realism: where they originate, how they function, and the consequences of their often indiscernible presence for empirical knowledge and normative judgments about international politics.
2. The Normative Construction of Scientific Realism: A Genealogical Analysis

In contemporary International Relations scholarship, Kenneth Waltz’s powerful reformulation of realism as a scientific, structural theory of state behavior has decisively influenced the discipline’s trajectory, especially in the latter half of the 20th century. Waltz’s seminal texts, *Man, the State, and War* (1959) and *Theory of International Politics* (1979), constitute key staging points for interlocutors who wish to revise, challenge, or reconstruct the realist understanding of world politics; his neorealism, which translates classical realist insights on material power and interest into the language of microeconomics, directly and indirectly spurred the development of the field’s leading critical alternatives to realism, notably neoliberalism, constructivism, feminism, critical theory, and post-structuralism.1 In addition to shaping the major theoretical debates in the field of IR, Waltz’s neorealism and his pivotal role in mentoring the discipline’s top security studies scholars have largely determined the substantive agenda for the study of international conflict.2 It is for these reasons that Waltz is dubbed “the preeminent international relations theorist of the postwar era.”3

Given the importance of Waltz’s texts in revitalizing realist analyses of, and judgments about, international relations and foreign policy, the following chapter assesses and challenges the conventional reading of Waltz’s exposition of structural realism contained in *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics*. I argue that the dominant reading of the former as an analytical precursor to the second invites a revisionist history of the development of scientific realism, which prevents us from seeing the theoretical, political, and ethical judgments implicated in the constitution of scientific realism. I offer an alternative reading that lays out *Man, the State, and War* as a work of political philosophy, which aims to critically appraise different kinds of political reform. I then show how this work is translated into scientific idiom in *Theory of International Politics* and discuss the

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1 For a critical overview of the influence and critical responses to Waltz, see Michael P. Sullivan, "That Dog Wont Hunt: The Cottage Industry of Realist Criticism, or Must You Play That Waltz Again?", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 8, no. 4 (2005), Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics*. For an account of constructivism as a response to neorealism, see Chapter 1 of Wendt, "Constructing International Politics."


3 Hanami, ed. *Perspectives on Structural Realism*, xi.
significance of this transition. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the normative sufficiency of contemporary realism. Although this chapter focuses on the founding texts of scientific realism, it aims to demonstrate, more broadly, that reading realist texts through the lens of contemporary methodological conventions crucially shapes our theoretical purview, empirical knowledge, and normative assessment of international politics.

2.1 Kenneth Waltz and the Levels of Analysis

Amongst International Relations scholars, it is fairly non-controversial to assert that the objective of Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War* is to systematize the “sources and causes of war.”⁴ According to this interpretation, its major theoretical innovation is its introduction of the levels of analysis framework, an analytical tool designed to organize explanations for interstate conflict. The levels of analysis framework contains three images, each associated with different causal hypotheses on the causes of war. The first image locates the primary cause of conflict in human nature or in the characteristics of individuals, the second image in the internal organization or characteristics of states, and the third image in the anarchical environment of the international political system. Collectively, the first and second images give rise to *unit-level* explanations of conflict, while the third image leads to *structural* analysis. Read in socio-scientific terms, the levels of analysis framework has a clear function: to organize salient independent variables, which are then hypothesized to relate to the dependent variable of interstate war.

Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War*, as interpreted above, is understood as providing the theoretical foundation for his later work, *Theory of International Politics*. The detailed exposition of structural realism in *Theory of International Politics* is rooted in the third image and develops the arguments previewed in *Man, the State, and War*.⁵ Notably, this interpretation emphasizes the

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conceptual and methodological contribution of Waltz’s texts rather than his substantive analyses. Indeed, it is precisely the success of *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics* in providing a parsimonious analytical framework to locate and sort the “main sources of state behavior” that explain their lasting influence in the field of IR. 6 By 1961, J. David Singer had already recognized the infinite uses to which Waltz’s theoretical apparatus could be put to work. As a general model to be deployed for explanatory and predictive purposes, Singer highlighted how the levels of analysis, as well as its distinction between structural and unit-level explanations, could be used to analyze a host of political outcomes. 7 Regardless of the specific outcome to be explained, e.g. war, stability, alliance formation, etc., Waltz’s organizational structure provided a convenient way to systemize hypotheses in the effort to facilitate and streamline causal analysis.

The interpretation of the levels of analysis as an explanatory tool has conditioned the conceptual landscape in the study of state behavior. Specifically, it has generated heated debates over whether structural approaches or unit-level approaches, which focus on the characteristic of states and leaders, provide better explanations of policy decisions and political outcomes. Various interlocutors have rejected Waltz’s privileging of structural explanations, calling instead for theoretical and empirical inquiries into how the attributes of individuals or specific domestic processes influence state behavior. 8 Although these responses seek to reverse Waltz’s judgment that the third image generates greater insight into international relations than the first or second image, they do not challenge Waltz’s explanatory framework. Indeed, the continued preoccupation with

8 For instance, see DL Byman and KM Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001). For an overview of neoclassical realism as a response to neorealism’s insufficient attention to domestic politics, see Glenn, “Realism Versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?” For an account of criticisms of Waltz’s levels of analysis that focus on its insufficiencies with regard to domestic politics and dyadic interactions, see Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism*, 194-5.
adjudicating between structural and unit-level explanations reveals the extent to which even Waltz’s positivist critics accept his theoretical premises and analytical distinctions.9

That Waltz’s positivist critics articulate their objections and socio-scientific projects in terms of the theoretical premises laid out in *Man, the State, and War* and *Theory of International Politics* is a direct consequence of reading these texts through an explanatory lens. After all, if the primary contribution of these texts lies in their adumbration of an analytical framework to arrange causal hypotheses, then accepting Waltz’s framework without accepting his judgments appears to be a reasonable possibility. This certainly appears to be the logic of many of his critics, who implicitly believe that Waltz situated these images on a level playing field to begin with, but unfairly preferred the third image.

Yet the notion that the levels of analysis is a neutral analytical tool ignores its built-in bias towards the third image. Systems level or structural analysis contains an implicit critique of unit-level analysis, which explains why the first and second image arguments Waltz overviews are all shown to be fallacious or spurious. The turn to structural explanations implies a prior judgment on the inadequacy of unit-level explanations, which is evident in Waltz’s discussion of exemplary third image theorists: “implicit in Thucydides and Alexander Hamilton, made explicit by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau […] is at once a generalized explanation of states’ behavior and a critical point d’appui against those who look to the internal structure of states to explain their behavior.”10 The upshot of Waltz’s own structural analysis is that unit-level analyses mistake symptoms for actual causes and concentrate on trivia at the expense of the larger picture.11 The lesson of the levels of analysis, Waltz

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9 This preoccupation is apparent in ongoing scholarship in neoclassical realism as well as Wayman and Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered*. With regard to neorealism’s radical critics, the genealogical work in this chapter supplements and complements Rick Ashley’s analysis in Richard K. Ashley, ”The Poverty of Neorealism,” *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984). Ashley’s criticism largely proceeds on the basis of Habermas’s three knowledge-constitutive interests: technical, practical, and emancipatory interest. While I agree with Ashley’s contention that neorealist knowledge, preoccupied with prediction and control, is rooted in technical interest, the next three chapters reject his contention that Morgenthau’s realism is exhausted by an interest in practical knowledge and attempts to draw out its emancipatory dimensions.

10 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, 7.

11 Ibid., 235. In this sense, the relationship between structural and unit-level explanations mirrors the relationship between sociological and psychological explanations. A sociological perspective contains an implicit critique of the limitations and omissions of psychological ones, which may mistake the epiphenomena of a historically contingent sociological
suggests, is that we should not be distracted by the infinite and varied causes of particular wars at the expense of “the uniform course of human events” illuminated by the third image.\textsuperscript{12}

The recognition that the levels of analysis framework already presupposes some explanations are better than others raises the question: for what purpose did Waltz develop the levels of analysis framework? I contend that although the conventional answer -- “to explain the causes of war” -- is not completely wrong, it is misleading. The rest of this chapter offers a different answer -- “to justify Realpolitik and balancing power” -- and reconsiders \textit{Man, the State, and War} as a work whose primary objective is to criticize alternatives to a sovereign state system governed by the principles of \textit{Realpolitik}. According to this reading, the levels of analysis framework is implicated in a normative endeavor to dismantle particular liberal, socialist, and neocolonial arguments for political reform. My interpretation recognizes that \textit{the substantive arguments Waltz is concerned with generate the levels of analysis schema and not the other way around}. It is not coincidental that Waltz’s intellectual rivals are liberal and socialist claims – i.e. arguments on behalf of certain modes of political and economic organization. Indeed, the normative and political dimensions of Waltz’s scientific realism and neorealism more generally cannot be understood without confronting the content of these arguments.

\textbf{2.2 From a Defense of Balancing Power to Balance of Power Theory: Reconsidering Waltz’s \textit{Man, the State, and War}}

In \textit{Theory of International Politics}, the practices of \textit{Realpolitik} and the act of balancing power occupy the status of scientific explananda, that is, recurrent phenomena to be explained. That states will balance power, that balances recur, and that disrupted balances will tend toward restoration are configuration for universal features intrinsic to the human mind. While Durkheim’s sociological explanation of suicide rates does not render psychological explanations useless, it diminishes the significance of specific individual level motives by placing them in the precise social circumstances that engender their existence. Failed marriages, vague bouts of despair, among a myriad of other details and particularities, are dwarfed by the concept of anomie. Waltz’s structural argument is similarly juxtaposed against, and critical of, unit-level ones. His basic claim is that the essential cause of war is the anarchical state system, not the properties of states or their constituents. He intimates on more than one occasion that arguments attributing war to state characteristics are mere rationalizations.\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 237.
theoretical expectations deduced from propositions about an anarchic state system.\textsuperscript{13} It would appear from this conception of balance of power that Waltz has absolutely no investment in its normative status. \textit{Realpolitik} and power distributions are simply phenomena to be explained. To even speak of states applying or following the dictates of balances of power successfully, Waltz asserts, is to engage in multiple, logical errors.

Despite his adoption of explanatory protocol in \textit{Theory of International Politics}, Waltz does not abandon the underlying politics and normative underpinnings of earlier proponents of power politics. This can be seen by understanding \textit{Man, the State, and War} as a normative defense of \textit{Realpolitik} and balancing power, that is, a legitimization of the phenomena scientific realism attempts to explain. The three images are thus not simply an efficient way to organize causes of war, but more significantly the analytical method by which a normative vision of international politics is justified.

If we view \textit{Man, the State, and War} as an attempt to adjudicate between normative and political visions, we can see that Waltz conducts an appraisal of four types of solution to the problem of international conflict: attempts at re-socialization espoused by so-called behavioral scientists, various modes of political and economic reform (e.g. liberal, socialist), balance of power politics, and world government. The levels of analysis framework originates as a tool to be used for the purpose of this normative assessment.\textsuperscript{14} To repeat, the primary function of the levels of analysis is “for accepting or rejecting prescriptions,” which is consistent with Waltz’s description of his work as political theory in the sense that it seeks to critically investigate the assumptions and implications of particular solutions to the problem of international conflict.\textsuperscript{15} Waltz explicitly states that his “primary

\textsuperscript{13} See p. 128 in \textit{Theory of International Politics} for a concise summary of the main theoretical expectations/predictions of Waltz’s structural model.

\textsuperscript{14} Waltz’s central concern with adjudicating between various political projects can be detected in the introduction to \textit{Man, the State, and War}: “If the validity of the images themselves can be ascertained, the critical relating of prescription to image becomes a check on the validity of prescriptions” (14). Here, it is intimated that Waltz’s intellectual project is to evaluate certain prescriptions by connecting them to their appropriate images, whose viability bears on the fate of their attendant prescriptions. A judgment on the validity of a level of analysis is not simply an analytical or explanatory one; it is, more significantly, a judgment on the prescriptions associated with that image. Waltz’s statement above also reveals the stakes of associating particular substantive arguments with particular images: which image an argument belongs to crucially determines the “validity of its prescriptions.”

\textsuperscript{15} Waltz, \textit{Man, the State and War}, 14.
concern [is not] with building models from which policies promoting peace can be derived but with examining the presuppositions upon which such models are based.”

Waltz determines the tenability of each political prescription by reducing it to a set of presuppositions, i.e. placing it in a particular level of analysis. As suggested at various point in the text, some images are faulty or less valid in the face of others. Ultimately, the trajectory of Waltz’s argument leads to the conclusion that alternatives to a nation-state system governed by Realpolitik are untenable. His analysis consists of a two-pronged justification of balance of power, in which he attempts to demonstrate the insufficiencies of the so-called unit-level solutions -- advocated by behavioralists as well as liberal and socialist political reformers – and the systems-level alternative of world government.

Beginning with an assessment of the first image, Waltz challenges a variety of prescriptions for reducing conflict offered by the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and social anthropology. According to Waltz, the failures of these prescriptions are “directly related to a view of man that is simple and pleasing, but wrong.” Yet Waltz’s dismissal of these arguments is a result of more than their presumptions about human nature or their focus on individuals. His placement of an assortment of prescriptions into the Procrustean bed of the first image belies the extent to which these arguments -- some emphasizing the psychiatric health of leaders and others aiming to develop less antagonistic intersubjective understandings between societies -- differ from each other, even in terms of their analytic components and presuppositions. In actuality, Waltz’s dismissal of these arguments arises from multiple considerations, including the impracticality of their implicit demands for large-scale social engineering, their tendency to surrender to a rationalist fallacy that equates knowledge with control, and his belief that re-socialization to larger group loyalties necessitates a political prior, namely world government. The last claim specifically and Waltz’s argumentation in

16 Ibid., 225.
18 Waltz, Man, the State and War, 39.
19 Waltz’s anti-rationalism in Man, the State, and War is in tension with his explicit contention in Theory of International Politics that explanatory theory is produced “by the desire to control” (6).
general reveals the extent to which his own materialist presuppositions motivate his criticisms against allegedly utopian attempts to combat partisan identifications or to alter expectations about war and peace.

Similarly, Waltz’s analysis of the second image is really a critique of the proposition “that through the reform of states wars can be reduced or forever eliminated.” For Waltz, this proposition is symptomatic of either imprudence or ideology. Waltz concentrates his criticisms on liberal and socialist claims that the proliferation of certain kinds of states will reduce conflict. In particular, he evaluates two variants of liberalism: *laissez-faire* and interventionist liberalism, dismissing the former because it ostensibly leads to predation and the latter because of its inflammatory effect on violence. Waltz disapproves of the passivity of the noninterventionists, whose salutary view of historical progress leads them to reject the prophylactic measure of balancing power. He asks: “what sense does it make to preach *laissez-faire* in international relations when not all states will practice it?” and concludes with the grave warning: “those who do find themselves at the mercy of those who do not.”20 The implication is that prudent states ought to oppose the conquests of others and to be wary of possible predation by being attentive to relative distributions of power.

While Waltz accuses *laissez-faire* liberals of naïveté, he regards their interventionist cousins as dangerously ideological. Comparing interventionist liberals to their socialist counterparts, Waltz indicts both for exhibiting messianic hubris, for their willingness to be “both judge and executor.” Frightened by the ease with which “idealists” appeal to justice, Waltz voices wariness over their disingenuous rationalizations through the words of 20th-century English historian, A.J.P. Taylor: “‘Bismarck […] fought ‘necessary’ wars and killed thousands; the idealists of the twentieth century fight ‘just’ wars and kill millions.”21 Crucially, Waltz’s remarks constitute less an analytical appraisal of the relationship between state characteristics and propensity towards conflict than a polemic against the ideological claims of those who profess to be harbingers of peace and adherents of just

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20 Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, 108.
21 Ibid., 113-14.
causes. Accordingly, he is equally critical of socialists who claim that war will disappear once capitalism is transcended, accusing them of adjusting their theories to account for facts they failed to predict, thereby buttressing their suspect political endeavors.\textsuperscript{22}

Waltz’s criticisms of first and second image arguments are heavily directed against their implicit moral judgments and their ostensible commitment to robust values like freedom, democracy, or equality rather than the allegedly immoral policies dictated by \textit{Realpolitik}. He characterizes first image optimists as those who “see a possibility of turning the wicked good and ending the wars that result from present balance-of-power politics,” and interventionist liberals as those who condemn the moral impoverishment of balance-of-power politics and believe that “it can be superseded.”\textsuperscript{23}

Waltz’s response to this aversion towards \textit{Realpolitik} is twofold. First, he attempts to reverse the judgment against \textit{Realpolitik} and the balance of power. Second, he implies that conventional moral judgments are irrelevant to international relations.\textsuperscript{24}

Waltz’s normative argumentation hinges on his development of the third image. Moreover, he invokes the classical realists to defend the balance of power and to rectify its dubious reputation as a tool for the immoral and corrupt. Turning to Thucydides, he asserts that the lessons of the \textit{History of the Peloponnesian War} echo the irrevocable truths of the third image: states “cannot consider what is just – their object cannot be to reward the righteous and punish the guilty”; alliances must be rooted in “interest” and “mutual fear”; states must anticipate the actions and, when necessary, balance the power of other states.\textsuperscript{25} Likewise, he invokes and comments upon Machiavelli’s tragic dictum:

‘A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything… must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good.’ This may not make unscrupulous behavior attractive, but to argue that on occasion one must behave

\textsuperscript{22} Waltz makes the same argument against neocolonial writers in Chapter 2 of \textit{Theory of International Politics}: “Latter-day Marxists and other neocolonialists… reinterpret the world to make it fit their misinterpretations of an old theory” (35).

\textsuperscript{23} Waltz, \textit{Man, the State and War}, 20, 110.

\textsuperscript{24} Waltz implies that such moral claims are necessarily ideological. This is clear in his critique of liberal understandings of American involvement in World War I and the Cold War as stemming from a commitment to freedom and democracy rather than a concern with balancing power. For Waltz, liberal ideology distorts the fact that balance of power considerations are and ought to be primary. More generally, he suggests that second image arguments give rise to the ideologically ripe distinction between “good” and “bad” states.

\textsuperscript{25} Waltz, \textit{Man, the State and War}, 211.
unscrupulously because others may do so does strip the adverb of its unsavory meaning and thus render it inappropriate.26

In other words, the structural view of the third image shows the folly of maligning balance of power politics; the necessity of Realpolitik renders the moral judgment against it unsuitable. In fact, the third image issues a radical challenge to conventional moral categories: “there is no such thing as an act good in itself.”27 Waltz concludes that in the anarchic state system acting on the basis of moral principles leads to exploitation. By implication, moral progress can never be anything more than a utopian fantasy.

Given Waltz’s dismissal of world government, the anarchic self-help system emerges as a normative ideal, where “rules of reciprocity and caution prevail.”28 Yet this is to be read less as a description of how things actually are than an injunction of how states ought to behave. Concurring with John Adams admonition that states ought not feel affections for one another, which is both “inappropriate and dangerous,”29 Waltz demonstrates his fidelity to the concept of self-help: any state should be concerned with its own preservation and independence within the conditions of anarchy.

Significantly, in Man, the State, and War, Realpolitik and the balance of power are meant to ensure more than the security of particular states; they are also meant to maintain “the condition [of] anarchy among them.”30 The political defense of anarchy this early text, though barely perceptible in Theory of International Politics, is implicated in one of the latter text’s central theoretical terms: stability.

Though stability is implicitly used as a proxy for peace, its precise definition (and political orientation) is markedly different from the absence of violence. For the international system to be stable means that it “remains anarchic” and that the number of major units that constitutes the system remains does not vary in any significant way.31 It is important to stress that Waltz’s concept

26 Ibid., 214.
27 Ibid., 231.
28 ———, Theory of International Politics, 175.
29 ———, Man, the State and War, 160.
30 Ibid., 216.
31 ———, Theory of International Politics, 162.
of stability, whose normative resonance is amplified by its conflation with peace, entails the preservation of the anarchic state system. In the context of Waltz’s persuasive project in *Man, the State, and War*, anarchy is as much a normative good as it is a descriptive category. Against the backdrop of allegedly doomed efforts at greater political centralization, Waltz makes a case for the “virtues of anarchy.” More than revealing how anarchy permits wars, he thus betrays his interest in justifying why we should maintain an anarchic state-system despite the fact that it does so.\(^\text{32}\)

Reading *Man, the State, and the War* on its own terms demonstrates that Waltz’s levels of analysis framework is more than an analytical precursor to the structural theory outlined in *Theory of International Politics*. It is a normative precursor as well. The third image provides an exoneration of *Realpolitik* and the balance of power on the basis of its implicit critique of unit-level analyses, which attempt to attribute such practices to bad individuals or bad states. The third image, Waltz argues, shows the “necessity” and desirability of each state defining and pursuing its own interest against alternative political visions of political reform. Accordingly, a foreign policy based on the principle of balancing power, which cannot be criticized through the lens of conventional notions of morality, embodies a “reasoned response to the world about us.”\(^\text{33}\) Whereas *Realpolitik* and balance of power are dependent variables whose recurrence is predicted in *Theory of International Politics*, they are defended against competing alternatives in *Man, the State, and War*. Furthermore, the concepts of anarchy and self-help, theoretical components within Waltz’s structural explanation of the law-like repetition of *Realpolitik* and interstate competition, receive their normative and political justification in Waltz’s earlier text; in the context of Waltz’s criticism of alternative modes of political transformation, they function as normative injunctions rather than simply analytical devices. The residues of this normativity remain in Waltz’s explanatory project, most notably by the inclusion of

\(^{32}\)———, *Man, the State and War*, 111. Waltz hints at this conclusion in the introduction to *Man, the State, and War*: “One, may for example, believe that world government and perpetual peace are synonymous, but one may also be convinced that a world state would be a world tyranny and therefore prefer a system of nation-states with a perpetual danger of war to a world state with a promise of perpetual peace” (15).

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 238.
anarchy in the very definition of stability, the dependent variable and key normative objective that anchors Waltz’s analysis and defense of Cold War bipolarity.34

Although the explanatory protocol of Theory of International Politics, with its implicit claim of value-neutrality, suggests reading Waltz’s earlier work, Man, the State, and War as merely an analytical precursor to his later work, doing so occludes more than it reveals about the evolution and nature of neorealism. First of all, such a reading, which ignores both textual and political context, misleads us into accepting Waltz’s analytical bias. While Waltz’s critics may be right to object to his partiality towards the third image, they err by not realizing that this privileging is embedded in the levels of analysis framework itself; they approach this schema as a neutral, empty, organizational box to be filled without acknowledging the critical function it was designed to perform. The common understanding that the levels of analysis framework was designed to be wielded as a knife to cut through explanatory puzzles elides the fact that this weapon was constructed specifically for the purpose of cutting the floor out from underneath political alternatives to Realpolitik. Only by apprehending the levels of analysis framework as serving a strategic function can we understand that Waltz used it to get at spurious arguments, whose fallacies should say nothing about the importance of the properties of man or states and how they relate to international relations.

Additionally, reading Man, the State, and War through an explanatory lens causes us to overlook the normative and political investments of scientific realism and the origins of the confluence between claims of how the world is (what is predicted) and claims of how the world should be (what is desired) that inheres in its theoretical structure. This confluence elucidates what

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34 Waltz’s normative defense of bipolarity is also outlined in Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Stability of a Bipolar World,” Daedalus 93, no. 3 (1964). See especially pp. 906–7, where Waltz argues that structural bipolarity produces stability by clarifying “who will oppose whom” and by encouraging responsible, calculated action. He explicitly asks us to “take comfort” in the fact that structural constraints mean elite leaders “are not wholly free agents.” In light of the “vagaries of men and the unpredictability of the individual’s reaction to events”, Waltz prefers too emphasize the constraints on freedom rather than appeal to “utopian hope,” though this chapter makes clear the illusory and “utopian” quality of those constraints.
stakes, beyond explanatory accuracy, scientific realists might have in seeing their predictions confirmed and why they react to instances of empirical falsification with normative disapprobation.\(^\text{35}\)

Finally, the attachment to value-neutrality in the field of International Relations means that scholars have not sufficiently engaged with the significant question Waltz raises in *Man, the State, and War*, namely what sort of political projects and normative visions ought to command our support. To ignore the centrality of this judgment to Waltz’s text is to accept his critique of any alternative to the *status quo*. By neglecting the normative backdrop of structural realism, neoclassical realists thus unwittingly reaffirm Waltz’s political judgments. They turn to domestic processes to explain deviations from the normatively ideal behavior predicted by structural realism, for instance why states fail to “conform to balance of power behavior.”\(^\text{36}\) In so doing, they fail to recognize that to engage with Waltz only on the basis of improving his theoretical apparatus in the effort to generate more detailed and accurate predictions is to accept his justification of power politics and the anarchic state system. For the normative defense in *Man, the State, and War* is inextricable from the explanatory endeavor of *Theory of International Politics*.

**2.2.1 The Politics of Ontology: What the Political World is Like… When It’s Convenient**

The political project of *Man, the State, and War* helps illuminate the theoretical choices made in the construction of scientific realism, especially those dimensions of realist theory, epistemology, and ontology that cannot be accounted for on the basis of scientific considerations alone. Realism’s ontology of a materialist international system characterized by continuity is a case in point. The fact that realists violate their own ontological claims – e.g. to offer non-realist explanations for anomalies, 

\(^{35}\) The previous chapter demonstrates how scientific realists respond to anomalies in patterned ways, namely with normative disapprobation and non-realist explanatory accounts. Using Charles Taylor’s critique of value-neutrality, I argue that this dual reaction, despite its ultimate incoherence, is a logical consequence of how realist theory is constructed.

\(^{36}\) See Glenn’s discussion of Schweller’s view of neoclassical realism as supplementing structural theory and geared toward explaining deviations in Glenn, "Realism Versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?,” 526-7. Glenn also mentions Wohlfarth et al's criticism of “the common practice of endeavoring to solve puzzles related to the failure of some states to conform to balance of power behavior.” Notably, this explanatory orientation fails to interrogate and, in fact, works to sustain Waltz’s normative judgments.
to engage in political activism, to justify their policy recommendations – in the process of defending their normative judgments provides good reasons for investigating how realist judgments have shaped their science. Apprehending Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War* as a defense of *Realpolitik* and balancing power is a useful strategy in this regard, for it helps us grasp the political functions of realist ontology.

The ease with which realists contradict their own materialist ontology suggests that expedience rather than theoretical suitability motivates their commitment. Materialism serves to buttress realist judgments in at least two ways. First, realists believe it would be normatively better if states acted as if they lived in a materialist world, in large part because of their fear of the danger of “utopian” ideas. In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz contends that appeals to "justice" and "rights", by conferring legitimization, make conflicts bloodier. Juxtaposing necessity and vital interests against liberal ideology and drawing out the horrific implications of wars buttressed by ideological commitments, Waltz makes the normative case for necessity and for abiding by the realities of power. If states acted as if they existed in a materialist ontology in which ideas were impotent, the world would ostensibly be a more peaceful and stable place. Mearsheimer echoes this normative assessment, asserting that "wars should not be fought for idealistic purposes, but instead for balance-of-power reasons." For both Waltz and Mearsheimer, the recourse to moral categories, to "utopian" claims of justice, right, and freedom, leads to disaster; hence it would be normatively desirable if states behaved as if the normative were irrelevant.

Second, a materialist ontology conceals the ideational premises of realism itself. The conventional understanding of neorealism as emphasizing the power of material factors and the

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37 See Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, 113-14.
38 Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 48-49. Ironically, the realist argument borders on the naive. Mearsheimer, specifically, recognizes that realist motives drive policy, even though liberal rhetoric may frame policy. Waltz is certainly correct in identifying liberal ideology as a possible justificatory doctrine, but the failure to recognize that the language of necessity is similarly an enabling ideology is naïve. After all, wars are always depicted as necessary and on behalf of vital interests regardless of real motivations, a truth Waltz himself acknowledges with regard to U.S. interventions in the past in *Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics,"* 48: “throwing the cloak of national security over U.S. interventions in Central America hardly concealed our rage to rule or to dictate to others how to govern their countries.” While realists prefer states to act as if they live in a world where only “materialist” factors of power and interests are efficacious, the refusal to recognize the case with which “behaving realistically” or “according to necessity” chafe material basis makes realism itself prone to ideological misuse.
impotence of ideational ones belies the extent to which neorealist concepts are themselves contingent upon the latter. Mearsheimer claims that “non-realist institutions are often based on higher norms, while few, if any, realist institutions are based on norms.” Yet realists consistently engage in normative argument, if one defines norms as standards of appropriate behavior; indeed, the terms "should" and "ought" are conspicuously prevalent in neorealist texts. The juxtaposition of realist self-interest against liberal norms, rooted in "altruistic" standards of appropriate behavior, reflects an unwillingness and/or inability to recognize the normative and ideational aspects of realism itself. Mearsheimer's false binary depends upon a conflation of the ideational and the ideal, the former an ontological characteristic and the latter an evaluative one. From the claim that realism is not concerned with the ideal, Mearsheimer untenably deduces that realism is not ideational.

According to neorealist theory, the effect of material structure is to constrain state behavior. History is marked by a continuity of outcomes and behaviors, which manifests the inescapable competitiveness and violence of international politics. Against the permanent backdrop of this anarchical structure, state behavior is conditioned by timeless and unalterable principles that mandate power politics. Neorealists regularly describe the political realm with language borrowed from and reminiscent of Hobbes' depiction of the state of nature, recalling a "nasty and brutish world" where relations are "ruthless and dangerous" and, most significantly, expected to be so for the foreseeable future. These allegedly universal laws and patterns of international politics have stayed constant in

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39 Neorealist theory is itself more "constructivist" than acknowledged. A close reading of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* reveals that the crucial difference between government and anarchy is not the physical presence or absence of coercion and organized violence, but rather intersubjective beliefs about legitimacy. See especially Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 104. On p. 81, Waltz himself argues that domestic hierarchy is a result of "broad agreement"; conversely, anarchy is the lack of intersubjective agreement on what constitutes legitimate authority. The ideational basis of Waltz's neorealist framework is further elucidated by the fact that Waltz details two processes by which the effects of structure take place: competition and socialization (pp. 92,128). Unfortunately, he fails to specify how the effects are to be distinguished, and later commentators have always assumed the former causal logic rather than the latter, which is explicitly rooted in a "constructivist" ontology.

40 Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 8-9, footnote 17.

41 Mearsheimer reveals both claims to be false when he accuses American political culture of being "hostile to realist ideas," warning that it "would be a grave mistake... for the country to turn its back on the realist principles that have served it well since its founding." See ———, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 402.

the past, rendering the very notion of transformation hopelessly utopian. Claims of inexorability notwithstanding, realism’s quasi-deterministic materialist ontology works to mask the political judgments involved in the theoretical privileging of power-seeking or maximizing security. Divorcing agency and choice from the "structural" phenomena of Realpolitik makes it possible to evade the ethical burden and responsibility of defending and legitimizing realist practices. In other words, if material forces are such that states cannot behave otherwise, then the question of Realpolitik’s appropriateness cannot be raised.

Not only does realism posit an inescapable materialist ontology, it further stakes its own relevance on the endurance of this reality. Mearsheimer asserts that realism will only become obsolete in the unlikely event that there is revolutionary or fundamental change in either the structure or essence of international politics. Both Waltz and Mearsheimer take claims of profound change or transformation to constitute an indictment of realism; hence both deny transformation and reinforce that "the real world remains a realist world." Neorealists explicitly acknowledge that their theory presupposes continuity and lack of change.

The relationship between the strength of realist analysis and the existence of radical transformation is usually understood to be strictly explanatory. Waltz elucidates the necessary linkage when he notes that structural realism can only explain the recurrent and repetitive and is ultimately a

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43 Whether this past is recent or not is unclear. Both Waltz and Mearsheimer comment on the continuity of politics in the post-World War II setting (see Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 109-11, Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 2). However, both have also made comments suggesting that history as such has always been characterized by a materialist world where actors are motivated primarily by self-regarding desires and a drive to maximize power. See Waltz’s excerpt above as well as p. 361 of Mearsheimer’s The Tragedy of Great Power Politics where he claims the behavior of great powers has remained invariant for centuries and on p369 where he asks rhetorically: "What is the causal mechanism that will delegitimize realism after seven hundred years and put a better substitute into its place?"

44 See Mearsheimer's "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," p. 23, p31.

45 Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 361. Waltz’s comment on p. 39 of “Structural Realism after the Cold War” is especially revelatory: “Every time peace breaks out, people pop up to proclaim that realism is dead. That is another way of saying that international politics has been transformed. The world, however, has not been transformed… Transformation… awaits the day when the international system is no longer populated by states that have to help themselves.” The last part of Waltz's statement reifies “anarchy” and "self-help," two key theoretical concepts in structural realism that Waltz contends are creative fictions. In other words, by talking about a world that is the artificial product of theoretical assertion as if he were describing an unchanging reality is to commit the error of reification, which, incidentally, Waltz criticizes in Theory of International Politics.

46 This is evident even in James’s attempt to reconceptualize structural realism in James, International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered.
theory that "explain[s] and predict[s] continuity." Although the content of their predictions differ, both defensive and offensive realism are confined to accounting for general laws and patterns of state behavior. Many scholars have criticized neorealism’s assumption of an unchanging structure for obfuscating empirical reality and naturalizing historical contingency. Yet what many realist critics fail to realize is that the fact that neorealism lacks “a theory of change,” a popular allegation after the fall of the Soviet Union, is not a coincidence. 48

There are a few reasons why realists are necessarily and not simply coincidentally invested in the lack of change. As the previous chapter shows, there are systematic links between what realism predicts and what it advocates, namely the continuity of Realpolitik. This chapter’s demonstration that scientific realism arises out of Waltz’s defense of a sovereign state system governed by the principles of Realpolitik illuminates the origins of this confluence. It also unearths the politics behind realist antipathy to change. Change is not only anomalous from the perspective of explanatory realism; it is also, as Waltz explicitly argues in Man, the State, and War, normatively undesirable. 49

The normative case on behalf of Realpolitik is ultimately contingent upon the accuracy of its empirical claims. Interestingly, the presence of empirical anomalies reveals that realism often mis-predicts, which entails normative disapprobation and, ironically, an advocacy of change in real-world politics to accord with the posited ontology of the recurrent. This suggests that just as realists believe it to be normatively desirable for states to act as if they existed in a world driven only by materialist power considerations, they similarly believe it normatively desirable for states to act as if fundamental change is impossible. If states believed change to be impossible, they would not choose to pursue allegedly dangerous "utopian" projects that guarantee disaster. Against the backdrop of Waltz’s verdict in Man, the State, and War that an anarchic world where states balance power is the best of all

47 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 70.
48 See Vasquez’s overview of criticisms of neorealism’s unchanging structure by Ruggie, Ashley, and Cox in Vasquez, The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism, 192-3. Moreover, Waltz’s own hypotheses about emulation in Theory of International Politics would only lead us to expect sameness across space and not necessarily sameness across time, especially if more efficient practices (via the competition mechanism) or especially powerful normative practices (via the socialization mechanism) are introduced into the system.
49 Waltz also explicitly argues against transformation of the system in the last chapter of Theory of International Politics.
possible worlds, the presupposition of an international system governed by Realpolitik loses any pretense to innocence. It is thus not too far-fetched to argue that Waltz and Mearsheimer posit a world of recurrent Realpolitik not primarily for explanatory or analytical traction, but because they hope that such an ontology becomes reified.\textsuperscript{50} Although many realists may be unconscious of the political judgments residing in their theoretical inheritance, the normative origins of scientific realism and the devastating inconsistencies in the work of scientific realists suggest that the politics of ontology must be taken seriously.

### 2.2.2 From Prudence to Prediction: The Case of the Missing Rationality Assumption

In addition to revealing the politics of realist ontology, the political project in *Man, the State, and War* clarifies a central tension in Waltz’s socio-scientific scholarship: the fact that rationality functions as a vital descriptive and prescriptive category in his argumentation despite his explicit rejection of a rationality assumption in *Theory of International Politics*.\textsuperscript{51} Although it is fairly easy to see that Waltz’s theorizing does rely upon a postulate that state actors are rational, it is harder to understand why a seemingly non-controversial and commonplace theoretical assumption is so anathema to Waltz, especially given his attempt to reconstruct balance-of-power theory on the basis of microeconomics.\textsuperscript{52} Situating Waltz’s socio-scientific project in *Theory of International Politics* within the context of his political project in *Man, the State, and War* can provide new insights on the

\textsuperscript{50} This would strengthen Waltz’s political judgments in *Man, the State, and War*. See footnote 45 for evidence that Waltz engages in reification. Mearsheimer argues that states should accommodate themselves to the allegedly timeless principles of reality. He invokes E.H. Carr to do so: “‘Realism,’ as E.H. Carr notes ‘tends to emphasize the irresistible strength of existing forces and the inevitable character of existing tendencies, and to insist that the highest wisdom lies in accepting, and adapting oneself to these forces and these tendencies.’” See Mearsheimer, “Liberal Talk, Realist Thinking,” 1, \textit{———}, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, 17. As the next three chapters show, Carr explicitly rejects such moral and political complacency.

\textsuperscript{51} Waltz’s rejection of an all-encompassing rationality assumption to account for the recurrence of balances of power in *Theory of International Politics* mirrors his equally suspect claim that deterrence does not depend upon rationality in Waltz and Sagan, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed*, 154.

\textsuperscript{52} Keohane explicitly concludes that Waltz presupposes rationality despite his claims to the contrary in Keohane, ed. *Neorealism and Its Critics*, 173. Elman and Elman also contend that Waltz’s central predictions “rely on the assumption that statesmen are ‘sensitive to costs’ and are likely to respond efficiently to changing international conditions and incentives,” i.e. statesmen are rational. See footnote 5 in Elman, Elman, and Schroeder, “History Vs. Neo-Realism: A Second Look,” 183.
significance of Waltz’s repudiation of the rationality assumption, which is ultimately inextricable from a web of contestable political judgments he hopes to circumvent.

In *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz contends that “structural constraints explain” why *Realpolitik* foreign policies recur, while balance-of-power theory explains why such practices lead to balances of power.\(^{53}\) Importantly, “balances are produced whether or not intended.”\(^{54}\) Contrary to how the term has been used in the past, balance of power theory’s sole purpose, Waltz asserts, is to explain why *Realpolitik* methods tend to produce balances of power. This view, which reduces balance of power to scientific explanandum, is contrasted with value-laden accounts that regard balance of power as either the epitome of cautionary foresight or a pretense for baser drives. Waltz bypasses this dispute and differentiates his version of the theory from earlier accounts, which -- as David Hume puts it -- consider balance of power “a constant rule of prudent politics.”\(^{55}\) Instead, Waltz contends that “balance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive.”\(^{56}\) Balances of power are uncoordinated, unintended phenomena, and their recurrence can be explained without reference to state motivations or shared expectations.

In contrast to this account in *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz’s discussion of balance of power in *Man, the State and War* clearly presupposes agency and judgment. Under conditions of anarchy, balance of power is crucial to state survival and therefore prudential. Indeed, Waltz claims that ignoring such power considerations is suicidal: “departure from the rational model imperils the survival of the state.”\(^{57}\) To neglect balance of power considerations not only leaves a state

\(^{53}\) Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 117. Note the subtle differences between Waltz’s discussion of *Realpolitik* and balance of power here and in Chapter 7 of *Man, the State, and War*. In the latter, Waltz asserts: “While *Realpolitik* is a method, the politics of balance forms its content and conditions its operation” (216). The focus on method and politics is suggestive of agency and deliberation. In contrast, in *Theory of International Politics* recurring balances of power are predicted as an evolutionary consequence of any anarchic system of units in which the units seek to survive.

\(^{54}\) ——, “Evaluating Theories,” 914.

\(^{55}\) ——, *Theory of International Politics*, 119.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{57}\) ——, *Man, the State and War*, 201. Italics mine.
unprepared for conflict, but also, Waltz further argues, actively invites aggression and predation. To balance power is thus to deter possible exploitation by ruthless aggressors.\textsuperscript{58}

The normative project in \textit{Man, the State, and War} sheds light on Waltz’s ambivalent relationship with the concept of rationality. Specifically, it highlights the reasons why Waltz is so keen to distance himself from such a theoretical presupposition in \textit{Theory of International Politics}. First of all, rationality plays a key role in rival arguments that Waltz seeks to demolish in \textit{Man, the State, and War}: for instance, behavioralists suggest the solution to the problem of conflict lies in making individuals and societies more rational; liberals argue that the fact that liberal states are more rational justifies political reform; Marxists are “rationalists in politics [who overestimate] the efficacy of reason” after the proletarian revolution.\textsuperscript{59} This appeal to rationalism or reason is associated with a kind of naïve optimism or ideological pretense Waltz wants to claim is absent from structural realism. More significantly, the invocation of rationality by competing parties, whether behavioralists, liberals, Marxists, or classical balance-of-power theorists, implies something about its nature: what constitutes rationality is contingent upon a contestable political judgment. This debate over rational state behavior is precisely one that Waltz wishes to foreclose. By asserting that his theory of international politics does not need to presume rationality, he implies that the political debate over what constitutes rationality is redundant.

Waltz wants to evade the debate about rationality not only because he sees it as opening the floodgates to naïve or ideological policies, but also because it directly weakens his claims about the necessity of balancing behavior. Though he argues in \textit{Man, the State, and War} that balancing power is prudential and rational, in \textit{Theory of International Politics} he attributes such behavior to structural causes that have nothing to do with intentionality or agency. In the latter conceptualization, the political

\textsuperscript{58} Even in \textit{Theory of International Politics}, Waltz implies the centrality of rationality, noting that “some states… act with relative efficiency to achieve” survival (93), and that states “try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view” (118). The notion of weaker states reacting prudently to the threat of unbalanced power is also prominent in his discussions of European history and contemporary American hegemony. Moreover, Waltz’s contention that Stephen Walt’s balance of threat is not so much a revision of balance of power theory as it is a description of the decision-making process of foreign policy makers contravenes his denial of a rationality postulate (as well as his assertion that theoretical assumptions are not ontological claims). See “Evaluating Theories,” 916, italics mine.

\textsuperscript{59} Waltz, \textit{Man, the State and War}, 66, 75.
debate over its appropriateness or desirability is simply unintelligible. Waltz recognizes that the
notion of rationality is a holdover from an explicitly normative understanding of balancing power as
prudential behavior. His endeavor to sidestep the normative controversy explains his critique of
Morgenthau for construing the balance of power as a “common framework,” whose “rules of the
game” states must accept in the rational endeavor to achieve greater stability.\footnote{60} For acknowledging
that balance of power is an institution that must be assented to reveals just how tenuous it is. Waltz’s
reduction of balance of power to a scientific outcome that can be account for without reference to
agency can be read as an attempt to mask this contingency as inevitability.\footnote{61} His political judgments
in \textit{Man, the State, and War} indicate that he does not object to the idea that states behave rationally but
rather to how rationality, which is ineluctably normative, is conceptualized by his rival interlocutors.
Ultimately, the fact that Waltz fails to eradicate rationality from his structural theorizing despite his
formal rejection of it as a theoretical presupposition demonstrates the extent to which the political
judgments explicit in \textit{Man, the State, and War} are implicated in Waltz’s scientific theory in \textit{Theory of
International Politics}.

\subsection*{2.2.3 From Political Theory to Scientific Theory}

That the defense of realist values is so pivotal to Waltz’s explanatory project and yet so
thoroughly ignored by contemporary IR social scientists is partly a result of Waltz’s own repudiation
of political philosophy, despite his admission that \textit{Man, the State, and War} is an exercise in political
theory.\footnote{62} His later conceptualization of theory and the distinction he draws between it and alternative
modes of inquiry is instructive. Theory, Waltz asserts, has to “meet certain standards and fulfill
certain requirements”; failure to meet these strict standards results in “philosophy or historical
interpretation” rather than theory.\footnote{63} Importantly, theory is ostensibly absent from political
\footnote{60} –––, \textit{Theory of International Politics}, 120.
\footnote{61} This claim is supported by the weakness of Waltz’s science. The previous chapter discusses Waltz’s reluctance to specify
standards for falsification and Schroeder’s finding that states have not historically balanced against potential hegemons in
Schroeder, “Historical Reality Vs. Neo-Realist Theory.”
\footnote{62} Waltz, \textit{Man, the State and War}, 2. I use political theory and political philosophy interchangeably.
philosophy, which Waltz pejoratively refers to as “great literature.” Distinguishing between the interpretative focus of the humanities and the rigorous approach of the sciences, Waltz associates theory with the latter. Theory, which is characterized by parsimony, simplification, and omission, is “fundamental to science” in a way that it is not to literature or history, which suggests something about its appropriate orientation. Waltz claims his notion of theory is embedded within a particular canonical understanding prominent in the natural sciences and philosophy of science literature, where its purpose is explanatory rather than critical.

