

## Reason of State

The subject of E. H. Carr's book *The Twenty Years' Crisis* was, Carr said, "a fundamental antithesis revealing itself in many forms of thought," the "antithesis of utopia and reality—a balance always swinging towards and away from equilibrium and never completely attaining it." He claimed that

The two methods of approach—the inclination to ignore what was and what is in contemplation of what should be, and the inclination to deduce what should be from what was and what is—determine opposite attitudes towards every political problem. (Carr 1946, 11)

The word *utopia*, of course, comes from the book with that name by Sir Thomas More and refers to an "impractical, idealistic scheme for social and political reform" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). Many efforts to create ideal or utopian communities have failed. What is it that makes utopian communities utopian?

The concept of an equilibrium, introduced first by John Nash and then developed by subsequent game theorists, provides a way of thinking about this question. To see what it entails, let us look at a simple way of organizing human behavior that works very well.

### Classical Realism, Social Norms, and Raison d'État

Perhaps the simplest possible example of a rule that works is the "rule of the road," which says, in some countries, that automobiles should keep to the right of a line drawn down the middle of a road and, in other countries, that they should keep to the left. As already mentioned in chapter 1, this rule works well enough that people everywhere bet their lives every day that everyone will follow it, and there is perhaps no form of human social behavior that is more antlike, not only in the appearance of the resulting lines of traffic but also in its extreme regularity and reliability. However,

this behavior is not genetically determined, and people are actually free to drive where they please. Moreover, if drivers fall asleep or are intoxicated they may deviate from the rule, and a head-on collision may result.

If our concern were merely to establish regularities in human behavior, this would have to be listed among them. However, no one would be impressed by our discovery of it.<sup>1</sup> But explaining it, while not difficult, is not quite as straightforward as it might at first appear to be. Making clear what the explanation is will help us think about behavior that is harder to understand, including situations where rules do not work.

### Rules and Equilibria

The part of the explanation that is obvious is that, if each driver sees everyone else driving on one side of the road, he or she will want to do likewise, since otherwise there will be a head-on collision. But to explain why everyone else is driving on the same side of the road we must assume that each driver expects everyone else to do that as well. And if other drivers are to expect me to drive, say, on the right side, then they must believe that I expect them to do so as well, and so forth.

We could summarize this reasoning in the following premises:

**Premise 1 (Individual preferences)** *Drivers prefer to avoid head-on collisions with oncoming traffic.*

**Premise 2 (Expected outcome of choices)** *If all other drivers drive on one side of the road, someone who drives on the other side will experience a head-on collision.*

**Premise 3 (Expectations of others' choices)** *In the United States, each driver expects other drivers to drive on the right-hand side of the road.*

**Premise 4 (Common knowledge)** *Premises 1–3 are common knowledge among drivers in the United States.*

These premises imply that we should expect the fact to be explained to be true:

**Conclusion 1 (Equilibrium outcome)** *In the United States, automobiles keep to the right of oncoming traffic.*

These premises together exemplify what is meant by the concept of an equilibrium in the theory of games, and the situation exemplifies what is

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1. Peter Kincaid's book *The Rule of the Road* (1986) describes this regularity in detail, but it is not considered to be a notable contribution to social science.

often called a coordination problem.<sup>2</sup> Premises 1 and 2 are represented in a more general form in figure 4, which makes obvious the fact that if one driver expects another to keep right he will prefer to keep right and that if he expects the other to keep left he will want to keep left. It also abstracts from the details of the driving situation and therefore applies to any situation that has the same structure. What figure 4 does not tell us is what will happen. To know that, we have to know what each expects the other to do and that those expectations are common knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

	<i>R</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>R</i>	(1, 1)	(0, 0)
<i>L</i>	(0, 0)	(1, 1)

**Fig. 4. A coordination game**

Note that this explanation does not mention the government or the fact that the law prescribes that drivers should drive on the right-hand side of the road. That is because the fact that one might get a traffic ticket if one drives on the left is a far less significant incentive to stay to the right than the fact that one will run into oncoming traffic if one does not. And in fact, rules of the road like this one were supported by conventions before the conventions were underwritten by governments (Kincaid 1986, 1–42). The function of government is not to give drivers an additional incentive to drive on the right (premises 1 and 2) but to make sure that everyone expects the same thing and that these expectations are common knowledge (premises 3 and 4). And while governments can, with considerable effort, change these expectations (as the government of Sweden did in 1967, when Sweden switched from driving on the left to driving on the right), it is obviously much easier and less costly for governments merely to ratify prevailing conventions than to try to change them (Kincaid 1986, 159–62).

Moreover, pedestrian traffic is often regulated by such conventions even when governments do not try to control it. In the United States, pedestrians generally keep to the right. In the United Kingdom people drive on the left, but pedestrians in London include many people from countries where everyone is used to staying to the right. At street intersec-

2. Readers who still think that explanations must identify causal relationships might ask themselves what causes what in this explanation.

3. Game theory clarifies this problem but has little to say about how common knowledge emerges. For an accessible introduction to the subject, see Chwe 2001. The emergence of conventions like the rule of the road is discussed in Young 1996. Thomas Schelling (1960) was important in defining the coordination problem. A classic treatment is by Lewis (1969). For a very clear and helpful discussion of the relevance of game theory and decision theory to many of the issues discussed in this chapter, see O'Neill 1999.

tions in London, therefore, there are instructions in the pavement telling pedestrians which way to look before crossing, and anyone using the stairs in a London underground station at rush hour will quickly notice what happens when there is no convention about pedestrian traffic that is common knowledge.

#### Rationalism, Materialism, and Social Norms

This simple example of the rule of the road is pregnant with implications for current controversies about the relation between culture or social norms and what is variously called classical Realism, *realpolitik*, or *raison d'état*. Explanations of social behavior like the one just offered for the power of the rule of the road are sometimes criticized for being “individualist” or “rationalist” or for focusing entirely on self-interest as a motive for action.<sup>4</sup> But, while the explanation of the behavior of drivers focuses on the decisions made by drivers, it is not strictly individualist, since it shows clearly that what drivers do is a function of the convention that tells them what to expect other drivers to do. This convention could well be described as a social norm, and a pedestrian who violates it and runs into another pedestrian might provoke an indignant response from the injured party. Since the consequences of running into a pedestrian are much less severe than a head-on automobile collision, a desire to avoid such a rebuke might be a significant incentive to watch where one is going while walking, whereas it plainly is insignificant in enforcing the norm for automobile traffic.<sup>5</sup>

The explanation could be said to be rationalist in that it exaggerates the extent to which drivers think about what to do. One might claim instead that the rule of the road is an institution that organizes people's behavior so that they do not have to think carefully about what they do.<sup>6</sup> But a rule that relied on people not thinking carefully about what they were doing would not be very reliable, since one day they might pay attention to what they were doing and do something different, or they might drive where the rule of the road was different and have an accident because they could only do what they were accustomed to doing. It is precisely because the rule of the road passes the “rationalist” test that people do not

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4. See, for example, the works of social constructivists referred to in the previous chapter.

5. On the other hand, if there is no such norm, there will be more collisions, but the interdependence of people's decisions will still be common knowledge to them, and they will do something. (One might think about whether the mixed strategy equilibrium in the game in figure 4 is a plausible model of such a situation.)

6. See, for example, March and Olsen 1989.

have to think about it and can instead think about something else while they are driving.<sup>7</sup>

One might say that the explanation was self-interested (or even materialist in at least one sense of that ambiguous word) because of premise 1. Note, however, that premise 1 does not say *why* drivers want to avoid head-on collisions—perhaps they are suicidal but do not want to harm other people. The explanation only relies on their having that preference. As long as people are free to choose, they will have preferences, and it is a mistake to confuse explanations based on people's preferences with explanations based on their self-interest.

However, it is plausible to think that the desire to avoid personal injury to themselves is a more reliable reason for expecting drivers to satisfy premise 1 than the desire to avoid harming others, and that helps explain why the rule itself is so effective. Moreover, if the opposite of self-interest is taken to be not altruism but the "internalization" of a social norm, then if the social norm is to drive on the right, people who have internalized it become a menace to others when they drive in countries where the norm is to drive on the left. And if the norm they have internalized is just to follow the local rule, whatever it is, then (1) there is still a coordination problem in specifying the local rule and (2) everyone would surely feel more comfortable knowing that drivers had a stronger reason to follow the local rule than a norm that they might or might not have internalized that tells them to follow it.

Note that everyone benefits from the existence of the rule of the road, but that benefit is not the motive that sustains the rule. The motive that sustains the rule is just each individual driver's desire to avoid a collision with the automobile coming in the opposite direction. Moreover, the social benefit can be achieved merely by the individual actions of every driver or pedestrian.

A utopian scheme for social organization, by contrast, would be a scheme that everyone would benefit from but that lacked an incentive for the people whose behavior was to be organized to conform to it or required them to cooperate in ways that were not feasible. The expectations associated with the rule, in other words, would not constitute an equilibrium.

An example would be a proposal to finance the U.S. defense budget entirely by voluntary contributions. One might argue that that would be

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7. When such a convention does not exist or there is uncertainty about whether it is common knowledge, premise 1 implies that people have a big incentive to think carefully about what they are doing. When the rule was changed in Sweden, the accident rate actually went down for a while, because people were more careful about what they were doing. However, the number of head-on collisions nonetheless increased (Kincaid 1986, 161).

better than a system of compulsory taxation, since, unlike taxation, it would mean that no one would ever have to contribute more than he or she wanted to. One reason that scheme would be utopian is that people would have a strong incentive to contribute little or nothing, since the effect of each individual's contribution would be imperceptible. The Prisoner's Dilemma game is a plausible representation of this problem. But that is only one part of the difficulty. Another is that even if people were willing to contribute something, perhaps because they had internalized a norm that said that they should, they would still somehow have to determine what would be their share of the total burden, and there would likely be a lot of disagreement about that and no feasible way to resolve it. And a third is that it is unlikely that there would be unanimous agreement as to what the actual consequences of any particular total amount of money spent on defense would be.

There are other, more subtle and less immediately obvious reasons why attractive-sounding schemes for social organization may not work. When, for example, it is necessary to create artificial incentives for individual behavior to substitute for an incentive like the one stated in premise 1, this may require some supplementary form of social organization that proves in turn to be infeasible. And one reason it could be infeasible is that it violates some other social convention. In a society, for example, in which conventions against killing people are enforced by family feuds, the establishment of a police force to find and prosecute killers according to government laws may prove to be ineffective, as when the police chief in Tropojo, Albania, resigned so that he could "avenge a family murder" and was "reported by his former colleagues to have killed, or ordered the killing, of eight men . . . for the murder of his brother" (Perlez 1998).

This example already takes us very close to the reason why people like Carr argued that the League of Nations was a utopian scheme. It also illustrates why both Carr and Herz thought that all of political thought consisted of a permanent tension between idealism and realism. As Herz put it:

Political thought may in general be reduced to two major "ideal types," one or the other of which each individual theory approaches to a now greater now lesser degree but which to some extent, and in one form or another, is always present. These types will be called Political Realism and Political Idealism. (1951, 17)

The idealist sees that the existing social order has terrible consequences for the people governed by it and tries to invent a new one that would improve their lives; the realist sees that existing social conventions are very powerful and very stable, and therefore they cannot be changed merely by such

actions as opening a police station, hiring some people to sit in it, and giving them uniforms. But without idealism, Carr said, we would all be fatalists:

we cannot ultimately find a resting place in pure realism; for realism . . . does not provide us with the springs of action which are necessary even to the pursuit of thought. . . . The impossibility of being a consistent and thorough-going realist is one of the most certain and most curious lessons of political science. (1946, 89)

This is not a statement that contemporary Realists tend to quote.

We can now see more clearly the relation between Realism and realism. Carr and Herz thought that the tension between idealism and realism characterized thought about both domestic and international politics. Waltz, on the other hand, was interested in creating a theory of international politics, and he thought that in order to do that he had to say what the difference between international and domestic politics was (Waltz 1979). He claimed that the difference was in their institutional structures, which he called anarchy and hierarchy. In doing this he took the existence of these institutional structures for granted and therefore was unable to explain how they emerged and changed. As a result, he was also unable to explain “domestic” political behavior in institutional environments that did not conform to his definition of *hierarchy* or analyze the possible effects of international institutions on the behavior of states. After Waltz was labeled a Realist, “Realism” became the study of the behavior of governments in an anarchic environment.

