

The Theory of International Politics

Therefore, the seeker after the truth is not one who studies the writings of the ancients and, following his natural disposition, puts his trust in them, but rather the one who suspects his faith in them and questions what he gathers from them, the one who submits to argument and demonstration, and not to the sayings of a human being whose nature is fraught with all kinds of imperfection and deficiency. Thus the duty of the man who investigates the writings of scientists, if learning the truth is his goal, is to make himself the enemy of all that he reads, and, applying his mind to the core and margins of its content, attack it from every side. He should also suspect himself as he performs his critical examination of it, so that he may avoid falling into either prejudice or leniency. (Ibn al-Haytham)¹

Since the end of World War II, debates about the relation between war and the state among political scientists in the United States have been dominated by a body of ideas commonly called Realism and the criticisms those ideas have provoked.² Nearly every author who wants to write something portentous about international politics either defends Realism, invents a new species of it, or uses it as a point of departure for some other “ism” that he or she wants to defend. Prominent among these alternatives to Realism have been Liberalism (including what has been called neoliberal institutionalism) and Constructivism.

Because mathematical models based on the theory of games have been used to evaluate the competing claims made by Realists and their critics, debates about Realism have become embroiled in controversies about game theory, the use of mathematics to describe human behavior, and something called “rational choice theory.” Some Constructivists have claimed that what is at stake is nothing less than fundamental issues in the philosophy of science or even something called “ontology.” The result has been not only to make the controversies provoked by Realism even more

1. Quoted in Sabra 2003, 54.

2. I will always capitalize the term *Realism* when I use it to refer to the academic doctrine that goes by that name among students of international politics.

difficult to settle but also to create confusion about what a theory of international politics might consist of or how to evaluate it.

Theories, Arguments, and Explanations

I will argue that the fundamental cause of the unproductive nature of these controversies has been the willingness of political scientists to tolerate incomplete arguments. Indifference to the validity of arguments is often justified by the claim that the issues raised in these debates are fundamentally empirical ones and that therefore they can only be settled by looking at the facts. If what I have to say is to be persuasive, I must show why this common view is mistaken. Let us begin, then, by looking at a few simple examples that will make this clear.

Arguments and Explanations

Suppose you went to the dog pound to look for an inexpensive dog and wanted to make sure that any dog you got had a friendly disposition, was good with children, and would not maul a passing stranger. Suppose the attendant assured you that a particular dog would have those qualities. Skeptical, you might ask, "How do you know that, and why should I believe it?" The attendant might reply that the dog in question was a Labrador retriever. "So?" you might reply, to which the attendant might respond that Labrador retrievers are friendly dogs and are good with children.

The attendant's answers to your questions can be interpreted as an argument, perhaps the simplest possible argument that actually conveys new information. It has two premises: "Labrador retrievers are friendly and good with children" and "This dog is a Labrador retriever," from which it follows that "This dog will be friendly and good with children," which is what you wanted to know. The conclusion "follows from" the premises only because if one accepts the premises and denies the conclusion one would have contradicted oneself, which is why if one believes the premises one must also believe the conclusion. Arguments that have this property are called valid arguments, and reasoning from premises to conclusion in this way is commonly called "deductive reasoning."

However, this little argument would satisfy you only if you were confident that both of the premises were true. If one or both were not true, the argument would remain valid but the conclusion might be false. Suppose, then, that you asked why you should believe that this dog was a Labrador retriever—this is, after all, the dog pound. The attendant might reply that Labrador retrievers had certain recognizable characteristics

such as a large, square head, short hair, a wide chest, and a friendly disposition, and this dog had those characteristics.

At first glance this looks like a deductive argument just like the first one: the first premise is that Labrador retrievers have certain recognizable characteristics, and the second is that this dog has all those characteristics. But if so, the argument is not valid, because it does not follow from these two premises that the dog is a Labrador retriever. Such an argument would be an example of a logical fallacy called “affirming the consequent” and therefore could not provide the assurance you were looking for.

But this would be a misunderstanding of the attendant’s reasoning. The attendant is saying that the hypothesis that the dog is a Labrador retriever would explain its appearance, and thus its appearance gives us reason to believe that it is a Labrador retriever. There is a deductive argument here, but its premises are that “All Labrador retrievers have certain recognizable characteristics” and “This dog is a Labrador retriever,” from which it would follow, if true, that this dog would have the properties of a Labrador retriever. But this is something that one does not have to be persuaded of, since the dog can be inspected directly. The question is, rather, what sort of dog is it? And the reasoning is that, since these premises, if true, would imply that the dog would have the appearance that it does have, the fact that it has that appearance is evidence that the premises are true. This is an example of what is commonly called “inductive reasoning,” and the problem of induction is to figure out what justifies an inference of this sort.³

But we do not require a justification for reasoning in this way to do it.⁴ What is important here is, rather, the fact that the inductive inference from the dog’s visible characteristics to its breed is made possible by a deductive inference from the breed to a dog’s visible characteristics: if the breed could not explain its appearance, then the breed could not be inferred from the appearance.⁵ The problem is that there are other possible explanations of the dog’s appearance, some of which might imply that it would be dangerous, and that is why inductive inference requires not just identifying a possible explanation of the facts but also supplying reasons to believe that

3. Probability theory provides a plausible answer to that question, since such an inference can be shown to be an application of Bayes’s rule. For a recent discussion by a philosopher, see Howson 2000. For a discussion by a physicist, see Jaynes 2003.

4. A person who did not engage in inductive reasoning would not soon survive, since unlike most animals the behavior encoded in the genes of human beings is inadequate for humans to cope with their environment. Thus there is reason to believe that human beings are endowed with a propensity to engage in it—even infants do it (Ruse 1998; Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl 1999).

5. In the Bayesian interpretation of inductive inference, the deductive argument tells us that the conditional probability of the conclusion being true, given the truth of the premises, is one.

that explanation is better than other possible ones. Thus inductive inference is sometimes said to be “inference to the best explanation.”⁶

Similarly, if you asked why you should believe that Labrador retrievers are good with children, you might be told that many people had had such dogs as pets and this was their uniform experience. Since the hypothesis that all Labrador retrievers are good with children would explain the fact that everyone who had had them as pets found them to be good with children, that fact is evidence that the hypothesis is true. However, a cautious person might wonder if there were other possible explanations of this fact.⁷

In spite of the fact that they are almost trivially simple, these examples illustrate how claims to knowledge are justified. More complex examples could be found in detective stories, murder trials, investigations of the causes of plane crashes, troubleshooting procedures for automobile mechanics or people who service computers, and throughout the natural sciences.

These examples also illustrate the fact that whether we are reasoning from premises to conclusions, or from observable facts to possible explanations of those facts, what is commonly called logical validity is necessary if our reasoning is to affect our beliefs: if the confidence we place in some premises is to be transferred to a conclusion then the conclusion must be implied by the premises, and if some explanation is to be supported by the facts then the facts must be implied by the explanation.⁸ In these examples satisfying this requirement is so easy that it is possible to overlook it. Unfortunately, in even slightly more complicated situations it is possible to think one has satisfied it when one has not. We will see that this is true of much that has been written about international politics.

Science, Causes, Variables, and Theories

People who are interested in making the study of politics scientific often consult works on the philosophy of science to tell them what a science is supposed to consist of.⁹ Many come away with the idea that the aim of sci-

6. C. S. Peirce called inference to the best explanation “abduction,” and many writers restrict the word *induction* to inference from a sample to a population. My usage conforms to recent literature that argues that the logic of inference in the two cases is the same (Harman 1965; Thagard 1978; and Lipton 1991).

7. See, for example, Malcolm Gladwell’s (2006) comparison between generalizations about the behavior of various breeds of dogs and the development of profiles of potential suspects by police.

8. Or at least the explanation must imply that the facts should have been expected with some probability.

9. For an engaging discussion of this sort of thing, see George Homans’s (1984) autobiography.

ence is to identify causal regularities. Since a curve defined by an equation in which a dependent variable is a function of one or more independent variables seems to be a way of representing a causal regularity, statistical techniques for fitting such a curve to numerical data are often the standard by which the study of politics is judged. As a result, even people who do not use statistics couch their explanations in terms of independent and dependent variables, and attempts to explain individual events are commonly described as “small n studies” or “case studies” or are said to commit the statistical sin of “selection on the dependent variable.”¹⁰

But the philosophy of science is mainly about the problem of induction, which is a problem for philosophers, not for scientists, and it is a serious mistake to think that one might find in it a blueprint for doing science. Moreover, the word *science* is not well defined, and the only thing that all the fields of study commonly called sciences seem to have in common is that (1) they all reward people for showing that existing explanations of the phenomena described by the field fail to meet the standards for justifying claims to knowledge discussed above, (2) they give even greater rewards to people who construct nonobvious explanations that survive attempts to discredit them in this way, and (3) they require scholars to make their work as easy to criticize as possible by making the reasoning that supports it transparent (Ziman 2000). Thus a plausible definition of *science* is just that it refers to any enterprise in which scholars compete with each other in constructing nonobvious explanations of the phenomena they study that can withstand concerted attempts to discredit them.¹¹

It is not really clear what a “causal regularity” is, but by any ordinary definition of that term much of what is commonly called “science” is more concerned with explaining regularities than with identifying them. Science does not tell us that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, that the sky is blue, or that the days are longer in the summer than in the winter—it explains those facts. Or, to take a less obvious example, cooks discovered that whipping egg whites into a meringue works best in a copper bowl. The physical sciences explain why that is true. The causal regularity was discovered by cooks; “science” explains it.¹²

10. For an influential example, see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994.

11. Many people believe that the philosopher Karl Popper defined at least one test for distinguishing between science and nonscience, and that is the requirement that propositions be falsifiable. However, while genetics may one day provide a means of falsifying the proposition that an anonymous dog at the dog pound has the genes that give Labrador retrievers their characteristic disposition, that is still, apparently, not possible. But that does not make inferences from its appearance to its breed meaningless or unjustifiable (Howson and Urbach 1993; Howson 2000; Ziman 2000, 226).

12. See Derry 1999, 4–6. Note that the explanation also increases our confidence that what cooks say is not just a superstition. See also the physical explanations in Chandrasekhar 1998.

However, what is called science does not just explain regularities, whether causal or otherwise; it also explains unique events, for example, where the HIV virus came from and, if it came from chimpanzees, how it got from animals to people. It is absurd to think that this is an example of a “small n study” that would be assisted by an increase in the size of the sample. Rather, the problem is to identify possible explanations of what happened and then to see how many of the known facts each explains.¹³

Consider the problem of explaining plane crashes. People charged with that grisly and important task often know very little about what happened: all the eyewitnesses may be dead, and the plane itself may be smashed to pieces and not fully recoverable. In addition to what can be recovered from the wreckage, they know the pattern formed by the debris, some of the weather conditions when the plane crashed, perhaps some or all of the data on the flight recorders, and sometimes a recording of radar images of the trajectory of the plane as it crashed. Their problem is to find an explanation that accounts not only for the plane crash but also for more of the other information at their disposal than does any other explanation. The plane crash is not a dependent variable whose variation might be accounted for by one or more independent variables. It is a fact, and what is wanted are some propositions from which, if true, that fact could be derived. Thus one must reason backward from what is known to what is unknown, and the only evidence there is for the truth of the investigators’ conclusion is that it explains the known facts. However, since more than one explanation might account for those facts, an effort must be made to avoid settling on the first one that comes to mind.

One broad category of explanations for plane crashes falls under the heading of “pilot error.” One might wonder if there is a relationship between such things as pilot training or flight schedules and pilot errors serious enough to cause plane crashes. If so, pilot error might be taken as a dependent variable, and one might test for a relationship between it and such independent variables as training procedures or frequency of flying. But such a relationship, if found, could not be said to explain the plane crashes. And to measure the dependent variable one must first have explained all the plane crashes individually, in order to know which ones were the result of pilot error and which were the result of mechanical failure or some other cause—the fact that all plane crashes are in some sense the same does not mean that they can all be explained in the same way. Moreover, to explain any plane crash one must first be able to explain why planes are able to fly.

Contrast this discussion of flight failure with the recent political sci-

13. See the account in Kolata 2001.

ence literature on “state failure.”¹⁴ In 1994, at the request of Vice President Al Gore, the U.S. government established a State Failure Task Force, composed of prominent social scientists, whose purpose was to determine what conditions were associated with the failure of states. It found three independent variables that accounted for most of the state failures—infant mortality, trade openness, and democracy—and on that basis made a number of policy recommendations to the U.S. government. What is one to make of such a study?