A “theoretical” understanding of Man, the State, and War is thus one that focuses on its contribution to scientific explanation. As an analytical precursor to structural realism, Man, the State, and War is nothing more than a conceptual glossary of the theoretical assumptions pivotal to scientific realism: anarchy, self-help, balance of power, state survival, national interest. Because normative and political matters are simply outside of theory’s purview, the fact that these concepts are also ideals becomes indiscernible. In the transition from political philosophy to social science, Waltz’s justification of a certain vision of political organization against alternative programs of political reform becomes an explanation of seemingly intractable, law-like political outcomes. In the transition from Man, the State, and War to Theory of International Politics, values become ahistorical and abstract theoretical devices in service of causal analysis. Anarchy and self-help, normative injunctions that receive their political justification in the earlier work, become analytical tools for the purpose of explaining why states are constrained to engage in Realpolitik, maximize security above all other values, and balance power. In Theory of International Politics, Waltz characterizes the theoretical assumptions of scientific realism (e.g. states are unitary actors that maximize security) as analogous to theoretical assumptions in the natural sciences (e.g. “imagining that mass concentrates at a point,

64 Ibid.: 372.
66 Halliday and Rosenberg, "Interview with Ken Waltz," 384. When asked about C. Wright Mills’ The Sociological Imagination, which conceives of theory as part of the endeavor to critically illuminate ‘the present as history,’ Waltz contrasts his use of the term, in line with the natural sciences, with alternative uses which he implies do not live up to the name of theory: “There are all kinds of theory. There’s the theory of literary criticism. And that obviously has to be a very different thing; I would not use the term theory for it… (384)”
inventing genes, mesons, and neutrinos”). Waltz’s analogy submerges the evaluative dimension of neorealist presuppositions and makes judgments about state behavior and the organization of international political life unintelligible.

In particular, Waltz’s espousal of scientific theory functions to obscure the ethical and political judgments behind his distinction between anarchy and hierarchy. As theoretical components of structural realism, they respectively denote the absence and presence of government and help provide explanatory leverage on the problem of international conflict. What becomes less obvious is the fact that this theoretical distinction universalizes a historically contingent and normatively contestable organization of international politics. Notably, Waltz’s distinction between anarchy and hierarchy is indebted to Weber’s conceptualization of the state, which is defined as having “a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.” The key insight of structural realism is that in anarchy, this intersubjective agreement on the legitimate exercise of violence is absent, leading to dangerous uncertainty and therefore to self-help. The extent to which the anarchy-hierarchy division is coupled with a particular view of the boundaries of ethics is hinted at – though ultimately elided by social scientists– by the centrality of legitimacy to this distinction. Waltz’s assertion that domestic use of force is “exercised in the name of right and justice” while interstate conflicts have and can have nothing to do with “questions of authority and right” is part and parcel of the anarchy-hierarchy distinction. Not only does Waltz’s notion of theory in Theory of International Politics transform a historically contingent understanding of just authority into an abstraction to be used for explanatory purposes, it also deflects attention away from his forceful attempts in Man, the State, and War to defend the maintenance of such a distinction, especially against political opponents of the sovereign state system. In his earlier text, Waltz contends that the normative dangers of political centralization

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67 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 10.
69 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 112. Waltz’s distinction echoes Martin Wight’s famous claim that the domain of international theory deals merely with the realm of necessity/survival and is irreconcilable with political theory, which is demarcated by the state and concerns theories of the good life, i.e. utopias. For a critique of Wight’s argument, see Robert H. Jackson, "Martin Wight, International Theory and the Good Life," Millennium: Journal of International Studies 19, no. 2 (1990).
render anarchy, with its understanding of right and justice as only relevant within states, the best of all possible worlds. In an anarchic system where states are mutually deterred by their capacity for violence, they – especially great powers – can focus on managing global problems rather than fighting over centralized power or over whose cause is just.70

2.2.4 Scientific Realism’s Circular Development: From Values to Ontology and Back Again

If the distinction Waltz articulates between political theory and scientific theory helps us understand how the value commitments of neorealism have become submerged and forgotten but perpetuated within an explanatory framework, the divergences between Waltz’s and John Mearsheimer’s view of theory -- and contemporary realism’s implicit acceptance of the latter’s presuppositions, allow us to understand why realists seem to converge on a common set of values.71 Most contemporary realists advocate that states be attentive to power, seek their national interest, and refrain from the pursuance of “ideological” or humanitarian objectives. The obvious desirability of these basic principles results from the dramatic shift that occurs from Waltz’s understanding of theoretical assumptions as heuristic devices to Mearsheimer’s understanding of them as ontological claims.

70 These judgments persist in Theory of International Politics, for instance in Waltz’s defense of anarchy against political centralization on p.112: “If might decides, the bloody struggles over right can more easily be avoided.” The political and ethical judgments in Man, the State, and War and Theory of International Politics are essentially identical, which makes it impossible to claim that although the first text may be explicitly normative, it has no bearing on Waltz’s ‘positivist’ work twenty years later. In particular, the last chapter of Theory of International Politics outlines a hierarchy of normative goals to be pursued by the Cold War powers: “In descending order of importance, they are the transforming or maintaining of the system, the preservation of peace, and the management of common economic and other problems” (199). Waltz proceeds to criticize attempts to transform the international system through hegemonic politics or active efforts to bring about multipolarity. The ladder of normative goods outlined by Waltz, which frames the explanatory protocol of Theory of International Politics, is consistent with the political judgments of Man, the State, and War. More specifically, this earlier work contains the philosophical and political underpinnings for the privileging of system maintenance in Waltz’s later work. 71 See Mearsheimer’s discussion of theory in Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics. Schweller’s contention that political realism is both a scientific research program and a political philosophy/world view implies an acceptance of Mearsheimer’s view of theory. That is, assumptions about state behavior and the centrality of conflict are ontological claims rather than epistemological conveniences. See Schweller’s discussion in Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, 75. See also Brooks, ”Dueling Realisms,” 19, Wayman and Diehl, eds., Reconstructing Realpolitik, 12. Brooks’s discussion of a possible “empirical duel” between the divergent assumptions of neorealism and postclassical realism can be considered a rejection of Waltz’s view of theory. Likewise, Wayman and Diehl adumbrate ten core realist propositions, followed by an eleventh proposition that all propositions “are rooted in the inherent character of human institutions and hence valid for all historic time.” In other words, realist theoretical presuppositions have ontological reality.
For Waltz, theory is a creative and imaginary act involving conceptual fictions. Theoretical assumptions are epistemological conveniences rather than ontological presuppositions.\textsuperscript{72} Mearsheimer specifically rejects the anti-realism of Waltz’s approach to theory, defended by Milton Friedman: “the best theories ‘will be found to have assumptions that are wildly inaccurate descriptive representations of reality, and, in general, the more significant the theory, the more unrealistic the assumptions.’”\textsuperscript{73} While agreeing with Waltz’s basic premise of the explanatory function of theory, he disagrees with Waltz’s argument that theoretical assumptions or concepts ought to be a product of creative invention. Asserting that unrealistic assumptions do not provide explanatory insight, Mearsheimer claims that the major theoretical assumptions of offensive realism are “accurate representation[s]” of international politics.\textsuperscript{74} An anarchic system filled with rational, unitary state actors whose primary goal is survival thus becomes an ontology of the international system. Whereas in \textit{Theory of International Politics} this vision of international politics is an artifice, a pragmatic abstraction used to deduce expectations about state behavior, Mearsheimer regards his theoretical model as a representation, albeit simplified, of reality. Crucially, in the transition from Waltz’s early work to Mearsheimer’s version of realism, normative judgments have shifted from theoretical artifices to ontological truths. While Waltz acknowledges in \textit{Theory of International Politics} that real states do not

\textsuperscript{72} Ironically, the neorealist view of theory rests upon Waltz’s assertion that “reality must be grossly distorted.” Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," 27. Waltz’s argument that theory involves creative acts rather than ontological claims is detailed in the first chapter of \textit{Theory of International Politics} and “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory.” Two things are important to note. First, Waltz’s conceptualization of theory allows him to dismiss criticisms of scientific realism’s explanatory insufficiencies. See p. 31 of “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” where he rejects the demand for empirical accuracy. In Waltz’s reply to his critics in “Evaluating Theories,” he basically argues that to ask theory to reflect reality is to misunderstand the purpose of theory. See also p. 188 of Elman and Elman, “History Vs. Neorealism,” where they counter Schroeder’s critique by noting that in Waltz’s epistemology, “theories do not have to describe real causal mechanisms.” Second, despite Waltz’s assertions that the theoretical assumptions of structural realism are not ontological claims, he defies this in practice. He engages in the same sort of argumentation as Mearsheimer, using ontological claims to buttress the normative judgment that states ought to engage in self-help and pursue their national interest. This is especially conspicuous in \textit{Man, the State, and War}, where he relies upon assertions about the nature and behavior of states to justify his conclusion that \textit{Realpolitik} within an anarchic state system is more desirable than more radical alternatives, namely political reform or political centralization. Although this section focuses on the differences between Mearsheimer’s and Waltz’s formal expositions on scientific theory, Waltz’s violation of his own theoretical commitments in practice suggests that we should approach his views on the philosophy of science with at least a modicum of skepticism.

\textsuperscript{73} Mearsheimer, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, 30.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
necessarily behave according to his assumptions and sometimes obviously contravene them,
Mearsheimer speaks of states as being “hardwired” to maximize power.\(^75\)

The difference between Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s formal expositions of theory is not
merely a matter of dispute over philosophy of science standards; it has profound normative and
political implications. As discussed in the last chapter, Charles Taylor’s work on value-neutrality
shows how theoretical frameworks contain value-slopes that render some political prescriptions more
obviously desirable than others. Scientific realism’s value-slope is constituted by its ontological
claims about the nature of states and the structure of international relations. Given scientific
realism’s account of political reality, certain behavioral prescriptions follow logically, which might
explain the profusion of normative arguments throughout realist scholarship. The claim that states
naturally behave in certain ways, e.g. engage in the single-minded pursuit of material power, leads
Mearsheimer to remark that “the best way to survive is to have your own state, and to have lots of
power, and not to depend on the international community.”\(^76\) Because states maximize power under
conditions of anarchy, a clear lesson follows: “if the opportunity to gain an advantage over another
state arises, take advantage of it.”\(^77\) According to Mearsheimer’s ontology of the political world,
“survival mandates aggressive behavior”; hence “Realism’s central message [is] that it makes good
sense for states to selfishly pursue power.”\(^78\) Thus, not only does Mearsheimer claim to explain how
states behave in the world – like offensive realists – he derives normative injunctions based on his
ontology of international politics.\(^79\)

\(^75\) Institute of International Studies, ”Through the Realist Lens: Conversation with John Mearsheimer,” "Lessons Learned”.
\(^76\) Ibid.
\(^77\) Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I),” 123.
\(^78\) ———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 21-22.
\(^79\) According to Mearsheimer, the ontology of the international system precludes any sort of salutary systemic change; hence
he argues that the prescriptions of institutionalists and critical theorists are “not realizable in practice” in ———, "The
False Promise of International Institutions," 40. Significantly, none of Mearsheimer’s normative prescriptions differ from
the way that states allegedly behave due to structure of international relations. Indeed, his account of great power behavior
in The Tragedy of Great Power Politics is as much explanation as it is justification of what detractors have taken to be “aberrant
strategic behavior,” e.g. the foreign policies of Imperial Japan, Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany as well as nuclear behavior
during the Cold War (233). It is perhaps Mearsheimer’s acceptance of his own argument that behavior must surrender to
the ontological properties of the international system that explains his peculiar volte-face on the matter of US troop
deployment in Europe and Northeast Asia. See ———, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War,"
John J. Mearsheimer, "Disorder Restored,” in Rethinking America’s Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order, ed. Graham
In spite of the slightly different prescriptions offered by Waltz and Mearsheimer as a result of the latter’s subsidiary claim that maximizing power is the best way to achieve security, Mearsheimer’s derivation of normative injunctions from realist ontology brings us full circle. In Waltz’s transition from *Man, the State, and War* to *Theory of International Politics*, values are transformed into abstract, utilitarian theoretical devices. Mearsheimer then translates these epistemological conveniences into ontological claims, from which recommended norms of behavior emerge. The beginning and end point in this closed circuit are realist valuations; in the evolution, these judgments have acquired a scientific legitimacy that they earlier lacked. Thus, what a genealogical perspective reveals is that scientific realism arose out of a normative defense of *Realpolitik* – its conceptual and analytical parts are derived from this earlier project of justification – and works to sustain those value judgments. On the basis of scientific realism, realist prescriptions become virtually self-evident, hence requiring little additional justification.

**2.3 The Normative Limitations of Scientific Realism**

**3.3.1 Grounds for Moral Judgment**

The normative origins and implications of scientific realism should inform our appraisal of realist critiques of contemporary foreign policy. In particular, realist criticisms against the 2003 Iraq War and the earlier Vietnam War beg two questions: On what grounds can realists pass judgment on specific foreign policies or on the international system more generally? And can realists challenge the ethics of either? Revisiting realist opposition against the invasion of Iraq allows us to think through these questions.

———, "The Future of the American Pacifier," 58-59. In the early 1990s, Mearsheimer supported the maintenance of robust forces abroad, conceding that although such a policy valued stability above power (i.e. it was against “the basic nature of states”), leaders in the US and the UK must recognize the “real” stakes involved and help their publics “recognize this interest” in preserving peace. In 2001, Mearsheimer completely reverses his position, arguing that robust military presence abroad in the quest to preserve peace is “seriously flawed” and “not a vital” interest. While Mearsheimer’s volte-face brings his normative position into line with his theoretical claims of state behavior, it requires repudiating his earlier rhetorical invocation of vital interest and thus completely undermines its theoretical and predictive credibility. Moreover, the ostensible inexorability of the international system poses the question of why it is necessary to advocate what is inevitable. If *ought* never deviates from *is*, then the distinction simply collapses. The very existence of persistent normative argumentation renders claims about what the world is necessarily like suspect.
The vociferousness of their criticisms notwithstanding, scientific realists framed their opposition to the Iraq War in technical rather than ethical terms. Waltz’s view that the war was unnecessary stemmed from his belief in the effectiveness of containment and deterrence. According to his logic, if the credible threat of retaliation suffices, then it is simply inefficient to engage in a costly war.80 The defense of the containment regime and the claim that state leaders – even of “rogue” regimes – can be deterred by the threat of violence do not necessarily imply a moral argument. Waltz’s reasoning suggests that his primary preoccupation was with the least costly means to achieve a given end. Similarly, Mearsheimer questions the “justification” of the war in terms of its probability of success and its desirability in comparison with what he, and realists more generally, believed to be the more effective alternative: containment.81 Like Waltz, his opposition to the war was articulated in terms of “cost-benefit analysis.”82 Mearsheimer’s judgment that the invasion was “delusional” is reducible to a more pragmatic objection: the U.S. lacked the military capabilities to achieve its objectives at a reasonable cost. For Waltz and Mearsheimer as well as realists more generally, the U.S. should have behaved as an offshore balancer, which would have more effectively protected its geographical interests than invading Iraq.

Importantly, realist criticisms do not explicitly challenge the basic value commitments undergirding the Iraq War. Two considerations explain why they may have pursued such a limited critique, despite their serious opposition to the war. First, realists voiced their criticisms as part of two larger cohorts of IR scholars, The Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy and The Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy. The latter in particular objected to the invasion of Iraq on the basis of realist, Weberian analysis. Taking the administration’s “value-orientation” as given, these scholars concentrated on assessing the adequacy of certain means, in this case the invasion of Iraq, in achieving given goals – e.g. fighting terrorism or maximizing the national interest.83 This critical

81 Mearsheimer, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part I)," 115.
appraisal of the war -- based on challenging its instrumental rationality and its cost effectiveness -- had the virtue of being consistent with the ostensibly universal commitment amongst IR scholars to value-neutral social science.\textsuperscript{84}

The second, and arguably more insightful, reason that scientific realists like Waltz and Mearsheimer grounded their criticisms in technical rather than moral concerns is a consequence of the normative judgments implicit in scientific realism. In \textit{Man, the State, and War}, Waltz suggests that the appeal to lofty moral values is always the problem and never the solution. The war in Iraq constituted a failure of pragmatism and once again demonstrated the violent consequences of ideological foreign policy. The realist indictment of the Bush administration's foreign policy, with its “emphasis on speculation instead of facts, on mythology instead of calculation, and on misplaced moralizing over considerations of national interest,” implies that the grounds for censure lies precisely in the failure to behave as realism requires: to pursue the national interest in sober recognition of the material realities of power.\textsuperscript{85}

Nevertheless, the implied dichotomy between prudential realism and a moralizing, imperialist neoconservatism elides the extent to which realism is itself complicit in the type of thinking that made the Iraq War seem reasonable. Echoing Waltz’s condemnation of the ideological nature of “second-image” liberal and socialist claims, Mearsheimer disparagingly refers to the Bush doctrine, rooted in neo-conservatism, “Wilsonianism with teeth,” that is to say, idealism driven by military power.\textsuperscript{86} Implicit in his formulation, especially in contrast with its unstated opposite – realism with a motivating vision -- is the notion that the idealism is culpable (for misguided policy)

\textsuperscript{83} Jackson and Kaufman, "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy: A Study in Weberian Activism," 98.
\textsuperscript{84} We should be skeptical of the Weberian and scientific foundations of the SSSFP critique. Indeed, the intellectual diversity of the scholars in question and the inclusion of a number of post-positivist scholars who doubtfully subscribe to a Weberian conception of the social sciences call into question any ostensible “scientific consensus” (Jackson and Kaufman 98). Given that it is much easier to organize a critical opposition without having to agree upon an alternative set of values or political commitments, we should view the adoption of a Weberian approach as a matter of strategy. Yet without an alternative orientation, the SSSFP criticism is indistinguishable from an endeavor to improve the technical operations of power. Such a critique can only sustain itself on the grounds of efficacy and is ultimately unable to engage in more significant debates over the appropriateness of given ends and the worldview which makes those ends intelligible.
\textsuperscript{85} Jackson and Kaufman, "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy: A Study in Weberian Activism," 100. See also Gilpin, "War Is Too Important to Be Left to Ideological Amateurs."
rather than the emphasis on military power. Yet the Bush doctrine shares with scientific realism a belief in the efficacy of force, the inefficacy of diplomacy implied by a materialist ontology, and the willingness of states to pursue power without apology. Accordingly, it is hard to see how the excessive unilateralism criticized by realists is not precisely the policy implication of the normative injunction of self-help. Realist opposition merely begs the question: why would a theory which considers discourse to be epiphenomenal and maximization of relative power crucial to survival not have an overly sanguine view of the use of material force—which is after all claimed by Mearsheimer to be the best way to survive—and a concomitant distrust of the potentials of diplomacy? It is difficult to reconcile realist criticism of the Bush administration’s failure to embrace diplomatic options with realist ontology.

Indeed, a unilateral foreign policy, which focuses on maximizing power at the expense of others, is precisely what offensive realism predicts and dictates. Mearsheimer claims that the Bush administration’s confidence in military force is responsible for its preference for unilateral rather than multilateral action and its subsequent denigration of diplomacy, which is by definition multilateral; however, his assertion that the administration was realist before 9/11 implies that it is not unilateralism per se that is objectionable, but only the particular manifestation of unilateralism in the war against Iraq. Moreover, Mearsheimer’s comments in 2002 that “Iraq and Iran are bent on acquiring nuclear weapons and show no signs of becoming status quo powers” show that realist disagreement is not about how threats are defined but how to deal with them.

The extent to which commentators and scholars have failed to recognize the incoherence of realist criticism is surprising. While Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams analyze the strategic failure of realism in the debate over Iraq, they fail to critically appraise the viability of realist arguments themselves. Schmidt and Williams seem to take realist arguments at face value,

87 Ibid.: 2.
89 Mearsheimer, "Realism, the Real World, and the Academy," 27.
90 For example, see Starobin, "The Realists."
juxtaposing realist caution against neorealist aggression and highlighting realist warnings on the power of nationalism. Yet they do not assess whether these particular claims and the general case against the Iraq War are actually sustainable on the basis of realist theory. As such, they miss the fact that realist opposition presumes the efficacy of ideas in ways inconsistent with realism’s materialist ontology. As Rodger Payne notes, political activism is itself in tension with realism’s theoretical claims about the meaninglessness of public deliberation, political communication, and discourse in general. Neorealist talk is anomalous in the face of the neorealist view that “talk is cheap.”

Furthermore, the centrality of nationalism in realist arguments against the war does not comport with realist analyses of state behavior. Mearsheimer’s explicit warnings of the decisive effects of rhetoric and the power of nationalism are case in point. He argues that a realist would understand the importance of rhetoric and the inevitability of nationalist backlash in response to military intervention:

I am amazed that so many Americans fail to understand that 

promiscuous rhetoric

about preventive war, not to mention actually engaging in war on a regular basis, is going to spur states all around the globe to get nuclear weapons to protect themselves from the United States…

Throughout his theoretical and policy writings, Mearsheimer references anecdotes illustrative of the force of nationalist sentiment in defeating conquering powers, as evidenced by the demise of European empires and the counterproductive 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. He claims that the efficacy of nationalism is consistent with the theoretical claims of offensive realism: “I do not say anything explicit about nationalism in my theory. However, they fit together neatly, since nationalism is all about nations craving their own state, and my theory, like all realist theories, assumes that states are the principal actors in the system.” He goes on to assert that realists oppose the Vietnam and

94 Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 249.
95 ———, "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part II)," 235.
Iraq Wars and embrace a “hearts and minds” approach precisely because they understand the power of nationalism.96

Mearsheimer’s emphasis on nationalism poses more problems than he anticipates. Significantly, the efficacy of nationalism -- and the normative implication of moderation suggested by it -- is inconsistent with the primary theoretical claim of offensive realism: states maximize power aggressively because it is the most rational way to maximize security. At a minimum, nationalist backlash imposes a cost that must be factored into a state’s rational calculation. At a maximum, nationalism implies that expansion and aggression are fundamentally irrational. Moreover, other passages in Mearsheimer’s work contradict his claim that nationalism is decisive. Indeed, Mearsheimer criticizes Bruce Russett for making the exact same argument years earlier. Russett argues that because the power of nationalism poses problems for conquest, European wars will be less likely in the future. Mearsheimer retorts that nationalism, even when potent, is an indeterminate force, as evidenced by French accommodation to Nazi Germany and the success of Soviet control over Eastern Europe for almost half a century.97 Mearsheimer gives no explanation for the change in his views, and his earlier position on the indeterminacy of nationalism is much more consistent with his descriptive claims in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, where he asserts that states maximize power relentlessly and in a myriad of ways, “even if doing so makes other states suspicious or even hostile,” i.e. regardless of the effects of nationalism.98 Mearsheimer’s contention that it is rational to maximize power aggressively and that such behavior is the most optimal way to attain security implies that nationalism is not powerful enough to make maximizing power a suboptimal strategy.

Not only does structural realism’s materialist ontology render the nationalism Mearsheimer bases his foreign policy criticism upon epiphenomenal, Mearsheimer’s theoretical assumptions about state behavior further provide ammunition for aggressive militarism. Anarchy requires that states

96 Institute of International Studies, "Through the Realist Lens: Conversation with John Mearsheimer." See p. 2 under the heading of “The Problem of Terrorism.”
make “worst-case assumptions about their rivals’ intentions.”99 The alleged rationality and optimality of making worst-case assumptions presupposed by explanatory realism, not to mention the offensive realist expectation that states will embrace innovation in the plight to maximize power, sound eerily similar to the arguments made to justify the logic of preventive war.100 The theoretical implications of anarchy entail belligerent behavior, of which the Iraq War seems to be a quintessential example. According to offensive realism, the structure of the international system constrains states to maximize power; in Mearsheimer’s own words, “survival mandates aggressive behavior,” and “great powers have aggressive intentions.”101 The theory of offensive realism construes aggression as justifiable and reasonable behavior in the face of systemic constraints.

The theoretical claim that aggression is crucial to survival, which orients offensive realism, makes it difficult to challenge any policy that claims to embrace expansionism for the sake of necessity or security. Mearsheimer’s discussion of the 19th century policy of Manifest Destiny offers an example of the inability to criticize policy on the basis of the theoretical assumptions of offensive realism. Although he acknowledges the ideological aspects of the doctrine, he claims that offensive realism explains the broad contours of Manifest Destiny on the basis of security concerns. By implication, the idealist or moral tenor of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny is superfluous; it does not vitiate the fact that the underlying cause was the security imperative. Mearsheimer’s account of Manifest Destiny, an exemplar of the kind of phenomena offensive realism explains, justifies its political rationality without any serious assessment of its normative implications.

Overall, this suggests a more fundamental problem with attempting to use the theoretical assumptions of scientific realism as a basis for normative judgment. Neorealism’s reliance on the concept of maximizing security and on the notion of necessity elides the distinction between a genuine security claim and ideological justification. This explanatory and normative indeterminacy

99 Ibid., 45. See Brooks’s discussion of this worst-case logic in Brooks, ”Dueling Realisms.”
100 Indeed, that preventative war is a logical consequence of maximizing power is implicit in Mearsheimer’s argument that France, Britain, and the Soviet Union should have launched a preventative war against Nazi Germany in Mearsheimer, ”Reckless States and Realism,” 252.
101 ———, ”Liberal Talk, Realist Thinking,” 2, ———, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 34.
arises from the fact that in scientific realism, whether Waltz’s or Mearsheimer’s version, security is constituted by way of theoretical fiat. Security is best achieved by balancing or maximizing power, respectively, without any attempt at systematic empirical assessment of whether either claim is supported by historical evidence. The elevation of the security imperative along with unsupported realist claims of how it is best fulfilled provide a sturdy scaffold for questionable pursuits; that is, realism itself provides a convenient framework of justification, an inconvenient truth that even scholars who opposed the war seemed to recognize: “The Bush Administration’s pre-war case for war was a Realist logic focused on response to threat.”

Mearsheimer himself acknowledges the extent to which realist considerations informed the decision to go to war. In addition to bold claims about freedom, democracy, justice, and human rights,

[Bush] made hard-nosed realist arguments for the war. For example, he talked constantly about the threat from WMD and terrorism. He talked about rogue states like Iraq and Iran using WMD to blackmail the United States. He talked about those states giving WMD to terrorists, who would surely use them against us. So there was both a realist and idealist logic at play in Bush’s mind, which is what allowed him to think that his behavior was morally as well as strategically correct.

Realism’s complicity in making preventive war intelligible, and the more specific fact that preventive war could be a predicted/normative response within offensive realism, renders it an unsuitable foundation from which to challenge the Iraq War. The explanatory re-positioning required to criticize the war cogently, which necessitates asserting that scientific realism cannot account for it, shows precisely the incoherence of such efforts; for the alternative non-realist explanations realists proffered – which emphasize interest group politics and liberal/neoconservative ideology -- undercut the very theoretical and ontological assumptions underpinning realist political judgments.

104 In the same interview, Mearsheimer denies there is a “good realist case for attacking Iraq.” Recall that the previous chapter shows how Mearsheimer responds to the Iraq War with normative disapproval and a non-realist explanation of the war, which results from the fact that scientific realism only explains/predicts normatively desirable outcomes.
Additionally, the epistemological and ontological commitments of scientific realists make it such that they are unable to issue more radical challenges to the deployment of violence in international relations. Waltz’s notion that theory is for the purpose of control renders scientific realism a tool to maintain and reproduce power distributions within the system of anarchy he defends. Similarly, the unchanging, materialist ontology posited by most contemporary realists constitutes a denial of “the possibility of a world ordered in any other way.” This chapter’s account of scientific realism’s origins and value commitments shows that not only is realism incapable of radically challenging the world as it is, it intentionally works to sustain that very world. For all its criticisms of specific foreign policies, and despite its condemnations of particular wars, scientific realism is founded in a normative defense of the very system of political organization from which those policies emerge as reasonable responses.

If revisiting Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War* allows us to locate the origins of what Taylor would call scientific realism’s value-slope, then Steven Forde’s analysis of the deployment of “scientific” claims by classical realists suggests that Waltz and Mearsheimer are indeed, as they claim, successors to an illustrious tradition of thinkers, including the likes of Thucydides and Machiavelli. However, they are indebted not to their predecessors’ substantive insights, as they believe, but rather to their deployment of scientific idiom and structural arguments for political, and arguably morally dubious, purposes. According to Forde, in the history of realist thought scientific claims – especially ones that rely upon structural argumentation -- have typically served to obfuscate the moral horror of policy, to avoid attribution of responsibility, and to exonerate aggression. To argue that a certain behavior stems from pressures emanating from an overpowering anarchy, to render such constraint a law-like necessity in scientific terms, is to provide a justification for not being able to do

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Incidentally, Waltz’s analysis of the Vietnam War is structurally equivalent to Mearsheimer’s analysis of Iraq. See Halliday and Rosenberg, "Interview with Ken Waltz," 373.

Ashley, "Political Realism and Human Interests," 234.

Contemporary realism’s investment in continuity is still evident in recent and more rigorously scientific scholarship, for instance in Wayman and Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered*.

With regard to Thucydides, I am referring here to the types of arguments made by his characters.
otherwise. Machiavelli and some of Thucydides’ characters turn to scientific renderings – whether in the form of Athenian appeals to the motivating powers of fear and the necessity of interest or in Machiavelli’s invocation of “‘universal causes’ [and reference] to the unalterable ‘order of things’” in *The Prince* – precisely to justify prophylactic measures that might otherwise seem unscrupulous.¹⁰⁸

The use of scientific formulations as “a potent political weapon” in classical realist texts and the use of explanatory realism as the basis for sustaining political judgments in contemporary realist texts imply that we should be wary of the claim to value-neutrality. As Forde notes, “realism, precisely insofar as it is scientific, is not a “value-neutral” approach.”¹⁰⁹ In contrast to contemporary realists’ understanding of themselves as engaged in either a value-neutral or a normatively valiant endeavor to advance peace and stability – which are incompatible visions, Forde’s analysis accentuates the tensions between scientific formulations and ethical considerations in the history of realist thought. If anything, and especially clear in Machiavelli’s texts, realism as a technology for statecraft is associated with a “negation of all moral concern.”¹¹⁰ To the extent that Waltz’s utilitarian account of theory and Mearsheimer’s postulates on the structural necessities of aggression mirror Machiavelli’s technological formulation of realism, they remain morally suspect. To the extent that contemporary scientific realists endorse Machiavelli’s desire to “close the gap between realism, as he sees it, and actual state behavior,” they belie their own explicit commitment to value-neutrality.¹¹¹ Consequently, they are incapable of mounting a cogent defense of their own judgments, which prioritize state security at the expense of competing moral values, much less an effective challenge against the judgments of others, especially those who hijack realist discourse.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: 150. Italics mine.
¹¹⁰ Ibid.: 156.
¹¹¹ Ibid.: 154.
3.3.2 Realism’s Exile from Political Theory

Political realism’s uneasy relationship with ethics is old news. When realism is not simply dismissed as immoral or amoral, it is equated with a form of moral statism too insufficiently robust to address normative concerns in international relations. Michael Walzer’s critique of realism is exemplary of the commonly accepted judgment in contemporary political theory that realism is too impoverished to offer insights into the ethical challenges posed by international politics, whether with regard to violent conflict, global justice, or humanitarian concerns. Although Walzer’s critical commentary predates Waltz’s structural theory, it sheds light on problems that continue to plague contemporary variants of political realism.

In *Arguing about War*, part retrospective and part sequel to *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer attributes the ascendancy of just war theory in the 1970s to political realism’s complicity in the collapse of moral thinking and its inability to accommodate serious moral concern. In particular, realist criticisms of the Vietnam War, which were oriented by the same concepts of national interest and cost-benefit analysis that made the war intelligible in the first place, “failed utterly to express the feelings of most of the war’s opponents, feelings that had to do with the systematic exposure of Vietnamese civilians to the violence of American war-making.” According to Walzer’s intellectual history, just war theory arose as “a critical theory” of interstate warfare in the vacuum engendered by realism’s hegemony.112

Walzer’s substantive critique of realism’s normative insufficiency in *Just and Unjust Wars* concentrates on two of its core claims: necessity imposes constraints that preclude moral decision-making in foreign policy, and moral categories lack, in any case, objective grounds for consensus, or as Hobbes puts it: “one [call[eth] cruelty what another justice.”113 The fact that scientific realists like Waltz and Mearsheimer adopt these presuppositions makes them vulnerable to Walzer’s criticisms. With regard to the first claim, Walzer’s analysis of Thucydides is suggestive and has implications for

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contemporary realism’s explanatory and normative sufficiency. As he points out in his analysis of the Athenian decisions concerning Melos and Mytilene, Thucydides does not provide an explanatory account of the former, and the debate over the latter – where Diodotus invokes the concept of interest to counter Cleon’s tyrannical cruelty – is a consequence of the demos’ “moral anxiety [rather than] political calculation.” That is to say, the archetypical neorealist explanation of state behavior, for example realist readings of Athenian behavior that equate the justifications of Thucydidean characters with actual causes, is untenable. For the very notion of necessity that engenders predictions about behavior is “mediated by a process of political deliberation”; hence, its concomitant judgment of necessity in its normative intonation is always retrospective. As for the debate over Mytilene, Walzer situates Diodotus’s appeal to interest in the context of repentance and moral doubt that engender deliberation in the first place and in the political contest against Cleon. Through this lens, we can see that the rhetoric of Diodotus is hardly support for a broader claim about the harmonization of state behavior with a materialist notion of interest. The “interest talk” is pure rhetoric, and the impetus for its occasion is bad conscience.

The implication of Walzer’s analysis for scientific realists is that they have turned rhetorical weapons into an ontology of constraint and an imposition of inevitability where none truly exists. In the process, they have written out by fiat relevant explanatory factors, whether domestic political factors, demagoguery and personal idiosyncrasies, or moral phenomena. By highlighting the epiphenomenalism of interest in the debate over Mytilene, Walzer gives us grounds for challenging the automaticity of scientific realism’s judgments about what factors constitute important versus unimportant causes in international politics. This is especially the case given realist privileging of material over ideational phenomena and the structural bias built into Waltz’s levels of analysis framework. Crucially, the political freedom Walzer hopes to resuscitate is denied by scientific realism’s suspect ontology as well as its epistemological orientation, most notably in Waltz’s

114 Ibid., 9.
115 Ibid., 8.
theoretical separation of foreign policy and international political outcomes and his conceptualization of theory as fiction, which means, significantly, that no account of the real decision, whatever it may be, has to be given. Instead, we are to believe that any behavior that matches the prediction generated by explanatory realism validates the inevitability realism invokes and thereby lends credence to its political judgments.

The second core assumption Walzer assesses is the realist notion that morality is just talk; it is essentially arbitrary and only deployed to justify actions that are actually rooted in material necessity. Waltz’s and Mearsheimer’s consideration of moral argumentation as epiphenomenal echoes Hobbes’ claim that “the names of the virtues and vices of are ‘uncertain signification’ until the sovereign establishes fixed definitions.” In anarchy, an institutional as well as moral condition, there can be no agreement over values. Waltz seems to accept Hobbes’ argumentation tout court. In the international system, without a global sovereign, interstate conflict “cannot settle questions of authority and right,” for authority and right are only intelligible in domestic politics. Asserting that “justice cannot be objectively defined,” Waltz implies that invocations of justice by states are a prelude to ideological warfare. Warning against the lure of world hegemony, he notes that “the temptation of a powerful nation is to claim that the solution it seeks to impose is a just one.” Waltz is frightened by the eagerness of states to advance “just” causes and, in making the comparison between both interventionist liberals and socialists who would seek to advance the cause of justice, un masks both as misguided and insincere. Justice is simply irrelevant to the condition of anarchy, and any claim to it is simply a deceptive attempt to cloak interest.

Yet Waltz does not seem to believe that justice really exists within states either. Contrasting the international system with the domestic, Waltz argues that the defining feature of the latter is its “effective decision-making authority,” regardless of the substance of the decision. He argues,

116 Ibid., 10.
117 Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 112.
118 Ibid., 201.
119 See ————, Man, the State and War, 113-14, 56.
The important point… is not that there is in the state a way of making and enforcing correct decisions but that some decision be made and followed. Thus Hans Kelsen has argued that ‘justice is an irrational ideal. However indispensible it may be for volition and action of men, it is not subject to cognition. Regarded from the point of view of rational cognition, there are only interests, and hence conflicts of interest.’ One set of interests can be satisfied at the expense of another, or they can be compromised. But one cannot say that one of these ways of dealing with conflict is just, the other unjust.\textsuperscript{120}

Waltz goes on to repeat that the important feature of the domestic system is the existence of a decision-making body, whose “arbitrary” decisions are normatively better than having “‘rights and wrongs’” settled by force. His normative conclusion, like Hobbes’ justification of the sovereign, presupposes a prior judgment of the overriding importance of stability and civil amity. In refusing to grant justice ontological reality, Waltz’s realism shows itself to be severely limited as an ethical discourse.

While Mearsheimer refrains from making any explicit claims about the incoherence of justice, his analysis likewise suggests that moral judgment in the realm of international politics is impossible. He states: “Realists tend not to draw sharp distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ states, because all great powers act according to the same logic regardless of their culture, political system, or who runs the government.”\textsuperscript{121} And this logic requires, in the case of Mearsheimer, unapologetic aggression and, in the case of Waltz, that states refrain from action rooted in moral visions – either pacifistic or evangelical – for the sake of balancing power. Mearsheimer goes on to argue that instead of distinguishing states according to whether they are “good” or “bad”, realists distinguish states on the basis of how much power they have.\textsuperscript{122} His rejection of the straw-man argument of the existence of “good” or “bad” states appears to morph into a very different claim: state behavior cannot be morally appraised. The centrality of structure and necessity in explanatory realism implies that moral and immoral actions are indistinguishable, or perhaps that all states are forced to engage in immorality. Claims to the contrary, notably “liberal talk,” are nothing more than hypocrisy.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{121} Mearsheimer, "Liberal Talk, Realist Thinking," 1.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.: 3.
Yet, as Walzer points out, the very existence of hypocrisy, which realists are so keen to direct our attention to in their endeavor to denounce moral ideals, presupposes some sort of shared moral understanding. Contemporary realism’s failure to acknowledge this constrains its empirical and normative purview. As evidenced by the debate over Iraq, realists are hamstrung by the language of interest and cost-benefit analysis, which render them unable to recognize, much less issue radical challenges against, serious moral violations. Ultimately, contemporary realism exhibits the same shortcomings that led Walzer to judge realism inadequate in both explanatory and normative terms in the 1970s. Contrary to its claims of value-neutrality, the science of contemporary realism relies upon morally problematic claims of exigency, necessity, and inexorable self-interest; its descriptions and invocations of necessity, which imply the irrelevance of ethical inquiry, function surreptitiously as apology, a sign of its unwillingness and its powerlessness to challenge reality. By reducing moral argumentation to fallacy and machination, contemporary realists destroy the very basis for critique that they themselves so often seek to deploy.

Walzer’s critique is part of a more general renunciation of realism in the field of international political theory. Realism, as either the advocacy of Realpolitik or a doctrine of moral relativism, is the first opponent of liberal attempts to theorize about international ethics. Just as the first chapter of Just and Unjust Wars lays out a critique of realism, the first section of Charles Beitz’s seminal work, Political Theory and International Relations, consists of a refutation of realism’s moral skepticism. This unequivocal judgment on realism’s shortcomings stands out even in more recent work, notably Martha Nussbaum’s Frontiers of Justice and Allen Buchanan’s attempt to develop a moral theory of international law, which commences with a repudiation of realism. These criticisms collectively reaffirm realism’s inability to provide normative traction on global politics. Even those more

123 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 20.
125 The ascendency of liberalism in the domain of international political theory is especially ironic given that prominent modern realists, notably Carr and Morgenthau, focused primarily on the inadequacies and ideological dimensions of liberal thought and practice.
sympathetic to realism question its normative contribution. Robert Tucker notes that prudence, despite its normative salience for realists, is equally applicable to Churchill or Stalin: “prudence is compatible with almost any purposes that hold out the solid prospect of success.”\footnote{RW Tucker, "Realism and the New Consensus," \textit{National Interest} (1992): 36.} Similarly, Michael Joseph Smith argues that realist keystones – e.g. prudence or tragedy – “do not advance ethical analysis very far.”\footnote{Michael Joseph Smith, "American Realism and the New Global Realities," \textit{Ethics and International Affairs} 6 (1992): 183.} Despite their powerful reformulation of realism as a science, contemporary realists do not offer anything new that might reverse these fatal judgments. An appraisal of their ethical and political judgments shows that they do not depart from the basic premises of earlier versions of realism, which have been deemed morally suspect or simply incapable of rendering moral phenomena intelligible. There is little solid ground in contemporary realism from which to contest the verdict that realism is irrelevant, if not a hindrance, to moral insight and critical theorizing in the realm of international politics.

\section*{2.4 Beyond Ontological Realism}

As demonstrated in the present and previous chapter, scientific realists not only fail to adhere to their proclaimed commitment to value-neutrality, they do so in ways that reveal the weaknesses of their science as well as the inextricable links between such a scientific project and specific normative commitments. Moreover, an appraisal of scientific realism in the context of its normative origins shows that its theoretical presuppositions -- whether with regard to its conceptualization of the nature of states or anarchy, the primacy of materialism, the insignificance of ideas and ideals, or the continuity of history -- are not primarily determined by criteria of epistemological appropriateness in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Instead, they are dictated by scientific realism’s commitment to an anarchic state system and the principles of \textit{Realpolitik}. Together, these theoretical propositions constitute a vision of international politics that support the
behavioral norms scientific realists wish to see materialize and perpetuated by states, a political world where rational expectation and normative desirability coincide.

Although the explanatory project is in service of the political one, the failure of the former forces scientific realists to amputate a limb to save the body. In the face of empirical anomalies that call into question realism’s explanatory sufficiency, realists are forced to deny their own ontological claims in order to offer non-realist accounts of offending phenomena, the prerequisite for criticizing failure to abide by realist injunctions. This move suggests that when the two conflict, realists prioritize their normative commitments, which their ontology is meant to buttress, above their scientific or explanatory projects. Yet it is precisely the failure of the scientific project that undermines the normative one: realist prescriptions presuppose that the realist understanding of the world is compelling and that its explanations of state behavior are accurate.

Ironically, the quest for better science may render the problem of normativity more intractable. Ignorant of the origins of their own enterprise, realism’s internal critics unwittingly perpetuate the normative and political judgments implicated in its scientific founding. Neoclassical realists, responding to neorealism’s inability to account for change, may offer more satisfactory explanations for variations in state behavior, but they are still constrained by realist categories, realist ontology, and realist judgments. By accepting the imperative to establish the conditions under which structural and unit-level factors explain state behavior, neoclassical realists remain blind to the political judgments driving their science. Their focus on pathology, i.e. “why states did not pursue the most obvious course of action,” presupposes neorealism as a theoretical as well as normative baseline and functions to reinforce its judgments about both ideal state behavior and the normative desirability of the sovereign state system itself. The fact that neoclassical realists concentrate on state decision-making reveals more than analytical predilection; it also indicates the limits of their

128 Glenn, "Realism Versus Strategic Culture: Competition and Collaboration?" 529. Schweller’s claim that realists should focus on scope conditions, that is identifying the conditions under which states balance or bandwagon, severely limits the domain of realist theory. The consequence of this narrowing is to place all normative and political questions surrounding the organization of the international system simply outside of realism’s purview. See his contribution in Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate.
theoretical and political understanding of change. To the extent Vasquez’s empirical finding that realist variables and propositions dominate IR inquiry (notably, theory construction and data collection) still holds, even scholars who are indifferent or hostile to realism risk buttressing the normative judgments that helped constitute the analytical categories they rely upon.\textsuperscript{129} Although rigor is certainly an intellectual value, scientific rigor alone, especially if it makes critical scrutiny less likely, cannot address the intellectual, ethical, and political challenges raised by a genealogy of scientific realism.

