

THEORIZING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

A DIALECTICAL APPROACH

ANDREAS H. HVIDSTEN

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Chapter One

The Analytical-Critical Duality of IR Theory

In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2014) John Mearsheimer gives an argument for why International Relations (IR) theory is important. International politics, Mearsheimer argues, is already infused with “theory” in a broad sense of the term:

none of us could understand the world we live in or make intelligent decisions without theories. Indeed, all students and practitioners of international politics rely on theories to comprehend their surroundings. Some are aware of it and some are not, some admit it, and some do not (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 9).

Mearsheimer uses the Clinton administration, whose “foreign policy [. . .] was heavily informed by [. . .] liberal theories of international relations” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 9), as an example. According to Mearsheimer, Clinton’s liberalist understanding of world politics justified policy moves such as the expansion of NATO membership in the 1990s to Central and Eastern European states. This illustrates, Mearsheimer maintains, that “general theories about how the world works play an important role in how policymakers identify the ends they seek and the means they choose to achieve them” (Mearsheimer, 2014, pp. 9–10). Not all theories are *good* theories, however, and Mearsheimer obviously finds Clinton’s liberal outlook naïve in comparison to his own realist understanding of international politics.

But on what basis can Mearsheimer claim that his realist theory is *better* than Clinton’s liberal theory? Mearsheimer argues that “[t]he ultimate test of any theory is how well it explains events in the real world” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 6). However, as is showcased in the title of his book, what Mearsheimer is supposed to explain is great power politics, meaning that the

politics of Clinton, a leader of a great power, falls under its domain. If we combine this explanatory ambition with Mearsheimer's own insistence that theories are important to how policymakers behave—and with his willingness to criticize their understandings and actions—a strange circularity emerges. Mearsheimer asks us to judge his theory on how well it *explains* how great power leaders, such as Clinton, see the world and act, but at the same time, he uses that very same theory to *critique* how Clinton sees the world and acts.

The whole situation is rather puzzling. How can Mearsheimer's realist theory stand in both an explanatory and critical relation to Clinton's liberal theory? If Mearsheimer has a theory about what drives and motivates great power leaders—the veracity of which, one would assume, depends on whether it captures what actually drives and motivates great power leaders—then would not Clinton's liberalism count as evidence *against* Mearsheimer's theory? After all, if it turns out that leaders of great powers can be liberals, that would seem to be a problem for realism, at least if we follow Mearsheimer's own admonition to judge his theory based on its explanatory power.

The example of Mearsheimer and Clinton illustrates a general challenge for social theory that is perhaps particularly acute in the study of international relations. This challenge is rooted in what I will refer to as the analytical-critical duality of IR theory: the fact that IR theories stand in both analytical and critical relations to their subject matter. This book is about the various problems that this duality generates and different attempts to resolve them. I hope to show that the analytical-critical duality is not an isolated conceptual issue, but that it is deeply interwoven with the core concerns of the discipline of IR and that addressing it can help us gain some fresh perspective on theorizing international politics.

I consider two ideal-typical solutions to the difficulties generated by the analytical-critical duality: essentialism and constructivism, both of which are presented more in detail in the next chapter.¹ My intention is not just to present these different paradigms, but to relate them internally and hierarchically in order to carve out a new and better understanding of theorizing. Through a series of immanent critiques, fueled by the internal contradictions each position generates, the argument takes us first from essentialism to constructivism, and then beyond. Finally, we arrive at a dialectical horizon for IR theory that emerges as a synthesis of the essentialist and constructivist positions.

As we progress through this argument, a number of key issues in IR come into play. The aim of this introductory chapter is to survey some of these issues and to relate my project to a broader IR literature, foreshadowing in the process many of the claims that will be more fully argued in subsequent chapters. In chapter 2, I present the dialectical approach I employ in this

book and give a more detailed overview of the argument. Chapters 3 and 4 consider, respectively, essentialism and constructivism—the critiques of which set up the transition to the dialectical horizon in chapter 5. The final chapter attempts to take stock of the argument and its implications for IR theorizing.

A MEETING OF HORIZONS

I approach the relation between scholar and practitioner (e.g., between Mearsheimer and Clinton) as a meeting of hermeneutical *horizons* (Gadamer, 2004). Philosophers have used different terms for what I refer to as horizons, such as “backgrounds” (Searle 1995: chap. 6), “paradigms” (Kuhn 2012: chap. 2), “inescapable frameworks” (Taylor 1989: chap. 2) or “worldviews” (Weber, 2004). What I have in mind, generally, is “a broad interpretation of the world and an application of this view to the way in which we judge and evaluate activities and structures” (Griffiths, 2007, p. 1).²

Insofar as social inquiry is a meeting of horizons, this puts the social theorist in a position that does not have an equivalent in the natural sciences.³ In his book *Agents, Structures and International Relations* (2006), Colin Wight makes two important points about this special circumstance of social inquiry. The starting point for any investigation of social phenomena, Wight argues, “must be the concepts [i.e., the horizon] of the agents concerned” (Wight, 2006, p. 57)—if we do not understand how people *think*, we do not understand why they do as they do.

However, “the concept-dependent nature of social relations does not mean that because agents must have some concept they will always have the *right* concept. Indeed, some concepts ‘may actually function so as to mask, repress, mystify, obscure or otherwise occlude the nature of what [the agents are doing]’” (Wight, 2006, p. 57, emphasis added, citations removed). The fact that the agents’ understandings are not incorrigible “opens up a unique possibility, for the social sciences, that of critique” (Wight, 2006, p. 57).⁴

Wight points to the analytical and the critical functions of social theorizing as an intersubjective encounter between two horizons (the theorist and the practitioner). To illustrate these two dimensions, think of Mearsheimer and Clinton. In analytical mode, Clinton *qua* great power leader, and his actions in this capacity, are for Mearsheimer an object of investigation. The relation between the two is one of empirical observation (what does Clinton do?) and explanation (why does he do it?). When this relation is investigated philosophically, it falls under the philosophy of science, and theory enter into the picture primarily in its capacity to contribute to “producing factual knowledge about world politics” (Jackson, 2011, p. 32)—in this case the behavior of Clinton.⁵

In critical mode, however, the relation between IR theory and international politics, is rather different. As a *critic*, Mearsheimer is concerned with Clinton not as an object of theory, but more like a fellow theorist of international relations. In this relation, it is not Mearsheimer's primary intention to explain Clinton, but pass judgement on Clinton's understanding of international politics, and possibly to inform and enlighten him about these issues. As such, while in analytical mode, Clinton is Mearsheimer's object to be observed and explained, in critical mode, Mearsheimer engages Clinton as a subject to be reasoned with. The two relations can be summarized as follows:

Table 1.1. The Analytical and Critical Dimensions of IR Theory

	International politics as	Function of theory	Relation
Analytical	Realm of facts (subject matter)	Knowledge- production	Observation
Critical	Realm of practice (audience)	Enlightenment	Participation

My primary concern in this book is not the analytical or the critical relations in themselves, but *the relation between the analytical and the critical relation*. This concern cuts across a number of ontological and epistemological issues, and separates this book from more traditional epistemological and methodological work that tend to focus on the analytical relation. In fact, it is a bit difficult to locate the issues raised in this book within a particular strand of IR literature. In the following, I attempt a brief, non-exhaustive overview of how my argument relates to various debates in IR.

On the ontological side, I obviously assume, in line with Wight, that how people think, reason and understand are a fundamental—even defining—part of social reality, including international politics. Since IR scholars who share this assumption sometimes feel the need to argue the point that “ideas matter in international relations” (Williams, 2004), this is perhaps not an innocent assumption. But although I seem to be siding with the “idealists” who believe that “the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces” (Wendt, 1999, p. 1), this is actually an issue that will have to be considered explicitly in order to come to grips with the analytical-critical duality. The question of the role of human subjectivity and its relation to “material” or “objective” aspects of international politics will turn out to be crucial in the discussion of essentialism (cf. chapter 3).

I have already hinted at the epistemological implications of my starting point. When the relation between IR theory and international relations practice is treated as a relation of horizons—a meeting of understandings—we are deep into hermeneutical territory. Indeed, I have borrowed the term “horizon” from Gadamer, the perhaps most influential modern philosopher of hermeneutics. Once again, far from making innocent assumptions, I seem to

have sided with those who seek to interpretatively *understand*, as opposed to those who seek to scientifically *explain*, international politics (Hollis & Smith, 2009). Yet things are not that simple either. The understanding-explaining contrast speaks primarily to the analytical relation between IR and international politics. When we add the critical dimension, we also transcend this dichotomy.

Understanding, on Hollis and Smith's influential account, aims to "reproduce the order in the minds of the actors" (Hollis & Smith, 2009, p. 87). However, the meeting of horizons between theorist and practitioner hardly consists of the former simply mirroring the latter's mind—in which case, Mearsheimer's understanding would not be critically related to Clinton's understanding. It is, of course, possible to argue that Mearsheimer makes a mistake in this, and that he *should* aim to reproduce Clinton's liberalism rather than critiquing it from a realist standpoint. This represents one possible way to address the analytical-critical duality that will occupy us in chapter 4. Either way, even if hermeneutics plays a key role in my argument, the analytical-critical issue takes us beyond a traditional interpretative framework for social inquiry.

Finally, investigating the critical-analytical duality raises an issue that is often addressed separately from the other topics discussed here: the political-practical relevance of IR theory. The relation between academic IR and the policy world has turned into an IR subfield of its own (e.g., Eriksson, 2014; Nincic & Leggold, 2000; Nye, 2008a, 2008b; Walt, 2005). This literature is primarily concerned with (potential) transfers from IR theory to politics—for instance how concepts such as " 'balance of power,' 'smart power,' [and] 'unipolarity,' [. . .] help policymakers understand their environment and structure their thinking" (Eriksson, 2014, p. 101)—and it generally brackets the epistemological problem of how theory can both explain and inform international politics. However, some contributors to this debate, such as Beate Jahn, see a deeper connection with the analytical and the practical aspects of IR theory:

The first dimension of political relevance is the one most widely overlooked in the contemporary debate on theory and practice. It arises from the co-constitutive relationship between politics and knowledge at the epistemic level and is embodied in the abstract metatheoretical and methodological reflections and practices of the modern sciences—including in IR (Jahn, 2017, p. 68).

To understand the political relevance of IR, according to Jahn, we must appreciate how science and politics are interlinked in the larger societal whole that they are both parts of. Specifically, Jahn argues that the role of theoretical science is to provide the kind of abstraction from particular interests that can "provide social and political authority in the modern world"

(Jahn, 2017, p. 69). I think there is a lot to this argument, especially the idea of theorizing as (necessary and valuable) abstraction that can endow theories with political authority. I consider this theme further below and I return to it in chapter 5.

THEORETICAL HORIZONS

Hermeneutical horizons are not identical to theories (Griffiths, 2007, p. 1). Although everybody has a hermeneutical horizon, which denotes “the pre-given basis for all experience” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 239), not everybody has a theory. To have a theory is more than having understanding. Rather, theoretical understanding seems to be a particular form of understanding: one that is systematic, explicit, abstract, and universal (Dreyfus, 1986; Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 36–38). Theorizing, I would argue, involves a certain degree of formalization and idealization of whatever categories of understanding one uses to make sense of the world, and the resulting theory itself emerges as an idealized externalization of the central elements of a particular horizon (a process well described in Jackson, 2011, pp. 142–46).

By making explicit the key elements of one’s interpretative horizon, theorizing is also a kind of self-reflection, and, as such, potentially (trans)formative of the very horizon it seeks to explicate. Plato was one of the first to give an account of theorizing as a self-reflective practice in the Western tradition with his allegory of the cave (see Bloom, 1968, book VI). He conceived of theorizing as a form of enlightenment. Most people live in a “shadow world,” according to Plato, only grasping imperfect reflections of the fundamental ideas that nourish their existence. Theorizing means beholding these ideas in their abstract, universal purity, of which “the last thing to be seen, and with considerable effort, is the idea of the good” (Bloom, 1968, p. 195, emphasis removed).

Even if one does not accept the idea that theorizing necessarily leads to “the idea of the good,” the concept of an underlying layer to the self and to social reality that can be excavated through intellectual effort seems crucial to the ambition of doing theory. Social theory arises, Charles Taylor suggests, “when we try to formulate explicitly what we are doing, describe the activity which is central to a practice, and articulate the norms which are essential to it” (Taylor, 1985, p. 93). And this is not merely a descriptive enterprise, according to Taylor:

Theories do not just make our constitutive self-understandings explicit, but extend, or criticize or even challenge them. It is in this sense that theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on, to show us the real, hitherto unidentified course of events (Taylor, 1985, p. 34).

On Taylor's account, theorizing is a sort of self-reflective intervention, through which previously naïve forms of practice are raised to higher levels of awareness concerning its own constitutive context—a context that up to this point has remained at least partly obscure.⁶ There is a certain ontology at the heart of Taylor's argument that assumes that "practice rests on background knowledge, which it embodies, enacts and reifies" (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 7, emphasis removed). There is also an epistemological-critical ambition that theorizing can "foreground" this background knowledge—and in doing so (potentially) transform it. As such, theorizing is not merely critical or analytical, but rather a *critical-analytical* endeavor.

Variants of this understanding of theorizing, though perhaps not exactly mainstream, is well represented in IR, particularly in the classical and the critical traditions (for general discussions of these traditions see Jackson, 2011, chap. 6; Rengger & Thirkell-White, 2007; Spegele, 2014; Wyn Jones, 2001). I will give one example from each.

One influential, critical vision for IR theory was formulated by Andrew Linklater, one of the leading figures of the so-called critical turn in the 1980s. Theories, Linklater suggested "aim to uncover the meaning and rationality of political existence without perpetuating the commonplace assumptions of everyday life or introducing their own undefended presuppositions." This project automatically becomes critical when "it confronts a form of social life whose rationality seems less than fully realised or complete" (Linklater, 1982, p. 3). For Linklater, the task of developing IR theory in this sense is methodologically speaking equivalent to (re)writing the history of ideas as it pertains to international relations, in a self-reflective fashion, with the objective of uncovering those "structures which were not consciously determined" (Linklater, 1982, p. 3).

Notwithstanding some obvious differences in political temperament, Linklater's understanding of theorizing is actually rather similar to E. H. Carr's classic account in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (Carr, 2001). On the one hand, Carr argues, theorizing involves deconstructing particular ideas informing international politics that history has shown to be "untenable as the bases of international morality." On the other hand, theorizing entails extracting from this deconstruction, in a phoenix-like fashion, a path forward. Or in Carr's words: "to explore the ruins of our international order and discover on what fresh foundations we may hope to rebuild it" (Carr, 2001, p. 226).⁷

Both Carr and Linklater envision theorizing as a form of intervention into an unfolding historical process. By helping to craft overarching narratives, theory can put the past into proper perspective and make visible the contours of possible (and better) futures. Such narratives, of course, do not simply consist of theory, i.e., the idealized concepts that provide the narrative with its particular form and trajectory. However, theory plays two important roles in this process: It structures the interpretation of the past, and it provides the

parameters for possible futures. As such, theory makes a certain claim to historical transcendence, which is central to its analytical and critical authority (cf. Jahn, 2017).

For Carr, the transcendental element is the dialectic between utopia and reality in political thinking and practice that is established in the first half of *Twenty Years' Crisis*.⁸ For Linklater, the transcendental element is the competing obligations to particular communities (states) and universal humanity that strain modern human beings. Both these issues—utopia versus reality and man versus citizen—are presented as having arisen in a specific historical context. However, the reason these dichotomies deserve to be called “transcendental” (my term) is that they, in their respective narratives, transcend their own historicity by (a) providing categories for putting their own historical context into perspective and (b) serving as guiding lights for the future. But why these concepts and not others? This raises the issue of justification, which will be very important in this book.

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH ANALYSIS OR CRITIQUE?

The neatness of Carr and Linklater’s approach to theorizing is that it makes it perfectly understandable how theory can serve both an analytical and a critical function—and how these two functions, in fact, reinforce each other. However, one thing is what theory *does*; another thing entirely is what makes a particular theory better than its rivals. Why do the concepts of utopia and reality, or man and citizen, deserve the transcendental place given to them by their respective proponents? This is a rather tricky problem that is obviously not restricted to Carr and Linklater. Patrick T. Jackson has raised this issue using Robert Cox, another influential critical IR theorist, as an example. Cox’s work, Jackson argues

consists largely of elaborating a Gramsci-inspired account of global hegemony, but provides no compelling set of reasons as to why an analyst not already inclined to this kind of Marxism should adopt [such] categories (Jackson, 2011, p. 183).

And we do not have to restrict ourselves to critical scholars either. Why should we adopt *any* particular set of categories—realist, liberal, Marxist etc.—for understanding and informing international politics? This is inevitably a question of *justification*, and when it comes to justification, there is a temptation to privilege either the analytical or the critical function of theory, depending on the methodological commitment of the scholar in question. Jackson’s much-cited *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (2011) is a good example of this approach.

Jackson differentiates between four ways to justify knowledge claims in IR, each with different implications for the role of theory. In three of Jackson's paradigms, theory is justified analytically: as a useful tool for generating and accounting for predictions (neopositivism) or constructing analytical narratives (analyticism), or as a more or less true conjecture about unobservable causal structures (realism). Only in the fourth paradigm, "reflexivism," is the *critical* function of theory relevant for justification—and then it seems to be all that is relevant:

[Reflexivist theory] is scientifically warranted to the extent that it properly and helpfully clarifies the tacit assumptions of a view from somewhere [. . .] as part of a campaign to transform society (Jackson, 2011, p. 184).

However well it works for Jackson's purpose, linking the analytical and critical functions of theory to different methodological paradigms obscures the issues related to the analytical-critical duality. For instance, the issues generated by the critical dimension of IR theory is not internal to reflexivist/critical scholarship, even if these challenges are most often raised by scholars who self-identify with this methodological camp. Although Mearsheimer is not a reflexivist, methodologically speaking, that does not make his theory any less critical or his need for reflecting on his theoretical categories any less pressing. Conversely, no critical scholar would justify his or her theory in complete abstraction from its analytical merits. Indeed, "[t]he critical theorists' concern has always been, first and foremost, with the situation here and now and how it came about" (Rengger & Thirkell-White, 2007, p. 11).

Yet, despite the critical claim that *all* theorizing and knowledge production is imbued with a political-practical function, there is a tendency to treat critical scholarship as a distinct category of inquiry. Once methodologically isolated, the critical theorists are then charged with accounting for their methods, which are generally seen as underdeveloped in comparison with their mainstream counterparts. It is not "that [reflexivist] scholars have not produced intriguing insights," Jackson argues, "it is simply unclear precisely *how* they have done so" (Jackson, 2011, p. 186; see also Spegele, 2014).

One casualty of this line of thinking is that the debate on "reflexivity"—the process of accounting for one's own horizon—has largely been framed as a methodological issue for a certain kind of scholarship (see, e.g., Ackerly & True, 2008; Agnew, 2007; Amoureux, 2016; Hamati-Ataya, 2013; Knafo, 2016; Neumann & Neumann, 2015; Tickner, 2013). The questions that animate this debate, however, transcend methodology and are directly relevant for our concern with the analytical-critical duality. We will focus on two key, interlinked, issues: the limits of reflective self-awareness, and whether self-reflection can not only disclose but *justify* particular theoretical commitments.

The first wave of critical theorists in IR relied on a practical-political interest in emancipation as their primary justificatory strategy. For Mark Neufeld, for instance, a justified theory is one that on the analytical side achieves “an interpretative understanding of the intersubjective meanings which constitute [the social] world,” and on the critical side forms part of an “effort to change it *in a way consistent with the goal of human emancipation*” (Neufeld, 1995, p. 4, emphasis added). However, emancipation is not an unproblematic standard by which to judge IR theories. First of all, although emancipation might be abstractly defined as liberation from “structures or conditions that hinder [us] from actualizing freedom in thought and practice” (Spegele, 2014, p. 1), what exactly this looks like is by no means obvious.

Secondly, emancipation—whatever one’s understanding of it—obviously represents a value commitment in itself that is just as vulnerable to an honest process of self-examination as any other axiomatic stance. Thus, Hamati-Ataya has argued that in an uncritical embrace of emancipation “part of [the] reflexive perspective seems to be lost, as if the notion of emancipation were endowed with some sort of [. . .] epistemic certainty” (Hamati-Ataya, 2013, p. 677). In this book, I will actually end up siding (in a sense) with the first-wave critical theorists on this issue, and, in chapter 5, I make the case that emancipation does in fact have a special epistemic status, and that it is tied to the very nature of theorizing in itself. However, emancipation is not the only kind of critical relation between IR theory and its subject matter that is relevant for justification.

Even if theorizing, as I have suggested, essentially consists of extracting from our current socio-historical horizon certain transcendental elements—concepts that deserve a privileged analytical-critical place in putting the past into perspective and possible futures into focus—it does not follow that only desirable aspects of our socio-historical horizon (e.g., “emancipation”) deserve this treatment. Indeed, our failure to achieve the things we want seems just as important to theorize as our hopes. These failures might of course be purely incidental obstacles to our dreams, but they might also point to a “tragic” aspect of international politics that is possibly just as transcendental (i.e., just as worthy of theoretical extraction) as any emancipatory *telos* that might be divined from our particular historical vantage point.

The tragic theme exists in numerous variants in international relations theory (see Wedderburn, 2018 for a recent review and critical discussion). For Mearsheimer, the tragedy of international politics lies in the existential uncertainty under anarchy that practically forces great powers to fight each other—even if they have no reason to other than mutual distrust. Another tragic theme relates to “hubris and its likely consequences,” which, according to Toni Erskine and Richard Ned Lebow is “a useful and revealing framework” to explain some of the more spectacular moments in international

political history, from Luis XIV's hegemonic ambitions to the 2003 Anglo-American invasion of Iraq (Erskine & Ned Lebow, 2012, p. 9).

A third tragic theme centers on the eternal tension between principles and power. Carr, for instance, argues that any particular international order—however just—depends on underlying configurations of power, something that inexorably erodes this order from within:

The ideal, once it is embodied in an institution, ceases to be an ideal and becomes the expression of a selfish interest, which must be destroyed in the name of a new ideal. This constant interaction of irreconcilable forces is the stuff of politics (Carr, 2001, p. 94).