One criticism one might make is that it has not properly identified the dependent variable or that some of the independent variables are really part of the dependent variable (King and Zeng 2001, 654–55). But more serious problems are implied by our plane crash example. It is not clear how one could explain state failure without being able to explain state success, which we are far from being able to do. Moreover, as with plane crashes, there is no reason to think that all state failures (whatever that might mean) can be explained in the same way. And finally, in explaining the “failure” of any state, the problem is not to find independent variables that would account for the variation in some dependent variable but to find a set of propositions from which the facts of interest could be derived. One of those facts would be the relation between the independent and dependent variables reported by the State Failure Task Force.¹⁵

Some people would say that this implies that to understand state failure we need a theory of state success. But the word *theory* means so many things and has been used in so many different ways by political scientists that that would not be very informative. Any conjecture can be called a theory, and it would not be at all surprising to find a political scientist referring to studies of state failure of the sort just summarized as “state failure theory.” Everyone aspires to “do theory,” and it is often said that there are many different ways of doing it and we should be tolerant of all of them.¹⁶

However, while there may be many ways of “doing theory,” there are

14. See especially the discussion in King and Zeng 2001.

15. Confusion between the relation between independent and dependent variables in a regression equation, on the one hand, and the relation between premises and conclusion in an explanatory argument, on the other, is common in political science, and many political scientists claim that a theory just consists of a specification of the relation among a set of variables. See, for example, Van Evera 1997, 7–48.

16. This usage reflects the influence of postmodernist writings on the study of literature. See the account in Culler 1997, chap. 1, titled “What Is Theory?” Culler writes: “In literary and cultural studies these days there is a lot of talk about theory—not theory of literature, mind you; just plain ‘theory’. . . . ‘Theory of what?’ you want to ask. It is surprisingly hard to say. . . . Sometimes theory seems less an account of anything than an activity—something you do or don’t do.”

not many ways of constructing valid arguments that can serve as explanations of observed facts. What is wanted is not just anything that might be called a theory but an explanation from which the facts in question can actually be derived. It is that sort of theory that is the subject of this book.

Causality and Meaning

Many people would say that human behavior is too unpredictable for such explanations to be possible. However, after saying that, such people will often literally bet their lives that what they have said is not true by driving a car at seventy miles an hour down a highway while separated from cars traveling at the same speed in the opposite direction only by a painted yellow line. And in buying the car they drive they will have bet a lot of money that wherever they go there will be people willing to supply them with oil and gasoline to keep it running and to fix it when it breaks down. Human behavior is, in fact, very predictable, and if it were not, social organization would be impossible.

Ants seem remarkable to us because their social organization resembles that of humans, and they engage in complex forms of cooperation that look very much like war, gardening, and the domestication of animals.¹⁷ In their famous book about ants, Hölldobler and Wilson say:

The study of ant social organization is by necessity both a reductionistic and a holistic enterprise. The behavior of the colony as a whole can be understood only if the programs and positional effects of the individual members are both specified and explained more deeply at the physiological level. But such accounts are still far from complete. The information makes full sense only when the colonial pattern of each species is examined as an idiosyncratic adaptation to the natural environment in which the species lives. (1990, 3)

If one substitutes “psychological” for “physiological” in this quotation, one gets something very close to the following statement by the German sociologist Max Weber:

Interpretive sociology considers the individual . . . and his action as the basic unit, as its “atom.” . . . In general, for sociology, such concepts as “state,” “association,” “feudalism,” and the like, des-

17. Comparisons between the social organization of humans and the social organization of insects can be found in both Hobbes and Aristotle. For a recent development of the theme, see Skyrms 2004, xi–xiv.

ignite certain categories of human interaction. Hence it is the task of sociology to reduce these concepts to “understandable” action, that is, without exception, to the actions of participating individual men. (Gerth and Mills 1946, 55)

These two quotations touch on two issues that are the source of vast amounts of unnecessary conflict and confusion. These issues have been revived by Constructivists in their quarrel with Realism.

One issue is whether the social sciences should be “reductionistic” or “holistic,” to use the terminology of Hölldobler and Wilson. What they say of this in connection with the study of the social behavior of ants seems obviously true of human beings as well: it must be both.¹⁸

The other is whether substituting “psychological” for “physiological,” in the quotation from Hölldobler and Wilson, implies that the scientific study of society is impossible. The basis for claiming that it does is that physiology is about what causes what, while psychology is, as Weber said, about meaning.¹⁹ However, as already mentioned, it is not really clear what “causality” means, and if what we are interested in is finding non-obvious explanations for what happens, then it makes perfectly good sense to speak of social science—though, contrary to what many believe, doing so tells us little about how to proceed. And once it becomes clear that we are interested not simply in whether some dependent variable can be made to jiggle by yanking on some independent variable but in why that might be true, one can see that the same criteria for evaluating explanations apply to both realms.

We are curious about how to explain the complex social behavior of ants because it seems so much like what human beings do. If we are to find nonobvious explanations of human social behavior, we must learn to become as puzzled by what humans are capable of doing as we are by the ants. Thus, instead of looking for new, unsuspected regularities that might be found in human behavior, it might be useful to begin by thinking about whether we can explain the regularities in it that are as familiar to us as the rising and setting of the sun or the progress of the seasons and that we all take completely for granted. For example, instead of being puzzled by what is now called state failure, we should be puzzled by state success, which is actually the rarer phenomenon if, by the word *state*, we mean the

18. See the discussion of controversies about this issue among biologists by Edward O. Wilson (1994). For a very interesting discussion of this issue in the social sciences by an evolutionary biologist, see David Sloan Wilson (2002).

19. For an extended argument of this sort, see Winch 1958, which claims that “the conceptions according to which we normally think of social events are logically incompatible with the concepts belonging to scientific explanation” (95).

modern states, whose leaders are now so concerned about state failures around the world.²⁰

Nonobvious explanations are, like nonobvious theorems, not obvious! There is nowhere to look up what they might be and no one to tell us in advance what will work and what will not. Unlike natural scientists, social scientists have the advantage of being able to think like the people whose behavior they want to explain.²¹ Moreover, it is counterintuitive to think that one could be part of a social organization without already understanding it. But one can know the important elements of a good explanation without seeing their implications, especially if they imply an explanation that is different from one that everyone already accepts. In Darwin's time, the ideas of Thomas Malthus were widely known and what animal breeders did was familiar to nearly everyone. However, only two people saw that those ideas together implied that complex organisms could have developed without an intelligent designer: A. R. Wallace and Charles Darwin. They would not have done so had they stuck with what seemed obviously true to everyone else. It is also unlikely that they would have done so had they first consulted a treatise on the philosophy of science, or a statistics textbook, before proceeding.²²

Models: Method or Madness?

A model is just something that is used to represent something else, like a model airplane. Everyone who has used a map or a house plan or an architect's drawing has used a model. The purpose of such models is to facilitate inferences about the thing that is modeled that would otherwise be difficult. You could try to figure out how to landscape your yard or arrange the furniture in your new house just by standing in the middle of it and thinking about how it will look, but you might find it easier to work with a drawing. Similarly, you could give your guests complicated verbal instructions about how to find your house, but it might be more effective to give them a map and let them draw the proper inferences from it.

Whenever we use models such as these we have to worry whether con-

20. See the discussion by Paul Seabright (2004) of how remarkable and puzzling the development of large-scale political and economic organizations by human beings really is.

21. This is not a trivial point, and it is important not just for social science but for human social organization as well (Ziman 2000, 107–9). See the fascinating discussion of the psychological literature on this subject in Baron-Cohen 1995.

22. Darwin's reasoning was criticized by some of the leading philosophers of his time for failing to satisfy appropriate standards of inductive inference—see the discussion in Hull 1973. For an account of the development of Darwin's ideas, see Mayr 1991, 68–89. See also Press and Tanur 2001, which contains accounts not only of the development of Darwin's ideas but of many other important scientific ideas as well. For further discussion of the problem of explanation in the social sciences, see the witty and enjoyable analysis in Homans 1967.

clusions that we reach that are true of the model also apply to the thing or things that the model represents. If a drawing of one's house or lawn is not drawn exactly to scale, then things that fit in the drawing won't fit in "the real world," and if roads that look straight on a map are really very crooked, then it may take longer to get to your house than your friends thought. There are always differences of this sort between models and the things they represent, and the question therefore is not whether the model is completely accurate (no model is or can be, or it would not be a model) but whether it is accurate enough for the purpose at hand. A map that is good enough to enable people to find your house might not be good enough to determine how much fiber-optic cable to buy if a company plans to wire your neighborhood or to plot the path of a cruise missile.²³

The same is true of models of nonphysical things. Formal or symbolic logic, for example, is a system of arbitrary symbols and rules for manipulating them that was designed to represent logical inference. Since the rules for manipulating the symbols are absolutely clear, it is often easier to prove theorems by using them than it is by using words. However, that can lead to controversies about whether theorems that are true in this symbolic language always carry over to the ordinary language that everyone actually thinks in (Strawson 1952). And what is nowadays called rational choice theory, in disputes about theories and methods among political scientists, is really just a way of constructing mathematical models of people's choices, which can lead to similar controversies (Wagner 2001).

Since reasoning about models instead of the real thing can be misleading, there has to be a good reason for doing it. And since we explain people's choices all the time without constructing models of them, the whole idea may seem ridiculous. There are three main ways in which explanations involving human choices can become complex enough that models of them can be useful. One is that the consequences of the choices of many people taken together may not be obvious and may then interact with people's subsequent choices. This is what happens in markets and in electoral systems with competing political parties. A second is that individuals may be faced with uncertainty about the consequences of their choices, so their choices are not implied in any straightforward way by their preferences over final outcomes. And a third is that individuals' choices may be interdependent, in that what one person will choose depends on his or her expectations about how one or more other people will choose and vice versa. It is not possible to understand international

23. For a discussion of such issues concerning models in the natural sciences, with examples, see Derry 1999, 69–88. An excellent introduction to the use of models in the social sciences can be found in Lave and March 1993. For an introduction to the use of mathematical models in studying international politics, see Powell 1999.

politics without confronting all these problems, which is why mathematical models have become so important in the study of it.

Formal models have helped us think much more clearly about many of the questions debated by students of international politics. However, what one gets out of a formal model depends on what one puts into it, and therefore game theory is not a ready-made theory of international politics, and no formal model can compensate for a poorly framed question. Many criticisms of formal models wrongly attribute the problems they identify to the use of mathematics, when they are instead the result of the way the problem has been formulated. The purpose of this chapter and the next one is to look carefully at how the questions debated by students of international politics came to be formulated in the way that they have been. I will then argue that they need to be reformulated.²⁴

A Guide for the Reader

One impediment to settling the issues raised by Realists and their critics is that it is not entirely clear what Realism is. There is now an embarrassment of Realisms. There is classical Realism, neoclassical Realism, structural Realism (aka Neorealism), human nature Realism, defensive Realism, and offensive Realism, and it may be undergoing further mutations as I write. Thus it will be necessary to figure out not only what is distinctive about each of the main varieties of Realism but also what, if anything, they all have in common.

Because I am interested in evaluating the current state of the field and not simply summarizing its historical development, I will begin with recent varieties of Realism and work backward from there, concluding with an examination of the origins of Realism. Along the way I will discuss the criticisms of Realism that have been made by its main competitors. Following the guidelines laid down earlier, I will not try to summarize everything that writers who identify themselves with these “isms” have said but will instead try to identify the main theses they have advanced and the arguments they have offered in support of them. In the next chapter I will examine the origins of these ideas in early modern European political thought, a subject that is frequently discussed by contemporary defenders of these competing doctrines but that they have often misinterpreted.

The purpose of these two chapters is to show that all these “isms” are

24. Unfortunately, defenders of formal models have contributed to confusion about their significance by saying that their purpose is to help us think consistently. To be inconsistent is to contradict oneself. The problem with the arguments made by students of international politics is not that they have been self-contradictory but that they have been invalid, that is, believing their premises and denying their conclusions would *not* be inconsistent.

collections of bad answers to important questions. An understanding of what is wrong with these answers will, I hope, lead to a better understanding of the questions, which are much broader than is commonly assumed by modern-day Realists and their critics. Beginning in chapter 3 I will investigate what contemporary scholarship has to say about these questions.

Every chapter prior to chapter 6 will lead to a new set of questions, which will be the focus of the following chapter. Following chapter 6 I will try to summarize the implications of the preceding chapters.

Offensive Realism

A recent version of Realism that has received a lot of attention is offensive Realism, and its main proponent is John Mearsheimer.²⁵ The main thesis of offensive Realism is that even states that want only to be secure act aggressively, because the international system forces them to do so.

This situation, which no one consciously designed or intended, is genuinely tragic. Great powers that have no reason to fight each other—that are merely concerned with their own survival—nevertheless have little choice but to pursue power and to seek to dominate the other states in the system. (Mearsheimer 2001, 3)

Thus whatever the nature of the component states, international politics “has always been a ruthless and dangerous business, and it is likely to remain that way” (2).