The fact that realism’s theoretical assumptions and ontological claims are implicit prescriptive constructs renders it vulnerable to accusations of masquerading political ideology as empirical social science.\textsuperscript{130} To the extent that scientific realism is the successor of classical realism, its failure dooms the entire realist tradition. Although this is certainly the consensus in contemporary political theory, it seems premature to resort to such finality. Neorealist attempts to monopolize theory notwithstanding, there is no reason to rule out \textit{a priori} the existence of alternative theoretical realisms. In order to offer a fair appraisal of the contributions of realism, however, it is imperative to move beyond realism understood as a set of core propositions about the nature of humans, states, and political structures.\textsuperscript{131} The remaining chapters attempt to retrieve a form of realism as politico-ethical analysis. My intention is to challenge the political and ethical judgments as well as the methodological orientation of contemporary realism, which are collectively responsible for its empirical and normative failures. More than this, I hope to demonstrate that modern realism can offer constructive insights into the empirical and normative dimensions of global politics, both in its own time and now.

In retrieving an alternative tradition of political realism, I aim to precipitate a rethinking of the relationship between ethics and power. The concept of power is privileged in realist thought, and

\textsuperscript{129} See Chapters 4, 5, 6 of Vasquez, \textit{The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism}.


\textsuperscript{131} This is the conventional way of understanding political realism, as evidenced by Brooks, "Dueling Realisms.", Vasquez, \textit{The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism}, Wayman and Diehl, eds., \textit{Reconstructing Realpolitik}. 

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this is usually taken to indicate the necessary deflation of our ethical aspirations. For scientific realists, the more fully one accounts for power, the more modest our aspirations for change and progress become. Yet to infer that preoccupation with and attentiveness to power is automatically anathema to ethics is untenable. Although realists have been dubbed apologists for the brute exercise of force, I want to suggest that the modern realists of the 20th century offer us a more palatable alternative: attentiveness to power creates the possibility for ethical action. As such, it is precisely a tradition of thought that is devoted to unmasking power that is called for in thinking through our most serious normative challenges in global politics.

Finally, in order to reassess what realism has to offer, it is necessary to challenge dominant readings of earlier realists as committed to a certain view of the world and as advocates of the same values as contemporary realists. It is fairly easy to make the case that the scientific realists engage in systematic mis-reading of their predecessors in order to buttress their ontological and prescriptive claims. To insist that E.H. Carr, arguably a proponent of radical socialism, was a “determinist” who recommended resigning oneself to power is gross mischaracterization. Likewise, to attribute to Morgenthau, who wrote extensively on moral complexity and the necessity of moral judgment, a sense of fatalism about escaping an immoral world is patently misleading. Tragically, by reading themselves into their predecessors in order to sustain a particular reading of the political world, scientific realists obliterate the intellectual and moral richness of the realist tradition.

Realism’s positivist and many of its anti/post-positivist detractors, paradoxically, make the same error. Vasquez’s turn to the philosophy of science results in a distorted reading of the modern realists and reduces Morgenthau to a purveyor, if not the originator, of the key propositions

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132 One might, for instance, posit that the more attentive you are to power, the more likely you are to engage in successful ethical action without falling into naïvité or hypocrisy.

133 The next three chapters will investigate the normative and political orientation of Morgenthau and Carr, demonstrating just how unsound neorealst appropriations of their predecessors are.

espoused by neorealists. Reading realism through the lens of science and philosophy of science has functioned to reaffirm a narrative of continuity, which envisions an unbroken thread connecting Thucydides, Morgenthau, and Carr to Waltz, Mearsheimer, and their more rigorous successors. Likewise, Ashley, George, and Der Derian who largely read earlier realists in terms of the later ones they seek to undermine, do not recognize the radical differences between them. By mistaking the baby for the bathwater, they fail to appreciate the sophistication with which their own theoretical, methodological, and political concerns are articulated within the realist tradition.

135 Vasquez, The Power of Power Politics: From Classical Realism to Neotraditionalism. Vasquez specifically asserts that Waltz’s Theory of International Politics is “basically a systemization of Morgenthau’s thought cast in a logically rigorous and parsimonious frame that subordinates all other levels of analysis” (191). The next three chapters show this claim to be untenable.

136 See Keohane, ed. Neorealism and Its Critics, 7-16, Vasquez and Elman, Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate, 5-7.

3. Historical Change and Crisis: Diagnosing 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Political, Economic, and Social Disorder

In “Political Theory as a Vocation,” Sheldon Wolin remarks that the language of crisis connotes derangement. The political theory of what he calls epic theorists constitutes a response to crisis in the world, where certain societal “arrangements, decisions, and beliefs are systematically mistaken.” Injustice, oppression, and violence become inevitabilities, manifestations of the underlying disorder. Under these precarious conditions, political life and political action possess a Janus-faced quality; politics reveals itself to be both an existential threat and the promise of deliverance from that threat.\textsuperscript{1}

This chapter contends that crisis was a central motif in the political writings of Morgenthau and Carr. Their efforts to “picture the disease”\textsuperscript{2} and to diagnose the major crises of the 20th century signaled an attempt to confront the systematic derangements of political and socio-economic organization. I engage in a close reading of a wide array of Carr’s and Morgenthau’s texts and outline their vision of a world beset by overlapping economic, social, and political crises. Although their writings elucidated a series of ostensibly unrelated global and domestic crises, I show how each crisis rested upon the disjunction between 20\textsuperscript{th} century historical conditions and inherited political principles and institutions (e.g. national self-determination/sovereign organization of states; liberal democratic principles; economic liberal orthodoxy). Detailing how each crisis reinforces and re-describes the others, I bring coherence to Carr’s and Morgenthau’s extensive political writings. In so doing, I am able to locate the essential source of their various concerns about social disintegration, democratic/authoritarian totalitarianism, increasingly virulent warfare and possible nuclear catastrophe. By emphasizing the conceptual underpinnings of, and the centrality of crisis to, Carr’s and Morgenthau’s inquiry, I am able to unearth the systemic, critical, and radical dimensions of their political preoccupations.

\textsuperscript{2} Morgenthau, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, 10.
3.1 E.H. Carr’s Vision of Revolutionary Crisis

3.1.1 The Twenty Years’ Crisis: An Introduction to the Twentieth Century Crisis

The *Twenty Years’ Crisis* is often understood as a realist reply to the idealism of the inter-war period. By revealing the impotence of public opinion, liberal democratic principles, and rationalism and against the backdrop of power and interest, Carr’s seminal work supposedly demonstrates the superiority of realism and the political obtuseness of utopianism. Although Carr did denigrate ‘utopian’ accounts of the breakdown of the League of Nations as attributable to moral or cognitive failure,3 these criticisms must be read in their proper context of elucidating historical crisis rather than taken as ammunition for the argument that *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* presents a generalizable account of political life.4

Carr explicitly remarked that *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* was not an assessment of the immediate causes of either World War I or the unraveling of the precarious peace of the inter-war period.5 Situating this text within Carr’s oeuvre allows us to see his analysis of the ‘twenty-years’ crisis of the inter-war period as a gateway to a much broader ‘twentieth century’ crisis. *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* was part and parcel of Carr’s endeavor to underscore the changing historical conditions he believed to be undermining 19th century liberalism, which rendered the continued dominance of its modes of thinking and social organization a threat to political and moral life.6 Carr’s critical writings honed in

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3 For instance, see Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 39.
4 I am arguing against a reading of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* as reducible to a treatise of power politics or a defense of a static political ontology, not against a reading of Carr’s text as a more generalizable attempt to theorize about the categories of realism and utopia as they relate to the production of knowledge. Michael Cox’s Introduction to *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* makes it clear that Carr intended the book, originally named *Utopia and Reality*, to be a more general philosophical work on “the nature of knowledge itself and the relationship between different types of knowledge on the one hand, and history and the production of ideas on the other.” Though Carr noted that the book was not meant to be a better history of the post-war period, I want to argue that Carr’s historical account of the inter-war crisis is inextricably intertwined with his preoccupation with the sociology of knowledge. It is only through the methods of the latter, of the realist unmasking of utopia, that the inter-war crisis can be apprehended. See Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, ed. Michael Cox (Palgrave, 2004), xxi, xi.
5 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, ix.
6 My analysis is concordant with Graham Evans’s 1975 rebuttal of Whittle Johnston’s claim that Carr’s theorizing was inconsistent and his argument that Carr was not opposed to liberalism as such, but rather the pernicious consequences of
on three central principles of 19th century liberalism, (liberal) democracy, (national) self-
determination, and laissez-faire economics, tracing how technological improvements, changes in
economic and social conditions, and shifts in political cleavages had brought each of these
interconnected historical configurations into crisis. *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, supplementing Carr’s
accounts elsewhere, narrates the basic trajectory of this crisis of liberalism in its international context.

From this perspective, the two world wars, the failure of the peace settlement of 1919, and
the rise of economic nationalism and fascism constituted “undiagnosed symptom[s]” in the “new
revolutionary crisis.” They were indications of systemic disorder. As Carr put it in *The Twenty Years’
Crisis*, “the real international crisis of the modern world is the final and irrevocable breakdown of the
conditions which made the nineteenth-century order possible.”* In his later work, *Conditions of Peace*,
Carr warned that the failure to understand the ongoing Second World War in the context of this
crisis risked a repeat of the failures of the peace settlement of 1919. The danger lay in perceiving
both wars to be momentary digressions from the trajectory of progress rather than symptomatic of
the domestic and international breakdown of the political, social, and economic order rooted in the
tenets of 19th century liberalism. Carr’s characterization of his own work as oriented by “the
underlying and significant” suggests the appropriateness of reading *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* through
his broader preoccupation with crisis. Indeed, as contemporary mis-readings of Carr suggest, it is
arguably impossible to grasp the significance and nature of Carr’s theorizing on international politics
without examining the explication of 20th century historical crises in his later works, especially
*Conditions of Peace*, *The New Society*, and *Nationalism and After*.

### 3.1.2 Crisis of Laissez-Faire Economics

Carr’s well-known polemics against the doctrine of a natural harmony of interests in *The
Twenty Years’ Crisis* reflected a more fundamental criticism of laissez-faire capitalism. In three of his

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the application of its principles to inappropriate historical conditions. See Graham Evans, "E.H. Carr and International
8 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 237.
9 Ibid., ix.
major works on world politics – *The Twenty Years' Crisis, Conditions of Peace*, and *The New Society* – Carr diagnosed a crisis of liberal economics. Highlighting the gap between the historical conditions of the late 19th and 20th century and the continued commitment to the orthodoxy of economic liberalism, he sought to stress the dangers posed this “chronic divorce” between economic practice and theory. Through historical analysis of the material conditions of European society, he illuminated the immanent forces responsible for the breakdown of the laissez-faire system, evident in both the transformation of economic organization and the changing role of the state.

Notably, Carr considered these changes inherent to the development of capitalism; the transmogrification of individualist capitalism into monopoly capitalism and of the night-watchman state into the 20th century welfare state was simultaneously the negation and logical culmination of the laissez-faire system. Although the industrial revolution undermined the old social hierarchies, the development of capitalism generated new inequalities, especially as individuals combined to create larger units of economic organization. Invariably, corporations, unions, and interest groups overtook the individual as the primary economic unit. Additionally, the rise of large-scale industry, which necessitated massive capital investments and labor supply, created new rigidities and vested interests opposed to the changes and adaptations demanded by a laissez-faire system. These economic transformations, according to Carr, signaled the “innate trend of competitive capitalism towards monopoly.” The reality of the concentration of economic power, in turn, generated social pressure for state intervention. Carr located the beginning of this trend in the 19th century introduction of social insurance in Britain and Germany and the increasing normalization of an active state in industrial economies, manifested by labor legislation, wage-fixing, taxation, and state provision of public services.

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10 ———, *Conditions of Peace*, 79.
12 Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, 73.
Such changes reflected a “profound revolution in [economic] practice and in thought,” characterized by the unraveling of the practices and regulatory norms of laissez-faire capitalism.\textsuperscript{14} Yet the final assault on this system came from the major economic players themselves, largely as a result of the conditions of mass employment during the Great Depression. Carr emphasized that it was organized capital and labor that rejected the orthodox view of economic crisis – painful though salutary – as a part of the normal process of capitalism: “it was… the capitalists – the industrialists, farmers and financiers – who, unwilling to see the capitalist theory of the elimination of the unfit through periodic crises applied to themselves, begged the state to save them by laying the foundations of an ordered national economy” In Europe, by 1933 state obligation to prevent economic crises become axiomatic; the principles of laissez-faire capitalism survived intact only in the United States, though the New Deal gave the lie to the sufficiency of unbridled capitalism.\textsuperscript{15}

For Carr, the uncritical attachment to the principles of economic liberalism threatened the accurate appraisal of empirical phenomena, including how the economic system actually functioned or the decisive political effects of technological changes. In \textit{Conditions of Peace}, Carr stressed that liberalism’s inability to understand the problem of chronic over-production during the inter-war period exemplified its divorce from reality. Chronic over-production was unintelligible through the lens of an economic philosophy that presupposed that the inputs of production were perfectly homogenous and mobile, in which case supply would always freely adjust to demand. Yet, Carr argued, this liberal understanding became ever more incongruent with the dynamics of industrialization, whereby economic conditions – e.g. increasing specialization, industrial requirements of huge sunk costs – impeded the mobility and substitutability of both labor and capital. Not only did classical liberalism fail to recognize the permanence of the problem of over-production, it also failed to understand that the problem was a consequence of the unequal distribution of power between producer and consumer. Ironically, the consensus that the solution

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Carr, \textit{Conditions of Peace}, 83.
\item \textsuperscript{15} --, \textit{The New Society}, 28, 30.
\end{itemize}
lay in subsidizing and restricting production (to raise prices) revealed the extent to which state power was beholden to producers.\textsuperscript{16}

In the context of this revolutionary crisis, in which the conditions of economic laissez-faire increasingly called its own principles into question, Carr saw both world wars as accelerators of this trajectory towards the practice of economic planning. In \textit{Conditions of Peace}, he contended that the first world war “prov[ed] conclusively that the most effective mobilization of the national resources for a given purpose is incompatible with reliance on the profit motive.”\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Carr described Nazi Germany’s planned war economy and rearmament program as well as Britain’s later rearmament as effective cures to the problem of mass unemployment.\textsuperscript{18} His intention was not to glorify war, but to underscore the role that war played in legitimizing and institutionalizing economic planning. Ultimately, Carr’s historical analysis, especially of the erosion of laissez-faire capitalism’s material substratum, implied the necessity of national and international planning, which had to proceed on the basis of something other than a war or rearmament economy.

\subsection*{3.1.3 Crisis of (Liberal) Democracy}

Carr’s insights into the rise of concentrated economic power were consequential for the tenability of liberal economics as well as liberal politics. In particular, Carr saw private economic power as a threat to liberal democracy. Despite Woodrow Wilson’s rallying cry that World War I was fought to make the world safe for democracy, Carr observed that, ironically, the inter-war period was characterized by a retreat from democracy and increased disillusionment with the notion of political rights.\textsuperscript{19} This cynicism, according to Carr, reflected the increasingly worrisome gap between the new conditions of mass democracy, which developed as a result of the extension of the franchise in the latter 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and the institutional configurations appropriate to earlier, restrictive

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{———}, \textit{Conditions of Peace}, 87-93.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 77, \textit{———}, \textit{The New Society}, 34.
\textsuperscript{18} Carr, \textit{Conditions of Peace}, 97-8, \textit{———}, \textit{The New Society}, 35.
\textsuperscript{19} Carr, \textit{Conditions of Peace}, 15-18.
\end{flushleft}
forms of liberal democracy. Notably, Carr’s account of democracy in crisis mirrored and reinforced his account of economy in crisis. Both were structurally equivalent; both honed in on the dangers of conceptual and institutional inertia under changing historical conditions.

In addition to concentrated economic power, Carr focused on the political ramifications of the growth of bureaucracy. Both economic and bureaucratic power, though Carr emphasized the primacy of the first, worked to sever the historical connection between the possession of political rights and the achievement of democratic ideals of equality and liberty. Carr compared the concentration of economic power of the early 20th century to the challenge posed by military power before the 19th century: both posed a threat to democracy by nullifying the power of political rights. Democracy and political rights became “meaningless if the effective control is in fact exercised by some other form of organized power,” in this case arbitrary economic power. Likewise, the rise of bureaucracy and the administration of public policy by technocratic elites threatened to make the ordinary citizen irrelevant to the process of governance. The inaccessibility and incomprehensibility of matters of public concern to the average citizen endangered the foundational principle of democracy, that of ruling and being ruled in turn. Democracy was further diluted as power transferred from elected officials, who struggled to apprehend increasingly technical legislation, to unelected civil servants and expert technicians.20

The material and technological changes of the late 19th and early 20th century increasingly undermined the premises of modern democracy, rooted in individualism, a fundamental harmony of interests, and the primacy of reason. Carr meticulously traced the increasing divergence between these principles and the actual conditions of democracy, whereby individualism gives way to concentration of economic power and mass democracy; the doctrine of a fundamental harmony of interests is undermined by the rise of interest groups and class cleavages; the ideal of rational adjudication of disputes is dethroned by the increasingly technical character of public policy, the “discovery” of the conditioned nature of reason as rationalization of interest by the likes of Marx and

20 Ibid., 34, 28-9.
Freud, and the introduction of propaganda as a calculated technique of manipulation. The fundamental disconnect between the foundational premises and institutions of 19th century liberal democracy and the material conditions of 20th century mass democracy -- distinguished by economic and social stratification, the rise of concentrated economic and political organizations, the proliferation of elite specialists, and the application of the techniques of modern psychology and advertising to the realm of politics -- challenged the very tenability of democracy.21

The failure to recognize these changing historical conditions, Carr contended, resulted in the inability to understand the dilemmas of mass democracy and the changes necessary to ensure its survival. Carr was adamant that the attempt to rehabilitate past conceptions of liberty and democracy no longer rooted in political reality was bound to be ideological and reactionary. His criticism that those who maintained an allegiance to the negative conception of liberty were likely to be those interested in securing their power -- e.g. big business -- mirrored his criticism in The Twenty Years’ Crisis that the victors of World War I who clung to their liberal doctrines, which had lost their objective foundation in reality, did so to protect their vested interests. Any viable attempt to deal with the crisis of democracy, which posed a threat to liberty, equality, and human reason, would have to reconcile the principles and institutions of democracy with the new conditions of mass democracy, not by a return to the past. As Carr put it, “a twentieth-century malady [could not] be cured by nineteenth-century specifics.”22

3.1.4 Crisis of Political Organization: Nationalism and Self-determination

Carr’s account of democracy in crisis paralleled his critical analysis of the principle of self-determination. He believed that the dominant interpretation of both through the lens of political rights conditioned blindness to the changing material conditions threatening the efficacy of those

21 See Carr’s discussion of mass democracy in Chapter 4 of ———, The New Society.
22 ———, Conditions of Peace, 32-33.
rights. As with his assessments of liberal democracy and liberal economics, Carr sought to highlight the disjunction between the principle of national self-determination, as exemplified in Wilson’s Fourteen Points, and the economic and military conditions of the 20th century. According to Carr, Wilson’s attempt to render the principle of self-determination an abstract and universal principle was mistaken in two respects. First, it confused the principle of nationality with the principle of self-determination and therefore failed to recognize that the national basis for statehood particular to the conditions of Western Europe could not be transplanted unproblematically elsewhere. Nationality could not be assumed to dictate political loyalty automatically; whether it did so was contingent upon context. Second, the attempt to generalize the principle of national self-determination indicated a failure to understand the material conditions necessary for it to be a tenable principle of political organization.

For Carr, the attempt to extend the principle of self-determination worked against the political and economic conditions of the time, “foster[ing] the disintegration of existing political units [and the proliferation of smaller states] at a moment when strategic and economic factors were demanding increased integration and the grouping of the world into fewer and larger units of power.” The increasing military disparity between great powers and smaller, weaker states and the techniques of modern warfare militated against any real achievement of self-determination for small states. In particular, the second world war quickly destroyed the fantasy that a small state – Switzerland notwithstanding – could be neutral and independent.

National self-determination not only posed a threat to the survival of small states, but also spurred economic nationalism. These economic repercussions were unanticipated, Carr contends, because the peacemakers of 1919 had failed to understand the changing economic conditions of the time, namely the trend towards concentrated economic power and its relatively new coercive

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24 The German military did draw up plans to invade Switzerland, though they never came to fruition. In this sense, Swiss neutrality was both ostensible – its airspace was repeatedly violated by both Nazi Germany and the Allied Powers as well as subject to multiple bombings by the latter – and a product of economic concessions and luck.
function. The use of economic power as a weapon, which was largely precluded or mitigated by the conditions of economic interdependence created and sustained by British hegemony, rendered the proliferation of political units mandated by the principle of self-determination destructive. Carr’s assessment was grave: “the wielding of unlimited economic power by a multiplicity of small national units had become incompatible with the survival of civilization.”

The attempt to generalize the principle of national self-determination under unsuitable historical conditions rendered it a threat to military security and economic well-being.

Indeed, the disjunction between the principles of national self-determination and the historical conditions of the early 20th century signaled a more encompassing crisis of political organization. Carr’s writings situated nationalism and the nation-state system within an historical process of disintegration, which made the uncritical advocacy of self-determination especially perilous. The primary claim of Nationalism and After was that nationalism had run its course. In this work, he traced the historical development of the modern nation in three stages in the endeavor to show how changing economic and political conditions rendered 20th century nationalism uniquely destabilizing. In the first period, lasting from the demise of feudalism to the French Revolution, the nation was essentially the individual ruler personified. These conditions were hospitable to a functional international society, governed by aristocratic rules and norms. The second period, beginning with the Napoleonic Wars and ending with the commencement of the first world war, was characterized by the democratization of nationalism and the identification of the middle-class with the nation. That this extension of nationalism did not result in the collapse of international order was due in large part to the particular conditions of the 19th century, which allowed for a delicate compromise between the forces of nationalism and internationalism. In particular, Carr highlighted the role of British hegemony in creating the conditions for a functional and prosperous international

26 Ibid., 62.
27 Notably, many of Carr’s arguments on the crisis of self-determination are echoed 50 years later in Amitai Etzioni’s “The Evils of Self-Determination.” In particular, Etzioni’s discussion of the economic disadvantages of political fragmentation and his argument that economic well-being necessitates larger political communities are both made by Carr in Conditions of Peace.
economic system; though largely unrecognizable at the time, “the political independence of nations was conditioned by the pseudo-international world economic order based on British supremacy.”

In the third period, beginning after 1870 and brought into stark relief by the first world war, nationalism reached its climax. During this phase, the precarious compromise of the 19th century unraveled as a result of three factors: the socialization of the nation, or the integration of new social strata into the polity, the subsequent nationalization of economic policy, in which political power came to be directed toward achieving the economic objectives of the newly enfranchised and empowered masses, and the proliferation of nations, which exacerbated the newfound tendency toward economic nationalism.

Under these new conditions, nationalism had become politically and morally questionable. Carr saw the rise of totalitarianism (in both autocracies and democracies), the two world wars, and the collapse of international order as symptomatic of nationalism in crisis. While 19th century conditions allowed for the ostensible separation of the political and economic realms, the political empowerment of the masses and the concomitant expansion of nationalism to the economic realm resulted in the practice of total war and the inability of nations to ameliorate conflict with each other. According to Carr, modern, socialized nations of the 20th century, being primarily committed to exercising power in service of the economic well-being of their entire populations, could not be reconciled with the stabilizing functions of international law. The decline in compliance with international law was a consequence of the historical evolution of nationalism.

In the 17th and 18th century, aristocratic norms ensured that monarchs largely abided by international law. Similarly, the 19th century norms of the ruling middle classes – e.g. respect for property rights -- and the economic order undergirded by British hegemony contributed to international stability. Alternatively, the socialized nation of the 20th century revealed the extent to which the principle of nationalism, in the

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29 See Carr’s discussion in Ibid., 1-27.
30 Crucially, Carr’s argument undercuts the conventional understanding of realism as being committed to a general skepticism of compliance with international law. Implicit in Carr’s account of the evolution of nationalism is the notion that compliance is a function of historical circumstance and contingent upon the social configuration of the state.
course of its development, had become destructive of international order. As Carr put it, “the ‘good’ nationalism of the nineteenth century, the stepping-stone to internationalism, […] transformed into the ‘bad’ nationalism of the twentieth century, the fertile breeding-ground of ‘economic nationalism’, racial discrimination and war.” The total character of both world wars, the forcible deportation of populations for the sake of national borders, and the protectionist policies of the interwar period reflected the bankruptcy of a state system based on the principle of nationalism. Carr’s historical analyses of the crisis of nationalism posed a fundamental challenge to the question of international order. If the principle of nationalism could no longer be salutary under 20th century political and economic conditions, if it became a threat to both security and economic welfare, then it had to be replaced by an alternative principle of political organization, a different foundation on the basis of which viable political communities could prosper. The crisis of nationalism was undeniable and by 1945, Carr had concluded that “no workable international organisation can be built on a membership of a multiplicity of nation-states.”

3.1.5 A Crisis of Moral Purpose

Carr considered the associated crises of democracy, self-determination, laissez-faire economics as concrete manifestations of a crisis of values. Despite his materialist orientation and his detailed analysis of changing political and economic configurations, he was emphatic that “the crisis [could not] be explained – and much less solved – in constitutional, or even in economic, terms. The fundamental issue [was] moral.” In each of the three crises Carr illuminated, rights were emphasized without a concern for correlative obligations. The continued neglect of obligation, he warned, threatened the survival of domestic and international order.

For Carr, the breakdown of the political morality of the 19th century brought the problem of moral purpose to the forefront. The system of ethics undergirding the political and economic

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32 See ———, *Nationalism and After*, 22-35.
33 ———, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 1919-1939, viii.
34 ———, *Conditions of Peace*, 128.
modalities of the 19th century presupposed the confluence of interest and morality. Rational pursuit of interest, it was surmised, automatically led to progress. This natural harmony of interests between individuals as well as nations, allegedly operable in both the economic and political realm, “dispensed with the need for a moral purpose.” Though this system survived as a consequence of dominant social norms - which valorized self-sacrifice and endowed the profit motive with moral force - and seemingly unlimited economic expansion, the closing of this frontier, the economic antagonism of the interwar period, and both world wars effectively revealed the fallacy of the doctrine of harmony of interest under 20th century social conditions. The historical evolution in material conditions, Carr posited, demanded a parallel evolution in political morality: “a new faith in a new moral purpose is required to reanimate our political and economic system”; only a common moral purpose could guide economic production, generate democratic cohesion, and elicit the sacrifice required for a sustainable international order.

Importantly, Carr argued that both world wars, and violent conflict in general, had to be viewed as symptomatic of the crisis of moral purpose. The quest for moral purpose had to begin by apprehending the social function of war in order to find a peaceful substitute for it. The failure of liberal thinkers to perceive the “moral function of war,” in terms of its mitigation of unemployment and inequality as well as in its provision of meaning and purpose, made war more difficult to curtail. In light of its unique power to elicit sacrifice for the sake of the common good, Carr cautioned: “we cannot escape from war until we have found some other moral purpose powerful enough to generate self-sacrifice on the scale requisite to enable civilization to survive.”

### 3.2 Hans Morgenthau and the Changing Faces of Power in Transformative Times

In our period of history, the justice and stability of political life is threatened, and our understanding of the political world is challenged, by the rise of totalitarianism on the domestic and international scene. The novel political

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36 Ibid., 116-19.
phenomenon of totalitarianism puts in doubt certain assumptions about the nature of man and of society which we took for granted. It raises issues about institutions which we thought had been settled once and for all… In one word, what has emerged from under the surface of legal and institutional arrangements as the distinctive, unifying element of politics is the struggle for power, elemental, undisguised, and all-pervading.37

Morgenthau’s writings share Carr’s preoccupation with revolutionary crisis. They concentrate on illuminating the systematic pathologies of 20th century institutions, broadly defined as the dominant patterns of thought and practice that govern domestic and international political life. Given that Morgenthau reviewed Carr’s major works in 1948, commending their brilliant diagnosis of “the essential defects of Western political thought”38 (unrivaled by anyone except Reinhold Niebuhr), it is probably the case that Carr’s work directly informed Morgenthau’s own accounts of crisis. Furthermore, given that Morgenthau’s main objection against Carr was the latter’s ostensible dismissal of transcendent standards, it is no coincidence that Morgenthau’s accounts of crisis, though largely echoing Carr’s, tend to emphasize the moral underpinnings of order and disorder. While it may be fruitful to juxtapose the primacy of economic and material factors in Carr’s explications of crisis against the metaphysical and cultural dimensions of Morgenthau’s, taking this distinction too far risks being misleading. Ultimately, Morgenthau’s criticism of Carr’s relativism masks the political commitments they shared as well as their congruent views on reason and moral purpose.

Although the above quotation substantiates the centrality of power to Morgenthau’s thought, it should not be taken to confirm the conventional misinterpretation propagated by international relations scholars, which sees Morgenthau as reducing the problems of politics to a monolithic, static form of material power – e.g. military force. Such a view wrongly deduces from the fact of the elemental nature of power its unchanging form39 and is usually implicitly suggestive of reconciliation with its inescapability in a way that contravenes Morgenthau’s actual intellectual and political project.

Morgenthau’s focus on power, particularly in the context of his diagnosis of a crisis of the institutions of modernity, was not on its immutability, but rather on its subtle and shifting forms, manifestations, and loci, conditioned by particular transformations in the technological, social, and political environment. He posited that these changing historical conditions had generated moral and political crises, which threatened to undermine the bases of political judgment and international order. While the “domestic” crises Morgenthau identified called into question the sufficiency of the dominant understanding of key political terms (e.g. democracy, citizenship, equality and freedom), the crisis of political organization posed by the increasingly precarious nation-state system in a nuclear age endangered human existence in both metaphysical and material terms. More generally, Morgenthau warned that the concepts, practices, and institutions governing international relations (e.g. sovereign equality) were increasingly at odds with political reality (e.g. bipolar distribution of power), a disjunction that threatened anarchy despite the ostensible stability of the Cold War.  

Similar to Carr’s understanding of the two world wars, Morgenthau considered the Cold War as a symptom as well as accelerator of more fundamental crises. Against the backdrop of this dangerous conflict, Morgenthau illuminated the profound and all-encompassing stakes of the transformative crises of the modern age, where the possibility of the physical destruction of human civilization was matched by the imminent loss of meaning, moral discrimination, and political judgment.

3.2.1 The Crisis of Democracy in a Scientific Age: Technocracy and the Evisceration of Politics

Morgenthau’s accounts of crisis, like Carr’s, accentuated the tensions between objective, material conditions and contemporary political institutions. Despite the anti-democratic reputation of the realist tradition – certainly evident in some of Morgenthau’s writings during the early post-war period – one of Morgenthau’s major themes in his later writings was the evisceration of democracy.

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40 Ibid., 8.
under modern conditions. Morgenthau’s general claim was that the technological revolution had initiated a general crisis of democracy.

In *Science: Servant or Master*, Morgenthau examined the political effects of the modern scientific age, emphasizing the shift in the distribution of power from the people to the government and from the democratically elected to technocratic elites. Morgenthau attributed the first shift in power to technological transformations that effectively gave government a monopoly over the most destructive military forces. In the case of the United States, its particular constitutional configuration rendered the executive branch, not the armed forces, the primary beneficiary of this shift in power. For Morgenthau, these technological changes and their subsequent political ramifications undermined the material basis of liberal understandings of freedom and democracy. The government’s monopoly over destructive technologies meant that “popular revolution has ceased to be a practical proposition in technologically advanced societies.” Moreover, the control over the technologies of warfare, transportation, and mass media rendered totalitarianism possible, allowing modern governments not only the ability to preclude revolution but also to actively manufacture consent by conditioning the thoughts of its citizens.

In addition to changing the distribution of power between government and the people, the technological revolution paved the way for the ascendancy of a scientific elite within government. By the second world war, government had begun to gain control over the scientific and technological

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41 See Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, Chapter 6. Scheuerman contends that Morgenthau’s democratic theory grows out of his writings on international politics. He notes that Morgenthau’s critical views of democracy, prominent in his work from the 1930s to the early 1950s, were informed by his preoccupation with failure of the Weimar Republic in the 1930s. Morgenthau’s views on democracy shifted in the 1960s and 1970s, as evidenced by his *Purpose of American Politics*, his collected essays, *Truth and Power*, and his forward for Arnold Kaufman, *The Radical Liberal: New Man in American Politics* (Atherton Press, 1968). It is crucial to note the distinction between Morgenthau’s views on Vietnam and Walt and Mearsheimer’s views on Iraq. Whereas Walt and Mearsheimer attribute the foreign policy mistakes of the Bush administration to the Israeli Lobby, Morgenthau believed Vietnam to be symptomatic of systemic crisis. As Scheuerman puts it in his exegesis of Morgenthau, it was not democracy per se but democratic decay and systematic domestic pathologies that were responsible for counterproductive foreign policy. Although Morgenthau came to advocate the radicalization of liberalism and called for serious changes in economic and social organization in the American context, he did not explicitly advocate economic and social changes on the international level despite his support for a world state. This might have been a consequence of his skepticism toward the Marxist bent of 1960s radicalism. However, given that his criticism of the Vietnam War presupposes a link between democratic decay and socio-economic pathology, on the one hand, and disastrous foreign policy on the other, it seems that Morgenthau’s own views on American politics have implications for the structuring of international economics and society.

apparatus for utilitarian purposes. The empowerment of a scientific elite within government, Morgenthau argued, posed a threat to both science and politics. The former -- tied to state objectives, subjected to vested interests, and hampered by “artificial barriers of secrecy” – risked “sterility and ossification.” The latter – faced with the esoteric nature of science – threatened to surrender itself to expert administration. In particular, the esoteric quality of scientific and technical knowledge endangered the very premises of political judgment; political authorities lost a critical level of control over military and foreign policy, which they were “in no position to scrutinize on the basis of their own scientific knowledge and judgment.” The centrality of scientific knowledge to public policy meant the integration of science into the struggle for political power, which functioned to politicize science and erode democratic controls over military and foreign policy. While political authorities began to utilize science for justificatory purposes, the power of the public in reference to public policy became strictly after the fact. Democratic control, by the public and the political authorities elected to represent that public, capitulated to expert elites. Morgenthau’s assessment of the implications of this shift in power for democracy were ominous: “[S]mall elites within the executive branch can commit us to informal alliances and undeclared wars; they can choose military strategies and weapons systems – and whatever public debate exists is like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, praising or bewailing what has already been done.”

Morgenthau attributed the troubling rise of political apathy to the discrepant distribution of power and the bureaucratization of the political apparatus. The remoteness and unintelligibility of public issues engendered a sense of political futility: “the public appears to regard as normal its exclusion from knowledge, debate, and decision”; and “the common man is no longer convinced that public issues will, or even ought to, yield to concerted public action.” For Morgenthau, these sentiments were both delusional and dangerous. The acceptance of a dichotomy between expert and layperson and the privileging of the specialized knowledge of the former, distorted reality, namely by failing to recognize that the type of thinking required to make judgments were political rather than

43 Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, 89-93, 97, 102.
technical as well as the extent to which the political values of the scientist determined his scientific advice.44 The abdication of political will by the demos endangered the public sphere by promoting its retrenchment as well as making it vulnerable to private power. Political apathy and the divorce between private life and public purpose, cautioned Morgenthau, presaged the end of citizenship and democratic accountability.45

3.2.2 The Crisis of Democracy in a Capitalist Age: New Feudalism and New Despotism

Morgenthau accepted Carr’s judgment that the crisis of democracy, conditioned by scientific, technological, and bureaucratic transformations, was exacerbated by the rise of concentrated private power, though his analysis focused on the American context. Just as technological changes altered the distribution of political power, the development of capitalism also reallocated power in ways that posed a threat to liberal understandings of liberty, equality, and freedom. In the 1960s, Morgenthau began highlighting the threat of what he termed new feudalism, or the rise of private governments of concentrated economic power, which functioned to usurp public power for private purposes.

The challenge Morgenthau identified in the late 20th century was not new; its historical precursor, which emerged in the United States after the Civil War and continued through the Great Depression, was temporarily solved by social reform. The crux of the problem lay in the free development of economic competition, which naturally led to the accumulation of wealth and the creation of vested interests that then turned to state power to secure its power. Morgenthau’s account of the historical development of capitalism echoed Carr’s narrative of how laissez-faire economics unleashed social forces that slowly undermined itself and necessitated state intervention; the tendency for economic concentration to give rise to concentration of political power gave the lie to the principles of free competition and equality of opportunity. The crisis motivated by the social

44———, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 104, 07, 10.
forces of unchecked wealth were unanticipated by and unintelligible to liberalism, which was, owing to its historical origins, preoccupied with the dangers of strong government. In this sense, the social reform movements of the 19th and 20th century, from Populism to the New Deal, rejected a central tenet of the American political tradition: skepticism of public power as the primary threat to individual freedom. As a matter of historical development, the conditions of industrial society, in which concentrated wealth equaled political power, called into being a strong, interventionist state.46

The 20th century crisis of new feudalism was intensified by the fact that economic forces worked in tandem with the fragmentation of executive power engendered by bureaucratization to eviscerate public power. Under these conditions, public power was “arrogated by numerous semi-autonomous public and private agencies, business enterprises, and labor unions.” The consequence was the perverse symbiosis of public and private power, where the former used the latter to increase its position within government and the latter used the former to shore up its private interest, both at the expense of public purpose.47

For Morgenthau, the threat private power posed to public power was heightened by the apathy of the middle class, whose complacency was, in light of objective conditions where millions were “deprived of the middle-class security and comforts,” ultimately unwarranted.48 Nevertheless, his saw this fatalism as complicit in the transformation of the political arena from one of great, vital issues to one of banal administration. The subsequent contraction and demotion of the public vis-à-vis the private aggravated the political dangers of new feudalism. In a passage that foreshadows Sheldon Wolin’s later concept of inverted totalitarianism, Morgenthau stated:

While in a totalitarian society what ought to be private is forcibly absorbed into the public sphere, all that is public is here viewed as being affected by a private interest. In a telling reversal of roles, many of the regulatory commissions created by the Federal and state governments to regulate business ‘affected with a public interest’ have become interests through which private business secures its support from the public powers.49

46 Ibid., 70-82.
47 Ibid., 267, 80.
48 Ibid., 201.
49 Ibid., 205.
The hijacking of the state by private economic forces, Morgenthau maintained, signaled the irrelevance of traditional liberal remedies. The crisis of democracy posed by economic power revealed the disjunction between the new historical conditions of new feudalism -- which had given birth to what could be considered a “new despotism” of state power -- and the inadequacy of 19th century liberal modes of thinking. The manifold concentrations of economic power and an administrative state complicated the problem of individual freedom, which required a new intellectual and political orientation. For Morgenthau, liberal thought, with its traditional juxtaposition of the state and the individual, was insufficient to the task.

3.2.3 Crisis of Political Organization: The Nation-State System in a Nuclear Age

4.2.3.1 The Novelty of the Nuclear Revolution

Just as the technological revolution generated political effects that called into question conventional understandings of democracy, equality, and liberty, it also generated a crisis of international political organization. Morgenthau’s later writings, especially, concentrated on the cornerstone of this crisis, namely the gap between our modes of thought and institutional configurations, on the one hand, and the historical conditions of the nuclear age, on the other. Unlike Carr, who did not acknowledge the threat posed by nuclear weapons until the late stages of the Cold War, Morgenthau began to stress the novelty of the nuclear age in the 1960s. The development of nuclear weapons, he claimed, represented a novel break with the past and a radical transformation of international relations. Morgenthau was highly critical of views that considered


51 In the Preface to the Second Edition of What is History?, Carr wrote that the late Cold War posed the “threat of nuclear extinction.” See Edward Hallett Carr, What Is History? (London: Palgrave, 2001), xlix-l. Though Carr began planning a new edition of his 1961 work in the last years of his life, he only wrote the Preface. His notes have been analyzed by R.W. Davies.

nuclear technology merely a quantitative rather than qualitative change.\textsuperscript{53} He remarked that “we still live in our thoughts and act through our institutions in an age that has passed. There exists, then, a gap between what we think about our social, political, and philosophical problems and the objective conditions that the nuclear age has created.”\textsuperscript{54} More specifically, the “moral commitments and political institutions” of the past had not caught up with technological developments; they were, therefore incapable of mitigating – and paradoxically served to magnify – the “destructive potentialities” of these novel technologies.\textsuperscript{55}

Morgenthau thought that the radical novelty of nuclear weapons lay in their political and metaphysical implications. While the technological changes associated with the rise of the scientific elite in government threatened political judgment in the context of democratic decision-making, the development of nuclear weapons similarly destroyed the conditions for political rationality in the context of foreign-policy decision-making. Nuclear weapons, Morgenthau argued, destroyed instrumental rationality by rendering the rational connection between means and ends impossible. The military means were so excessive that they overwhelmed and could not be adjusted to political ends.\textsuperscript{56} The consequence of this technology for politics was the obliteration of the conditions under which prudence was possible.

While it is precisely this conclusion, namely that the use of nuclear weapons would be irrational, that led Kenneth Waltz to his optimistic assessment of the pacific effects of nuclear technology so long as conditions for deterrence were met, Morgenthau reached the opposite conclusion: “it would indeed be the height of thoughtless optimism to assume that something so absurd as a nuclear war cannot happen because it is so absurd.”\textsuperscript{57} In light of his critical views on the counterproductive and destabilizing nature of American nuclear policy during the Cold War— e.g.

\textsuperscript{53} Campbell Craig discusses Morgenthau’s inconsistencies and his flirtation with limited nuclear war in “Hans Morgenthau and the World State Revisited,” in Williams, ed. Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations, 201, 03.

\textsuperscript{54} Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 115.

\textsuperscript{55} “International Relations”———, The Restoration of American Politics, 174.

\textsuperscript{56}———, Science: Servant or Master?, 138.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 132.
plans for limited nuclear war, counterforce strategy, nuclear arms racing, and the project for missile
defense, -- which Waltz ironically shared, he was ultimately not sanguine about the stability of nuclear
deterrence. For Morgenthau, the psychological foundations of deterrence, whose political efficacy
depended on the cultivation of uncertainty, were unstable. Repetitive threats were likely to lose
credibility and prompt dangerous forms of brinksmanship. The “very dynamics of mutual
deterrence,” characterized by “the ever-diminishing credibility of the nuclear threat and ever bolder
challenges to make good on it” eroded its stability and triggered escalation. When nuclear deterrence
reached the point of bankruptcy, Morgenthau conjectured, the resort to conventional war would
become more likely. Yet in the context of nuclear technology, conventional war always carried the
risk of nuclear escalation, either because the stakes were vital from the outset or acquired significance
through the dynamics of conflict.58

Morgenthau claimed that the ineradicable danger of nuclear war fundamentally undermined
the state as a unit of political organization. The possibility of nuclear war, and the fact that states
could only deter rather than defend against nuclear attack, implied the wholesale destruction of the
state’s raison d’être: “to protect its citizens and their way of life.”59 Furthermore, he believed that
proliferation would render deterrence more precarious by making aggressors impossible to identify, a
concern that would be amplified in the post-Cold War setting of Russian “loose nukes” and violent
non-state actors. By the 1960s, Morgenthau had concluded that the technological revolution
rendered the nation-state obsolete and that the failure to apprehend and address the novel
technological conditions of the nuclear age would transform the nation-state from an emblem of “life
and civilization” into one of “anarchy and universal destruction.”60

The stakes of this crisis involved more than material destruction. The threat posed by
nuclear weapons was not merely political; it was also metaphysical. According to Morgenthau, the

60 Morgenthau, The Purpose of American Politics, 171.
possibility of nuclear destruction invalidated the central terms of human existence: life, death, freedom, and immortality:

Nuclear destruction is the mass destruction, both of persons and of things. It signifies the simultaneous destruction of tens of millions of people, of whole families, generations, and societies, of all the things they have inherited and created. It signifies the total destruction of whole societies by killing their members, destroying their visible achievements, and therefore reducing the survivors to barbarism. Thus nuclear destruction destroys the meaning of death by depriving it of its individuality. It destroys the meaning of immortality by making both society and history impossible. It destroys the meaning of life by throwing life back upon itself.\textsuperscript{61}

Whereas the sacrificial death of the individual soldier who chose to go to war constitutes a meaningful assertion of freedom, the indiscriminate death of masses by modern destruction carried no such meaning. The possibility of nuclear destruction obliterated the human relationship to death, mediated by forms of collective memory and mourning as well as institutions of honor and fame that could only be sustained by a living society.\textsuperscript{62}

Significantly Morgenthau insisted that it was the failure to apprehend the technological revolution, not the transformation of objective conditions itself, that threatened to bring its most horrific consequences into being. It was consciousness, which tried to evade the novelty of the nuclear age by forcing it into conventional modes of thought and practice, “that threatens us with the actuality of nuclear death.” The continued adherence to obsolete forms thought and action in the face of novel conditions entailed the inability of thought and practice to mitigate the dangers and nurture the promises of the technological age.\textsuperscript{63} This was especially the case in light of changing political conditions.