Invoking the tragic in international politics is to invoke something inescapable about the way the world works that will necessarily doom our efforts to transform it. For Carr, it is the circumstance that “[p]olitics are made up of two elements—utopia and reality—belonging to two different planes which can never meet” that is responsible for “the tragedy of all political life” (Carr, 2001, p. 93). This commitment is no less axiomatic than a commitment to human emancipation as the natural *telos* of history. For all the thinkers mentioned here it is probably fair to say that “tragedy expresses a wisdom that transcends its historical specificity” (Wedderburn, 2018, p. 178). Some have even suggested the tragic theme as a unifier for different schools of thought in IR:

An appropriate starting point, I believe, is to recognize IR as an extreme manifestation of human tragedy. The question then becomes, to what extent does each worldview provide us with important insights into the dynamics of tragedy and empower us, if not to overcome it, at least to ameliorate its effects? (Griffiths, 2007, pp. 9–10).

As Griffiths admits, such a synthesis of worldviews will in itself amount to “a worldview on worldviews,” i.e., a master IR “-ism” based on the overarching theme of tragedy. The ultimate justification for such a grand synthesis, according to Griffiths, is how well it illuminates “our existential and historical condition” (Griffiths, 2007, p. 9). This ambition, I believe, could be generalized as a yardstick for all IR theorizing, regardless of the emphasis one puts on tragedy.

Theorizing as existential and historical illumination would mean, in particular, to identify transcendental purposes and limitations of international politics. Purposes could range from “maintenance of international peace” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 25) to “transforming the unequal power relationships between women and men” (Tickner, 2001, p. 137). Limitations would identify circumstances that complicates and frustrates our purposes. The most important kinds of limitations will be those who are tragic in nature, i.e.,

obstacles that are not only incidental barriers, but that are etched into the practice of international relations in a fundamental and ultimately ineradicable manner. On this understanding, a key component of evaluating any particular IR theory will be by how plausibly it identifies and accounts for (potentially) tragic aspects of international politics—aspects that, of course, only become “tragic” in the light of a certain purpose. I return to this at the end of the book, in chapter 6.

NOTES

1. These ideal types are constructed logically not empirically, and are not meant to reflect consciously held commitments by IR scholars. Indeed, I believe that the IR theorists I discuss, for the most part, have no coherent, explicit position on the analytical-critical duality—which is a big part of the motivation for writing this book.

2. When made explicit, these horizons are conventionally called “ideology” when referring to political practitioners, such as Clinton, and “theory” when referring to scholars, such as Mearsheimer. Thus, when we say, for instance, of a politician that he or she is a “liberal,” we are making a statement about his or her ideology—when we say of a scholar that he or she is a liberal (or a realist, or Marxist, etc.), we are usually making a statement about his or her theoretical standpoint. However, the important thing is not whether we call something a theory or an ideology, but that we recognize the similar function that making explicit our deepest conceptual commitment to understanding the world plays for both scholarly and political practice.

3. Of course, some natural sciences deal with “horizons” in a more simple sense when studying animals. Animals, however, (as far as we now) do not have religions, political ideals, ideological world-views or conceptions about truth, justice and freedom. If they did, then biology would be in the same position as the social sciences.

4. The relation between analysis and critique is, in many ways, the central issue around which this thesis revolves. The point I am trying convey at this point is merely the following. In social inquiry, we have (at least) two horizons of understanding: that of the agent(s) being explained and that of the scholar doing the explanation (see also Giddens, 1987, p. chap 1). The question is who has understood the most and why? This question pertains equally to the validity of explanation as to the validity of critique.

5. The primary epistemological axis of contention as regards theory is between (a) seeing theory as (possibly) reflecting the real but empirically unobservable causal structure of the object (e.g., Joseph & Wight, 2010); and (b) seeing theory as a conceptual framework for intellectually structuring the object in the first place (e.g., Jackson, 2008). The metaphor for the first case is to see theory as a mirror; the metaphor for the latter case is to see theory as a lens.

6. This contrast between a naïve and enlightened horizon is also crucial to the classic link between theorizing and *Bildung*, where achieving an abstract perspective on one’s own reality is crucial to self-understanding (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 10–13).

7. If Carr’s vision for IR theorizing is rather similar to Linklater’s, it is very distinct from Waltz’s. Indeed, Waltz’s conception of theory as that which explains empirical laws (Waltz, 1979, p. 6) would be closer to the naïve realist in Carr’s framework who believes, erroneously to Carr’s mind, that “[t]he political process [. . .] consists [. . .] in a succession of phenomena governed by mechanical laws of causation” (Carr, 2001, p. 13). The classical heritage of the critical turn was appreciated at the time (e.g., Cox, 1981, p. 131). However, it is above all since the early 2000s that classical IR theory has been properly wedded to the critical tradition.

8. This is, properly speaking, Carr’s *theory*—at least on the understanding I adopt in this book—and why I believe it is so misleading to label Carr as a “realist,” as is often done.

Chapter Two

Dialectics

This book is written dialectically, which means both that it follows a particular method and that the argument is framed under a certain value horizon (for general discussions, see, e.g., Brincat, 2014, pp. 589–94; Jay, 1996; Warren, 2008; Westphal, 1998). In IR, the dialectical approach is primarily associated with the first wave of critical theorists who took their inspiration from the Frankfurter school and the neo-Marxist more generally (see Brincat, 2011 for a review). Since there is actually “no consensus on what dialectics is” (Brincat, 2014, p. 593), some care must be taken to delineate what I take to be its characteristic features (see also Hvidsten, 2018).

The driving force of the kind of dialectical inquiry pursued in this book is the Socratic imperative to know oneself, which is a plea to examine one’s own conceptions and ideas, i.e., one’s own horizon, as to whether it is consistent with itself. Although this takes us into the treacherous “terrain of the self” (Knafo, 2016, p. 33), the point is not to take an introspective inventory of one’s personal quirks or to perform a sociological objectification of oneself (as in, e.g., Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Rather, the Socratic imperative is a guiding principle for how to conduct dialogue, which is to continually foreground and justify the assumptions one makes in a way that is accessible to others. This is different than declaring a standpoint (as in, e.g., Harding, 1992) because of the implication that one’s stance might evolve in the dialogue itself, which, ideally, is more of an educational process than a debate.

Simply put, the Socratic imperative asks you to account for the position you hold on any given issue (the issue in Plato’s *The Republic*, for instance, is “what is justice?”). When such self-examination is done systematically, it takes the form of a so-called *immanent critique* that evaluates a particular position—in this book, first essentialism and then constructivism—according

to its inner coherence. This sort of critique does not rely on first specifying evaluative criteria and then subjecting a position to evaluation, but “proceeds from within” (Neufeld, 1995, p. 6), using the position’s own internal criteria against itself. The intimate connection between this sort of self-reflection and the very practice of theorizing itself, as I portrayed it in the first chapter, will be important to my argument.

A very simple example of an immanent critique is the liar’s paradox: “[a] writer who says that there are no truths [. . .] is asking you not to believe him. So don’t” (Scruton, 2012, p. 6). This paradox illustrates how a position can trip itself up. However, pointing out the internal inconsistency involved in claiming that truth does not exist is not, on its own, a very constructive form of critique. A good dialectical argument is both negative and positive; it both *de*-constructs and *re*-constructs. As such, “the *telos* of immanent critique is positive [and] leads to a reassessment” of the position in question (Neufeld, 1995, p. 6). The trick to understanding this process is that deconstruction and reconstruction happen, so to speak, in two different “places”: in front of your eyes and behind your back.

The position that has been deconstructed is laid out before you as a dissected object whose limits you have now seen and therefore gained distance to. The new position that has been erected, on the other hand, is not so immediately noticeable: it is the position from where the limits of the deconstructed position are visible. Søren Kierkegaard put it as follows: “[t]he secret of all comprehending is that this comprehending is itself higher than any position it posits” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 95). To understand a position is to transcend it and thereby establish a new, higher position.

I am not using the terms “place” and “position” in a spatial sense. Rather, they should be understood in what can only be termed an *existential* sense. Let me suggest three metaphors to aid this understanding. The first metaphor is to “think of reality as a set of concentric spheres, progressively revealed as we detach gradually from the contingencies of the self” (Nagel, 1986, p. 5). Human existence has different spheres that form a set of concentric circles moving from particularity (“the contingencies of the self”) to universality. Each of us is composed of aspects that vary from the individual-idiosyncratic, to the social (things we share with some contemporaries, e.g., nationality), to the historical (things we share with all contemporaries, e.g., modernity), to the universal (things we share with all human beings, regardless of social-historical circumstance). The purpose of dialectic argument is to get to the outmost, meaning “most universal,” sphere of existence.

The second metaphor is “broadening horizons,” which speaks to the “the conceptual affinity of dialectics and *Bildung*” (Brincat, 2014, p. 591). The metaphor of “broadening horizons” is meant to convey that the movement from particularity to universality is not a movement from one particular perspective to another particular perspective. Rather, this movement means

discovering a more fundamental way of thinking that forces a re-interpretation of other ways of thinking as aspects of that more fundamental horizon. As one's horizon expands, former positions, previously thought to be fundamental, are left behind. Note that "left behind" does not mean simply discarded, but re-interpreted (from a more fundamental horizon). Thus, a position that is superseded is not, for that reason, completely invalidated. Rather, it is merged into a larger whole.

The Hegelian term *aufheben* is the best description of what happens in a transition from one position to another in a dialectical argument. This concept, which does not really translate well, has three meanings: to annul, to keep and to elevate (Skjervheim, 1996b, p. 22). It is a paradoxical term, as the phenomenon itself is paradoxical. In his famous preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), Hegel warns against a tendency to unduly simplify philosophical refutation in either/or terms:

conventional opinion [. . .] tends to expect a given philosophical system to be either accepted or contradicted; hence it finds only acceptance or rejection. It does not comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in it simple disagreements (Hegel, 1977, p. 2).

Next, he offers an alternative metaphor for how to think about transitions from one philosophical system to another:

[t]he bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the other. [. . .] These forms [the bud and the blossom] are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible [i.e., they cannot both be at the same time]. Yet at the same time [they are] moments of [a larger] unity (Hegel, 1977, p. 2).

It is precisely seeing the whole, rather than fixating on particular parts (or erroneously taking any particular part to be the whole), that is the ambition of dialectical argument. However, Hegel's bud-to-blossom metaphor is also a bit misleading. Thinking of the transition from bud to blossom as a whole is easy enough since we can *picture* it as a series of external transitions happening before our eyes. Or to put in terms that will play an important part in this thesis: It is a whole that we observe from the outside; it is not a whole we *participate* in. This difference is crucial, but also a bit difficult to grasp and hold on to, which is why the metaphor of expanding horizons is so important. A third metaphor, "levels of reflection," can help us complete the idea of dialectical argument.

Dialectically speaking, what makes one horizon better than another is the superior horizon's insight into the limitations of the less fundamental horizon. The relation between the more and the less fundamental horizon is

asymmetrical. Specifically, the two horizons belong to different levels reflection, such that “from the lower level of reflection [i.e., from a less fundamental horizon] it is not possible to understand the thought that is on the higher level of reflection [i.e., the more fundamental horizon], while the higher level of reflection can understand the lower level” (Skjervheim, 1964b, p. 178, my translation).

Let me briefly illustrate how dialectical argument is supposed to work, using the positions discussed in the following chapters: essentialism and constructivism (see below for a more detailed review). One way to think of these two positions is simply as different, competing understandings of the ontological, epistemological and practical-philosophical issues we consider in this book—which they are. However, constructivism and essentialism are also *internally* related. Specifically, constructivism can be understood as a response to internal contradictions in the essentialist position. Insofar as constructivism resolves these anomalies, constructivism represents, dialectically speaking, a higher level of understanding (in relation to essentialism). In other words, the relation between essentialism and constructivism is asymmetrical in the sense outlined above: constructivism understands essentialism better than essentialism understands itself. Indeed, if my argument is correct, it follows that when essentialism understands itself, it becomes constructivism.

The question is how far back one can go. The answer is that one can only go back to the dialectic itself. Consider that the piece of insight on which the previous paragraph ended—i.e., the insight into the internal relation between essentialism and constructivism—does not belong to essentialism nor to constructivism; it is a *dialectical* insight. Thus, we actually have three levels of self-insight: essentialism, which does not understand itself; constructivism, which understands essentialism; and dialectical thinking, which understands both essentialism and constructivism. The demonstration and the defense of my thesis, which are so closely related that they cannot really be considered separate tasks, will be precisely to follow this spiral of self-knowledge, starting with essentialism and ending in the dialectical horizon—an ending which, in a sense, takes us back to the beginning, since the argument itself is dialectical.

A dialectical argument, as it works its way through the layers of particularity towards the universal, gradually becomes more abstract. This is unavoidable: if you want to say something *universal* that stands on its own regardless of particular circumstance, it will necessarily have to be formulated in abstract terms.¹ However, abstract truths are not “empty” or inconsequential. True, such truths amount to very little *on their own* but they are not meant to stand on their own. Rather, they are meant to be a beginning; not a beginning that you can subsequently forget, but something to hold on to as you get involved with more particular problems. If a horizon sets the stage

for subsequent thinking and being, dialectic is concerned with setting (or more precisely: *re-setting*) the stage correctly.²

THE DIALECTIC OF THE ANALYTICAL-CRITICAL DUALITY

The trajectory of this book towards a dialectical understanding of IR theorizing starts with trying to answer a simple question: *What is the relation between the analytical and the critical dimension of IR theory?* An answer to this question implies an answer to (at least) three sub-questions:

1. What is the fundamental nature of international politics?
2. What is the analytical function of IR theory?
3. What is the critical function of IR theory?

The next two chapters are structured around a set of internally connected answers to these three questions that I call “essentialism” and “constructivism.” In this book, these concepts have very specific meanings. For instance, essentialism is defined as the following answers to the three questions above:

1. International politics has an unchangeable, ontological essence
2. The analytical function of IR theory is to bring out this essence
3. The critical function of IR theory is to enlighten practitioners about this essence so they realize what they can and cannot change about international politics—and what the prudent course of action in light of this is.

“Constructivism” does not primarily refer to a theoretical tradition or a body of research, but denotes the anti-thesis to essentialism: an ontological commitment to the socio-historicity of international politics, combined with an analytical commitment to deconstruction and a critical commitment to the possibility of fundamental change. Essentialism and constructivism generate different kinds of internal contradictions that fuel the dialectal argument in this book. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a brief explication of this argument, which will be repeated in a more extensive form in the following three chapters.

Essentialism

Essentialism divides international politics into an objective unchanging part, its *essence*, and a contingent changeable part, the subjective understandings of the practitioners. This division solves the analytical-critical issue as fol-

lows: IR theory analytically reflects the essence of international politics and critically enlightens the subjects involved in international politics by providing insight into this essence. I consider two variants of essentialism that I relate dialectically, meaning that I investigate the second kind of essentialism as a response to internal contradictions in the first kind.

The first variant of essentialism is represented by the political realism of Hans Morgenthau, who locates the essence of international politics in the subjectivity of political practitioners. The most important aspect of Morgenthau's thinking, for our purpose, is his distinction between essence and appearance. The essence is the "political man," and the appearance is the false layer of professed ideologies and values that tend to cover up this essence and make it seem as if international politics is about other things than it actually is. Political realism, according to Morgenthau, sees through this appearance and into what is really going on—something which makes realism "not only a guide to understanding [for the analyst], but also an idea for action [for the practitioner]" (Morgenthau, 2011, p. 264).

There is an underlying paradox in this line of thinking. State leaders are both the subject matter and the audience for Morgenthau's theory. Accordingly, he lands himself in the paradoxical situation of both arguing that state leaders (*qua* subject matter) are political realists by nature and that state leaders (*qua* audience) should be political realists as a sort of moral imperative. Indeed, one of Morgenthau's primary grievances is that state leaders continually fall short of the political realist ideal. However, the mere fact that political realism is an ideal—a way of being that has to be actively pursued—undermines Morgenthau's *justification* for political realism, which is that it represents international politics as it is, regardless of what practitioners want it to be.

The internal contradictions in Morgenthau's essentialism results from locating the essence in the subjective element of international politics, i.e., in how practitioners of international relations are and how they think. A second kind of essentialism ostensibly avoids this problem by distinguishing more clearly between the subjective and the objective part of international politics, locating the essence in the latter in the form of unchanging and eternal *structures*. Kenneth Waltz and his *Theory of International Politics* (1979) is the canonical statement of this position. The cornerstone of Waltz's ontology is a distinction between agent and structure that corresponds, respectively, to the subjective-contingent and the objective-eternal part of international reality. IR theory, on Waltz's understanding, is supposed to reflect the structural rather than the subjective element of international politics.

For Waltz, the structure of the international realm is akin to a physical environment that constrains, rewards and punishes certain ways of being. Practitioners who are ill-informed about the nature of this environment tend to fare badly—and so do the political communities they represent. Structural

essentialism re-configures the analytical-critical duality as follows: Theory analytically reflects the objective structure of international politics and critically enlightens the subjects inhabiting this structure. Such enlightenment can help practitioners better navigate international politics but it cannot change its structure, as the fundamental structural characteristic of international politics is quite unaffected by the characteristics of its inhabiting subjects.

However, in the end, Waltz cannot maintain the strict separation of structure and agency he needs to make his solution work. The analogy with a physical environment can only be carried so far. A social structure is, after all, not like a wall or a cliff. Rather, as Waltz argues, social structure is a principle of arrangement (Waltz, 1979, p. 80). In international politics, this organizing principle is supposed to be anarchy, which again is supposed to be disconnected from the characteristics of the agents living under anarchy. But anarchy, as Alexander Wendt would point out, does not in itself dictate any particular way of being (Wendt, 1992); if it did, it would not really be anarchy.

And indeed, Waltz' organizing principle turns out not be anarchy. Instead, Waltz holds that "[i]nternational-political systems [. . .] are formed by the coaction of self-regarding units" (Waltz, 1979, p. 91). However, *self-regard* is obviously a characteristic of the agents. Furthermore, self-regard is equivalent to what Waltz calls the "international imperative," which is "take care of yourself!" (Waltz, 1979, pp. 107, 201). This imperative surfaces both in the analytical part of the book where Waltz argues that each country is necessarily "constrained to take care of itself" (Waltz, 1979, p. 109), and in the critical part of the book where he introduces self-help as an "international imperative" (Waltz, 1979, p. 201). This makes Waltz's argument circular: The structuring principle is self-regard, and this structure is then used to advocate self-regard.

The lesson we can draw from this is that any so-called objective structure, once you start digging into it, is rooted in subjectivity, i.e., in a particular way of being. This means that whatever the merits of self-regard (Waltz) and prudence (Morgenthau)—and I am not saying that self-regard and prudence is necessarily bad advice—this way of being cannot be justified with reference to an objective realm of "the real" separate from a subjective realm of "the ideal."³ In the end, international politics cannot be completely abstracted from the self-understandings of the agents involved in international politics.

Constructivism

Constructivism begins with the realization with which the chapter on essentialism ends: that the shape and form of international politics is rooted in

subjectivity. The term “subjectivity,” however, no longer means the same thing as it did in structural essentialism. In structural essentialism, the subjective is ontologically separate from an objective environment. The subject is located in this environment in much the same way as one might be physically located in a building. Constructivism is first and foremost a rejection of this starting point, i.e., a rejection of the subjective and the objective as a fundamental ontological division, and a re-interpretation of the “objective” as a form of (inter-)subjectivity—what Christian Reus-Smit calls “constitutional structures”:

coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles, and norms that perform two functions in ordering international societies: they define what constitutes a legitimate actor, entitled to all the rights and privileges of statehood; and they define the basic parameters of state action (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 30).

Re-interpreting essences as such intersubjective horizons, the constructivist critique is that essentialism reifies particular intersubjective horizons as “natural,” when they are, in fact, socio-historically contingent. Instead of *the* essence of international politics, constructivism holds, international politics can have different essences and take different forms. This is not only an ontological dispute; it also provides a new foundation for thinking about the relation between IR theory and international politics.

Constructivism allows IR scholars to take a more analytical stance towards international politics. The reason essentialist IR theory has a critical relation to international politics is the claim to have discovered how international politics necessarily must be. Given that what international politics *is* depends on how international politics is *understood*, the claim to have discovered its essential aspect makes essentialist theory critical: it entangles essentialist theorists in the belief system sustaining international politics at any given time, either supporting or undermining it (or a bit of both). The constructivist, however, asks not “what is the essence of international politics?” but “what do people take to be the essence of international politics?” By avoiding essentialist claims themselves, constructivists can be analytical in a much stronger sense.⁴

Analytically speaking, constructivism connects intersubjective horizons to forms of international life. In this endeavor, essentialist IR theories are a good source of material since they often state explicitly the world views that are current in a particular social-historical context and justify certain ways of being. When Waltz reflects on how his theory was made, the best answer he can give is “creatively” (Waltz, 1979, p. 9). John Hobson has somewhat more to add:

Waltz’s master-variables in world politics—anarchy, sovereignty, self-help, balance of power and great power politics—are all derived from his reading of

the modern European inter-state system. Thus in viewing these specifically European norms and practices as natural, he both tempocentrically [i.e., anachronistically] extrapolates them back in time, as well as universalizes these provincial features through space [ethnocentricity] (Hobson, 2012, p. 210).

Thus, while Waltz considers his theory as reflecting the eternal, unchanging structure of international politics, Hobson considers Waltz's theory as reflecting something else, namely a *particular* way of thinking nourishing a *particular* form of international life in which Waltz participates (not as a practitioner, of course, but as an ideologue for practitioners).⁵ However, Hobson's analytical relation to Waltz (and, by extension, to everyone who shares Waltz's horizon) is not neutral. While Waltz is imprisoned within his particular social-historical horizon, Hobson is not. Rather, Hobson's position is one of insight into Waltz's horizon that Waltz himself lacks. This analytical superiority puts Hobson in a *critical* relation to Waltz, and to everyone—scholar or practitioner—who is imprisoned within the same horizon as Waltz and thereby (unwittingly) fellow victims of tempo- and ethnocentricity.

The larger point is that constructivist analysis of essentialist beliefs is a form of critique. Such analysis is based on a fundamental asymmetry between the deconstructed agents under study (whether scholars or practitioners) who are assumed to be essentialists—i.e., who are assumed to subscribe to an “ensemble of beliefs, principles and norms” that support a certain form of international politics—and the deconstructing constructivist. History, as it emerges for constructivism is a series of intersubjective worlds, each containing its own essence (re-interpreted as an inter-subjective horizon). This is the *analytical* starting point for constructivism, but this analytical starting point has a critical edge. The constructivist does not share the horizon she attributes to the people under study. Rather, she has gained analytical distance to these horizons through social-historical particularization (deconstruction)—an analytical distance that is also a *critical* distance.