This is not realism in the sense of Carr or Herz, nor would they have considered it to be necessarily “realistic.”<sup>8</sup> It was therefore a mistake to think that Waltz, Herz, and Carr were all doing the same thing, a mistake caused by the proclivity of political scientists to group writers into schools of thought, which are then labeled and discussed together, as though the common label implied adherence to a common “theory” or “paradigm.”

Carr and Herz both claimed that utopian thought was always unrealistic in the same way. For Carr, the mistake was to overlook the role of self-interest in human behavior and the insufficiency of morality as a way of overcoming it (1946, 95). For Herz, the mistake was to overlook the security dilemma (1951, 18). But the example of the rule of the road illustrates the fact that the possible divergence between self-interest (or “egoism”) and the common good is not restricted to the problems posed by violent conflicts, nor is the security dilemma necessarily relevant to

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8. Carr, for example, did not think that the international order would necessarily long remain “anarchic” (1946, 224–39).

understanding it. And neither morality nor coercion, the two correctives that Carr focused on, is necessarily helpful in aligning the two.

There are two features of the rule of the road that make it so effective. One is that, given expectations that are common knowledge, the rule is self-enforcing. The other is that, once one rule has been established, no one has an interest in changing it for the other one. As already noted, more difficult problems arise when rules are not self-enforcing—it is in that context that Carr’s discussion of morality versus coercion becomes relevant. But difficult problems also arise when the rule would be self-enforcing, but people have conflicting preferences as to what it should be. Precisely because the rule would be so effective, there might be intense conflict about what rule is to be followed. Instead of determining what side of the road people should drive on, for example, the question might be what language they should speak.<sup>9</sup>

The question raised about international politics by both Carr and Herz, then, is this: If the League of Nations was a utopian scheme for reducing the number of violent conflicts, what would be realistic? Both Carr and Herz saw that this is a question that applies to what is now considered to be “domestic politics” as well as to international politics. To answer it we would need to be able to explain why violent conflicts occur. But the closest either Carr or Herz came to an answer to that question was Herz’s definition of the security dilemma, and we have already seen that that is not an adequate answer.

#### Social Norms, Equilibrium Institutions, and Raison D’état

Imagine a place where people had, in the course of many years of experience with pedestrians and horse-drawn vehicles, developed a variety of different conventions as to what to do when they passed each other when traveling in opposite directions. These conventions included not only what side of the road they should keep to in order to avoid colliding with someone traveling in the opposite direction (which might be dependent on whether the travelers were pedestrians or horse-drawn vehicles or some combination of the two) but also what to do in case of collisions and who was responsible for various kinds of damages that might result. Suppose as well that there were conventions about how to proceed in case someone failed to follow such a convention, for example, if a person suffered some damage as a result of a collision with another person and the other person

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9. In that case, the game in figure 4 becomes the game commonly called “Battle of the Sexes.”

ran away instead of offering the compensation that was prescribed by convention.<sup>10</sup>

Suppose also that different conventions had developed in different localities, with the result that when people from different localities encountered each other they might each violate the other's expectations as to what should be done. Then, since the conventions were in conflict, each might look for some higher principle that would justify his or her own convention as to the right way of behaving in order to show that the other was in the wrong.<sup>11</sup> But there might be disagreement about these principles or disagreement about how to apply a principle to any given collision.

As long as the vehicles were slow and traffic was sparse and mainly local, these collisions and the ensuing disagreements might be a tolerable inconvenience to most people. Suppose, however, that there was a rapid increase in both the volume of traffic and the speed and power of the vehicles encountering each other. Then the number of collisions might increase rapidly, along with a rapid increase in the number of disagreements about how to deal with their consequences and about what principles should be used to resolve those disagreements. Moreover, new situations might arise that were not covered by any existing convention, and the new vehicles might give the people who owned and operated them an opportunity to take advantage of other people in ways that had earlier not been feasible. They might, for example, be able simply to drive certain kinds of traffic off the roads entirely.

In those circumstances some people might continue to try to extend existing conventions to the new situation by inferring general principles from the prior conventions and then applying those principles to the new problems. But there would be two difficulties with this response. One, as already mentioned, is that there might be disagreement about how to define those principles or to apply them to particular cases. Another is that the new principles might not be supported by effective conventions as to how to enforce them—a man could be expected, with the assistance of friends and family, to chase down a hit-and-run driver and extract compensation from him when the most powerful vehicle was a horse-drawn carriage, but not if the offender was driving a fast car.

These two difficulties could then provide the stimulus for an alternative approach, based on (1) an attempt to elicit support for new, artificial

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10. The blood feud, exemplified by the actions of the police chief in Tropojo mentioned previously, is an example of such a convention. For a systematic description, see Boehm 1987. For an illustration of how game theory can be used to model such social conventions, see O'Neill 1999.

11. Examples can be found in the development of the common law tradition. See Holmes 1991 and Levi 1949.

conventions by emphasizing the dire consequences of continuing disagreement and (2) an examination of how new conventions could be arrived at and then enforced. Because of the general disagreement about both the appropriate conventions and the general principles that might justify them, this alternative approach would have to appeal to motives that did not rely on prior agreement about either the conventions that should govern behavior or the principles that might justify them.

One reason this discussion of traffic problems may seem silly is that we take for granted the fact that governments are available to deal with such problems. But modern governments are a side effect of the response of Europeans in the early modern period to violent conflicts. I believe that thinking about these possible responses to the hypothetical problem of regulating traffic can help us understand the responses of European thinkers in the early modern period to the problem of the increasing scale and intensity of violent conflicts that occurred at that time.

The hypothetical attempt to derive more general principles from existing conventions in my little story about traffic problems corresponds roughly to the development of the idea of natural law as a way of regulating conflict. The attempt to devise new, artificial conventions for regulating violent conflict that did not require prior agreement on general principles is sometimes called *raison d'état*, and the motives to which writers in this tradition appealed came to be known as people's "interests," which referred roughly to what is now commonly called "rational self-interest."<sup>12</sup>

As noted earlier, sometimes self-interest is contrasted with altruism and sometimes with a commitment to norms or ethical principles. However, contrary to what many people assume, the term *self-interest* itself has no standard meaning. It is not clear, for example, whether one should say that parents who devote most of their income to preparing their son for medical school, and then insist that he attend even after it becomes clear that he would prefer to be a rock musician instead, are altruistic or self-interested. An appeal to people's "interests," in the context discussed here, means just an appeal to strong motives that everyone can be counted on to have, regardless of their ethical commitments. These would include a desire to feed and clothe and to avoid death and personal harm to both oneself and one's family. Other motives might also be important in particular contexts, for example, the desire to be esteemed by others. There is no

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12. For an extended discussion of the meaning of the term *interests*, and the reason for its use among European political thinkers in the early modern period, see Hirschman 1977. For a discussion of the subsequent development of the concept, see Swedberg 2003.

reason to think that a person's "interests," in this sense of the term, could not include a concern for the well-being of other people.<sup>13</sup>

The term *rational* also does not have a well-defined meaning. Indeed, decision theory and game theory are largely devoted to defining what it means in contexts where its meaning is especially unclear. The reason it is associated with the word *interest* is that if political organization is to be based on people's interests then people's interests need to be stable and reliable (Hirschman 1977, 42–54). Thus "interest" (or "rational self-interest") refers to what people would want to do if they thought carefully about what they were doing and therefore represents what one might call, borrowing a term from the political philosopher John Rawls, a "reflective equilibrium."

That is why the concept of rational self-interest has always had both a descriptive and a normative component. Decision theory is, in part, an attempt to determine whether such a reflective equilibrium always exists for individual choices, while game theory is an attempt to determine whether an equilibrium always exists if the choices of rational individuals are interdependent. However, neither decision theory nor game theory is restricted to the analysis of people's *interests*, but both focus instead on their *preferences*, a better defined and more general idea. They reveal that non-self-interested preferences are not the solution to all social problems.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, if people are to think carefully about what they are doing, they must have an incentive to do so, and therefore interests are most effective as a mechanism for supporting an equilibrium when, like the rule of the road, people have a strong incentive to think carefully about how their interests are affected by their actions. That will be true when (1) the

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13. See George Homans's discussion of individual self-interest in Homans 1950, 95–96. Homans writes: "If we examine the motives we usually call individual self-interest, we shall find that they are, for the most part, neither individual nor selfish but that they are the product of group life and serve the ends of a whole group and not just an individual. What we really mean . . . is that these motives are generated in a different group from the one we are concerned with at the moment." For an extended discussion of how the difference between self-interest and altruism could be rigorously defined, see the papers collected in Katz 2000.

14. Some of the most intense family conflicts I have witnessed were conflicts over who was to pay the bill for a family meal in a restaurant, where neither party to the conflict wanted the other to pay but each wanted to pay the whole bill himself. People claiming to be acting to protect unborn babies have killed doctors who perform abortions. And it is hard to see how a suicide bomber could be acting out of pure self-interest. The distinction between people's interests and their preferences is the basis for ongoing controversies about whether people's preferences are entirely socially determined or reflect at least in part something that might merit the term *human nature*. For an interesting discussion of this question by an evolutionary biologist, see Wilson 2002.

interests that are at stake are important to them and (2) the consequences of their actions will have a significant impact on those interests.

The *raison d'état* tradition has led to recurring controversies about the relation between the interests required to sustain a rule, or system of rules, and prevailing mores or standards of ethical behavior. This issue is exemplified by current debates about whether honesty on the part of corporate executives in the United States requires, or can best be achieved by, a commitment to ethical behavior on the part of the executives or a system of financial rewards and/or penalties that would rely on their interests instead. In that context, the “realist” view would be that interests are more reliable than ethics.

But as the rule of the road example illustrates, artificial rules are most effective if they rely on existing conventions, and solutions that violate prevailing standards of morality may not work—the police chief in Tropojo may have been motivated by what he considered to be an ethical principle (Boehm 1987, 65–89). That is why Carr claimed that the “realist answer to the question of why law is regarded as binding” contains only “part of the truth”:

no community could survive if most of its members were law-abiding only through an ever-present fear of punishment. . . . there is plenty of evidence of the difficulty of enforcing laws which seriously offend the conscience of the community or of any considerable part of it. (Carr 1946, 176–77)

The reason Carr thought the League of Nations was utopian was not just that it was not backed by sufficient military force but also that it was not supported by the conscience of a community.

As the behavior of the police chief in Tropojo also illustrates, however, ethical principles do not just exist in people’s heads. They are embedded in social conventions, which are enforced in turn by actions that impinge on violators’ interests. The police chief may have been motivated by what he considered to be right, but he also had to take into account what other members of his family expected him to do and how they would treat him if he failed to comply. Similarly, the corporate executive must be concerned not just with the monetary consequences of his behavior but also with what his wife and children will think about what he does and what they will do as a consequence.

The reason writers in the *raison d'état* tradition emphasized interests over social norms or ethical standards is that in Europe in the early modern period, as in contemporary Albania, prevailing social norms and ethical standards came to be seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to it. And that was not just because there were deep disagree-

ments about social norms but also because the social norms of that time actually helped make large-scale violent conflict possible by sustaining the organizations that participated in it. The nobility consisted of a privileged class of warriors, and prevailing conventions gave them a license to profit from violence.<sup>15</sup> The Roman Church had come to be seen by many as a protection racket, which had acquired great wealth by selling protection from God's punishments. Efforts to reform it led to competing religious organizations, which threatened to undermine the conventions that supported the established social and political order. These rival religious groups were opposed by forcible means, and commitments to alternative systems of norms were then invoked as incentives to participate in the ensuing violent conflicts.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the development of trade and the resulting revival of money, all of this took place in the context of increasing wealth, which made participation in organized violence not just justifiable but also profitable for large groups of people.<sup>17</sup> And in response to these incentives, new modes of military organization and new forms of military technology were developed, which led to organized violence on a scale that had not been possible before.<sup>18</sup>

### The State of Nature

A writer who wanted to emphasize the need for new rules of the road would paint a dire picture of the traffic problems that would arise without them. Without any commonly known rules, he might argue, drivers would have to concentrate on protecting themselves from collisions. Since no one could know what other drivers might do, each might want to have maximum flexibility in responding to oncoming traffic, which would mean that everyone would drive down the middle of the road, leading to many head-on collisions. To avoid this outcome, each might want to find a way to signal to others what side of the road he intended to use. One way of doing this would be for drivers to join together in groups driving on one side of

15. For example, a promise by a captured nobleman to pay a ransom in order to be released was considered to be a valid contract. For a discussion of medieval conventions regulating looting and the use of booty, see Redlich 1956, 1–5.