4.2.3.2 The Crisis of Nationalism in a Nuclear Age

The dangers of the technological revolution were exacerbated by a more fundamental political and moral revolution in the international order. In the 1960s, Morgenthau identified the

\textsuperscript{61} ———, \textit{Science: Servant or Master?}, 149.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 150-1.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 152-3.
paradox engendered by the revival of old forms of nationalism in Western and Eastern Europe and the emergence of two new forms – the micronationalism of Africa and the “nationalistic universalism” of the United States and Soviet Union – in an age where technological development, notably of warfare, had “rendered nationalism in all its forms obsolete as a principle of political organization.” While Morgenthau considered the micronationalism of former African colonies, owing to their arbitrary borders and historical legacy, to be unstable and an invitation to aggression, he saw the nationalistic universalism of the great powers as pernicious “political religion” which provoked conflict that could only be settled by total war.64

Morgenthau’s criticisms of 20th century nationalism stemmed from his belief that nationalism could only function within a cosmopolitan framework. The destructiveness of nationalism, he contended, was a reflection of the breakdown of the European political morality that had governed international society since the 17th century. Morgenthau’s primary account of this crisis is in “The Twilight of International Morality,” an argument first previewed in Politics Among Nations. His historical analysis of the process by which nationalism acquires unparalleled destructive capacities is consistent with the one Carr provided in Nationalism and After. Although both discussed the political changes wrought by the demise of aristocratic international order, Morgenthau emphasized the moral displacement of international norms by national ones, while Carr accentuated the material conditions – especially social and economic – that facilitated this moral revolution. In this sense, their accounts of the dissolution of the moral framework underpinning international society are mutually reinforcing.

Morgenthau’s narrative of the breakdown of the system of supranational ethics that had formerly constrained the destabilizing potential of nationalism, focused on two causes: the transition from the aristocratic order to a democratic one, especially in the conduct of foreign affairs, and the substitution of a morality of nationalism for a universal one. In the 17th and 18th century, personal sovereigns interacted within an aristocratic framework with a common set of accepted rules and

norms. The “commercialization of statecraft”, whereby governments regularly paid foreign ministers and statesmen from other countries, stabilized national aspirations. Under this system, the aristocracy complied with supranational moral standards. In the 19th century transition from an aristocratic to a democratic system, “international morality as a system of moral restraints [changed] from a reality into a mere figure of speech.” The distribution of responsibility from aristocratic rulers to a new cohort of elected and appointed officials entailed a proliferation of divergent moral orientations, making both agreement on normative principles and moral accountability impossible.

While the devolution of responsibility broke down normative agreement and destroyed the previous international morality capable of restraining individual nations, Morgenthau argued that the rise of nationalism “destroyed the international society itself within which that morality had operated.” After the French Revolution, the cosmopolitan aristocratic society, whose normative structure had restrained international politics, began to decline. The common framework of international society fragmented into a system of separate, national societies, followed by the spread of a “new morality of nationalism,” in which the “nation became the ultimate point of reference for the allegiance of the individual.” These changes marked a watershed: supranational moral norms constraining individual nations were rendered ineffective and national ethics acquired a universal dimension.

Morgenthau considered 20th century nationalism more dangerous than any of its precursors. Its destructive powers were magnified by the development of technology to control public opinion as well as the technologies of modern warfare, whose capacity for indiscriminate destruction required “the individual to disregard universal moral rules of conduct” and worked to strengthen the identification of national morality with universal morality. Although Morgenthau regarded politics as permanently “corrupt” because of the ineradicable tension between ethics and politics, he believed this corruption to be intensified by the conditions of the modern nation-state, under which individual

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66 Ibid.: 93-94.
67 Ibid.: 95-96.
ego and power impulses were transferred vicariously to the nation -- as “mortal God”-- and justified through political ideologies that “blunt[ed] the individual conscience [and made it] oblivious to the corruption of power in the public sphere.” Incidentally, Morgenthau’s preoccupation with domestic politics was informed by an awareness of the pernicious international effects of domestic conditions: the phenomena of social disintegration, malaise, and personal insecurity risked being channeled into nationalist fervor.

The nature of 20th century nationalism magnified the stakes of political conflict. Before, conflict between nations took its course within a shared normative framework, which constrained both the “ends and means of their struggle for power.” Old conflict was characterized by the fight over “glory, wealth, and power,” over relative position within a common system of political morality in which the rules of the game were accepted by all the players. Bismarck, Morgenthau observed, was no Hitler. Alternatively, with the rise of nationalistic universalism, nations vie against each other as “standard-bearers of [rival and incompatible] ethical systems.” Because each party perceived its “way of life” to be at stake, disputes could not be solved except by war that was zero-sum and total. In the twilight of international morality,

carrying their idols before them, the nationalistic masses of our time meet in the international arena, each group convinced that it executes the mandate of history, that it does for humanity what it seems to do for itself, and that it fulfils a sacred mission ordained by providence, however defined. Little do they know that they meet under an empty sky from which the gods have departed.

Morgenthau’s views on 20th century nationalism, registered in 1948, lamented the breakdown of the international moral order. His tragic pessimism would soon be deepened by the first Soviet atomic test a year later. In his later writings, Morgenthau was emphatic about the dangers arising from the disjunction between political institutions and objective technological conditions. In his view, the trajectory of the development of nationalism in quantitative and qualitative terms – i.e. toward ever more virulent and destabilizing forms – in the context of both the technology of total

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70 ———, "The Twilight of International Morality," 96, 98, 81, 96.
71 Ibid.: 99.
war and nuclear weapons posed a threat to human survival. While the technological developments of modern warfare had nullified the moral and security functions of the state, the political and moral institutions associated with nationalism made mass nuclear destruction ever more likely. Nationalism had triumphed, but technological revolution had made that triumph a source of imminent devastation. Morgenthau’s judgment in the 1960s was unequivocal: “nationalism as a principle of political organization is not only obsolete; but in the nuclear age it is also self-destructive.”

3.2.4 The Crisis of American Foreign Policy in the Post-World War Period

Although Morgenthau made innumerable interventions into American foreign policy debates, some of his major criticisms can be understood through the concept of crisis that orients his more theoretical political inquiries. His foreign policy writings reflect his broader preoccupation with the essential source of all crisis: the disjunction between historical conditions and extant political principles. Morgenthau was especially critical of US foreign policy during the Cold War, whose static orientation he considered out of touch with the revolutionary conditions of the post-World War II period. It is in this context that his infamous criticisms of the Vietnam War must be understood.

In his foreign policy writings, Morgenthau identified a world in revolution, characterized by political, technological, and moral shifts that had altered the international environment in the post-World War II period. Politically, the European balance of power system, where Britain played a crucial stabilizing role, had been replaced by a world system defined by a bipolar distribution of power. Technologically, changes in the techniques of warfare, transportation, and communication had brought about the concept of total war and made totalitarianism politically possible. Morally, the common civilization that undergirded the stability of the Western world gave way to competing political religions. Additionally, the decolonization movements in Asia, driven by desires for national self-determination and social justice, increasingly signaled the rise of Asia as an autonomous moral

72 ———, The Restoration of American Politics, 345-47.
73 See Morgenthau’s "Introduction" to Mittry, A Working Peace System.
74 In a different vein, see Richard Little’s contribution in Williams, cd. Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations, 137-65. Little argues that Morgenthau’s Vietnam criticisms come out of his analysis of nationalism.
force; these movements also presaged similar ones throughout Africa and Latin America. For Morgenthau, these three revolutions were mutually reinforcing and signaled a movement away from European dominance toward new distributions of material power and moral authority: ‘their coincidence in time and their parallel development aggravate the threat to the survival of Western civilization which each of them carries independently.’

Morgenthau accused American policymakers of failing to appreciate these revolutionary conditions. American policy, he asserted, was characterized by a “utopian conservatism,” whose stagnation reflected a deeper “atrophy of government” and atrophy of purpose apparent in all aspects of foreign policy, from the conclusion of alliances to foreign aid policy. Morgenthau was especially critical of the anti-Communist orientation that underpinned American foreign policy, which he considered outmoded. The anti-Communist crusade reflected an inappropriate generalization of “modes of thought and action growing from the specific European experiences of the postwar period”; its presupposition of a monolithic Communism, initiated by the Truman Doctrine and fostered by Dulles’s aggressive foreign policy, was increasingly out of tune with the objective conditions of polycentrism. The Tito-Stalin split, the later Sino-Soviet split, and the concrete, idiosyncratic conditions of various revolutionary movements in the so-called third-world all pointed toward the devolution of Communism. Yet, Morgenthau lamented, foreign policymakers continued to champion a monolithic anti-Communism.

While Morgenthau saw the anti-Communist orientation as appropriate to Europe because its “phony revolutions” were a consequence of Russian imperialism, he warned against its application to the genuine popular revolutions of Asia. The opposition to these revolutions invariably transformed into counter-revolutionary defense of an obsolescent status quo. The national and social revolutions of Asia and Latin America, Morgenthau asserted, would have existed without

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77 ———, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, 130.
Communism; their identification with Communism reflected the vacuum created by the West’s failure to provide moral and material support. The American commitment to an anti-revolutionary stance thus indicated a fundamental misunderstanding of both Communism and the revolutionary conditions outside of Europe. The infamous domino theory, by perceiving social change to be “the mechanical result of imitation and prestige,” betrayed a flagrant misunderstanding of the intimate connection between historical conditions and revolution.\(^8^0\)

The anti-Communist orientation of American foreign policy resulted in two tendencies that Morgenthau considered pernicious: support for the political status quo and a concomitant reduction of the political objectives of foreign policy to military containment and defense. In Vietnam, these orientations resulted in the fatal inability to perceive the destabilizing implications of its commitment to the Diem regime. The attribution of instability to external Communist forces rather than an illegitimate and repressive domestic regime justified a purely military approach, which Morgenthau considered intellectually simple-minded and politically disastrous. Additionally, Morgenthau heavily criticized the notion that the exercise of power in places like Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Taiwan, could successfully contain the power of China. He argued that such a policy did not see that the rise of China was primarily cultural and political rather than military. Containing this inevitable regional hegemon was an illusion; the only way to prevent the ascendancy of China was to conquer it. And though American policymakers had already acknowledged the unwillingness to bear the overwhelming cost of this enterprise, its policy in Vietnam was, according to Morgenthau, inviting precisely this disastrous conflict.\(^8^1\)

Morgenthau considered the espousal of military containment outside of Europe, the indiscriminate formation of military alliances, and the more fundamental reduction of politics to military terms to be counterproductive. This sort of reductionism, which flattened political into military struggle, reflected a failure to understand that the policy of defending the political and

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\(^8^0\) See Ibid., 78.
\(^8^1\) See Ibid., 31-37.
military status quo everywhere “tended to identify the United States with those forces and with preparations for war and gave Communism in turn the opportunity to identify itself with the forces of progress and peace.” Anti-Communism, in calling forth blanket hostility towards radical change, rendered the United States “an antirevolutionary power per se,” and paradoxically fueled the ascendency of Communism.

From Morgenthau's perspective, the implications of the crisis of American foreign policy, generated by the gap between the revolutionary changes of the post-World War II international environment and anachronistic modes of thought and practice, were profound and wide-ranging. In failing to understanding the actual nature of the Soviet political threat and the relationship between Soviet imperialism and Communist ideology, a crusading anti-Communism worked to undermine both security and Western values. Additionally, the universalization of the principles of anti-Communism and military containment outside of its original historical context – namely the threat posed by the Red Army to Europe – threatened political disaster. A foreign policy based on indiscriminate anti-Communism failed to attend to concrete political conditions, conflicting political interests, and unique historical circumstances. By corrupting political judgment and promoting a hubristic vision whereby moral and military might guaranteed political success, it also precluded the possibility of diplomacy and peaceful accommodation.

Even more disconcertingly, the pathologies of domestic politics and the pathologies of foreign policy aggravated each other. Morgenthau highlighted the danger arising from the fact that the confused thinking of America’s counter-revolutionary foreign policy was encouraged by domestic forces arrayed against change. The attempt to defend the domestic status quo thus had its corollary in foreign policy: “the symbol of the threat of a non-existent Communist revolution becomes a

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82 ________, The Purpose of American Politics, 188.
83 ________, A New Foreign Policy for the United States, 126.
84 ________, Vietnam and the United States, 90-91, 56.
85 Morgenthau made a similar argument in Hans J. Morgenthau, Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970): “there exists… an organic relationship between the trend toward violence at home and our policies in Vietnam. For in Vietnam, too, we have had a choice between accepting as inevitable a national and social peasant revolution and destroying the revolutionaries through violent repression, and we have chosen to pound, thus far
convenient cloak, as it was for German and Italian Fascism, behind which a confused and patriotic citizenry can be rallied to the defense of what seems to be the security of the United States, but what actually is the security of the status quo.” While anti-Communism was strengthened for domestic political purposes, the failures encountered as a result of its untenability, in turn, gave rise to antidemocratic domestic political practices. Systematic misrepresentation, the replacement of deliberation with the techniques of advertising, and consistent deception vitiated democratic processes and destroyed the trust necessary for a functioning democracy. Likewise, the delegitimization of dissent and criticism of government, especially with regard to the Vietnam War, undermined the democratic ethos. In these domestic tendencies, Morgenthau diagnosed the beginnings of totalitarianism.  

3.2.5 The Loss of Transcendent and Objective Principles: Crisis of Moral Purpose

Like Carr, Morgenthau understood the domestic and international crises of his time to be rooted in the loss of moral purpose. Morgenthau’s preoccupation with purpose is most obvious in his writings on American political life in The Purpose of American Politics. Diagnosing a series of social, political, economic, and cultural pathologies, he censured the United States for having forsaken its founding purpose: the commitment to equality in freedom. The crisis of American foreign policy without decisive effect, an intractable problem into oblivion. In intellectual, moral, and practical terms, nothing is easier and less ambiguous than to deal with a social problem by oppressing and getting rid of the human beings who pose it. It is not accidental that many congressional advocates of violent repression in Vietnam represent states whose societies could not exist without the violent oppression of large masses, sometimes the majority, of their populations. Nor is it by accident that a retired Air Force General was, according to the Anaheim Bulletin of August 12, 1967, loudly applauded when he told his audience of American Legionnaires: “Military takeover is a dirty word in this country, but if the professional politicians cannot keep law and order it is time we do so, by devious or direct means” (38).

86 Morgenthau, In Defense of the National Interest, 81.
and the crisis of democracy were but symptoms of what was “essentially a crisis of the national purpose.”

The reduction of Cold War foreign policy to the military defense of the status quo, according to Morgenthau, represented the identification of survival with purpose and the subsequent loss of greater vision; it also paradoxically threatened the achievement of absolute security which had come to replace its purpose. Morgenthau was especially critical of the progression of the Vietnam War, which signaled systematic rather than accidental derangement. Such failure was generated by and symptomatic of underlying disorder. Morgenthau surmised that “when a nation allows itself to be misgoverned in such a flagrant fashion, there must be something essentially wrong in its intellectual, moral, and political constitution.”

In his appraisal of American society, Morgenthau saw an economic, political, and cultural system in crisis, stemming in part from a loss of moral orientation. He identified a “society of waste,” where production had become “a cancerous growth,” where a mass army of labor performed “superfluous functions at the service of unnecessary production” driven by “artificially induced obsolescence.” Morgenthau’s identification of an irrational system of production -- an economy unmoored from “transcendent and objective principles of justice, which both [restrain and direct] it, as it were, beyond itself” -- paralleled Carr’s diagnosis of laissez-faire’s dangerous divorce from moral purpose. The consequence was an economy characterized by indiscriminate hedonism, chronic overproduction, and structural defects – owing partly to technological developments – that render labored obsolescent and give rise to “a permanently unemployable new proletariat.”

Morgenthau’s critique of capitalism coincided with his analysis of the subordination of public power to the private sector, the reduction of politics to administration, and the demise of a politics of great issues. He lamented the fact that American government had become a tool for endless economic production, that public power had been denuded of purpose and delimited to a

90 Ibid., 181.
91 ______, *A New Foreign Policy for the United States*, 140.
subsidiary role, which constituted a rejection of the promise of politics. In this context, the
disjunction between the condoning of private debt and the political preoccupation with a balanced
budget was revelatory of the demotion of the public sphere relative to the private as well as the
promotion of means to the status of ends. In the irrational obsession with a static balanced budget,
Morgenthau detected “a symptom of the deep insecurity and malaise induced by the loss of national
purpose.” The demise of a truly public politics and its replacement by private administration was
part and parcel of what Morgenthau termed “a decline of objective standards of excellence.” In this
vacuum of moral purpose, preserving the status quo became the ultimate purpose and conformity
the ultimate virtue.93

In this status quo, the aimless movement and spurious novelty of the economic and cultural
realms were accompanied by the contraction and stagnation of politics and thought, symbolic of the
failure to reconcile “old ideas with… new facts.” In a variety of settings, changing conditions had
undermined the dominant modes of thought and action, the conceptual and institutional frameworks
whose perpetuation threatened to conceal and exacerbate the worst features of emergent political
realities. Crucially, these historical transformations undermined the material bases underlying central
categories of liberal thought. Echoing Carr in Conditions of Peace, Morgenthau asserted that under
conditions of concentrated economic power, the doctrines of free enterprise and free competition
had become ideological. Their “invocation by the modern concentrations of economic power has
served the purpose of keeping such concentrations free from regulation rather than of safe-guarding
or restoring the freedom of enterprise and competition of all, jeopardized by the existence of these
concentrations.”94 Ultimately, both the crisis of an irrational economy, characterized by incessant,
unnecessary and wasteful production, and the crisis of democracy posed by concentrated economic
power called into question the adequacy of old notions of equality and freedom.95

93 Ibid., 212, 22, 14.
94 Ibid., 6, 220.
95 Morgenthau emphasized that the problem of racial inequality was interconnected to the problem of economic and social
order. Without radical transformation of the latter, the equality of political rights would be meaningless. See his Preface to
Ibid.
3.3 The Threat of the Old and the Promise of the New

The major works of Carr and Morgenthau on 20th century world politics illuminate a world in crisis. It is this focus on crisis, in contrast to their perceived focus on uniformity, repetition, and the perennial, that drives a wedge between their political project and that of their alleged neorealist successors. Where the latter see a static political world characterized by law-like behavior, Carr and Morgenthau advanced a dynamic and more ominous vision, where social, technical, and economic changes threatened democratic possibilities and undermined the nation-state as a viable unit of political organization, where the dominant liberal ideals of their time had become ideological defenses of the status quo. Both Carr and Morgenthau perceived the 20th century world, in the midst of revolutionary crisis, to be living on the edge of a knife. The failure to address crisis threatened social disintegration, alienation, democratic breakdown, total war and nuclear catastrophe.

Although they differed in their prescriptions, both thinkers agreed on the necessity of radical change. For Carr, the fundamental regulatory principles of domestic and international society were implicated in a crisis of meaning; disaster could only be averted by re-conceptualizing the principles of democracy, self-determination, and economic organization in ways compatible with emerging historical conditions. Likewise, Morgenthau argued that the novel conditions motivating crises required radical rethinking. He expressed dismay at the fact that this demand was met only by the “ritualistic incantations of old ideas that have lost their meaning, and for the routine use of institutions that have lost their purpose.” Despite their differences, it is clear that for both Carr and

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96 ———, ed. The Crossroad Papers, 12. It is impossible to ignore the unnamed presence of Hannah Arendt in Morgenthau’s later work, especially Science: Servant or Master. Note how Morgenthau’s remark echoes Arendt’s in Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 5: “What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.” Arendt’s ‘thoughtlessness,’ the inability to ‘think what we are doing,’ corresponds to Morgenthau’s argument that thought has yet to catch up to the moral and political realities of the technological age. While scholars have commented upon the friendship between Arendt and Morgenthau, there has not been to my knowledge systematic research into how they influenced each other’s political thought. However, in 1976 Morgenthau was asked to list the ten works that “meant the most to him”; Arendt’s The Human
Morgenthau resolution of the domestic and international problems of the age would ultimately hinge on the revitalization of political thought and its reorientation toward the revolutionary conditions of the age.

*Condition* was on that list. See Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 113. Though systematic analysis of their intellectual exchange is beyond the scope of this project, I will draw out the points where Morgenthau appears to co-opt and/or re-work Arendt’s arguments and categories for two reasons: first, to deepen understanding of Morgenthau’s intellectual and political project, that is, to clarify what he is doing and why; and second, to alleviate inconsistencies in Morgenthau’s work by drawing out the Arendtian framework implicit in it. To put it bluntly, Morgenthau often makes the same arguments as Arendt, but not as clear and not as well. For an account of Arendt’s “realism” and her views on war, see Patricia Owens, “The Ethic of Reality in Hannah Arendt” in
4. To Abate, Not to Abet: Modes of Inquiry in Times of Crisis

The crises of the political and social world that Morgenthau and Carr diagnosed raised the question: what sort of knowledge and which modes of inquiry were appropriate to apprehend and address these crises? The following chapter contends that Morgenthau’s and Carr’s understanding of crisis shaped their philosophy of science and history. Situating their methodological discussions within the context of their political writings, I argue that their identification of the persistence of anachronistic thought and practice as the linchpin of crisis prompted their criticism of ahistorical, positivist methodologies. Moreover, I show how their concern with the universalization of liberal thought underlay their skepticism towards ostensibly value-neutral inquiry. I further extract two distinct modes of inquiry from critical realism: (1) ideology critique, a method used to illuminate the historical origins, socio-economic conditioning, and political/ethical implications of anachronistic thought and (2) prophetic historical inquiry, a form of future-oriented, historical inquiry deployed to prefigure the novel changes required to align political thought and practice with historical developments.

4.1 Morgenthau’s Quest for a Science of Politics: The Ideology of Scientism and Political Science as Ideology Critique

Morgenthau’s works on politics are suffused with discussions of scientific knowledge. Although neorealists stake a claim on Morgenthau’s understanding of politics, they do not seriously engage with his writings on epistemology and methodology. Yet a close examination of his scholarship reveals intimate connections between realist substance and methodology. More specifically, Morgenthau’s understanding of politics conditioned his views on science, whose orientation and practice he saw as having decisive intellectual, moral, and political consequences.

In order to accurately assess Morgenthau’s views on the relationship between science and politics, it is necessary to investigate his criticism of a particular kind of science, rooted in liberal
rationalism and oriented by the epistemological premises of the natural sciences (i.e. scientism¹), on
the one hand, and his espousal of science properly conceived, on the other. Morgenthau
characterized scientism as fundamentally hostile towards politics and political judgment, blind to its
socio-historical conditioning, and lacking transcendent moral orientation; as a result, scientism
invariably functioned as political ideology. Genuine science, alternatively, embodied what
Morgenthau considered the distinctively human trait – reflexivity – and constituted a morally
courageous response to the existential threat posed by politics.

### 4.1.1 Scientism and the Rationalization of Politics

For Morgenthau, there was a fundamental tension between “the principles of scientific
reason” and the nature of the social and political world. The attempt to apply the former, “always
simple, consistent, and abstract” to the realm of organized social life, “always complicated,
incongruous, and concrete” was bound to be either futile or fatal.² Contrary to Waltz’s
understanding of this position as a rejection of science tout court, Morgenthau’s extrapolation of the
tension between “science” and politics was part of a critical analysis of scientism’s desire for the
complete rationalization of politics, rooted in both hostility towards politics and misunderstanding of
its intrinsic nature. In this context, Morgenthau censured post-World War II behavioralist political
science, the rise of game theory, the growing preoccupation with methodology as reflective of a
misguided quest for the comprehensive rationalization of politics, despite the fact that politics itself
was inherently resistant to these attempts. Theoretical approaches to international relations
attempted to “superimpose upon a recalcitrant reality a theoretical scheme” for the sake of

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¹ To avoid confusion, I will try to use the term scientism as much as possible to refer to this sort of scientific approach.
Morgenthau used the term science to refer to both scientism and what he conceived of as genuine science that lives up to
its human purpose. Morgenthau’s views on science have generally been misunderstood, as evidenced by interpretations that
he was irrevocably hostile to science (e.g. Waltz) or that he was a positivist. For an instance of the latter, see Martin Hollis
“thorough rationalization”; they sought to “eradicate” the fundamental resistance immanent in politics by “overwhelming [it] with theoretical devices.”

Calling these theories, which attempted to subsume and conquer an intransigent political reality, utopian and dogmatic, Morgenthau argued that their ostensible practical orientation (to eliminate uncertainty and aid prediction) and claims to “empirical demonstration” were specious and illusory.

What is distinctive and problematic about this sort of scientism was not its apprehension of politics through the modalities of science but its attempt to “make politics a science.” Morgenthau considered this mission to transform politics into science a sort of delusional alchemy devoted to the wholesale rejection of politics, political action, and political judgment; it hoped to transmogrify politics into administration, political action into rational calculation, and political judgment into scientific standards. The precursor to the 20th century scientism Morgenthau criticized - the 19th century “science of peace” and its characteristic “method of the single cause” (whose determination would entail the end of war) -- was symptomatic of the search for a “magic formula” to solve the problem posed by politics. Notably, its solution lay in the eradication of politics itself, perceived to be immoral and atavistic, and its replacement by the mechanical application of technique; in this framework, the “uncertainties and risks of political action [would be replaced] by the certitude of rational calculation.”

For Morgenthau, scientism’s reduction of politics to science, which conditioned a drive towards the acquisition of factual knowledge, represented a fundamental misunderstanding of the kind of knowledge required for understanding and therefore “mastering” politics, especially in times of crises. The problems of politics, he contended, did not primarily call for technical or factual

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4 Ibid., 243. Incidentally, Morgenthau’s pejorative use of the term utopia against mainstream political science demonstrates the mistake of equating utopianism with a substantive position as such (e.g. liberalism, idealism). Morgenthau often uses this term against scientism and Machiavellianism. Utopianism is the failure to attend to political reality, not a static political reality that is true for all time, but a particular historically contingent social and political configuration.
5 ———, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, 10. Italics mine.
6 Ibid., 92, 95.
7 Ibid., 213-5.
knowledge but rather for political evaluation and judgment.\textsuperscript{8} Though science as such was not antithetical to the latter, scientism’s attempt to replace contextual political judgment with universal, uniform technique failed to admit the necessity of political will and leadership; hence, its “substitution of scientific standards for political evaluations,” its confusion of empirical for political knowledge, threatened to destroy the very capacity for political decision-making.\textsuperscript{9} The knowledge required for politics was not the technical facility of the social engineer but the political wisdom of the statesmen. And to the extent that scientism attempted to substitute the former for the latter, to the extent that it failed to see that politics required a specifically political orientation, it demonstrated “intellectual confusion, moral blindness, and political decay.”\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{8} The task of the intellectual, Morgenthau contended, was “to make us not clever for one day but wise forever.” The quote is from Jakob Burekhart. See ———, 

\textsuperscript{9} ———, \textit{Scientific Man Versus Power Politics}, 101. Implicit in Morgenthau’s criticism of scientism’s attempt to escape politics, to replace the uncertainty and dangers of political action with rational calculation, and to abdicate political will to uniform technique is the existentialist notion of bad faith. Karl Jaspers, who supervised Arendt’s dissertation, features prominently in \textit{Science: Servant or Master}, and Morgenthau’s account of politics and science in this work is explicitly oriented by existentialist concerns. Morgenthau’s existentialism poses two problems, first its seeming irreconcilability with his Marxist understanding of the centrality of social-historical conditioning and, second, its irreconcilability with a robust normative account of political life. The first tension can be resolved by appealing to Arendt’s distinction between the human condition and human nature. For Arendt, humans are necessarily conditioned but never conditioned absolutely. The view that humans are conditioned beings, she remarks in \textit{The Human Condition} (10-11), is not the same as positing a human nature. As such, there is no defining essence of human existence despite human conditioning, a view that is reconcilable with the existentialist notion that existence precedes essence. Despite Morgenthau’s usage of the term human nature, his views are actually concordant with Arendt’s. In fact, in \textit{Science: Servant or Master}, he asserts that “the very nature of man may be subject to radical changes” because of technological advances (141). His discussion of the psychological and biological changes in man as a result of space travel directly echoes Arendt’s discussion of how man’s emigration to another planet would radically change the human condition (10). Ultimately, the more interesting question is in light of the centrality of power, ideology, and historical conditions to Morgenthau’s oeuvre (which he shares with critical theory), to what extent is his existentialism subject to Marcuse’s and Adorno’s critiques that existentialism itself functions as ideology? This question cannot be resolved here, but Paul Tillich seems to direct us towards an answer by distinguishing between various meanings of existentialism, including existentialism as a tradition of dissent against the objectification of the world and the historical transformation of people “into things, into pieces of reality which pure science can calculate and technical science can control.” In \textit{The Courage to Be}, Tillich considers people like Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Bergson, and Weber to be part of this tradition of dissent (135-9). The second problem regarding existentialism’s irreconcilability with normative constraints is a common criticism. Martin Jay made the argument that Arendt’s political existentialism put her in the category of some politically dubious folks, like Heidegger and Schmitt. Morgenthau accused Schmitt of plagiarizing ideas from his thesis and integrating them without acknowledgement in the revision of \textit{Concept of the Political}; having referred to Schmitt as “the most evil man alive,” he undoubtedly would have been horrified to be put in his intellectual company, just as he was when put in his personal company. See Chapter 1 of Scheuerman’s \textit{Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond} for an account of Morgenthau’s exchange with Schmitt and, despite Morgenthau’s hostility, the latter’s influence on him intellectually. Morgenthau explicitly rejected Machiavellianism and views that attempted to justify immoral or amoral politics. In “The Evil of Politics and the Ethics of Evil,” he argued that the moral nature of man entailed a dialectic of politics and ethics, which prevented the former from escaping the latter’s “judgment and normative direction”(5). In this regard, Morgenthau’s existentialism is certainly qualified by his judgment that action was invariably (and rightly) subject to transcendent moral constraints.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 10. Morgenthau’s criticism of Vietnam emphasized the threat to political judgment posed by the uncritical pursuit of quantitative knowledge. See ———, \textit{A New Foreign Policy for the United States}, 142-44. Morgenthau’s warning of the dangers of substituting quantitative computation for qualitative political judgment seems particularly compelling in light of Robert McNamara’s assessment of the Vietnam War in 1962. “Every quantitative measurement we have shows we are winning this war,” Mr. McNamara said after returning from his first trip to South Vietnam in April 1962. His statistical
The scientism that attempted to apply a discredited model of the natural sciences to the social world in order to master politics failed not only to understand why social life eluded such mastery but also the historical and social conditioning of science itself. For a variety of reasons, the attempt to predict social phenomena was doomed to fail, for instance, because causes themselves were social products that could not be engineered, because effects were variable in light of the their sociality, because of unanticipated consequences, and because of the greater significance of individuality – whether of events, people, or behavior -- in social life. At most, social science could only provide hypothetical possibilities, identify patterns and trends. Morgenthau considered anything more (e.g. point predictions) to be delusional pseudoscience. The determinism of a naïve positivism presupposed an untenable subject-object dichotomy; it thus failed to apprehend that, in actuality, the social scientist was not an “indifferent observer but [intervened] actively as both product and creator of social conditions.” For Morgenthau, apprehending the world intellectually necessarily changed it; diagnosing causation invariably influenced actual social processes. This unavoidable intervention, this disturbance of the reality the scientist intended to examine, rendered the notion of an objective social world of predictable phenomena illusory. The upshot of Morgenthau’s criticism of the adaptation of the premises of natural science to the social world was that political and social problems were never amenable to an ultimate scientific solution. Challenges emanating from violent analysis showed that the military mission could be wrapped up in three or four years.” Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/07/us/07mcnamara.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&hp.

Morgenthau’s criticism of the flawed thinking during Vietnam can be extrapolated to Iraq, where quantitative measurements of power ostensibly guaranteed easy success and conditioned blindness to political reality and the likely consequences of military invasion given the particular political configuration, concrete political interests, and unique historical conditions in question.

11 Morgenthau criticized social science that presupposed the nature of the social world was analogous to a “physical nature as the paradigm of reason (126). He contended that this model was no longer accepted by natural scientists themselves owing to scientific advances, especially quantum physics. See Chapter V of Morgenthau, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, ———, Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70, 245. Ironically, the scientific realism of the physical sciences is still being challenged from the inside. For an example, see Ronald Giere’s attempt to divorce the natural sciences from so-called laws of nature and his advocacy of scientific perspectivism in Science Without Laws (1999) and Scientific Perspectivism (2006).

12 Morgenthau, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, 143.

13 Morgenthau cites the effect of election forecasts on results and Marx’s scientific analysis as self-fulfilling prophecy as examples.
conflict, social institutions and modes of political organization, and political principles and moral principles were only ever provisionally “resolved.”

Morgenthau’s criticism of scientism was inextricably connected to his analysis of the abstraction of liberal thought and values from their historical matrix. In fact, Morgenthau traced the emergence of scientism to the historical triumph of liberalism. As Michael Williams has argued, Morgenthau believed that understanding the powerful influence of the epistemic principles associated with rationalism required inquiry into its historical genesis in the context of early modern Europe. Specifically, scientific rationalism had to be situated in the political struggle of the rising middle classes against the aristocratic, feudal order. Rationalism was part and parcel of an attempt to challenge the political power of the aristocracy by delegitimizing politics and ultimately domesticating it through administration and rationalization. The mistake, for Morgenthau, was that the middle class generalized its own experience of the threat of aristocratic power with the threat of politics as such. This resulted in an impoverished understanding of politics as well as liberalism’s blindness to its own politics. The universalization of liberal postulates concerned Morgenthau greatly, for it constituted a denial of its historical origins, made liberalism ripe for ideology, and paradoxically threatened the very possibility of a liberal political order.

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15 Nevertheless, Morgenthau considered the privileging of science to be a more general feature of the modern age, as evidenced by the centrality of science to liberal, conservative, and Marxist thought as well as its penetration into the realms of art and religion. See Ibid., 30-33.
16 The genealogy in *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* appears to be informed by Nietzsche. Morgenthau implies that the morality of rationality and the immorality of political power espoused by the middle classes in their struggle against an armed aristocracy constituted slave morality. For an account of Nietzsche’s influence on Morgenthau, see Frei, Hans J. *Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography*.
17 Moreover, Morgenthau argued that liberalism’s failure to understand the historical preconditions of its own principles as well as their originating purposes made it ripe for abuse in ways that threatened the fulfillment of liberal ideals. See Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, 56: “In its abstract formalism it does not see that democracy, as any other political system, functions only under certain intellectual, moral, and social conditions and that the unqualified principle of majority makes democracy defenseless against its enemies, who will use the democratic processes in order to destroy them. Freedom of speech, originally a principle by which religious and political minority groups tried to secure independence from state interference, outgrew its political origin and belongs today exclusively to the sphere of natural rights which ought to be enjoyed by everybody within and without the national frontiers, even by the foe who claims the right only in order to be able to monopolize it. Freedom of the press, originating as a political weapon against the powerful and transformed into an abstract, unpolitical principle, now becomes a protective device of the powerful against control and competition. While in the 19th century the idea of the common good was understood in terms of the interests of the middle classes as over against an aristocratic minority, it is now interpreted as an abstract principle available to everybody and particularly to minorities which, by invoking it, try to forestall those very reforms which in the 19th century the middle classes could identify with the common good…”
that the danger posed by an uncritical commitment to scientism was the flip side of the danger posed by an uncritical commitment to liberalism. Both liberalism and scientism, guilty of historical amnesia, failed to appreciate the pervasiveness of politics, including the sinister aspects of their own rationalism.\footnote{Morgenthau's account of the historical origins of scientism is laid out in Ibid. See Michael Williams's overview and discussion in Chapter 3 of Williams, \textit{The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations}. While Williams focuses more on Morgenthau's critique of liberalism and the implications for a liberal political order, I concentrate in this section on Morgenthau's critique of scientism and its implications for political science.}

In this context, something like the subject-object dichotomy was not only an untenable epistemological principle; it was also politically irresponsible. It was implicated in a naïve scientism that denied the socio-historical conditioning of all science and thus could not apprehend the politics motivating, perhaps even undermining, its own commitment to knowledge. Morgenthau was emphatic that “irrational” social conditions determined the purpose, object of study, assumptions, and methodological orientations of science; in every society, certain approaches and phenomena were privileged and ostracized. Social norms and material rewards governed the practice of science, even to the extent of affecting the “judgment as to the scientific character of the investigation.”\footnote{Morgenthau, \textit{Scientific Man Versus Power Politics}, 164.}

There were always vital practices, institutions, and concepts that were off limits to critical investigation, notably the basic principles by which a society was organized. Each society had its objects that could not, without risk of either life or livelihood - be subject to the critical scrutiny of the social scientist, e.g. Marxism in socialist societies, the profit motive in capitalist systems, racial inequality in racist ones. To some extent, even the scientific results and evaluative implications of research were constrained by the values of the society in question, such that American economists were unlikely to conclude that communism achieved better outcomes while Russian political scientists were more likely to agree that capitalism caused war.\footnote{I do not think Morgenthau is making the claim that this limitation of the results of scientific inquiry is simply a symptom of bad science. I take Morgenthau to mean that the unconscious or conscious absorption of particular social values makes considering and testing certain hypotheses less likely. Someone who believes that capitalism is the best mode of economic organization is likely to study how liberalization increases efficiency rather than its effects on distribution or its possible negative implications for democratic politics. Likewise someone living in a monogamous society is unlikely to study the conditions under which polygamy may increase economic well-being or enhance social welfare.} Within a society, the particular institution or organization of which the individual scholar is a member of also conditioned their
research. In addition to privileging certain objects of study over others, social conditions and prevailing values also affected the modes of inquiry seen as legitimate or appropriate to research. For Morgenthau, the notion that methodology was purely a function of its intellectual suitability to answer a particular question was naïve. He wryly noted that in our society sexual relations could not be studied by experimental methods. Morgenthau’s point was that societies always privileged certain modes of knowledge and certain methodologies over others; and these methods of inquiry could be applied to certain objects of inquiry but not others.

The failure to apprehend the social determination of social science posed a political problem. Without recognition of the social interests that conditioned the very nature of scientific thought, science threatened to become ideological justification to be invoked by various political interests. Moreover, the failure to recognize that all social knowledge is necessarily contingent and perspectival was ultimately detrimental to science itself. Ultimately, Morgenthau considered the transformation of scientific knowledge into political ideology to be a result of two factors: science’s lack of reflexivity about its own social and historical conditioning and its loss of moral purpose. Morgenthau’s writings on the latter, particularly his views on the relationship between scientific knowledge and moral judgment, explain his rejection of ostensibly value-free social science.

4.1.2 The Moral Crisis of Scientism and the Political Danger of Value-Freedom

Morgenthau argued that the reductionism of scientism, in its attempt to make politics a science and to render social problems scientific propositions, demonstrated a denial of the moral nature of man. By assuming that significance exhausted itself in causal knowledge, it neglected the

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21 The controversy caused by Dr. Alfred Kinsey’s interviews and accusations that he had garnered data via experiments on children proved Morgenthau right in this regard.

22 See Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, 162-3, ———, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 38. In the latter, Morgenthau asserted that a society imbued with a scientific culture would necessarily denigrate philosophical inquiry, while a humanist or religious society would be less likely to encourage quantitative methods.
centrality of meaning and judgment to human life. By privileging rationalized and quantitative approaches that could only approach the “lowest level of [human] existence,” it denied the spiritual and moral dimension of human life. In particular, Morgenthau excoriated international relations theory for its expulsion of anything that failed to live up to a completely rational theory, which constituted an attempt to eradicate “the ineradicable qualities of the subject matter itself.” Here, he echoed Arendt’s critical view of behavioralism, whose “application of the law of large numbers and long periods to politics or history signifies nothing less than the willful obliteration of their very subject matter.” For Arendt, statistical uniformity, which presupposed the substitution of behavior for action, was the political ideal of a modern society that no longer recognized the nature and human significance of action. Meaning in politics was irrevocably tied to deeds, whose natality or newness “always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability [and] therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle.” Morgenthau’s criticisms of scientism’s and rationalism’s impoverished view of the human condition and of its inability to “master” social life as it would nature were but ineloquent versions of Arendt’s imputation of the behavioral sciences to the phenomena of mass society and her analysis of the inherent unpredictability of action.

Ultimately, Morgenthau faulted science for having lost not only its orientation to some sort of transcendent value that could provide meaning, but also the consciousness that moral discrimination was an integral part of scientific knowledge. Scientific progress under these conditions had grave implications for the moral and political condition of human life. Despite material progress, technological developments had made totalitarianism possible, contributed to environmental destruction, and engendered the threat of nuclear destruction.

23 Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, 124,68.
26 Ibid., 178.
27 Morgenthau was equally hostile to the conformism of modern society – he lamented the decline of objective standards of excellence in all areas of human life - as well as what he perceived to be the retrenchment of the public sphere and of politics and the concomitant explosion of the private sphere (with its focus on economics) and its infiltration into the public sphere. His diagnosis of the pathologies of modern society in *The Purpose of American Politics* certainly shares a common sensibility with Arendt’s *The Human Condition*.
Science’s inability to grapple with the danger posed by its own drive to master nature, its failure to protect human life not from “the forces of nature” but from the forces emanating from man himself, signaled a more ephemeral failure.  It could not provide a philosophical framework through which these threats to human life could be made intelligible; as such, it could not affirm the meaning and significance of human existence. For Morgenthau, science made totalitarianism possible in two ways. First, technological development made it materially possible. Second, science’s failure to give a viable response to both physical and ontological insecurity made it an attractive alternative. Popular support for Nazism and Fascism represented widespread alienation and abdication to power that could provide meaning. Collective political ideology in the modern age offered a potent response to the experience of existential threat, which science, in part the cause, had been unable to provide.

The loss of a life-affirming, transcendent orientation did not simply entail a moral vacuum in the realm of scientific knowledge. The alienation from scientific culture that Morgenthau diagnosed, for instance in 1960s American life, was not due to “the absence of values but the presence of those that [were] meaningless, corrupting, or fraudulent.” The loss of moral orientation had serious political implications for the functioning of scientific knowledge itself. Scientific knowledge became increasingly divorced from important social concerns, a trend matched by its “increasing relevance to the purposes of the state, especially in its destructive aspects.” Transformed into political ideology, science became an instrument in service of public and private power for the purpose of “acquiring, defending, and demonstrating power.” Political science as ideological servant to power was reduced to “advocacy selling itself to the highest bidder.”