Constructivist analysis and critique is directed at (essentialist) others; it is Waltz that Hobson deconstructs, not himself. However, constructivism is itself a form of subjectivity that is internal to a social-historical horizon. If the central commitments of constructivism are possibility over necessity—i.e., that any given social phenomenon “X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is” (Hacking, 1999, p. 6)—and human agency—i.e., that we live in a “world of our making” (Onuf, 2013)—then a belief in human *freedom* to take charge of our historical situation in a fundamental way is the (implicit or explicit) horizon of constructivism. This horizon, which is distinctly modern and liberal (even, perhaps, “Western”), is no less social-historical than any other horizon.⁶

The difference between the constructivist and the essentialist, then, is not that one is internal to history and the other is not—the difference between,

e.g., Hobson and Waltz is not that Waltz is inside of history and Hobson is on the outside. Rather, the difference is one of self-awareness of one's own historicity; it is a difference between living immediately under a horizon, taking it as natural, and having insight into this horizon. Such self-awareness is a form of *emancipation*: coming to know your horizon also frees you from that horizon in a certain sense by giving you critical distance to it. This insight into the emancipatory side of constructivist critique takes us beyond constructivism and into dialectical thinking.

THE DIALECTIC HORIZON

The immanent critiques of essentialism and constructivism serve two purposes. Firstly, they illustrate how the analytical and critical aspects of IR theorizing cannot be separated. The logic behind this insight has already been laid out in the introductory chapter: social analysis is a (re)interpretation of agents who also interpret themselves. For instance, to deconstruct someone—even if *intended* as a purely analytical exercise—is also a form of critique: the person being deconstructed might not be aware of the socio-historicity of his or her horizon—or even that he or she has a horizon at all. By becoming aware of this, a new layer to that person's self-interpretation has been added in the form of self-awareness of one's own horizon, something which, I argue, makes an emancipatory difference.

Secondly, the critiques of essentialism and constructivism are meant to provide the ground for a way of thinking about IR theorizing that takes us beyond essentialist reification and constructivist deconstruction. In chapter 5, I build on two insights from these chapters to disclose this new way of thinking: (1) *theory* as a regulative ideal (which makes it critical), and (2) *theorizing* as the laying bare of transcendental horizons (which makes it analytical). These two elements are combined by thinking dialectically, which means to think in first-person rather than in third-person mode.

To illustrate what I mean by first-person mode, consider that constructivist critique can be used in two ways: as an ideological weapon against essentialist others (third-person thinking) or, when turned inward dialectically, as an emancipatory tool (first-person thinking). In the latter case, deconstruction is not an end in itself, but serves a larger purpose of disclosing one's own horizon as a theorist—not only one's socio-historical embeddedness and one's transcendental value commitments, but also how one relates analytically and critically to the world. First-person, dialectical deconstruction is explicitly concerned with “the relationship between [one's] gaze and the object of [one's] gaze” (Knafo, 2016, p. 39), and, as such, represents a potentially important way of doing reflexivity in IR.

Dialectically understood, such constructivist self-critique has both a negative and a positive aspect: The *negative* side of constructivist critique is the removal of the natural necessity of being any particular way (through self-awareness of one's own socio-historicity); the *positive* side of constructivist critique is the discovery of the freedom to define oneself. To see the latter aspect, consider the following passage from Hubert Dreyfus, which I think summarizes the constructivist attitude neatly:

[t]o exist [as a human being] is to take a stand on what is essential about one's being and being defined by that stance. Thus [a human being] is what, in its social activity, it interprets itself to be. Human beings do not already have some specific nature (Dreyfus, 1991, p. 23).

This passage is, in a sense, self-contradictory. It is, of course, quite understandable what Dreyfus means by human beings not having some specific nature; it means that human beings are, in large part, what they make of themselves. However, this freedom to define oneself is *in itself* a kind of "human nature." If the self is a relation to itself (a self-interpretation), then "[t]he self is freedom" (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 27). Insight into our own socio-historicity is also an insight into what makes us social-historical, which is our freedom (to define ourselves). Disclosing this freedom is to disclose a horizon with practical implications for how to relate to each other—whether we are speaking of relations between political communities or relations between IR scholars and political practitioners (the latter kind of relation is, of course, the main focus of this book).

When theorizing becomes simultaneously analytically deconstructive and critically reconstructive in this manner—i.e., when the practical intent of theorizing is to disclose our common horizon rather than dogmatically telling others to be a certain way or to ideologically debunk their way of being—theorizing becomes *dialogue*. Constructivism, on its own, is not dialogue, but it is a step on the road towards dialogue. Constructivism opens up possibility where essentialism sees only necessity. The contribution of constructivism to the conversation is to see that the limitations to political change represented by the current state of affairs in international politics, while real enough, are not *principled* limitations. Whoever sanctions the current state of affairs theoretically as something that cannot *possibly* be overcome (and not merely something that might be difficult or undesirable to overcome) because it is the natural and inevitable way of things, needs a good dose of deconstruction before dialogue can begin.

Deconstruction turns into dialogue the moment it (dialectically) sees its own limits—in particular, that socio-historization of theory is not really an effective critique of theory. True, a theory of international politics is internally connected to and justifies a particular form of international politics. How-

ever, theories of international politics are not, for that reason, equivalent to the forms of international politics they justify—i.e., IR *theory* is not reducible to international political *practice*. Rather, a theory is an idealization that practice can only approximate. Morgenthau knew this:

a perfect balance of power [. . .] will scarcely be found in reality, [political realism] assumes that reality, being deficient in this respect, must be understood and evaluated as an approximation to an ideal system of balance of power (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 8).

The essentialist mistake is to justify a regulative ideal—such as a balance-of-power system—as a natural law in the same sense as the law of gravity is natural law.⁷ The constructivist is right to point out that the regulative ideal that Morgenthau is peddling has an inner socio-historicity.⁸ Specifically, Morgenthau’s ideal is part of a political horizon that emerged in Europe after the Westphalian settlement and was refined in the nineteenth century with the advent of the modern nation state. The constructivist mistake, however, is to consider this political horizon as “debunked” merely by virtue of having socio-historicity.

But an ideal—and therefore a theory—cannot be debunked by social-historical particularization; only the justification of the ideal as “natural” is undermined by recuperating its social-historical origins. Debunking an ideal can only be done with reference to a higher ideal, i.e., by arguing, for instance, that “no *good* person [. . .] would want to operate by the cynical tenets of realism unless they were forced to do so” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 248, emphasis added). The constructivist argument is precisely that we are not *forced*⁹ to do anything: if international politics is currently cynical, oppressive, war prone and unjust (or if it is the opposite of these things) it is not because it *has* to be that way. We can blame ourselves—or “the world” as the externalization of our collective failures and accomplishments—but we cannot blame natural necessity.

If the horizon that Morgenthau idealizes is inadequate (and I think it is), it is not because it has socio-historicity—*all* horizons have socio-historicity—but because this horizon is not on par with the level that theoretical reflection has reached in history. Today, we can look back at the nineteenth-century political horizon and see it more clearly than the people who lived more immediately within this horizon could. The difference between now and then is not merely that time has passed, but that we have emancipated ourselves from what was “natural” back then, such as denying women the right to vote, colonialism, seeing war as a part of a healthy international system, etc.

This claim to historical supersession is not like saying that Renaissance music is better than Baroque music, which is, arguably, merely an expression of taste. Rather, it is a deeply moral, ethical and political claim: we know

better now (Taylor, 2003, p. 176), by which I mean we know *ourselves* better—we have greater insight into our universal community of freedom and what it demands of us. It is, I argue, against this background that the question of justification of IR theory must be understood. If taking a theoretical standpoint is to take a stance in an evolving historical dialogue on the boundaries of political legitimacy in international politics, as I will suggest in this book, then there is no way of *justifying* that stance with reference to something beyond the dialogue itself. However, nor is that necessary, because the dialogue is its own standard and its own ideal. We have arrived at a point in history where we have insight into the dialogue itself and the demands it puts on our inter-subjective relations (including *international* relations and the study thereof). Any IR theory that does not recognize this is, I would argue, not on par with the horizon we live under.

NOTES

1. There is really nothing strange about this. We see the same thing in, for instance, natural science: the more fundamental the science, the more abstract it becomes. Theoretical physics, for instance, is so abstract that its central theories (the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, string theory etc.) cannot be concretized and explained without also distorting them to some degree.

2. The primary motivation for writing this book is, naturally, that I think there is something wrong with the way the stage for IR scholarship is currently set up. Of course, I am fully aware that IR is not really *one* stage, which I consider to be part of the problem. I am also aware that I am “playing with fire” (Jackson 2011: chap. 1) by even suggesting that IR should gather under one horizon (and it is no use pretending that I am not in order to avoid offending people). I think that some IR scholars have understood more than others about what they are doing, and that certain IR scholars might even be doing more harm than good—not out of malice, not out of deficiency in empirical knowledge or worldly wisdom, but out of lack of Socratic self-knowledge.

3. Morgenthau understands this, which is what makes his work so tension-filled.

4. This move is equivalent to what Karl Mannheim refers to as the transition between the evaluative (critical) to a non-evaluative (analytical) study of belief systems “where [. . .] no judgements are pronounced as to the correctness of the ideas to be treated. This approach confines itself to discovering the relations between certain mental structures and the life-situations in which they exist” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 71).

5. Note that once Waltz’s theory is mediated through a constructivist understanding it loses its critical function, since its critical function was rooted in Waltz’s essentialism. In a sense, Waltz theory, reinterpreted from a constructivist standpoint, becomes exactly the purely descriptive theory it was intended to be; that is, descriptive of a particular kind of (inter)subjectivity underpinning a particular kind of international society. However, this re-appropriation of Waltz into a constructivist framework is also a transition to a new theory based on ideational constitutional structures as the fundament for international politics, and therefore also at the same time a debunking of Waltz.

6. The emancipation that lies in freedom from “the illusion that there is only one way of thinking” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 11) connected to a natural world order is in many ways the defining aspect of the modern liberal political identity. This attitude, which is a relatively recent historical phenomenon, is deeply subversive to traditional authority, whose legitimacy is linked to the belief in a natural order of things. The concrete political and social transformation associated with this historical development, in Europe at least, was the breakdown of “the monopoly of the ecclesiastical interpretation of the world” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 10) exercised

by the Catholic church during the Middle Ages. The modern, liberal horizon, and the freedom it brings (and the analytical opportunities it opens up), is so naturalized now that we hardly think of it as a horizon at all.

7. The law of gravity is also, in a sense, an idealization (Cartwright, 1983)—but no less real for that matter.

8. Morgenthau is also aware of this.

9. Please note: “forced” in the same way as the law of gravity forces you to fall down if you jump out the window.

Chapter Three

Essentialism

Essentialism, as I use the term, is a set of internally connected ontological, epistemological and practical-philosophical¹ commitments that together represent a solution to the problems associated with the analytical-critical duality of IR theory. Ontologically speaking, essentialism entails a commitment to an objective essence of international politics that is principally immune to change—something that must be worked with rather than transformed. The *analytical* function of IR theory is to reflect this essence.² The *critical* function of IR theory is to enlighten practitioners about this objective essence so they can better adjust their behavior to the realities of their situation.

There are two traditional versions of essentialism in IR: one placing the essence in subjectivity and one placing the essence in structure. The paradigmatic example of the former is Hans J. Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (1978); the paradigmatic example of the latter is Kenneth N. Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979).³ These two works will be the main illustrations of essentialism in this chapter. Most conventional accounts present the difference between Morgenthau and Waltz as one of analytical focus (e.g., Hollis & Smith, 2009)—a level of analysis issue—or different hypotheses about what makes international politics the way it is (e.g., Donnelly, 2000; Mearsheimer, 2010). I take a different approach, and consider the relation between Morgenthau and Waltz as *dialectical* relation.⁴ I am primarily interested in the move from Morgenthau's "human nature essentialism" to Waltz's "structural essentialism" as an internal development of the essentialist position itself—as essentialism trying to resolve its own internal contradictions.

The driving force of this dialectic is the analytical-critical duality of IR theory. The essentialist "solution" to the analytical-critical duality is rooted in the division of international reality into a subjective and changeable part—

the part that can be *informed* by IR theory—and an objective and eternal part (the essence)—the part that can be *reflected* by IR theory. The primary threat to this solution is that the objective and eternal should turn out to be subjective and changeable, in which case theory would lose both its analytical footing and its primary justification as a critical and enlightening force in international politics.

The search for the essential part of international reality is what takes us from one essentialist position to the next in this chapter. Morgenthau argues that the essence of international relations is located in the subjectivity of political practitioners (“political man”). However, this creates a paradox: Either practitioners are political realists by necessity, in which case political realism is true (according to essentialist standards) but cannot possibly fulfill any kind of critical-enlightening function; or practitioners are not political realists by necessity, in which case political realism *can* fulfill its critical-enlightening function but is not true (according to essentialist standards).⁵ Waltz solves this problem by distinguishing more clearly between the subjective and the objective—between agency and structure—and locating the essence in the latter.

The Waltzian solution depends on a strict separation of agency and structure—a separation he, in the end, cannot maintain. The “objective” characteristics of the international realm are not, it will turn out, inseparable from the “subjective” characteristics of the agents inhabiting the international realm. In fact, Waltz has to smuggle in a particular kind of agent—the self-regarding, power seeking nation state—in order to create the kind of international reality he has in mind. This makes Waltz’s argument circular in the same way as Morgenthau’s argument: power seeking and self-regard is justified as a strategic adaption to an environment defined by power seeking and self-regard. The larger point is that structure cannot be divorced from subjectivity. The lack of an objective place to ground theory creates an internal crisis in essentialism that sets the stage for the transition to constructivism, which is the focus of the next chapter.

A DISCLAIMER

Before I begin the analysis, I want to make a caveat. Neither Morgenthau nor Waltz are perfect examples of essentialists, nor would they necessarily have understood themselves as essentialists. This is particularly true of Waltz whose self-understanding is in many ways the opposite of essentialist. A theory, Waltz argues is “not an edifice of truth and not a reproduction of reality [but] a depiction of the organization of a domain [e.g., international politics]” (Waltz, 1979, p. 8). In other words, Waltz understands theory in purely *analytical* terms—as something merely used to structure an object of

empirical observation (see Jackson, 2011, pp. 112–15). Thus, “one can therefore not legitimately ask if [theories] are true, but only if they are useful” (Waltz, 1979, p. 117).

However, I am not convinced that Waltz’s self-understanding matches what he actually does in *Theory of International Politics* and elsewhere. When Waltz depicts the international realm as a “self-help system” whose stability depends on power-balancing, is that not meant to reflect something essential about international politics? When Waltz talks about structures that “constrain and select” does he mean real, actual structures with real, actual effects, or is he merely making a theoretical assumption that is helpful for empirical analysis? If it is the latter, then it seems completely unwarranted to transform these theoretical assumptions into real-life practical standpoints, such as arguing that Iran should be allowed to develop a nuclear bomb because “power begs to be balanced” (Waltz, 2012, p. 2).

In this chapter, I treat Waltz’s theory as more than the analytical tool he claims it is. Rather, my reading is that his theoretical standpoint is also a claim to say something essential and important about international politics that both scholars and practitioners should listen to. This is not a terribly controversial reading of Waltz, although it admittedly flies in the face of Waltz’s own meta-theory (Wæver, 2009). If the point was to replicate Waltz’s self-understanding, this would be a problem. However, the point is not to replicate Waltz’s self-understanding—or Morgenthau’s self-understanding for that matter. This chapter is not primarily about Morgenthau and Waltz, but about *essentialism*. This means that my treatment of Morgenthau and Waltz, given that their own self-understandings are not entirely essentialist (and they are not), will be a bit unfair.

The same disclaimer applies to the next chapter on constructivism. Not all scholars who understand themselves as constructivist will agree with my understanding of constructivism. Indeed, the term “constructivism” is not intended to describe a research tradition at all (as in e.g., Hopf, 1998), but a possible solution to the problems associated with the analytical-critical duality of IR theory. I certainly believe that—insofar as they have coherent commitments on these issues at all—most self-identified constructivists would adhere to some form of what I term constructivism on a philosophical level. But my focus is not on what a specific group of scholars believe; my focus, in this and the next chapter, is on the larger conceptual issues generated by the analytical-critical duality. This focus requires a lot of unfair simplification and idealization. The question is whether I have made the *right* simplifications, or if I have missed something of essential importance to my investigation. This question I leave to the critical reader.

Morgenthau's Paradox

In his *Politics Among Nations* (1978) and other writings, Morgenthau presents a political theory of international politics connected to a set of meta-theoretical principles. Morgenthau's primary meta-theoretical commitment is that "a theory of international relations must seek to depict the rational essence of its subject matter" (Morgenthau, 2011, p. 264). Morgenthau locates this essence in a "human nature" that transcends social and historical context:⁶

human nature, in which the laws of politics have their roots, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these laws. Hence novelty is not necessarily a virtue in political theory, nor is old age a defect (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 4).

The essence Morgenthau refers to is will to power and the elevation of (national) self-interest. It is important, he argues, to distinguish between this *essence* of international politics and the *appearance* of international politics, since appearances can be deceptive. Political practitioners often lack the courage to admit—to themselves as well as to others—that they are by nature Machiavellians. The politician, Morgenthau argues, "cannot help "playing an act" by concealing the true nature of his political actions behind the mask of a political ideology [. . .]. [P]oliticians have an ineradicable tendency to deceive themselves about what they are doing by referring to their policies not in terms of power but in terms of [. . .] ethical and legal principles" (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 100).

The critical-enlightening role that political realism can play is clear. Political realism represents enlightenment and reason that, if it were generally accepted, would bring about a more honest political practice more in line with its essence. It is important to note that although Morgenthau certainly wants international politics to be more Machiavellian, this is not an expression of Morgenthau's personal preference. According to Morgenthau, it is not just that international politics *can* be Machiavellian. In an important sense international politics always and already *is* Machiavellian—it is just (sometimes) covered behind a façade of ethics and morality. This is the first hint of Morgenthau's paradox, namely that "Morgenthau spends half his time explaining that states follow their national interests and the other half lecturing American leaders that they should do so" (Guilhot, 2011, p. 42).

Let us disaggregate this paradox as a tension between the analytical and the critical dimension of Morgenthau's theory, much as we did with the relation between Mearsheimer and Clinton in the introduction. The critical edge of Morgenthau's writing is clear. Indeed, Michael Williams has suggested that the classical realist project of which Morgenthau was a part should be understood as an enlightenment project (Williams, 2013). Howev-

er, the justification for political realism as a valid theory is not its critical-enlightening function. Rather, Morgenthau's argument for political realism is based on its analytical accuracy, i.e., that political realism depicts "historical processes as they *actually* take place" (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 4, emphasis added). This way of justification is not accidental "as the prescriptive value of realism obviously proceeds from its descriptive accuracy" (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 245).

However, there is an obvious problem with justifying political realism analytically, since what "actually took place" is a matter of interpretation. Consider that, according Morgenthau's own logic, we can see historical processes from two different angles: as it was experienced by the agents involved, with all their potential ideological distortions, and as they are interpreted by the political realist armed with insights into human nature. Of course, these two interpretations might coincide (if the agent understands himself and his situation in political realist terms), but then again, they might not. Either way, the brute circumstance that these two interpretations may or may not coincide—i.e., that we are dealing with a meeting between horizons—makes analytical justification problematic. I will now try to clarify this difficulty.

The following statement brings out the tension between the two different perspectives: "[as scholars] we think as he [the statesman] does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the international scene, does himself" (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 5). However, if we understand the political actor better than he understands himself we do not, strictly speaking, "think as he does." Rather, we, the political realists, are thinking on a higher level than he, the statesman, does—unless, of course, the statesman is also a political realist. As such, the statesman's understanding of what he is doing cannot possibly count as independent evidence for political realism, since political realism is itself the criterion for whether the statesman's understanding is accepted as valid or ideologically distorted.

Morgenthau's *analytical* understanding of events in international politics is also a form of critique. The agents involved in these events have their own understanding and this understanding is, presumably, important for what "actually happens." If the statesman in question *thinks* he is acting for reasons relating to "ethical and legal principles," then Morgenthau, committed as he is to political realism, must argue that the statesman is either lying or is the victim of some kind of misunderstanding regarding his own motives. If the statesman is lying, Morgenthau is sympathetic, since lying is often good statecraft:

[t]o rally a people behind the government's foreign policy [. . .] the spokesman of the nation must appeal [among other things] to moral principles, such as

justice, rather than to power. This is the only way a nation can attain the enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice without which no foreign policy can pass the ultimate test of strength (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 95).

Morgenthau mentions Roosevelt and Churchill as men with good instincts for satisfying the people's need to feel that their nation's cause was morally justified through the use of "ideological disguises" (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 94). It is primarily the second case, the statesman who honestly believes in his own moral justification, who is most in need of realist guidance. When Morgenthau comes across these types of statesmen he is often not kind in his judgment:

Neville Chamberlain's politics of appeasement were, as far as we can judge, inspired by good motives; he was probably less motivated by considerations of personal power than were many other British prime ministers [i.e., less of a Machiavellian], and he sought to preserve peace [. . .]. Yet his policies helped to make the Second World War inevitable, and to bring untold miseries to millions of men (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 6).

In the end, Morgenthau's empirical analysis is just as much about passing judgment on current and historical political practice from the standpoint of political realism as it is about validating political realism itself as a theory. Is this an accident—something that could have been avoided by a more careful essentialist—or is it a real, inescapable difficulty of essentialism itself? Let us review the paradox again.

The root of the paradox is that Morgenthau tries to combine two incompatible ideas: (1) the epistemological idea that IR theory should be judged by its descriptive accuracy concerning how statesmen think and act; and (2) the practical-philosophical idea that IR theory has a critical-enlightening function, since "not all foreign policies have always followed [a] rational, objective, and unemotional course" (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 7). Political realism is both a description and an ideal. Since it is *both* these things, the criteria of evaluation cannot be strictly empirical; one cannot evaluate an ideal, which speaks to what *ought* to be, using empirical observation, which speaks to what *is*. Morgenthau himself is aware of this latter point:

it is no argument against the theory here presented that actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to it. That argument misunderstands the intention of this book, which is to present not [a] description of political reality, but a rational theory of international politics (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 10).