Unlike many writers, Mearsheimer actually lists five properties of international politics that together, he claims, logically imply this conclusion (30–32). They can easily be stated in the form of five premises:

Premise 1: *There is no world government.*

Premise 2: *All states are capable of using force against other states.*

Premise 3: *No state can ever be certain that another state will not use force against it.*

Premise 4: *All states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and domestic autonomy.*

Premise 5: *States are rational actors.*

After listing these assumptions, Mearsheimer says:

25. The distinction between offensive and defensive Realism is apparently due to Jack Snyder (1991, 10–13).

none of these assumptions alone dictates that great powers as a general rule *should* behave aggressively toward each other. There is surely the possibility that some state might have hostile intentions, but the only assumption dealing with a specific motive that is common to all states says that their principal objective is to survive, which by itself is a rather harmless goal. Nevertheless, when the five assumptions are married together, they create powerful incentives for great powers to think and act offensively with regard to each other. (32)

Thus Mearsheimer claims to have derived a strong, nonobvious conclusion from premises whose truth it would be hard to deny.

However, he makes no attempt to show that his conclusion follows from these premises. Had he done so, it would have been more obvious that, while his premises are clearly stated, it is far from clear what the conclusion actually is. In the passage quoted earlier, he says that, because of these properties of international politics, states “have little choice but to pursue power and to seek to dominate the other states in the system.” And in the passage just quoted he says that these properties “create powerful incentives for great powers to think and act offensively with regard to each other.” But, while it is clear that he thinks that these statements may be true even if the only objective of states is to survive, it is not really clear what they mean.

One possibility that is consistent with what he says is the following statement:

Conclusion 1 (Mearsheimer?) *Two states may go to war with each other even though they both want only to survive.*

But, while we may be able to think of circumstances in which this statement would be true, it does not follow from these premises.

Another possible interpretation of what he says is something like this:

Conclusion 2 (Mearsheimer?) *Even a state that wants only to survive will want to have more powerful military forces than all other states combined.*

But not even this statement follows from his premises.²⁶

Because Mearsheimer never makes clear exactly what he thinks follows from his premises, the fact that his argument is not valid is not as

26. Note that the issue is not whether international politics has in fact often been a “ruthless and dangerous business,” as Mearsheimer says, or even whether these hypothetical conclusions are sometimes true, but what would explain their truth and therefore whether they must be true as long as Mearsheimer’s premises are true.

obvious to the reader as it might be. Impressed by the seemingly obvious truth of the premises, readers may be unjustifiably impressed by the argument itself.²⁷

This is the key to explaining the dominant role that Realism has played in the study of international politics: it claims to derive strong conclusions about the behavior of states from properties of international politics that are difficult to deny. But the claim is unjustified, not just in Mearsheimer's case but in others as well.²⁸

Defensive Realism

No Realist of any type would quarrel with any of Mearsheimer's five premises. Nonetheless, as Mearsheimer points out, other Realists do not accept his conclusion (Mearsheimer 2001, 19–22). (This would be more clearly true if it were clearer what his conclusion actually is.) But if Mearsheimer's claim about the implication of these premises is correct, they must have made a mistake in their reasoning. Yet nowhere does he say exactly what this mistake is.

For example, he says of Kenneth Waltz, the most prominent of the scholars he identifies as a "defensive realist," that there is a "status quo bias" in his theory, leaving one with the impression that Waltz merely assumes that states only want to protect the status quo, without seeing that his own assumptions imply something different (20). However, Waltz did not merely assume that states were not interested in aggressively expanding; he argued that even if they were inclined to expand, the very features of the international system that Mearsheimer describes would lead them not to do so. Mearsheimer simply ignores Waltz's argument, asserts a different conclusion, and gives it a distinctive name to emphasize the nature of the difference.²⁹

27. On the cover of the paperback edition of Mearsheimer's book, Samuel Huntington is quoted as saying of it: "All serious students of international affairs will have to come to grips with its argument." On the back, the *Economist* is quoted as saying that Mearsheimer "demolishes all the main components" of the "happy vision" of international politics that emerged at the end of the cold war.

28. Mearsheimer's third premise is actually far more questionable than it appears to be. I will examine it in chapter 6. But first we must determine why it is important.

29. Schweller (1996) also claims that Waltz assumed that states were only interested in security, not expansion. Waltz is frequently unclear, but he flatly and explicitly says otherwise in more than one place. "Beyond the survival motive," he wrote, "the aims of states may be endlessly varied; they may range from the ambition to conquer the world to the desire merely to be left alone." What he assumed was just that "[s]urvival is a prerequisite to achieving any goals that states may have" (Waltz 1979, 91). Otherwise the argument summarized subsequently would have been unnecessary, and his reasoning would have been not merely invalid but absurd.

Waltz's argument, while no more valid than Mearsheimer's, makes even more apparent the fact that Mearsheimer's argument is not valid either. It rests on the fact that, when there are more than two states in the world, one state cannot expand without giving another an opportunity to expand as well, in which case an increase in one state's absolute level of military capabilities might leave it relatively worse off than it was before. Hence, Waltz claims, the nature of international politics forces all states to focus on preserving their own independence by forming balancing coalitions rather than on maximizing their own power. Thus even expansionist states

cannot let power, a possibly useful means, become the end they pursue. The goal the system encourages them to seek is security. Increased power may or may not serve that end. (Waltz 1979, 126)

Mearsheimer claims, however, that the nature of international politics forces even satisfied states to be aggressive in order to maximize their power. Yet both claim to have derived their conclusions from exactly the same properties of international politics.

Mearsheimer, as we have seen, makes no attempt to show that his conclusion follows from these properties. This is Waltz's attempt to justify his conclusion:

Because power is a means and not an end, states prefer to join the weaker of two coalitions. . . . If states wished to maximize power, they would join the stronger side, and we would see not balances forming but a world hegemony forged. This does not happen because balancing, not bandwagoning, is the behavior induced by the system. The first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system.

Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side, for it is the stronger side that threatens them. (Waltz 1979, 126–27)

This is the entirety of Waltz's argument in support of his claim that anarchy leads to "the recurrent formation of balances of power" (119). But it is not valid. A state that joins with the more powerful of two states to fight the third will confront a more powerful adversary after victory, but if it allies with the weaker state instead it will be less likely to be victorious. Without more information we cannot say what it should be expected to do.³⁰

30. For an extended analysis of the question raised by this passage from Waltz's book, see Powell 1999, chap. 5.

In discussing the difference between offensive and defensive Realism, Snyder says:

anarchy is not in itself sufficient to predict an expansionist security strategy. Realist scholars argue that the normal response to threat is to form a balancing alliance. Therefore states should expect that expansion will reduce their security insofar as it threatens other states and provokes an opposing coalition. (1991, 22)

This may be what some people who have identified themselves as Realists say. But there is no more reason to believe that it is true than there is to believe Mearsheimer's claim for the opposite view.

Structural Realism

The claim that propositions about the behavior of states can be deduced from properties of the state system is the most basic idea in what is often called structural Realism, or Neorealism. This claim was advanced originally by Kenneth Waltz, but it is accepted by Mearsheimer as well, and therefore offensive and defensive Realisms are both varieties of structural Realism. What is not commonly recognized is that the mere fact that structural Realists disagree about which of these views is correct is enough to call structural Realism itself into question.³¹ However, there is more to structural Realism than just the question of whether the international system makes states expansionist or instead curtails any expansionist tendencies they might have.

There are two important structural attributes of a state system, according to Waltz. All state systems, he claimed, are alike in having anarchic rather than hierarchical structures. However, there are also structural differences among anarchic systems as a result of differences in the distribution of power among the constituent states (Waltz 1979, 79–101). The disagreement between defensive and offensive Realists is one of the questions that arise about the properties of all systems with an anarchic structure. The other main issue raised by structural Realism is what differences

31. Instead, people who are reluctant to conclude that published works might just be wrong often try to save structural Realism by claiming that disagreements among Realists are the result of differing tacit assumptions made by authors who disagree. However, not only is there no textual basis for doing this, but typically no attempt is made to show that the respective arguments might be valid even with the extra assumptions. For an example, see Brooks 1997.

among anarchic systems can be attributed to differences in the distribution of power within them.³²

Prior to Waltz, most writers about international politics focused on the question of whether power among states was distributed equally or unequally.³³ Since Waltz's writing, nearly everyone has focused on whether systems were characterized by a bipolar or a multipolar distribution of power. There have been controversies about what sort of state behavior can be expected in each type of system and also about whether other types of "polarity" are possible and what effect they might have. I will have more to say about the effects of anarchy later. First let us consider the polarity of state systems.

Waltz's distinction between bipolarity and multipolarity was a product of debates about how to understand the cold war. During the period between 1945 and 1950, when it gradually became clear that World War II would not, as most people had expected, end like World War I with a comprehensive peace settlement but would lead instead to a protracted conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, there were two features of the international situation that many people found deeply disturbing. One was the development of nuclear weapons, whose existence was unknown to most people until 1945. The other was the fact that after World War II the major powers seemed to be organizing themselves into two hostile coalitions separated by unbridgeable ideological differences. At some point this second feature of postwar international politics began to be referred to as "bipolarity."

The combination of nuclear weapons with bipolarity led many people to fear that civilization itself was threatened. It is ironic that by the end of the cold war many people had concluded that it was precisely those two features of international politics that had turned the cold war into what some people now call "the long peace" (Gaddis 1987). While Waltz originally accepted the view that nuclear weapons were very dangerous, he was almost single-handedly responsible for convincing many people that bipolarity was good, not bad—good enough, in fact, to compensate for the dangers posed by nuclear weapons (Waltz 1964).³⁴

Waltz claimed that people who were concerned about the polarization of the world into two nuclear-armed camps as a result of the cold war had misunderstood the situation. What had happened was not that the world had divided into two cohesive alliances of the traditional sort but rather

32. While Waltz was responsible for the idea that international systems could be characterized by their structures, it is important to recognize that a very large part of what Waltz said about the effects of a system's structure on the behavior of states within it was first said by John Herz. Herz's discussion is often clearer than Waltz's. See especially Herz 1959.

33. See, for example, Claude 1962, chaps. 1–3; Sheehan 1996.

34. Later Waltz (1981) also argued that nuclear weapons were actually a good thing too.

that the number of great powers had been reduced to two. And a world in which there are just two great powers, he claimed, is less prone to war than a world in which there are more than two (Waltz 1964; 1979, 168–70). He called a world with just two great powers a bipolar world and a world with more than two great powers a multipolar world, and the names stuck.³⁵

Why did Waltz think that a bipolar world was less war-prone than a multipolar world? Because, he claimed,

States are less likely to misjudge their relative strengths than they are to misjudge the strength and reliability of opposing coalitions. Rather than making states properly cautious and forwarding the chances of peace, uncertainty and miscalculation cause wars. . . . In a bipolar world uncertainty lessens and calculations are easier to make. (Waltz 1979, 168)

Because alliances are important in a multipolar world but are not in a bipolar world, in other words, the sorts of miscalculations that lead to war are less likely in a bipolar world.

Is this a valid argument? Let us try to reconstruct it. Clearly one of Waltz's premises is just a definition:

Premise 1 (Waltz) Definition: *A bipolar world is one in which there are two great powers, and a multipolar world is one in which there are more than two great powers.*

Another premise is:

Premise 2 (Waltz) *Miscalculations of the relative strength or behavior of opposing states or coalitions of states can cause wars to occur.*

A third is:

Premise 3 (Waltz) *States are less likely to miscalculate the strength or behavior of states than of opposing coalitions.*

And the conclusion is:

Conclusion 1 (Waltz) *War is less likely in a bipolar world than in a multipolar world.*

35. However, the distinction, as well as the terminology and much of the argument Waltz gave for its significance, had earlier been introduced into the literature by John Herz (1959).

It should be obvious that this is not a valid argument.

What is missing? At the very least we need the following two additional premises:

Premise 4 *The only miscalculations that can lead to war are miscalculations about the relative strength or behavior of the great powers.*

Premise 5 *There is no other possible cause of war that might be more likely to occur in a bipolar world than in a multipolar one.*

If we believe the fourth premise, then reducing the number of great powers to two implies that incorrect expectations about the behavior or performance of coalitions cannot lead to war. And if we believe the fifth then there is no other possible factor that might influence the likelihood of war that we need to be concerned about. However, it is far from clear why we should believe either premise, and Waltz does not say why we should.

Waltz's silence on the fifth premise is an indirect consequence of the more general fact that he has virtually nothing to say about why war occurs at all (his second premise is justified by a reference to an earlier edition of Blainey 1988). This is a point that I will return to later. A close reading of what he says about bipolarity, however, will show that his silence on the question raised by the fourth premise is apparently the result of confusing a reduction in the number of *great powers* in the world with a reduction in the number of *states*. Clearly when there are only two states in the world, uncertainty about who will ally with whom in a conflict between them cannot arise. As Waltz put it:

Systems of two have qualities distinct from systems of three or more. What is the defining difference? . . . Where two powers contend, imbalances can be righted only by their internal efforts. With more than two, shifts in alignment provide an additional means of adjustment. (1979, 163)

Waltz claimed, in effect, that a reduction in the number of great powers to two was equivalent to a reduction in the number of states in the world to two. But nowhere does he say why this should be true.