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29 Ibid., 46–47.
30 Ibid., 16–17, 51. This is the flipside of political liberalism’s failure. For a discussion of Morgenthau’s contention that fascism was the culmination of liberalism (its epistemology and politics) and its affinity to arguments made by members of the Frankfurt School, see Williams, _The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations_, 102–3, footnote 54.
31 Morgenthau, _Science: Servant or Master?_, 16.
32 Ibid., 5.
33 Ibid., 14.
34 Ibid., 50.
Much of Morgenthau’s writings in the 1960s were dedicated to a critical appraisal of what he termed an “academic-political complex” in American society, which consisted of formal and informal ties between government and academia. This connection entailed “unconscious adaptation to imperceptible social and political pressures” in ways that transformed the intellectual function of political science. The “expert” who took the orientation and processes of government as given, who simply helped identify the means by which government could most effectively achieve their ends, had made truth and judgment secondary to rationalizing power.\(^{35}\) For Morgenthau, it wasn’t that the ideological use of science meant that scientific claims were always false, but that it was “true only by accident.” Its truth was incidental to its political function; the scientific idiom became an ideological mode of rationalization, whose purpose was the justification of power and position.\(^{36}\)

In the case of political science, theoretical knowledge, surrendering its task to guide politics, became “ideological disguise.”\(^{37}\) Likewise, Morgenthau saw mainstream international relations theory, which reflected political science’s trend toward esotericism, over-specialization, and methodological fetishism, as performing two ideological functions, one for the field and one for the political world at large. The arcane nature of theory served to justify its significance, thereby legitimizing “noncontroversial theoretical pursuits.” Additionally, the neutrality of most contemporary theories in practice tended to buttress the political status quo.\(^{38}\) By avoiding the task of critically appraising power -- its forms, functions, and effects in society, it implied the satisfactory nature of existing power relations.


\(^{36}\) The political function of a science unmoored from a transcendent standard was twofold for Morgenthau. It became a tool in individual power struggles within academia and, more significantly, served to buttress the political status quo in society at large. The first is important to the extent that it contributed to the second. See ———, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 22-24. Note Morgenthau’s discussion of science in service of individual aspiration, whereby scientific truth becomes incidental to individual power struggles. The political implications are implicit in the destruction of genuine scientific knowledge: “Since what is at stake are personal aspirations and not the objective validity of the truth, scientific arguments transform themselves into personal polemics. Instead of trying to understand reality in a systematic, theoretical fashion, theories about theories dealing with reality and theories about them become the main concern of science; the purpose is no longer the meaningful understanding of reality but an advantage in individual competition, accidentally pursued with the means of science” (20).

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 46.

More generally, Morgenthau considered the ideal of value-freedom fraudulent. Calling value-free political science contemporary sophism, he argued that its intellectual and political function was to defend and legitimize the extant social structure.\(^{39}\) Behavioralist, empirical political science accepted the existing distribution of power, and though it might “explain it, elaborate it, try to improve it, try to change it… within narrow limits,” it did not engage in a more vital judgment of it. Such “subjective values” had no legitimate place in value-free social science. Yet for Morgenthau, value-free political science was an impossibility; all science operated by an “implicit and unarticulated system of values”; all social science was socially and historically conditioned.\(^{40}\) A value-free political science, which precluded questioning of the existing distribution and normative orientation of power, was necessarily a “conservative [and] conformist political science.” The principles of positivism, of objectivity, and of the relativity of values served a positive political function by helping to perpetuate prevailing values and existing distributions of power.\(^{41}\)

A political science without a moral compass and ignorant of its own historical conditioning invariably distorted the political world. In failing to recognize how it had been reduced to producing “useful or irrelevant but not threatening” knowledge,\(^ {42}\) it was simply incapable of registering certain phenomena. In the early 1970s, Morgenthau faulted the political science of the day for its inability to apprehend the political power of private organizations and the politics of race.\(^ {43}\) The proliferation of irrelevant research masked truly significant problems posed by power and ideology.\(^ {44}\) Ultimately, this sort of political science could not apprehend systematic crisis in either the domestic (e.g. of democracy) or international sphere (e.g. of the nation-state). Accustomed to neglecting the shifting nature of power and its implications for social life, blind to the social forces that deployed or

\(^{39}\) Notably, Morgenthau identifies himself with the position of Socrates and Plato rather than the ‘realist’, Thrasymachus.

\(^{40}\) Morgenthau, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 118.


\(^{42}\) Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 14.

\(^{43}\) ———, *Political Theory and International Affairs: Hans J. Morgenthau on Aristotle’s the Politics*, 24-5.

\(^{44}\) More specifically, Morgenthau contended that mainstream political science ignored “the nature of power and of the truth about it, political ideologies, the political power of economic organizations, alternative foreign policies, the relations between government and public opinion, between tyranny and democracy, between objective truth and majority rule, as well as most of the other fundamental problems of contemporary democracy.” See———, *The Decline of Democratic Politics*, 40.
neutralized scientific knowledge for political purposes, and accepting existing political forms and distributions for power as given, “value-free” political science could neither see the threats posed by political reality, nor its own complicity in exacerbating those threats.

### 4.1.3 The Purpose and Orientation of Political Science Properly Conceived

> “Man is a political animal by nature; he is a scientist by chance or choice; he is a moralist because he is a man.”

According to contemporary interpreters (notably neorealists), the distinctive feature of classical realists like Morgenthau is their focus on human nature. In this interpretation, Morgenthau can be considered a pre-scientific realist who located the cause of violent conflict in *animus dominandi*, or the ineradicable human will to power. Although this reductionist reading ultimately distorts the substance and orientation of Morgenthau’s political analysis, it does get one thing right. Morgenthau’s account of “human nature” is crucial to his account of political science, though not in the way contemporary scholars believe. Ultimately, his ontology of human nature in conjunction with his analysis of 20th century historical conditions lead to a specific view of the ideal orientation of a science of politics.

First of all, Morgenthau considered man to be not only a political animal, but also a moral one. For the intellectual project of scientific understanding, especially under conditions of unavoidable social and historical conditioning, this meant that the ultimate problem of scientific knowledge was moral rather than intellectual. That is, the fundamental question that the scientist had to answer was: what constitutes significant and meaningful knowledge? Given the fact that scientific

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knowledge presupposed moral judgment, scientific ability included the capacity to “select from among the truths accessible to us those that ought to be known.”

Second, contrary to contemporary readings, including neorealism’s, animus dominandi was not the decisive feature of human nature. According to Morgenthau, the distinctive trait that separated human from animal was the capacity for reflective consciousness: “to be conscious of himself, of his fate in the world, is the specifically human quality in human existence; it is the property of man alone.” Rejecting the traditional privileging of action over thought, Morgenthau asserted that human purpose lay in this capacity for consciousness to turn back upon its source. Genuine science, for Morgenthau, was a reflexive response to the metaphysical and empirical threat of man’s encounter with the world, which revealed the limits of human knowledge, the vulnerability of the human condition, and the uncertain meaning of human existence. Science properly conceived was “the process of making [human] life [and human experience] conscious through the method of conceptual abstractions” in a “theoretically valid, systematic way.” However, contrary to rationalist, positivist science, genuine science approached philosophy and religion in its awareness of the limits of human knowledge, of the truth that the unknowable could not be overcome by “the total triumph of science.” As such, it had a recognition that its systematic statements always asserted “more than it [could] prove with its own empirical methods.”

47 Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 11.
48 Ibid., 53.
49 Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 1, 167. Since this description might seem to fit much of the rationalist, positivist science Morgenthau criticizes, it is important to keep in mind the context of these statements. One key distinction between the genuine science Morgenthau depicts and the political science he rejects is the former’s commitment to reflective consciousness, which entails the moral courage to take on the suffering of the human condition. In this regard, rationalist, positivist political science might be said to reflect bad faith. The following passage contextualizes Morgenthau’s comment on the systematic character of science within the existentialist condition: “For man to be conscious of the world means to suffer: this consciousness contains the insufficiency of man vis-à-vis the world, the exposure to empirical and metaphysical peril, the split between himself and the world, the minuteness of the light of consciousness in the midst of the impenetrable darkness of infinite possibilities… To suffer means to be conscious of the insufficiency of one’s existence, both in experience and as a possibility. Since human life in the world is life in the state of insufficiency, man’s consciousness of his life in the world is suffering, and so is scientific knowledge as the process of making this life conscious through the method of conceptual abstractions” (67).
50 Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 1, 167. Since this description might seem to fit much of the rationalist, positivist science Morgenthau criticizes, it is important to keep in mind the context of these statements. One key distinction between the genuine science Morgenthau depicts and the political science he rejects is the former’s commitment to reflective consciousness, which entails the moral courage to take on the suffering of the human condition. In this regard, rationalist, positivist political science might be said to reflect bad faith. The following passage contextualizes Morgenthau’s comment on the systematic character of science within the existentialist condition: “For man to be conscious of the world means to suffer: this consciousness contains the insufficiency of man vis-à-vis the world, the exposure to empirical and metaphysical peril, the split between himself and the world, the minuteness of the light of consciousness in the midst of the impenetrable darkness of infinite possibilities… To suffer means to be conscious of the insufficiency of one’s existence, both in experience and as a possibility. Since human life in the world is life in the state of insufficiency, man’s consciousness of his life in the world is suffering, and so is scientific knowledge as the process of making this life conscious through the method of conceptual abstractions.” (67).
51 Ibid., 62-3. In Scientific Man vs. Power Politics, Morgenthau argued that scientism’s failure to recognize the limits of knowledge and control constituted a misunderstanding of human nature, namely of the nature of human reason. See p. 168.
Proper science was a reflexive response to the metaphysical and empirical dangers to human existence emanating from the world – from both man and nature; it was a reply to the “shock of wonderment” engendered by the limits of human reason and power to render the world intelligible and subject to mastery. The source of this threat in the modern age, Morgenthau claimed, was political. Crucially, though Morgenthau viewed the lust for power, the *animus dominandi*, as inherent to human nature, he implied that its existential significance and, therefore, its implications for science, were historically qualified. The thought of “true science” is oriented toward what is “philosophically and empirically essential in a particular period of history.” Because the existential threat “in our period of history” was posed by politics, Morgenthau considered it “the vital task of our age” to transform this existential shock, originating from politics, into political science. His scrupulous qualifications suggest that politics was not the existential threat par excellence; the danger that the will to power posed to meaning and physical survival was contingent upon historical conditions. Hence its existential importance, and thus what scientific thought, or reflective thought in general, should be oriented towards depended upon the age in question. It was not *animus dominandi* per se, but rather its functioning under the precarious conditions of modernity that produced the shock to which thought had to compose a reply. The urgency of the problem posed by power lay in the environment in which it ran rampant, characterized by uniquely destructive nuclear technology, the trend towards democratic and authoritarian totalitarianism, the proliferation of destabilizing forms of nationalism -- whose centripetal and centrifugal forces threatened violent catastrophe, the peril of imminent social disintegration stemming from racial conflict and socio-economic vulnerability, and, most disconcertingly, the abdication of political consciousness and will in the face of a seemingly absurd and ungovernable reality. It was this particular concatenation of crises, which threatened both the values, purposes, and significance of human existence as well as the survival and well-being of

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52 Only in the sense that *animus dominandi* is itself a manifestation of human insufficiency, is it existentially significant for all time. See “Love and Power” RAP for Morgenthau’s analysis of love and power as responses to existential loneliness.

53 Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 27, 30, 33. Italics mine.
humanity, that called for political science. The purpose of this systematic appraisal of empirical reality was twofold:

   to create a philosophical order in our minds through the transformation of an unintelligible and discordant reality into a theoretical system for its own intellectual sake and to serve as a preliminary to the elimination of the threats to human existence by transforming reality.54

In other words, its purpose was to respond to the dual threat posed by the existential threat of politics by rendering the absurd intelligible and the uncontrollable responsive to human will.

Although Morgenthau never explicitly detailed what a genuine political science entailed, we can extrapolate some essential principles on the basis of his theorizing and the kind of political inquiry he, himself, conducted. In particular, I want to make the claim that Morgenthau’s ideal political science entailed a commitment to ideology critique, or the unmasking and moral evaluation of power and political relations. The centrality of ideology critique to political science can be deduced from Morgenthau’s understanding of the nature of power and the nature of man. With regard to the first, Morgenthau understood power to be irrevocably tied to deception. Political science was fundamentally about “the truth of power, its manifestations, its configurations, its limitations, its implications, its laws.” Nevertheless, Morgenthau noted, “one of main purposes of society [was] to conceal these truths from its members.”55 Because “revolt against power… is as universal as the aspiration for power itself,”56 the efficacy of power hinged on its ability to conceal itself, to masquerade as something else. Power’s elaborate mechanisms for deception were further accompanied by the self-deception its wielders,57 whose conviction in the pretense of power increased its invisibility. The task of a political science concerned with the truth of power, therefore, required the unmasking of these pretensions and penetration “beneath the ideological veil with which society conceals the true nature of political relations.”58

54 Ibid., 33.
55 ———, The Decline of Democratic Politics, 37.
58 ———, The Decline of Democratic Politics, 39.
Yet power, to the extent that it conditioned and constrained the apprehension of truth, posed a threat to the intellectual function of a political science dedicating to unmasking the truth about power. Thus, political scientists had to be reflexive about their own socio-historical conditioning and demonstrate moral courage by remaining committed to truth in the face of power. This intellectual task was, of course, not politically neutral. It necessarily and rightly disturbed power. The moral nature of man meant that genuine political science could not shed moral judgment; it could not evade the task of questioning “the purposes and processes of power.” Morgenthau explicitly asserted that political thought was ultimately about the “the moral evaluation of political power.” In the case of international relations, this meant that “independent prudential judgment” was inseparable from “a theory of international relations.”

Morgenthau’s own analyses of scientism, rationalism, liberalism, Marxism, etc. in the context of his diagnosis of crises can be understood as rooted in, and emphasizing the importance of, the project of ideology critique. Because these configurations of thought persisted in ways that denied their own historical specificity, they tended to function ideologically, distorting and masking the workings of power and politics. As a result, they could not avoid operating in service of those powers, and this complicity generated an existential threat in both philosophical and empirical terms. Morgenthau’s theorizing can be interpreted as attempting to bring this phenomenon into relief by exposing the links between crises of thought and knowledge, on the one hand, and crises of (in)action on the other. His empirical analysis of the origins of liberalism as a doctrinal system deployed by the middle-class against the forces of feudal aristocracy demonstrated his concern with the generalization of political thought and practice in ways that made their dissonance with historical

60 ________, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, 169. Morgenthau argued that political science and political philosophy were necessarily intertwined, that all political science presupposed a philosophical framework. Contrary to political science rooted in positivism, which Morgenthau believed to have disastrously cut itself off from Western political thought, proper political science and political theory were identical. The disciplinary split was both untenable and debilitating to both. See ________, The Decline of Democratic Politics, 31, 42-44.
62 For instance, see Morgenthau’s discussion of how liberalism’s reductionist views of power rendered it blind to its own institutional forms and practices of domination, notably international law and laissez-faire economics in ________, Scientific Man Versus Power Politics, 45-6, 83-6. The failure to perceive the ideological dimensions of the principle of free trade in 20th century international relations stemmed from this blindness.
reality imperceptible. In his view, the intransigence of abstract political thought, owing to the seductiveness of its supposedly universal applicability, entailed blindness to the degenerative and threatening tendencies of politics (e.g. the crisis of democracy generated by the modern scientific age; ethico-political threats posed by technology) and therefore, unwittingly or not, ended up intensifying them. Morgenthau’s view that the fundamental problem motivating crisis was the persistence of unreflexive thought and practice led directly to a preoccupation with ideological modes of thinking.

To recapitulate, Morgenthau’s theorizing on the deceptive nature of power and the moral orientation of man as well as his own analyses of crisis collectively support the claim that ideology critique was central to his conception of political science. Additionally, Morgenthau’s understanding of proper political science as a reflective response to existential threat provides a more fundamental philosophical reason for ideology’s significance. In *Science: Servant or Master*, Morgenthau wrote: “If it is man’s proper task to become conscious of himself and of the world, then the renunciation of this consciousness, the lapse into unawareness, the evasion into a delusory false consciousness is cowardice and betrayal.”63 The “lapse into unawareness” represents a tempting, though perverse, response to metaphysical shock, for it attempts to escape rather than confront it. By implication, surrender to ideology constitutes a rejection of the distinguishing trait of human life, an evasion of the human task. The mission of reflective consciousness, at its very core, presupposes a commitment to penetrating the ideological veils thrown up by the world.

### 4.1.4 Political Thought, Crisis, and Transformation

Morgenthau was well versed in the Western canon of political philosophy. Great political thought, he reflected, was a response to real world crises. Great thinkers were “moved by the defects of the existing political order toward thinking about the nature of politics and of the right political order”: Plato and Aristotle by the decline of Athens, Augustine by the decline of the Roman Empire;
Machiavelli by the political decay of Italy.\textsuperscript{64} Morgenthau considered the function of international relations theory through the same lens; the intellectual function of such theoretical reflection was irrevocably tied to diagnosis of crisis and the quest for political change. The “ultimate theoretical and practical justification” for theorizing about international relations was to apprehend political crises and its implications for extant modes of political organization and dominant institutions governing social life. Theory had the task of thinking into being new practices, institutions, and forms (e.g. supranational political structures) that would address the particular ailments of a concrete political reality (e.g. destabilizing effects of the nation-state in the nuclear age).\textsuperscript{65}

In light of conventional interpretations of Morgenthau’s theorizing on international relations, it is surprising to what extent his understanding of IR theory is tied to change rather than continuity: “Reflecting on a theory of international relations, the politically conscious theoretician cannot help reflecting upon the political problems whose solution requires such novel structures and types of organization.” A theory of international relations attuned to political reality heralds the new. It anticipates radical transformation and is oriented not by the concerns of the past, but of the present and future. Significantly, Morgenthau echoed Carr when he implied that a politically conscious theory of politics combined both utopianism and realism, or more accurately, rooted its utopian prophecy of a “new political order” in realist analysis of a particular empirical reality in crisis.\textsuperscript{66} The ultimate function of such thought was transformation of the political world. Notably,


\textsuperscript{65} Morgenthau, \textit{The Decline of Democratic Politics}, 77-8.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 76-8, 114. Given Morgenthau’s anti-utopian orientation, it is important to recognize that he abhorred the idea of utopia’s eradication. He quotes Mannheim approvingly in his introduction to ———, ed. \textit{The Crossroad Papers}.: “the complete elimination of reality-transcending elements from our world would mean the decay of the human will... human nature and human development would take on a totally new character. The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would be faced then with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses... with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it” (15). Although Morgenthau did not theorize explicitly about utopia, his commentary here on the relationship between utopia and realism is consistent with Carr’s and seems to gesture at precisely the immanent, reflexive utopianism that I contend Carr tried to develop in the latter part of this chapter.
Morgenthau remarked that “genuine political thinking is action.” Political thought at its best would alter consciousness and finally deeds.67

4.2 The Politics of Knowledge and Carr’s Realist Utopia: Ideology Critique and Prophetic History

Just as Morgenthau’s theorizing on the domestic and international crises of the 20th century was intimately connected to his writings on science, Carr’s account of real world crisis must be read in tandem with his account of intellectual crisis, which had decisive implications for his views on political inquiry. Carr’s major works on international politics contain systematic analysis of epistemological and methodological issues that are part and parcel of his diagnosis of crisis. For instance, a chapter on historical inquiry precedes the substantive analysis of The New Society. Likewise, The Twenty Years’ Crisis begins with a discussion of political science, the study of international relations, and an inquiry into utopianism and realism. Attentive scholars and biographers of Carr have recognized that The Twenty Years’ Crisis, known for its historical and critical study of the interwar period, is also – and more significantly - an account of knowledge production and of the relationship between power and knowledge.68

In line with those who have stressed the importance of relating Carr’s epistemological and methodological works to his analyses of international politics, the following section argues that Carr’s diagnosis of economic and political crisis was concomitant with his diagnosis of a crisis of political thought and knowledge. In particular, Carr’s categories of realism and utopianism provided the theoretical leverage necessary to apprehend the problem posed by the persistence of certain modes

67 Morgenthau argues that genuine political thought transforms the world by transforming the consciousness of an individual and of an epoch in Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 59-60. Also see his comments in ———, Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70: “historical experience reassures us that truth can indeed make people ‘see a lot of things in a new light.’ And when people see things in a new light, they might act in a new way.” Though note that Morgenthau, ever attuned to power, preceded this by warning that truth, despite its resilience, cannot win the confrontation with power. Ultimately, transformation requires a change in the distribution of power.

of thinking beyond their originating historical conditions and, hence, of thought’s devolution into ideology. As was the case with Morgenthau, the intellectual and political function of Carr’s realism was to reveal the historical conditioning of ‘utopian’ thought that had degenerated into ideological defense of the status quo. Carr’s realism was, in this context, given the task of unmasking the nature and politics of thought, which bore on the latter’s relationship to real world crisis and determined whether it would effectively perceive and respond to crisis or, alternatively, conceal and exacerbate crisis.

Moreover, I argue that realism’s de-(con)structive project, which sought to expose the historical conditioning and ideological functions of liberal political thought, ought to be understood as clearing the way for Carr’s constructive project: offering a mode of inquiry that could inform political thought and action adequate to the ongoing crises of the 20th century. Here, it is emphatically the case that Carr’s brief discussion of political science in The Twenty Years’ Crisis and his theoretical writings on the study of history -- especially in What is History? and The New Society -- are mutually reinforcing and ought to be considered jointly.

69 In fact, I would contend that the full meaning of the discussion of science in The Twenty Year’s Crisis is occluded unless read in the context of the latter. Oren’s critique of the tension between contemporary realism’s commitment to a naturalist epistemological and methodological orientation, on the one hand, and the explicit political activism of realist scholars, on the other, is case in point. See Oren, “The Unrealism of Contemporary Realism: The Tension between Realist Theory and Realists’ Practice.” Oren is certainly right that the classical realists approached questions of epistemology and methodology in a more sophisticated way than contemporary realists and that the former wrote explicitly about the interconnections between values, politics, and science. Nevertheless, he refrains from noting the broader political implications of his methodological critique and the fact that the relevant stakes are beyond that of logical consistency. After all, what would happen if contemporary realists abdicated their commitment to value-free, scientific realism? Would Mearsheimer, Walt, and the rest of the contemporary realists be immune from criticism by simply embracing an interpretive approach or the theoretical commitments of post-positivism, whatever this may mean? It may be the case that Oren knows this move is impossible (and would either change the politics of realism beyond recognition or else cause realism to implode), and therefore his proposal that contemporary realists reduce the tensions between their theoretical orientation and political practices is really an attempt to illuminate the spuriousness of their scientific claims and the extent to which their substantive arguments are groundless. If Oren’s exhortation to contemporary realists to drop their positivist orientation is strategic, it certainly raises the question of whether masquerading disagreement over politics and values as methodological disputes is a salutary development in the discipline. However, if we take Oren’s critique at face value, then it seems that he errs in treating inconsistency as merely a logical problem to be solved rather than symptomatic of something dubious about contemporary realists’ commitment to scientific protocol. In either case, the punch line of Oren’s analysis is a bit anticlimactic, and I think this has to do with his strategy of situating Morgenthau and Carr in contemporary debates over social science and methodology rather than contextualizing their methodological views within their own understanding of politics and history. This results in a largely misleading account of Morgenthau and an unsatisfactory account of Carr. In the case of Morgenthau, Oren’s attempt to emphasize his indebtedness to Weber causes him to misrepresent Morgenthau’s views. Contrary to Oren’s argument, Morgenthau emphatically rejected the subject-object dichotomy and value-neutral social science; nor did he believe that political science was separable from politics. Ultimately, Morgenthau’s position is a lot closer to Carr’s: both rejected the subject-object divide and contended that political thought is a form of political action. In the case of Carr, although Oren wants the contemporary realists to revert back to Carr’s epistemological and
philosophy of science and history reveal Carr’s unique response to the question: what sort of thought is needed to negotiate crisis? Adamant that all modes of inquiry were necessarily teleological and rooted to purpose, Carr advanced an intellectual and political orientation that I term prophetic historical inquiry. This sort of inquiry, confronting head-on the challenge issued by crisis, would encounter the revolutionary movement in history and draw out its utopian possibilities.

Significantly, Carr’s account of science and history, properly conceived, helps resolve a puzzle posed by The Twenty Years’ Crisis: the ostensible contradiction between Carr’s unmistakable hostility toward utopianism, on the one hand, and his assertion that any tenable political thought or political life presupposes a combination of utopianism and realism, on the other. Carr’s writings on history clarify that he was not against utopia (or even liberalism!) as such; his animosity was reserved solely for utopias that attempted to impose themselves upon a recalcitrant reality, not those that were emergent from it. Carr’s prophetic historical inquiry was, in fact, a form of immanent utopianism. As sequel to the project of ideology critique featured in The Twenty Years’ Crisis, Carr’s later works espoused an intellectual orientation attuned to the political reality of crisis and in service of future transformation. Ultimately, the significance of Carr’s substantive analyses of international politics cannot be grasped without recognizing that they were performative of the particular modes of inquiry he identified as necessary for political thought and action in the context of crisis.

4.2.1 Clearing the Ground: Realism as Sociology of Knowledge and Anti-Utopianism as Ideology Critique

In line with both Carr’s own objectives and recent critical readings of his work, the following analysis situates the central categories of The Twenty Years’ Crisis – power, realism, and utopianism –

methodological foundations, he does not appraise Carr’s major methodological writings beyond his limited comments on science in The Twenty Years’ Crisis. As such, it is unclear what insights Carr might offer beyond generic criticism of the subject-object dichotomy as an epistemological principle. There are certainly no clear guidelines for an alternative type of political inquiry that contemporary realists or other scholars might adopt, much less an account of its significance and payoffs. Ultimately, Oren does not delve deeply enough into the politics of Carr’s epistemological stance; thus, he misses the full significance of the classical realist commitment to reflexivity and the political stakes of competing forms of theoretical inquiry.

Supporters (e.g. neorealists) and detractors (e.g. Carr’s early critics) have typically resolved this tension by ignoring the latter and identifying Carr with his realism.
within an account of the social and historical conditioning of thought.\textsuperscript{71} In this context, the significance of power lay in its relationship to the production and reproduction of knowledge. The original title of the \textit{Twenty Years' Crisis} was intended to be \textit{Utopia and Reality}, a play on Mannheim's \textit{Ideology and Utopia}. Carr's aim, as Michael Cox has noted, was a philosophical investigation of "the nature of knowledge" and its relationship to "history and the production of ideas."\textsuperscript{72} The principle thinkers informing the text were not primarily Machiavelli and Hobbes, but Marx and Mannheim. In his autobiography, Carr acknowledged that \textit{The Twenty Years' Crisis} was "strongly impregnated with Marxist ways of thinking" and influenced by Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. He qualified that his indebtedness to Marx lay not in the latter's substantive account of the demise of capitalism, but rather in his "method of revealing the hidden springs of thought and action," specifically of the material substratum behind their ostensibly free-standing rationalism and moralism.\textsuperscript{73} Likewise, Carr was influenced by Mannheim's endeavor to discern the sociological element in the historical production of ideas. He followed Mannheim's rejection of Marx's strict materialism, economic reductionism, and his restrictive association of interest with class. Built on Mannheim's intellectual scaffolding, \textit{The Twenty Years' Crisis} adhered to his conception of the sociology of knowledge, whose purpose was to "investigate the whole 'style of thought' of a particular group at a particular period, to relate its thinking to the whole social order."\textsuperscript{74}


\textsuperscript{72} Carr, \textit{The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939}, xxi.

\textsuperscript{73} Michael Cox, ed. \textit{E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal} (Palgrave Macmillan,2004), xviii-xix. Although Carr recognized that Marx's specific expectations were falsified by history, he still seemed to accept Marx's broad predictions about the demise of capitalism. In 1933, Carr dubbed Marx "one of the most successful prophets in history." Around 1970, Carr wrote a rough draft, entitled "Marxism and History," in which he affirmed the undeniable centrality of Marx and Marxist conceptions to any utopian vision of the future. Despite his agreement with Herbert Marcuse that the proletariat could no longer be the vanguard of change, he did not accept the pessimism of Marcuse's \textit{One-Dimensional Man}. See R.W. Davies, "From E.H. Carr's Files: Notes Towards a Second Edition of What Is History?," in \textit{What Is History?}, ed. Richard J. Evans (Palgrave, 1986), lxxvii-lxxxii.

\textsuperscript{74} This is Carr's own formulation of Mannheim's project. See p. 180 of "Karl Mannheim," in Edward Hallett Carr, \textit{From Napoleon to Stalin and Other Essays} (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).
It is in this context that Carr’s categories of utopia and realism must be understood. Undoubtedly, Carr used these terms imprecisely, inconsistently, and rhetorically. Carr variously implied that utopia was primitive aspiration, normative desire, a vision of ends, the negation of extant facts, among other sins and strivings. In a series of highly oversimplified and nebulous dichotomies, he associated utopia with free will rather than determinism, theory rather than practice, intellectualism rather than bureaucracy. For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in a broader theoretical account of utopia implicit in The Twenty Year's Crisis, namely thought initiated from a particular perspective but then universalized in a way that renders it ideological. Here, I am following Charles Jones’s analysis of Carr’s re-working of Mannheim’s central terms. Jones argues that Carr’s utopianism referred to Mannheim’s ideology, defined as thought espoused by the powerful to rationalize their position in society. For Mannheim, ideology functioned to falsify reality in ways that preserved its extant configuration. Under Mannheim’s treatment, “false consciousness” acquired a new meaning: thinking the present through anachronistic categories. It is this notion of ideological distortion – in particular, thinking of the present in terms of the past, that informed Carr's (and Morgenthau’s) writings on the disjunction between acquired thought and emergent political reality. Both thinkers were preoccupied with the process whereby “antiquated and inapplicable norms, modes of thought, and theories… degenerate[d] into ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than to reveal it.”

While the continued application of anachronistic categories masked “new realities,” the transformation of historically contingent ideas into “absolute,” “immutable,” and eternally valid

75 See in particular Peter Wilson’s account of Susan Stebbing’s criticisms of Carr in Wilson, "Carr and His Early Critics: Responses to the Twenty Years' Crisis, 1939–46."
76 Carr, The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939, 6.
77 See Chapter 6 of Jones, E.H. Carr and International Relations: A Duty to Lie.
78 See Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936), 96. He writes: “Knowledge is distorted and ideological when it fails to take account of the new realities applying to a situation, and when it attempts to conceal them by thinking of them in categories which are inappropriate.” Mannheim considers both ideological and utopian mentalities to be forms of false consciousness. Ideological perceptions apply antiquated categories to the present; utopian ones apply future ones. However, Mannheim is explicit that utopianism is “not a mere negative case of” ideology (97, footnote30). Both ideology and utopia are “incongruent with reality,” but only the latter “breaks the bonds of the existing order” (192).
79 Ibid., 95.
ideals served to “distort, pervert, and conceal the meaning of the present.”

Consonant with Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* aimed to demonstrate that such absolute standards were rooted in particular historical conditions. The general principles of utopian thought were “conditioned and dictated by the social order, and [were] therefore political.” According to Carr, the “exposure of the hidden foundations of utopian theory,” by which he meant insight into the conditioning and political dimension of thought, was vital to any viable political inquiry, including that of political science.

In this context, realism’s intellectual and political function was to unmask utopian thought that had become “political programme[s] disguised as statements of fact.” Carr argued that utopia could neither escape its totalizing logic nor become aware of its own complicity with power unless realism came to tear down its edifice. The realist's task is "to bring down the whole cardboard structure of utopian thought by exposing the hollowness of the material out of which it is built."

Carr's analysis implies that realism outlives its purpose once it identifies the particular interests that benefit from the universalization of utopian thought. The overarching purpose of realism lies in its unmasking function, its revelation of utopia as rationalization of power. Informed by ideology critique, realism serves to "demonstrate that the intellectual theories and ethical standards of utopianism, far from being the expression of absolute and a priori principles, are historically conditioned, being both products of circumstances and interests and weapons framed for the furtherance of interests.

From this perspective, “theories of international morality” are the

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80 Mannheim’s account of the ideological preservation of the *status quo* is not reducible to economic motives and is cast in existentialist terms. This broader account of ideology is apparent in both Carr and Morgenthau (neither are economic reductionists), though the existentialist inflection is only clearly identifiable in the latter’s work: “To find people in our day attempting to pass off to the world and recommending to others some nostrum of the absolute which they claim to have discovered is merely a sign of the loss of and the need for intellectual and moral certainty, felt by broad sections of the population who are unable to look life in the face… [It] is not primarily the man of action who seeks the absolute and immutable, but rather it is he who wishes to induce others to hold on to the *status quo* because he feels comfortable and smug under conditions as they are. Those who are satisfied with the existing order of things are only too likely to set up the chance situation of the moment as absolute and eternal in order to have something stable to hold on to and to minimize the hazardousness of life.” (87).

81 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 21, 13.

82 Ibid., 12.

83 Ibid., 75.

84 Ibid., 68.
product and reflect the interests of the dominant powers.\textsuperscript{85} Carr remarked that realism’s most compelling project is its capacity to show the historical and political underpinnings of utopian thought, which lacks the reflexivity to apprehend its own politics. Realism demonstrates that dominant ideas and standards are not, despite the universal character of claims to peace and order, disinterested. In accordance with its nomenclature, the proper function of realism is the critical revelation of the falsification of reality by the ideological concealment of utopianism: “where utopianism has become a hollow and intolerable sham, which serves merely as a disguise for the interests of the privileged, the realist performs an indispensable service in unmasking it.”\textsuperscript{86}

The particular utopianism that provoked Carr’s critical ire was the rationalism, utilitarianism and economic laissez-faire of 19th century liberal thinking. Significantly, Carr’s exposition of realism followed his presentation of utopianism in a chapter entitled “The Realist Critique.” The critical analysis of liberal presuppositions, notably the purportedly natural harmony of interests and doctrine of internationalism, aimed to show their ideological dimensions. Carr drew attention to the political ramifications of the anti-political orientation of liberal ideology. Specifically, he argued that the development of the League of Nations demonstrated the desire to eradicate and discipline politics in ways that distorted reality and its own complicity in power politics. Surprisingly, Carr’s antipathy towards the League was more nuanced than typically perceived. He criticized not the League as such, but its gradual transformation from an institution that relied on judgment, interpretation, and attentiveness to power to a machine-like system of standardized procedures. Carr even commented that in its early years, the League looked as if it “might reach a working compromise between utopia and reality and become an effective instrument of international politics.”\textsuperscript{87} Yet, the organization’s trajectory toward rationalization destroyed this possibility. Carr excoriated its attempts to order disorder and to preempt disruption, as evidenced by the Geneva Protocol of 1924, which sought to make war impossible. He was deeply disappointed by the League’s evolution into “a system” to

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 79.  
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 93.  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 29, 104. Though note that in the preface to the 2nd edition, Carr rejects his earlier complacency with the sovereign state system.
discipline the excess of politics, which reflected the belief that "salvation could be found in a perfect card-index, and that the unruly flow of international politics could be canalised into a set of logically impregnable abstract formulae."  

Carr’s analysis accentuated the paradox of liberalism, which by attempting to eradicate politics while neglecting its own complicity in the maintenance of power combined naïveté and disingenuousness in equal measure. The unreflexive application of liberal postulates to 20th century international relations distorted reality by making political phenomena invisible. The unbridled belief in the efficacy and “moral force of public opinion” masked its use in hypocritical ways, for instance Wilson’s prevarication in the face of Japan’s request for a clause on racial equality in the League’s Covenant. Likewise, the pronouncement of a common interest in peace and denigration of those who threatened to disturb the peace masked divergent interests over the desirability of extant political and economic structures. In other words, it functioned ideologically to obfuscate politics. The ostensibly universal interest in peace presupposed and advanced by liberalism not only misrepresented the fact of conflicting interests, it also evaded the political and moral significance stemming from the distribution of power. Carr remarked that the platitude of world peace concealed “the fact that some nations desire to maintain the status quo without having to fight for it, and others to change the status quo without having to fight in order to do so.”  

Not only did the abstract principle of a political harmony of interests distort the unequal distribution of material goods and status between states, it also failed to apprehend its own ideological service on behalf of beneficiaries of the status quo. Carr considered such liberalism ideological because it falsified both political reality and its own relationship to power politics, which resulted in the inability and refusal to recognize legitimate calls for change and thus effectively barricaded peaceful avenues for systemic political transformation.

88 Ibid., 31.
89 Ibid., 37-8.
90 Ibid., 53.
Liberalism’s inattentiveness to its own “subtler forms of compulsion” meant that it neglected how its own values became ideological justification for the maintenance of the existing structures of power. Carr’s deployment of realism sought to unmask the ideological dimensions of abstract liberal principles, especially the doctrine of the harmony of interests that underlay both laissez-faire economics and political internationalism. Under 20th century conditions, free trade and competition had become “the ideology of a dominant group concerned to maintain its predominance by asserting the identity of its interests with those of the community as a whole.” Carr acknowledged that though the presumptive harmony of interest and common investment in economic and political cooperation and international order were not entirely fictitious, such doctrines were not equally beneficial to all members of the international community. Despite the universalist tenor of international peace and collective security, these ideals helped to uphold the predominance of the stronger powers.

Similarly, the lofty appeal to international law masked its political antecedents. Explicitly referencing Marx, Carr’s realist analysis stressed that law was “a function of a given political order” and therefore invariably reflected “the policy and interests of the dominant group” within that order. Like Morgenthau, Carr posited that the failure to recognize that all law, whether international or domestic, presupposed a political agreement entailed a sort of congenital blindness to the essential stabilizing and hence conservative function of law. Moreover, he believed that the condemnation of aggressive war after World War I and the concomitant failure to provide a viable alternative to modifying the extant political (and legal) configuration had “made contemporary

91 Ibid., 102.
92 Ibid., 44.
93 Carr’s discussion of the intimate link between the British economy and global economic health still resonates today. This same connection might be drawn between the health of the contemporary American economic system and the global economy, as demonstrated by the global effects of the 2007 financial crisis.
94 See Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939, 81-2; 87-8.
95 Ibid., 176-8.
international law a bulwark of the existing order to an extent unknown in previous international law.”

Ironically, Carr observed, the more ideological law became, the less compliance it elicited.

In *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, the purpose of the realist critique of utopia was to demonstrate how the latter degenerated into “a tool of vested interests” and how the primary expositions of international morality “became little more than a convenient weapon for belabouring those who assailed the status quo.” As evidenced by his analysis of the intimate connection between the principles of laissez-faire economics and 18th century (and even 19th century) economic structure, Carr’s broadside was against the uncritical perpetuation of liberal thought regardless of the changing historical conditions that rendered it a falsification of reality, not against liberalism as such. The task of realism was to unmask the façade of ostensibly universal liberal categories that distorted and sustained the present order; and it is this intellectual and political project that oriented Carr’s criticisms of the glorification of democracy as self-complacent, the promotion of liberty and freedom as reactionary, and the righteous pursuit of security against aggression as implicated in power politics.

The political significance of ideology critique lay in two fatal problems with the thinking of the privileged: the idealization of the circumstances under which it rose to power, which resulted in its consideration of the maintenance of these conditions as a universal good, and its preoccupation with security at the expense of reform and progress. Carr warned that the tendency to abstract from historical circumstance and the uncritical persistence of ideological modes of thinking hindered the “prompt recognition of new and vital needs.” The very categories of peace and security had become reactionary attempts to freeze the status quo against the currents of change. Carr did not deny that notions of the good, like peace or security, had truth value, but he was emphatic that every conception of the good was conditioned by power and historical circumstance. The autonomy of the absolute good notwithstanding, Carr posited that prevailing moral dogma was primarily “a product of

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96 Ibid., 191.
97 Ibid., 147.
98 ———, *Conditions of Peace*, 16, 32, ———, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 105.
the dominant individuals or dominant class” in a given society.\textsuperscript{100} This dominant morality was ineluctably distorted by interest, and its beneficiaries tended to identify “the morality which protect[ed] that interest with absolute and universal good.”\textsuperscript{101} This phenomena was apparent in both domestic and international society. While slave-owning or a property-owning societies did not typically question the morality of slavery or the moral claims of property-owners, economically strong states that had little to fear and much to gain from market competition tended to value free trade. That 19\textsuperscript{th} century Britain and 20\textsuperscript{th} century America considered competition principled and protectionism reproachable reflected their position in the international economy. Crucially, Carr considered the uncritical generalization of the dominant group’s moral perspective as the main obstacle to a viable international morality and world order.\textsuperscript{102} As was true of Morgenthau, he was wary of the equation of national interest with morality as such; and in exposing the appeal to common values as the universalization of particular social interests, he endeavored to unveil the mechanisms by which thought distorted and maintained the political configuration of the status quo.

Although I have followed Jones’s account of Carr’s rhetorical revision of Mannheim’s theoretical categories, it is important to diverge momentarily and issue a caveat. Jones argues that Carr’s opening accounts of utopianism and realism in The Twenty Years’ Crisis were “stalking horses,” which allowed him to present his own views as the moderate compromise between two untenable extremes. As the text continued, the original association of utopia with the political left and realism with the political right imperceptivity shifted: utopia became Mannheim’s ideology and realism became a stand-in for the sociology of knowledge. According to Jones, Carr strategically pitted liberal utopianism against the sociology of knowledge as a ploy to undermine the credibility of his liberal opponents and to swindle his conservative ones. Given that his domestic audience consisted largely of middle-aged, male, conservative policy-making elites, the initial dichotomy between

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 69-71.
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immature utopianism and sterile realism rendered Carr’s compromise of a “mature,” “romantic pragmatism” attractive and flattering to its potential adherents. Moreover, that the substantive definitions of both utopianism (as liberalism) and realism (as Realpolitik) equaled Mannheim’s conservative ideology meant that Carr’s centrism was, in fact, leftist. In Jones’s interpretation, Carr cunningly deployed dichotomy, dialectic, and Mannheim’s theoretical categories to create the illusion that he was sensibly positioned between the ostensible extremes of realism and utopianism. This magic trick, as it were, allowed him to portray his own radical and utopian policy recommendations in Parts 3 and 4 of *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* as prudential and moderate.

While Jones’s interpretation exposes the rhetorical machinations behind Carr’s text and therefore goes a long way in accounting for the ambiguous, shifting and even contradictory nature of his central theoretical terms, a strictly strategic reading risks being misleading and obfuscatory. Such a reading misses the substantive significance of Carr’s appropriation of Mannheim’s theoretical apparatus. In particular it occludes the full intellectual and political significance of ideology and utopia as well as Carr’s implicit attempt to grapple with the precarious fate of the latter in a disenchanted world. It is important to emphasize that for Carr, utopia was not ideology *per se*, and neither was liberalism. His initial account of utopia was consistent with Mannheim’s, conceptualized as a “type of orientation which transcends reality and which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order.” Later, Carr’s utopian label does take on the meaning of Mannheim’s ideology: “situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed *de facto* in the realization of their projected contents” because they are “distorted representations of a past or potential social order.”

104 See Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of Ibid.
107 Ibid., 194.
utopian thought, Carr primarily meant institutionalized utopian thought that had degenerated into ideology, which “conceals the present by attempting to comprehend it in terms of the past.”

Although Jones is correct in his appraisal of Carr’s reworking of Mannheim, notably in the fact that the former’s utopia coincided with the latter’s ideology, he fails to appreciate that the confluence is dynamic rather than static, despite its rhetorical usage. That is, Carr did not simply substitute the term utopia for Mannheim’s ideology. The simple collapse of Carr’s utopia into Mannheim’s ideology elides the fact that Carr’s utopia referred to both Mannheim’s utopia -- as reality-transcendent thought geared toward transformation of the status quo -- and ideology, which distorted and preserved the status quo. The utopianism that Carr criticized had become ideology, which is consistent with Mannheim’s explanation that the “utopias of ascendant classes are often… permeated with ideological elements,” for instance in the bourgeois idea of freedom. This interpretation is consistent with Carr’s grammatical usage (“where utopianism has become a hollow and intolerable sham, which serves merely as a disguise for the interests of the privileged”) and preserves the conceptual and political space between Mannheim’s utopia and ideology. The latter is crucial in so far as Carr (especially in his later writings) is concerned with retrieving a utopianism that does not become ideological or falsify reality, i.e. a future-oriented form of thinking that successfully facilitates transformation precisely because it avoids distorting present reality by mindlessly and violently subsuming it with transcendent categories. In Jones’s reading, the concept of utopia functions as a red herring, employed rhetorically to mislead and discredit. The problem with this interpretation is that the category of utopia is itself delegitimized and sacrificed in the process so that Carr can masquerade utopian content as moderate compromise. As much as Carr appropriated and altered Mannheim’s categories for strategic purposes, it is nevertheless vital to recognize how Carr’s usage was substantively consistent with Mannheim’s as well as Carr’s preoccupation with the challenge of locating a utopianism less prone to ideological ossification. In this sense, the dialectic

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108 Ibid., 97 (footnote 30).
109 Ibid., 203.
110 Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939, 93.
between realism and utopianism was not only strategically useful in allowing Carr to appear more centrist than he was, but also substantively noteworthy because it signaled the theoretical call for a mode of thinking simultaneously attuned to changing political conditions and oriented by reality-transcendent elements.