16. See the graphic picture of life in Europe in the fourteenth century painted by Barbara Tuchman (1978). For a recent discussion of the prevalence of organized violence in early modern Italy, see Jones 1997, 333–650. For a general discussion of the problem of order in early modern Europe, see Rabb 1975.

17. See Fritz Redlich's (1956, 1964–65) studies of looting and mercenary armies in early modern Europe.

18. The literature on the effects of changes in military technology and organization in early modern Europe is immense. For recent introductions to it, see Keen 1999 and Parker 1996.

the road in hopes that oncoming traffic would be compelled to drive on the other side. To minimize the damage from collisions, larger and better-protected vehicles might be developed. Since this would only increase the damage done to others in a collision, others would feel compelled to develop better-protected vehicles in response.

Note that none of this behavior would require that drivers be unconcerned about the damage they did to others. Rather, even drivers who suffered severe remorse from it would be unable to avoid it without a commonly known set of rules to govern the behavior of all of them.

My stories about traffic problems are, I fear, growing more and more fanciful. Nonetheless, I think they offer some insights into early modern European political theories, which continue to influence everyone's thinking about the relation between war and the state.

One might say, using terminology that became common in early modern Europe, that drivers in the conditions I have described were in a state of nature with respect to each other (Tuck 1999, 1–15). If so, note what that would, and would not, mean. It would not mean, as already noted, that they did not care about each other's welfare or even that they did not want their behavior to be governed by rules or had no idea what rules should be followed were they to adhere to them. It also would not mean, as some people have said about men in Hobbes's state of nature, that they lived "outside of society" (Tuck 1999, 8). It would mean simply that there were no rules to regulate their behavior such that (1) it was common knowledge that each would have an incentive to follow the rules if he or she expected others to do so as well and (2) it was also common knowledge that each in fact expected the others to follow them.

A possible interpretation of Thomas Hobbes's political ideas, then, is that he described what he thought were two equilibria, one of which (the equilibrium that characterized behavior in the state of nature) was much worse for everyone than the other (the equilibrium that characterized behavior in a commonwealth). In the state of nature, men are "in that condition which is called war."

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no soci-

ety; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes 1957, 82)

If men are to avoid such a condition, Hobbes claimed, they require “a common power, to keep them in awe, and to direct their actions to the common benefit.” And

[t]he only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be the author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments to his judgment. This is more than consent or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every other man. (Hobbes 1957, 112)

In the state of nature, Hobbes wrote,

we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly glory.

The first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men’s persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile; a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession or their name. (81–82)

“The passions that incline men to peace,” by contrast, “are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary for commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them” (84).

From the passions that incline men to peace can be inferred rules for right behavior, which Hobbes calls “laws of nature,” which can all be summarized in the maxim “Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not

have done to thyself” (103). However, men are not obliged to obey these laws of nature in the state of nature, since doing so would put their lives at risk, and everyone has a natural right to defend himself. Thus the laws of nature become obligatory only in a commonwealth.

It is because of his claims about equilibrium behavior in the state of nature that it is unclear whether Hobbes should be considered a writer in the natural law tradition or a writer in the tradition of *raison d'état*. He claimed that self-defense was not only a basic *interest* but also a *natural right* and that as long as it was not common knowledge that everyone would obey the laws of nature people had the right to defend themselves. Moreover, what sustained the natural law equilibrium in a commonwealth was the realization that violation of those laws would propel people back into the state of nature.<sup>19</sup>

According to Tuck, the explanation for this dualism is that Hobbes was looking for a firm foundation for morality in a time of general skepticism about the foundations of all knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Like other writers on natural rights at the time, he took “the jurisprudence of war which had developed among humanist lawyers, and derived a theory of individual rights from it” (Tuck 1999, 11). Thus the analogy that Hobbes and others drew between the relations among individuals in the state of nature and the relations among sovereigns was meant to be taken literally. The *raison d'état* tradition, on the other hand, was heavily influenced by Tacitus, who saw all politics as at least potentially civil war. And therefore there was a close relation between ideas about natural rights and the *raison d'état* tradition in early modern Europe (Tuck 1999, 1–15).

This analogy between sovereign princes and sovereign individuals has been the source of confusion ever since. For if Hobbes's description of equilibrium behavior in the state of nature was accurate, then one might expect it also to be a description of equilibrium behavior in the relations among states. And, indeed, this is where offensive Realism comes from, by way of Herz's security dilemma. But Hobbes himself did not make this inference. He wrote:

But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another; yet in all times, kings, and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and

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19. Some people have thought that the Prisoner's Dilemma provides a way of understanding what Hobbes wrote about the state of nature. But there is little support for this in Hobbes, and we will see that there are better ways of understanding what he may have had in mind. For a discussion of Hobbes and the Prisoner's Dilemma, see Tuck 1989, 106–9.

20. See Tuck 1989. For a brilliant description of the social conditions that give rise to such skepticism, see Mannheim 1936, chap. 1.

posture of gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms; and continual spies upon their neighbors; which is a posture of war. But because they uphold thereby, the industry of their subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery, which accompanies the liberty of particular men. (Hobbes 1957, 83)

But if wars in the state of nature were only conflicts among “particular men,” they could not be very severe: civil wars are conflicts among armies, just as wars among sovereign princes are. Thus it is not clear why wars among sovereigns should have less serious consequences than civil wars.

This is one of the great questions posed by the development of the European system of states beginning with the Renaissance. In early modern Europe, sovereign political authorities came to be seen as the solution to pervasive violent conflicts. But the creation of sovereign political authorities led to violence among them on a scale that dwarfed what had been possible earlier. This raised the question of whether the process that, in retrospect, we can see led to the construction of the modern state would stop with the construction of multiple independent sovereigns and, if so, whether the cure for the violence of early modern Europe might be worse than the disease.

Hobbes does not have an answer to this question, in part because his main concern was with civil war, not interstate war. Perhaps the closest he came to saying something relevant to it was this:

a great family, if it be not part of some commonwealth, is of itself, as to the rights of sovereignty, a little monarchy: whether that family consist of a man and his children; or of a man and his servants; or of a man, and his children, and servants together: wherein the father or master is the sovereign. But yet a family is not properly a commonwealth; unless it be of that power that by its own number, or by other opportunities, as not to be subdued without the hazard of war. For where a number of men are manifestly too weak to defend themselves united, every one may use his own reason in time of danger, to save his own life, either by flight, or by submission to the enemy, as he shall think best; in the same manner as a very small company of soldiers, surprised by an army, may cast down their arms, and demand quarter, or run away, rather than be put to the sword. (Hobbes 1957, 133–34)

Hobbes clearly thought that it was enough that a sovereign be able to defend his subjects “from the invasion of foreigners” as well as from “the

injuries of one another,” and therefore it would be wrong to seek in what he wrote an answer to the questions that have occupied modern-day Realists (Hobbes 1957, 112).

A more basic reason for Hobbes’s lack of an answer to these questions is that his arguments, like the arguments advanced by modern-day Realists, were incomplete. And, therefore, not only did he not say what he thought the answer was, but it is also not possible to infer it from what he said. For it is not only unclear from what Hobbes wrote why relations among sovereigns should not be as bad as relations among individuals in the state of nature; it is also unclear why the state of nature must be as bad as Hobbes said it was.

Nor is it clear what sustains a commonwealth. Hobbes wrote that the laws of nature were not binding in the state of nature, because “covenants, without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all” (1957, 109). But one man’s sword is not enough to enforce the agreement that sustains Leviathan, the artificial man that is the commonwealth, nor can the existence of the commonwealth be threatened by one man acting alone. Both rebellion and opposition to it require cooperation and therefore agreement. And if agreement can only be sustained by force, then both the commonwealth and rebellion would appear to be impossible, and we are left with a world of solitary individuals.

Some writers have claimed it was Hobbes’s individualism that prevented him from providing a clear account of what might hold a commonwealth together. As Meinecke wrote:

Mere egoism and that which is merely useful, in however rational and knowledgeable a manner it might be advocated (as in the case of Hobbes), will never serve as an internal connecting-link to hold great human communities together. Some sort of higher feelings of moral and intellectual values must be superadded to thought and action which is in accordance with *raison d’état*, if the latter is to lead on to its climax [i.e., the modern state]. (1998, 216)

This view is reflected in Talcott Parsons’s discussion of Hobbes (1937, 43–74). Like Meinecke, Parsons claimed that Hobbes’s ideas showed that “individualism” and “utilitarianism” were incapable of explaining social order. And there is a straight line from there to the criticisms of structural Realism made by Ruggie, Wendt, and other Constructivists.<sup>21</sup>

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21. For a survey of the literature by sociologists on the Hobbesian problem of order, see Wrong 1994. Note, however, that what Hobbes wrote about contracts makes it hard to explain not only social order but any sort of collective action, including both war in the state of nature and rebellion against the sovereign. And therefore any solution to the Hobbesian problem of order might lead to more social disorder than order.

The example of the rule of the road suggests, however, that the problem with Hobbes's account of the Leviathan is not that he focused on the interests of individuals but that he lacked the idea of an agreement that was self-enforcing because it was part of an equilibrium set of expectations that were commonly known (Hardin 1991). Given such an equilibrium set of expectations, the "passions that incline men to peace" might be enough to hold a great human community together.

Note well, however, that whatever sustains the commonwealth, the difference between the state of nature and a commonwealth cannot be that in the commonwealth the contract that binds men together is enforced by the sword. The sword of Leviathan may be used to enforce contracts between individual men but not to enforce the contract that takes men out of the state of nature. And this is true even if the sovereign is established by force rather than by agreement, since the force of an individual person alone could never be sufficient to compel the agreement of large numbers of people.

### The Prince

Hobbes wrote that sovereign power that is acquired by force

differeth from sovereignty by institution, only in this, that men who choose their sovereign, do it for fear of one another . . . : but in this case, they subject themselves, to him they are afraid of. (1957, 129–130)

Whether established by "institution" or by "acquisition," as Hobbes called it, the outcome is the same, a power "as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it" (136):

His power cannot, without his consent, be transferred to another: he cannot forfeit it: he cannot be accused by any of his subjects, of injury: he cannot be punished by them: he is judge of what is necessary for peace; and judge of doctrines: he is sole legislator; and supreme judge of controversies; and of the times, and occasions of war, and peace: to him it belongeth to choose magistrates; and to determine of rewards, and punishments, honour, and order. (130)

But if the power of the sovereign is so great, why should people who are subjected to it expect that life in a commonwealth will necessarily be better than life in the state of nature?

The first great question posed by the development of the European

state was whether the resulting violent conflicts among states would be worse than the violence within them that they supplanted. The question just stated is the second: whether the new Leviathans that emerged in Europe would themselves be a greater or lesser threat to the well-being of their citizens than violence within them had been. While Hobbes does not have an answer to the first question, he does have an answer to the second, and it has the merit of recognizing that the idea of a social contract provides no answer to it—whether a sovereign authority is the result of voluntary agreement or the exercise of force, the outcome is the same: a sovereign authority that is no longer constrained by the circumstances that led to its creation. To determine whether the creation of Leviathan will improve people's welfare, therefore, we must examine the interests that will shape the behavior of the sovereign once it is in place.

Hobbes claimed, of course, that life in the state of nature would be very bad indeed, and therefore it would not take much for the creation of a sovereign to make it better. That is why Hobbes's critics asked why this must be so: it would appear that the worse the state of nature is expected to be, the less the sovereign must fear rebellion and therefore the worse the life of the citizen would be. But this overlooks a factor that is the main focus of Hobbes's own answer to the question: the dissolution of the commonwealth plunges the sovereign into the state of nature along with everyone else, and therefore the worse the state of nature is expected to be, the more the sovereign would fear the consequences of the dissolution of the commonwealth as well. That is why the "laws of nature," which reason derives from the "passions that incline men to peace," are as binding on the sovereign as they are on his subjects.