But a *rational* theory of international politics cannot, in principle, be validated empirically against what "actually happens." Rationality is not an empirical conjecture; it is a critical standard for evaluating behavior. Of course, whether particular statesmen acted rationally—i.e., according to Morgen-

thau's theory—can be evaluated empirically, but such an evaluation presupposes the theoretical standard used for evaluation; it is, emphatically, not a *test* of that standard. To be rational is to live up to an ideal. Comparing this ideal to practice as it currently is and historically has been is a critique of that practice, not a critique of the ideal. Actual international political practices might deviate a good deal from the political realist standard of rationality, such as Morgenthau argues that Neville Chamberlain's policies of appeasement did, but that does not in itself invalidate (nor could it validate) that standard.

Morgenthau's *essence*—and therefore Morgenthau's theory—is a kind of ideal, i.e., a critical standard to which practice can approximate that, when recognized and acted upon, is constitutive of a certain kind of international life. Morgenthau himself, I think, would not disagree with this. Indeed, it follows almost by default from his emphasis on subjectivity. A person, Morgenthau argues, is a composite of different subjectivities;⁷ “of “economic man,” “political man,” “moral man,” “religious man,” etc. “ (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 14). A theory of politics is concerned with “political man,” and abstracts from the other aspects of existence. Political man is a way of being that corresponds to a particular sphere of practice, the *political* sphere, and not to others, such as the family sphere, where other ways of being are appropriate.⁸

Morgenthau's theory of politics, then, is really a specification of the set of values that make up an ideal-typical way of being in the realm of politics—international politics in particular.⁹ It is an ideal that envisions a very specific form of international life. It idealizes the classic balance-of-power system in Europe, which, according to Morgenthau was an international *society* in the true sense of the word—a “common system of arts, and laws, and manners, the same level of politeness and cultivation, and [a shared] sense of honor and justice” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 262). This shared understanding prevented, for a long time, great-power war on the continent. Morgenthau's diagnosis of his contemporary historical situation is one of decay compared to this Golden Age. His contemporary historical situation lacks such shared values, which gives the struggle for power “a ferocity and intensity not known to the other ages” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 263).

Morgenthau was not shy about spelling out the practical-political implications of his theoretical standpoint, which, indeed, he saw as the whole point of political analysis. The most important point for our investigation is to note how Morgenthau's supposedly neutral reference to the essence of international politics is actually a political ideal. What started as mere statement of how things are (like it or not) turns into a political project of transforming how things are. The paradox stems primarily from the way Morgenthau *justifies* his theory, which is not as an ideal but as a reflection of an inescapable

pable aspect of international politics. This contradiction is not accidental, but a consequence of Morgenthau's essentialist commitments.

Morgenthau's essence is a form of subjectivity—a particular way of being that is supposed to be “human nature.” But to foreshadow the constructivist critique of the next chapter: when you are dealing with human subjectivity there is no “natural” way to be. A political agent certainly *can* be a Machiavellian, but he can also be Gandhi, and most political actors are probably somewhere in between. The indeterminacy of human political identity turns all models of any particular identity—such as classical political realism—into a standard against which any particular self-understanding can be measured. That does not in itself make these ideals *wrong* (a subject we will return to) but it makes it problematic to justify any such particular ideal of “political man” with reference its natural necessity.

INTERLUDE: ARON AND THE ROAD TO STRUCTURE

The turn to structure in political realism, i.e., the move from classical to structural realism, was partly prompted by the need to find some other place than subjectivity to ground theory (although it was not necessarily formulated in these terms). It was also, however, a good deal more. In particular, it was a transition from a philosophical-historical to a more social-scientific way of approaching international politics. An important, but somewhat forgotten, figure in this intellectual evolution is Raymond Aron, whose thoughts on theory are interesting for our discussion.

The fate of Aron is that he was a transitional figure, uneasily occupying an intellectual space somewhere between the classical and the structural realists—between Morgenthau and Waltz. Aron's work, in particular his tome *Peace and War* (2003), is suffused with the historical sensibility and admiration for prudent statecraft that are the hallmarks of classical realism, but his understanding of *theory* is largely sympathetic to the scientific self-understanding that was sweeping IR at the time (*Peace and War* came out in 1966). In the essay *What is a theory of international relations?* (1967), Aron addresses the theory question explicitly. Theory, Aron argues, has two meanings in the Western tradition. On one hand, we have

theory as contemplative knowledge, drawn from ideas or from the basic order of the world, [. . .] the equivalent of philosophy. In that case, theory differs not only from practice [. . .], but from knowledge animated by the will to “know in order to predict and thus be able to act.” At most it [i.e., theory] changes the one who has conceived it and those who are enlightened by it (Aron, 1967, p. 186).

On the other hand, we have

authentically scientific theories, with those of physical science offering the perfect model. In this sense, a theory is a hypothetical, deductive system consisting of groups of hypotheses whose terms are strictly defined and whose relationships between terms (or variables) are most often given in mathematical form (Aron, 1967, p. 186).

Thus, a scientific theory of IR, if it could be constructed, would go beyond mere philosophical enlightenment and provide grounds for a political practice based on prediction and control. Morgenthau would (and did) scoff at such an idea. Indeed, an opposition to a “scientification” of political life was somewhat of a central motif in his writings (Guilhot, 2011; Williams, 2013). His *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (1967) is probably his most explicit treatment of the topic, but also in *Politics Among Nations* he contrasts the “scientific” alternative to the “perennial wisdom” of a rationalist approach to international politics,” christening the former “scientific utopianism” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 41).¹⁰

Aron, showing the full elasticity of his thinking, actually ends up in a position very close to Morgenthau on theory: “if we expect a theory of international relations to provide the equivalent of what a knowledge of construction materials provides the builder of bridges, then there is no theory and never will be” (Aron, 1967, p. 204). The reason for this surprising conclusion (given Aron’s initial declaration of the superiority of scientific theory) is that IR, unlike physics, is concerned with *subjectivity*; i.e., with the thoughts and actions of men and women burdened with the freedom and responsibility of interpreting what is going on, taking a stance and making choices. What a theory can offer, Aron argues, is at best

an *understanding* of [the] various ideologies—moralism, legalism, realism, and power politics—through which men and nations think out problems in international relations, establish their goals or assign themselves duties (Aron, 1967, p. 204, emphasis added).

The limits for scientific theory in IR, as Aron sees them, are ontological—that is, inherent in the kind of the subject matter that IR deals with. His way of putting it is interesting in light of what was to follow in IR theory: “the object of knowledge [for IR] is not only the logic of systems but also *the logic of action*” (Aron, 1967, p. 206, emphasis added). The primary thrust of Kenneth Waltz’s seminal work *Theory of International Politics* (1979)—the foundational text, one might say, of structural realism—is precisely to move away from “the logic of actions” and to focus on “the logic of systems.”

WALTZ: STRUCTURE AND ANALYTICAL DISENGAGEMENT

For Waltz, the primary fault of previous IR theorists (and he sees no important difference between Aron and Morgenthau in this regard) is that they focused too much on *agents*—too much on “finding out who is doing what to produce the outcomes [of interest]” (Waltz, 1979, p. 62). However, this approach is bound to fail since “the behavior of states and of statesmen [. . .] is indeterminate” (Waltz, 1979, p. 68). The focus of IR theory, Waltz argues, should not be on individuals and their actions, but on the *system* in which these actions take place. The international system, in Waltz’s ontology, is decoupled from the agents inhabiting the system and acts as an external “constraining and disposing force” (Waltz, 1979, p. 69). To explain outcomes in international relations, according to Waltz, is to show how a certain outcome, although it could *in principle* have been completely different (because we are dealing with human beings), nevertheless was to be expected given the structure of the system.

The move from Morgenthau to Waltz—the move from subjectivity to structure—is also a shift in the IR scholar’s position vis-à-vis international politics. With Morgenthau we are *in* the hustle and bustle of political practice, putting “ourselves in the position of a statesman who must meet a certain problem of foreign policy under certain circumstances” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 5). Indeed, the all-encompassing drive in Morgenthau’s writing, as one observer has put it, is to “enter into the moral world and engage the problems dilemmas, fears, and aspirations of human relations” (Bain, 2000, p. 446). With Waltz, on the other hand, we are someplace high above the action where agents are barely visible anymore and certainly less important, reduced as they are to more or less interchangeable “behaving units” (Waltz, 1979, p. 62).

We can say that while Morgenthau adopts more of a *participant* perspective, Waltz adopts more of an *observer* perspective (Skjervheim, 1996c). Note that this is an *existential* distinction. Both Morgenthau and Waltz are observers in the sense that they are not actual participants in the social practices we usually refer to when speaking of international politics. In this sense, a scholar is always an observer. The distinction between observer and participant is not primarily related to social role—both Morgenthau and Waltz are scholars, not practitioners—but to the intellectual vantage point they adopt in their analysis. The difference between these vantage points lies in the level of *existential engagement* in their subject matter.

To illustrate what I mean by “existential engagement,” consider a situation *without* existential engagement. The astronomer studying the movements of planets is not existentially engaged in her subject matter; she does not see the universe as the planets do and understand their movements in light of their values and world views. If the astronomer were to start looking

for *meaning* in planetary movements she would no longer be doing astronomy but a completely different social practice, such as astrology.

When studying planets, the question of existential engagement is moot—there is simply nothing to be existentially engaged in. However, when studying social and political life, things are different. In this case, existential engagement is at the very least a possibility. The question is whether existential engagement is also a *necessity*, i.e., whether in order you explain why people do as they do, you must understand how they think. As Hollis and Smith has suggested, if we really are serious about modelling IR on natural sciences such as physics and astronomy, the answer to this question is, perhaps, “no”:

if three centuries of physics [is] taken as the model to emulate, it is tempting to suggest that it really does not matter what the actors of the international scene have in their minds. In the strongest version of this approach behavior is generated by a system of forces or a structure, external not only to the minds of each actor but also external even to the minds of all actors (Hollis & Smith 1991: 3).

The larger point is that focusing on structure, existential disengagement and “scientification” (moving toward a natural-scientific ideal) are internally related. Structure is only visible from the *outside* and not from within the structure itself. This outside position belongs to the existentially disengaged observer—a position that can be occupied by anyone, scholar or practitioner, prepared to extract him- or herself intellectually from his or her immediate context.¹¹

In some ways, the move to a more disengaged position is not a sharp break with Morgenthau. Rather, Waltz’s approach is a radicalization of elements that are also present in Morgenthau’s thinking. It is the theorist’s *disengaged* position, Morgenthau argues, that allows him to see through the muddle in a way that practitioners themselves might not:

[t]he more removed the individual is from a particular power struggle, the more likely he is to understand its true nature. So it is not by accident [. . .] that scholars are better equipped than politicians to understand what politics is all about (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 93).

There is a certain sense in which the theorist *must* be “disengaged” in order to see the big picture he or she is supposed to see; it is part the job requirement, so to speak. However, there are different ways of understand this requirement. We can understand this *ethos* as equivalent to approximating the natural-scientific ideal, where the imperative is to become as detached an observer as is humanly possible. But we can also understand this imperative in another sense—a sense which is perhaps not as immediately understand-

able—namely as a *dialectical* imperative to come to know our most fundamental horizon. I am getting a bit ahead of myself here (we will return to dialectical thinking in chapter 5), but to give a preliminary feel for the difference between these two approaches, consider the following passage from Thomas Nagel’s book *The View from Nowhere* (1986):

[a] view or form of thought is more objective than another if it relies less on the specifics of the individual’s makeup and position in the world. [. . .] A standpoint that is objective by comparison with the personal view of one individual may be subjective by comparison with a theoretical standpoint still farther out. The standpoint of morality is more objective than that of private life [i.e., personal interests], but less objective than the standpoint of physics (Nagel, 1986, p. 5).

But is the standpoint of physics or, more generally, the scientific standpoint really the most fundamental standpoint? If we by “most fundamental” mean something like “analytically detached to the highest degree,” then I am inclined to agree that yes, in *that* sense, the perspective of science is the most fundamental standpoint. However, in another sense, at least one standpoint more fundamental than science exists: the standpoint that critically evaluates and judges science as the most fundamental standpoint, i.e., Nagel’s own *philosophical* standpoint.

The philosophy that situates science as the most fundamental standpoint is itself a theoretical standpoint “still farther out” than science. This philosophical standpoint, however, is not a disengaged analytical observer’s standpoint; it is rather a deeply engaged, critical standpoint—a *horizon* that provides a normative hierarchy for arranging other standpoints, such as “the standpoint of physics,” as more or less fundamental. Getting to this background horizon is what “seeing the big picture” means when we are thinking dialectically, and the road to this horizon is the kind critique from the *inside* that I have performed in these latter two paragraphs.

Waltz, however, is not thinking dialectically. Instead, he understands the imperative to see the big picture in an, arguably, more common way: to establish a view of international relations from the *outside*, akin to astronomy’s perspective on the solar system. To theorize international relations, on Waltz’s understanding, *is* to adopt an outside vantage point from where the international realm emerges as a finite and delimited object. This follows from Waltz’s *mimetic* understanding of theory as a “depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connection among its parts” (Waltz, 1979, p. 8). This commitment is a fundamental part of Waltz’s horizon—a horizon that even constructivists who rebelled against Waltz would struggle to free themselves from.

STRUCTURE AND THE ANALYTICAL-CRITICAL DUALITY

Let us track back to the analytical-critical duality of IR theory. As already mentioned, it is not obvious that this issue is relevant to Waltz, since he has a purely *analytical* understanding of his own theory. A theory, Waltz claims, is an intellectual device for the observing IR scholar, the purpose of which is primarily explanation (and perhaps prediction). Theoretical progress is *analytical* progress: to move from more or less inductive fact collection, to a higher level of understanding where the different pieces of empirical information is seen as parts of a whole (Waltz, 1979, p. 8).

This insistence on theory as merely an analytical tool puts Waltz at odds with his realist predecessors. Both Morgenthau and Aron also speak of theory as an analytical tool for carving out a piece of social reality called “international relations” in order to study it (Aron, 1967, p. 187; Morgenthau, 2011, p. 264).¹² However, they also insist that theory is something more than *just* an intellectual device: “a theory of international relations presents not only a guide to understanding, but also an idea for action” (Morgenthau, 2011, p. 264).

Aron’s understanding of the critical function of theory is very interesting in this regard, since it is less connected to particular ways of being—such as Morgenthau’s “political man”—and more focused structure. Theory, Aron argues, speaks to the parameters for action set by the environment in which action takes place. This would likely also be Waltz’s understanding of how his own theory functions critically (if he believed that theory had a critical function). After all, his theory is supposed to delineate “the constraints that confine all states” (Waltz, 1979, p. 268). Referring to the practical implications of Waltz’s theory, Alexander George and George Bennet regard “structural realism as a theory of *constraints* on foreign policy, rather than a theory of foreign policy” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 268, emphasis added).

However, how exactly should we understand “structure” and in what sense does structure constrain? Should we understand structure, in this context, as an external environment—akin to physical environment—that constraints behavior in the same way a physical environment does? Let me try to explain what I mean by this. A physical landscape has certain features that you must adapt to in order to navigate it effectively (or even, in some cases, to survive). Being in the middle of a vast ocean, for instance, is a structural circumstance you have to deal with, whether you like it or not. You can either adapt to your circumstances and learn to swim, or you can give up and drown—either way, it is no use wishing you were on dry land. I do not think that Waltz’s conception of structure is quite as crude as this, but it gives us a place to start.

Obviously, the comparison between social and physical structures in the previous paragraph cannot be taken *literally*. The “stuff” of social structure is

not physical-material. A “social landscape” is a metaphor—it is not actually a landscape in the same sense as an ocean, a forest or a mountain range is a landscape. So what is it? Aron suggests we think of the structures made visible by theory as the “rules of the game” of international relations. He differentiates between mapping out these rules, the subject of *theory*, and doing well in the game, the subject of *praxeology*. As an analogy Aron uses the game of soccer. Soccer has a certain social structure (the rules of the game) that makes it soccer and not something else. Taking that structure as given, one can develop strategies for doing well in the game (Aron, 2003, pp. 8–9).¹³

Two things should be noted about Aron’s structures-as-rules that both point towards the next phase of the argument in chapter 4. First, rules, whether they are explicitly agreed upon or have emerged in a more implicit manner, are socially dependent. Neither soccer nor international relations are naturally occurring phenomena that would have been there also in the absence of human beings. Second, rules are normative, and the most fundamental rules concern the boundaries of political legitimacy:

I tried to determine what constituted the distinctive nature of international or interstate relations, and I concluded that it lay in the legitimacy or legality of the use of military force (Aron, 1967, p. 190).

Thus, the legitimacy of using military force is the inescapable background against which all international politics take place. This is the fundamental constraining condition that, like being in the middle of the ocean, one must adapt to in order to survive and thrive. The practical implications that Aron derives from this fundamental insight are, largely, identical to Waltz. Aron speaks of the “necessity of egoism” that “derives logically from [. . .] the state of nature which rules among states” (Aron, 2003, p. 580); likewise Waltz derives the “international imperative” that is “take care of yourself!” (Waltz, 1979, p. 201).

However, despite their similar practical attitudes, Waltz would probably not entirely agree with Aron’s way of deducing the necessity of self-regard. Waltz’s central idea is that it is *anarchy*, i.e., the absence of a central government holding the monopoly on the use of force, that is the fundamental condition of international politics—not that the use of military force is legitimate. *Legitimacy* has nothing to do with it; it is the mere possibility that, at any moment and for whatever reason, any particular state may use military force that is important. Using violence to get one’s way is not “off the table” in the international realm as it is in a (well-functioning) domestic realm. This is, as I understand it, what Waltz means by “the structure that constraints all states.”

However, there are some problems with this structure-as-anarchy understanding. The absence of a central government holding monopoly on the use of force in international politics is not really a *theory* (in the essentialist sense), but an empirical fact—something that could conceivably change. Theory is what makes this empirical fact of anarchy so important. But to answer why anarchy is important, you need to make assumptions about *agents*, about how they see each and relate to each other. As Alexander Wendt famously pointed out: it does not follow logically from the empirical fact of anarchy that states have to relate to each other in any particular way (Wendt, 1992, p. 396)—war of “all against all” and security communities are both possibilities that are perfectly compatible with the fact that no world government exist.

Waltz himself is aware of the problem of thinking of anarchy as a structure. A structure, Waltz argues, “is an organizational concept” (Waltz, 1979, p. 89): a principle by which something is arranged and brought into order. But “[i]f structure is an organizational concept, the terms “structure” and “anarchy” seem to be in contradiction” (Waltz, 1979, p. 89). Anarchy is not an ordering principle; indeed, anarchy would be the *absence* of an ordering principle. But Waltz is not saying that the international realm is disordered. Rather, Waltz is claiming that there is “an order without an orderer” (Waltz, 1979, p. 89)—a structure that “emerge[s] from the co-existence of states” and is “formed by the coaction of their units” (Waltz, 1979, p. 91) rather than imposed by a central power.

How does this order come about? “International-political systems, like economic markets, are formed by the coaction of *self-regarding* units” (Waltz, 1979, p. 91, emphasis added), “formed and maintained on a principle of *self-help* that applies to the units” (Waltz, 1979, p. 91, emphasis added). But if the structuring principle in question is self-regard, then Waltz has not divorced agency from structure after all: self-regard is an agent characteristic. It takes a special kind of state—the kind committed to Waltz’s own “international imperative” (take care of yourself!)—to make the kind of structure Waltz has in mind.

The point of repeating this familiar critique of Waltz is that it re-opens the same kind of analytical-critical paradox we find in Morgenthau’s thinking. Placing the essence in structure rather than agency was supposed to solve this paradox. If what actually does the work in Waltz’s theory are assumptions about agency, then either we are back with the “human nature” argument of Morgenthau, with all its associated problems, or we have laid the ground for something new, something beyond essentialism.

CONCLUSION

Essentialism holds that international politics has two distinct parts: the objective essence that exists independently of whether practitioners of international politics recognize it or not, and the subjective understanding of this essence. This opens up the possibility of splitting up the analytical and critical function of IR theory as follows: the analytical task of theory is to reflect the objective essence of international politics; the critical task of theory is to enlighten and transform subjective understandings of this essence.

For this solution to work, the essence and the understanding of this essence—the objective and the subjective—must be strictly separable. Morgenthau, however, places the objective essence in subjectivity (in human nature), which creates a paradox since now both the analytical and the critical function of theory is directed at the subjective aspect. Waltz remedies this situation by moving the essence out of subjectivity and into the structure that surrounds the subject—a structure that, supposedly, is what it is independent of the inhabiting subjects’ understanding of what it is. Waltz’s project depends crucially on getting to pure objective structure, completely untainted by subjectivity. His failure to do so sets the stage for the constructivist turn in IR, which explicitly tries to account for the irreducible subjective dimension of international politics.

NOTES

1. “Practical” refers to the relation between theory and practice.
2. As such, essentialism is a form of philosophical realism (see Joseph & Wight, 2010).
3. But see the disclaimer below.
4. For a discussion of this dialectic method, see chapter 2.
5. See also the Mearsheimer-Clinton example in the introduction.
6. The term “human nature” is often interpreted biologically (e.g., Donnelly 2000; Mearsheimer 2001: 19), but it is not necessarily to take it quite so literally (Williams 2007). The important idea is that we have a backstop to human subjectivity, i.e., something that cannot be changed and just have to be worked with.
7. A constructivist would probably call different these different subjectivities *identities*.
8. A healthy human being is not merely a political man; “[a] man who was nothing but “political man” would be a beast, for he would be completely lacking in moral restraints” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 14).
9. These values are tempered prudence, that sees in politics the art of the possible, and nationalism, which mandates always looking to the national interest first—the primary interest being survival—rather than personal moral convictions or abstract universals.
10. In a later essay, Morgenthau describes the scientific approach as “still another type of progressivist theory”; “Its aim is not the legalization and organization of international relations in the interest of international order and peace but the rational manipulation of international relations [. . .] in the interest of predictable and controlled results (Morgenthau 1970: 46).
11. We can continue the analogy to astronomy in order to illustrate this point. The perspective of astronomy on the solar system is not the perspective of any particular astronomer at any particular physical place in the solar system. Although all particular astronomers are physically located at such a particular point in the solar system, their perspective *qua* astronomers is not.