Just as Jones’s overarching emphasis on the tactical aspect of Carr’s use of the term utopian collapses it into ideology in a way that elides the extent to which Carr accepted Mannheim’s claim that utopias, by virtue of their real capacity to alter social order, are not ideologies (despite their historical concurrence and practical entwinement\(^{111}\)), it also risks collapsing the distinction between particular and total ideology crucial to the sociology of knowledge. The consequence is reading liberalism through the lens of the former sense of ideology as the “more or less conscious” and calculated deception by (liberal) partisans interested in maintaining a social structure conducive to their own interests rather than the latter sense of ideology as the espousal of both “a form of knowledge… no longer adequate for comprehending the actual world” and a political ethics “oriented with reference to norms, with which action in a given historical setting, even with the best of intentions, cannot comply.”\(^{112}\) To put it differently, overemphasis of the rhetorical function of utopia-cum-ideology and its association with liberalism in Carr’s work risks distorting both the theoretical content of ideology (which consists of more than its political instrumentality) and, by encouraging the reduction of ideology to substantive ideas, risks misrepresenting Carr’s views on liberalism.

Carr’s critical analyses of liberalism focused on the distortions resulting from the application of historically contingent liberal categories to 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century political life. Mirroring Mannheim’s example of the landed proprietor who tries to explain his own function and the economic relations of his estate, which has already become capitalist, in patriarchal terms, Carr highlighted the anachronistic character of liberal thought, for instance in its attempt to think of democracy in terms

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\(^{112}\) Ibid., 55, 95-6.
of abstract political rights, which concealed changing social conditions of concentrated economic power and the rise of bureaucratic structures, or in the attempt to apprehend economic reality in terms of homogenous, competitive economic units, which concealed conditions of oligopoly, domestic planning, unequal distributions of material resources across nations, and uneven patterns of development across time. Just as anachronistic liberal modes of thinking generated distorted knowledge of new realities, the application of liberal principles derived from an earlier social configuration to a discordant one meant that its normative injunctions were unrealizable in practice. Thus, while it was possible under 18th and even 19th century conditions to advocate laissez-faire as a normative standard, the economic and political conditions of the 20th century made protectionist policies unavoidable for relatively disadvantaged states. Carr’s implicit defense of the revisionist perspective revealed the extent to which he embraced the ethical judgments in Mannheim’s analysis of antiquated ethical ideals that had become ideological. Under conditions where ethical ideals failed to correspond to and distorted social circumstances, violations were not due to “personal transgression” but “the compulsion of an erroneously founded set of moral axioms.”

Only by appreciating the full measure of Carr’s indebtedness to Mannheim’s theorizing on ideology is it possible to understand Carr’s criticisms of liberalism. It bears repeating that for Carr ideology was defined in reference to particular historical conditions, not in terms of ideas themselves. Carr’s criticism of liberal ideology centered not on the intrinsic substance of liberal ideas, but on the disjunction between the presuppositions of 19th century liberalism and 20th century political conditions, which coincided with Mannheim’s approach to ideology as attempting to think through the present with the categories of the past. He concluded that the intellectual faults and political dangers of this gap between thought and reality necessitated the transformation of liberal categories (not their total rejection) in accordance with emergent historical conditions.

113 Ibid., 95.
4.2.2 Future-Oriented Historical Inquiry and Emergent Utopias

Although Carr’s critical attack on utopianism was central to The Twenty Years’ Crisis, he did not, contrary to the claims of his neorealists supporters and his critical detractors, stop at realism or relativism.\textsuperscript{114} He explicitly stated that “realist criticism” of utopianism was “the first task of the political thinker,” and although it was a necessary precursor, it was by itself insufficient for either effective political thought or action. Carr recognized realism’s lack of reflexivity towards its own conditioning and political investments and acknowledged the “impossibility of being a consistent and thorough-going realist.”\textsuperscript{115} Every realist analysis, he claimed, was animated by utopian concerns.\textsuperscript{116} This was true with regard to both realism as Realpolitik and realism as sociology of knowledge, as evidenced by Machiavelli’s exhortation to unify Italy and by Marxist unmasking of liberal democratic values as principles of the bourgeois order in service of “emancipation of the proletariat.”\textsuperscript{117} Carr, whose work was informed by the critical projects of Marx, Freud, and Mannheim, defended all three (and by extension, himself) against the charge of relativism and anti-rationalism. He saw all of them as exposing the unconscious groundwork of thought and behavior for emancipatory purposes, that is, in order to bring more of human life and social organization under the domain of reason.\textsuperscript{118} Carr’s reliance on the unmasking functions of ideology critique and sociology of knowledge was informed by a utopian commitment to reason (despite its limits), progress, and democratic politics. Refusing to follow ‘relativism’ to its logical conclusion, he emphasized that the revelation of the irrational underneath the façade of reason presaged not the embrace of anti-rationalism or irrationalism but the “understanding and overcoming [of] the irrational.”\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{114} Morgenthau famously criticized Carr for his relativism and for his rejection of a transcendent morality in Morgenthau, "The Political Science of E.H. Carr." Morgenthau’s comments reflected a common criticism against Carr, namely that he destroyed the basis of morality and was an apologist for power. Nevertheless, Carr adamantly defended his historicism against charges of relativism, (even to the point of making explicit his belief in an absolute good) as evidenced by his defense of Mannheim from similar charges. Regardless of whether Carr’s defense is compelling, Morgenthau’s criticism belies the striking parallels between their intellectual and political projects, despite their divergent views on the Cold War.

\textsuperscript{115} Carr, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939, 89.


\textsuperscript{119} Carr, The New Society, 106.
In other words, the critical analysis of realism was exercised on behalf of utopian, or reality-transcendent, commitments. Given that Carr’s utopian target referred to ideological thought, the critical realist sociology of knowledge operated from the perspective of utopianism. According to Mannheim, the unmasking of ideology was, in the main, the work of “representatives of an order of existence which is still in the process of emergence.”\footnote{Mannheim, \textit{Ideology and Utopia}, 203.} That Carr transmuted realism into the sociology of knowledge and deployed it against the ideological dimensions of liberal political thought can be read as an attempt to counteract realism’s own tendency to degenerate into ideological forms of determinism, skepticism, and materialism by endowing realism with the task of criticism from the perspective of the weaker and ascendant rather than dominant social groups. Carr was aware that realism had to be policed, as it were; left to its own devices, it would result in the complete “sterilization of thought and the negation of action.” He considered the “mechanization of human will and human aspiration” to be “untenable and intolerable” and the presupposition of the complete and irrevocable conditioning of human judgment to be indicative of “moral and intellectual bankruptcy.”\footnote{Carr, \textit{The Twenty Years’ Crisis}, 1919-1939, 10, 13, \textit{———}, \textit{The New Society}, 14.} Carr was averse to taking realism to its logical conclusion, convinced as he was that total realism was ultimately destructive of thought and purpose, moral and political judgment, human agency and social transformation.

One of the central claims of \textit{The Twenty Years’ Crisis} was that “sound political thought and sound political life” required both reality and utopia, which meant attentiveness to historical conditions and reality-transcendent ideals.\footnote{Carr, \textit{The Twenty Years’ Crisis}, 1919-1939, 10.} Carr considered the dialectic of realism and utopianism to be fundamental given the destructive tendencies of both. For once utopia was institutionalized, it invariably became ideological and thus required the unmasking power of realism. The centrality of realist analysis in Carr’s theorizing was a product of its critical task of demonstrating the ideological nature of the modes of international political thinking dominant during the mid-20th century. Its fundamental purpose was to reveal the intellectual limits and political dangers of the universalization
of liberal categories and modes of thinking. Yet realism could only function as a corrective in light of its own tendency to collapse into determinism, relativism, and therefore political complacency. Carr was emphatic that realism was untenable without utopia; it, too, was blind to its own condition, to its own complicities with power. Though the critical function and historical acumen of realism were necessary to tear down ideological modes of thought, realism ultimately could not provide political thought and action with a meaningful compass. Its function in Carr’s thinking was to clear the way for a mode of inquiry informed by utopian elements that could accurately perceive new political realities and facilitate their emergence.

Carr’s diagnosis of the crisis of knowledge and of its inability to respond to the revolutionary movement of 20th century politics centered on two problems with the dominant mode of international political thought: its lack of reflexivity about its own embeddedness in historical and social circumstance and hence a tendency to devolve into ideological distortion, on the one hand, and its failure to understand the unavoidable and necessary connection between teleology and political thought, on the other. The first problem required the intervention of critical realism (sociology of knowledge), and the second required the intervention of a utopian mode of inquiry that could avoid the trap of the first.

Carr’s introductory comments on the nature of political science in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* hinted at the delicate balancing act required. He asserted that political science presupposed the coexistence of purpose and rigorous empirical analysis. Purpose “precedes and conditions thought,” and thinking is invariably teleological. Distinguishing the social from the physical sciences, Carr argued that in the case of the former purpose not only initiated the train of intellectual investigation, it also became embedded in it in a way that rendered the subject-object divide untenable. In claiming that purpose and analysis were inseparable in political science, Carr meant that human purpose became a social fact that changed the empirical landscape apprehended by the thinker, such that
“every political judgment,” whether of the scholar or the ordinary person, “helps to modify the facts on which it is passed.”

Carr's insight into the effective collapse of political thought and political action and the ineluctably normative orientation of political science implied the centrality of judgment to political inquiry. Yet he saw this judgment to be threatened by pathological relations to purpose or reality-transcendent elements, either in the form of imposing abstract utopian visions onto an intransigent reality or in positivist approaches, which either entrusted raw empirical knowledge to gesture towards its own significance or presumed the futility of purpose by denying that human consciousness had any bearing on, and hence power to alter, the objective laws of causality. These stances, in which “thought [was] at a discount,” involved the abdication of intellectual, moral, and political discrimination. The practical result was that thought disintegrated into ideology, extreme skepticism, or both.

Carr’s discussion of this crisis of knowledge in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* should be read as a preface for his broader intellectual preoccupation with working out a mode of thought that is historically attentive, politically transformative, and more resistant to the seductions of either power (of ideology) or powerlessness (of skepticism), both which represent a flight into “nervous irresponsibility.” In order to understand the significance and relevance of Carr’s methodological observations in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, which by appealing to the concepts of judgment and human interest raise more questions than they answer, it is necessary to consider them in the context of his major methodological writings on historical inquiry and its relationship to politics.

Like Morgenthau, Carr considered political knowledge, unlike knowledge of the natural and physical world, to be rooted in history. It is knowledge of political action within a specific social configuration and context of historical consciousness. It is this latter factor that led Carr to reject an understanding of history as repetitive. Carr’s criticism of this approach to history in *The New Society*

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123 Ibid., 5.
124 Ibid., 9.
125 Ibid. Though Carr is indicting utopian ideology, his view that a total commitment to realism results in the rejection of judgment suggests that it is equally irresponsible.
and *What is History?* focused particularly on Arnold Toynbee, whose view of history as repetitive and cyclical he regarded as both substantively problematic and symptomatic of ideology. He considered Toynbee’s notion of history as consisting of “the same things happening over and over again with minor variations in different contexts” to be rooted in an untenable analogy between history and the physical sciences. By treating political actors as “inanimate objects,” such a perspective failed to see how “human consciousness of the past,” most notably in the intentional desire of political actors not to repeat the past, undermined a mechanistic view of history. The fact that the subject-object dichotomy was untenable implied that an ontology of politics as fundamentally repetitive and determined by intransigent, objective laws was also unsound. Moreover, implicit in this perspective of knowledge was the assumption that the subject stood outside of and was fundamentally unaffected by political or historical circumstance. Yet it was precisely this lack of reflexivity about the unavoidable conditioning of thought, reflected in the ideal of a free-standing observer working to decode the objective laws that governed society, which rendered political knowledge more vulnerable to ideology. Carr contended that Toynbee’s cyclical view of history after the First World War, which sought to revise the previously dominant view held by British historians of history as linear progression, was the “characteristic ideology of a society in decline.” Though Carr’s criticisms were targeted at specific interlocutors, they are also applicable to much of contemporary political science, which sees history as repetitive and the investigator of politics as standing aloof from the object of study. In contrast with his neorealist successors, Carr’s claim that history was “continuous” did not imply repetition, but rather constant movement that “never returns to the same place.” Carr’s ontological perspective was conditioned by his belief in the dialectical relationship between thought and existence, whereby existence conditions knowledge and historical consciousness transforms existence. He rejected the assertion that history was repetitive and predictable, locating it within a theory of knowledge that, by virtue of its neglect of the transformative effects of

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127 ———, *What Is History?,* 52.
consciousness and the social mediation of thought, ended up distorting political phenomena and
masking the ways its own knowledge claims were implicated in politics.

Indeed, Carr became increasingly convinced that the study of history and the social sciences,
which failed to take change seriously, were in crisis. Contending that the proper preoccupation of
history concerned the “fundamental processes of change,” he saw the trend towards specialized
socio-scientific history as symptomatic of a broader social and intellectual crisis. Carr considered the
historical turn to quantitative methodologies as a form of “taking cover,” reflective of the social fear
of, and animus against, radical transformation. This “taking cover” was evident in a variety of
disciplines, manifested by the popularity of literary formalism, econometrics, linguistic philosophy,
and the structuralism of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the connections between structuralism and
Marxism, Carr argued that its focus on the static ultimately rendered it politically conservative. For
Carr, the intellectual fashions of the 1970s and their embrace of the abstract constituted an escape
from ethics, politics, and history.129

The seeds of Carr’s explicit diagnosis of intellectual crisis in the 1970s as well as his insights
into the crucial connections between dominant socio-political understandings and dominant modes
of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences are contained in his earlier work. Carr’s polemics
against naïve empiricism in What is History?, like his later polemics against structuralism, already
stressed the illusion of empirical reality divorced from socio-historical context and hinted at the
importance of reflexivity. For Carr, the idea that the task of intellectual inquiry consisted simply in
the collection of “objective facts of history” as “objective data of science,” was both substantively
invalid and politically suspect. This sort of naïve scientific realism, by positing the objective existence
of facts, failed to apprehend the centrality of interpretation involved in the construction of history
and politics. The inquirer framed, selected, and arranged material in light of prior judgments, and it
was only the judgment of something’s significance that made it a “fact of history.” In Carr’s analysis,

129 Davies discusses these issues in his analysis of Carr’s prepared notes for the second edition of What is History?. See
the interpretive dimension of the “facts of history” undermined any claim to value-neutrality.

Prefiguring Charles Taylor’s notion of a value-slope, Carr acknowledged that the researcher’s value orientation and judgments, unwittingly or not, conditioned the theoretical framework in which some empirical phenomena constituted the “facts of history” while others were irrelevant and immaterial, so to speak. Highlighting the unavoidable “circularity” between a researcher’s presuppositions and his conclusions, between one’s view of “the nature of the historical process” and of “the facts of history,” Carr contended the “facts of history [came] into being simultaneously with [a particular] diagnosis of the historical process and as an intrinsic part of it.”

He considered the view of historical knowledge as the grasping of pre-existing, objective facts not only substantively untenable, but also symptomatic of a deep faith in a univocal meaning immanent in politics. Attentive to the intimate connection between modes of inquiry and their presumptions about the nature of social knowledge, on the one hand, and their historical context, on the other, he located the notion of the autonomy of facts, i.e. that they speak for themselves, in the 19th century liberal view of history.

Arguing that this view of history was cut from the same cloth as the economic doctrine of laissez-faire, he saw both as demonstrative of a faith in automatic progress, whether in terms of materiality by virtue of the invisible hand or in terms of meaning by virtue of the implicit significance and self-evident nature of historical fact.

Notably, this orientation towards history and politics, which ostensibly withheld judgment and deferred to empirical reality, was equally characteristic of liberalism and realism. Despite their divergent political judgments, both approached facts as if they existed outside of interpretative frameworks and failed to perceive the extent to which the patterns of empirical reality were imposed by the inquirer. As such, the understanding of political knowledge as the objective study of facts in order to identify the causal laws of history, whether of development, stasis or decay, was blind to the extent to which all social knowledge was a product of conditioned thought. All knowledge of the

132 See Carr’s discussion of realism’s fatalism in ———, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939, 10.
past was conditioned by the knower’s own experience and social circumstance. Carr’s comments on the relationship of the historian to history, which is equally applicable to social science, emphasized the perspectival nature of knowledge. History is a moving procession, and

as the procession winds along, swerving now to the right and now to the left, and sometimes doubling back on itself, the relative positions of different parts of the procession are constantly changing, so that it may make perfectly good sense to say, for example, that we are nearer today to the Middle Ages than were our great-grandfathers a century ago, or that the age of Caesar is nearer to us than the age of Dante. New vistas, new angles of vision, constantly appear as the procession – and the historian with it – moves along. The historian is a part of history. The point in the procession at which he finds himself determines his angle of vision over the past.133

Carr’s metaphor was certainly an important reminder that the historian’s (or the political scientist’s) view of the past was conditioned by his position in it, that knowledge was necessarily knowledge from a particular perspective. But the more significant point was that the inquirer was not stationary; he was moving within the dynamic procession of history toward the future, and his view of the horizon ahead invariably conditioned his understanding of the past. In this sense, there could be no definitive understanding of a “dead” past. Carr understood history as continuous and reciprocal dialogue between a living past and a living present headed towards its prospective future. Because “history [dealt with a] procession of events, half of which [lay] in the past and half in the future,” both future and past were unintelligible without each other, which led Carr to the paradoxical conclusion that “historical thinking [is] always teleological.”134 Carr's assertion that the historian's task was to analyze the past in terms of “the future… growing out of it,” was distinct from the determinist view of history as law-like repetition in accordance with objective laws as well as the view that the future could totally transcend the constraints of the past. Moreover, Carr made it clear that to avoid meaninglessness historical knowledge had to be oriented by values, whose source lay outside of history but whose every instantiation was historically conditioned and a product of historical process. Together, this entailed a mode of historical inquiry committed to analyzing the

immanent movements originating out of the past in service of a future social order where certain values could be realized.\textsuperscript{135}

Carr’s recognition of the value-infused nature of historical inquiry, and social inquiry more generally, challenged the epistemological criterion of objectivity, rooted in the subject-object dichotomy. Yet despite Carr’s recognition of the unavoidable conditioning of all knowledge, he eschewed the judgment that all knowledge was relative and all interpretations of history equally valid.\textsuperscript{136} Rejecting absolute truth as inappropriate to historical knowledge, Carr still held onto a notion of historical truth, provisional and value-laden though it may be.\textsuperscript{137} This commitment required a reformulation of the principle of objectivity in line with the evaluative component of knowledge. Objectivity was not a feature of facts, which may or may not be in dispute, but a feature governing the interrelationship of interpretation and fact and of the past and future. More concretely, it was the ability to distinguish between “real or significant facts” and “accidental facts” that could be ignored. Objectivity was, at its essence, the right “standard of significance” in relation to a particular end.\textsuperscript{138} Despite the counterintuitive nature of Carr’s claim, his discussion of causal inference demonstrated the extent to which such a view of objectivity was, in some respects, already implicated in ordinary thinking and historical research. Carr outlined a mundane hypothetical of a drunk motorist, driving a car with faulty breaks, who kills a man crossing a blind corner to buy cigarettes. In assessing the possible causes of death, investigators could be expected to look into the inebriated condition of the driver, the defective breaks, and perhaps the limited visibility of the roadway, but they would not assert that the cause of death was the victim’s desire for cigarettes.

Carr’s point was not that the latter was causally invalid (it wasn’t), but that causal analysis (even of the ordinary variety) was implicitly governed by a principle of objectivity, such that out of all the infinite

\textsuperscript{135} Carr, The New Society, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{136} Despite Carr’s indebtedness to Collingwood’s ‘presentist’ view of history, he was concerned that it presaged total skepticism and pure relativism. See his criticism of relativism in ———, What Is History?, 29-35. See also p. 161 where Carr contrasts his radical understanding of objectivity with the relativist view of history.
\textsuperscript{137} Rejecting the fact-value distinction, he noted that the ordinary usage of the term ‘truth’ connoted both fact and value. Carr considered historical truth to lie between “the north pole of valueless facts and the south pole of value judgments still struggling to transform themselves into facts.” See Ibid., 173-6.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 159-60.
links between cause and effect only some were relevant in light of a particular standard of significance. The distinction between generalizable and accidental causes in history reflected precisely this. Objectivity was not about getting the facts right, but of locating the standard of significance, whether of lowering traffic fatalities or of preventing violent interstate conflict, by which relevant facts could be identified.

This task was, however, more difficult than it appeared. For Carr, objectivity required two capabilities, the awareness of one’s current standpoint in history and society and the capacity to apprehend the progression of the future. Both constituted a mindful enlargement of vision and an attempt to “transcend” the limitations stemming from one’s unavoidable involvement in history. Objectivity necessitated the ability to “rise above” one’s own socio-historical situation, which in turn required a recognition of the extent to which one’s intellectual orientation was mediated by one’s social environment and location in the procession of history. Yet the language of transcendence is slightly misleading, for Carr’s call for reflexivity was not exactly a call for the inquirer to rise above history to gain a birds’ eye perspective so to speak, but rather a call for the inquirer to cultivate awareness of his location in the procession of history and, subsequently, consciousness of the direction it was headed towards.

The first component of objectivity, reflexive awareness of the inquirer’s standpoint in history, was a precondition for the second, “the capacity to project his vision into the future in such a way as to give him a more profound and more lasting insight into the past than can be attained by those historians whose outlook is entirely bounded by their own immediate situation.” Carr not only

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139 See Anders Stephanson’s “The Lessons of What is History?” in Cox (ed.) where he clears up a potential misreading of Carr’s comments on generalization. Stephanson makes clear that Carr was not advocating the specific type of ahistorical nomothetic generalization of the natural/social sciences but rather “the articulation of hypotheses that will serve to advance the development of history in desirable directions. Such causal sequences ‘are potentially applicable to other countries, other periods, and other conditions, lead to fruitful generalizations and lessons can be learned from them.’ This is a very different standard of generality from the nomothetic rules of natural science” (290).


141 Carr seemed to come to a greater appreciation of the importance of context in scientific knowledge as well as historical knowledge. He had prepared ample notes on the philosophy and methodology of science for the second edition of What is History?, and his engagement with Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Polanyi suggested an appreciation of the influence of socio-historical context on the theory and practice of science. See Davies, “From E.H. Carr’s Files: Notes Towards a Second Edition of What Is History?,” xi-xiii.
defined objectivity as a standard of significance by which the theoretical framework, central categories, and selection of relevant facts would be oriented, but contended that this standard of significance was an emergent historical property. As such, history was a “dialogue between the events of the past and progressively emerging future ends.” Objectivity connoted an historical understanding of the past that was responsive to the emergence of these future ends. Carr praised the turn towards social and economic interpretations of the past as case in point, which he saw as an appropriate response to the materialization of social and economic goals and the concomitant decline in the importance of political rights and constitutional liberties in 20th century politics. Yet despite the concreteness of this example, Carr was adamant that the standard of objectivity, the criterion by which historical interpretation would be oriented, was always provisional. As an emergent end, it was invariably “something still incomplete and in process of becoming – something in the future towards which we move, which begins to take shape only as we move towards it, and in the light of which, as we move forward, we gradually shape our interpretation of the past.” Simultaneously grasping and negotiating the past and future, objective historical inquiry responded to trends immanent in political reality, aware of the temporary and uncertain nature of these trends and hence of the necessity of its own “constant modification.”

In Carr’s account, the task of the inquirer was to discern the emergent properties of his immediate historical situation and their implications for thought and practice. In interpreting the past in light of the forward momentum of history, the work of the historian, and the political thinker more generally, converged with the work of the political actor, who aimed “to liberate and organize human energies in the present with a view to the future.” Carr hinted at this union when he proclaimed in The Twenty Years’ Crisis that “political thought is itself a form of political action.” Indeed, Carr’s own historical inquiry in his major works on international politics embodied the modes of thinking adumbrated in What is History? and The New Society. His diagnosis of crises was

143 Ibid., 161.
144 Ibid.
145 ———, The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939, 5.
rooted in a narrative of changing historical conditions and attuned to its emergent trajectories toward new ideals and new forms of social, political, and economic organization. This type of prophetic historical inquiry was explicitly political and utopian in so far as it attempted to draw out emancipatory possibilities immanent in the historical process on behalf of a future order where they could be realized. In his analysis of the evolution of the multiple structures of social organization, whether of the institutions and operations of capitalism, democracy, or sovereignty, Carr’s overarching purpose was to trace the movement of these historical configurations in order to illuminate the necessity (and foreshadow the content) of radical shifts in thought and practice. The primacy of the ends of social justice, economic equality, supranational principles, and various forms of obligation in Carr’s historical investigations reflected his preoccupation with extrapolating new principles and practices sprouting from the old order, characterized by laissez-faire capitalism, liberal democracy, and a system of sovereign states committed to self-determination. Carr was adamant that the new was not a product of solitary imagination; it was “necessarily bound up with social, economic, and military conditions as well as with moral trends of thought.” By discerning signs of these emergent modes of thought and action in the progression of history, Carr’s own historical inquiry aimed to “hasten [the] transformation” from old to new.146

### 4.2.3 Carr’s (Anti-)Utopianism Reconsidered

That Carr’s understanding of historical inquiry, both in terms of his methodological writings and his own historical analyses, was overtly utopian requires us to revisit the infamous excoriations of utopia present throughout his texts. In *What is History?,* Carr asserted that “nothing is more radically false than to set up some supposedly abstract standard of the desirable and condemn the past in the light of it.”147 In *The New Society,* he attacked utopian “wish-dreams” and the speculative endeavor to build “castles in the air.” Yet it is important to recognize that Carr was not hostile towards utopia as

146 ——*, Conditions of Peace*, 115-6.
147 ——*, What Is History?*, 171.
such and that his criticisms were targeted specifically at utopias that refused to take history seriously, including the historical conditions of its own emergence. The upshot of Carr’s polemics was not the denunciation of utopia tout court, but the recognition that any tenable utopia had to be immanent and reflexive. Utopianism aware of its own conditioning and attuned to the concrete developments and emergent possibilities within the historical process was fundamentally different from the imposition of transcendent visions of “imaginary commonwealths having no lineal or causal connexion with the past” onto political reality, without regard to historical complexity, its own relationship to history, and the intrusion of parochial interest into utopian formulations. The latter utopianism could indeed be well-meaning, but to the extent that it lacked knowledge of extant historical conditions and social forces, it was doomed to practical failure. To the extent that it failed to appreciate the implications of its own historicity, it risked becoming ideological and precluding the very transformation ostensibly desired. Ironically, this sort of utopia functioned as a foreclosure of emergent future possibilities.

In *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, Carr warned that “no political utopia will achieve even the most limited success unless it grows out of political reality.” This qualification of utopia is consistent with his later works. In both *The New Society* and *What is History?*, Carr gave the hypothetical example of someone who aimed for the installation of monarchy in the United States. To this sort of utopianism, Carr’s reply was matter of fact: history is against you. He considered the monarchist’s utopia, which simultaneously reflected pathological nostalgia and a denial of historical dynamics, to be untenable. By emphasizing the primacy of history, Carr was not denying utopian possibility in light of historical determinism. Instead, he sought to emphasize that any viable utopia had to have its roots in the historical process and could only be sustained in the context of critical dialogue between the past and future.

149 ———, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 10.
150 Carr’s argument seems to be widely applicable. For instance, one might imagine him responding to resistance against gay marriage by invoking the historical expansion of civil liberties in industrialized societies.
Carr’s claim that utopian ideals had to be concordant with political conditions within a particular historical dynamic helps clarify his oft-misunderstood criticisms of liberalism in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. As argued earlier, Carr was not hostile towards the substance of liberalism; instead, he was worried about its divorce from extant historical conditions. He was sympathetic to liberal ideals and clearly indebted to the categories of progress, reason, and freedom. He simply rejected the premise that the achievement of these ideals were automatic or inevitable. Indeed, despite all of Carr’s attacks on the harmony of interests, his main objection was not the convergence of interest per se, but the assumption of its naturalness: “to make the harmonization of interests the goal of political action is not the same thing as to postulate that a natural harmony of interests exists; and it is this latter postulate which has caused so much confusion in international thinking.”151 There is abundant evidence, notably in Carr’s prescriptions for restructuring political and economic life, that he took the political task of harmonizing interests very seriously. In fact, it is possible to restate Carr’s critical position toward liberalism more empathetically than by highlighting its naïveté and disingenuousness. For Carr, liberal prescriptions were simply not radical enough. By neglecting the necessity of transforming political conditions and configurations of power at the root of interstate conflict, its solutions were bound to be superficial.152 Carr’s conclusion to *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* reveals the extent to which he was sympathetic to supranational aspirations for world federation and the construction of cooperative international institutions. It is noteworthy that he did not completely rule out either their desirability or the possibility of their efficacy. Yet he was adamant that the viability of these “superstructures” was contingent on “progress [in] digging the[ir] foundations.”153

Ultimately, the corpus of Carr’s political and historical inquiry is consistent with his claims of the necessity of realism and utopia in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*. In this light, Carr’s radical revision of the epistemological (and political) principle of objectivity in *What is History?* was consistent with his

151 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 51.
152 Cox contends that *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* sought to “attack all those liberals who thought they could build a new international system after 1919 without changing the basis of world politics.” See his introduction to ———, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 2.
153 ———, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 239.
earlier declaration that viable political thought had to combine realism (reflexive awareness of sociohistorical conditioning) and utopia (reality-transcendent elements to motivate and guide thought/practice). In some ways, Carr’s criticism of liberalism can be read as a warning for utopianism. Utopias were not to be found outside of history or to be forced upon a discordant political reality, but in the “new forces and movements, whose shape we cannot yet guess,… germinating beneath the surface” of the dynamics of history. The task of political thought was to engage in historically attentive critical inquiry in order to reveal the immanent utopian elements in political reality and to gesture towards a future order where they could be realized.

4.3 A Political Appraisal of Political Inquiry

The word crisis connotes a turning point: “a vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything… a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent.” Both Morgenthau and Carr expressed awareness of this decisive stage in the multifaceted crises of 20th century life. Through the idiom of crisis, they sought to emphasize that the Western world could either maintain the status quo, which guaranteed decay and disaster, or come to terms with the novel historical conditions of the time, which necessitated a transformation in extant modes of thinking and the domestic and international institutions governing political, social, and economic life. Carr’s writings from the end of the Second World War onwards emphasized the untenability of either stasis or a nostalgic return to the past and called for “re-adaptation to the needs and conditions of a new historical period.” He saw the post-war problems, upon which the fate of economic welfare, political democracy, and international society hinged, as requiring a revolutionary ethos: “we must move with [the world] or perish.” Morgenthau was similarly attentive to the opportunity and danger posed by the domestic and international crises he diagnosed, which he

157 ———, Conditions of Peace, 131.
prophesied would either engender “creative effort at reconstruction” or “violent repression.”¹⁵⁸

Crucially, he was adamant that the problems that preoccupied 20th century life, which variously threatened material and spiritual impoverishment, social decay, environment destruction, and unparalleled political violence, were not a “result of accidental misfortunes”¹⁵⁹; they were systemic, interrelated, and could (only) be elucidated by the right kind of theoretical reflection.

The historical conditions of the 20th century called for modes of inquiry that could apprehend the major crises of political and social organization and point towards the theoretical and political transformations required to negotiate them. Because the fundamental problem motivating crisis was the persistence of unreflexive thought and practice divorced from history, Morgenthau and Carr saw dominant modes of positivist science and history as part of the problem, not the solution. Morgenthau’s specific analyses of the historical origins of liberal thought and his more general deployment of ideology critique constituted an attempt to demonstrate how thought and praxis became universalized and abstracted in ways that falsified empirical reality and their own investment in that reality. Recognizing the historicity of thought and practice was crucial given that the perpetuation of anachronistic ideas and institutions precluded vital and salutary change. Any viable transformation depended on understanding that concepts and practices, despite their claims to universality, are always inherited entities that may come to distort the actual material conditions of existence, their promises and their dangers. Similarly, Carr embraced sociology of knowledge and prophetic historical inquiry in the attempt to provide a mode of political thought appropriate to the times. The dual focus of his political thought on unmasking ideology and locating emergent utopias was directed toward the transformation of the extant international political and economic order.

This chapter has concentrated on how Morgenthau’s and Carr’s preoccupation with crises influenced their methodological views. It is, however, possible to make some broader claims about their understanding of the relationship between politics and modes of inquiry. Morgenthau and Carr

conceived of political inquiry and historical knowledge as intimately connected to, and ultimately indistinguishable from, political action. Furthermore, both considered epistemic practices as embedded in particular historical and political matrices, which meant that they had to be judged for their intellectual as well as political adequacy. As such, Morgenthau’s “rational theory of international politics,” a rational theory of “objective laws that have their roots in human nature” in *Politics Among Nations* must be read in the context of his criticisms of rationalism, rationalization, rational choice theory, and scientism, which he considered politically obtuse and destructive. The common misreading of Morgenthau as a positivist demonstrates the failure to appreciate the divergent political judgments of Morgenthau’s political science, on the one hand, and the anti-political scientism he criticized, on the other. Despite rhetorical similarities, they differed in their conception of politics, judgment, scientific knowledge, and their proper interrelations. Moreover, in light of Morgenthau’s contention that political science has to counter the pathologies and limitations characteristic of dominant modes of thinking at a certain socio-historical moment, we must not mistake his strategic and rhetorical moves for ontological claims. Morgenthau explicitly argued that political science, though preoccupied with power broadly conceived, must shift its emphases strategically:

When the times tend to depreciate the element of power, it must stress its importance. When the times incline toward a monistic conception of power in the general scheme of things, it must show its limitations. When the times conceive of power primarily in military terms, it must call attention to the variety of factors which go into the power equation and, more particularly, to the subtle psychological relation of which the web of power is fashioned. When the reality of power is being lost sight of over its moral and legal limitations, it must point to that reality. When law and morality are judged as nothing, it must assign them their rightful place.

Political inquiry, in other words, must be responsive to political conditions.

160 ———, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4, 10. In addition to his discussions in *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics* and *Science: Servant or Master?*, see Morgenthau’s methodological criticisms in “International Relations,” in ———, *Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70*, 241-61.

161 For example, see Hollis and Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations*.

162 Morgenthau’s political theory was “oriented toward political action,” but ultimately subject to political will that could not be reduced to technical knowledge. See Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master?*, 42.

Carr’s rejection of a social science or history of objective laws and his embrace of more critical methodologies reflected a similar belief that intellectual inquiry must remain attentive and change in response to historical conditions. In *What is History?,* Carr argued that the rise of large-scale capitalism, which rendered concentrated power decisive, and the emergence of planning suggested the illusion of an economy governed by objective laws and processes. Carr took this example to indicate a broader truth: changing historical conditions and societal practices, arising out of technological and scientific revolution, have implications for political inquiry and the social function of reason. Indeed, Carr believed that the 20th century was implicated in a revolutionary expansion of reason, in which the function of intellectual inquiry was changing (and ought to change) from the investigation of objective laws to the self-conscious transformation of man and society. Carr’s own commitments to reflective self-consciousness and politically transformative inquiry can be understood as implications of this historical expansion of reason.\(^{164}\)

Morgenthau’s and Carr’s writings on the nature of thought and their own historical investigations presupposed not only the pivotal role of inquiry under conditions of crisis and revolution, but also that certain modes of thinking were required at certain moments in history. Ultimately, their epistemic and methodological criticisms and commitments cannot be divorced from their political preoccupations. Situating the former in the latter not only illuminates the political appropriateness of Morgenthau’s and Carr’s methodological choices. It also underscores the importance of apprehending the historical origins as well as political dimensions and consequences of any mode of inquiry.

\(^{164}\) Carr claimed that after Marx and Freud, whose work illuminated the unconscious dimensions and condition of thought and behavior, “the historian has no excuse to think of himself as a detached individual standing outside society and outside history.” In “the age of self-consciousness,” he continued, “the historian can and should know that he is doing” (186). In short, the expansion of reason’s critical function meant that intellectual inquiry could no longer be blind to its own involvement in history; the very capacity of reason to reveal the falsity of professed motives and intentions implied an obligation to reflexivity in the study of politics and history. Additionally, Carr believed that the expansion of reason meant that more of social life was subject to rational inquiry, thus making possible conscious political transformation. See Chapter 6 of Carr, *What Is History?*
5. Critical Realism and Visions of Radical Transformation

Although the writings of Morgenthau and Carr deal with a wide range of topics and issues, their political and historical inquiries are remarkably coherent. Reading Morgenthau and Carr on their own terms, that is, reading their theoretical, methodological, political, and ethical writings in concert with each other, helps illuminate a common thread connecting their disparate works: a sustained preoccupation with crisis, in particular, the common structure of ostensibly separate and unrelated crises. There is ample evidence to support the claim that their political thinking aimed to provide the intellectual resources required to systematically think through crises on behalf of radical political change. Both Morgenthau and Carr were deeply concerned with the uncritical defense of the status quo, which they saw as heralding disaster.

In Science: Servant or Master, Morgenthau concluded by outlining three prerequisites for successfully navigating the crossroads of crisis:

the first prerequisite for our ability to deal with these novel experiences is to be conscious of their novelty. The second prerequisite is to be conscious of the fact that our modes of thought and action belong to an age that has been left behind by the technological age. The third prerequisite is to close the gap between our obsolescent modes of thought and action and the novel conditions of the technological age by radically changing those modes of thought and action in the light of the novel conditions. Only thus will we be able to use the infinite potentialities of the technological age for the good of humanity rather than for its destruction.¹

It is my contention that this passage provides a clear manifesto for the intellectual and political orientation of critical realism. Morgenthau’s and Carr’s texts can be read in reference to these concrete tasks, which are explicitly in service of radical transformation as a response to crisis. The emphasis on novelty and radicalism is especially significant, especially since realism’s relationship to change has been systematically misrepresented by mainstream interpretations of the tradition. Although Morgenthau is expressly concerned with the novelty of the nuclear age, his focus on “novel

¹ Morgenthau, Science: Servant or Master?, 153.
conditions” must be considered more broadly. A careful appraisal of his writings as a whole should make it clear that the novel conditions of the technological age referred not only to the technologies of destruction (which amplified the prospect of nuclear holocaust and had implications for the concept of political liberty and the possibility of revolution), but also to the technologies of industrialization (which precipitated concentrated economic power), the “mechanized and bureaucratized” social institutions governing communal life (which posed a threat to judgment, purpose, freedom, and democracy), and the more general sacrifice of “human ends to technological means” characteristic of modernity (which portended physical and metaphysical loss).

Morgenthau’s assessment of novelty largely echoed Carr’s, who similarly emphasized the economic, social, and political implications of the technological and scientific revolution. For Carr, the changes stemming from technology had decisive implications for the configuration of society as well as the fulfillment of liberal democratic aspirations.

Furthermore, contrary to those who read realist preoccupation with power as evidence of their preoccupation with continuity and sameness, both Carr and Morgenthau recognized the shifting nature and pernicious aspects of power in modern life. Carr considered the development and application of technologies of mass communication — “the rationally calculated use of irrational methods of persuasion” — to be “unparalleled” in its power. He saw this “abuse of reason,” which threatened judgment and democratic life, as more sinister than conventional means of coercion, not least because an escape from reason was impossible in the technological and scientific age.

Morgenthau also accentuated the novelty of power in the late 20th century: the “discrepancy in power

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2 See ———, "Reflections on the End of the Republic," 1-2. In light of the strategic character of Morgenthau’s thought, perhaps he intended his invocations of rationality and objective laws to serve a very counterintuitive function: to apprehend the opposite, that is, to reveal the extent to which the historical conditions of the age were neither recurrent nor rational. And this discordance between theory and reality would signal crisis. See "The Intellectual and Moral Dilemma of Politics," ———, The Decline of Democratic Politics, 11-12., where Morgenthau criticized the “tendency to disparage the perennial and typical in history” because of its consequences: failure to appreciate continuity meant the incapacity to recognize “the truly unique: the ability for universal destruction that man has received from nuclear power. Likewise, only by appreciating the rational character of international relations could one recognize the mythology of instrumental reason in the nuclear age and in the technological age more generally. The political thinker who encountered the 20th century armed with these categories was bound to experience a violent concussion (precisely because of their falsity!), and it was this collision with political reality that would engender consciousness of the necessity of new modes of thinking and new political practices.

between the wielder of power and its object” in contemporary political life was not only “unprecedented,” the objects of power experienced it as “irresist[i]ble,” anonymous, “unfathomable,” “unchallengeable and invisible.”4 The prevalent experience of estrangement, alienation, and cynicism diagnosed by Morgenthau, especially in The Purpose of American Politics, reflected something novel (and seriously disturbing) about the functioning of power under the particular conditions of the post-war period.

Morgenthau’s and Carr’s stress on the novel conditions of 20th century life prefigured their radicalism. That is to say, their recognition of changing historical conditions and their decisive implications for the organization of communal life precipitated their preoccupation with radical political transformation. Their efforts to rethink the theory and practice of sovereignty provide a concrete example of their commitment to radical change and demonstrate the coherence between their political visions and their diagnosis of crisis. The following chapter examines Morgenthau’s and Carr’s views on political transformation, paying special attention to their respective reconceptualizations of sovereignty and the strategies they outlined to redistribute political and moral authority in global politics. I conclude by explaining why Morgenthau and Carr believed radicalism and a robust vision of ends to be necessary by explicating one of the major problems implicit in their diagnoses of crisis: the modern inability to distinguish between means and ends and the subsequent elevation of technologies and instruments into higher ends.

5.1 Rethinking Sovereignty and Self-Determination

5.1.1 Transforming Political Authority: From Diplomatic Accommodation to World State

Morgenthau’s historical analysis, which revealed a worrisome gap between technological developments and the “parochial moral commitments and political commitments” of the 20th

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century, precipitated his thinking about ways to transform the latter.\(^5\) Recognizing that historical
dynamics had invalidated conventional ways of thinking about/through politics as well as their
attendant institutional configurations, Morgenthau believed that the solution – coterminous with the
restoration of reason, both in the limited sense of instrumental rationality and in the more
encompassing sense of a commitment to substantive ends – required the introduction of novel
principles and institutions. Specifically, he advocated the supranational control of nuclear weapons
and took seriously the project of creating a world state, a new polity that would take over the moral
and practical functions he thought the nation-state could no longer perform.\(^6\) Well aware of the
obstacles to the cultivation of common loyalty and purpose required for a viable supranational order,
the latter sections of Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations* sought to lay out a roadmap and a set of
practices by which the political and moral barriers to a peaceful world order could be dismantled.

Morgenthau’s writings on the problem of international peace are usually read as
quintessential examples of realism’s essential hostility toward liberal and institutional solutions to
international conflict and its support for elite diplomacy and balance of power techniques. Yet this
reading of Morgenthau elides both his commitment to supranational political organization and
international community, which he shared with his liberal opponents; his complex, idiosyncratic
views on traditional realist measures; and his account of their appropriate interrelation. Morgenthau
criticized liberal solutions for their tendency to deal with political problems symptomatically and their
inattention to the conditions necessary for the formation of supranational community, never for their
progressive aims. After all, the need for radical transformation was both a moral and logical
conclusion of Morgenthau’s own historical and political inquiry. If anything, his criticism of the
reigning preoccupation with institutions was due to its conservatism; the limitations of international
organizations demonstrated the need for a more radical solution. Morgenthau’s critical appraisal of
the balance of power and extant international institutions aimed to show their respective

\(^6\) See Morgenthau’s discussion of the supranational control of nuclear weapons in _———*, *The Purpose of American Politics*, 308-09.
achievements and their ultimate inability to address contemporary political crisis, which he believed required nothing short of transcending the sovereign state system. However, such transformation could not be achieved without cultivating communal loyalties beyond the state, which first required the amelioration of violent conflict. Morgenthau, who sought to facilitate the fundamental transformation of political organization, contended that diplomatic practices and cooperative international institutions, though insufficient as ends in themselves, were vital instruments in constructing the moral and material foundations for supranational order.