Moreover, the role of the sovereign is not just to provide everyone (the sovereign included) with security against the "injuries of one another" but also with security "from the invasion of foreigners." Thus, Hobbes claimed,

the greatest pressure of sovereign governors, proceedeth not from any delight, or profit they can expect in the damage or weakening of their subjects, in whose vigor, consisteth their own strength and glory; but in the restiveness of themselves, that unwillingly contributing to their own defence, make it necessary for their governors to draw from them what they can in time of peace, that they may have means on any emergent occasion, or sudden need, to resist, or take advantage on their enemies. (1957, 120)

This passage illustrates a connection between the two great questions posed by the development of the European system of states that is one of the themes of the *raison d'état* literature but that the division of intellectual labor in modern political science makes it easy to overlook: the sover-

eign's interest in securing his position against other princes who would like to take it from him gave him an additional incentive to preserve the "vigor" of his subjects, which was the source of his own "strength and glory." Thus the extent of the domestic welfare-enhancing effect of Leviathan was in part a function of the extent of the potentially welfare-reducing effect of the state system that was Leviathan's by-product.

This link is exemplified in a striking work written by a near-contemporary of Hobbes, a French Huguenot nobleman named Duke Henri de Rohan, called *De l'interest des Princes et Estats de la Chrestienté*, which was published in 1638 and translated into English in 1663 (Rohan 1663). As Meinecke wrote of this work, "There are sentences here which will make even the modern reader's heart beat fast" (1998, 168). Were it not for the archaic English into which it was translated, one might think it had been written by a modern student of international politics. But it was written about European politics before the emergence of the modern European state, and it illustrates the fact that the development of the European state cannot be separated from the development of the European state system.

The preface to this work is often quoted. It begins with the arresting statement:

The Princes command the People, & the Interest commands the Princes. The knowledge of this Interest is as much more raised above that of Princes actions, as they themselves are above the People. (Rohan 1663, preface)

However, "[t]he Prince may deceive himselfe," or "his Counsell may be corrupted,"

but the Interest alone can never faile. According as it is well or ill understood, it maketh States to live or die. And . . . it alwaies aimeth at the augmentation, or at leastwise the conservation of a State. (preface)

Rohan's purpose in this work is to use the interests of the main actors in European politics at the time to explain what they were doing, in order to help the French king to understand what the protection of his interests required. He thereby illustrates both the descriptive and normative content of the notion of "interests" discussed previously.

The reason this is relevant in the current context is that Rohan had been one of the main military leaders of the French Protestants, whose military power the French monarch had set out to destroy. Yet in this treatise he seeks to instruct the king of France as to how best "to augment, or at least conserve," the French monarchy. One reason for this is that the

Huguenots had been defeated and Rohan was trying to ingratiate himself with the king's chief minister, Richelieu, and preserve a military role for himself in the service of the king. But he also wanted to argue that the threat to France posed by Spain meant that it was in the king's own interest to follow a policy of toleration toward the Huguenots, in order to elicit their support against Spain.<sup>22</sup>

Since Rohan's own future was at stake, and since this treatise was written to seem persuasive to Cardinal Richelieu, Rohan's reasoning reveals a great deal about the way men of affairs thought about these questions in the seventeenth century.<sup>23</sup> In the preface he says that "to consider well the Interest of the Princes of this time"

one ought to lay for a ground, that there be two Powers in Christendome, which are as the two Poles, from whence descend the influences of peace and warre upon the other States, to wit, the Houses of France and Spaine. This of Spaine finding itself augmented all at once, hath not been able to conceale the designe she had to make her selfe Mistresse, and cause the Sun of a new Monarchie to rise in the West. That of France is forthwith carried to make a counterpoise. The other Princes are annexed to the one, or the other, according to their Interest. (Rohan 1663, preface)

One should probably resist the temptation of calling this the first reference to a bipolar international system.

Rohan's argument is that the Spanish Habsburgs had sought to use Catholicism, "as that for conscience sake doth make people to undertake anything," as a way of stabilizing their control of Spain and extending it elsewhere (4-5). It was therefore in the interest of the Spanish monarch to establish himself as the protector of the "Catholik Religion" everywhere, which had the effect of making allies of the pope and Catholic princes and weakening potential opponents such as France and England by fomenting discord between Catholics and Protestants within their territories.

From this it follows, Rohan wrote,

that if the first maxime of the interest of Spaine be, to prosecute the Protestants, for to grow by their spoils: the first interest of France is, to make the Catholikes perceive the venom hidden under the same. Especially to let the Court of Rome understand that the hopes which Spaine gives her to augment her treasures by the ruin of the Protestants; is not but to further her designe

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22. For a discussion of Rohan's career and writings, see Meinecke 1998, 162-95.

23. For Richelieu's own thinking, see Church 1972.

towards the Monarchie, where she can no sooner arrive, but the Pope must become her Servant. (19–20)

Rather, the authority of the pope “never hath more lustre, then when the power of Christian Princes and States is ballanced.”

Moreover France should make shew to the Protestant Princes and States, that although she be of a diverse Religion to theirs, yet shee would rather their conversion, then their destruction, assuring them that this shall not at all hinder her that shee contribute not of her owne to conserve them, and to aide them freely against all those that would trouble or change any thing in their States and liberties. (20)

Implicit in this argument was the inference that the Huguenots should not seek the support of Spain against the French king but should support the French king against Spain.

One implication of this interpretation of the interests of the Huguenots is that the strength of the French king’s army is not a complete explanation of his ability to disarm them. The fact that they could have sought the assistance of Spain perhaps explains the willingness of the French king to maintain a policy of tolerance even after they had been disarmed, while the fact that he could be expected to do so may in turn help explain their willingness not to seek Spanish assistance. Nonetheless, eventually a French king reversed this policy of toleration, whereupon many Huguenots fled to England and became a source of strength for the English monarchy.

The passage just quoted refers to “Protestant Princes and States,” but both Rohan’s argument and his own position in the world illustrate the fact that no European prince in the seventeenth century had the power that Hobbes said a sovereign must have, and therefore no “state” was a commonwealth in the sense that Hobbes used the term. When Hobbes spoke of the “state of nature,” therefore, he likely had in mind not some thought experiment or historical condition prior to civilization but the condition of Europe in the seventeenth century.

One of the myths that sustain modern Realist accounts of international politics is that the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War, ushered in a system of sovereign states.<sup>24</sup> If Europe during

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24. On this point see Osiander 2001. For a fascinating discussion of how Westphalia came to be seen as the foundation of the European state system, see Keene 2002. Keene argues that this was the product of attempts by German scholars to find a legal foundation for opposition to revolutionary France and Napoleon. Works by these scholars were subsequently accepted as authoritative characterizations of the European state system by the founders of what is commonly called the “English school” of international politics (Keene 2002, 14–22).

Hobbes's time was in the "state of nature," then one might think that after the Peace of Westphalia it consisted of a collection of Hobbesian commonwealths. This is far from the truth. Rather, "the restiveness of themselves, that unwillingly contribut[ed] to their own defence," to use Hobbes's words, continued for many years to prevent European princes from "draw[ing] from them" what they needed, and the inability of the French monarchy to finance its army by nonviolent means out of the resources available to it within its own borders eventually led to its demise in the French Revolution (Lynn 1993).

Students of international politics today look at the Balkans or Afghanistan and are puzzled, and this puzzlement has produced the growing literature on "state failure." But Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was much like the Balkans or Afghanistan today, and the important puzzle is how it came to be so different. The process by which states with the properties of Hobbes's commonwealth were created in Europe was a long and violent one. The question it poses for us today is whether people now living in the "state of nature" must follow the same long and violent path out of it that Europeans did and whether the outcome will ultimately be as welfare enhancing as Hobbes claimed it would be.

The path the Europeans followed is not well described by either of the ways Hobbes said a commonwealth might be created: "institution" or "acquisition." It was, rather, a long, drawn-out mixture of both, in which at times princes attracted sufficient support from some "little monarchs," to use Hobbes's term, to intimidate others, as the French king had done to the Huguenots, and at other times held out sufficient inducements to all to attract voluntary cooperation, as illustrated by Rohan's argument for supporting the French monarch against the one in Spain. But in all cases what was crucial was the relationship among princes, warriors, and the people who produced the goods that fed and armed them all. The effect of the outcome on the welfare of citizens depended heavily on the distribution of bargaining power among these three groups, which was in turn heavily influenced by the recurring military conflicts among would-be sovereigns that characterized modern European history.<sup>25</sup>

### A World of Leviathans

Hobbes's *Leviathan* was published in 1651. Almost one hundred years later, Rousseau wrote a work that he originally called *That the State of*

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25. Useful surveys of the literature on this process can be found in Porter 1994 and Glete 2002. A classic contribution to it is Tilly 1992. A useful account of this process as it developed in England can be found in Brewer 1989.

*War is Born of the Social State* but that became simply *The State of War* (Rousseau 1991a). In it, as the original title indicates, Rousseau argued that Hobbes had things exactly backward: “Far from the state of war being natural to man, war springs from peace, or at least from the precautions that men have taken to ensure a lasting peace” (45). “Let us contrast these ideas,” Rousseau wrote, “with Hobbes’s horrible system, and we will find the very reverse of his absurd doctrine.”

As individual men we live in a civil state subject to laws; as people we enjoy a natural liberty: this makes our position fundamentally worse than if these distinctions were unknown. For living simultaneously in the social order and in the state of nature we are subjected to the inconveniences of both, without finding security in either. (44)

As we saw in chapter 1, Rousseau’s writings are one of the main sources of what came to be known as structural Realism.<sup>26</sup>

In the hundred years between the publication of *Leviathan* and Rousseau’s writings about war, the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century were replaced by conflicts among princes over territory and foreign trade, and independent mercenary armies were replaced by armies that were controlled by monarchs. However, as already noted, the European state in Rousseau’s day was still a work in progress, and therefore rule was still largely hereditary, the rights of inheritance were still subject to dispute among quarreling princes, monarchs still had difficulty financing the military forces they controlled, and war continued to be a way of financing war (Lynn 1993, 310).

Different as eighteenth-century Europe was from the seventeenth century, it was still radically different from Europe today. And therefore it is not clear whether the frequency of war in the eighteenth century is best explained by the fact that Hobbes was wrong to be optimistic about the consequences of creating a world of commonwealths or by the fact that the modern commonwealth was still under construction. By adopting uncritically Rousseau’s answer, structural Realism conceals the question from us.

Rousseau’s thinking about international politics was at least in part stimulated by a proposal for a European confederation written by Charles Castel, Abbé de Saint-Pierre, early in the eighteenth century. After Saint-Pierre’s death, his family asked Rousseau to edit and abridge his writings.

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26. Constructivists fail to emphasize this fact and, following Talcott Parsons, concentrate their fire on Hobbes. But Rousseau was much more pessimistic about international politics than Hobbes was, and it would be hard to portray Rousseau as an individualist, materialist, or utilitarian. For a discussion of Rousseau’s ideas about international politics and their relation to the ideas of Hobbes and Kant, see Hoffmann 1963.

Rousseau produced instead an abstract of Saint-Pierre's project, written in his own words, and a separate evaluation or "Judgement" of it that was not published until after his death. In Rousseau's abstract of Saint-Pierre's ideas and his evaluation of them we find many of the issues debated by Realist students of international politics and their critics.

As described by Rousseau, at the heart of Saint-Pierre's proposal was a system of collective security, consisting of "a perpetual and irrevocable alliance" among the nineteen principal sovereigns of Europe, which would "guarantee to each of its members the possession and government of all the dominions which he holds at the moment of the treaty, as well as the manner of succession to them, elective or hereditary, as established by the fundamental laws of each province" (Rousseau 1991b, 69). All future disputes among the members were to be settled by arbitration by a permanent diet consisting of representatives of all of them, "to the absolute exclusion of all attempts to settle the matter by force or to take arms against each other under any pretext whatsoever." Moreover, "all the confederates shall arm and take the offensive, conjointly and at the common expense," against any sovereign who fails to abide by the provisions of the treaty, and "they shall not desist until the moment when he shall have laid down his arms, carried out the decisions and orders of the diet, made amends for his offence, paid all the costs, and atoned even for such warlike preparations as he may have made in defiance of the treaty" (70).