Astronomy allows us to escape our physical limitations and investigate the solar system from an intellectual vantage point that is liberated from our own physical limitations. Our models of the solar system are not made from the perspective of someone standing on earth and looking up at the sky—the structure of the solar system is simply not visible from that position.

12. An understanding for which they are all indebted to Max Weber's notion of ideal types (see, in particular Weber, 2004). Aron makes the connection to Weber explicit, the close intellectual kinship between Morgenthau and Weber has been noted by several Morgenthau scholars (e.g., Barkawi, 1998; Turner & Mazur, 2009), and Patrick T. Jackson has recently made the argument that Waltz is a methodological Weberian (Jackson, 2011, p. chap. 4)

13. There are some obvious connection to Wittgenstein (1958) here that I am not pursuing.

Chapter Four

Constructivism

In this chapter, I consider a position I term constructivism—intimately connected to, but not necessarily identical with, the IR school of thought with the same name. What I have in mind is a set of ontological, epistemological, and practical-philosophical commitments that constitutes an alternative to essentialism for thinking about the relation between IR and international politics, and the role of theory in this relation. As with the move from human nature essentialism to structural essentialism in the previous chapter, I am primarily interested in the move from structural essentialism to constructivism as a dialectical response to the internal contradictions in the former position.

We ended the previous chapter with the assertion that Waltz's structural essentialism is not a solution to the analytical-critical paradox that plagues the essentialist position more generally. Just like Morgenthau, Waltz wants to justify his theory analytically—as a reflection of an underlying, inescapable circumstance of international politics. The critical function of Waltz's theory is a secondary issue of enlightening practitioners about this circumstance, telling them to be a certain way. The analytical-critical paradox reappears when the way Waltz is telling international practitioners to be is precisely what would make international politics the way Waltz imagines it to be by necessity. The idea of a structure divorced from subjectivity turns out to be an illusion, which means that the structural essentialist solution to the analytical-critical paradox is also an illusion.¹ The exact nature of Waltz's shortcoming is instructive for our further discussion.

Waltz wants to find something beyond subjectivity that can be reflected analytically, which is what prompts his search for objective structure. This search takes the form a sort of phenomenological reduction of international politics where “[w]e abstract from any particular qualities of states and from all their concrete connections” (Waltz, 1979, p. 99). But if we abstract from

all the qualities of the states and their concrete connections, we also abstract away international politics itself. In the end, this turns out to be impossible and Waltz ends up smuggling back in theoretical assumptions that speaks precisely to state characteristics (self-regard) and the nature of interstate relations (self-help). The critique one can direct at Waltz, then, is not that his structure is a form of subjectivity, which is unavoidable, but that he is not aware of this and that he justifies this way of being as an adaption to objective circumstances.

This insight into the limits of structural essentialism sets the stage for constructivism, which re-interprets structural essentialism as a theoretical elevation of a *possible* way of being into a *necessary* way of being in international politics. At the root of this critique of structural essentialism is a new understanding of the concept of (social) structure itself: from something akin to a physical constraint to an intersubjective world, i.e., a conceptual horizon that sets the stage for what is possible and legitimate to do in international politics. Thus, what is at stake in the transition to constructivism is not only particular essentialist claims concerning international politics, but essentialism itself.

Among other things, leaving behind essentialism requires a re-interpretation of what theorizing international politics entails. In fact, theorizing itself, insofar as this practice depends, as I suggested in chapter 1, on claims to socio-historical transcendence and penetration beyond appearances to a more real layer of social reality, becomes problematic. At the very least, it is not obvious what, exactly, theory is supposed to divulge about the practice of international politics when the answer can no longer be “its essence.” This has consequences for the analytical-critical paradox too, since this paradox, as it was presented it in the previous chapter, is a direct consequence of essentialism. Ostensibly, the internal logic of constructivism pushes in the direction of a purely analytical approach to theory that is primarily concerned with its ability (or inability) to lay bare the conceptual horizon under which international politics is conducted, rather than make transcendental claims.

However, even if many self-identified constructivists see their work as strictly analytical in this sense—what Ted Hopf calls “conventional constructivism” (Hopf, 1998)—constructivism just as essentialism, I argue in this chapter, has an inescapable critical edge. Specifically, a constructivist stance, however analytical in its intention, necessarily involves a critical relation to essentialist ways of being and thinking. This obviously creates a critical tension between constructivists and essentialist IR scholars. Less obvious, perhaps, is that this critical tension also extends to practitioners of international politics, who are potentially no less essentialist about their ideas than IR theorists. In this way, constructivism generates its own analytical-critical paradox.

Constructivist analysis starts from the assumption that all people live under a social-historical horizon that sets the stage for performing social practices such as those connected to international politics. Living under a horizon, however, can be done with varying degrees of naïveté concerning that horizon, i.e., varying degrees of insight into the horizon itself. One important source of such self-insight is knowledge of the socio-historical particularity of the ideas and values that form one's intersubjective world. Such knowledge, which constructivist analysis provides, eats away at naïve, essentialist attitudes that, in Cox's terms, "takes the world as it finds it" (Cox, 1981, p. 128). In this way, even if it does not intend to, constructivism finds itself in an analytical *and* critical relation to its subject matter. This chapter is devoted to exploring this dialectic.

THE ONTOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

It is common to think of a world as an objective, external environment distinguishable from its inhabiting subjects. The physical world is a good example of a world in this sense of word. However, we also use the term "world" in a different sense, such as when we say that millionaires and beggars live in different worlds, or claim that the world has changed since the 1950s. By such expressions we are not referring so much to differences in physical surroundings (although often that too) as to *existential* differences in lived experiences. The millionaire and the beggar might be in physical proximity, but their worlds—their lived experiences—are far apart. It is this latter meaning of the word "world" that is implied when talking about intersubjective worlds (for a more fine-grained and philosophically sophisticated treatment of the concept of "world," see Heidegger, 1962, chap. 3, in particular p. 93).

The intersubjective concept of "world" is closely related to Thomas Kuhn's concept of a "paradigm." Kuhn's discussion of paradigms and worlds in the natural sciences is helpful, I believe, to bring out the difference between an objective world such as the physical world, and an intersubjective world. Let me give an example. After the switch from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican paradigm in astronomy, a whole range of phenomena (sunspots, new stars, comets, etc.) were suddenly discovered without any change in physical equipment. Indeed, many of these phenomena had been previously discovered by scientists in other cultures with considerably less sophisticated observational equipment, who were unburdened with the Ptolemaic conceptual commitment to the immutability of the heavens. What had changed was Western astronomy's *conceptual* equipment:

[u]sing traditional instruments, some as simple as a piece of thread, late sixteenth-century astronomers repeatedly discovered that comets wandered at

will through the space previously reserved for immutable planets and stars. The very ease with which astronomers saw new things when looking at old objects with old instruments may make us wish to say that, *after Copernicus, astronomers lived in a different world* (Kuhn, 2012, p. 116, emphasis added).

What sense can we make of astronomers “living in a different world” after Copernicus? I want to suggest that we can make perfect sense of this if we distinguish between the objective physical world studied *by* astronomy, and the intersubjective social world in which astronomy is conducted as a social practice (a distinction Kuhn did not, but should have made). Copernicus did not change the physical makeup of the universe, but he changed “the world of astronomy.” Copernicus did not change or make the solar system, but he changed astronomy’s conceptualization of its own subject matter such that the solar system became understandable as a “solar system,” in the first place. Astronomers lived in the same *physical* world after Copernicus, but not in the same *existential* world, which is to say not in the same social-historical or intersubjective world.

To say that astronomy is a practice, is to say that astronomy takes place against a transcendental background that acts as a condition of possibility for astronomy being astronomy. This conceptual background does two things. First, it puts astronomy, in the modern sense of the term, on the existential menu as something that can possibly be done in at all; second, it provides the (implicit or explicit) criteria for distinguishing between better and worse performances of this practice. To say that astronomy is a *social-historical* practice is to say that this transcendental background was not handed down from eternity in its current form: Astronomy, as we think of it today, is the result of a long historical development that includes some revolutionary changes along the way (which is not in any way a threat to astronomy’s status as a science). If we generalize this notion of social-historical practice beyond astronomy to include, among other things, international politics and the study of international politics (IR), we get the constructivist ontology.

The term “transcendental conditions of possibility” is from Kant, who must be considered one the (unwitting) founding fathers of constructivism. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asks: how is mathematics and natural science possible? Note that Kant is not questioning whether mathematics and natural science exist, but rather “*how* they are possible—for that they *are* possible is proved through their actuality” (Kant, 1998, p. 147, emphasis added). In more contemporary terms, Kant starts from the established fact of natural science and seeks to make sense of this social practice through delineating the conceptual conditions of possibility underpinning this practice (in the shape and form it had in Kant’s day). Kant calls this “transcendental critique,” and it is central to his philosophical method.

Transcendental critique of natural science as a social practice, Kant argues, is different from doing natural science. Thus, what comes out of Kant's transcendental critique is a different kind of knowledge than natural scientific knowledge—and these two forms of knowledge cannot be understood or evaluated according to the same standards. Insight into the conditions of possibility for natural science is a form of *transcendental* knowledge which is not “occupied with objects [as natural scientists are] but rather with the mode of our cognition of objects” (Kant, 1998, p. 149). The difference is subtle, but important. While natural scientist study nature, Kant is concerned with the conceptual framework natural scientists use to study nature—including the very concept of “nature” itself.

Two things separate Kant from modern-day constructivists. First, Kant was not concerned with the *socio-history* of this conceptual framework. Second, Kant was not concerned with the larger totality—the *world*—in which more specific practices, such as natural science and international politics, take place. The concept of an intersubjective world comes after Kant, but this concept can also be read as a generalization of the Kantian framework. An intersubjective world is a shared horizon of meaning (Ruggie, 1998) that nourishes particular ways of being. This entails a rethink of “structure” and how it relates to agency. Where “structure” for Waltz “designates a set of constraining conditions” (Waltz, 1979, p. 73),² the constructivist notion of structure is more like a *stage* on which practical activity can be performed. As such, structures both enable and constrain; they put limits on what can be done, but they also open up possibilities.

For instance, a “humanitarian intervention” can only take place in an intersubjective world that contains certain ideas about how a minimum standard for human dignity can justify the use of military force. These ideas do not exist merely inside the head of individual statesmen, but are part of the larger ideational context in which international politics is conducted in the twenty-first century. There were not and could not be humanitarian interventions in medieval times simply because medieval inter-subjectivity did not contain the ideational materiel necessary to underpin the political practice we know as “humanitarian intervention.” Likewise, certain forms of political actions that were possible in medieval Europe, such as religious crusades, are not part of the menu of political possibilities in contemporary European politics—these practices belong to a historically dead inter-subjectivity.³

Intersubjective structures cannot be decoupled from the subjects that inhabit them. Instead, the very notion of inter-subjectivity assumes a mutually constitutive relation between agency and structure, such that structure makes agency possible and agency maintains, reproduces and sometimes alters structure (Hopf, 1998, pp. 172–73). One side of this equation is the formation of identities and corresponding world views from the ideational material available in one's social-historical context. For instance, political realism is a

world view, but being a political realist—which is inseparable from interpreting the world in a particular way—is also an *identity*. In real life, of course, “pure” political realism does not exist, but is always colored by a larger historical and social context. As an example, consider Richard Sakwa’s analysis of Vladimir Putin as a political realist with Slavic characteristics:

Russia’s foreign policy under Putin can be described as a ‘new realism.’ It is a realism concerned not so much with balancing as a with joining, while at the same time tempered by neo-Slavophile concerns about autonomy and uniqueness, and pragmatic Euroasianist notions of balance between East and West (Sakwa, 2007, p. 270).

The other side of the agent-structure equation is the role of agents in maintaining or transforming the intersubjective world through practical activity—indeed, by merely being who they are. This side of things is captured in such formulations “a world of our making” (Onuf, 2013) and “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992). “Making” is, however, an unfortunate choice of words insofar as it gives associations to acts of deliberate design, rather than the more subtle, often unconscious, transformative or supportive effect ideas have on practices and institutions:

[f]irst, obviously, for most institutions we simply grow up in a culture where we take the institution for granted. We need not be consciously aware of its ontology [i.e., its ideational basis]. But second [. . .] in the very evolution of the institution the participants need not be consciously aware [that they are maintaining/changing it] (Searle, 1995).

After this introduction to the basic ontological concepts of constructivism, we now return to the main concern of this book: How does constructivism deal with the analytical-critical duality of IR theory?

THE ANALYTICAL SIDE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

Constructivism opens up a new program for empirical research in the form of investigating the constitution and historical movement of the intersubjective backgrounds that underpin different forms of international politics. Some of the conceptual groundwork for this research program is actually visible in the more “constructivist” parts of Waltz. Consider the following passage:

[t]he behavior of [a pair of agents] cannot be apprehended by taking a unilateral view of either member. The behavior of the pair cannot, moreover, be resolved into a set of two-way relations because each element of behavior that contributes to the interaction is itself shaped by being a pair. They have become part of a system. [. . .] Each acts and reacts to the other. Stimulus and

response are part of the story. But also the two of them act together in a game, which—no less because they have “devised” it—motivates and shapes their behavior. Each is playing a game, *and* they are playing a game together. [. . .] In spontaneous and informal ways, societies establish norms of behavior (Waltz, 1979, p. 75, emphasis in original).

Waltz is clearly suggesting that participation in the international realm is also participation in a kind of broader social “game” defined by certain higher-order rules. It is precisely that higher-order dimension that “define both the rules of the game what the pieces are” (Buzan, 2014, p. 31), and its fundament in the larger social-historical background, that constructivists are interested in. Different social-historical backgrounds correspond to different—even *radically* different—forms of international coexistence (see, e.g., Buzan & Little, 2000; Reus-Smit, 1999).

The failure of Waltz from a constructivist perspective is that he takes one particular kind of international coexistence—only one kind of “game”—and treats it as if this was the *only* possibility. In other words, Waltz elevates a particular social-historical possibility to universal necessity. Constructivism is a move “beyond Waltz” to more fundamental questions that are latent but not explicitly addressed in Waltz’s own work:

neorealism assumes that all units in global politics have only one meaningful identity, that of self-interested states. Constructivism stresses that this proposition exempts from theorization the very fundamentals of international political life, the nature and definition of the actors (Hopf, 1998, p. 176).

Alexander Wendt’s critique of the neo-neo debate is a good example. “Neorealists and neoliberals may disagree about the extent to which states are motivated by relative versus absolute gains,” Wendt argues, “but both groups take the self-interested state as the starting point” (Wendt, 1992, p. 392). There exists, however, a more fundamental set of questions “about identity-and interest-formation” (Wendt, 1992, p. 392) of which neoliberals and neorealists seem unaware. The mere existence of a state system does not explain why a state system is a certain way: “self-help and power politics do not follow either logically or casually from anarchy” (Wendt, 1992, p. 394).

Wendt, famously, developed this argument further and distinguished between three different “cultures of anarchy”—the Hobbesian, the Lockean, and the Kantian—each with their own kind of logic. In a Hobbesian anarchy everybody is an enemy—a potential threat to one’s own survival—and should be treated as such. In a Lockean anarchy the role structure is more differentiated, where “the kill or be killed logic [. . .] has been replaced by a live and let live logic” (Wendt, 1999, p. 278). In the Lockean world one speaks of rivals rather than enemies. The difference between these two terms is a certain degree of mutual recognition and respect: “unlike enemies, rivals

expect each other to act as if they recognize their sovereignty, their “life and liberty,” as a *right*, and therefore not to try to conquer or dominate them” (Wendt, 1999, p. 278). Finally, in a Kantian anarchy a third kind of relationship prevails: that of *friendship*, where “disputes will be settled without war or the threat of war” (Wendt, 1999, p. 298).

However, Wendt does more than to particularize Waltz and therefore debunk his essentialist claims. Wendt’s constructivist standpoint also leads him to re-examine the historical record with fresh eyes and find something very different from Waltz:

[t]o my mind the empirical record suggests strongly that in the past few centuries there has been a qualitative structural change in international politics. The kill or be killed logic of the Hobbesian state of nature has been replaced by the live and let live logic of the Lockean anarchical society (Wendt, 1999, p. 277).

Furthermore, “since World War II the behavior of the North Atlantic states, and arguably many others, seems to go well beyond a Lockean culture”; “a new international political culture has emerged in the West within which nonviolence and team play are the norm” (Wendt, 1999, p. 294). None of these developments are *visible* from a realist perspective that operates with a fundamental commitment to an unchanging objective core of international politics; it is only through a “de-reification” of this core that structural change becomes an analytic possibility in IR.

“Structural change,” of course, means something deeper than, e.g., mere redistribution of material power. The commitment to the possibility of structural change on the level that constructivism envisions is a politically significant commitment. Wendt is certainly right in arguing that constructivism is a form of “strong liberalism” (Wendt, 1992, p. 393), or perhaps more accurately a form of *idealism*: a commitment to ideas as the fundamental component of the social world (including international politics) and, accordingly, a belief that changing ideas quite literally changes the world. For some this might be a very radical idea. However, it follows naturally from the constructivist ontology I specified earlier.

Not all ideational change amounts to structural change (or *would* amount to structural change if the new ideas took hold and started to permeate practice), so we need to be even more specific. In this regard, I do not think Wendt goes quite deep enough. Consider the difference between, say, a Kantian and a Hobbesian relation in Wendt’s scheme. The difference is obviously important: the first case is a relation between friends, who, although they still disagree about stuff, would not consider going to war against each other as a way resolving these disagreements; the second instance is a relation between enemies, in which case war is not “off the table”

at all, but rather provides the background for all dealings they have with each other.

The relations between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are a good example, I think, of how international relations can move from a Hobbesian to a Kantian kind. Today, a Nordic war is close to unimaginable. However, this is not a “natural” state of affairs. Rather, this situation is a fairly recent and remarkable historical development. Norway, in particular, did not always feel so safe from what today are some of its closest allies. A speech given by Jørgen Løvland, who would become Norway’s first Foreign Minister in 1905, can serve to illustrate this point:

We must not look away from the truth. Norway has never had enemies in Germany and Russia as we have in Denmark and Sweden. [O]ur big neighbours have never hurt us. No, it is Denmark and Sweden who have been dangerous.⁴

If we accept that Norway has gone from something close to a Hobbesian to something close to a Kantian relationship with its neighbors over the last century,⁵ then there is still the question of why and how it happened. What fundamental shift took place so that, after the Second World War in particular, what was arguably Norway’s worst enemies had now become its closest friends? A clue to this transformation might be found in the Norwegian parliament’s decision to apply for NATO membership in 1949, where we read that “in its culture and as concerns social ideals and fundamental values Norway is most naturally at home amongst the Western democracies.”⁶

The move from a Hobbesian to a Kantian relation between the Nordic countries, I would argue, is internally connected to the emergence of political identities built on values and ideals that transcend national boundaries that took place in the first half of the twentieth century. This move away from traditional nineteenth-century nationalism, when each nation was a self-sufficient moral-political entity, to a more ideologically based identity is one of a series of fundamental re-orientations of the international-political horizon over the last two hundred years. Samuel Huntington retells the story of these changing political fault lines of European politics in his *The Clash of Civilizations* (2002):

beginning with the French Revolution the principal lines of conflict were between nations. [. . .] This nineteenth-century pattern lasted until World War I. [. . .] In 1917, as a result of the Russian Revolution, the conflict of nation states was supplemented by the conflict of ideologies, first among fascism, communism, and liberal democracy and then between the latter two. In the Cold War these ideologies were embodied in the two superpowers, each of which defined its identity by its ideology and neither of which was a nation state in the traditional European sense (Huntington, 2002, p. 52).

What Huntington is describing here are re-configurations of what I have referred to as the intersubjective world or horizon that nourishes particular forms of international politics. When Francis Fukuyama argued (somewhat unfairly, perhaps) that “theorists of international relations talk as if history did not exist” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 246) he referred precisely to the lack of awareness of the historical evolution of the “human horizon” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 246). Part of this re-configuration was a re-shuffling of who were friends are and who were enemies. More fundamentally, however, this movement in the moral and conceptual background also transformed the political space of what is possible, reasonable and legitimate to do in international politics.

THE CRITICAL SIDE OF CONSTRUCTIVISM

So far, I have focused on the analytical side of constructivism. However, constructivism also has a *critical* side. Specifically, constructivism is critical of essentialist theory and practice that “reifies” and “naturalizes” social structures. Reification, on Luckman and Berger’s classic definition is

the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things [. . .] as if they were something else than human products—such as facts of nature, result of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will (Berger & Luckmann, 2011, p. 88).

In opposition to this, constructivism seeks to

Reification occurs both consciously and unconsciously. Regarding the latter, constructivism stands in a critical relation to the “pre-theoretical” consciousness of the agent who lives immediately into his or her social world, taking it as natural and given. This mode of being in the world, where one is not conscious of one’s social surroundings as social-historical constructions is a form of reification, resulting simply from the unquestioned acceptance of the way things are. When “tradition becomes master,” Heidegger writes,

it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible [. . .] that it becomes concealed. Tradition takes what has come down to us and delivers it over to self-evidence; it blocks our access to those primordial ‘sources’ from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have

been [. . .] drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that have had such an origin (Heidegger, 1962, p. 43).

Recuperating those “primordial sources” is precisely what constructivism sets out to do through social-historical *deconstruction*, i.e., through showing the inner socio-historicity of particular forms of life. From the standpoint of constructivism, the unquestioning acceptance of the way things are as natural and self-evident is a form of *naïveté*, rooted in lack of insight into the socio-historicity of one’s own thinking and being. This is another kind of “self-deception” than we find in essentialist writings. Morgenthau’s “self-deceiving” political agent is one who hides behind “ideological justifications and rationalizations” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 92). While for Morgenthau this self-deception is a kind of coping mechanism that renders the “contest for power psychologically [. . .] acceptable to the actors and their audience” (Morgenthau, 1978, p. 93), the constructivist notion of ideological self-deception is deeper.

Karl Mannheim once made a distinction between the particular and the total conception of ideology that can help clarify this difference. The particular understanding of ideology (represented by Morgenthau) is psychological: an agent’s ideas are regarded as “more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation,” ranging from “calculated attempts to dupe others to self deception” (Mannheim, 1997, pp. 56–57). The reason Mannheim calls this understanding of ideology *particular* is that only parts of the agent’s ideas are under suspicion:

[i]f it is claimed for instance that an adversary is lying, or that he is concealing or distorting a given factual situation, it is still nevertheless assumed that both parties share common criteria of validity—it is still assumed that it is possible to eradicate sources of error by referring to accepted criteria of validity common to both parties. The suspicion that one’s opponent is the victim of an ideology does not go so far as to exclude him from discussion on basis of a common theoretical frame of reference (Mannheim, 1997, p. 57).