Contrary to Waltz, Morgenthau explicitly rejected the balance of power “as a guiding principle of international politics” in light of “its uncertainty, its unreality, and its inadequacy.” For Waltz, balance of power is both an automatic mechanism and the quintessential policy of prudence. For Morgenthau, the balance of power was intrinsically ideological and could just as easily destabilize as it could preserve national independence and international order, a sign that its efficacy ultimately depended on something extraneous to the balance of power itself. In Politics Among Nations, Morgenthau argued that the nature of power makes power calculations inherently uncertain, and though this uncertainty under conditions of multipolarity might elicit caution and moderate aggression in the short-run, it also precipitated the long-run maximization of power. Preventive war was, for Morgenthau, a logical consequence of the balance of power.8 “While nobody can tell how many wars there would have been without the balance of power,” Morgenthau asserted, “it is not hard to see that most of the wars that have been fought since the beginning of the modern state system have their origin in the balance of power.” Theoretically and historically, he saw the balance of power as implicated in a cycle of violence between status quo and revisionist powers. That the balance of power suffered from congenital vagueness and distorted the empirical pursuit of preponderance also rendered it deeply suspect. For Morgenthau, the balance of power, irrevocably connected to the status quo by virtue of its intrinsic definition and conventional usage as a synonym

8 See Morgenthau’s discussion of how balance of power mechanics precipitated World War I in Ibid., 229.
for the extant distribution of power, was ideology. By masking reality and its own political function, it served to “disguise, rationalize, and justify international politics as it actually is.”

While the ideological dimension of balance of power undermined its moral status, the empirical indeterminacy of the balance of power—reflected in theoretical controversy over its efficacy—undercut its claims to generalizability. In response to those who thought that the history of 17th to 19th century Europe proved the salutary effects of the balance of power on international peace, Morgenthau contended that the contribution of the balance of power to moderation, restraint, and equilibrium was illusory. To the extent that the balance of power ameliorated conflict and preserved stability, it was not the mechanism of balancing itself that did the work but rather the common intellectual and moral framework it was embedded in. Morgenthau’s appraisal suggested the need to focus not on the mechanics of balance but rather the moral and political conditions generative of a commitment to peace.

Morgenthau’s criticism of institutional approaches to the problem of international peace and order similarly highlighted their blindness to these underlying conditions. While disarmament ameliorated tension and fear, it ultimately dealt with symptoms rather than the political issues that made violence an attractive option in the first place. Likewise, Morgenthau denigrated the idea that international institutions could serve as some sort of ultimate solution. Those who advocated “divided sovereignty” between states and international organizations or placed their hopes in the latter’s mechanisms for peaceful change (specifically Article 10 and 14 of the UN Charter and its historical predecessor Article 19 of the League Covenant) failed to recognize that “national

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9 Ibid., 230, 32-33.
10 Morgenthau explicitly stressed the differences between 18th century aristocratic Europe, founded upon moral consensus and commitment to balance and restoration of power, with the Cold War period, where such common understandings were absent under conditions of bipolarity as well as the geographic expansion of international relations. See Ibid., 388-89.
11 Michael Williams provides a cogent explanation for why Morgenthau insisted on treating the balance of power as a principled strategy rather than a mechanistic process in Williams, The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations, Chapter 3, 5. Williams considers Morgenthau’s concept of balance (and his conception of politics more generally) as part of a strategy to produce and sustain liberal political order, willful constructions on behalf of a politics of limits. While I agree with William's broader point that the political theory of realists are political constructions, I think Williams fails to appreciate Morgenthau’s radicalism. Morgenthau ultimately considered the balance of power insufficient as a political principle, and his criticism of it prefigured his call for radical transformation of the sovereign state system.
sovereignty itself [was] the largest barrier to peace.”13 While something like the UN General Assembly could subtly change the quality of politics by instituting a common language rooted in supranational interest and by creating a space more conducive to concessions without the loss of face, its achievements were too minor to quell conflict in any permanent way.14

International peace, Morgenthau contended, could not be achieved solely through the limitation of national power, whether by individual states or interstate organizations. It called for the formation of a world state, which in turn necessitated a world community. For Morgenthau, this sort of social foundation for global governance could not be formed on the basis of something as facile as cultural exchange, which mistook shared culture or cultural appreciation for a “community of moral judgments and political actions.” Transcending the sovereign state system, he cautioned, necessitated “a moral and political transformation of unprecedented dimensions,” a “revaluation of all values.”15

The problem with institutionalism and with superficial appeals to “one world” was their failure to take seriously the revolutionary moral and political changes required to actually achieve their own objective of a workable supranational order.

Although Morgenthau dismissed the notion that international organizations could be the panacea for political strife, he acknowledged that they had a crucial role to play in creating supranational loyalties. Morgenthau praised Mitrany’s functionalism, which embraced a bottom-up approach that focused on forming small agencies to fulfill functional tasks rather than a top-down approach centered around a constitutional and legal framework. Functionalism presumed that limited activities in one sphere, specifically activities that satisfy common needs, would create a community of interest, which would in turn encourage the development of other functional spheres dealing with concrete economic, infrastructural, agricultural, technological, or military issues. If these

13 Morgenthau, Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, 246, 480.
15 Ibid., 353, 50, 41.
agencies were dense enough and effectively served the basic needs of ordinary people, they could condition supranational loyalty and give rise to a “community of interests, valuations, and actions.”

For Morgenthau, NATO, the European Communities, and economic and technical aid agencies embodied functional premises and aspirations. They all expanded the domain of international concern to military and economic issues that had been exclusively domestic. More than that, they constituted the most serious attempts to pursue the kind of novel solutions Morgenthau believed to be necessary to create the conditions for supranational sovereignty. NATO was thus not simply a military alliance; it further pursued economic and political stability and cultivating closer relations among its members beyond what a traditional ad-hoc alliance required. Even more radical, the EC aimed to generate political unity organically by way of functional units in different spheres. In the case of its success, Morgenthau surmised that it would transfer sovereignty not by fiat, but through the gradual inculcation of wider loyalties and the institutional devolution of power.

Yet Morgenthau was not overly sanguine about the prospects of functionalism alone. He judged economic and technical assistance agencies in their existing configurations as either useless or counterproductive. He was alert to the limitations of regional organizations like NATO and the EC. Most importantly, he acknowledged that their success hinged on national interests and the distribution of power. It was at this point in the argument that Morgenthau turned to diplomacy. While functionalism could help create the institutional frameworks productive of supranational interests and loyalty, the possibility of an international community also rested upon mitigating intransigent international conflict and the clash of uncompromising national interests that risked disaster and, more disturbingly, precluded the changes required to avert it. In other words, international community was contingent on constructing supranational loyalty as well as diminishing national ones. Morgenthau had no illusions that this would be an easy task, especially in light of the fact that the nation offered “the individual protection, vicarious gratification of power drives, and

immediate satisfaction of material needs,” while international agencies remained “removed from the
direct experiences of ordinary people.”\textsuperscript{18}

Yet he saw the practice of diplomacy as fundamental to releasing the hold of nationalism on
the popular imagination. Diplomacy was, for Morgenthau, directed towards the creation of
conditions amenable to a world state. It was a transformative practice rather than a static,
instrumental strategy beholden to an unchanging sovereign state system. In outlining the rules of
diplomacy, Morgenthau was providing the framework for a political morality in transition to
supranational order. Certainly, the idea that diplomacy could pave the way for radical transformation
seems to clash with Morgenthau’s idea of diplomacy as the promotion of national interest.\textsuperscript{19} The
latter appears to strengthen rather than weaken parochial political commitments.

Nevertheless, Morgenthau’s invocation of the national interest was not as straightforward as
is commonly construed. As Michael Williams has argued, Morgenthau’s national interest constituted
a reflexive ethical practice, part and parcel of a more comprehensive political morality.\textsuperscript{20} In Politics
Among Nations, Morgenthau contended that “if we look at all nations, our own included, as political
entities pursuing their respective interests defined in terms of power, we are able to do justice to all
of them.” The purpose of national interest was to encourage reflection on the nature of one’s own
pursuit of power in light of other’s equally valid pursuits, and significantly, to cultivate “respect [for]
the interests of other nations.” Morgenthau’s concept of national interest was deployed against
ideological foreign policies, governed by virtuous self-delusions and demonological conceptions of
the other; the upshot of the theoretical focus on the universality of interest was the ability to cultivate
a certain kind of disinterested judgment, namely the capacity to “to judge other nations as we judge
our own.”\textsuperscript{21} Hence, the invocation of national interest was not a prelude to narcissistic

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 549.
\textsuperscript{19} Morgenthau contends that the primary objective of diplomacy is “the promotion of the national interest by peaceful
\textsuperscript{20} See Williams, \textit{The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations}, 180-92.
\textsuperscript{21} Morgenthau, Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, 13. Terry Eagleton has argued for the ethical
“Disinterestedness is not some bogus impartiality, but a question of projecting oneself by the power of the sympathetic
ethnocentrism or uncompromising nationalism, but to the ability to put oneself in the proverbial shoes of another. Its purpose was to provoke the recognition that other states had needs and interests as well, a simple fact that Morgenthau thought too often eclipsed by American foreign policy. Because of its capacity to provoke political awareness, its implicit conferral of deference and equality when applied to one's adversaries, and its direct appeal to political judgment, the conceptual framework of national interest was — though certainly insufficient in itself - crucial to successful diplomacy and negotiation. Importantly, given the fact that ideology precluded the very possibility of self-judgment, Morgenthau's concept of national interest was geared toward encouraging precisely this lost reflexivity.

Instead of appealing to a static, self-regarding interest, Morgenthau simultaneously deflated and inflated its scope in ways that eradicated its pernicious qualities while reconciling it with ostensibly incompatible supranational concerns. A close reading demonstrates the fluidity and flexibility of interest and Morgenthau's attempt to revise it to make conflict less intractable. He strategically chipped away at the content of interest, arguing that disputes involving non-vital interests were to be abandoned or mitigated through bargaining: “nations must be willing to imagine into the needs and interests of others. As both an ethical and epistemic affair, it means an indifference to one’s own concerns, not to those of others.” Or as he puts it in an earlier book, **After Theory** (Basic Books, 2003), 133-37., its opposite is not partisanship but egoism. The important point I am making here is that Morgenthau’s “objective” appraisal of the national interests of all political actors is intended to cultivate disinterestedness, not in the sense of an objective account of truth or of value-neutrality (He rejected the first as impossible given knowledge is always from a particular perspective and considered the latter ideological.), but in the ethical sense. The national interest was part of Morgenthau's attempt to foster politically attuned and morally responsible thinking and judgment.

Put differently, the national interest was less an assertion than a question. In every concrete situation, the question arose: what was the national interest? And whose national interest needed to be considered? Morgenthau's use of the term with regard to Vietnam sought to raise precisely these questions, and he believed that the sort of consciousness (and perhaps conscience) evoked would expose the inadequacies of a strictly military approach that refused to encounter political realities and sidestepped the motivations and commitments of other parties, including the Soviet Union, Communist China, American allies, and Vietnam itself. See Morgenthau's discussion of Vietnam and the national interest in Morgenthau, *Vietnam and the United States*, 34-35.

Of course, Morgenthau recognized that appeal to the national interest was often sheer hypocrisy and ideology. Perhaps his own use of the term was problematic in this sense. The *Purpose of American Politics*, with its central category of national purpose, can be read as Morgenthau's admission of the inability of the national interest to sustain robust ethics as well as its own tendency towards complete ideology. The introduction of purpose seems to indicate that interest (and appeal to it) had not gone where Morgenthau had hoped and therefore needed to be policed or directed by a more “robust” and utopian concept: “In order to be worthy of our lasting sympathy, a nation must pursue its interests for the sake of a transcendent purpose that gives meaning to the day-by-day operations of its foreign policy.” ———, *The Purpose of American Politics*, 8. See Williams's analysis of the dangers of Morgenthau's conceptualization of national interest as part of a politics of responsibility in Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations*, 193-97. Williams focuses on its potentials for reification and ideological justification in ways counterproductive to its intended purpose.
compromise on all issues that are not vital to them.” Though more dangerous, even conflicts involving vital interests were amenable to bargaining and reconceptualization. According to Morgenthau, clashing vital interests “might be redefined, reconciled [and] made compatible.”

Morgenthau further contended that diplomacy had to be attentive to historical conditions and their ramifications for (the reinterpretation of) guiding principles, including national interest or national security. He drew out the implication explicitly: in the nuclear age, “diplomacy, in order to make one nation secure from nuclear destruction, must make them all secure. With the national interest defined in such restrictive and transcendent terms,” he continued, “diplomacy must… look at the political scene from the point of view of other nations.” By reconceptualizing the security of one nation as tied to the security of all nations, Morgenthau essentially circumscribed the goal of foreign policy to the pursuit of indivisible peace and altered the orientation toward the other from one of hostility to one of empathy and shared interest. In so doing, he effectively excised the parochial content of the national interest. Ultimately, it is crucial to note Morgenthau’s novel take on traditional measures and his treatment of diplomacy as a political practice to condition broader loyalties. Together, the nine rules of diplomacy in Politics Among Nations constituted a political morality -- rooted in prudence, reflexivity, and obligation to others -- whose function was to lay the foundations for the systematic transformation of international political life.

5.1.2 Functional Sovereignty, Dispersed Political Authority, and the Moral Foundations of International Order

Like Morgenthau, Carr diagnosed a crisis of sovereignty in the context of 20th century political life. His realist analysis aimed to demonstrate how the uncritical commitment to the principle of nationalism and the right of self-determination was out of tune with political reality and...

25 Ibid., 383.
26 The inevitable obsolescence of the national interest is intimated by Morgenthau’s contention that political realism, rooted in national interest, was a political morality attuned to concrete politics and historical circumstance. In fact, Morgenthau specifically emphasized that political realism recognized the historical contingency of the state and therefore of the relativity of the national interest itself. See Hans J. Morgenthau, "Another "Great Debate": The National Interest of the United States," American Political Science Review 46, no. 4 (1952): 988, 72.
normatively problematic, while his historical inquiry sought to trace how technical and material realities necessitated coordinative efforts beyond the nation-state. For Carr, the connection between the nation-state, on the one hand, and the human values of security and economic welfare, on the other, was an empirical question dependent on socio-historical circumstance, not something to be presumed. Through rigorous historical investigation, he concluded that the development of nationalism – especially under conditions of the socialized nation and nationalized economic policy – rendered a political organization of self-regarding nation-states a threat to security, economic development, and world peace. In order to defuse the destructive effects of nationalism, the theory and practice of sovereignty had to be revolutionized. Carr’s work sought to demonstrate that the nation-state was historical instead of absolute and had been outmoded by technological and material developments. In Nationalism and After, Carr explicitly rejected his prior belief in The Twenty Years’ Crisis of “the possibility of achieving a community of nations”\(^\text{27}\) and called for moving beyond the nation-state as a mode of political organization for the sake of political amity and economic prosperity. In addition to these concrete changes in political practice, he emphasized the necessity of a concomitant “revolution in men’s ways of thinking,” under which the political right of self-determination would be reconceptualized and brought within an overarching framework of obligation.\(^\text{28}\)

Despite Carr’s criticism of the sovereign state system and his insistence that nationalism was now bankrupt, he did not embrace the “empty universalism” of a world state and its sentimental rhetoric of unity under “one world.” Carr’s writings preceded Morgenthau’s, though he undoubtedly would have been critical of the latter’s ideal of a world state. For Carr, not only did this route risk naïveté and disingenuousness (for centralization was dangerously symptomatic of an obsession with homogenous order), it was also at odds with the complexity of modern life, which necessitated the

\(^{27}\) Carr, Nationalism and After, 44.

\(^{28}\) ———, Conditions of Peace, 67.
existence of “several competing centres of power.”²⁹ Although contemporary readings of realism emphasize its deep opposition to functionalism and institutionalism, ³⁰ Carr explicitly advocated the dispersion of political authority according to a functional approach, where authority would be vested in different units for the achievement of different purposes. Offering an alternative to the sovereign state system, his functionalism was rooted in the “interplay between centralization and devolution.”³¹ Just as domestic politics was rooted in the “multiplicity of authorities and diversity of loyalties” to counter the possibility of totalitarianism, Carr believed that the survival and flourishing of the international community necessitated similar safeguards. Specifically, he contended that the best hope for individual security and social justice lay in multinational units that would coordinate military security and facilitate greater economic planning. These multinational units would operate alongside existing as well as smaller units serving other purposes. Importantly, Carr saw the introduction of larger political units as part of “a system of overlapping and interlocking loyalties” and hence perfectly compatible with “national administrative and cultural units.”³² Moreover, he espoused this vision of overlapping authority structures across regions and, in the case of Africa and Asia, emphasized the importance of local administrative units rooted in local traditions, customs, and respect for the self-determination of tribal units.³³

Underlying Carr’s prescriptions for the reorganization of political life was the presumption that self-determination was a fluid principle that had to be modified to fit political reality. It was not intrinsically tied to nationality and could accommodate both political organization in smaller or larger units. Carr acknowledged that reconceptualizing the principle of self-determination and the practice

²⁹ ———, Nationalism and After, 45-46. Scheuerman argues that Morgenthau’s failure to consider alternatives to a world state is a consequence of his intellectual debt to, and engagement with, Carl Schmitt. See his essay in Williams, ed. Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations, 62-92.
³⁰ For instance, see Samuel Barkin, "Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy," Foreign Policy Analysis 5 (2009). Barkin wrongly deduces from Morgenthau’s criticism of scientism and rationalism an irreducible hostility towards institutions. Yet Morgenthau’s problem with rationalism is its attempt to eradicate politics and to reduce it to administration, and only institutions that proceed on the basis of rationalist premises would be subject to his critique. Given that both Morgenthau and Carr advocated functionalism and embraced supranational institutions, it is clear that Barkin’s juxtaposition of realism and functionalism is wrong. Barkin misses the extent to which the substantive commitments between realists and liberals overlap.
³¹ Carr, Conditions of Peace, 66.
³² ———, Nationalism and After, 61.
³³ ———, Conditions of Peace, 68-69.
of political organization successfully required reconciling the need for meaningful cultural and communal groupings with material and economic realities. Significantly, neither the practical or cultural needs motivating self-determination prohibited alternatives to the sovereign state system. On the contrary, fulfillment of these needs under 20th century conditions required new ways of thinking about self-determination and novel practices to redistribute political authority.

Carr’s embrace of functionalism reveals the extent to which he shared a commitment with liberal thinkers to principles of political organization beyond the nation-state. However, his functionalism was rooted in a bottom-up, pragmatic approach to institutional cooperation. He thought that institutionalization of military and economic cooperation should be driven by the extension of existing institutions and the evolution of actual practices rather than abstract formalism. In the aftermath of the second world war, he advocated beginning from “practical working arrangement[s]” instituted during wartime, which may in the future “be given both a wider geographical extension and appropriate constitutional forms.”

Carr’s criticism of the League was largely due to the fact that it did not proceed in a pragmatic way and was not attuned to political reality. More generally, Carr’s approach to institutionalization was consistent with his skepticism towards transcendent approaches that emphasized abstract formal relations. From his perspective, an immanent approach that aimed to draw existing historical dynamics along more salutary paths was more likely to be successful and less likely to mask material reality under ideological appeals to constitutional and political rights.

Carr’s writings on the need for multi-national institutions to deal with post-war challenges -- undoubtedly prescient given the development of the European Union -- reveal the centrality of the

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34 Ibid., 250-51, 79.
35 See Ibid., 167-68, where he criticizes the League for being ideological in the dual sense of serving parochial interests and in its commitment to anachronistic political presuppositions; importantly, Carr is critical of the League’s inattentiveness to political reality and its “obscuring [of] the need to study with patience and humility the historical perspective and the economic organisation of the world for which [it] prescribe[s].”
A handful of UK scholars have noted that Carr’s endeavor to move beyond the nation-state and his project of reconfiguring sovereignty was tied as much to peace and security as it was to economic welfare and prosperity. As Michael Cox notes, Carr saw the problem of political organization and the structure of international economy as interconnected: “if the new world was to be a more peaceful place then it was essential to develop an entirely different approach to economics, and if it was to be more prosperous then it could only become so if people were prepared to rethink the notion of sovereignty.”

Although Morgenthau came to advocate radical economic changes in the context of American politics, he never embraced the radical restructuring of international economic life advocated by Carr. This difference was, in part, a consequence of their divergent accounts of the crisis of nationalism. Morgenthau’s preoccupation with the moral underpinnings of international society and its breakdown blinded him to the relationship between economics and political sovereignty as well as the political dimensions of economic distribution. Alternatively, Carr’s materialist analysis of the historical trajectory of nationalism explains the centrality of economic concerns and social justice to his critical analysis of the nation-state. According to Carr’s narrative, the modern socialized nation that posed such a grave threat to individual and communal welfare, was the natural consequence of the evolution of laissez-faire economics; it was the irony of historical development that the institutional configuration that emerged to protect individuals from the destructive effects of “unfettered economic individualism” itself became a threat to welfare and

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36 In *Conditions of Peace*, Carr calls for a European Relief Commission, European Transport Corporation, European Reconstruction and Public Works Corporation, and a European Planning Authority. The long-term mission of the latter would be “nothing less than the reorganization of the economic life of ‘Europe’ as a coherent whole” (257).
38 See Cox’s introduction to Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, xxvi.
39 Morgenthau’s narrative of the breakdown of international morality is also anti-democratic. Morgenthau’s views on democracy change dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s. See Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond*, Chapter 6. Unlike Carr, Morgenthau was much more skeptical of Marxist radicalism, which he considered insufficiently political. Though his late views stress the connections between economics and politics, the fact that he did not advocate radical economic changes in an international setting may be partly attributable to his disdain for Marxism.
security and hence indicated its own insufficiency.\textsuperscript{40} Because the destructive consequences of nationalism were in part a result of the drive to economic security, any redistribution of political authority had to go hand in hand with the reorganization of economic life.

Carr, who viewed the Second World War as symptomatic of a commitment to the “wrong ideals” of laissez-faire (which masked the problem of inequality and privilege), considered striking discrepancies in material standards of living to be a fundamental threat to international community and peace. The quest to construct viable supranational institutions or to redistribute sovereign authority had to acknowledge the link between social and economic inequality and violent conflict, especially under conditions of restricted immigration. Taking unequal distribution seriously would entail changing economic practices, for instance by introducing industrialization to less developed areas or by the development of regional industries to counter national monopolies.\textsuperscript{41} International authority, Carr concluded, was sustainable only if it could effectively maintain order with “reasonable impartiality” and in service of “widely diffused social well-being.”\textsuperscript{42}

The commitment to economic well-being and social justice that Carr believed to be crucial to a working international order reflected his concern with the moral underpinnings of political institutions. The larger point of his attempt to position the principle of self-determination within a framework of obligation was that international order had to be rooted in common moral purpose and that this purpose was not reducible to self-regarding interest. One reason Carr was so critical of the doctrine of a harmony of interests was because it presupposed that the extension of political rights would automatically lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, and therefore concepts like obligation were morally and practically redundant. For Carr, any attempt to reconfigure sovereignty or to found a more viable international order required a robust concept of obligation and common purpose. In \textit{Conditions of Peace}, he noted: “What we are required in fact to surrender is not a mythical attribute called sovereignty, but the habit of framing our military and economic policy without regard

\textsuperscript{40} Carr, \textit{Nationalism and After}, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{41} See Carr’s recommendations in \textit{———, Conditions of Peace}, 260-67. Carr’s prescriptions presuppose that economic practices can reshape identity and quell nationalism.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{———, Nationalism and After}, 62.
for the needs and interest of other countries.”\textsuperscript{43} The self-centered pursuit of interest and rights, exacerbated by lofty appeals to national self-determination, had to be recognized as a counterproductive “habit” or “frame” subject to change. Contrary to the notion that sovereignty necessitated the unreflexive pursuit of self-interest, Carr considered such an orientation, devoid of positive and shared moral purpose, ultimately destructive of international order. He maintained that “no international organization of power… will prove durable unless it is felt to rest on certain common principles, and to pursue certain common purposes, worthy to command the assent and loyalty of men and women throughout the world.”\textsuperscript{44}

Shared moral purpose had practical significance for Carr. This can be seen in \textit{The Twenty Years' Crisis}, where he argued that peaceful change required a common moral framework. Peaceful change, Carr emphasized, could not simply be the function of an honest appraisal of power where the less powerful would willingly submit to the demands of the stronger; it necessitated “a certain measure of common feeling as to what is just and reasonable… a spirit of give-and-take and even of potential self-sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{45} In other words, for an international system capable of facilitating peaceful change to be possible, there had to be a common language of justice and obligation intelligible to all parties and compelling enough to motivate other-regarding behavior, whether of forbearance or generosity. If this sort of obligation to the welfare of individuals -- regardless of nationality -- conditioned action, then challenges related to international cooperation were not insuperable.

Yet Carr’s claim that moral foundations were indispensable to world order was not a naïve appeal to nebulous universal principles, much less a faith that such principles would automatically guarantee a successful international order. Carr understood that the appeal to shared purpose and moral obligation so crucial to international order had to prove itself as something more than empty sentiment or, even worse, pernicious ideology.\textsuperscript{46} Otherwise, it would not be able to secure the loyalty

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., \textit{Conditions of Peace}, 169.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., \textit{Nationalism and After}, 63.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., \textit{The Twenty Years' Crisis}, 1919-1939, 220.
\textsuperscript{46} Carr criticized proponents of international law precisely because they delegitimized political change in ideological ways. See Ibid., 191-2.
required to be efficacious. Carr advocacy of international public works, thus, not only sought to address unemployment and stimulate economic growth, but more significantly to provide “immediate and concrete task[s]” to elicit cooperation and sacrifice. He thought that such schemes could “capture the [popular] imagination” and demonstrate in a tangible way – through the provision of jobs and public infrastructure -- that the common person had a stake in public life and international society.\(^{47}\) Carr surmised that the strongest basis for international society would be a common commitment to the betterment of individual well-being regardless of citizenship and “active policies to improve the conditions of life of ordinary men and women in all countries.”\(^{48}\) He envisioned a new political order where sovereign authority would be distributed across various and multiple political units; and the shared purpose sustaining this international society would be a commitment to meeting the social and economic needs of the common person.\(^{49}\)

Carr was certainly aware of the difficulties of something as “utopian” as cultivating obligation,\(^{50}\) but this did not lead him to deny the centrality of obligation to the smooth functioning of communal life – whether of democracy, the economic system, or the international system – or to replace it with an appeal to incentives or interest. In every realm, Carr believed, the privileged “will be obliged from time to time to make deliberate sacrifices in order to make the system work,” which could be regarded as either a “moral obligation” \([\text{or}]\) an insurance premium."\(^{51}\) While neorealists generally deny this is the case (sacrifices are neither forthcoming nor desirable),\(^{52}\) Carr’s writings

\(^{47}\) ———, *Conditions of Peace*, 257-58.
\(^{48}\) ———, *Nationalism and After*, 63.
\(^{50}\) Carr’s discussion of the necessity of give-and-take in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* emphasizes both its moral and pragmatic qualities; the latter is apparent when he contends: “Those who profit most by that order can in the long run only hope to maintain it by making sufficient concessions to make it tolerable to those who profit by it least” (169). More generally, Carr’s emphasis on social and economic welfare rather than political rights is also motivated by a concern with efficacy and pragmatism.
\(^{51}\) Carr, *Conditions of Peace*, 269. Carr is specifically talking about the international financial system, but he makes the same argument with reference to the international political system. See ———, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939*, 169, 237., where he argues that international conflict cannot be solved without real sacrifice. For a general discussion on the significance of obligation in his new political morality, see ———, *Conditions of Peace*, 125.
\(^{52}\) It should be clear from the two chapters on neorealism that this denial of obligation is impossible. The prevalence of imperatives and the conflation of normative and positive in neorealism are symptomatic of the failure to dispense with obligation. Implicit in Waltz’s scientific realism and explicit in *Man, the State, and War* is an injunction to great powers to maintain the system by balancing power and avoiding ideological foreign policies; great powers should be committed to international order and exercise forbearance. The normative upshot of neorealism’s materialist ontology (and explicit in the
suggest that we have a responsibility to make democracy, economy, and sovereignty work. To acknowledge this is simply to say that moral ends and moral action are crucial to political life and that because morality necessitates going beyond a narrow conception of self-regarding interest, it requires prudence, courage, and a commitment to shared values. We might imagine Carr or Morgenthau responding to contemporary scholarships’ denial of the empirical and human importance of moral agency and responsibility by invoking realism: the refusal to encounter the centrality of moral phenomena does not make it any less real; it just indicates a failure to admit human responsibility for the historical configurations that govern political, economic, and social life.

5.2 Rethinking Ends and Means: Moral Purposes, Radical Transformation, and the Insufficiency of a Politics of Limits

5.2.1 Servants That Overtook Their Masters

For both Morgenthau and Carr, addressing the domestic and international crises plaguing 20th century political, social, and economic life required an affirmation and reappraisal of moral purpose. The radical transformation required to defuse crisis hinged upon the revitalization of public purpose. Morgenthau’s The Purpose of American Politics, published in 1960, emphasized the “novel urgency” of the task of rehabilitating what he called America’s “national purpose,” which he saw as the commitment to equality in freedom. Domestically, this entailed radical economic and social transformation to bring economic production into line with public interest and to address the problem of concentrated private power, active measures to achieve racial equality, and a commitment by government and society to free themselves from the “deadly servitude to conformity” in the endeavor to “create a commonwealth of [cultural] excellence.” Internationally, this entailed a reflexive foreign policy and a commitment to constructing the foundations of supranational order.

\[\text{writings of Waltz and Mearsheimer} \] is functionally equivalent to the obligation to behave as if in a materialist world of rational actors.

\[53\] Morgenthau, The Purpose of American Politics, 300, 06, 23.
Morgenthau’s invocation of “purpose, courage, and ingenuity” in the quest to “conquer nuclear power, space, anarchy, and ourselves,” his denigration of anachronistic “Keynesian remedies” and traditional liberal ways of thinking to alleviate crises, his explicitly utopian vision of a political and economic community oriented by emancipatory and even socialist concerns are seriously at odds with the conventional understanding of his politics and the political commitments of the realist tradition more broadly.54 Realism, as the story goes, is associated with prudence and suspicious of any revolutionary ethos. So how can we reconcile Morgenthau’s call for radicalism and revolution in thought and practice with the politics of prudence and limits ostensibly central to realism? After all, the reason Morgenthau is read as a conventional realist is precisely because these latter elements are discernable in his work.

One way of dismissing the incongruence (and the radical dimensions) of Morgenthau’s work is to suggest that he simply changed his mind, and that the early Morgenthau is a prototypical realist while the late Morgenthau, perhaps having gone soft or senile, became an unabashed utopian. While this argument can be formulated to make the ostensible shift in perspective a logical development rather than an impulsive reversal55 – and therefore less dismissive of the later Morgenthau, I want to make a different claim here. Morgenthau espoused attentiveness to power and interest, forbearance, restraint, caution, skepticism, and all the values and dispositions associated with prudence and conservatism. Yet this orientation does not conflict with his critical insistence on the necessity of radical change, which is present in his early and late works. Ironically, the misunderstanding that

54 See Ibid., 323, Introduction. Morgenthau’s vision of what radical transformation entails: “One can well imagine that the public authorities will then provide free of charge food, clothing, power, transportation, medical care, and other services, as they already water, roads, police, and fire protection. In consequence, the meaning of work will radically change. People will work less and for different purposes. They will work not in order to earn subsistence but in order to avail themselves of benefits of a higher order. Leisure will become more extensive and widespread and will pose with renewed urgency the question of the purpose of man’s life. People will cease competing for sheer survival, but on the basis of an economically assured survival they will fight for the realization of what they regard as their respective purposes in life. Thus will be posed again the issue… of an objective order providing standards for judgment and action and giving a substantive meaning to the American purpose.”

55 Such an argument would proceed as follows: Because the material conditions of existence are subject to historical change, thought and practices have to change. The failure to alter thought and practice in light of historical dynamics is a result of ideological confusion and moral disorientation. Since I am arguing that Morgenthau and Carr explicitly adopted this logic, I am saying that their shifting views are consistent with their own understanding of the changing nature of historically-informed political inquiry.
there is a contradiction is symptomatic of what Morgenthau diagnosed as one of the major problems of modernity: the inability to distinguish between means and ends. In The Purpose of American Politics, Morgenthau declared his commitment to a conservative “philosophy and method of politics,” which takes heed of conflict and the need to balance interests via institutionalized checks and balances, but emphatically rejected a “conservative view of purposes of politics,” which “endows the status quo with a special dignity and seeks to maintain and improve it.” He considered the latter at odds with the very history of America, whose purposes have from its origins been “unique,” “revolutionary,” future-oriented, and hence aware of the necessary transience of any particular status quo.\(^{56}\) Morgenthau’s distinction gives us grounds for putting his commitment to prudence (and his realism) in its proper context: prudence is the means to achieve revolutionary purpose, not a vision of the ultimate end of politics.\(^ {57}\)

The confusion of means and ends and the disconcerting elevation of technologies and instruments into higher purposes was a prominent motif throughout Morgenthau’s work. Although most contemporary IR scholars emphasize his understanding of politics as the rational struggle for power, this is an ironic misreading. Morgenthau thought 20\(^{th}\) century life was profoundly irrational. In his “Reflections on the End of the Republic,” he issues an impassioned indictment of the “conspicuous irrationality” of modern economy, society, and polity, part of a “meaningless and unbending world… under the shadow of an atomic cloud.” For Morgenthau, this world was experienced as a theater of the absurd: “a gigantic hoax where nothing is as it appears to be and upon


\(^{57}\) I agree with Michael Williams’s argument that Morgenthau’s objectivism and consequentialism are ethical strategies in service of the construction of responsible political actors and orders. See Williams, The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations. Yet I do not think that Morgenthau’s politics can be reduced to a politics of limits. While Williams sees Morgenthau’s political theory, including his emphasis on balance of power, interest, and prudence, as operating on behalf of a politics of limits, I contend that Morgenthau was ultimately committed to more radical politics. This radicalism is a logical consequence of his understanding of crisis: historical changes inevitably render extant political categories and practices obsolete and hence make systematic transformation necessary. To the extent that Morgenthau relied upon prudence and interest as rhetorical and political tools, his writings on sovereignty indicate that their primary function was to create the political actors, dispositions, and circumstances under which radical transformation could occur. In a different vein, see Anthony Lang’s examination of the Aristotelian dimension of Morgenthau’s political thought in ———, ed. Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations, 18-41. As Lang reminds us, phronesis involves the ability to reason and reflect on means as well as ends.
which [one] feels, thinks, aspires to and does has no effect except to provide inducement for harassment and repression."\(^5\)

Morgenthau’s commitment to rationality, or more accurately to reason, was a commitment to the intellectual, moral, and political work required to restore the proper connection between ends and means. This called for the systematic rethinking of purpose, which was the only way to recognize and stop the perpetuation of instruments, whether conceptual or material, that no longer served, and were in fact destructive of, human ends. In light of the quest to restore reason, Morgenthau’s work – whether on economy, polity, society, or philosophy of science - is remarkably consistent: Irrational overproduction and a society of waste could only be stopped by the subordination of economic practices to communal welfare. Militarism and the dangerous reduction of politics to the acquisition of military power could only be curbed by the subordination of the armed forces to foreign policy, military power to the demands of diplomacy. Likewise, the problem of international peace and political organization could only be addressed by having a clear-sighted view of instruments and purposes. For Morgenthau, this meant understanding that the prudential work of diplomacy and international organizations were important instruments to cultivate the conditions of world community and supranational order, not ends in themselves. Their larger purpose was to facilitate the radical transformation of political principles and practices in line with historical development. Only such change could adequately apprehend significant technological and material developments, defuse their threat to domestic and international society, and draw out their human promises.

### 5.2.2 Radicalism, Reason, and the Rehabilitation of Ends

Like Morgenthau, Carr was averse to thinking of authority as an end in itself or as limited to strictly prophylactic measures. It was a mistake, he thought, to conceive of the task of international order as maintenance of the status quo. The quest for a tenable international society had to pursue a

“higher ideal than orderly stagnation.” Carr believed that post-war reconstruction could not be oriented by restoration; the very vagueness and ambiguity of appeals to peace, security, democracy, and independence, he thought, symptomized their loss of meaning. These negative, reactionary aims no longer had a clear connection to material reality and tended to function ideologically. Paradoxically, the continued commitment to these abstract principles, whose meaning was unclear, rendered any truth value they might have unrealizable. Domestically, Carr noted that the greatest danger to British democracy was the inability to recognize the historical contingency of democratic institutions and the necessity of their transformation in line with social and economic realities; to the extent that superficial and nebulous appeals to universal principles of liberal democracy precluded such change, they threatened the reality of democracy. In the international context, Carr saw the negative pursuit of peace and security as similarly misguided and counterproductive; these values, he claimed, could only be achieved as the by-product of positive aims. The drive to stabilize any contingent historical reality -- even if in line with some sort of allegedly universally beneficial scheme -- reflected a fundamental misunderstanding of history and politics and was therefore doomed to failure. Highlighting the danger posed by the persistence of anachronistic ideas no longer connected to historical reality, Carr contended that, paradoxically, the “realist” quest for prudence and security could only be achieved through the courageous commitment to radical change.

Carr, insistent on the need for a vision of positive ends to guide radical transformation, defined himself in opposition to the anti-utopianism and anti-radicalism of Oakeshott and Popper. He rejected Oakeshott’s overly pessimistic notion of politics as nothing more than “keep[ing] afloat” on “a boundless and bottomless sea.” For Carr, this sort of minimalism was empirically and normatively insufficient. Not only did Oakeshott’s description of political life fail to correspond to

59 Carr, Nationalism and After, 63.
60 ---, Conditions of Peace, 111.
61 See ibid., 165, 30-38, for Carr’s particular reconceptualization of democracy. See also his comparative historical analysis of Anglo and Soviet democracy in Edward Hallett Carr, Democracy in International Affairs (University College Nottingham, 1945).
63 Carr, What Is History?, 205.
how people actually behaved, it also failed to apprehend the normative significance of human ambition, whose scarcity in the mid-20th century worried Carr. The aspiration to keep afloat without concern for a “port of destination” was “altogether too low a view of human endeavor.” While empathetic to Popper’s commitment to reason and reform, Carr similarly criticized him for his overly modest aspirations. In particular, he found fault with Popper’s “piecemeal social engineering,” whose limited reform efforts Carr saw as indicative of the “subordination of reason” to the extant ends of society. Carr rejected the reduction of reason to instrumental rationality and the view that ends and ultimate purposes were unamenable to reason. He believed that reason could issue “fundamental challenges” to the core assumptions and ends governing society, and his historically informed political inquiry aimed to provide ammunition for precisely this endeavor. Carr’s guidelines for the revitalization of moral purpose, laid out most explicitly in *Conditions of Peace*, ventured far beyond a liberalism of fear toward the achievement of social and economic progress.

Implicit in Carr’s project to rehabilitate ends and to rethink the relationship between means and ends lay another critique of Popper’s reluctance to critically engage with ends: the refusal to do so did not dispel the problem of ends; instead, it created a vacuum for means to become ends. The substance of Carr’s reconceptualizations of economy, democracy, and sovereignty reveals the extent to which the dominant ideals and principles he dealt with reflected this phenomenon, whereby the instruments and technologies meant to serve a particular purpose usurped that purpose. In response to economic crisis, Carr argued for radical transformation of the basic premises of economic life: the subservience of finance to production, the organization of production in service of consumption, the organization of industry, trade and financial exchange in service of economic welfare, and the subservience of the price mechanism and profit motive to the principle of welfare and communal ends. All of these recommendations suggested the importance of re-evaluating means, ends, and their proper relationship. When Carr claimed that the crises of economy, democracy, and self-

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64———, *The New Society*, 16.  
66 See Chapters 4 and 10 in———, *Conditions of Peace.*
determination were at essence indicative of moral crisis, he meant that all of them reflected the absence of positive, moral purpose. Their ideological inflections aside, appeals to free trade, political rights, independence, self-determination -- instrumental means in service of unspecified ends -- were fundamentally incoherent. To the extent that these crises demonstrated the pernicious consequences of instrumental rationality divorced from ends and the usurpation of purpose by technology, they highlighted a need for the renewal of moral purpose and a reassessment of the means suitable for objectively rational ends.67

5.3 The Radicalism of Critical Realism

A commitment to realism is typically understood as providing justification for amoral or immoral politics or, more generously, foundations for prudential behavior. Carr’s and Morgenthau’s critical realism, alternatively, led to a more robust political morality. Their analyses of 20th century politics, which attempted to take conflict and the distribution of power seriously, entailed explicit recognition of the need for systemic change in politics, economy, and society. Their criticism of the limits and distortions of liberal principles and practices entailed acknowledgment of the need to cultivate common moral purpose and a willingness on the part of the privileged to engage in the sacrifice required to sustain international political life. The upshot of their realism, which demonstrated the ideological function of ostensibly universal principles and ideals, is that the uncritical pursuit of stability – which refuses to apprehend the historical dynamics of material reality – is morally and politically untenable: “the defence of the status quo is not a policy which can be

67 Both Morgenthau’s and Carr’s writings on the irrationality of modern life share affinities with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, notably Horkheimer’s analysis of the decline of objective reason, oriented toward the determination of truly rational ends, and the restriction of reason to subjective instrumental rationality, oriented toward determining the most efficient means to achieve given ends in Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason (London: Continuum, 2004). Like Horkheimer, Morgenthau and Carr sought to restore a more robust understanding of reason rather than reject reason altogether. See also Andrew Linklater’s attempt to claim Carr for critical theory in “Nationalism and the Future of the Sovereign State,” in Cox, ed. E.H. Carr: A Critical Appraisal, Andrew Linklater, “The Transformation of Political Community: E.H. Carr and Critical Theory and International Relations,” Review of International Studies 23 (1997). There are certainly suggestive parallels between Carr (and Morgenthau) and the Frankfurt School, but systematic inquiry is needed to make more concrete claims. This is especially the case since Carr relied heavily upon Mannheim, whose sociology of knowledge and reformulation of ideology Adorno appraised as insufficiently attentive to, and critical of, social power. See Theodor Adorno, Prisms (London: The Garden City Press, 1967).
lasting successful. It will end in war as surely as rigid conservatism will end in revolution.”68

Ultimately, their realism and utopianism, too entwined to pull apart, converged in the recognition of the necessity of radical moral and political transformation.

68 Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, 222.
Conclusion

The genealogical investigations of this dissertation reveal intimate connections between the respective empirical, philosophical, methodological, political, and ethical dimensions of neorealism and critical realism. Despite claims of a homogenous realist tradition, apprehending neorealism and critical realism on their own terms clarifies just how considerable their divergences are. Scientific realism’s preoccupation with maintaining a stable anarchic state system dictates its commitment to ahistorical, predictive theory and methodology, which directs its empirical viewfinder at continuity and conditions its normative judgments on the desirability of anti-utopian Realpolitik, however defined. Alternatively, critical realism’s preoccupation with systemic crisis dictates its commitment to historical, reflexive, and critical theory and methodology, which directs its empirical attention at historical processes and the connections between power and knowledge and conditions its judgments on the necessity of radical change and immanent utopianism.

Critical Realism Versus Neorealism and its Successors

Crucially, immanent critique and genealogy shatter the link between scientific criteria and theoretical commitments by unearthing the political considerations behind theoretical choices that, from a strictly scientific standpoint, are inexplicable. That is to say, neorealist contradictions indicate something more significant than lack of rigor; they alert us to the extra-scientific reasons for ostensibly scientific decisions. Even if new generations of scientific realists correct for their predecessors’ explanatory weaknesses, they still do not evade the problems posed by the political origins of their theoretical inheritance, even if they explicitly reject the politics of early neorealists. To see why this is the case, it is worth drawing out some of the distinctions between neorealism and critical realism and illuminating how newer forms of scientific realism still fall on the neorealist side of the divide.