Three questions could be asked about such a proposal: (1) Was it utopian; that is, would the behavior the proposal is intended to induce actually be an equilibrium, in the sense discussed earlier? (2) Was it realistic to think that the rulers who would be governed by it would agree to it? (3) If the proposal was not adopted, how pessimistic should one have been about the prospects for peace?

Even when Rousseau spoke for himself, it is often difficult to figure out what he meant to say. The problem of determining Rousseau's answer to these questions is compounded by the fact that he tried to make the most persuasive case he could for Saint-Pierre's proposal, while at the same time criticizing it as unrealistic. He appears to have thought not that the scheme was utopian but that it was unrealistic to expect that it would be adopted:

though the scheme in itself was wise enough, the means proposed for its execution betray the simplicity of the author. . . . this good man saw clearly enough how things would work, when once set going, but . . . he judged like a child of the means for setting them in motion. (Rousseau 1991b, 94)

A federation of Europe, he wrote, could only be established by force. "That being so," he said,

which of us would dare to say whether the league of Europe is a thing more to be desired or feared? It would perhaps do more harm in a moment than it would guard against for ages. (100)

Since it could not be adopted, the reasons given for thinking it would be desirable made Rousseau pessimistic about the prospects for a peaceful European order.

However, there are good reasons to believe that the scheme was utopian and therefore would not have made much difference even if it had been adopted. The idea behind it was that, while princes would retain their ability to make war, none would choose to do so because each would expect to be opposed by an overwhelming coalition of forces if he did, and therefore “the thought of conquests will have to be given up from the absolute impossibility of making them.” Moreover, “the very thing which destroys all hope of conquest” would relieve all princes “at the same time from all fear of being attacked,” and therefore there could be no purely defensive reason to go to war either (Rousseau 1991b, 74). The function of such a treaty, then, would be, like the rule of the road, to enable states to avoid costly conflicts by creating a set of equilibrium expectations that would be common knowledge. But there are good reasons to think that the behavior predicted would not in fact be an equilibrium.

Suppose that the agreement were violated by a single prince, and consider whether each of the others would choose to join forces in opposition to it. It would be costly to join such a coalition, and therefore if a prince’s own interests were not threatened by the violation he might choose not to do it. Moreover, failing to join would be costless unless this failure were itself subject to punishment of some sort. But this punishment would require that all the others cooperate, and now there would be two states to punish, and the costs of punishment for all the others would be even higher. The same reasoning would apply to each successive noncooperative prince in turn, with the cost of joining the punishing coalition greater each time. But this implies that the initial violator could not be confident enough of punishment to deter him from violating the agreement in the first place. Obviously, the cost of punishing an initial violation of the agreement would be even higher if two or more princes joined together to violate it.

The League of Nations was a similar scheme, and this is why realists like Carr and Morgenthau thought that it and other such schemes were utopian.<sup>27</sup> But even if this were not true, and any violation of the agreement were expected to be met by a coalition of all the other princes, this might not be enough to deter violations. The treaty said that the members

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27. The commitment to collective security required by the charter of the League of Nations was actually both vaguer and weaker than the commitment in Saint-Pierre’s scheme.

of the opposing coalition “shall not desist until the moment when [the violator] shall have laid down his arms, carried out the decisions and orders of the diet, [and] made amends for his offence” (Rousseau 1991b, 70). But while it was carrying out this provision, the violator could offer to accept a compromise settlement instead. Since the treaty gives the diet full power to settle all disputes by arbitration, members of the opposing coalition might be sorely tempted to agree to a revision of the prewar status quo as a way of ending such a costly conflict. But then a prince might violate the agreement with the expectation that the violation would lead the diet to take his claims more seriously than it otherwise would.

Rousseau’s abstract of Saint-Pierre’s reasoning says that “the powers of Europe stand to each other strictly in a state of war, and . . . all the separate treaties between them are in the nature rather of a temporary truce than a real peace” (Rousseau 1991b, 60). “The causes of the disease, once known,” he writes,

suffice to indicate the remedy, if indeed there is one to be found. Everyone can see that what unites any form of society is community of interests, and what disintegrates is their conflict; that either tendency may be changed or modified by a thousand accidents; and therefore that, as soon as a society is founded, some coercive power must be provided to co-ordinate the actions of its members and give to their common interests and mutual obligations that firmness and consistency which they could never acquire of themselves. (Rousseau 1991b, 61)

Thus Saint-Pierre, like Hobbes, assumed that, if individuals were to avoid the evils of the state of nature, they required, as Hobbes said, “a common power, to keep them in awe.” The problem his proposal was meant to solve was how to construct such a common power over the sovereigns of Europe without subjecting all of Europe to a common Leviathan, which was not only unrealistic but, many believed, undesirable.

However, the reason just given for thinking that Saint-Pierre’s scheme might not lead to peace even if a punishing coalition were expected to form is a reason for questioning that assumption. For if princes could influence the decisions of Saint-Pierre’s diet by threatening to use force if it did not alter the status quo, then dissatisfied groups within commonwealths could do the same in order to influence the decisions of the sovereign. And therefore, as Waltz recognized, “[i]f the absence of government is associated with the threat of violence, so also is its presence” (1979, 103).

In our examination of structural Realism we saw that, without an understanding of why violent conflict occurs, it is not possible to say what

the connection is between a commonwealth (or hierarchy) and peace, or the state of nature (or anarchy) and war, and that structural Realism did not have an answer to that question. Neither does Hobbes, Saint-Pierre, or Rousseau. Thus we must rely on our own resources in thinking about it. A possible answer to it is that Hobbes, Saint-Pierre, and Rousseau all had everything backward—that it is the expectation of peace that makes commonwealths possible, rather than the other way around, and the possibility of war that preserves the state of nature.

Moreover, the arguments of both Hobbes and the Duke de Rohan illustrate the possibility that it is the expectation of war between or among groups that creates reliable expectations of peace within them and that peace, therefore, not only makes large-scale war possible (as Rousseau claimed) but is also just a means of waging it. Since such peace makes war possible on an ever more violent scale, this would be a very pessimistic answer to the question indeed. However, it would be premature to conclude that that answer is the right one.

### The Balance of Power

Saint-Pierre, as represented by Rousseau, argued that the condition that made his proposal both possible and realistic was the fact that there was a stable balance or equilibrium among the nineteen sovereigns of Europe.<sup>28</sup> It was realistic to think that his proposal might be accepted, he claimed, because the balance of power made it impossible for any sovereign to expect to make major alterations in the status quo:

so that if the princes who are accused of aiming to universal monarchy were in reality guilty of any such project, they gave more proof of ambition than of genius. How could any man look such a project in the face without instantly perceiving its absurdity, without realizing that there is not a single potentate in Europe so much stronger than the others as ever to have a chance of making himself their master? (Rousseau 1991b, 62)

Moreover, this same condition implied that, if all the states of Europe but one acted together, they would be overwhelmingly more powerful than a single state that violated the confederation's prohibition of the use of force, and so the existence of a balance of power also made a collective security agreement among the sovereigns of Europe possible.

“[T]his much-vaunted balance,” as Saint-Pierre called it, is one of the

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28. For a list of these sovereigns, see Rousseau 1991b, 72.

pervasive themes of the *raison d'état* tradition, a theme that, like that tradition itself, has its origins in the warring northern Italian city-states of the Renaissance. In the words of Garrett Mattingly:

In the 1440's there began to form in certain Italian minds a conception of Italy as a system of independent states, coexisting by virtue of an unstable equilibrium which it was the function of statesmanship to preserve. This conception was fostered by the peninsula-wide alliances whose even balance of forces had ended every war of the past twenty years in stalemate. It recommended itself increasingly to statesmen who had accepted a policy of limited objectives, and had more to fear than to hope from a continuance of an all-out struggle. (1964, 71)

Here we have a concise statement of both the main subject of the modern discipline of international politics and some of the most important issues debated by students of it, which is why Kenneth Waltz wrote that “[i]f there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it.” Yet, he said, “one cannot find a statement of the theory that is generally accepted” (Waltz 1979, 117). Unfortunately, this is still true even after Waltz’s attempt to provide one.

As Waltz said, this conception of “a system of independent states” assumed that states,

at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination. States, or those who act for them, try in more or less sensible ways to use the means available in order to achieve the ends in view. These means fall into two categories: internal efforts (moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies) and external efforts (moves to strengthen and enlarge one’s own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one). (1979, 118)

Waltz claimed that “[b]alance-of-power theory is microtheory precisely in the economist’s sense” and that these assumptions implied that we should expect “the formation of balances of power” (118). He wrote:

Balance-of-power theory claims to explain a result (the recurrent formation of balances of power), which may or may not accord with the intentions of any of the units whose actions combine to produce that result. To contrive and maintain a balance may be the aim of one or more states, but then again it may not be. According to the theory, balances of power tend to form whether

some or all states consciously aim to establish and maintain a balance, or whether some or all states aim for universal domination. (119)

But there was no theoretical work on the balance of power prior to Waltz that established that this conclusion follows from the premises Waltz listed, nor, as we have seen, did Waltz's own argument show that it does. Thus the "balance-of-power theory" described by Waltz, like many of the "theories" that populate the literature of political science, is a mythological creature.

According to Waltz, the central proposition of balance-of-power theory is that "balances of power tend to form." But what does that mean? If there are just two states, to say that their power is balanced would mean that their military capabilities were equal. But why should we think that the military capabilities of two states in a two-state world would tend to be equal? The answer is not clear.

When there are more than two states, the proposition becomes ambiguous. It could mean that, as in a two-state world, the military capabilities of all states would tend to be equal to each other. But it is even less clear why that would be true if there are many states than if there are just two. And the implications of such a condition, were it to exist, are even less clear, since, as Saint-Pierre pointed out, it would imply that there were coalitions of states that would be much more powerful than their opponents.

Waltz interpreted the proposition to mean that, when there are more than two states, weak states would prefer to ally with other weak states, leading to alliances whose military capabilities were approximately equal to each other. As we saw in chapter 1, his argument for that proposition was not valid, and some people have claimed that, while states seeking only their own preservation would behave in that way, expansionist states would not. This would be consistent with Mattingly's statement, quoted earlier, that it was "the function of statesmanship" to preserve a balance, an idea that "recommended itself . . . to statesmen who had accepted a policy of limited objectives." It would also be consistent with the Duke de Rohan's analysis of the interests of the French monarchy summarized earlier. In the passage just quoted, however, Waltz explicitly denied that this was true, claiming that balances would form "whether some or all states consciously aim to establish and maintain a balance, or whether some or all states aim for universal domination."

I will return to this question in a later chapter. However, whatever the right answer to it might be, let us take note of two facts. First, even if Waltz's answer is correct, it is not clear what its implications are for either the likelihood of war or the long-run stability of a system of states. For it

is possible that two evenly matched coalitions might fight each other, and therefore it is possible that over time wars in such systems would lead to the defeat of all states but one.<sup>29</sup>

Second, for Waltz's answer to be possible, the distribution of military capabilities among individual states cannot be so unequal that one state could defeat all the others. As already noted, there is no reason to assume that this will always be true. The fact that it was true of Europe over a period of centuries may have been what distinguished that area from other parts of the world.

Moreover, it is this condition that many European writers, including Saint-Pierre, had in mind when they wrote of a balance of power. Saint-Pierre wrote:

The lie of the mountains, seas, and rivers, which serve as frontiers for the various nations who people [Europe], seems to have fixed forever their number and their size. We may fairly say that the political order of the continent is, in some sense, the work of nature. (Rousseau 1991b, 62)

However, he said, “[t]his does not mean that the Alps, the Rhine, the sea, and the Pyrenees are in themselves a barrier which no ambition can surmount; but that these barriers are supported by others which either block the path of the enemy, or serve to restore the old frontiers directly the first onslaught has spent its force” (64). Among these other, supporting, barriers was the fact that no prince, nor any two or three princes, could raise an army that could defeat all the others.