Indeed, he could not possibly say that, because he never defines what a great power is. He expresses impatience at the question, saying that "one finds general agreement about who the great powers of a period are, with occasional doubt about marginal cases," but admits that "[w]e should not be surprised if wrong answers are sometimes arrived at." "The question," he says, "is an empirical one, and common sense can answer it" (Waltz 1979, 131). In fact, however, common sense cannot answer the question,

since the term *great power* has no standard meaning. Definitions without arguments are often pedantic, but arguments without definitions are often not valid. That is why mathematicians are so picky about definitions.³⁶

Thus the seeming plausibility of Waltz's reasoning about the difference between a bipolar and a multipolar world was the result of his equivocation between the number of states in the world and the distribution of power between or among them. As a result, he showed neither that during the cold war there were only two great powers nor, if that were true, that that fact would have the consequences he claimed for it. Moreover, his claim that bipolarity rendered other states unimportant to the United States and the USSR during the cold war would, if true, make it impossible to understand why the cold war occurred at all.³⁷

It is a remarkable fact that, in spite of all the discussion and debate about bipolarity and multipolarity, not to mention the possible consequences of "unipolarity" since the end of the cold war, neither Waltz nor anyone else has ever specified what the "polarity" of an international system refers to. And therefore no one has ever presented a valid argument in support of the claim that states behave differently in systems with different polarities.³⁸

Anarchy and War

We have seen that offensive Realists believe that the anarchic nature of international politics forces states to be aggressive, while defensive Realists believe that even states inclined to aggression are forced by the anarchic structure of the system to create balances of power instead. All structural Realists agree, however, that interstate wars will continue to occur as long as there is no world government.

Some advocates of world government would agree with this proposition, and their only disagreement with structural Realists concerns the fea-

36. For one of the few systematic discussions of how the term might be defined, see Levy 1983, 10–19.

37. For further discussion, see Wagner 1993. On the importance of third states for understanding the cold war, see especially Trachtenberg's (1999) discussion of the role of Germany.

38. Schweller, in an analysis of what he calls "tripolarity," defines a "pole" as a state that possesses "at least half of the resources of the most powerful state in the system" (1998, 46). But he then proceeds to discuss tripolar systems as though they were three-state systems and therefore, like Waltz, confuses the number of states with the distribution of power among them. Moreover, Schweller includes forces in being as part of his measure of military capabilities. But forces in being are a function of the decisions made by states and therefore cannot be part of the structure of an international system, which is supposed to constrain the decisions of states.

sibility and/or desirability of world government. Many other people have thought, however, that peace could be achieved without world government. Trade, democracy, socialism, international institutions that fall short of being a world government, or just a common realization that war is self-defeating have all been advanced as possible causes of peace among states. Structural Realists are pessimistic about these suggestions, not because they have examined each of them and concluded it would not have the predicted effects (though there are, of course, many disagreements about the predicted effects of all these factors) but because they think they have an argument that shows that none of these factors, *or any others that one might suggest*, could possibly eliminate interstate wars. This is a very strong claim. Is there any reason to believe it is true?

The claim is that in any anarchic system wars will occur. *Anarchy* just means that there is no world government, so the implicit premises in the structural Realist argument include at least some of those stated by Mearsheimer:

Premise 1 (Anarchy) *There is no world government.*

Premise 2 (Anarchy) *All states are capable of using force against other states.*

Premise 3 (Anarchy) *All states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and domestic autonomy.*

The justification for thinking that this last premise is part of what is meant by anarchy is, perhaps, that if it were not true states would abandon anarchy and create a world government.

In addition, since our goal is to establish what is the best we could expect from an anarchic system, it makes sense to use another of Mearsheimer's premises:

Premise 4 (Best case assumption) *States are rational actors.*

It is not really clear what *rational* means here, but a case for the possibility of peace that relied on the irrationality of states would not be a very strong case, so let us stick it in here and worry about exactly what it means later.

This appears to me to be about as far as one can go in writing down what is implied simply by saying that the interstate system is anarchic. But what are these premises together supposed to imply about the occurrence of war? Waltz has virtually nothing to say about that in *Theory of International Politics* (1979), which is usually taken to be the canonical statement of structural Realism, and what he does say seems to contradict the claim that anarchy is an important part of the explanation of war. The main claim in that book is, rather, that anarchy leads to balances of power, as

we have seen. To see what Waltz thought about the relation between anarchy and war, one must look at his first book, *Man, the State and War* (1959), and a later article entitled “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory” (1988).

Many people seem to have the impression that Waltz’s structural Realism is Hobbes’s account of the state of nature in modern dress. But Waltz’s inspiration was Rousseau, not Hobbes, and in Waltz’s first book he attributes to Rousseau the idea that

wars occur because there is nothing to prevent them. Rousseau’s analysis explains the recurrence of war without explaining any given war. He tells us that war may at any moment occur, and he tells us why this is so. (1959, 232)

The conclusion Waltz expects us to derive from premises that describe an anarchic interstate system, therefore, would appear to be this one:

Conclusion 1 (Structural Realism) *War may at any moment occur.*

But this conclusion plainly does not follow from these premises.

What is missing? The premises obviously imply that in anarchy, as Waltz said, there is nothing to prevent states from using force if they want to, but the conclusion would be true only if at any moment some state may want to. Suppose, then, we added a premise that said, “At any moment some state may want to use force against another state.” But this would beg the question! No one would doubt that states can use force whenever they want to. The question we started with was whether trade or democracy or something else might lead them not to want to do so. Structural Realism claims that anarchy makes this impossible, but it turns out that Waltz just assumed that it is. The reason this is not obvious is that Waltz confuses the *possibility* of war, which cannot be doubted, with its *probability*, which is what is in question.³⁹

Lest one think I am being unfair to Waltz, the following passage makes crystal clear that that is exactly what he did:

According to the third image [i.e., structural Realism], there is a constant possibility of war in a world in which there are two or more states each seeking to promote a set of interests and having no agency above them upon which they can rely for protection. But many liberals and socialist revisionists deny . . . the possibil-

39. As long as planes fly, plane crashes will be possible. But they are sufficiently infrequent that most people do not worry about them.

ity that wars would occur in a world of political or social democracies. An understanding of the third image makes clear that the expectation would be justified only if the minimum interest of states in preserving themselves became the maximum interest of all of them—and each could rely fully upon the steadfast adherence to this definition by all of the others. Stating the condition makes apparent the utopian quality of liberal and socialist expectations. (Waltz 1959, 227)

The expectations may possibly be utopian, but if they are, it is plainly not the absence of a world government that makes them so.

In the passage just quoted, Waltz said that for an anarchic system to be peaceful it would be necessary not only that no state wanted to use force but also that all states knew that this was true. To many structural Realists this is the key to the relation between anarchy and war. It seems to suggest the possibility of a much stronger and more interesting conclusion than the one Waltz got from Rousseau:

Conclusion 2 (Structural Realism) *At any moment some state may choose to use force against another state, even if no state expects to gain from doing so.*

Note the similarity of this conclusion to the first of the conclusions that one might attribute to Mearsheimer that was discussed previously. As we have seen, it does not follow from Mearsheimer's premises, and it is not implied by the premises describing a world of independent states just discussed. Some people believe that it is implied by what is called the security dilemma.

The Security Dilemma

Although many people associate the notion of a security dilemma with Waltz's structural Realism, the idea was John Herz's, and it is unclear from Waltz's own writings exactly what he thought about it. It was first presented in an article published in 1950, nine years before Waltz's first book was published. This article defends the same thesis that Waltz defended in his book but offers a different justification for it. Remarkably, Waltz does not even cite it. Herz claimed that anarchy leads to war, not, as Waltz said, because in anarchy there is nothing to prevent it but because

Wherever such anarchic society has existed—and it has existed in most periods of known history on some level—there has arisen

what may be called the “security dilemma” of men, or groups, or their leaders. (Herz 1950, 157)

But what is a security dilemma? According to Herz, groups or individuals who “live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity”

must be . . . concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on. (157)

He goes on to claim that

families and tribes may overcome the power game in their internal relations in order to face other families or tribes; larger groups may overcome it to face other classes unitedly; entire nations may compose their internal conflicts in order to face other nations. But ultimately, somewhere, conflicts caused by the security dilemma are bound to emerge among political units of power. (158)

It appears that Herz was an “offensive Realist” long before Mearsheimer was. We have already seen that Waltz explicitly denied that states seeking security from attack will, as Herz claimed, be “driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others.” However, in his later article “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory,” Waltz cites Herz’s article and says that the security dilemma is the link between anarchy and war (1988, 619). This adds to the puzzle of what Waltz thought the connection between anarchy and war really was.

Whatever the answer to that question might be, the more important question is whether (1) there is any reason to think that anarchy must lead to a security dilemma and (2) there is any reason to think that security dilemmas lead to war. Let us begin by looking at what Herz says a security dilemma is.

The most common interpretation of what Herz had in mind seems also to be the most plausible one. It can be captured in two premises, which we can add to the ones listed previously that describe a world of independent states. The first premise is as follows:

Premise 5 (Security dilemma) *An increase in one state's ability to protect itself from an attack by others will diminish the ability of other states to protect themselves from an attack by the first state.*

This seems to be an obvious consequence of the fact that military power is relative, so that, for example, the number of infantry divisions one state needs to defend itself against another depends on how many infantry divisions the other state has, and so an increase in the size of one state's military forces will reduce the chances of success of its potential adversary.

However, no state would care about the size of another state's military forces if it were certain that the other state would never use them in an attack. And therefore if the fact that power is relative is to have any significance we need the following premise as well:

Premise 6 (Security dilemma) *No state can ever be certain that another state will not use force against it.*

Note that this is identical to one of Mearsheimer's premises discussed earlier.

In fact, we now have a set of premises identical to Mearsheimer's except for the addition of one premise, which merely states the obvious fact that only relative, not absolute, military capabilities are important for a state's security. It is obvious that neither conclusion 1 nor conclusion 2 follows from these premises, any more than the various possible interpretations of Mearsheimer's conclusions followed from his. Thus the security dilemma is of no help whatsoever in showing that it is utopian to think that a world of independent states might be peaceful.⁴⁰

Before moving on, let us notice exactly what is missing in this argument. It is certainly possible that, in a world of independent states, no state would actually expect to benefit from war. Thus if anarchy alone is to lead to war, then war must be possible even if no state expects to benefit from it. But if no state actually uses force against another, then no war will occur no matter how apprehensive states might be about its possibility. Thus if anarchy alone is to lead to war, there must be some reason to expect that anarchy alone will lead a state to use force against another state *merely because it fears that another state might use force against it*. There are obviously occasions when states might do such a thing. Indeed, that is what the United States and Britain did against Iraq in the second war in the Persian Gulf. However, the conditions that make that possible

40. As noted earlier, it is far from clear why we should believe that premise 6 is true. The important point to note here, however, is that, even if it is true, structural Realism's main claim about the relation between anarchy and war is still not supported.

are not implied simply by the absence of a world government. Nor, as we will see, would a world government make it impossible for such conditions to exist.

Offense and Defense

In addition to doubting whether the sixth premise is true, one might also doubt whether the fifth premise must be true. Clearly it is true of infantry and tanks. But it does not seem to be true of fortifications: increasing the strength or number of one state's castles does not appear to diminish the effectiveness of another state's castles.⁴¹ Moreover, the condition that came to be known as mutual assured destruction (or MAD) seems to imply that it is not true of nuclear weapons either: once a state with nuclear weapons has a secure second strike capability, it is not obvious that it needs more nuclear weapons or that, if it acquires more, its adversary's ability to protect its independence is diminished.

Examples such as these led Robert Jervis to argue, in one of the most influential articles about international politics ever written, that the truth of the fifth premise depended on two factors: "whether defensive weapons and policies can be distinguished from offensive ones, and whether the defense or the offense has the advantage" (Jervis 1978, 186).⁴² Paradoxically, even though Jervis questioned whether the fifth premise was always true, his article nonetheless helped convince many people that the security dilemma was the key to understanding why war occurred. The reason is that his article seemed to explain something that was otherwise unexplained by structural Realism.