From a constructivist point of view, however, the agent living naïvely into her social world, taking it as natural, is not *consciously* deceiving herself or others—something that implies that she knows, deep down, that the social reality she takes as “natural” and self-evident is really a social-historical construct that could be different. Indeed, she can only “reify” the social world insofar as she has actually not reflected on the social-historical contingency of the world she takes for granted. We must not make the mistake of thinking, Berger and Luckman argues, that constructivism is the original mode of being and that everyday reification is “a sort of cognitive fall from grace”:

[o]n the contrary, the available ethnological [. . .] evidence seems to indicate the opposite, namely that the original apprehension of the social world is highly reified. [. . .] This implies that an apprehension of reification as a modality consciousness is dependent upon an at least relative *dereification* of consciousness, which is a comparatively late development in history (Berger & Luckmann, 2011, p. 88, emphasis in original).

The discovery that the social world is a human construction belongs to the later stages of history. It is only when a culture starts to systematically question its own foundations that de-reification enters the stage. This is a long process of replacing tradition with reason that started in earnest in the Western world with the Enlightenment. Unlike, for instance, the Renaissance, Anthony Pagden has recently argued, “the Enlightenment [. . .] begun not as an attempt to rescue some hallowed past but as an assault on the past in the name of the future. [. . .] It was a period that sought to overturn every intellectual assumption, every dogma, every “prejudice” (a favorite term) that had previously exercised any hold over the minds of men” (Pagden, 2013).

Such questioning of the past and the present, regardless of its particular content and direction, implicitly or explicitly accepts the constructivist premise of a non-natural social world that does not have to continue being as it currently is. The difference between a more immediate, naïve consciousness that has not started this radical questioning and a constructivist consciousness is captured in Mannheim’s *total* conception of ideology:

[i]nstead of being content with showing that the [agent] suffers from illusions or distortions on a psychological [. . .] plane, the tendency now is to subject his total structure of consciousness and thought to a thoroughgoing sociological analysis (Mannheim, 1997, pp. 76–77).

By “thoroughgoing sociological analysis” Mannheim is referring to the explication of the link between a way of thinking and being to the social-historical background in which the agent is embedded. This kind of analysis is a much more radical kind of critique since it studies thinking itself “as a function of the life-situation of a thinker” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 57).

It is not only in the pre-theoretical, immediate relation with the social world that reification occurs; reification also occurs through theorizing. The process of theoretical reification is to take some social phenomenon and “bestow on [it] an ontological status independent of human activity and signification” (Berger & Luckmann, 2011, p. 88)—to elevate certain aspect of a social-historically contingent culture into the status of eternal and universal truth. This is, of course, exactly the critique that constructivist direct at essentialist theories—whether it is Morgenthau’s human nature or Waltz’s structures.

The critical element in essentialism lies in pointing out the discrepancy between essence and understanding—between the inner truth of international politics (the objective, eternal part) representable in theory and practitioners' understanding of this essence (the subjective, changeable part). The critical element in constructivism, on the other hand, lies in dethroning exactly such appeals to having discovered the eternal essence of something. Saying that *X* is socially constructed, is to say that “*X* need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. *X*, or *X* as it is at present [. . .] is not inevitable” (Hacking, 1999, p. 6). When the essentialist says “*X* is human nature,” the constructivist counters that humans have no “nature,” they have identities. When the essentialist says “international politics must be *X*,” the constructivist counters “international politics *can* be *X*.” It is the idea that international reality by *necessity* has to be a particular way that is the target of constructivist critique: “social constructivism is basically about questioning the *inevitability* of the social status quo” (Guzzini, 2000, p. 154, emphasis added). This is what makes constructivism inescapably critical.

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ANALYTICAL-CRITICAL DUALITY

Waltz ends his famous book with a chapter on “the management of international affairs” (Waltz, 1979, p. chap. 9), in which he tries to derive practical applications from his principles.⁷ His essentialist commitment to an objective structure of international politics allows him to do so quite unproblematically; it is no less strange than someone having discovered the spherical shape of the earth deriving practical advice concerning navigation from this discovery.

The practical implications of essentialist theory take the form of *adjustment* to an unchanging political reality.⁸ The practical implications of constructivist analysis are, in a sense, precisely the opposite: the de-reification of supposedly unchanging structures opens up possibilities beyond strategic adaption—possibilities of changing the very structures essentialists insist we must adapt to. The reason for this is that “structure” is no longer an *objective* structure akin to a physical environment, but a horizon of “intersubjective meanings that define what constitutes a legitimate state and what counts as appropriate state conduct” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 156). This redefinition of structure *in itself* re-orientes the analytical-critical relation between IR and international politics, from adjustment to structures to insight into and therefore emancipation from structures (the link between emancipation and insight is further specified in the next chapter).

At the end of his book *The Moral Purpose of the State* (1999), which is an investigation into certain horizons under which international politics have

been conducted throughout history, Reus-Smit divulges the practical intent of his analysis: “to contribute to a broadly defined critical theory of international relations,” whose ultimate goal is to “promote emancipatory transformations in the nature of social and political community” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 168). One very important part of such transformation is the very realization that transformation is possible at all: that international politics does not have a fixed nature, but can be transformed as the “normative foundations that undergird [international] societies” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 168) are changed.

De-reification of the “naturalness” of international politics—expanding our political imagination by putting before us historical alternatives to the present system and pushing us to confront the intersubjective structure of contemporary international life—is effective in freeing ourselves from “the tyranny of the present.” However, insight into the transformability of international politics is not in itself enough, for how should international relations be transformed? As Reus-Smit notes, “unless the normative and the sociological are brought together, no progress can be made” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 170). But this is also the last sentence of his book—further than this he cannot take us. I want to suggest that this is not just the end of Reus-Smit’s book, but the limits of constructivism itself.

Constructivist analysis particularizes standpoints, which gives it a critical function. However, this function in itself is purely negative: it debunks (essentialist) justifications of any particular position as “natural,” but it does not justify any new position. I now want to say something about why that is. To justify a position is, in principle, to justify one’s *own* position. To justify someone else’s position without reservation is to make that position one’s own. Another way to put this is that justification is something that is done in *the first person* (Skjervheim, 1973, p. 86). Examples of first-person questions are “what is just?,” “what is good?,” “what is legitimate?,” etc.

Empirical questions are not first-person questions. Rather, first-person questions are turned into empirical questions by re-asking them in *third person*—i.e., asking not, for instance, “what is just?” but “what does X hold to be just?” One way to think about the transition from essentialism to constructivism is as a move from asking questions in first-person mode to asking third-person questions. It is not important, from a constructivist standpoint, whether the “the norm of discursive justice [that] provided the justificatory foundations for the ancient Greek practice of arbitration” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 35) is valid, or whether “the pursuit of civic glory, or *grandezza*” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 8) is a noble undertaking. What matters is that the ancient Greeks believed in discursive justice and that renaissance Italians held *grandezza* to be a central purpose of international politics. If the ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians did not have these commitments, then Reus-Smit’s argument is wrong.

In other words, constructivist analysis is parasitic on someone else—i.e., the people under study such as ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians—asking and answering first-person questions. However, constructivism itself merely asks third person questions. This transition from thinking in first person (e.g., “what is good?”) to thinking in third person (“what do people think is good?”) is a form of existential detachment. When I ask the question in third person I do not have to take a stance myself. Or to put it in some familiar terms: I become an observer of rather than a participant in the life I am analyzing.

Analytical detachment is something that structural essentialism and constructivism has in common. Waltz also avoids first-person questions by focusing on objective structures. The difference between constructivists and Waltz is that constructivists have realized that “objective structures” actually are answers to first-person questions—i.e., that these structures are intersubjective horizons containing fundamental commitments to what is good, bad, legitimate and so forth. Thus, any claim to have discovered an objective structure of international politics is actually an answer to fundamental first-person questions, something which reimplicates the structural essentialist in the world he is trying to existentially detach from. This realization (which marks the transition from structural essentialism to constructivism) opens up a possibility for analytical detachment in a possibly stronger sense. If international politics is constituted by ideals, beliefs, and identities, then this ideational structure can be investigated without any commitment “as to the correctness of the ideas to be treated” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 71)—an approach that “confines itself to discovering the relations between certain mental structures and the life-situations in which they exist” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 71).

In a way, constructivism is the ultimate outside-observer position. Different forms of life emerge for the constructivist consciousness as delimited social-historical horizons for the analyst to dissect and explain. In principle, this attitude can be directed at the whole of history, which then becomes a series of external intersubjective worlds whose variety and richness affords endless possibility for the researcher to explore the manifold ways humans can organize their existence. The constructivist, in this observer position, realizes what Henrik Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* considered a pleasant possibility for spending one’s life:

I will follow the path of the human race!
Like a feather I’ll float on the stream of history,
make it all live again, as in a dream,—
see the heroes battling for truth and right,
as an onlooker only, in safety seconded (Ibsen, 2012, p. 136).

Apart from the question of whether such an existentially detached position beyond considerations of “truth and right”—i.e., beyond first-person ques-

tions—is desirable, the more urgent question is whether such a position is even possible. The answer to this question actually takes us back to the fundamental assumption with which I began this book: that a meeting between the scholar and the people under study is a meeting of horizons; it is always a (re-)interpretation of self-interpretations.

This hermeneutic-critical relation is obvious in cases such as Mearsheimer's interpretation of Clinton and Morgenthau's interpretation of Neville Chamberlain. It is less obvious, but still present, in cases such as Reus-Smit's interpretation of ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians. The ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians Reus-Smit studies are *participants* in a world: they live under a horizon defined by “[h]istorically specific beliefs about legitimate statehood and rightful state action” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 26). Reus-Smit is not a participant in their world in this way, he does not live under their horizon; rather, he is the outside *observer* for whom these horizons appear as “historically specific.” As such, in relation to ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians, Reus-Smit *qua* constructivist is not only chronologically situated at a later point in historical time (that too, of course), but also *existentially* situated outside of the horizons under which the ancient Greeks and the renaissance Italians lived.

The relation between Reus-Smit and the people he studies is asymmetrical in the following way: While ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians cannot see above their own horizons (for in that case their horizons would, strictly speaking, not be their horizons anymore), Reus-Smit *can* see the limits of their horizons as historical perspectives next to others. We can say that ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians are, existentially speaking, *naïve* in relation to Reus-Smit. While they, presumably, simply believed in certain values as a consequence of being children of their times, Reus-Smit has liberated himself from such immediacy. Reus-Smit has a critical distance to ancient Greek or renaissance Italian life that the ancient Greeks or renaissance Italians did not have—at least insofar as they were in fact ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians, and not modern-day constructivists such as Reus-Smit.

Gadamer has remarked that interpretation “is always more than merely recreating someone else's meaning” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 383). It is easy to think, Gadamer argues, that in historical analysis “one must leave one's own concepts aside and think only in the concepts of the epoch one is trying to understand” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 414). However, “[t]his demand, which sounds like a logical implementation of historical consciousness is [. . .] a naïve illusion” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 414). Understanding, for instance, renaissance Italians or ancient Greeks in order to comprehend their mode of life is not the same as becoming a renaissance Italian or an ancient Greek, who could not possibly comprehend their way of life in the same way that we can.

An ancient Greek, for instance, did not think of himself as an “ancient Greek.”

What makes the interpretative relation *critical* (and not just limited), however, has nothing to do with historical or cultural distance, but with existential difference, i.e., the difference between living naively within a horizon (taking it as natural) and knowing its inner socio-historicity. The historical fact that ancient Greeks do not seem to have had the same insight into their own socio-historicity as modern people do is, in one sense, less important. The important difference is first and foremost the difference in self-insight. Even among modern people the insight into our own socio-historicity is not universal. Existentially speaking, the relation between Reus-Smit and ancient Greeks is the same as the relation between Reus-Smit and Waltz. The relevant difference, for the purpose of critique, is between essentialism (Waltz, ancient Greeks) and constructivism (Reus-Smit) as levels of self-insight into one’s own horizon.

Constructivist analysis stands in a potentially emancipatory relation to its subject matter: It can provide Socratic self-knowledge to the agents under study, in the form of insight into their own horizon. This, I argue in the next chapter, gives such analysis purpose beyond deconstruction—and recognizing this purpose puts the IR scholar in a dialectical relation to international politics. Before we move on to the dialectical horizon, however, I want to explore an alternative to using constructivist critique dialectically, namely to use it as an ideological weapon. Constructivism that is not tempered dialectically can easily slide into becoming merely ideological debunking. I raise this particular worry because it is a real and fundamental threat to establishing dialogue.

WHEN CONSTRUCTIVISM BECOMES IDEOLOGY: ANTI-UNIVERSALISM

Social-historical particularization is an effective ideological weapon against essentialist positions. Carr, writing some years after Mannheim introduced the sociology of knowledge, noted how such particularization of thought (ideological debunking), had become an integral part of the political realm. This provided a new kind of ammunition for political realists:

[i]n the last fifty years, thanks mainly though not wholly to the influence of Marx, the principles of the historical school⁹ have been applied to the analysis of thought; and the foundations of a new science have been laid [. . .] under the name of the “sociology of knowledge.” The [political] realist has thus been enabled to demonstrate that [. . .] intellectual theories and ethical standards [. . .], far from being the expression of absolute and *a priori* principles, are historically conditioned, being both products of circumstances and interests

and weapons framed for the furtherance of interests. [. . .] This is by far the most formidable attack which utopianism has to face; for here the very foundations of its beliefs are undermined by the realist critique (Carr, 2001, p. 68).

Mannheim was perhaps the first¹⁰ to think the implications of social-historical particularization all the way through. When all concepts and ideas have been socio-historicized, then what? What comes after the total conception of ideology? After all, “it may be asked whether [. . .] while we are destroying the validity of certain ideas by means of the ideological analysis [i.e., by social-historical particularization], we are not, at the same time, erecting a new construction” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 79).

Mannheim found new firm ground in the very principle of particularization itself. The insight into the socio-historicity of thinking and being was itself the start of a new position: “the realization that norms and values are historically and socially determined can henceforth never escape us” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 84). This realization is itself constitutive of a new historical subjectivity. Francis Fukuyama, in his famous *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), has given one of the best portraits of this subjectivity:

[h]istory teaches us that there have been horizons beyond number in our past—civilizations, religions, ethical codes, “value systems.” The people who lived under them, lacking our modern awareness of history, believed that their horizon was the only one possible. Those who come late in this process, those who live in the old age of mankind, cannot be so uncritical. Modern education [. . .] liberates men from their attachments to tradition and authority. They realize that their horizon is merely a horizon, not solid land but a mirage that disappears as one draws closer [. . .]. This is why modern man is the *last man*: he has been jaded by the experience of history, and disabused of the possibility of direct experience of values (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 306, emphasis in original).

Fukuyama’s uses the word “horizon” in a slightly pejorative sense (“merely a horizon”), obviously having in mind the kind of naïve (from our, modern perspective) horizons that, for instance, renaissance Italians who actually believed in things like civic glory lived under. There are still many people today, Fukuyama argues, “who would like to “live within a horizon.” That is, they want to have commitments to “values” [. . .] such as those offered by traditional religion” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 307), but a modern person (such as Fukuyama) cannot go back to essentialist forms of life. Modern man’s relation to his horizon is not direct, but mediated through the awareness of his own social-historical particularity.

Constructivism is a product of a particular social-historical situation that, since we need a name for it, we can call “modernity.”¹¹ Furthermore, constructivism (if not re-interpreted dialectally) is, in an important sense, caught in the *negative* aspect of modernity—the Nietzschean modernity in which no

absolute ideas can take root. As such constructivism is, on one hand, not very constructive; it can leave no solid ground, for “the ground itself is but the rubble of construction” (Onuf, 2013, p. 35). However, on the other hand, it is precisely at this point, when the constructivist attitude is totalized, that something new—a new ideology—is erected.

An ideology contains an inner criterion for separating clearheaded from distorted interpretations of the world (Skjervheim, 1973, p. 74). One such criterion is the commitment that all values are socially and historically determined. Thus, Mannheim speaks of “ideological distortions” when “we try to resolve conflicts and anxieties by having recourse to absolutes, according to which it is no longer possible to live [for a constructivist]” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 86). Accordingly, any reference to “transcendental-religious factors” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 84)—any attempt to “separate thought from the world of reality, [. . .] to exceed its limits” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 87)—is debunked as ideological. The imperative is clear: “[t]hought should contain neither more nor less than the reality in whose medium it operates” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 87). Anyone who claims to speak on behalf of the universal rather than a particular perspective can be, quite literally, put in his place (i.e., socially-historically situated) by constructivism.

This anti-universalism is itself an ideology—and it is pervasive in contemporary political thought. I will give one example that I think is instructive because it highlights the internal connection between constructivist analysis and anti-universalism. In his famous book on civilizations, Huntington notes how the very concept of civilization itself has changed in modern times. The “classical” concept of civilization was a *critical* concept that differentiated between what was essential to a civilized form of life and what was not, i.e., “[t]he [classical] concept of civilization provided a standard by which to judge societies” (Huntington, 2002, p. 41).

The classical concept of civilization was *universal*. As a standard for judging societies, civilization did not refer to any particular society; it was an *ideal* to which particular societies could approximate. “Civilization” referred to the highest possible form of life that humanity could reach for. As such, separating the civilized from the uncivilized was ultimately a question for philosophy; it was, in Skjervheimian terminology, a first-person question of “what is good?”; “what is right?”; “what is just?”; etc. During the nineteenth century, however, the concept of civilization took on a more cultural and particular meaning:

people increasingly spoke of civilizations in the plural. This meant “renunciation of a civilization defined as an ideal, or rather as the ideal” and a shift away from the assumption that there was a single standard for what was civilized [. . .]. Instead, there were many civilizations, each of which was civilized in its own way (Huntington, 2002, p. 41, citations removed).

Note that the cultural relativization of the civilization concept is also a move from first-person to third-person question; instead of asking, e.g., “what is good?” one asks “what do different peoples think is good?”¹² In other words, civilization becomes an *analytical* rather than a critical concept.¹³ In the process, “civilization” loses its political edge, and refers simply to “the overall way of life of a people” (Huntington, 2002, p. 41), whatever that way of life may be. In principle, the analytical concept of civilization places the social life of uncontacted tribes in the Amazon on the same civilizational level as modern Europe. We are all civilized in our own way.

However, if the analytical concept of civilization is considered a more enlightened way of thinking about different forms of life than the classic concept, the analytical concept actually turns into a new critical standard. The analytical concept becomes a political weapon against any attempt at justifying some form of life as better, more civilized, or more enlightened than other forms of life. If any particular ideal of civilization comes to dominate, it can only be the result of power and oppression:

[t]he Western universalist belief posits that people throughout the world should embrace Western values, institutions, and culture because they embody the highest, most enlightened, most liberal, most rational, most modern, and most civilized thinking of mankind. [. . .] Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false; it is immoral; and it is dangerous. [. . .] Culture [. . .] follows power. If non-Western societies are once again to be shaped by Western culture, it will happen only as a result of [. . .] Western power. *Imperialism is the necessary logical consequence of universalism* (Huntington, 2002, p. 310, emphasis added).

Thus, the analytical concept of civilization, although in one sense neutral is also deeply political. Specifically, if the analytical concept is allowed to be absolutized it becomes a form of anti-universalism, where the very possibility of thinking, not on behalf of a particular community, but on behalf of a universal community is denied *a priori*. We can summarize the ideology of anti-universalism as follows: Political ideals, if they originated in a particular time and place (such as the modern West), are only valid in that particular place at that particular time. The spread of political ideals beyond that time and place is inevitably a form of oppression, paternalism or imperialism.¹⁴

Anti-universalism is also anti-Enlightenment. In particular, it betrays the most central commitment of the Enlightenment: a belief in universal reason. This belief is more important than one might think. It is, for one thing, absolutely fundamental for the prospect of engaging with others across cultural, national and religious barriers. If we (as I do) agree with Andrew Linklater that we should “increase the spheres of social interaction that are governed by dialogue [. . .] rather than force” (Linklater, 2001, p. 31), then we cannot put a ban on universalism. Let me try to illustrate what happens if we put in

place such a ban using Kant—a spokesperson for universal reason if there ever was one.

Kant made a sharp distinction between the particular and empirical, and the universal and rational. The particular and empirical separates people from each other—the universal and rational unites. Rising above particular differences, Kant envisioned “a [universal] union of rational beings through common objective laws, that is, a kingdom, which can be called a kingdom of ends (admittedly only an ideal) because what these laws have as their purpose is just the relation of these beings to one another” (Kant, 1996b, p. 83). The fundamental conditions of possibility for such a union of rational beings is mutual recognition as rational beings (Kant, 1996b, p. 85). Such mutual recognition means placing everybody on equal terms before reason. Only from this position of radical symmetry can we ask the question “whether institutions might exist that can be accepted by all and with which we can all identify” (Skjervheim, 1996d, p. 105)—i.e., only from this position can we ask *first-person* question. If such questions are disallowed as oppressive, then dialogue itself is disallowed.

Social-historical particularization is an effective weapon against taking any particular form of thinking and being as natural, but it is also, if it is totalized, an effective weapon against dialogue and theoretical reflection. Consider John Hobson’s book on the Euro-centricity of IR theory, which is probably one of the most systematic works of deconstruction ever written in IR. Very symptomatically for this line of thinking, the book ends on a question:

[t]his book provides a key dual challenge to the discipline of IR. [W]e need to ascertain the extent to which IR scholars can concede the Eurocentric foundation of their discipline, and [. . .] we need to ascertain whether this is or is not a problem. [. . .] IR theory can no longer be represented as positivist, objective or value-free. In which case, the key question is [. . .] ‘to be or not a Eurocentric’ (Hobson, 2012, p. 344).

Well, should we be Eurocentric?¹⁵ One thing is to connect current conceptions of world politics as expressive of values tied to a particular time and place (modern Europe)—this constructivism *can* do (it is a third-person inquiry). Another thing entirely is whether these values and conceptions are valid, reasonable, problematic, etc.—this constructivist analysis *cannot* answer (it being a first-person inquiry). As C. S. Lewis once remarked, “You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it” (Lewis, 2001, p. 80).