Saint-Pierre also claimed, however, that if several joined together to try and had some success,

that very success would sow the seeds of discord among our victorious allies. It is beyond the bounds of possibility that the prizes of victory should be so equally divided, that each will be equally satisfied with his share. The least fortunate will soon set himself to resist the further progress of his rivals, who in their turn, for the same reason, will speedily fall out with one another. I doubt whether, since the beginning of the world, there has been a single case in which three, or even two, powers have joined forces for the conquest of others, without quarreling over their contingents, or the division of the spoil, and without, in consequence of this dis-

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29. As we have seen, Saint-Pierre, as represented by Rousseau, believed that if war is to be prevented states that initiate it must expect to be opposed by superior force, not a force of equal size.

agreement, promptly giving new strength to their common enemy. (Rousseau 1991b, 64)

Here is an argument for the stability of the European balance that is different from Waltz's but equally incomplete. It illustrates the complexity of the issues raised by the European literature on the balance of power.<sup>30</sup>

## War

Saint-Pierre claimed that

the established order, if indestructible, is for that very reason the more liable to constant storms. Between the powers of Europe there is a constant action and reaction which, without overthrowing them altogether, keeps them in continual agitation. Ineffectual as they are, these shocks perpetually renew themselves, like the waves which forever trouble the surface of the sea without ever altering its level. The nations are incessantly ravaged, without any appreciable advantage to the sovereigns. (Rousseau 1991b, 65)

But if the waves that troubled the surface of the sea gave no appreciable advantage to the sovereigns, what caused them? If, as Saint-Pierre claimed, "it appears improbable that, under any supposition, either a king, or a league of kings, is in a position to bring about any serious or permanent change in the established order of Europe" (64), why was it necessary to create a collective security agreement whose sole purpose was to guarantee the stability of that order? Why wasn't the balance of power alone enough to deter states from using force? This is one of the recurring issues in the literature on the balance of power.<sup>31</sup>

One has to look hard to find an answer to that question, either in Rousseau's abstract of Saint-Pierre's ideas or in his presentation of his own, in part because both apparently thought the answer was so obvious that it required little or no justification. As Saint-Pierre put it in discussing "the perpetual quarrels, the robberies, the usurpations, the revolts, the wars, the murders, which bring daily desolation" to Europe:

But, in truth, what else was to be expected? Every community without laws and without rulers, every union formed and main-

30. A useful collection of other European writings on this subject can be found in Wright 1975. See also Sheehan 1996.

31. For an overview of what writers on the balance of power have said about this question, see Claude 1962, 51–66, 88–93.

tained by nothing better than chance, must inevitably fall into quarrels and dissensions at the first change that comes about. (Rousseau 1991b, 59–60)

This, as we have seen, is the foundation on which structural Realism was built. But, as we have also seen, not only is it not an answer to the question, but it is also contradicted by the fact that even communities with laws and rulers often have the properties that Saint-Pierre attributed to the nascent European state system. Moreover, in both Rousseau's abstract of Saint-Pierre's reasoning and in his own evaluation of it one can find arguments that are inconsistent with this explanation of war in eighteenth-century Europe.

According to Saint-Pierre, the fundamental problem was that all agreements among princes were guaranteed only by the contracting parties, there were many disagreements about the principles that should govern those agreements, and those disagreements could only be settled by force of arms. Thus the wars among European princes that so concerned Saint-Pierre and Rousseau were the result not of attempts to overturn the European balance of power but of attempts to compel agreements about the terms of what Saint-Pierre called "the public law of Europe" (Rousseau 1991b, 60).

But, of course, the perpetual agreement that he proposed as the solution to those problems was also to be guaranteed only by the contracting parties, and there would still be disagreements among them. And therefore the question raised by Saint-Pierre's analysis is why there could not be a perpetual agreement reached by the parties to all these individual disputes, which, once settled, would lead to peace among them. The answer he gives is that (1) there were always fresh disagreements to be settled (partly because the nature of the states themselves was constantly changing) and (2) the parties to the agreements were free to use force to renegotiate them "as soon as a change of circumstances shall have given fresh strength to the claimants" (Rousseau 1991b, 60–61).

This, of course, is a reason for thinking that, if Saint-Pierre's scheme were not utopian, the princes of Europe would not accept it, since it would require them to renounce the use of force as a way of settling disagreements that Saint-Pierre assumed they preferred to settle by force. But it is also a reason for thinking that if the range of disagreements among European princes eventually narrowed, and they ceased to expect marked changes in their relative military capabilities, they might be able to avoid the use of force in settling any remaining disagreements among them.

And therefore, one might conclude, the fundamental cause of war among European princes in the eighteenth century was not that they were in a state of nature (or a condition of anarchy) but that they lacked agree-

ment on the principles that should govern their relations with each other and their relative military capabilities were in a constant state of flux. Perhaps in more stable circumstances they would be able to achieve such an agreement, in which case neither a collective security agreement nor a European Leviathan would be necessary to avoid military conflicts among them.

In his *Judgement* of Saint-Pierre's proposal, Rousseau claimed that it was the interests of princes that made agreement among them difficult:

The whole life of kings, or of those on whom they shuffle off their duties, is devoted solely to two objects: to extend their rule beyond their frontiers and to make it more absolute within them. (1991b, 90)

"From these two fundamental maxims," he wrote, "we can easily judge of the spirit in which princes are likely to receive a proposal which runs directly counter to the one and is hardly more favourable to the other":

anyone can understand that war and conquest without and the encroachments of despotism within give each other mutual support; that money and men are habitually taken at pleasure from a people of slaves, to bring others beneath the same yoke; and that conversely war furnishes a pretext for exactions of money and another, no less plausible, for keeping large armies constantly on foot, to hold the people in awe. (90–91)

Thus wars among princes were a means of sustaining and increasing their control over their subjects, which in turn was a means of extracting the resources required for further wars. It was war that sustained the political order of Europe, and therefore war could not be eliminated without threatening the interests of rulers.

But this implies that European rulers were actually in a state of war with their subjects, and therefore, as already noted, the states of Europe in the eighteenth century were not Hobbesian commonwealths. Thus it does not imply that a world of Hobbesian commonwealths could not be peaceful. On closer inspection, therefore, Rousseau's explanation of war in the eighteenth century was not, as he claimed, "the very reverse of [Hobbes's] absurd doctrine."

Why was this not obvious both to Rousseau and to his readers? The reason is that Rousseau, along with many other readers of Hobbes, understood Hobbes's state of nature to consist of isolated individuals. But violent conflicts among individuals, Rousseau said, are necessarily limited, because (1) the damage that individuals can do to others is limited, (2) the

appetites of individuals are limited, and (3) there is a limit to the inequality of strength of individuals and therefore to the extent to which they must fear each other.

“The state, on the other hand,”

being an artificial body, has no fixed measure; its proper size is undefined; it can always grow bigger; it feels weak so long as there are others stronger than itself. Its safety and preservation demand that it makes itself stronger than its neighbors. It cannot increase, foster, or exercise its strength except at their expense; and even if it has no need to seek for provisions beyond its borders, it searches ceaselessly for new members to give itself a more unshakeable position. For the inequality of men has its limits set by nature, but the inequality of societies can grow incessantly, until one of them absorbs all the others. (Rousseau 1991a, 38)

Wars between states, then, are wars between artificial persons, not individual men:

Basically, the body politic, in so far as it is only a moral being, is merely a thing of reason. Remove the public convention and immediately the state is destroyed, without the least change in all that composes it. . . . What then does it mean to wage war on a sovereign? It means an attack on the public convention and all that results from it. . . . If the social pact could be sundered with one blow, immediately there would be no more war; and by this one blow the state would be killed, without the death of one man. (42)

In such struggles between artificial persons, states' objectives far exceed those that individuals would have:

Land, money, men, all the booty that one can carry off thus become the principal object of reciprocal hostilities. As this base greed imperceptibly changes people's ideas about things, war finally degenerates into brigandage, and little by little enemies and warriors become tyrants and thieves. (40)

But this is a good description of life in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is probably what Hobbes had in mind when he spoke of life in the state of nature. Because Hobbes's sovereign, unlike the eighteenth-century sovereigns described by Rousseau, would be able to make peace without undermining his own position, a world of commonwealths would not necessarily have those properties.

### The Market

Rousseau's description of war "in the social state" could actually have been taken directly from Hobbes's description of the state of nature in *Leviathan*. Hobbes wrote that

in all places, where men have lived by small families, to rob and spoil one another, has been a trade, and so far from being reputed against the law of nature, that the greater spoils they gained, the greater was their honour. . . . And as small families did then; so now do cities and kingdoms which are but greater families, for their own security, enlarge their dominions, upon all pretences of danger, and fear of invasion, or assistance that may be given to invaders, and endeavor as much as they can, to subdue, or weaken their neighbors, by open force, and secret arts, for want of other caution, justly; and are remembered for it in after ages with honour. (Hobbes 1957, chap. XVII, 109–10)

The state of nature that Hobbes described was not a world of isolated individuals but a world in which great families, with their servants and dependents, engaged in violent contests for wealth and then tried to secure their wealth by further violence.<sup>32</sup> When writers in the *raison d'état* tradition wrote of the interests of princes, it was the interests of the heads of these great families that they had in mind. As Mattingly wrote of Italy in the sixteenth century:

The sixteenth-century struggle for power had a dynastic, not a national orientation. The kingdom of Naples and the duchy of Milan were wealthy and famous provinces; the conquest of either would increase the apparent strength of the prince who could effect it, and indubitably increase, for a time, the benefits he would be able to bestow on his captains and counsellors. Whether such conquests would be worth to his people the blood and treasure they would cost was an irrelevant, absurd question. Nobody expected they would. (1964, 140)

These words could have been taken directly from Rousseau's characterization of the interests of rulers in the eighteenth century in his critique of Saint-Pierre's proposal.

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32. Hobbes translated Thucydides into English and was no doubt struck by the parallels he saw between Thucydides' descriptions of the breakdown of political order in ancient Greece and conditions in Europe during his time. For recent discussions, see Johnson 1993 and Rogers and Sorell 2000.

One way writers in the *raison d'état* tradition thought that interests could provide the basis for political order was that the increasing scale of conflicts among the heads of ruling families might align the interests of rulers with the interests of their subjects. It was out of this alignment of interests that the modern concept of the “national interest” emerged.<sup>33</sup> The idea that competition among predators might protect the interests of their prey became increasingly common and is reflected in the design of the U.S. Constitution (Hirschman 1977).

Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” of market competition, which protects consumers from producers who seek to exploit them, was another example of the same idea. But even a producer who overcharged his consumers due to lack of competition from other producers would be better than a predatory nobleman who merely confiscated the fruits of people’s labor and provided them nothing in return. And therefore another way that the interests of predators could be aligned with their prey was to substitute trade for predation as a way of accumulating wealth.<sup>34</sup>

In a chapter of *The Wealth of Nations* called “How the Commerce of the Towns Contributed to the Improvement of the Country,” Adam Smith wrote that, “though it has been the least observed,” the most important contribution by far of the development of commerce and manufactures was that they

gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbors, and of servile dependency upon their superiors. (1937, 385)

This was an effect that was especially striking to contributors to the Scottish Enlightenment such as Smith, who saw clearly the difference between life in the commercial towns of Scotland and life in the Scottish highlands and the borderlands between Scotland and England.<sup>35</sup>

Smith wrote:

In a country which has neither foreign commerce, nor any of the finer manufactures, a great proprietor, having nothing for which he can exchange the greater part of the produce of his lands which

33. For a description of this process in England, see Brewer 1989.

34. This is the main theme of Hirschman 1977.

35. Life in the Anglo-Scottish borderlands might well have been described as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” It is the area that contributed the word *blackmail* to the English language, where its original meaning was what would now be called “protection money.” For a description of life in the borderlands, see Fraser 1995. For a recent discussion of the Scottish Enlightenment, see Herman 2001.

is over and above the maintenance of the cultivators, consumes the whole in rustic hospitality at home. If this surplus produce is sufficient to maintain a hundred or a thousand men, he can make use of it in no other way than by maintaining a hundred or a thousand men. He is at all times, therefore, surrounded with a multitude of retainers and dependants, who having no equivalent to give in return for their maintenance, but being fed entirely by his bounty, must obey him, for the same reason that soldiers must obey the prince who pays them. (385)

Moreover, “the occupiers of land were in every respect as dependent upon the great proprietor as his retainers,” and this was the foundation of “the power of the ancient barons.”