Even people who did not ask whether Waltz's structural Realist argument was valid noticed that anarchy was a constant property of international politics, but the frequency of war varied greatly. The only explanation of that fact that Waltz had to offer was the distinction between bipolar and multipolar systems. But he claimed that

Until 1945 the nation-state system was multipolar, and always with five or more powers. In all of modern history the structure of

41. Be careful not to be misled by this example, however: castles are fairly immobile, but fortifications can be constructed as infantry forces advance, and so they are more mobile than they might appear to be. If they can be used to protect troops as they advance against the enemy, then they add to the effectiveness of infantry.

42. The effect of the relation between offensive and defensive capabilities on the likelihood of war was the subject of a book by George Quester (1977) published shortly before Jervis's famous article. Jervis's article helped stimulate a long debate about this question that is still going on. Representative selections from the literature can be found in Brown et al. 2004. For a recent survey, see Morrow 2002.

international politics has changed only once. We have only two systems to observe. (Waltz 1979, 163)

Yet prior to the “long peace” of the cold war, there was the “long peace” of the nineteenth century. The distinction between bipolarity and multipolarity could not account for this. Perhaps what Jervis called the “offense-defense balance” could.

Thus Jervis’s discussion of the offense-defense balance only reinforced many people’s belief that the most fundamental cause of war is indeed anarchy and the security dilemma, though the security dilemma may be attenuated if military technology favors the defense. There are, however, two problems with this inference. First, as we have already seen, anarchy and the security dilemma alone do not imply that war will occur, even if defensive capabilities are not dominant. Thus anarchy and the security dilemma cannot explain why wars occur even when the conditions described by the security dilemma exist. And therefore, second, there is no reason to believe that changing the offense-defense balance will change the likelihood of war at all.

We have already noted that one of the things missing in Waltz’s discussion of the relation between polarity and war is any explanation of why wars ever occur. The same is true of both Herz’s and Jervis’s discussion of the security dilemma. Without such an explanation it is not possible to say what the effect of the offense-defense balance might be on the likelihood of war. This question will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

Even without such an explanation, however, there are good reasons to doubt Jervis’s claim that changing the offense-defense balance will change the likelihood of war. For one effect of a situation in which the defense has the advantage might be that states that fight each other are unlikely to risk being disarmed. If so, then war would be less risky than if the offense had the advantage and therefore possibly more attractive.

It is unlikely, for example, that the Palestinians thought in recent years that they could defeat the Israeli army. At the same time Israel has been unable to disarm the Palestinians. Surely this does not make the armed conflict between them puzzling but instead helps explain why it occurs—otherwise the Palestinians either would never have dared challenge the Israelis or would long ago have been disarmed by them. Similarly, the eighteenth century was characterized by frequent wars, and the nineteenth by a long peace. Yet it seems odd to suggest that the offense had a greater advantage in the eighteenth century than in the nineteenth—in fact, exactly the opposite seems to be true. It seems unlikely, therefore, that variations in the salience of the security dilemma could actually account for the difference between them.⁴³

43. For a development of this point, see Fearon 1995a.

The Security Dilemma and the Prisoner's Dilemma

In his famous article, Jervis also gave another reason to question whether the security dilemma must have dire consequences. He claimed that it could be represented by the famous 2×2 game commonly called the Prisoner's Dilemma, in which "there is no solution that is in the best interests of all the participants." This would seem to justify pessimism about the ability of independent states to avoid conflict. However, if the Prisoner's Dilemma game is expected to be repeated indefinitely, he said, then cooperation becomes possible, though still not certain. This would imply that violent conflict among states might be avoidable (Jervis 1978, 171).

By offering the Prisoner's Dilemma game as a model for the security dilemma, Jervis seemed to provide additional support for the view that the security dilemma was the key to understanding the recurrence of war among independent states. At the same time, by showing that the security dilemma did not make war inevitable, this model provided yet another way of showing how anarchy, which was constant, could explain the occurrence of war, which was not.

Unfortunately, the only connection between the security dilemma and the Prisoner's Dilemma is that they both have the word *dilemma* in their names. And therefore, like his discussion of the offense-defense balance, the additional plausibility that Jervis's use of the Prisoner's Dilemma gave to the idea that anarchy made peace among independent states unlikely was quite unwarranted.

The security dilemma, remember, is represented by premises 5 and 6. The Prisoner's Dilemma is represented in figure 1.⁴⁴ The "dilemma" in the Prisoner's Dilemma is the result of two facts, both obvious from figure 1: (1) each player would want to choose D, whatever he expects the other to do, but (2) if they do that, they will end up with an outcome worse for both than if they had both chosen C.

	C	D
C	(3, 3)	(1, 4)
D	(4, 1)	(2, 2)

Fig. 1. The Prisoner's Dilemma

In thinking about what relation there could possibly be between these two so-called dilemmas, note first that part of the definition of the security

44. The first number in each cell is the payoff to the row player, and the second is the payoff to the column player. They merely represent the preferences of the players, with bigger numbers being preferred to smaller ones. The labeling of the choices is conventional and is the result of the fact that they are customarily thought of as "Cooperate" or "Defect." However, the names have no significance whatever.

dilemma is that states are uncertain about what each other's preferences actually are. However, in the Prisoner's Dilemma it is assumed that the players' preferences are commonly known and there is no uncertainty about them. Note second that in the Prisoner's Dilemma the essence of the problem is not the players' preferences but the constraints under which they must choose: they must *independently* choose only once between two alternatives. The security dilemma, however, does not specify what choices states must make or how they will go about making them—that is why one cannot infer from it anything about what choices they can be expected to make. It merely says that, when they choose what military capabilities to have, an increase or decrease in one state's military capabilities will change the relative size of the other's.

Suppose, for example, that states are choosing between arming and not arming. Then, one might think, premise 5 would imply that they would have the preferences represented in figure 1. But if states can observe each other's arms levels and respond to them, their choices would not be restricted to simply arming or not but would include as well the possibility of arming if the other does but not arming if it does not. That would not be a Prisoner's Dilemma, even if states had the preferences represented in figure 1. Moreover, if they did both arm they would be worse off than if they had not, but that does not imply that they would fight each other.⁴⁵

Of course, if the Prisoner's Dilemma is expected to be repeated, then the choice that a state makes in one round can be based on the choice that the other state made in the previous round. But each must still pay the price of the other's defection if that is what it chose. It is not clear why this must be so or even what it would mean in any concrete case. Moreover, if the choice involves war (as it must, if the security dilemma is to explain why wars occur), then it is not clear why states would expect that exactly the same game would be played again after a war occurred. In fact, one might think that if states could expect that they would always be around to play the next stage of a repeated Prisoner's Dilemma game, they would enjoy a far greater degree of security than Herz thought they could possibly have.

Finally, let us note that Jervis claimed not only that the security dilemma could be represented by a repeated Prisoner's Dilemma but also that a repeated Prisoner's Dilemma could be represented by the 2×2 game often called the Stag Hunt. The Stag Hunt is portrayed in figure 2. Note

45. Jervis says, "A relatively low cost of CD has the effect of transforming the game from one in which both players make their choices simultaneously to one in which an actor can make his choice after the other has moved" (1978, 172). This is obviously not true. But there is no reason to assume that states must make their choices simultaneously in the first place.

that it is different from the Prisoner's Dilemma only in that the players' preferences between joint cooperation and defecting when the other cooperates are reversed. Now, if one player expects the other to choose C, he will want to choose C as well, whereas each will want to choose D only if he expects the other to choose D. In the lingo of game theory, this means that, instead of each having a dominant choice of D, there are two pure strategy Nash equilibria, CC and DD, and determining which will occur depends on what each expects the other to do.⁴⁶

	C	D
C	(4, 4)	(1, 3)
D	(3, 1)	(2, 2)

Fig. 2. The Stag Hunt

However, while in this game, as in the repeated Prisoner's Dilemma, both joint cooperation and joint defection are equilibria, the Stag Hunt is not the repeated Prisoner's Dilemma but is instead just another one-shot 2×2 game like the one-shot Prisoner's Dilemma. Furthermore, in the Stag Hunt the preferences of the players are common knowledge, and therefore the uncertainty confronted by the players of this game, if there is any, is the result of the existence of more than one equilibrium in the game and not uncertainty about what the other state's preferences might be. But the security dilemma is defined by uncertainty about what other states' preferences might be.

The name "Prisoner's Dilemma" is based on the fact that the game was originally illustrated by a story about two prisoners who were induced to confess to a crime by a clever district attorney who, by separating them, forced them to choose independently between confessing or not confessing. The name "Stag Hunt" is based on the fact that the game with that name seems to represent a situation described by Rousseau in his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, which Waltz had used in his book *Man, the State and War* to illustrate the effect of anarchy (Waltz 1959, 167–71).

However, Rousseau used the story not to make a point about international politics but to illustrate what he thought was the lack of foresight of primitive men, who "were so far from troubling themselves about the distant future, that they hardly thought of the morrow."

46. A Nash equilibrium is just a set of plans for making choices (called a "strategy"), one for each individual, such that if everyone expects everyone else to choose the appropriate strategy in this set, no one would have any incentive to choose some other strategy. There is also a mixed strategy equilibrium in this game, but I will ignore it.

If a deer was to be taken, every one saw that, in order to succeed, he must abide faithfully by his post: but if a hare happened to come within the reach of any one of them, it is not to be doubted that he pursued it without scruple, and, having seized his prey, cared very little, if by so doing he caused his companions to miss theirs. (Rousseau 1913, 194)

Rousseau thought that the ugly nature of international politics was the indirect result of the fact that human beings had learned only too well to be more industrious, farsighted, and cooperative than that. And Waltz used the story merely to illustrate the proposition that what is rational for an individual is not always rational for a group (1959, 168–71).⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Waltz's use of Rousseau's story and Jervis's subsequent use of the 2×2 game with the same name have led many people to believe that the Stag Hunt game contains an important insight about the nature of international politics. To add to the confusion, in his *Theory of International Politics*, which was published one year later, Waltz claimed that in international politics "states face a 'prisoner's dilemma'" and cited Jervis's article in support of that claim (Waltz 1979, 109).

Jervis's use of these famous games reflected a more general tendency at the time to think that the family of 2×2 games, each of which differs from the others only by having a different configuration of preferences, were ready-made models of any social situation of interest.⁴⁸ However, as we have seen, these games contain hidden assumptions that are very strong. Many people thought their use could be justified by the fact that models are not supposed to be descriptively accurate, which is true. However, the assumptions represented by 2×2 games are frequently inconsistent with other assumptions made by people who use them to justify their conclusions, and therefore the arguments they support are self-contradictory.

What 2×2 games can do is serve as *examples* of the counterintuitive effects of the interdependence of choices that can also occur in more complex social situations. The Prisoner's Dilemma illustrates the fact that mutually beneficial choices may not be made if individuals have an incentive to take advantage of other people's decisions to cooperate. The Stag Hunt illustrates the fact that even if this problem does not exist cooperation may not occur if people are not sufficiently confident that others intend to cooperate as well. These are certainly problems that arise in international politics, but they are not restricted to international politics.

47. For a recent development of the idea that the Stag Hunt game, and not the Prisoner's Dilemma, best represents the fundamental problem of human social organization, see Skyrms 2004.

48. For an especially influential example, see Snyder and Diesing 1977.

And it is not obvious what they have to do with the security dilemma defined by Herz.

These early attempts to use game theory as a way of thinking about the security dilemma were hampered by the fact that, at the time, game theory provided no way of thinking about one of the defining features of the security dilemma, the uncertainty of states about other states' preferences. Moreover, equilibrium outcomes in matrix representations of games implied implausible predictions when one looked at the actual sequence of choices represented by a game tree. Subsequent developments in game theory that addressed both these issues have led to the widespread use of game models in extensive form with incomplete information. Ironically, unlike the earlier misleading use of 2×2 games, they are the cause of complaints that trivial models have driven out significant research in political science. But they have only focused attention on all the complexities that models like the Prisoner's Dilemma and the Stag Hunt concealed.⁴⁹

Hierarchy and Peace

If anarchy is the root cause of war, one would expect that government (or "hierarchy," as Waltz called it) should lead to peace. But in his famous book *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz explicitly and emphatically denied that this was true:

The threat of violence and the recurrent use of force are said to distinguish international from national affairs. But in the history of the world surely most rulers have had to bear in mind that their subjects might use force to resist or overthrow them. If the absence of government is associated with the threat of violence, so also is its presence. The most destructive wars of the hundred years following the defeat of Napoleon took place not among states but *within* them. . . . If the possible and the actual use of force mark both national and international orders, then no durable distinction between the two realms can be drawn in terms of the use or the nonuse of force. No human order is proof against violence. (1979, 102–3)

This passage seems to contradict the main thesis of *Man, the State and War*. Nonetheless, Waltz later wrote:

49. For a discussion of what can be learned by analyzing the implications of assuming that participants in a 2×2 game are uncertain whether the other person's preferences conform to the preferences in the Prisoner's Dilemma or to those in the Stag Hunt, see Kydd 2005.