First, as shown in the Chapter 1, neorealism is committed to a materialism that its own adherents consistently violate in order to save realist judgments. As Chapter 2 reveals, this materialist
commitment is meant to sustain the practice of Realpolitik against the threat of ideological politics aimed at transforming the anarchic state system. Newer scientific realists betray the same commitment to materialism, although they appear to interpret it as a choice oriented solely by a concern for the accurate explanation of empirical phenomena. Patrick James’s attempt to elaborate structural realism accepts the materialist focus on distribution of capabilities. Similarly, neoclassical realists give explanatory primacy to the systemic distribution of material power, despite their attention to how foreign policy decisions are mediated by domestic politics. According to Gideon Rose, it is the first that make them realists and the second that make them neoclassical. Rose asserts that,

[a] distinct methodological perspective flows from neoclassical realism’s theoretical argument: analysts wanting to understand any particular case need to do justice to the full complexity of the causal chain linking relative material power and foreign policy. Realism, in this view is a theoretical hedgehog: it knows one big thing, that systemic forces and relative material power shape state behavior. People who ignore this basic insight will often waste their time looking at variables that are actually epiphenomenal.1

He goes on to acknowledge that neoclassical realism’s “theoretically informed narratives,” which attempt to illustrate how perceptions and state-society relations condition the effect of relative material power, make falsification difficult; this weakness is compensated, however, by its ability to provide “satisfying comprehensive explanations of foreign policy without abandoning the theory’s core assumptions.”2

Rose’s last comment begs the question: what is at stake in preserving neorealism’s core assumptions, especially if the very turn to domestic politics required to explain particular foreign policy decisions fails to buttress, and arguably further undermines, its scientific rigor? The fact that the one proposition that is most empirically controversial, namely that relative material power decisively shapes state behavior, is presupposed by neoclassical realism not only makes newer realists just as scientifically suspect as Waltz, it also indicates their similar commitment to a materialist

1 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 165.
2 Ibid.: 153, 68.
ontology that functions to justify the very foreign policies that are predicted. Regardless of neoclassical realists’ intentions and despite their limited focus on perceptions, their presumption that ideational phenomena are largely epiphenomenal implies that the practices of Realpolitik are intransigent, timeless, and rooted in material reality. Despite their claim to be neoclassical, that is successors to classical realism by virtue of their emphasis of “unit level” variables, the second half of this dissertation suggests that Morgenthau and Carr would not have found the stark divide between domestic and systemic intelligible, much less recognized themselves as “unit level” theorists. In their analyses, the motors of historical change (e.g. the scientific and technological revolution, the development of new economic practices and shifting political cleavages, the breakdown of norms) occur simultaneously within and across political units. Moreover, Morgenthau’s and Carr’s understanding of the assertion of liberal values as demonstrative of the will to power destroys any illusion that they espoused a materialist ontology. Ironically, like Waltz and Mearsheimer, they were concerned with the danger and promise of ideas and ideals, although their attention to history led them to a different understanding of what those dangers and promises were.

Carr and Morgenthau were preoccupied with historical transformation, with changing technological, economic, political, social, military, and normative conditions, and the implications for the organization of 20th century communal life. They were concerned with the new, the emergent, the revolutionary, and the emancipatory possibilities immanent in the historical process. Morgenthau’s emphasis on the perennial was not an implicit claim that the perennial is all there is, but rather the backdrop against which novelty could be detected. Carr, who likewise saw a “world in perpetual motion,” contended in What is History? that the world was “changing its shape more rapidly and more radically than at any time in the last four hundred years,”3 such that the dominant understandings of economy, democracy, and sovereignty no longer made any sense. If there is one thing that is perennial in the realism of Morgenthau and Carr, it is the inevitability of anachronism.

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3 Carr, What Is History?, 208.
And it is the danger of anachronistic ways of thinking and practicing politics that led Morgenthau and Carr to conclude on the necessity of radical transformation.

Neorealism, alternatively, sees an anarchical sovereign state system largely unmarked by time. It is characterized by continuity, repetition, regularity, and persistence. Waltz’s judgment in *Man, the State, and the War* is that this is a good thing. And this judgment is implicated in the theoretical foundations of scientific realism, as evidenced by its empirical and normative appraisals.

Mearsheimer explicitly contends that states should accommodate themselves to the allegedly timeless principles of reality, which illustrate the necessity of *Realpolitik*. He misappropriates Carr to make this argument: “‘Realism,’ as E.H. Carr notes, ‘tends to emphasize the irresistible strength of existing forces and the inevitable character of existing tendencies, and to insist that the highest wisdom lies in accepting, and adapting oneself to these forces and these tendencies.’”

When newer forms of realism embrace their predecessors’ views on continuity, they also adopt their empirical blind spots and political judgments. A cursory overview of recent realist writings underscores their commitment to continuity. In the conclusion to his edited volume on structural realism, Andrew Hanami contends that “structural realism today can be expected to endure as long as state preeminence endures and states remain the most important actors in the international system.” James justifies revisiting structural realism on the same basis, calling attention to “continuity” and “regularities” in international politics despite 20th and 21st century changes: “anarchy and coercion persist” and “the system of states continues to endure even to this day.” Likewise, Wayman’s and Diehl’s edited volume, which attempt to reconstruct realist theory and subject it to rigorous empirical assessment, outlines a realism that “emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system” where “nation-states pursue their own national interests,” a la Morgenthau, “in terms of power.” Laying out a series of realist propositions, they conclude by proposing that these propositions are “rooted in the inherent character of human institutions and hence valid for all

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historic time.” Although realists acknowledge changes that have occurred from antiquity to contemporary times, realism, they declare, sees “underlying continuity.”

Yet to assert the relevance of realism because of the continuity of the international system either makes no sense, or it puts the cart before the horse. Carr and Morgenthau upend the connection between realism and continuity; and structural realism, which originated out of a commitment to continuity, works precisely to sustain the very theoretical understanding of politics and political actors required for the maintenance of a stable anarchy. Notably, the empirical tests conducted in Wayman’s and Diehl’s edited volume “all find variations in patterns of behavior” that undercut realism’s claim to “time invariance.” Although Wayman and Diehl acknowledge that realism’s assumption of “time invariance” has decisive empirical ramifications (including the neglect of change), they conclude that accommodating different state motivations and domestic influences can help realism better “account for variations in state behavior.” While the contributors to *Reconstructing Realpolitik* make an important contribution to the empirical assessment of scientific realism’s core propositions, their continued espousal of realist models of state behavior further entrenches a theoretical apparatus that, in their own assessment, occludes empirical change. Without an understanding of the origins and extra-scientific functions of these realist propositions, they miss the fact that scientific realism’s weakness at detecting empirical change, not to mention its preoccupation with state behavior, is inextricable from a political judgment on the undesirability of

5 Hanami, ed. *Perspectives on Structural Realism*, 199.
6 See James, *International Relations and Scientific Progress: Structural Realism Reconsidered*, 7, 16, 213.
7 Wayman and Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, 5.
8 Ibid., 12-13. Wayman and Diehl lay out these propositions in Table 1 on p. 9: States are key actors; the state system is anarchic; states are unitary and pursue state interests; states are rational; values are not crucial; states aim at survival; states enhance and maintain their own power; states maintain their territorial integrity; states focus on military security, national material capabilities, leadership, and unity create power/power centers are threats; intentions, especially revisionist, indicate threats; the state should strengthen its relative capability; the state should form alliances to balance power; the state should show resolve in crisis; realism has timeless relevance.
9 Ibid., 262. Wayman and Diehl write: “The time variance of realism has some unfortunate consequences for the study of international affairs. Not only will changing patterns of behavior be ignored in analyses, but their will be a tendency for realpolitik models to produce mixed, misleading, or inclusive results. For example, a study of power distributions and war in which preponderance was escalatory in the nineteenth century and parity was escalatory thereafter would produce aggregated results corresponding to the null hypothesis (thereby masking the true underlying relationships). Too many studies of international conflict in particular look for patterns across a broad spatial domain and inevitably come up short in their predictions… That is not to say that broad generalizations are not desirable but rather that scholars must be sensitive to changes over space and time.”
systemic political transformation. Indeed, Morgenthau and Carr rejected positivist modes of inquiry, in part, because it presupposed too limited a view of politics and threatened to occlude the empirical landscape of 20th century political life.

Lost Opportunities in Neorealism

If so far I have emphasized only the divisions between neorealism and their successors, on the one hand, and critical realism on the other, then I would like to point out some fleeting confluences in their political and methodological views. Waltz’s two seminal works, Man, the State, and War and Theory of International Politics, arise out of a preoccupation with the insufficiencies of certain kinds of political inquiry as well as a concern with political ideology. Although he shares these concerns with Morgenthau and Carr, his failure to understand the full extent to which the two are connected is where he diverges with them. With regard to inquiry, Waltz’s structural theorizing was, in large part, a response to the prominent modes of behavioralist research in the mid-20th century, which presumed that the accumulation of data would automatically engender meaningful theoretical progress. Theory of International Politics was his attempt to reassert the importance of theory as something beyond correlation, which as he made clear in his earlier text “means nothing.”

In addition to its misunderstanding of theory, Waltz criticized the behavioral sciences for its inability to see the political, for its conviction that adopting a rational, scientific worldview could solve the problems of politics. Ironically, Waltz’s chapter on behavioralism in Man, the State, and War not only contains no mention of Morgenthau’s criticisms of scientism, it is the second half of his polemic against the first image and immediately follows a chapter in which Morgenthau’s “first image” observations on human nature feature prominently. By grouping Morgenthau and the behavioralists

10 Waltz, Man, the State and War, 13.
under the first image, Waltz unwittingly sacrificed a potential intellectual ally, for Morgenthau had already articulated concerns about scientism’s reduction of politics more than a decade earlier.\^11

Waltz’s critical views of social science seem odd given his later turn to scientific theory. Of course, if we re-read Waltz in light of Morgenthau’s own rhetorical politics, we might make more sense out of Waltz’s harsh criticisms of naïve social science rooted in “the old rationalist fallacy [which identifies] control with knowledge” in Man, the State, and War and his claim in Theory of International Politics that explanatory theory is produced “by the desire to control.”\^12 Waltz’s failure to meet his own scientific criteria and the remarkable consistency between the two works undercuts any attempt to read this volte-face as evidence of a true scientific conversion. Yet given his serious concerns about rationalist ideology, whether liberal or Marxist, we can read it as an attempt to make his political judgment on the desirability of Realpolitik intelligible and compelling to a community that privileged scientific discourse. If there is any significant continuity between Carr and Morgenthau, on the one hand, and Waltz and Mearsheimer, on the other, it lies in their shared concern with the pernicious consequences of ideology. Neorealism’s hostility to the democratic peace claim, which Waltz stresses is a “purported fact [not] a theory,”\^13 is much more than either an explanatory dispute over whether “unit level” or “structural” causes are primary or an epistemological dispute over what a theory is. It is, more fundamentally, a political intervention against ideological foreign policy. If this is not clear in Waltz’s analysis of specious, “second image” liberal and socialist arguments, then it should be obvious in Mearsheimer’s condemnation of neoconservatives for believing that the “world divides into good states and bad states, and that the democracies are the white hats.”\^14

Elsewhere, Mearsheimer implies that neorealist concerns about ideological politics are related to a sense of political responsibility:

\^11 By the time of Theory of International Politics, Waltz was intent on distancing himself from Morgenthau’s view that balance of power politics was contingent upon historical conditions no longer applicable to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.
\^12 Waltz, Man, the State and War, 59, \textit{———}, Theory of International Politics, 6.
\^13 See the 2001 Preface to Waltz, Man, the State and War, x.
\^14 Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-Conservatism," 3. Mearsheimer argues, however, that realism is not anti-democratic: “Realists are often accused of disliking democracy and even of being anti-democratic. This is a bogus charge. Every realist I know would be thrilled to see Iraq turned into a thriving democracy. Realists, however, are well aware of the difficulty of spreading democracy, especially by military means. They also understand that even if the enterprise is successful, that is no guarantee that peace will break out” (5–6).
One thing that bothers me greatly about most political scientists today is that they have hardly any sense of social responsibility. They have hardly any sense that they’re part of the body politic and that the ideas that they are developing should be articulated to the body politic for the purposes of influencing the public debate and particular policies in important ways. They believe that they’re doing ‘science,’ and science is sort of an abstract phenomenon that has little to do with politics. In fact, I think exactly the opposite should be the case. We should study problems that are of great public importance, and when we come to our conclusions regarding those problems, we should go to considerable lengths to communicate our findings to the broader population, so that we can help influence the debate in positive ways.\textsuperscript{15}

This is a momentary, albeit incomplete, overlap between neorealism and the realism of Morgenthau and Carr. As my second chapter demonstrates, neorealism cannot live up to these aspirations. The theoretical and methodological foundations of neorealism cannot sustain their ethical and political commitments, either their particular criticisms of the Iraq War or their general criticisms of ideological foreign policy. In fact, the theoretical orientation of neorealism makes it easily deployable for the very ideological and normatively dubious purposes neorealists wish to challenge. Although Morgenthau and Carr were similarly preoccupied with ideology, they understood this to indicate a need for modes of inquiry that could illuminate the historical origins of political thought and practice and the consequences of their persistence under altered circumstances. Both understood that criticism of political ideology and criticism of unreflexive, ahistorical methodologies were two sides of the same coin. While Waltz ends up adopting the very scientific orientation he earlier condemns, thereby reducing states to firms and politics to techniques of control, Mearsheimer seems to completely overlook the fact that the practices of science are themselves implicated in politics. For all their criticisms of the Iraq War, neorealists ultimately do not understand what their own theory entails.

What the New Reveals about the Old: Neo(classical) Realism and Democratic Nuisances

In 1984, Rick Ashley warned of the dangers of “neorealism’s totalitarian implications.” I do not intend to revisit Ashley’s argument here. Nevertheless, I want to use his appraisal, along with Mearsheimer’s comments on democracy and social responsibility, as the backdrop for a brief foray into neoclassical realism. Although neoclassical realism challenges defensive realism’s presupposition that states seek security and offensive realism’s failure to consider domestic politics, it is by and large the continuation of neorealist theory. It seeks to account for specific foreign policy decisions, which requires complicating the parsimony of neorealism by investigating domestic politics. As I briefly noted in Chapter 2, neoclassical realism, which takes neorealism as a baseline, primarily explains pathology. I would like to draw out the political implications of this theoretical orientation, but by way of letting neoclassical realists speak for themselves. Rose’s review of key works in neoclassical realism accentuates their common focus on explaining “non-strategic” behavior. Aaron Friedberg’s study of the effect of Britain’s decline at the turn of the 20th century on its foreign policy finds that “British officials reacted to decline haphazardly.” That the British response to its relative decline in power was “more halting, inconsistent, and ‘nonstrategic’ than a simple structural model would predict,” is due to elite and “bureaucratic” fragmentation” and the fact that officials made assessments of power on the basis of “familiarity or cognitive appeal rather than… substantive appropriateness.” Fareed Zakaria, puzzled by “why America did not expand more and sooner” in the late 19th century, attributes this failure to respond to systemic incentives to “weak state” capacity. This state weakness, which prevented the United States from translating its power into effective foreign policy, is what explains why “when confronted by real threats… the United States usually

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16 Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism,” 258.
17 See Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 152. Rose suggests that neoclassical realism is closer to offensive than defensive realism, for although states may define their interests differently, “they are likely to want more rather than less external influence… The central empirical prediction of neoclassical realism is thus that over the long term the relative amount of material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition – the enveloped, as it were – of their foreign policies: as their relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions and ambitions will be scaled back accordingly.”
18 Ibid.: 156-58.
Randall Schweller’s more recent general explication of why states fail to balance threats adequately makes explicit the judgment that underlies Zakaria’s finding. Of his own theory, Schweller remarks: “a theory of underbalancing is a theory of mistakes; notwithstanding the fact that it commonly occurs throughout history, underbalancing is a wrongheaded behavior that defies balance-of-power logic.” He is forthright about his theory’s value judgments and attempts to preempt objections by observing that “the notion that causation amounts to assigning blame [is] a common practice among historians [sic],” as intimated by the very etymology of *causa*, which signals “‘guilt,’ ‘blame,’ or ‘accusation.’”

Neoclassical realism’s recognition that structure does not automatically determine foreign policy and its focus on domestic politics are thus part and parcel of a broader attempt to clarify what kind of state is required to respond rationally to systemic incentives. As Rose puts it, neoclassical realists focus on the “strength and structure of states relative to their societies,” the latter which constrains the “complete freedom” of elites to “extract and direct national resources” required to construct foreign policy. In his study of Sino-American politics, Thomas Christensen notes that structural realists fail to acknowledge the domestic requirements of *Realpolitik*: “without a healthy degree of consensus behind security strategies, no state can harness its population and project national power abroad. A low degree of political support may cause even the most rational and resolute national leadership to shelve prudent policies.” He concludes that realists must take into consideration the importance of “national political power” or “the ability of state leaders to mobilize their nation’s human and material resources behind security policy initiatives.”

Similarly, Zakaria highlights how a “‘weak state, one that [is] decentralized, diffuse, and divided,’” a state

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19 Ibid.: 163.
21 Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 147.
23 Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 162.
with “elite dissensus” indicated by “executive-congressional division,” cannot respond to changes in the relative distribution of power. Schweller, who also concentrates on “elite and social fragmentation” and “elite disagreement,” essentially makes the same argument:

only strong and unified states can effectively adapt to structural-systemic incentives, even when they are quite compelling and intense. In other words, for structural systemic explanations to work, they must be applied to strong agents… Stable and united regimes that govern united polities have the capacity to mobilize the necessary national resources to deal with new threats and opportunities. In contrast, unstable and fragmented regimes that rule over divided polities will be significantly constrained in their ability to adapt to systemic incentives; they will be least likely to enact bold and costly policies even when their nation’s survival is at stake and they are needed most.

While Schweller focuses on how state weakness and disunity preclude rational, prudent behavior, Christensen contends that domestic challenges re-route elite behavior, but does not necessarily challenge its rationality. His analysis of Truman’s China policy in the late 1940s is an attempt to show that “foreign policies that appear overly aggressive, ideological, or otherwise wasteful of resources and alliance opportunities,” for instance the “manipulation or extension of short-term conflict,” are rational attempts to mobilize domestic public support for grand strategy. According to Christensen, Truman’s anti-China policy and the manipulation of anti-communist sentiment it required were crucial to America’s global competition with the Soviet Union, which could not be sustained without massive amounts of resources and public support for the Marshall Plan, the Military Assistance Program, and NATO. He asserts that to the extent that one accepts Truman’s grand strategy, one cannot easily criticize his China policy. For Truman was caught in a domestic battle against a coalition of fiscal conservatives intent on using McCarthyism and the anti-Communist China Lobby to undercut European reconstruction. Under these circumstances, he had no other choice but to accede to the logic: Chinese communism is no different from Soviet communism. Short-term conflict with China was thus a strategic move to “sell an expensive, long term security strategy” to a public too uneducated for a “purely rational sales pitch.”

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26 Ibid., 130.
public opinion polls, Christensen claims, Kennan’s call for officials to publicly explain the logic of terminating American support for the KMT in the Chinese civil war while fighting Communism in Greece and Turkey was “far too subtle for Almond’s “moody” American public.”

Rose, too, notes Christensen’s fairly obvious elitism: “From his tone and choice of cases… one gets a picture of far-sighted elites sensitive to the consequences of changing relative power, yoked to penny-pinching publics who respond only to obvious, short-term military threats.”

If Mearsheimer still speaks fondly of the “body politic,” reminding scholars of their duty to articulate important findings in an intelligible way to the public of which they are a part, his neoclassical realist successors do not seem to share any of his optimism that the “mass” public can do anything but impede prudent foreign policy. Contrary to Mearsheimer’s claim that there is no link between realism and anti-democratic judgments, many studies in neoclassical realism focus almost exclusively on how the liberal and democratic dimensions of domestic politics, whether institutional checks and balances, decentralization, pluralism, disagreement, or deliberation, threaten national security. If Ashley’s “totalitarian implications” are still unclear, let me quote at length from Schweller’s neoclassical realist study on underbalancing. Structural realism’s predictions are often wrong, he contends, because they presuppose a certain kind of state.

[The] ideal ‘mobilizing’ state is, in practice, best captured by a fascist state. Fascism provided the rationale and ‘mobilizing passions’ required for bold state action, while it eradicated the kind of internal dissent that I argue inhibits balancing and expansionist behaviors. In contrast, realist theory, which surprisingly shares many of the geostrategic assumptions and views of the state that motivated the rise of fascism, cannot generate the political heat necessary to launch costly mobilization campaigns for offensive purposes; its structural balancing-of-power logic is too arcane to be of much use to elites as a mobilizing ideology in an age of mass politics. Most realists, even those who claim that states should seek to maximize their relative power for reasons of security and profit (e.g., E.H. Carr and John Mearsheimer), openly acknowledge realism’s political deficiencies. Still, realists have not moved to fill this large normative-prescription hole in the theoretical perspective. The question, therefore, remains: How do and how should modern elites sell to their publics the offensive schemes that many realists approve for structural-systemic reasons?

28 Ibid., 258-59.
29 Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 164.
In fundamental ways, fascism is offensive realism with a racist and social Darwinist overlay.\(^31\)

[If all states were ruled by fascist regimes, offensive realism’s predictions of state behavior and international politics would be more accurate than they have proven to be. States would not regularly pass up opportunities to expand. Instead, stronger states would absorb weaker ones on a regular basis. They would possess the internal unity and strength, the ruthlessness, and will to power required for expansion and empire. It is precisely these qualities, which permit… powerful states to fill structural holes when they open that are most lacking in liberal, capitalist democracies.\(^32\)]

In practice, fascist leaders were, indeed, overconfident, reckless, and too aggressive for their own good. I see no reason why this ‘had to’ have occurred, however. There is nothing inherent in fascism that predisposes its leaders to privilege – so dramatically and at some great cost – values over material interests. I know of no requirement that fascist states be led by absurdly reckless dictators with unlimited-revisionist aims. Consider the historical counterfactual that Hitler and Mussolini had decided to conclude their wars of conquest in 1939, or even in 1941. Had that happened, would not Germany and Italy have captured significant material gains without provoking an overwhelmingly powerful, counterbalancing coalition? And would not realists have applauded (if only begrudgingly so) their efforts on behalf of Germany and Italy?\(^33\)

Given serious criticisms of neorealism’s political implications by external critics, it seems necessary to reflect on neoclassical realism’s anti-liberal and anti-democratic bent and Schweller’s specific contention that a prudential fascist state is the kind of political actor structural realism presupposes and recommends. Furthermore, despite the fact that Schweller conflates Carr and Mearsheimer as well as Carl Schmitt and Morgenthau, it is important to recognize how egregious these conflations are. Carr and Morgenthau were both seriously concerned with the political implications of the technological and scientific age, the rise of bureaucratic irrationality, social disintegration, and democratic impoverishment, which they saw as facilitating totalitarianism, whether authoritarian or democratic. As shown in Chapter 3, their criticisms of liberalism focused on its inability to recognize its own historicity and therefore its disjunction from novel historical conditions; as such it could not understand that totalitarianism was “not the disease, but one of the symptoms” of crisis. Carr, like Schweller, commented on fascism’s Darwinist ideology, but stated

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 124-25.
\(^{33}\) Ibid.
very clearly that its identification of “the good of the whole with the good of the fittest and [its contemplation] without repugnance the elimination of the unfit” was “untenable” and unacceptable.\textsuperscript{34} Morgenthau, unlike Schweller, took fascism very seriously, not least because his own life was upended by it. As many scholars have pointed out, Morgenthau had notable personal and intellectual engagements with Schmitt.\textsuperscript{35} After meeting Schmitt in 1929, Morgenthau remarked: “Now I have met the most evil man alive.” Personality aside, he was immensely troubled by Schmitt’s nihilism and his disregard for the normative and the moral.\textsuperscript{36} Although Schmitt’s understanding of politics influenced Morgenthau’s intellectual views, it certainly did not do so in a way that would support Schweller’s assertion of the compatibility of their political judgments.

\textbf{Politics and Scientific Theory, Values and Ontology}

It might seem that neoclassical realism’s orientation suggests once more that neorealism is the problem and that the study of international relations would be just fine without such ideology masquerading as social science. Nevertheless, I think this response fails to apprehend the broader implications of neorealism’s normativity. Ultimately, realist honesty may be unpleasant, but it also tells us something about the truth. In this case, Schweller’s forthrightness underscores an important implication of my analysis in Chapter 2. Scientific realism is a body of research that allows us to apprehend the essential links between value judgments and philosophical and methodological commitments. In particular, it directs our attention to the relationship between ontology and politics and illustrates the extent to which debates over what the world is like are inseparable from debates over what sorts of political arrangements and actions are normatively desirable. In the case of scientific realism, it is misguided to understand recent scholarship as primarily an attempt to improve the empirical accuracy of structural realism. Newer realists or social scientists who wish to improve

\textsuperscript{34} Carr, \textit{The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939}, 225-26.
\textsuperscript{35} Scheuerman, \textit{Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond}. See the contributions by Scheuerman, Chris Brown, and Oliver Jütersonke in Williams, ed. \textit{Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations}.
\textsuperscript{36} Scheuerman, \textit{Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond}, 34-35.
the explanatory power of realism might understand themselves in this way, but their preoccupation with scientific standards fundamentally misses the point: neorealist knowledge is secondary to and in service of its politics.

Similarly, it is insufficient to understand neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism merely as responses to the scientific inadequacies of neorealism. For institutionalist and constructivist contestations over what sort of state behavior rationality allows and the ontological character of the international system are meant to challenge neorealist political judgments, hence their focus on “good” forms of cooperation and “good” norms. Neta Crawford’s recent theorizing on *homo politicus* hones in on precisely this link between ontology and politics. She offers a richer ontology of politics and political actors, what she calls a “re-reading of human nature” (as an alternative to narrowly self-interested *homo politicus* of realism) in order to challenge the primacy and reasonableness of coercive, strategic inter-state relations and to justify deliberation and a greater role for argumentation and persuasion in world politics. Crawford’s work indicates that debates over the ontological character of politics and political actors, e.g. between realism, liberalism, and constructivism, are inextricable from and subsidiary to debates about political practice. I am not making any novel observations here, but if I am right that the epistemological and methodological debates initiated in response to neorealism are more about politics than science, then this poses problems for politics and science. At the very least, I am suggesting that scholars engage openly with the question posed by Waltz’s *Man, the State, and War*, namely what sort of political visions and projects ought to command our support. There might be a general reluctance to do so, if only because value-neutrality still has theoretical currency regardless of its practical impossibility. But this reluctance does not make judgments disappear; it simply means that they take the form of epistemological and methodological arguments.

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Realism and its Others

While my genealogy of neorealism directs our attention to the relationship between politics and scientific theory and its challenges for neorealists, neoliberals, and constructivists, my genealogy of Morgenthau and Carr shows the necessity of getting past these labels. Realism has long been read as a tradition skeptical of, and hostile to, international institutions, liberal democratic values, radical change, and robust ethics. In particular, realism’s anti-utopianism has been used to delegitimize the liberal and constructivist fixation with ideas, values, cooperation, and the cultivation of common interests and less parochial modes of identification. For Carr and Morgenthau, “liberal” principles contained both truth-value and an ideological component at a given historical moment. Their analyses have a tragic dimension, as evidenced by their insights into how ideological appeals to abstractions like peace, democracy, and justice paradoxically destroy their truth-value. At the same time, Carr’s and Morgenthau’s attempts to gesture at the radical changes in thought and practice required to preserve their capacity for realization reflect an overarching commitment to those selfsame “utopian” values.

Similarly, I think the affinities between Carr and Morgenthau and more radical thinkers are vastly underappreciated. After drawing out the differences between Morgenthau’s realism and neorealism, Ashley claims that classical realism is “unable to grasp the deeper dimensions of crisis in the world polity.” He calls for an alternative model “to account for the emergence, reproduction, and possible transformation of a world-dominant public political apparatus: a tradition of regime anchored in the balance-or-power scheme and constitutive of the modern states system.” In Chapters 3 and 5, I have shown how Carr and Morgenthau did precisely what Ashley calls for, namely to “specify the tendencies threatening to undermine or transform the conditions upon

38 Michael Williams also argues against what he calls the “tyranny of false polarities” in Williams, The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations. He argues that the Wilful Realism of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Morgenthau undermines the ostensible opposition between realism and liberalism, constructivism, post-modernism. I largely agree with Williams, although because he focuses on Wilful Realism’s commitment to a liberal politics of limits, my analysis of the confluences between Morgenthau’s and Carr’s critical realism, on the one hand, and liberalism and more radical thinkers, is substantively different.

39 Contemporary realism’s self-fulfilling prophecies generate the same result.

40 Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism,” 275-76.
which” the sovereign state system depends. Like Ashley, they were profoundly concerned with conditions of possibility; they recognized systemic crises and prefigured a more radical and just world. Their analyses of power were remarkably prescient and their anxieties about the meaningless of democracy and individual freedom under conditions of large-scale capitalism, private power, expert knowledge, depoliticization, technologies of mass warfare and communications still resonate in the 21st century. Compare Carr’s and Morgenthau’s imperative to reconceptualize the dominant categories of political life (e.g. democracy, rights, economic liberalism, self-determination/sovereignty, liberalism’s dyad of the state and individual) spanning from the late 1930s to the 1970s with Wolin’s contention in Politics and Vision (2004) that “the traditional categories of citizen, democracy, state, and power desperately need reformulation.” I do not wish to make the claim that if Morgenthau and Carr were still alive, they would be theorizing like Wolin. Yet I do think that Morgenthau and Carr, like Wolin, sought to respond to a common dilemma in their own time: if our ways of thinking are tied up with and complicit in the continuation of oppressive and destructive modes of power, how do we change political thought and practice such that we can better apprehend and mitigate those dangers? Contrary to Ashley’s claim that classical realism refuses “to comprehend its own limits,” I believe Carr’s and Morgenthau’s political orientation, not to mention their progressive radicalism, indicates that they would have been more than willing to concede the anachronism of their own thought.

41 Ibid.: 277.
42 Carr may have been too sanguine about centralized planning, but his critical analysis of laissez-faire and the inevitability of “planning” seems not altogether irrelevant to the current American financial crisis. Likewise, Morgenthau’s discussion of vested private interest and technological stagnation in the 1960s is still intelligible in the context of the collapse and restructuring of the American auto industry: “Vertical mobility is further threatened by the concentrations of private power because they are able to retard technological changes that would affect their interests adversely. Corporations and labor unions have under certain conditions a vested interest in the preservation of the technological status quo, and they have preserved the status quo at least for the time being when technological change requires large and risky investments that private sources will not provide. They have thus retarded the peaceful uses of atomic energy, they are artificially preserving uneconomic enterprises, and have made us pay through systematic featherbedding an unnecessary price for automation. The government must, because it alone has the ability, to see to it that the technological frontiers of America remain open by using its economic and political resources to advance technological change.” See Morgenthau, The Purpose of American Politics, 302.
The Problem of Ahistorical Political Science

Beyond providing a richer account of their political thought, my re-examination of Morgenthau and Carr has broader implications for contemporary research in political science. Although many scholars, especially those who do not identify with the dominant paradigms of international relations scholarship, might consider revisiting older forms of realism anachronistic, I would like to propose a paradoxical reason for doing so. The untimely thinking of Morgenthau and Carr alerts us to the intellectual and political significance of anachronism, in this case the consequences of ahistorical modes of socio-scientific inquiry. As argued in Chapter 4, Morgenthau’s and Carr’s preoccupation with crisis dictated their methodological views; their concern with the persistence of obsolete thought and practice led them to reject unreflexive, ahistorical modes of inquiry. To the extent that mainstream socio-scientific research is committed to positivist methods that rely upon abstract propositions and static categories across time and space, it cannot even apprehend the phenomena that concerned Morgenthau and Carr. Their conception of ideology, the disjunction between historical conditions and conceptual and institutional arrangements, is by definition temporal. The notion of past thought that conceals present reality is unintelligible without a concept of historical change.

More concretely, Morgenthau’s and Carr’s concerns about the empirical and political consequences of positivism seem to be vindicated by the fact that systemic crisis of political, economic, and social organization are nearly invisible from the perspective of contemporary modes of inquiry. If we consider the place of regime type in international relations scholarship, especially in quantitative studies, we can see that the concepts and operationalizations of democracy and authoritarianism are largely analytical. The orientation of studies that depend on such conceptualizations tend to focus on determining causal relations between regime type and a variety of dependent variables, e.g. conflict, bargaining strategy, or military effectiveness. The historical origins and development of democracies and the subsequent implications for the achievement of democracy itself are simply outside of the boundaries of relevance. In short, democratic crisis is invisible. More
than this, Carr’s and Morgenthau’s writings on democracy would alert us to the limitations of conventional ways of conceptualizing and measuring democracy with regard to understanding their effects. Their diagnoses of how technological and economic changes fundamentally alter the nature of democracy, including the institutions and distributions of power within it, indicate that democracy is not the same across time. Carr’s historical analysis of the divergences between the political-liberal democracy of the English-speaking world and the social-economic democracy of the Soviet Union suggests that democracy is not the same across space. If we find their analyses compelling, then there are consequences for the way we theorize and empirically evaluate democracy and its implications.45

Carr’s and Morgenthau’s writings not only direct our attention to the empirical consequences of ahistorical modes of inquiry, they also suggest that we should be wary of privileging modes of inquiry that treat political phenomena as abstract objects and empirical correlations as objective laws rather than historically contingent configurations sustained by human agency. Carr and Morgenthau would certainly approve of recent calls for reflexivity in political science research, which they considered vital for intellectual, political, moral, and (in the case of Morgenthau) metaphysical reasons. Inattention to the socio-historical and political conditioning of knowledge not only distorts empirical reality by making the historically contingent seem true for all time and occluding the empirical distributions of power, practices, and self-understandings that sustain it. It also overlooks theory’s own implication in that distortion. However, despite its significance neither Morgenthau nor Carr would consider reflexivity sufficient. This is obvious when we consider the function of reflexivity in their political inquiry. Reflexivity is prominent in their criticisms of liberalism, scientism, positivism, empiricism, and value-neutral inquiry. For both, reflexivity served to clarify the contingency of thought as well as its empirical elisions and political consequences, such that it could then be replaced by more appropriate ways of thinking. Awareness of the socio-historical mediation

45 As Ido Oren reminds us, the discipline’s conceptualization of democracy is by no means innocent. Oren illustrates how the field’s understanding of democracy shifts over time partly in response to America’s political rivalries. See Ido Oren, Our Enemies and Us: America’s Rivalries and the Making of Political Science (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).
of thought was a prerequisite for re-orientating thought toward the radical possibilities immanent in
the historical process. Ultimately, any contemporary call for reflexivity on the basis of Carr and
Morgenthau is incomplete without recognizing the extent to which they understood the purpose of
political inquiry as appraising the conditions under which politics must be re-imagined, the kinds of
radical transformations required under novel historical conditions, and the sorts of practices
necessary to facilitate them.

**Critical Realism and Political Inquiry in the 21st Century**

In addition to offering astute warnings for contemporary political inquiry, I would like to
gesture at how critical realism might enrich substantive theoretical and empirical inquiries into global
politics. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I do not preclude the possibility of
using the substantive and methodological insights gained from genealogy to develop a research
agenda for realism in the 21st century. Without giving a systematic outline of what such an agenda
would look like, let me simply note the general types of phenomena Carr and Morgenthau direct our
attention to, if only to emphasize the breadth of their political concerns.

Despite the conventional understanding of realism as indifferent or even hostile to global
justice, Morgenthau’s and Carr’s theoretical and historical accounts of the state suggest that we ought
to reexamine the possibility and limits of a realist theory of justice, especially since statist arguments
(realist, liberal, or communitarian) are typically made to limit the scope of distributive justice. In
particular, there are intriguing confluences between Carr’s reconstructed sovereignty and Thomas
Pogge’s nested sovereignty,46 and it would be worth bringing realist writings into dialogue with
contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism to assess how different critical understandings of sovereignty
might supplement and challenge each other in ways that reconfigure extant debates on global justice.
Moreover, Carr’s and Morgenthau’s ambivalent relationship with utopianism raises some fruitful

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questions for the theory and practice of politics. Given their wariness of a specific form of utopianism blind to power, historical process, and its own implication in both, what alternative sorts of utopian politics are effective, sustainable, and capable of resisting their own ideological reduction? How might various nonviolent, transnational social movements exemplify a more viable utopian politics, and what lessons might they impart for how we theorize power, powerlessness, and utopia?

Since realism is often portrayed as antagonistic to institutionalism and constructivism, I would like to highlight the potential contributions of critical realism to research on institutions and political identities. In particular, Carr’s and Morgenthau’s writings would shift our attention to the effects of specific institutions, for instance the relationships between international and regional institutions, socio-economic distribution, and the self-understandings of actors within and affected by those institutions. They also suggest the importance of examining how communal identities are ruptured and sustained as well as the conditions under which diplomatic practices generate changes in political identities. Furthermore, Carr and Morgenthau focused heavily on the political effects of technological changes, which have become even more important in contemporary life. Their analyses imply the importance of assessing how technological changes influence the distribution of various types of power (economic, military, communicative, cultural, epistemic) and the subsequent implications for democracy, society, economy, and the relationships between political units. These recommendations are, however, meant to be suggestive. I do not want to imply that we can extract from Carr’s and Morgenthau’s collective oeuvre a discrete set of empirical puzzles to be solved by contemporary methodologies. For to use Carr and Morgenthau in this manner undermines their crucial insights on the connections between history, politics, theory, and methodology and evades the fundamental questions they raise about the nature and purpose of politics and political inquiry.

Although political scientists have not sufficiently grappled with these questions, the American foreign policy community has looked upon realism as a resource for political guidance. Lieven and Hulsman, who seek to recover a richer, more ethical realism, is a case in point. However, I think their endeavor represents a starting rather than end point for how we might respond to the
crucial question my reconsideration of Carr and Morgenthau begs: how might their political inquiry and their notion of political inquiry guide contemporary political action?

Although Lieven and Hulsman bring to light key elements in the realist tradition, including prudence, humility, responsibility, as well as the importance of social justice and equitable development, their main contribution lies more in the representation of an ideal sort of political actor (a prudential one with a moral, if tragic, sensibility who embraces responsibility, even for “necessarily ruthless actions”47) than in a novel interpretation of political realism. Their views on foreign policy are indebted as much, if not more, to the policies of Truman and Eisenhower as to the political thought of Kennan, Niebuhr, and Morgenthau. While Lieven’s and Hulsman’s assertion of the “bankruptcy of the traditional party divisions as a way of understanding the real policy differences and alternatives facing America today” would have resonated with Morgenthau,48 I do not think either Niebuhr or Morgenthau would have concurred with their views about capitalism. Lieven and Hulsman link ethical realism to an attempt to root international order in the “Great Capitalist Peace.”49 Contrary to neoconservatives, they see capitalism as primary to democracy, claiming that “capitalism is over time one of the most effective means ever created of wearing down authoritarian governments.”50 Although they are critical of “radical free market orthodoxies,” they also seem to believe that capitalism can unravel the knots of politics. For instance, they write: “Part of the Great Capitalist Peace strategy involves freezing and managing existing difficulties with Russia while the magic of capitalism hopefully does its work over the next generation.”51 Though they might have been sympathetic to some of Lieven’s and Hulsman’s arguments, Morgenthau and Carr, who were highly critical of capitalist pathologies and their political implications, would probably not have appraised the Great Capitalist Peace as ethical or realist.

47 Lieven and Hulsman, Ethical Realism: A Vision for America’s Role in the World, 77.
48 Ibid., xix. Morgenthau wrote that the “traditional juxtaposition of ‘right’ and left” was obsolete forty years earlier in Morgenthau, Truth and Power: Essays of a Decade, 1960-70, 376.
49 Lieven and Hulsman, Ethical Realism: A Vision for America’s Role in the World, xvii.
50 Ibid., 134.
51 Ibid., 132, 67.
Lieven’s and Hulsman’s appropriation of realism presumes, mistakenly I believe, that the political inquiry of earlier realists can provide a clear outline for contemporary American foreign policy. Alternatively, Michael Williams’s recent work on Morgenthau and neoconservatism illustrates how earlier realists might help us reflect on neoconservatism’s theoretical concerns and limits. Williams importantly notes that Morgenthau grappled with (neoconservative) concerns about decadence, the limits of interest, the importance of political community, and the need for values, but also had an understanding of the modes of power and domination in modern life that moved beyond the limited domain of the “culture wars.” Williams further argues that Morgenthau’s thinking stresses the “dangers lurking in too radical a formulation and response to the dilemmas of liberal modernity,” and hence would alert us to the threats neoconservatism pose to liberal democracy. While I think Williams, who underscores Morgenthau’s preoccupation with the crisis of liberalism in the context of the Weimar Republic, is partially right, I also think Morgenthau’s political commitments are not exhausted by “the fundamental problem of sustaining or reviving a virtuous and self-limited political order.”

Williams contends that Morgenthau offers strategies to achieve such a vision, namely domestic and international balance of power, leadership, and renewed political culture. Yet Williams neglects the fact that Morgenthau’s own diagnosis of concentrated private power and democratic evisceration led him to call for the radical redistribution of power in American society. In 1970, Morgenthau argued that none of the key issues of the day, whether militarization, Vietnam, social disintegration, racial inequality, urban and environmental decay, socio-economic inequality, could be solved “within the existing system of power relations.” All of the great American reform movements, from early 20th century populism to the 1960s antiwar movement, despite their significant achievements, “appear in retrospect as essentially futile attempts at accomplishing through rational and moderate reform what can be accomplished only as a result of a new distribution of

power, either through the spontaneous disintegration of the existing power structure or through revolution.”\textsuperscript{53} Morgenthau’s comments gesture way beyond a politics of limits.

Williams notes that for Morgenthau, one of core commitments of political inquiry “was to stand in opposition to the more dangerous tendencies in modern politics.” In light of neoconservative exuberance, he interprets this primarily as an indictment of uncritical proclamations of national virtue. In doing so, he misses how Morgenthau’s preoccupations with concentrated power and his radicalism in the American context are related to his anxieties about foreign policy and the fate of sovereign states more generally. Consequently, he misses how Morgenthau’s political inquiry can expand our vision of politics. If Morgenthau’s and Carr’s refusal to divorce domestic from international suggests the parochialism and the limits of Lieven’s and Hulsman’s ethical realism, their accounts of crises provide more nuanced insights into the pathologies of modern society and Western foreign policy than neoconservatism’s diagnosis of cultural decay, thereby problematizing the latter’s call for “remoralization.”\textsuperscript{54} More than this, it is worth recalling that Morgenthau and Carr both re-imagined alternatives to the sovereign state system. Both outlined various strategies and transformative practices to release the hold of nationalism on the popular imagination, to cultivate broader identities and a sense of obligation, and to facilitate radical political change.

We might not agree with their substantive visions or particular conclusions, but recognizing the depth and breadth of their political concerns ought to make us reflect on the straightjackets we put on realism and the modest demands we place on political inquiry. Morgenthau and Carr remind us: “It is a legitimate and vital task for a theory of politics to anticipate drastic changes in the structure of politics” and “the intellectual, political, and institutional changes” required to meet new needs. “The great political utopians have based their theoretical anticipation of a new political order upon the realistic analysis of the empirical status quo in which they lived.”\textsuperscript{55} If these sentiments too closely resemble neoconservative ideology, then I think the appropriate response is not to demand

\textsuperscript{54} This term is from William Kristol and Robert Kagan and quoted by Williams: “ ‘The remoralization of America at home ultimately requires the remoralization of American foreign policy’ ” (226).
less of political inquiry but more. And if Morgenthau’s and Carr’s critical ethos and radical
understanding of politics and political inquiry lead us to reject their own specific judgments, I think
they would approve if that were what critical realism required.
References


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261


Biography

Ming-Whey Christine Lee was born in Omaha, Nebraska on November 11, 1980. She graduated summa cum laude from Southern Methodist University with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Bachelor of Science in Economics. She earned a Master of Arts in Political Science in 2006 and will be awarded a Ph.D. from Duke University in 2009. Christine is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and a recipient of the James B. Duke Fellowship, National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship, Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, and Kenan Graduate Colloquium Fellowship.