They necessarily became the judges in peace, and the leaders in war, of all who dwelt upon their estates. They could maintain order and execute the law within their respective demesnes, because each of them could there turn the whole force of the inhabitants against the injustice of any one. No other person had sufficient authority to do this. The king in particular had not. (386–87)

The feudal law was not the source of this authority but rather an attempt by the king to restrict it. But

[a]fter the institution of feudal subordination, the king was as incapable of restraining the violence of the great lords as before. They still continued to make war according to their own discretion, almost continually upon one another, and very frequently upon the king; and the open country still continued to be a scene of violence, rapine, and disorder.

“But what all the violence of the feudal institutions could never have effected,” Smith wrote, “the silent insensible operation of foreign commerce and manufactures gradually brought about” (388).

Foreign commerce and manufactures provided the proprietors of the great landed estates something to spend their wealth on that they preferred to the limited services provided by their retainers. As a result, both retainers and unnecessary tenants were dismissed, and therefore

the great proprietors were no longer capable of interrupting the regular execution of justice or of disturbing the peace of the country. Having sold their birth-right, not like Esau for a mess of pottage in time of hunger and necessity, but in the wantonness of

plenty, for trinkets and baubles, fitter to be play-things of children than the serious pursuits of men, they became as insignificant as any substantial burgher or tradesman in a city. A regular government was established in the country as well as in the city, nobody having sufficient power to disturb its operations in the one, any more than in the other. (390–91)

Like the more famous “invisible hand” of market competition, this was a “revolution of the greatest importance to the public happiness, . . . brought about by two different orders of people, who had not the least intention to serve the public.”

To gratify the most childish vanity was the sole motive of the great proprietors. The merchants and artificers, much less ridiculous, acted merely from a view to their own interest, and in pursuit of their own pedlar principle of turning a penny wherever a penny was to be got. Neither of them had either knowledge or foresight of that great revolution which the folly of one, and the industry of the other, was gradually bringing about. (391–92)

However, the great landed proprietors did not just become consumers of “trinkets and baubles.” Some of them, of course, became commercial and manufacturing magnates and therefore a different sort of “robber baron.” One could argue that this was nonetheless preferable to the real thing. Others, however, became officers in the king’s army or administrators of his empire and therefore the indirect beneficiaries of predation on a larger scale. If the process described by Adam Smith led to the replacement of Hobbes’s “little monarchs” by big monarchs, one must ask why these big monarchs would not just be bigger predators.

Indeed, one could argue that the effect of commerce and manufacturing was not just to provide nonagricultural sources of wealth but also to increase the optimal scale of predation. When agricultural production that is consumed locally is the source of all wealth, then whoever controls an agricultural estate controls the wealth that it produces. Trade and manufacturing, on the other hand, lead to economies of scale in predation, and the existence of money provides a means of sharing the gains among predators without dividing large tracts of territory among them.<sup>36</sup>

It was such large-scale predators that Rousseau had in mind when he argued that European sovereigns would not be impressed by arguments

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36. This is the basis of Henri Pirenne’s (2001) argument that European feudalism was the product not of the barbarian conquest of Rome but of the disruption of Mediterranean trade caused by the rise of Islam.

“drawn from the interruption of commerce, from the loss of life, from the financial confusion and the real loss which result from an unprofitable conquest.”

It is a great miscalculation always to estimate the losses and gains of princes in terms of money; the degree of power they aim at is not to be reckoned by the millions in their coffers. The prince always makes his schemes rotate: he seeks to command in order to enrich himself, and to enrich himself in order to command. . . . it is only in the hope of winning them both in the long run that he pursues each of them apart. If he is to be master both of men and things, he must have empire and money at the same time. (Rousseau 1991b, 92)

Anticipating recent arguments about the importance of relative gains, he also claimed that

the advantages to commerce from a general and lasting peace are in themselves certain and indisputable, still, being common to all states, they will be appreciated by none. For such advantages make themselves felt only by contrast, and he who wishes to increase his relative power is bound to seek only such gains as are exclusive. (93)

However, Europe is no longer ruled by princes, and rule is no longer a means of acquiring great wealth. Thus Rousseau’s reasoning does not necessarily apply to states such as the ones that exist in modern Europe.

What accounts for the change? Part of the answer is that competition among the predatory rulers of early modern Europe meant that the resources that were required to maintain their positions greatly increased over time. Thus as more and more of the wealth of Europe was produced by traders and manufacturers rather than by great agricultural estates, means had to be devised to convert this new form of wealth into military capabilities. But, as Adam Smith wrote,

A merchant . . . is not necessarily the citizen of any particular country. It is in a great measure indifferent to him from what place he carries on his trade; and a very trifling disgust will make him remove his capital, and together with it all the industry which it supports, from one country to another. (1937, 395)

And therefore merchants and manufacturers were in a stronger bargaining position than people tied to the land when predatory rulers sought to cap-

ture their resources to support their own wealth and power. In modern totalitarian states rulers have tried to exploit the wealth of commerce and industry without having to compromise with its producers, but, to the surprise of many, states in which the rulers were weaker have proved so far to be militarily stronger. Military competition among states, therefore, has had an important influence on the interest rulers have taken in the economic well-being of their subjects.<sup>37</sup>

### Recurring War, Perpetual Peace

It is a short step from the idea that interests are a more reliable way of providing for the common good than morality to the idea that the actions of individuals in pursuit of their interests can have nonobvious consequences for human social behavior. And it is a short step from there to the idea that explanations of the collective behavior of human beings might resemble explanations of natural phenomena.

The ideas of Adam Smith illustrate the first step. One of the people who took the second was Immanuel Kant, who wrote:

No matter what conception one may form of the freedom of the will in metaphysics, the phenomenal appearances of the will, i.e., human actions, are determined by general laws of nature like any other event of nature. . . . Thus marriages, the consequent births and the deaths, since the free will seems to have such a great influence on them, do not seem to be subject to any law according to which one could calculate their number beforehand. Yet the annual (statistical) tables about them in the major countries show that they occur according to stable natural laws. . . . Individual human beings, each pursuing his own ends according to his inclination and often one against another (and even one entire people against another) . . . unintentionally promote, as if it were their guide, an end of nature which is unknown to them. They thus work to promote that which they would care little for if they knew about it. (1784, 116–17)

Even though “men . . . do not act like animals merely according to instinct, nor like rational citizens according to an agreed plan” (117), it is possible, Kant claimed, that there is an order to human affairs that human beings could uncover.

“[N]ature,” he wrote, “produced a Kepler who figured out an unex-

37. For extended presentations of this argument, see Jones 1987 and McNeill 1982.

pected way of subsuming the eccentric orbits of the planets to definite laws, and a Newton who explained these laws by a general cause of nature.” Kant claimed to have discerned an order to human history, though he said he “would leave it to nature to produce a man who would be capable of writing history” in accordance with it (117). The order he claimed to have discerned could be characterized as a theory of the evolution of human society, which he outlined long before Darwin’s theory of biological evolution.<sup>38</sup>

Darwinian evolution takes place through the biological process of the inheritance of traits of organisms, and individual animals have only limited means of responding to changes in their environments. Kant’s idea was that human beings were endowed with greater means of inventing ad hoc responses to their environment than were animals, but this adaptation

requires trials, experience and information in order to progress gradually from one level of understanding to the next. Therefore every man would have to live excessively long in order to learn how to make full use of all his faculties.

Thus, in humans, “those natural faculties which aim at the use of reason shall be fully developed in the species, not in the individual,” and therefore, we might now say, human evolution takes place at the social level as well as, or instead of, the biological level (Kant 1784, 118).

There are three elements to the Darwinian theory of evolution: (1) a mechanism that randomly produces new traits in animal populations; (2) a mechanism that selects some traits to be reproduced at greater rates than others; and (3) a mechanism of reproduction that leads to repeated operations of the first two mechanisms. In any theory of social evolution, the mechanism that produces diversity must obviously be human inventiveness, while the mechanism of reproduction must be just the transmission of culture and social organization from one generation to the next.

What is striking about Kant’s theory of social evolution is that the mechanism that selects some social inventions over others is conflict, which leads to violence and war.

The means which nature employs to accomplish the development of all faculties is the antagonism of men in society. . . . I mean by antagonism the asocial sociability of man, i.e., the propensity of men to enter into a society, which propensity is, however, linked

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38. Kant was interested in eighteenth-century ideas about biology, and some scholars have claimed to find in his writings about biology ideas that anticipate Darwin’s. For a skeptical discussion of these claims, see Lovejoy 1910 and 1911.

to a constant mutual resistance which threatens to dissolve this society.

“This propensity,” he wrote, “apparently is innate in man.”

Man has an inclination to *associate* himself, because in such a state he feels more like a man capable of developing his natural faculties. Man has also a marked propensity to *isolate* himself, because he finds in himself the asocial quality to want to arrange everything according to his own ideas. He therefore expects resistance everywhere, just as he knows of himself that he is inclined to resist others. (Kant 1784, 120; emphasis in original)

According to Kant, man’s “asocial sociability” leads to an evolutionary process that might be compared to the process by which American professional football has evolved. Teams, seeking to defeat other teams, invent strategies and formations that their opponents have difficulty coping with. Such successful strategies are either copied or countered by newly invented strategies, and over time, therefore, the game of football gradually changes.<sup>39</sup>

The development of football, of course, is constrained by rules that define the game. The evolution of human society, however, is not constrained by rules, and therefore any rules that constrain conflict must be endogenous to the evolutionary process that is driven by recurring conflicts.

Kant’s description of human nature resembles Hobbes’s, and like Hobbes he thought that “[m]an *needs* a master who can break man’s will and compel him to obey a general will under which every man could be free” (Kant 1784, 122; emphasis in original).<sup>40</sup> However, as we saw in our discussion of Hobbes, the creation of a “master” (or sovereign) entails a problem, which Kant states very graphically:

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39. It is interesting to compare what Kant said about the evolution of human society with modern writings on the same subject by evolutionary biologists. For examples, see Diamond 1997 and Wilson 2002. Also relevant is Bingham 1999. A useful recent survey of evolutionary thinking in the social sciences, with a focus on the development of economic institutions, can be found in Bowles 2003. See also the collection of papers, with accompanying commentaries, in Katz 2000. I have found the work of the anthropologist Christopher Boehm useful in thinking about what “asocial sociability” might mean as a way of characterizing human nature—see Boehm 1987 and 1999. Kant’s ideas about social evolution have been given remarkably little attention by evolutionary social scientists. For recent discussions, see Fukuyama 1992; Wright 2000; and Cederman 2001a and 2001b. For a discussion of Wright’s book by an evolutionary biologist, see Wilson 2000. Some of William McNeill’s writings lend themselves to interpretation in these terms. See especially McNeill 1980 and 1982.

40. On Kant’s Hobbesianism, see Tuck 1999, 207–25.

But where is he to get this master? Nowhere but from mankind. But then this master is in turn an animal who needs a master. Therefore one cannot see how man, try as he will, could secure a master . . . who would be himself just. . . . One cannot fashion something absolutely straight from wood which is as crooked as that of which man is made. (122–23)

There are two parts to Kant's solution to this problem. One is to "organize a group of rational beings"

in such a way that, in spite of the fact that their private attitudes are opposed, these private attitudes mutually impede each other in such a manner that the public behavior . . . is the same as if they did not have such evil attitudes. (Kant 1795, 453)

"Such a problem," he claimed, "*must* be solvable."

But the solution to it would seem to require both a designer with the appropriate motivation and a willingness to accept what the designer recommended. Hobbes, as many people have pointed out, was unclear how people were supposed to get from the state of nature to a commonwealth, and Rousseau argued that European rulers would never accept the scheme for regulating violence proposed by Saint-Pierre. Kant's solution to this problem is analogous to Darwin's argument that intelligent design is a by-product of the evolutionary process:

if I say of nature: she wants this or that to take place, it does not mean that she imposes a *duty* to do it . . . but it means that nature itself does it, whether we want it or not.