Although neorealist theory does not explain why particular wars are fought, it does explain war's dismal recurrence through the millennia. . . . The origins of hot wars lie in cold wars, and the origins of cold wars are found in the anarchic ordering of the international arena.

The recurrence of war is explained by the structure of the international system. (1988, 620)

But what, then, explains the recurrence of civil wars?

These apparent contradictions are in part yet another illustration of the fact that structural Realism has virtually nothing to say about why war ever occurs anywhere. It is therefore not surprising that structural Realists actually have nothing to say about the connection between either anarchy or hierarchy and the occurrence of war. But these passages also illustrate another important fact about structural Realism: in spite of the fact that its main theme is the difference between anarchic and hierarchical systems, it also has little to say about what that difference is.

Here is what Waltz had to say about it:

The difference between national and international politics lies not in the use of force but in the different modes of organization for doing something about it. . . . A government has no monopoly on the use of force as is all too evident. An effective government, however, has a monopoly on the *legitimate* use of force, and legitimate here means that public agents are organized to prevent and to counter the private use of force. Citizens need not prepare to defend themselves. Public agencies do that. A national system is not one of self-help. The international system is. (1979, 103–4)

But the world is full of governments that are not “effective” in this sense, and yet neither Waltz nor any of his followers have ever suggested that structural Realism might have something to say about them. Moreover, the origins of the U.S. Civil War are not to be found in the fact that in the nineteenth century U.S. citizens could not look to government to protect them against the private use of force.

The end of the cold war has been followed by a period like the one in the nineteenth century described by Waltz, in which the most destructive wars have taken place “not among states but within them.” As one might expect from these passages in which Waltz attempted to state the difference between anarchy and hierarchy, structural Realism has been little help in understanding them.

For example, one Realist, Barry Posen, has written that they can be understood as the result of the collapse of governments: when the sover-

eign disappears ethnic groups are faced with the security dilemma that results from anarchy (1993). John Mearsheimer, however, argued that only partition could resolve the conflict in Kosovo or provide a long-term resolution of the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia (1998). But even if the security dilemma could explain why war occurs (which, as we have seen, it cannot), it would seem strange to say that in 1860 the U.S. government first collapsed and then the North fought the South because of the resulting security dilemma. And the consequence of partition is to substitute anarchy for a common government. If anarchy has the consequences Mearsheimer claimed for it, how could it lead to peace among warring ethnic groups?⁵⁰

Compare these conflicts with the recent conflicts between India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan are independent states, each with nuclear weapons, and the conflicts between them might be taken to illustrate the dire effects of anarchy and the security dilemma. However, their existence is the consequence of the partition of British India into two states, one predominantly Hindu and the other predominantly Muslim, after it became independent. Would conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent be greater or less if India had not been partitioned? Since the differential effect of anarchy and hierarchy on violent conflict is one of the main themes of structural Realism, one might expect that it would have an answer to that question. But in fact it does not.

In this respect structural Realists are not unique. Virtually everyone takes governments for granted, and this fact is reflected in the division of intellectual labor among American political scientists between students of international politics and students of comparative or domestic politics: international politics is the study of relations among governments, and everything else is the study of politics structured by governments within borders that define their jurisdictions. But governments and borders come and go, the incidence of organized violence within the jurisdictions of governments varies enormously across time and space, and both well-defined borders and governments that resemble the ones in contemporary Europe or the United States are rare and a very recent development. The way political scientists organize their work has created a gap in our knowledge about the central problem of our time: the relation between political institutions and organized violence. Structural Realism is like a rug thrown over this gap that only makes it harder to see it.

This gap in our knowledge not only inhibits our understanding of what is now called “state failure.” It also inhibits our understanding of international institutions. In discussing the idea of world government, Inis

50. On this question, see also the section of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* called “The Virtues of Anarchy” (1979, 111–14).

Claude said:

In the final analysis, it appears that the theory of world government does not *answer* the question of how the world can be saved from catastrophic international conflict. Rather, it helps us to *restate* the question: How can the world achieve the degree of assurance that inter-group conflicts will be resolved or contained by political rather than violent means that has been achieved in the most effectively governed states? (1962, 271)

Because of the division of intellectual labor between students of domestic and international politics, we still do not have a good answer to Claude's question. And therefore we do not know what contribution international institutions short of a world government might make to the resolution of interstate conflicts. Structural Realism does not answer this question, it begs it—as do the advocates of various interstate institutions like the International Criminal Court, whose main appeal is that they resemble some of the features of modern states.

Worse than that, we cannot even specify clearly what the difference between government and anarchy is. Is the European Union a government, and if not, what would suffice to turn it into one? Is there a government in Yemen? Was there a government in Afghanistan under the Taliban? Does an Afghan warlord preside over a government? Does the rebel group in Colombia known as the FARC, which controls a large segment of the territory nominally allocated to the government in Bogotá, constitute a government in the territory that it controls? Was there a government of the United States prior to the U.S. Civil War? How long has there been a government of France, and when did it first appear? The question that structural Realism begs is not even well defined.⁵¹

Realism's Competitors

Structural Realism makes three main claims: (1) the anarchic structure of international politics leads to the recurrence of war, (2) war is less frequent in anarchic systems with a bipolar structure than in systems with a multipolar structure, and (3) in anarchic systems with a multipolar structure, alliances lead to balances of power rather than to a preponderance of

51. For an elaboration of this point, see Milner 1991. See also Lake 2003. A good way to begin thinking about this question is to immerse oneself in Samuel Finer's great posthumous work, *The History of Government* (1997). For a survey of the anthropological literature on the development of the state, see Johnson and Earle 1987. An older discussion by an anthropologist that I have found very helpful is Fried 1967.

power. No valid argument has ever been presented in support of any of those claims, which is what makes the disagreement between defensive Realists and offensive Realists possible. Thus the only good reason for continued attention to the works that defined structural Realism is that they provide illustrations of how easy it is to make mistakes in thinking about international politics.

However, in a volume recently published under the auspices of the American Political Science Association describing the current “state of the discipline,” Stephen Walt claims that “[t]he bottom line is that realist theory is alive and well. It remains relevant, rigorous, and theoretically fecund” (2002, 222). In support of his evaluation, Walt says that the “utility of a research tradition may be judged by two basic criteria,” which he calls “explanatory power” and “internal fertility.” Following Van Evera (1997), he says that “explanatory power can be judged by the percentage of variance explained by the independent variable(s), the range of topics covered by the theory, and the prevalence of the phenomena being explained” (Walt 2002, 201). And therefore, he claims that

debates within the realist family and between supporters of realist theory and those of various rivals should not be resolved by asking who can muster the flashiest abstract argument; rather we should ask which explanation best fits the facts. Determining which theory (or approach) is most useful is an empirical question, and rendering such judgments usually requires careful historical evaluation of the specific causal mechanisms in each theory. (Walt 2002, 224)

These statements illustrate the fact that it never occurs to many political scientists that logical validity is an important criterion in evaluating arguments. Empirical evidence cannot confirm or disconfirm an explanation if the evidence is not actually implied by the explanation. For that, the argument need not be “flashy,” but it must be valid.⁵²

As these quotations from Walt illustrate, one reason for the low value political scientists place on logical validity is the widespread confusion among them between explanations and regression equations. Another is the tendency to equate a theory with any plausible conjecture. Various buzzwords from the philosophy of science are often invoked as ways of

52. For Van Evera’s own use of the criteria for evaluating theories listed by Walt, see Van Evera 1999. In an earlier article attacking the use of formal models, Walt (1999) claimed that it was consistency that we should aim for in constructing explanations. But the problem with structural Realism is not that it is inconsistent but that the arguments offered in support of its main claims are not valid. For another influential example of this confusion, see King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 105–7.

evaluating those conjectures. But ultimately many political scientists believe that it is the job of empirical research to resolve the disagreements among the authors of these conjectures.⁵³

This can never happen, because no facts can actually be derived from any of the competing “theories.” Thus competing conjectures accumulate. Similar conjectures are grouped into schools of thought and named, and scholars who find them plausible identify themselves with them (as Walt identified himself as a member of the “realist family”). Students in political science courses are then expected to know about these competing families, and if the question of how to evaluate them arises, it is only by asking students to think about how they might be tested empirically. And therefore great academic rewards go to those who succeed in devising a new “paradigm” or “approach,” which can then provide the basis for further inconclusive empirical research. Thus, in spite of all the talk about science and scientific method among political scientists, the study of international politics does not satisfy the definition of a science given at the beginning of this chapter.

This is not only sad but ironic, since Waltz’s book *Theory of International Politics* was written to counter just such attributes of the field. “Among the depressing features of international-political studies,” he wrote,

is the small gain in explanatory power that has come from the large amount of work done in recent decades. Nothing seems to accumulate, not even criticism. Instead, the same sorts of summary and superficial criticisms are made over and over again, and the same sorts of errors are repeated. (Waltz 1979, 18)

The first chapter of that book is devoted to emphasizing the distinction between a correlation and an explanation, and in it Waltz emphasized that an explanation required a creative guess as to what propositions might imply the facts to be explained. Unfortunately, Waltz’s arguments did not satisfy his own criteria, but most people accepted his claim that they did. As a result, many criticisms of Waltz’s ideas are criticisms of what some people take to be his assumptions rather than the validity of his arguments.

One reason many people accepted Waltz’s arguments so uncritically is probably that they already believed his main conclusions to be true. The

53. One favorite criterion for evaluating theories is “parsimony.” Note that it is hard to beat a bald general assertion for parsimony. See the recent collection of essays in Elman and Elman 2003, which try to appraise the status of international relations theory by the standards laid down by Imre Lakatos but in which no one asks the simple but obvious question whether the arguments being evaluated are valid. See also James 2002.

idea that states form coalitions to balance the power of other states is one of the oldest ideas in writings about international politics. During the cold war the United States and the USSR were obviously much more powerful than other states, and it seemed very plausible that that fact explained both the conflict between them and their ability to avoid war with each other. And the proposition that violent conflicts were likely without a government to prevent them also seemed obviously true to many people.

Waltz's emphasis on the anarchic nature of the international system seemed especially compelling. It implicitly invoked not only the support of the entire Western tradition of the social contract and its concept of the state of nature but also the theory of the state that had been developed by economists, in which the function of the state was to supply public goods and compensate for market imperfections. And, as the article by Jervis discussed previously illustrated, the Prisoner's Dilemma game had come to be accepted by many people as a persuasive illustration of why government was necessary if people's common interests were to be served and therefore a validation of pessimistic expectations about the consequences of anarchy or the state of nature (Jervis 1978).⁵⁴

Neoliberal Institutionalism

The works of two economists in particular were especially influential in reinforcing the view that the anarchic nature of international politics was the key to understanding what happened in it: Albert Hirschman and Charles Kindleberger. In a book about the prospects for constructing a peaceful international order after World War II, Hirschman pointed out that sovereign states always had the option of interrupting trade with other states, in which case the gains from trade became the losses from the interruption of trade. If those losses were not distributed symmetrically, he claimed, they could be the basis for demanding political concessions, and therefore international trade necessarily had an impact on the ability of sovereign states to exercise influence over each other (Hirschman 1945). And in a book about the Great Depression, Charles Kindleberger argued that, given the lack of an international monetary authority, international monetary stability required a dominant state willing to act as a substitute. Britain, he claimed, had served that function in the nineteenth century; in

54. It is ironic that Ruggie has criticized the use of rational choice models to study international politics because they resemble the models found in economics, which he claims (oddly) require the existence of markets; and yet, he claims, they cannot explain where markets come from (1998, 23). But economists have traditionally thought that *governments* were required to make markets work, which makes structural Realism's claim that bad things should be expected in a condition of anarchy seem plausible—a claim that Ruggie wants to dispute.

the twentieth century the only substitute available was the United States, but in the 1930s it was unwilling to assume that role (Kindleberger 1973).

Kindleberger's thesis was one of the bases of what is known as "hegemonic stability theory," which came to be accepted as part of Realism.⁵⁵ But the only connection between hegemonic stability theory and structural Realism was that they both purported to be consequences of the anarchic nature of international politics (Keohane 1984, 7–10).

As the economic preponderance of the United States declined, hegemonic stability theory seemed to imply that people should be pessimistic about the future of the international economy. But in an influential book called *After Hegemony*, Robert Keohane (1984) argued that such a pessimistic conclusion did not follow from anarchy alone. Rather, he claimed, independent states could cooperate in an anarchic environment, and international institutions could facilitate such cooperation. The repeated Prisoner's Dilemma was one of the foundations of his argument (65–84). This thesis came to be known as "neoliberal institutionalism," and another "ism" was added to the field's inventory of doctrines.