CONCLUSION

Constructivist critique's primary function is to dissolve essentialist naïveté. The logical conclusion of this process is a kind of anti-universalism that reduces all horizons to social-historical perspectives. This puts a paradoxical twist on our entire discussion. The essentialist believes that international politics has to be a certain way (by necessity); a constructivist knows that international politics do not have to be any particular way (by necessity). Once the constructivist level of insight is reached and a naïve belief in natural necessity is removed, we can ask: How should international politics be? We have now gone full circle, since this is really the same question that Morgenthau asked (given that his essence is actually an ideal). But by getting back to this question, we have seemingly removed the grounds for answering it. How do we justify any particular form of international life without unwarrantably reifying some particular social-historical horizon?

NOTES

1. Given, of course, that no other kind of social structure completely divorced from subjectivity can be found.
2. A more constructivist understanding of structure is actually latent in Waltz. One of the ways "which structures work their effects," Waltz argues, "is through *socialization* that limits and molds behavior" (Waltz, 1979, p. 76, emphasis added).
3. The most important aspect of this horizon is perhaps that it gives *purpose* to international politics, and makes it about something—whether it is reclaiming the Holy Land, dealing with climate change, securing peace, glorifying the nation or whatever. The idea is that international war, conflict and cooperation does not happen merely for the sake of war, conflict and cooperation in itself, but for the sake of some larger ideal(s) connected to a fundamental historical horizon (For a general treatment of the idea of a fundamental horizon, see Taylor, 1989, p. chap. 2. I return to this idea in the next chapter).
4. "Nationale spursmaal," Oslo, 1904. Available at: <http://virksommeord.uib.no/taler?id=1021> . My translation.
5. Actually the primary change seems to have happened from 1905 to 1945.
6. Stortingsproposisjon nr. 40 (1949) Om Stortingets samtykke til å inngå en traktat for det Nord-Atlantiske området (Atlanterhavspakten), s. 2. My translation.
7. Perhaps going against his own meta-theory introduced at the start of the book.
8. Of course, this is the essentialist self-interpretation of what is going on. The constructivist would argue that "adjustment to realities" is, in fact, the (unconscious) reification of a social-historically contingent form of life.
9. A reference to the German Historical School (Ranke, Droysen, Dilthey etc.) who took over Hegel's concept of historical worlds.
10. With the possible exception of Nietzsche.
11. An intellectual history of constructivist thinking, which I have no space for here, would probably start with Kant's discovery of transcendental conditions of possibility and then move on to Hegel's historization of these transcendental conditions. The nineteenth-century German Historical School subsequently turned the concept of intersubjective world into a historical-empirical research program. Karl Mannheim, at beginning of the twentieth century, brought these ideas into sociology, arguing that transcendental subjectivity is not only historical but also *social*—i.e., that the structure of consciousness is conditioned by social position (a discov-

ery he attributes to Marx). In the process, Mannheim also gave the first comprehensive account of the ideological-critical dimension of this way of thinking.

12. The analytical concept of civilization was above all taken up and turned into an empirical research program by the nineteenth-century German Historicists. The fundamental principle for this research tradition was laid down by Leopold von Ranke: “[t]o history has been assigned the office of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages. To such high offices this work does not aspire: It wants only to show what actually happened” (Ranke 1973: 57).

13. This is part of a broader intellectual development in the nineteenth century, where philosophical questions take a backseat and start to lose legitimacy. Indeed, it is in this period that the very practice of philosophy itself comes under attack, and anti-philosophical philosophies such as positivism, utilitarianism and pragmatism, which for all their internal differences share a common skepticism of first-person question, achieves dominant positions in Western intellectual life (for an account of this development in a German context see Beiser, 2014).

14. My point is not that scholars who self-identify as constructivists are necessarily anti-universalist, but that the same logic that fuels constructivism also fuels anti-universalism. This logic needs to be dialectically checked without returning naive essentialism. This is the topic of the next chapter.

15. And do we really have choice in the matter? Is not deconstructing IR theory as Eurocentric in itself a pretty Eurocentric thing to do? Has Hobson himself somehow detached himself from his social-historical situation or is his own work infused with modern European values, such as the value of not being ethnocentric?

Chapter Five

The Dialectical Horizon

This book is about the analytical-critical relation between IR theory and international politics. Let us draw some conclusions concerning this relation from the discussion so far. From the discussion of essentialism, we concluded that theories are ideals that (if realized in practice) correspond to a particular shape and form of international politics. From the discussion on constructivism, we concluded that such ideals are internal to intersubjective horizons—a set of answers to first-person questions that form a more or less “coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles, and norms” (Reus-Smit, 1999, p. 30) setting the boundaries for what is possible and legitimate—and that these horizons are in social-historical movement. These two lessons combined amounts to a fundamental challenge to the very project of IR theorizing.

In the introductory chapter, I defined theorizing as abstracting certain elements from a particular socio-historical horizon and elevating them to transcendental status: giving certain concepts a privileged place in putting the past and present into perspective, and possible futures into focus. I further suggested two kinds of transcendental elements that any theory needs to deal with in the form of hope and tragedy: what we are trying to achieve—peace, emancipation etc.—and what is frustrating their achievement. A pressing issue for IR theorizing then, is whether and how, at this point in the historical trajectory of IR, it is still possible to make transcendental claims of this nature, or whether IR theory really has come to an end (Dunne, Hansen, & Wight, 2013).

Constructivism leaves us with a formidable argument against IR theory of the kind that concerns us in this book. The discovery that “theoretical thought is not autonomous, that our ideas are conditioned by our interests and our [social-historical] situation” (Westphal, 1998, p. 43), puts us in a tough spot

insofar as theorizing is concerned. It obviously makes it impossible to go back to essentialism. However, the very project of theorizing itself is intimately connected to a central feature of essentialism: the willingness to ask and answer first-person questions. Hedley Bull gives a few examples of such questions, “of which the theory of international relations essentially consists” (Bull, 1966, p. 367), in his classic defense of the traditional approach to IR theory:

[D]oes the collectivity of sovereign states constitute a political society or system, or does it not? If we can speak of a society of sovereign states, does it presuppose a common culture or civilization? And if it does, does such a common culture underlie the worldwide diplomatic framework in which we are attempting to operate now? What is the place of war in international society? Is all private use of force anathema to society’s working, or are there just wars which it may tolerate and even require? Does a member state of international society enjoy a right of intervention in the internal affairs of another, and if so in what circumstances? Are sovereign states the sole members of international society, or does it ultimately consist of individual human beings, whose rights and duties override those of the entities who act in their name? (Bull, 1966, p. 367).

Answering these questions (and these are just some examples, colored by Bull’s particular fields of interest) would necessarily involve us in taking value stances and developing concepts that we award privileged places in our hermeneutical horizons. Indeed, only in framing the questions he finds particularly interesting, Bull has situated himself within a theoretical tradition, employing certain cherished concepts of that tradition, such as “international society.”

It would presumably not be difficult for someone to deconstruct Bull’s list of questions as “Eurocentric,” “state centric,” and maybe even “androcentric.” Indeed, Bull explicitly associates himself with a tradition of thinkers, from Thomas Hobbes to Martin Wight, that seemingly consists solely of white, Western males, and who, in various ways, concern themselves with issues related to the historical emergence of the nation state (Bull, 1966, p. 361). Bull’s position in that tradition almost certainly gives him a good deal of blind spots worth critiquing. However, unless we are prepared to abandon the kinds of questions he asks—which are first-person question and (as I believe he is correct to suggest) the very stuff of IR theory—we need to find a way to perform this critique in a constructive manner.

The problem of constructive theoretical criticism actually takes us back to the beginning of modern IR theory—and to the beginning of this book. Carr’s classic critique of utopianism, for instance, was based on the idea that theories are not “*a priori* propositions, but are rooted in the world of reality in a way which the utopian altogether fail to understand” (Carr, 2001, p. 13).

However, Carr was not oblivious to the dangers of totalizing the particularization of theory: “Denying any *a priori* quality to political theories, and proving them to be rooted in practice, falls easily into a determinism which argues that theory [is] nothing more than a rationalization of conditioned and predetermined purpose” (Carr, 2001, p. 13).¹

A healthy study of international politics, Carr argued, must be “based on a recognition of the *interdependence* of theory and practice” (Carr, 2001, p. 13, emphasis added). In other words, a healthy discipline would avoid to the twin dangers of theorizing that does not understand its own social-historical rootedness and political purpose, and ideological debunking that sees theory *only* in terms of its social-historical rootedness and political purpose. Daniel Levine has recently echoed the latter part of Carr’s warning:

[c]ritique is not merely something to be directed outward, against specific value constructs that particular IR theorists may dislike. It [i.e., critique] must also be directed *inward*. [. . .] When critique fails in this latter aspect, it cannot sustain itself over time. It becomes merely [. . .] a means by which one partisan agenda hacks away at competing ones (Levine, 2012, p. 12, emphasis in original).

In a climate of theoretical warfare that Levine is portraying, dialogue is lost. This might not be a terrible loss if it is merely academic, but insofar as academic theories do not exist in a vacuum outside of society but reflect real political differences, the loss of dialogue is more pressing. In the end, this is a question of how people with different conceptual horizons can relate to each other in a constructive manner. This goes way beyond the very specific kind of meeting of horizons considered in this book, namely that between IR scholars and political practitioners. It is, among other things, (part of) an IR theory in its own right. After all, international politics is also about meetings between agents, in the form of representatives for political communities, with different, often conflicting, understandings of their circumstances (Jervis, 1976, pp. 160–64).

Theoretical critique is perhaps better than theoretical dogmatism in such meetings, but, then again, perhaps not if such critique becomes one-sided and purely negative. Critique, after all, “is no end in itself” (Behr, 2015, p. 37); “a de-essentializing, critical project needs some kind of reconstructive direction” (Behr, 2015, p. 37). But whence does this “reconstructive direction” come from?² What we need, I suggest, is to combine two insights from the preceding chapters: (1) that IR *theory* is a set of answers to first-person questions, i.e., not a neutral reflection of how international politics is by natural necessity, but first and foremost a political ideal; and (2) that IR *theorizing* is the laying bare of the transcendental, social-historical horizon of international politics. This entails thinking of this horizon itself as an ideal, which again means that this horizon cannot be disclosed by asking empirical

third-person question. Instead, we must turn constructivist critique from third-person to first first-person mode, which means to re-interpret such critique dialectically.

To illustrate what I mean by re-interpreting constructivist critique dialectically, consider what it means to go beyond the commonsensical surface and gain a (more) theoretical understanding of international politics. Both structural essentialists and constructivists share a basic understanding of this process as existential disengagement from the international realm so that it appears as a delimited, objectified whole. This places the epistemological observer on the outside of an ontological object, which creates a fundamental analytical-critical *asymmetry* between the deconstructing subject and the deconstructed subject(s). Social-historical deconstructing is based on relocating essentialist ways of thinking and being (answers to first-person questions) inside a delimited intersubjective world visible to the constructivist, but not to the essentialist. In this sense, the deconstructed essentialist is *naïve* in relation to the constructivist.

However, the constructivist position is not an *absolute* outsider position, insofar as every existing human being (and IR scholars are surely existing human beings) is located in a social-historical context. It is not the case that essentialists, such as ancient Greeks, renaissance Italians and Kenneth Waltz are on the inside of history, and constructivists, such as Reus-Smit and John Hobson, are on the outside. They are all *in* history, but they are in history in different ways. Thus, if we want to speak of different positions in history as more and less fundamental in terms of understanding, another distinction than outside/inside is called for, namely that of narrower and wider horizons. Instead of thinking of essentialist naïveté and constructivist critical distance as two *different* horizons—that of, respectively, the constructivist and the deconstructed—think of naïveté and critical distance as moments in the development of *one* horizon. Instead of thinking of constructivism and essentialism as two externally conflicting positions, think of them as internally related levels of reflection.

Thinking in terms of expanding horizons makes the relation between essentialism and constructivism *pedagogical* rather than oppositional. It does not remove the principled asymmetry between these positions, but it removes the principled asymmetry between any particular people holding these positions. One's ideological counterparts become victims of lack of self-insight to be educated rather than opponents to be debunked. For an example of this way of thinking, consider Richard Ashley's famous critique of neo-realism as an "orrery of errors," a self-enclosed, self-affirming joining of statist, utilitarian, positivist, and structuralist commitments" (Ashley, 1984, p. 228). What is notable about Ashley's critique of neo-realism is that it does not question the *integrity* of neo-realists, but their lack of self-understanding:

I am being unfair. To suggest, as I have, that neorealists play a trick of sorts is to imply some kind of intentional duping of an innocent audience. This is surely wrong. It is wrong because neorealists are as much victims as perpetrators (Ashley, 1984, p. 248).

The contribution that constructivist critique can make in terms of self-insight is, naturally, to lay bare the inner socio-historicity of (international) theory and practice. What difference does this contribution make? In this chapter, I argue that the insight into our own socio-historicity is a new kind of “essentialist” insight into human nature—an insight that discloses a new horizon beyond essentialism and constructivism that, among other things, sets the stage for a new kind of international politics and a new kind of study of international politics. This horizon is not imported from the outside, but is discovered as we add an extra layer of dialectic self-insight to our own philosophical-historical situation. As such, I am not trying to make a radical break with constructivism in this chapter, but to continue along the road that constructivism has opened up.

FROM DEBUNKING TO EMANCIPATION

I have distinguished between two ways of using constructivist analysis: as an ideological weapon for debunking essentialist others and as a dialectical-pedagogical tool for emancipation. If we just want to debunk others, then the meeting of horizons becomes a battleground, where “everyone knows [the] other, but nobody knows himself” (Skjervheim, 1996e, p. 121). However, in addition to being an effective (negative) weapon against dogmatic essentialism, constructivist analysis also has a positive, emancipatory side—a side that is often underplayed by constructivists themselves in order to “satisfy mainstream theorists on their terms” (Neufeld, 2001, p. 134). Harnessing this positive side of constructivist analysis is the clue to “bringing the sociological and the normative together,” as Reus-Smit puts it.

The emancipatory power that lies in insight into one’s own horizon is well described by Mannheim:

[w]henver we become aware of a determinant which has dominated us, we remove it from the unconscious motivation into that of the controllable, calculable, and objectified. [M]otives that which previously dominated us become subject to our domination; we are more and more thrown back upon our true self and, whereas formerly we were the servants of necessity, we now find it possible to unite consciously with forces with which we are in thorough agreement (Mannheim, 1997, p. 169).

Mannheim’s point, which echoes Ashley’s point above, is that essentialism is a form of bondage, and that understanding one’s horizon and, through such

understanding, transcending one's horizon is a form of emancipation. Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall have stressed this somewhat underappreciated point in their much-cited article on power in international politics:

[a]lthough constructivists have emphasized how underlying normative structures constitute actors' identities and interests, they have rarely treated these normative structures themselves as defined and infused by power, or emphasized how constitutive effects also are expressions of power (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 41).

What kind of power are we dealing with? Not with the power of one particular agent over another, but the "productive power" (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 48) of intersubjective horizons. Skjervheim (1968, pp. 138-139) has made a distinction between anonymous and non-anonymous power that I think is useful to build on this point.

Non-anonymous power is the explicit exercise of control that particular agents (such as a government) have over other agents (such as citizens). *Anonymous* power, on the other hand, is the control that larger forces exercise over agents without being wielded by any particular agent. The power that intersubjective horizons have over people and societies is of the anonymous sort; it is a form of "self-imprisonment" that shackles one to a particular form of life out of ignorance of (better) alternatives. One source of such dogmatism is essentialist reification, for which an insight into one's own socio-historicity is an effective solvent. This makes deconstruction a kind of enlightenment—i.e., a kind of "emergence from [. . .] self-incurred minority" where "minority is inability to make use of one's own understanding" (Kant, 1996a, p. 17, emphasis removed).

However, the danger with becoming aware of the socio-historicity of thinking and being is that one starts to understanding oneself and others entirely in terms of social-historical differences. Social-historical barriers are, of course, *real* barriers—people think differently. As such, there is something to thinking of " 'the international' as a realm [of] endless and seemingly irresolvable contestations—over meanings and morals as much as resources and power" (Seth, 2013, p. 28). However, one should not reify these actual barriers into *a priori* unsurmountable barriers that cannot be overcome except by coercion and force. Some thinkers (including Mannheim) have drawn anti-universalistic conclusions from the discovery of the socio-historicity of thinking and being. In fact, the self-insight into our own socio-historicity shows us something completely different.

Freedom as the Condition of Possibility for Constructivism

The discovery of the socio-historicity of thinking and being is also a *universal* insight into something that all human beings have in common, regardless

of social-historical differences: that we are all social-historical beings. This insight, furthermore, is also an insight into another universal feature of human existence, namely the freedom to define ourselves. This freedom is immune to social-historical deconstruction, because it is a condition of possibility for there being something to deconstruct in the first place. Or in other words: what is deconstructed are particular self-definitions, not the universal freedom of self-definition itself. This freedom is paradoxical in the following way: it only truly exists for you if you know about it, yet ignorance cannot take it away. One way to discover this freedom is to try to deconstruct yourself.

Self-deconstruction has actually become fashionable in IR, in the form of “reflexivity”: “[r]eflexivity is everywhere. If one had to choose a single buzzword that is driving current debates within the field of International Relations (IR), especially those that are about IR itself, the ‘R’ word would be at the top of the list” (A. B. Tickner, 2013, p. 627). Reflexivity entails that “the tools of knowledge production are turned back on situation of scientist himself” (Jackson, 2011, p. 157). Pierre Bourdieu, with whom the very term “reflexivity” is closely associated, explicates this methodological principle as “self-objectification”:

[t]he most effective reflection is the one that consists in objectifying the subject of objectification [i.e., the researcher]. I mean by that [an analysis] that dispossesses the knowing subject of the privilege it normally grants itself and that deploys all the available instruments of objectification (statistical surveys, ethnographic observations, historical research, etc.) in order to bring to light the presuppositions it owes to its inclusion in the object of knowledge (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 10).

The most interesting thing about self-objectification for our purpose, however, is its *limitations* and what those limitations show us about human existence. Consider the following argument by Skjervheim:

[t]here are certain limits to what one can perceive as ‘fact,’ or [. . .] to what one can objectify. *In principle one cannot objectify oneself.* I can rightly enough regard myself as a fact, but it is not denoted in the fact [. . .] I register and ascertain [the act that I] register and ascertain [myself as a fact]. I may in the next instance correctly ascertain my ascertaining, but this ascertaining, which is grasped by reflection, is something other than what I live in the moment. This “I” which objectifies, but which itself always eludes attempts to become objectified, this “I” which is always subject, but which can never become object, which, when one attempts to objectify it, is no longer here and now, but always *was* here and now [. . .] has been called [. . .] “existence” (Skjervheim, 1996c, p. 129, emphasis altered).

The term “existence” as it used by Skjervheim in this passage speaks to the inescapable circumstance that being human is something beyond being a social-historical object. You *qua* existing subject is not co-extensive with the various external, social-historical facts about you *qua* social-historical object that you may unearth through empirical investigation (e.g., that you are a male, twenty-first-century Norwegian political scientist from a middle class background); you are also your *relation* to these facts and your relation to your relation to these facts and so on *ad infinitum*.

Self-objectification is an attempt to stop this infinite process of self-relation and box your existence into being a particular, delimited object. However, a person “cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which, after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 17). This relating-to-oneseff that is constitutive of being a human self is a continually ongoing activity of taking a stance and realizing certain possibilities (e.g., being a political realist). Since “to be” is a task, it is a misunderstanding to equate the realized possibilities with the person as an existing self. The term “existence,” thus, takes on a special significance when dealing with human subjects, “expressing not its “what” (as if it were a table, house or tree) but its Being [i.e., its always ongoing relating to itself and the world at large]” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 67).

The mistake involved in the idea of self-objectification is precisely to misunderstand oneself as co-extensive with one’s realized possibilities, which, in effect, is to think of oneself as if one were a table, house or a tree, and not an existing self. The scholar who finds himself as a social-historical object and says “this is me” forgets that he or she is actually the one pointing to the object and speaking. This is important since the difference between the constructivist subject and the deconstructed object (in this case “oneself”) is precisely the asymmetry that self-objectification was supposed to eliminate in the first place (cf. Bourdieu quote above).

The attempt to objectify yourself, i.e., to imprison your own existence in the external social-historical facts about yourself, is really to deny yourself your ongoing freedom to define yourself. However, you cannot *deny* yourself that freedom. You can be *unaware* of this freedom, in the sense that you can define yourself without explicitly reflecting on your own freedom to define yourself—but once you have reflected on this freedom you cannot then proceed to deny it. An insight into your own socio-historicity is an insight into your own freedom. However, this insight is easily hidden if you only deconstruct others—or if you mistakenly think you are deconstructing yourself when you externalize some social thing and call it “yourself.”

But if you cannot deconstruct yourself, why would you think you can deconstruct others? If that other is also a self-relation (i.e., freedom), then there is a part of him or her that is just as immune to deconstruction as you are.

This is the part you have in *common* with that other person, even if neither of you are aware of it. For all your social-historical differences, you both find yourself “in the situation of being a reflecting human being” (Skjervheim, 1964b, p. 174, my translation). I am trying to make three points. The first point is negative: to highlight the ontological limits of deconstruction. The second point is positive: that this limit, i.e., human freedom as self-relation, is the beginning of something new beyond constructivism. The third point is that this new beginning is not imported from the “outside” of constructivism, but is discovered dialectically as a condition of possibility for constructivism itself—i.e., as we “direct critique inwards,” to speak with Levine.

The latter point can be elaborated as follows. Self-relation—and the freedom implied in self-relation—is the (usually unacknowledged) *horizon* for constructivist analysis. If the freedom to define oneself did not exist, then there would be nothing for the constructivist to analytically deconstruct in the first place. This freedom is also what makes deconstruction potentially emancipatory. I say “potentially” because deconstruction can also be used non-dialectically, as an ideological weapon against essentialist others. It is only when deconstruction is used dialectically as a door opener to the horizon of deconstruction itself—as a window into our own freedom—that it becomes both de-constructive and re-constructive. Once we open this door, new possibilities for analysis and critique open up. We now turn to these new possibilities.