And the mechanism by which nature does it is war: "If internal conflicts did not compel a people to submit itself to the compulsion of public laws, external wars would do it" (Kant 1795, 452). "We have to admit," Kant wrote, "that the greatest evils which oppress civilised nations are the result of war."

But if this constant fear of war did not compel even heads of state to show this *respect for humanity*, would we still encounter the same culture, or that close association of social classes within the commonwealth which promotes the well-being of all? Would we still encounter the same population, or even that degree of freedom which is still present in spite of highly restrictive laws? We need only look at *China*, whose position may expose it to occasional unforeseen incursions but not to attack by a powerful

enemy, and we shall find that, for this very reason, it has been stripped of every vestige of freedom. (Kant 1786, 231–32)<sup>41</sup>

Biological evolution does not have a goal or end state toward which it is directed. Kant claimed that there was reason to believe that social evolution does:

a union of nations wherein each, even the smallest state, could expect to derive its security and rights—not from its own power or its own legal judgments—but only from this great union. . . . However fanciful this idea may seem and as such may have been ridiculed when held by the Abbé St. Pierre and Rousseau . . . it is, nevertheless, the inevitable escape from the destitution into which human beings plunge each other. (Kant 1784, 124)

Thus, he claimed:

All wars are . . . so many attempts (not in the intention of men, but in the intention of nature) to bring about new relations among the states and to form new bodies by the break-up of the old states to the point where they cannot again maintain themselves alongside each other and must therefore suffer revolutions until finally, partly through the best possible arrangement of the civic constitution internally, and partly through the common agreement and legislation externally, there is created a state which, like a civic commonwealth, can maintain itself automatically. (Kant 1784, 124–25)

Thus Kant claimed not only that “war made the state,” as modern scholarship on the development of the European state tells us (Tilly 1992; Porter 1994), but also that it would eventually produce a peaceful global order.

Recent writings about Kant by students of international politics have mainly focused on his characterization of the properties of a peaceful global order, which some have seen as an alternative to Realism as a theory of international politics.<sup>42</sup> However, Kant’s understanding of the basic problem of political order was nearly indistinguishable from Hobbes’s, and his understanding of international politics in his time was not very different from Rousseau’s (Tuck 1999, 197–225). What distinguished him

41. For Kant’s analysis of how external wars lead to internal justice, see Kant 1784, 128; and Kant 1795, 448–55. It is replete with biological analogies.

42. See especially the influential articles on Kant by Michael Doyle (1983).

from Rousseau was his belief that a global Leviathan was not necessary for peace, and what distinguished him from Hobbes was his belief that peace among commonwealths required that commonwealths be republics.

Even though Kant thought that a global Leviathan was not necessary for peace, he wrote that

the state of peace must be *founded*; for the mere omission of the threat of war is no security of peace, and consequently a neighbor may treat his neighbor as an enemy unless he has guaranteed such security to him, which can only happen within a state of law. (Kant 1795, 436; emphasis in original)

Therefore peace required a treaty that embodied specific commitments. This treaty would establish

a union of a particular kind which we may call the *pacific union* . . . which would be distinguished from a *peace treaty* by the fact that the latter tries to end merely *one* war, while the former tries to end *all* wars forever. This union is not directed toward the securing of some additional power of the state, but merely toward maintaining and securing the *freedom* of each state by and for itself and at the same time of the other states thus allied with each other. And yet, these states will not subject themselves (as do men in the state of nature) to laws and to the enforcement of such laws. (444; emphasis in the original)

But if such commitments are not backed up with force, what guarantees that they will be kept? Kant's answer is "mutual self-interest."

It is the *spirit of commerce* which cannot coexist with war, and which sooner or later takes hold of every nation. . . . In this way nature guarantees lasting peace by the mechanism of human inclinations. (455; emphasis in original)

Human interests, then, would enable such an agreement to "maintain itself automatically," as Kant put it, or, as we would now say, make peace an equilibrium. Thus we might now conjecture that the function of the treaty would be to make the expectations that supported the equilibrium common knowledge. But in the absence of such a commitment, it is not clear that Kant thought that peace would be an equilibrium.

Both the states that make up the international system and the network of agreements that define it have changed considerably since Kant's time. Structural Realism assumes, without any supporting argument, that noth-

ing important has changed since then. Enthusiasts for Kant's ideas are inclined to believe that the conditions that Kant specified for peace among the states of Europe have been achieved. But that would have seemed a plausible claim in the middle of the nineteenth century as well, when the greatest amount of violence was yet to come. And Kant seems to have thought that revolutionary France might form the nucleus of a peaceful international order (Tuck 1989, 221–25).

The problem is that Kant's theory of social evolution suffers from some of the same limitations as Marx's theory of economic evolution: (1) it is not clear exactly what properties the end state of the process is supposed to have; (2) therefore it is not clear how far off the achievement of the end state is; and (3) it is not clear whether the actions of human beings can influence when the end state might be reached. Modern scholarship provides strong support for Kant's claim that war is the mechanism that drove the creation of the modern European state. But without a better understanding of what explains violent conflicts it is not possible to say what implications the current properties of those states have for the likelihood of future conflicts.

### From Raison d'État to Realism

As Kant's writings illustrate, the origins of modern social science are to be found in the *raison d'état* tradition.<sup>43</sup> The idea that people's behavior is to be explained by their interests, arguments that show that the consequences of this fact can be both complex and nonobvious, and efforts to design institutional arrangements that channel competing individual interests in directions that serve the common good are all fundamental to both modern economics and modern political science. Moreover, current controversies about the relative importance of interests and social norms or culture in explaining social behavior echo early criticisms of writers in the *raison d'état* tradition.<sup>44</sup>

Since the theory of games has been most enthusiastically embraced by economists, many people have the impression that game theory is just economics, and since economists are not much interested in norms or culture, they conclude that game theory cannot have much to say about the relation among culture, norms, and the interests of individuals. But, as the example of the rule of the road discussed at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, this is wrong (O'Neill 1999, 259).

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43. As they also illustrate, this is where the modern Western conception of the morally autonomous individual comes from as well (Tuck 1999).

44. See the discussion in Tuck 1999. For an interesting argument that even religion can be explained as a way human beings have managed to organize themselves for collective action to serve human interests, see Wilson 2002.

The two fundamental insights of game theory are (1) that one cannot specify what actions are in an individual's interests without also specifying what would be in the interest of other individuals (this is the problem of strategic interdependence) and (2) that in any given social situation there will often be multiple combinations of rational choices by individuals, all of which are both stable and individually rational (this is the problem of multiple equilibria). The second insight provides a way of understanding how norms and culture help explain the behavior of individuals. But the first insight illustrates the fact that cultural explanations are usually incomplete, in that they fail to explain why individuals must do what their culture requires, even when it appears contrary to obvious human interests.<sup>45</sup> Thus it seems unlikely that we will be able to resolve the issues raised in debates between writers in the *raison d'état* tradition and their critics without an answer to the questions that game theory has always focused on.<sup>46</sup>

If "realism" is *raison d'état*, it is just modern social science and not a theory of international politics. Why, then, is realism thought by so many people to be a doctrine that is only relevant to international politics?<sup>47</sup> At least part of the answer lies in the fact that the central concern of writers in the *raison d'état* tradition was to control violence by using political institutions to channel people's interests in peaceful directions. Because the European state proved to be such a successful means of doing that, such states are now taken for granted. They are considered as natural as the rivers and mountain ranges that often separate them. Many people now project the states of the second half of the nineteenth century back onto earlier periods in European history, when they did not actually exist. As a result, domestic violence now seems abnormal or unnatural, the civil wars in the United States and Spain aberrations, and violence within territories demarcated by international agreements to be the consequence of "state failures" rather than the absence of states that have the properties of the ones that developed in Europe.

This is why, when Kenneth Waltz set out to write a book about the causes of war, he took for granted that his subject was interstate wars, and

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45. For an investigation of this question by an anthropologist in an analysis of one particular set of social norms, see Boehm 1987. For a more general discussion, see Wilson 1998. For an extended discussion of the incompleteness of cultural explanations of human behavior, see Homans 1967.

46. The importance of social norms for understanding human behavior was part of game theory from the beginning. See the discussion of "standards of behavior," and their relation to social organization, in von Neumann and Morgenstern 1944, chap. 4. For recent discussions of how game theory can be used to illuminate the relation between culture and individual behavior, see Wilson 1998; O'Neill 1999; Chwe 2001; and Bowles 2003. See also Aoki 2001 and Greif 2006.

47. Unfortunately, the recent book about the relation between Realism and *raison d'état* by Jonathan Haslam (2002) mainly serves to reinforce this impression.

it seemed natural to him to group the possible causes of war into three categories: those pertaining to the nature of man (the first image), those pertaining to the nature of states (the second image), and those pertaining to the nature of the interstate system (the third image) (Waltz 1959). This would have made little sense to Europeans in the seventeenth century, to whom Hobbes's writings were addressed.

Thus contemporary Realism simply assumes that the problem that concerned Hobbes has been solved and then turns our attention to the implications of the existence of a world of commonwealths. But Hobbes's problem has not been solved in many places, and even where solutions seem to have been found, we cannot assume that they will last forever (Seabright 2004).

Contrary to what many people assume, Waltz had very little to say about Hobbes, and what he did say implied that Hobbes's characterization of the state of nature rested entirely on a pessimistic interpretation of human nature. According to Waltz:

because for Hobbes there is no society, nothing but recalcitrant individuals on the one side and government on the other, the state must be a powerful one. (1959, 85)

This reflects Rousseau's reading of Hobbes. But we have seen that Hobbes wrote things about the state of nature that are inconsistent with this interpretation and that his contemporaries were very unlikely to have understood him in that way. The state of war that concerned Hobbes and his contemporaries was not a condition populated by individuals outside of society but one populated by warring groups, and thus the wars that concerned Hobbes and his readers were neither armed conflicts among individuals nor wars between or among states.

Waltz also claimed that liberals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

were as individualistic as Hobbes, but they rejected usually Hobbes's view of human nature and always his opinion of the social results of selfishly motivated behavior. Most of them believed, on the one hand, that man is generally pretty good and, on the other, that even though individual behavior may be selfishly oriented, still there is a natural harmony that leads, not to a war of all against all, but to a stable, orderly, and progressive society with little need for governmental intervention. (1959, 85–86)

But if there is a disagreement between writers like Adam Smith and Hobbes, it is not a disagreement about human nature but about the extent to which increasing the opportunities for trade will reduce the relative attractiveness of predation as a means of satisfying people's interests. In the absence of trade and economic growth, the only means to achieve great wealth is to seize it by force. It requires neither an optimistic view of human nature nor belief in a natural harmony of interests to think that increasing the opportunities to gain from trade will reduce the incidence of economic predation or that the self-interest of both rulers and ruled could motivate them to acquiesce in arrangements that had that effect.

Modern Realism's analysis of the implications of the existence of a world of commonwealths is an eclectic mixture of Hobbes's characterization of the state of nature and Rousseau's characterization of interstate politics in a world of predatory rulers. But there is no foundation in what Hobbes wrote for Realism's characterization of a world of commonwealths, and no valid reason has been given why Rousseau's characterization of his own time applies to a world of states whose rulers more closely resemble Hobbes's sovereign than the rulers of the eighteenth century.

### What Next?

Thus Waltz, in trying to construct an explanation of war on the foundations laid by writers in the *raison d'état* tradition, started in the wrong place. One must begin not with a world of sovereign states but with a world in which people are free to organize themselves in order to profit from the use of force. That is where Europe found itself in the early modern period, and that is where much of the world finds itself today. Violent conflicts among such organizations may continue for long periods of time, as they did in Europe in the early modern period. However, out of them may emerge, as eventually happened in Europe, institutional arrangements that substitute for the use of force. These arrangements may take the form of common institutions, or they may take the form of separate institutions with jurisdictions over separate territorial areas. The division of intellectual labor in modern political science underemphasizes the problem of explaining which of these outcomes occurs. And modern Realism begs the question of which should be expected to be the most stable substitute for violent conflict.

Beginning with the next chapter, then, I will consider what violence might be good for and what that implies for the ways in which human beings organize themselves.