Keohane claimed to have shown that

even on the restrictive assumptions of Realism and game theory, gloomy conclusions about the inevitability of discord and the impossibility of cooperation do not logically follow. Egoistic governments can rationally seek to form international regimes on the basis of shared interests. (107)

The first statement is certainly correct—in fact, none of the main claims made by structural Realists follows from their assumptions. It is therefore unclear why, in the conclusion to his book, Keohane praised the "taut logical structure" of Realism and said that it "should not be discarded, since its insights are fundamental to an understanding of world politics," but that "it does need to be reformulated" (245).

In fact, because of structural Realism's lack of a "taut logical structure," it is not even clear that Keohane's conclusions are inconsistent with what Waltz said about the consequences of anarchy. Keohane claimed that

If there were an infinitely large number of equally small actors in world politics . . . [i]nternational conditions would more closely approximate the Hobbesian model in which life is "nasty, brutish, and short." But as we have seen, the fact that the number of key actors in the international political economy of the advanced

55. See also Gilpin 1975, 1981.

industrial countries is typically small gives each state incentives to make and keep commitments so that others may be persuaded to do so. (258)

It is hard to see how this contradicts Waltz's discussion of the benefits of the fact that economic interdependence among states is managed by a small number of great powers.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, members of the Realist family resisted Keohane's attempt to hoist them by their own petard, the Prisoner's Dilemma. Prominent among them was Joseph Grieco, who seems to have coined the term *neoliberal institutionalism* (1993, 335–36). Grieco (1988) claimed that neoliberal institutionalists had overlooked the fact that states in an anarchic environment had to be concerned not just about achieving gains from economic cooperation but also about protecting themselves from the possibility of elimination through war. But, as we have already noted, the possibility that states might be eliminated through war contradicts the assumptions underlying the repeated Prisoner's Dilemma game.⁵⁷ And without the repeated Prisoner's Dilemma, neither structural Realists nor neoliberal institutionalists have the basis for making any claims whatever about the consequences of anarchy for the behavior of states.⁵⁸

However, Grieco avoided this modest conclusion and claimed instead that Keohane was wrong about states' *preferences*. Neorealists, he claimed, assumed that states were concerned not about *absolute* gains, as in the standard Prisoner's Dilemma game, but about *relative* gains. But structural Realists had not objected to Jervis's use of the standard Prisoner's Dilemma as a model of the security dilemma. Rather, as we have seen, Waltz was happy to accept it as confirmation of his main thesis. Moreover, Grieco did no more to show how a concern for relative gains could be inferred from premises describing anarchy than Waltz or Mearsheimer have done to support their inferences from them. The resulting "relative gains" controversy helped make the disagreement between neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists a staple of international relations courses all over the country.⁵⁹ Like Walt, Grieco claimed that any resulting disagreements could be resolved by empirical tests.

Neoliberal institutionalism is not based on realist theory; in fact,

56. See especially Waltz 1979, 132.

57. This was pointed out by Robert Powell (1991) in response to Grieco's article.

58. Another strand of Liberal thinking about war and the state rests on the empirical observation that democratic states do not fight each other and takes its theoretical inspiration from Immanuel Kant's response to the writings of Hobbes and Rousseau (Doyle 1983). I will discuss Kant's ideas, and what contemporary writers have made of them, in the next chapter.

59. The main contributions to this controversy are reproduced in Baldwin 1993. For an incisive review and critique of the arguments advanced by the participants in this controversy, see Powell 1994.

realism specifies a wider range of systemic-level constraints on cooperation than does neoliberalism. Thus the next scholarly task is to conduct empirical tests of the two approaches. (Grieco 1988, in Baldwin 1993, 131)

But an empirical test of an “approach” is not possible.⁶⁰

Constructivism

Like neoliberal institutionalism, Constructivism takes as its point of departure the fact that structural Realism’s conclusions cannot be derived from premises that describe anarchy. However, it also objects to the way in which neoliberal institutionalists have tried to think about what the consequences of anarchy might be, as exemplified by the repeated Prisoner’s Dilemma game. In the end, however, it is not really clear what this objection is.

Like structural Realism, Constructivism is more nearly a family of like-minded people than a system of logically related propositions. Two of the most prominent members of this family are John Ruggie and Alexander Wendt. I will focus primarily on Wendt.

“Constructivism,” Wendt says, “is not a theory of international politics” (1999, 7). What, then, is it? Like much else about Constructivism, the answer to that question is not entirely clear.⁶¹ Unlike neoliberal institutionalism, Constructivism’s critique of structural Realism invokes ideas from philosophy and sociology, which are used to support a version of what Dennis Wrong (1961) called “the oversocialized conception of man in modern sociology.”⁶² This conception of man and society is then applied to states and international systems and provides the basis for Wendt’s claim that “anarchy is what states make of it,” that is, that there are no inherent properties of anarchic systems independent of the cultures that define both them and the states they contain—a much stronger claim than Keohane made (Wendt 1992).

Some of what Wendt borrows from philosophy is just the account of inference to the best explanation that I laid out at the very beginning of

60. Note that there is a special problem in looking for evidence of a concern for “relative gains”: whenever states bargain over the terms of a mutually beneficial agreement, no distinction can be made between a concern for absolute gains and a concern for relative gains, since making one state better off must make the other worse off.

61. The term *social constructivism* means somewhat different things in different contexts. My focus here is on what *Constructivism* generally refers to in the literature on international politics. To make this clear I will capitalize the word.

62. Many Constructivist complaints about structural Realism have their origins in Talcott Parsons’s discussion of Hobbes (1937, 43–86). Richard Ashley (1986) was apparently the first to try to interpret structural Realism in this light.

this chapter, which, as I pointed out, is perfectly consistent with Waltz's own account of inductive inference in the first chapter of *Theory of International Politics* (Wendt 1987, 350–55; 1999, 47–91). However, as I also pointed out, we do not need to invoke the authority of philosophers of science to reason in this way, since, as Wendt himself says, “scientists, not philosophers, are the final arbiters of what is ‘scientific’” (1987, 351). Moreover, like Waltz, Wendt overlooks one of the most important implications of this description of inductive inference: if facts are to support explanations, the facts must be implied by the explanation.

The reason Wendt thinks it is necessary to invoke the philosophy of science is that he wants to use this literature to support the proposition that social structures really exist, even though they are not directly observable (Wendt 1987, 351–55). And the reason he thinks this is important is that he wants us to believe that structural Realism rests on the assumption of “methodological individualism,” that is, that only individual people really exist, and therefore statements about social behavior must be reducible to statements about the behavior of individual people. This is a very odd thing to say, since structural Realism is about the behavior of *states*, not individuals, a fact that should make a methodological individualist profoundly suspicious of it.

The relation between individuals and social structures is the subject of what some sociologists call the “agent-structure” problem. To understand it we need only think about the comparison between humans and ants mentioned earlier. Ant social organization is the product of a complex genetic program. Human social organization is invented by humans, but the social organizations humans invent also shape the people who are part of them in complex ways. Every baby is born into a family, and the adult is the product of both the baby's genetic endowment and the family, a fact that gives rise to the nature-nurture controversy among psychologists. Family organization, however, is not simply the product of a genetic program and therefore can be changed. Families, of course, are part of larger cultures and so forth.⁶³

Clearly none of this implies that when individuals encounter each

63. Constructivists like to say that social structures determine the “identities” of individuals. The word *identity* is undefined, and it is not at all clear what it means, especially when applied to states (Fearon 1999). Constructivists writing about international politics, for example, like to say that the cold war ended because the Soviet Union changed its identity. The Soviet Union *lost* its identity when it collapsed, but it is not clear what it means to say that it changed its identity, unless it means simply that people with different ideas became influential or that influential political actors changed their understanding of how the world works. But in that case one might say that every book, including this one, is an attempt to change the identity of its readers. For an extended example of this sort of discussion, see Hopf 2002. Other examples of Constructivist writings about this and other matters can be found in Katzenstein 1996.

other outside of their families or other organizations that they belong to (as, e.g., when they trade with each other), or when families and other groups engage in organized conflict with each other, their interactions do not conform to the assumptions of either the one-shot or repeated Prisoner's Dilemma games (Seabright 2004). Thus not only should all this come as no surprise to any reader, but it is irrelevant to the issues debated by structural Realists and neoliberal institutionalists.

Wendt, however, tries to leave the reader with a different impression. For example, he says:

It is possible for a Hobbesian anarchy to have no culture at all. Here, all knowledge is private rather than shared. . . . The absence of shared culture has an interesting, perhaps counter-intuitive implication: the resulting warfare is not really "war" at all. Killing there may be aplenty, but it is akin to the slaughtering of animals, not war. War is a form of collective intentionality, and as such is only war if both sides *think* it is war. Similarly, a balance of power in this context is not really a "balance of power." Mechanical equilibrium there may be, but actors are not aware of it as such. (Wendt 1999, 266–67)

But this is very misleading. War between organized groups is a "form of collective intentionality" *on the part of each of the warring groups*, but not between them—war is not like a Saturday afternoon game of touch football that people agree to play for their mutual enjoyment. And, unless one simply defines common knowledge as equivalent to a shared culture, whatever level of common knowledge may be required for two groups to form and fight each other, a shared culture, as that word is ordinarily used, is plainly not necessary, either within the two fighting groups or between them.⁶⁴

Wendt says that the subject of his book *Social Theory of International Politics* "was the ontology of international life" (1999, 370). *Ontology* is not a word that any student of international politics should ever have an occasion to use, and therefore it is incumbent on people who use it when talking about international politics to define carefully what they mean by it. Both Ruggie and Wendt use the word freely but never define it. The result can only be to intimidate and confuse the reader.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, ontology is "the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being." It is far from clear how the study of international politics might entangle one in contro-

64. The ability of human beings to infer each other's intentions is not supplied by culture, but it is what makes culture possible (Baron-Cohen 1995; Tomasello 1999).

versies about the nature of being. Wendt says that the question of whether social structures really exist is a question about the “ontological status of unobservables” and therefore similar to the question of whether elementary particles really exist (1987, 351). But to ask whether elementary particles exist is not to ask a question about the nature of being but to ask what evidence there is for their existence, and therefore the question should be addressed to physicists and not philosophers. Similarly, the existence or nonexistence of social structures or shared cultures among human beings who interact with each other is not an ontological question but an empirical one, and the knowledge that they are human beings tells one nothing about the answer to it.⁶⁵

Whatever ontology is, Constructivism’s fundamental objection to structural Realism is that its ontology is (1) individualist and (2) materialist (Wendt 1999, 1–44, 370–78; Ruggie 1998, 1–39). I have just pointed out how strange it is to call structural Realism “individualist.” What could it mean to say that it is “materialist”?

A clue to the answer can be found by looking up the word *materialism* in the dictionary:

materialism n. 1. Philosophy. The theory that physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena. 2. The theory or doctrine that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life. 3. A great or excessive regard for worldly concerns. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

Social Constructivists complain that structural Realism rests on the assumption that material things like military capabilities, rather than ideas, culture, and social norms, are the only things that influence the behavior of states. This is, perhaps, materialism in the second and third senses of the definition, but it is not clear what it could have to do with something that might plausibly be called ontology. Wendt claims that, since it is materialist, structural Realism emphasizes causality rather than meaning in trying to explain international politics. This might plausibly have something to do with ontology, but it is materialism in the first sense of the definition. Thus Wendt has apparently confused the first meaning of materialism with the second and the third ones. That is why he claims that “[m]aterialists privilege causal relationships, effects, and questions”

65. In the field of artificial intelligence, the word *ontology* refers to a conceptual scheme or system of categories. (A number of ontology editors are available for downloading on the World Wide Web.) To find out more about ontology, see the Buffalo Ontology Web site, at <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/>.

(Wendt 1999, 25) and also claims that theories of bureaucratic politics reflect a materialist orientation (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996, 33).⁶⁶

Wendt's two complaints about structural Realism can be summarized together by comparing the contrast between ant and human social organization discussed previously, which is summarized in figure 3, with Wendt's typology of social theories (1999, 29–33). The ant column in figure 3 exemplifies causal explanations and the human column represents explanations based on meaning and intentionality. An explanation of social behavior that would be genuinely both individualist and materialist (or "physicalist" as Ruggie calls it) would fall into the lower left quadrant. The corresponding explanation of human behavior would, as Weber said, be based on the choices of "participating individual men" and therefore fall into the lower right quadrant. Structural Realism would have to be placed in the upper right quadrant, since it is based on choices made by organizations of human beings acting as units. However, in a table in Wendt's book whose dimensions apparently correspond to the ones in figure 3, Neorealism (or structural Realism) is placed in the lower left quadrant (Wendt 1999, 32). It is not clear why.

	ant	human
holistic	colonies	state choices
individualist	genetic programs	individual choices

Fig. 3. Ant vs. human social organization

It is clear, however, why Wendt thinks this strange way of characterizing structural Realism is important. He claims that "[n]eorealism's problematic conclusions about international politics" stem not from faulty reasoning but "from its underlying materialist and individualist ontology." This, he claims, implies that "by viewing the system in idealist and holist terms we could arrive at a better understanding" (Wendt 1999, 370).

In other words, if we see (1) that Waltz confused "social kinds" with "natural kinds" (to use Wendt's terminology), we will conclude (2) that the

66. The confusion can be clearly seen throughout Wendt 1999, chap. 3. Actually, it is not clear why structural Realism should be called "materialist" even by the second and third definitions of the term. Cultural or religious differences can lead to military conflicts, and it is not clear what is "materialist" about being concerned about the probability of prevailing in such conflicts. The distinction between "material" and "cultural" explanations is, of course, a staple in debates among sociologists and anthropologists about both Marxism and sociology (Johnson and Earle 1987, 8–11). But it is not clear what any of that has to do with structural Realism. However, the anthropologist Marvin Harris's discussion of what he called "cultural materialism" is directly relevant to many of the issues to be discussed in the following chapters. See, for example, Harris 1977.

nature of international politics is determined by the culture that states share rather than by its anarchy (Wendt 1999, 372). The first statement is hard to square with the fact that Waltz's inspiration was Rousseau, and Wendt considers Rousseau to be a precursor of Constructivism.⁶⁷ But the second would not follow even if it were true.

On this basis, Wendt identifies three types of international culture that might be possible: a Hobbesian culture, a Lockean culture, and a Kantian culture, the main features of each of which are taken from Hobbes, Locke, and Kant respectively (Wendt 1999, 246–312). Using this typology of cultures, he says, for example, that states would form balances of power, as Waltz claimed, only in a Lockean culture in which no state feared elimination by any other state, and therefore a “Lockean culture . . . is a condition of possibility for the truth of Neorealism” (Wendt 1999, 285). But this is simply asserted, and Wendt makes not the slightest attempt to show that it is true or how Waltz was mistaken in thinking otherwise.⁶⁸ Thus Constructivism merely adds yet another collection of invalid arguments with a distinctive name to the field of international politics. Like Liberalism (or neoliberal institutionalism), it is supported indirectly by the inadequacies of structural Realism but fails to identify correctly exactly what those inadequacies are.

In a recent evaluation of Constructivism, Jack Snyder has written that

Current debates about anarchy and culture have been carried out largely at the level of abstract philosophy and visceral morality. Ultimately, however, the impact of culture on war in anarchy is an empirical question. (2002, 9–10)

He then claims that empirical research by anthropologists investigating whether one could “explain behavior in anarchy solely in terms of either cultural or material causes” is relevant to answering this question (12).⁶⁹

In saying this, Snyder illustrates a common view among political scientists that valid inference is just the concern of “abstract philosophy”; any published conjecture is a theory that has to be evaluated empirically; and any argument, valid or invalid, can be represented as a relationship

67. See Wendt 1999, 171. Note that this is the only reference to Rousseau in the index to Wendt's book.

68. If culture alone is sufficient to prevent organized violence at the global level, then one might think that governments are not actually necessary to prevent domestic violence, as structural Realists assume, and wonder why Constructivists are not anarchists. But Wendt does not discuss the problem of domestic order and, indeed, has little to say about organized violence at all.

69. Note that Snyder leaves unclear what the distinction between anarchy and hierarchy refers to in a world of stateless societies or what the connection is between “material explanations” and structural Realists' claims about the effects of anarchy.

between one or more independent variables and a dependent variable. That view will keep Constructivism, along with all the other warring “isms,” in business for a long time to come.

Generic Realism

The indifference of most political scientists to the validity of arguments, and the resulting incentive to develop competing brands of “theory,” leaves everyone with the impression that there is more to all the theories than is really there. Thus, although the brands are ostensibly in conflict with each other, they all actually give indirect support to each other. A recognition that they all shared the same flaw would mean that they would all have to go out of business, and better answers to the questions being debated might not lead to an easily marketable new brand. Instead, each is given credibility by its criticisms of the others, and a never-ending debate among the competing brands comes to define what the field is.⁷⁰ Moreover, ideas can be marketed under a brand name even if they have no logical relationship to each other, as offensive Realism, the security dilemma, and hegemonic stability theory all came to be thought of as part of structural Realism as defined by Waltz, simply because they all focused on the effects of anarchy.

Just as Chevrolet, Buick, and Cadillac are all General Motors brands, so offensive Realism, defensive Realism, hegemonic stability theory, and even structural Realism itself have all been considered brands of Realism, and they all gain some credibility from the common view that, if there is a flaw in this or that brand of Realism, we can nonetheless be pretty confident that, whatever the right answer is, it will turn out to be a Realist answer. But what is Realism?

It is sometimes said that prior to structural Realism there was classical Realism, which tried to explain interstate conflict as the result of an inborn human urge to seek power over other men—not surprisingly, this is sometimes called “human nature Realism.”⁷¹ However, this was a mistake, so the story goes, because violent conflicts are caused not by human nature but by anarchy, and therefore structural Realism corrects a mistake made by classical Realists. This is a story often used to explain the importance of Waltz’s writings, but it is a story that was first told by John Herz to justify the importance of his contribution to the subject.⁷²

However, “human nature Realism” seems on closer inspection to be a

70. The typical argument has the following form: (1) Either A or B is true; (2) B is not true; (3) Therefore A is true. The argument is valid, but the first premise is always false.

71. See, for example, Mearsheimer 2001, 18–19.

72. See Herz 1959, 232. In spite of this, both Keohane and Ashley have counted Herz among the classical Realists, and Herz’s security dilemma does not even appear in the index to

caricature. Its main academic exemplar is Hans Morgenthau, who wrote a famous textbook about international politics that is generally considered to be the main contribution to Realist doctrine prior to Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*. In the first edition of that book, Morgenthau wrote: "Domestic and international politics are but two different manifestations of the same phenomenon: the struggle for power" (1948, 21). But he also said that "the statement that A has or wants political power over B signifies always that A is able, or wants to be able, to control certain actions of B through influencing B's mind" (14). And that is why, "[w]hatsoever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim": anything one wants to accomplish in politics of any sort requires getting other people to do something they would not otherwise want to do (13).

Thus Morgenthau did not say that people have an inborn urge to dominate other people (though admittedly he sometimes used language that could be interpreted in that way); he merely stated the truism that to achieve any political objective, no matter what it was, one had to be able to influence other people. The difference between international and domestic politics in this respect, he said, was that in domestic politics

Cultural uniformity, technological unification, external pressure, and, above all, a hierarchic political organization co-operate in making the national society an integrated whole set apart from other national societies. In consequence, the domestic political order is . . . more stable and to a lesser degree subject to violent change than is the international order. (Morgenthau 1948, 21)

It certainly sounds as though Morgenthau was talking not about the effects of human nature but about the effects of anarchy.⁷³

The other main "classical Realist" in the Realist canon is E. H. Carr, whose book *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1946) seems to have given Realism

Keohane 1986, which is devoted to an evaluation of Neorealism (199, 257). This illustrates once again the confusion about what structural Realists think the explanation of war really is and what role the security dilemma is supposed to play in it.

73. For further evidence on this point, see Frei 2001, 140. There is a similar misinterpretation of Hobbes that is common. Hobbes said: "I put for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death" (1957, 64). But he defined "power" as a man's "present means, to obtain some future apparent good" (56). And the reason men sought "power after power" was not "that a man hopes for a more intensive delight, than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well . . . without the acquisition of more" (64). Hobbes was perhaps the first "offensive Realist." Morgenthau's emphasis on the struggle for power was, according to Frei, influenced primarily by the writings of Nietzsche and Weber, a fact that Morgenthau carefully concealed in order to avoid alienating his American audience (Frei 2001, chaps. 5 and 6).

its name. But Carr spelled the word with a lowercase *r*, and the message of Carr's book was that the thinking behind the League of Nations had been utopian and therefore unrealistic. This use of the term is consistent with one of the definitions of the word *realism* given by the *American Heritage Dictionary*, which is simply "The representation in art or literature of objects, actions, or social conditions as they actually are, without idealization or presentation in abstract form." John Herz agreed with this interpretation:

Strictly speaking, the terms "realism" and "idealism" should not be applied to theories. Theory is either correct or incorrect, depending on how it analyzes what happens in politics, but perhaps it is permissible to call a correct analysis a realistic one. Chiefly, however, the terms apply to actions and actors, those who behave according to "real," that is, existing givens, and those who engage in wishful thinking. (1981, 182)⁷⁴

In the first edition of his famous book, Morgenthau did not mention Realism or identify himself as a Realist.⁷⁵ And in *Man, the State and War* and *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz did not identify himself as a Realist either—the terms *Neorealism* and *structural Realism* were bestowed on him by others. He did say that his ideas were "closely identified with the approach to politics suggested by the rubric, *Realpolitik*" (Waltz 1979, 117). But the word *Realpolitik* was introduced into the German language by August Ludwig von Rochau, a disillusioned participant in the failed revolutions of 1848, in a book about politics in the German-speaking states (Rochau 1859). The word meant, and still means, no more than the word *realism* means as described in the passage just quoted from Herz: Rochau came to believe that he and other revolutionaries had engaged in wishful thinking.

Thus, generic Realism seems to be nothing more than realism and therefore nothing very specific. If so, then the credibility of the Realist brand is entirely dependent on the inferences Realists have made about the effects of anarchy and the security dilemma, and if those cannot be justified then there is no more general Realist doctrine to fall back on. Any work that focused on war and military capabilities that reflected skepti-

74. However, see Herz 1951, where the terms *realism* and *idealism* are applied to theories.

75. He had, however, frequently used in his writings the English words *realism* or *realistic* (as well as their French equivalents) in criticizing writers who, he thought, had overestimated the efficacy of norms and the law in controlling social conflicts (Frei 2001).

cism about the prospect of eliminating war in the near future might call itself realist, but Realism itself would provide no justification for such skepticism.

That possibility seems consistent with the definition of the latest brand of Realism, neoclassical Realism, which was invented by Gideon Rose simply as a way of organizing a review of several otherwise unrelated books. "The works under review here," he says, belong to a school of thought

which I term "neoclassical realism." It explicitly incorporates both external and internal variables, updating and systematizing certain insights drawn from classical realist thought. Its adherents argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical. (Rose 1998, 146)

The authors reviewed did not identify themselves as "neoclassical Realists," but given the importance of brand names in the field of international politics, the gift of a brand can hardly be refused, and thus it is not surprising that the term has had a life beyond Rose's review essay.⁷⁶ Instead of inventing new brands of Realism and new counter-Realisms, students of international politics should remove the word from their vocabulary, so that arguments can stand on their own and be evaluated independently of each other.

What Next?

An understanding of the deficiencies of structural Realism supplies us with a list of important questions that need answers. At the heart of all of them is the question of what explains the occurrence of war, whether interstate war or not. An answer to that question would help us understand the relation between government and war, which would in turn help us determine

76. See, for example, Schweller 2003. Note Rose's assumption that theories are defined by the "variables" that they focus on.

whether a world of sovereign states is doomed to war or not.⁷⁷

While Realism contains no valid arguments in support of answers to these questions, the works of Carr, Morgenthau, Herz, and Waltz are indeed part of a longer tradition of thinking about them. The proper name of that tradition, however, is not *realpolitik* but *Staatsräson*, *raison d'état*, *ragion di stato*, or reason of state. That is the tradition that Waltz claimed to be heir to when he invoked the name of Machiavelli in illustrating what he meant by *realpolitik* (Waltz 1979, 117). However, that is a tradition of thought not about international politics but about fundamental questions of political order that help us understand where the Western distinction between domestic and international politics came from. Supporters of the various “isms” have left quite a misleading impression of what writers in this tradition actually said. If we are to settle the issues that have been debated in the wars among the “isms,” we will have to take a closer look at this tradition. That will be the subject of the next chapter.⁷⁸

77. The failure of structural Realism to provide a clear answer to this question is the main theme of Van Evera 1999. However, there is actually no explanation of the occurrence of war in Van Evera's book, which instead contains a number of more or less plausible claims about what influences the probability that war will occur. This is like substituting a weather forecast for an explanation of the occurrence of snow. But if the weatherman does not know why snow occurs, one cannot have much confidence in his forecast. Van Evera claims that the hypotheses he discusses, which he calls “misperceptive fine-grained structural Realism,” provide support for the structural Realist “paradigm.” But it is actually not clear what they have to do with structural Realism. Many of the factors that Van Evera claims influence the probability of war will be discussed later in the book, beginning with chapter 4.

78. For background reading on this subject, I strongly recommend the following books, *to be read in this order*: Meinecke, *Machiavellism* (1998); Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace* (1999); and Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (1977). For a discussion of the influence of Meinecke on Hans Morgenthau, see Frei 2001.