THE HISTORICAL DIALOGUE

Constructivist analysis is made possible by a combination of two universal insights into the human condition: the radical freedom to define ourselves combined with the necessary inner socio-historicity of any particular self-definition. A human being, therefore, “is just as much an historical idea as a biological species” (Skjervheim, 1964a, p. 35, my translation). This sets the stage for a very particular, and a very modern, kind of history: to empirically investigate the process “where man defines itself and redefines itself” (Skjervheim, 1964a, p. 35, my translation), and the different intersubjective worlds, such as “ancient Greece” and “renaissance Italy,” that this process gives rise to.

Call this “process of definition and re-definition”—i.e., the continuous struggle “about fundamental questions of right and wrong” (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 62)—the historical dialogue. This dialogue has both a theoretical and a practical dimension; movements in political horizons (theory) and corresponding movements in political practice as new horizons connected to new worlds replace old horizons supporting old worlds. These transitions are *struggles*—and usually not purely intellectual struggles. Indeed, sometimes

new ideas only defeat old ideas through war or revolution. Thus, the mutually constitutive relation between identity and structure, dialectically understood, is both harmonious and disharmonious. When disharmony becomes dominant we can speak of *alienation* as “the individual stands over against a society that does not express him” (Taylor, 1986, p. 171). If alienation spreads, the political legitimacy of the established order is threatened.

At certain junctures in history we see a new horizon gaining ground, unsettling the established order, and creating a political climate of *crisis*. In such situations something’s got to give—and it is usually the established order. In the long run, even the mightiest empire cannot beat fundamental shifts in the boundaries of political legitimacy. As an example, consider Reus-Smit’s recent history of how a burgeoning human-rights self-consciousness fueled the evolution of modern international society:

[i]n their twilight years, the Holy Roman Empire, the Spanish Empire, and Europe’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century empires all suffered severe crises of legitimacy. Political systems experience such crises when support among those subjected to their rule collapses. [. . .] New, distinctly modern ideas about individual rights took root in each context, and as they spread, were interpreted, reconstituted and embraced as legitimate, subject peoples reimagined themselves as political agents, developed new political interests in the recognition and protection of their rights, challenged established regimes and entitlements, and sought institutional change (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 4).

I am building towards a reconsideration of the relation between IR and international politics as a relation between IR theorizing and this historical dialogue. However, before we get further into the particulars of theorizing international politics, I want to lay some philosophical groundwork. What I am getting at is really a certain kind of ontology—a conceptualization of how man and society are connected—where “what is most essential to our being-in-the-world is that we are dialogical” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 229),³ i.e., that being human and being a participant in a dialogue are two sides of the same coin. This ontological shift, just as the ontological shift from the objective to the intersubjective notion of “world,” underpins a re-orientation of the epistemological (analytical) and practical-philosophical (critical) dimensions of theory.

Let me try to clarify what I mean by “being dialogical.” I have spoken of existing as a continual task of relating rather than being a particular thing. One particularly important category of beings we relate to are other human beings, through intersubjective relations. Inter-subjectivity is just as inescapable a part of the human condition as freedom of self-definition. Freedom to self-define without inter-subjectivity would be a completely empty and abstract freedom, and a ghost-like existence. In *actual* existence, “‘the Others’ are already there with us” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 152). It is impossible to exist

in the human sense of the term in a social-historical vacuum. Even in our most solitary reflections, others are present in the very concepts we use to define ourselves:

[t]he language I use [as a self-defining subject], is not my private language, but belongs to linguistic society. This society has a history, and my language [. . .] is historically loaded [with] the reflections of earlier generations. Through the language I use other language users are already implied. [I]nter-subjectivity is therefore not something that is constituted through radical egologic meditation. [. . .] I, as radically meditating subject [i.e., as self-relation], must also employ language (Skjervheim, 1973, p. 163).

If we in “reflections of earlier generations” include what I above referred to as the historical dialogue, then simply existing makes you, in a sense, a participant (however unwitting or reluctant) in that dialogue.⁴

The phrase “radical egologic meditation” is a reference to Edmund Husserl, and by extension to Descartes who served as Husserl’s model for reflection (see Husserl, 1999). The purpose of such meditation is to existentially detach from the world so that the world can be revealed as an existential whole, i.e., as a delimited, intersubjective horizon in the constructivist sense. This detachment is analogous to the existential move from participation to observation that characterizes the move first from Morgenthau to Waltz, and then from Waltz to constructivism. Consider the following passage from Husserl’s famous *Cartesian Mediations*:

If the Ego, as naturally immersed in the world, experientially and otherwise, is called “*interested*” in the world, then the phenomenologically altered [. . .] attitude consists in a *splitting of the Ego*: in that the [analytical]⁵ Ego establishes himself as “*disinterested onlooker*,” above the naïvely interested Ego (Husserl, 1999, p. 35, emphasis in original).

The two different Egos in Husserlian transcendental philosophy⁶ corresponds to the distinction between naïve essentialism (the interested Ego) and constructivism (the analytical Ego). An important thing to note is that the relation between these two Egos is *internal* in the sense discussed at the beginning of this chapter: the “disinterested onlooker” and the naïve participant are not two different subjects—e.g., the researcher/constructivist and the researched/essentialist—but two levels of reflections in *one* consciousness. The movement between these two levels of reflection, i.e., from naïve participation to analytical disinterestedness, is, Husserl argues, an emancipatory movement towards an “absolute freedom from prejudice” (Husserl, 1999, p. 35, emphasis removed).

This emphasis on disinterestedness and value freedom that we find in Husserl is pervasive in social inquiry.⁷ Reflexivity, for instance, is supposed

to be “a way of making sure that one’s knowledge-claims are as close to being disinterested as it is possible for them to be” (Jackson, 2011, p. 172). The self begins naïvely in the world, but through a process of reflection extracts itself (existentially, if not actually) out of the world and into a position where it is “free from the ‘biases’ linked to his or her position and dispositions” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 114). The Husserlian ideal is even found among more critically inclined scholars. Levine, for instance, argues that “IR needs a form of critique in which theory’s [ideological] nature is accepted even as theorists continue to strive for “value freedom” (Levine, 2012, p. 12). One sometimes gets the feeling that expressing values—being engaged, taking a stance—is just an unfortunate side effect of theorizing, something to be avoided as far as possible.

However, analytical disinterestedness, whatever its virtues (and it has virtues), is never total—nor is it a goal in itself. In particular two aspects of our background stand out as impossible to existentially detach from: (1) the language we use and, by extension, the inter-subjective community of which we are a part; and (2) our freedom *qua* self-defining subjects that makes existential detachment possible in the first place. Existential detachment is a form of *reflection*—a way of being-in-the-world that begins with friction between these two inescapable circumstances of social-historical finitude and transcendence.

Reflection is an “act of separation whereby the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and external events and from their influence upon it” (Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 54). This act of separation is, from the very first moment, an emancipatory act. Thus, reflection is not disinterested: “reflection is both insight and interest, and the fundamental interest is the interest in emancipation” (Skjervheim, 1973, p. 167, my translation). This emancipatory interest underlies the ongoing struggle of becoming an individual by taking a stance and being defined by that stance as one’s *identity* (Taylor, 1989, p. 27)—what Habermas calls the “the progress of reflection toward adult autonomy” (Habermas, 1971, p. 281).

When we start reflecting we find ourselves *in* an intersubjective, social-historical situation that we cannot simply think away. We cannot begin completely anew somewhere “right outside of the human tradition” (Lewis, 2001, p. 41) as if history never happened. In this sense, “history does not belong to us; we belong to it” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 286). Yet, and this is the fundamental paradox that human freedom creates, in one sense we *can* begin anew: “I have unreflectively taken over many opinions, and I am, in that sense, a “product” of my environment [i.e., a social-historical object]. But I do not have to continue being merely [such a product]” (Skjervheim, 1964b, p. 173, my translation). It is an important difference between living unreflectively into one’s social-historical situation, accepting whatever is handed down by tradition as natural and unproblematic, and actively questioning prevailing

ways of thinking and being.⁸ The break with immediacy that reflection represents is, in this sense, a new beginning.

Reflection *qua* the active questioning and examining of one's horizon can be done sporadically and intermittently or it can be done systematically. In the latter case, we can speak of *theoretical* reflection. Charles Taylor has suggested that we think of social theory as what happens when we try to “formulate explicitly what we are doing” (Taylor, 1985, p. 93). By “formulating explicitly” Taylor means, in effect, what I have referred to as clarifying the conditions of possibility—the constitutional structure—that is essential to our own social-historical life. This is an analytical task, but it has a critical intent:

the framing of a theory rarely consists simply of making some continuing practice explicit. The stronger motive for making and adopting theories is the sense that our implicit understand [i.e., the pre-theoretical understanding] is in some way crucially inadequate or even wrong. Theories do not just make our constitutive self-understandings explicit, but extend, or criticize or even challenge them. It is in this sense that theory makes a claim to tell us what is really going on (Taylor, 1985, p. 94).

Theoretical reflection, then, is a particular way of being in the historical dialogue. This way of being, although expressive of a particular kind of social-historical experience (not all forms of social life reach the point of systematic theoretical reflection), is not confined to any particular social-historical context. Quite the opposite: as an exercise of critical reason theorizing cuts across social-historical barriers and makes it possible for us to *engage* with people in other social-historical situations—who, for all their social-historical “otherness,” are also self-reflective beings. For instance, we cannot become Socrates, for he was an ancient Greek and we are not, but we can still *learn* from Socrates in much the same way as his contemporaries could, because both we and Socrates belong not only to history and particular societies, but also to a universal community of reflection that transcends history and societies. This universal community—which is both real and ideal—is what I refer to when I talk about the dialogical horizon.

IR THEORY AND THE HISTORICAL DIALOGUE

I now want to track back to the more specific focus of this book, namely the relation between IR theory and international politics. The larger point I want to bring over from the previous section is that we should think of IR theorizing as the systematic self-reflective part of international politics.⁹ Such reflection, if performed dialectically, has an existential direction toward emancipation and is part of a larger political project toward a universal dialogical

community. This ideal is an analytical-critical lens for analyzing and participating in the historical dialogue on international politics. In this and the next section, I try to concretize what this dialogical turn means for theorizing international politics. To this end I return to the Reus-Smit example from before.

Reus-Smith is concerned with how the modern political horizon—in particular, “modern of ideas of individual rights”—came to be a theoretical and political reality. Obviously, this is a story that can only be told from our modern horizon, and not from any of the earlier horizons that Reus-Smit investigates as stages towards this horizon. In other words, the analysis will necessarily be a *re-interpretation* of these earlier horizons.

Let me give an example. One of the transitions that Reus-Smit deals with in his book is the move from the medieval to the modern world. Or more precisely a particular phase of that movement: the Reformation and the ensuing religious conflicts that lead to the peace settlements of Augsburg (1555) and Westphalia (1648). The Reformation is a good example of a movement in the basic ideational fabric of the world that works like a “hidden hand” in history—what Hegel calls movement in Spirit [*Geist*] (Hegel, 1988)—the significance of which is only visible in retrospect. I will dwell on this particular historical transition, and Reus-Smit’s interpretation of it, as I think it is an instructive example in several respects.

In medieval Europe, political legitimacy was not tied to nations to the same extent as it would later be. Instead, legitimacy was grounded largely in the community of Latin Christendom, where “the most profound manifestations were the [Holy Roman] empire’s dependence on the papacy for its legitimacy [and] the papacy’s dependence on the empire for its security” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 78). National sovereignty, accordingly, was severely circumscribed, as Hedley Bull, among others, have noted (see also Ruggie, 1993, p. 150):

[i]n [medieval Europe] no ruler or state was sovereign in the sense of being supreme over a given territory and a given segment of the Christian population; each had to share authority with the vassal beneath and with the Pope and (in Germany and Italy) the Holy Roman Emperor above (Bull, 2002, p. 245).

Furthermore, in the medieval world, “[t]here was no notion that rights were universal, possessed by individuals equally, or that the universal rights of individuals could form the basis of legitimate authority” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 80). Both these aspects of political legitimacy—national sovereignty and individual rights—Reus-Smit argues, would undergo internally connected changes during the Reformation and its aftermath.

One of the principal elements of the Reformation was a re-drawing of the boundaries of church and state. For instance, in the Augsburg Confession

(1530), one of the most important documents of Protestantism, the separation of the affairs of the church and the affairs of the state is clearly stated.¹⁰ Today, we are used to thinking of church-state relations as a national issue, but in medieval Europe this was very much an *international* issue. Removing church authority from worldly affairs was a clear challenge to the Papacy's position in European politics. The result was to transfer sovereignty away from Rome and first to the princes, and then to the *nations*, of Europe. As Daniel Philpott has argued, “[national] sovereignty, in substance if not in name, comes directly out of the very propositions of Protestant theology” (Philpott, 2001, p. 109).

The state-church separation had two sides: The church should not interfere with worldly affairs, but neither should the state be concerned with spiritual matters. This is the Protestant bargain: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21), or as Martin Luther put it:

[i]f [. . .] your prince or temporal lord commands you to hold with the pope, to believe this or that, or commands you to give up certain books, you should say, It does not befit Lucifer to sit by the side of God. Dear Lord, I owe you obedience with life and goods; command me within the limits of your power on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe, and to put away books, I will not obey; for in this case you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, and command where you have neither right nor power.¹¹

What we see in this passage, Reus-Smit argues, is “the individual’s right to liberty of conscience, although not couched in the language of rights” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 86).¹² Of course, *Reus-Smit* can couch this transition in the language of rights, because he, unlike Luther, lives under a horizon where this part of Protestant theology has turned into (secular) human rights theory. To think of Luther as a human rights activist (on this particular issue) is not completely wrong—he did argue for what we today would call freedom of conscience—but it is also a judgement by posterity using concepts that would have been alien to Luther himself.¹³

It is easy to forget that for the vast majority of history, the horizon of universal human freedom currently expressed in the idea of human rights—and inwardly grasped through radical reflection—was, at best, nascent. Hegel stressed this point in his philosophy of history:

[t]he consciousness of [f]reedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that *some* are free—not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks, therefore, had slaves; and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery; a fact moreover, which made that liberty on the one hand only an accidental, transient and

limited growth; on the other hand constituted a rigorous thralldom of our common nature—of the Human (Hegel, 1988, p. 18).

However, once we have recognized this universal freedom, we cannot go back. It is too late now to take back the words “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”¹⁴ There is simply no returning to previous moral horizons that justified things like slavery and colonialism. Even if, say, the United States *could* restart the slave trade or establish colonies—“could” in the sense of having the material power to do it—that does not really matter, because the moral horizon that could have justified such actions and given them some higher meaning is gone.

At this point in history, we cannot in good faith live under moral horizons that justifies slavery. However, we can re-reconstruct those earlier horizons through constructivist analysis, and the reason we can do that—the condition of possibility for such analysis, which, to repeat, is a distinctly modern phenomenon—is that we live under a horizon marked by awareness our own freedom. The thing we cannot deconstruct, i.e., the horizon that we cannot look back upon as a delimited intersubjective world, is that freedom itself, which is *our* horizon. The current boundaries of political legitimacy are drawn around this freedom, and we cannot simply think those boundaries away as merely social-historical constructions, in part because this very freedom is the condition of possibility for social-historical construction (and subsequent analytical deconstruction).

I want to dwell for a moment longer on the Reformation example in order to extract one more lesson from it, namely how “deep” the notion of a horizon goes. I have made the point about the inescapability of horizons several times, but it is worth repeating because of the dangerous habit (which I share) of continually forgetting one’s own horizon. Among other things, a horizon encompasses what we today think of as the religious and the secular aspects of existence. The secular-religious divide—which is so hardwired into modern, liberal thinking that it tends to become invisible to us modern liberals—is not a “natural” way of dividing up existence, but largely internal to one particular social-historical experience (for a landmark discussion of the dangers of naturalizing the religious-secular division, see Asad, 1993). Thus,

while it seems obvious to Western liberals [. . .] that religion and politics constitute two different spaces, each with its own rules, norms, and logic, this may not be the case in other cultures and societies (Mandaville, 2014, p. 11).

That the religious-secular division is not “natural” does not mean that it is wrong (see next section). This is not the place for either defending our denouncing this distinction. My concern is slightly different, namely to prop-

erly locate this dialectical movement in history, which takes place on the level of horizons. The orthodox story of the Westphalian origins of modern international politics, which I have partly retold in this section, is that European politics went from a religious to a secular phase, with the peace agreement in Westphalia marking the transition between the two. Religion was removed from international affairs and became a national—and eventually even *private*—affair. “Holy war” was no longer a part of the intersubjective horizon under which European politics was conducted.

This secularization story is increasingly being challenged as IR is rediscovering religion (Hurd, 2007; Petito & Hatzopoulos, 2003; Snyder, 2011b; Thomas, 2005). Part of this rediscovery is the dawning realization that perhaps religion “never left” (Hurd, 2009, p. 2)—that perhaps “religious international politics had been there all along” (Snyder, 2011a, p. 1). Westphalia, Hurd notes in one of the most important contributions to this burgeoning field, “was secular and also deeply Christian” (Hurd, 2009, p. 2). In fact, one could argue that the secular-religious distinction is itself a religious principle. I do not mean this only in the sense that this distinction, as a matter of historical fact, is internal to Protestant theology. My point is that, in a more general sense, sorting out how the divine relates to the earthly (as when Jesus divided the world into what belonged to Cesar and what belonged to God) is necessarily a piece of theology.

The larger point I am trying to make is that an apolitical conception of religion and an areligious conception of politics are internally connected within a larger horizon that is both religious and political. Thus, we do not really have a dichotomy (religion-politics), but a *triad*: religion, politics and the background against which religion and politics are constituted as distinct spheres of existence—a background that acts as a condition of possibility for speaking of the religious and the political as separable in the first place.¹⁵ It is this underlying mediation that divides up existence in a certain way, but which itself transcends the divisions it makes, that I refer to as a “horizon”—the “constitutional structure” (Reus-Smit, 1997) of a life world—and it is on this fundamental level that dialectical movements in history (and in thought) happen.

REOPENING THE ISSUE OF JUSTIFICATION

At the beginning of this book, I raised the question of what makes one IR theory better than another as a motivation for philosophically clarifying the relation between IR and international politics. The essentialist answer to the issue of justification is that an IR theory is valid to the extent that it reflects the objective essence of international politics. The constructivist critique of essentialism is in no small measure a critique of this idea of justification (as a

kind of reification). Constructivism, however, struggles with regrounding justification in something else than essences and thereby runs the risk—if it is not reinterpreted dialectically—of becoming purely negative, incapable of justifying anything.

One of the first things to emerge in our discussion, when considering Morgenthau, was that IR theory is a regulative ideal for international-political practice. Such ideals have the strongest hold on us when we are not aware of them as ideals at all, but think of them as the natural order of things—i.e., when they are part our unquestioned horizon. In a sense, constructivism begins with the insight into these ideals as ideals, but also with the insight into the social-historical origins of these ideals. This lays the ground for an empirical research program of investigating how different social-historical horizons underpin different forms of international politics. The justification of any particular horizon becomes difficult, however, because it is no longer possible to think of any particular horizon as “natural.”

However, even if no particular horizon is natural it does not follow that all horizons are equally good, rational and enlightened—it just means that horizons have a social-historical origin. Once we have realized this, the question of justification is back on the table. But how can we say that one horizon is better than another if no horizon is natural? This question actually turns the entire issue of justification on its head. It is precisely *because* no horizon is natural that we can speak of better and worse—or more and less enlightened—horizons. If there was a natural horizon, something that was just as present in the mind of the first man who descended from the apes as it is today, then the idea of a progressive historical dialogue would be nonsensical. Either we can deny that such progress has taken place (or even *can* take place), in which the case the issue of justification is moot again, or we must seek out the criteria by which we can make sense of such progress as progress (i.e., not merely change).¹⁶

The first thing to note is that such a criterion cannot simply be the mere passing of time. Just because something came chronologically later in history it is not *for that reason* an improvement on what came before. Fukuyama, one of the contemporary thinkers who have taken the idea of historical progress most seriously, runs perilously close to such historical opportunism in passages such as these (his terms “consciousness” and “perspective” are roughly equivalent to what I call “horizon”):

[c]onsciousness—the way in which human beings think about fundamental questions of right and wrong, the activities they find satisfying, their beliefs about the gods, even the way in which they perceive the world—has changed fundamentally over time. And since these perspectives were mutually contradictory, it follows that the vast majority of them were wrong, or forms of “false consciousness” to be unmasked by subsequent history (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 62)

However, it does not exactly follow from the fact that these horizons were mutually contradictory that the “vast majority of them were wrong” or “forms of false consciousness.” It is not history itself that sees the limitations of historical horizons—only the subject surveying history (Fukuyama in this case) can do that. When Fukuyama claims that any particular horizon has been transcended in history he is not simply speaking on behalf of history; he is judging historical horizons from a historical horizon, namely his own.

This, I have been arguing, is unavoidable; we all have to speak from somewhere. Accordingly, it is not the fact that Fukuyama has a horizon and uses it to pass judgement on history and participate in the historical dialogue that is problematic. What is problematic is that he does not clarify his own horizon and why his horizon is superior to the horizons he debunks. I am being a bit unfair to Fukuyama here (he does have something to say about his own horizon in other parts of the book) in order to make a point concerning justification of horizons, namely the role that *self-reflection* plays in this endeavor.

By “self-reflection” I refer to the dialectical process of situating oneself in the historical dialogue through self-insight into one’s own horizon. Part of this is self-historicizing, but the most important part, for justificatory purposes, is the *existential* position one occupies. The latter is what provides not only historical but *critical* distance to alternative horizons and closes off certain social-historical existence possibilities. I want to begin with a simple example borrowed from Skjervheim to illustrate this latter point.

Romanticism, such as that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (in particular Rousseau, 2012), was one of the first reactions to the modern disenchantment brought on by the Enlightenment. The romantics celebrated the immediate life as the highest form of human existence and encouraged feeling above reflecting. However, one thing is to *live* immediately, another thing is to want to live immediately:

[w]hat Rousseau wants is to restore a lost naïveté, but what he achieves is something entirely different. Instead of bringing back naïveté, he becomes the founder of something entirely new in European culture: the modern *sentimentality*. This is not accidental. The immediate does not understand itself as immediate, which is precisely what makes it immediate. Rousseau’s idealization of immediacy is not itself immediate, it cannot be. Immediacy cannot idealize itself without annulling itself. [. . .] One “goes back to nature,” but brings the arts and literature with one. The European elite begin travelling to the countryside, without for that reason becoming simple peasants. Quite the opposite, a new layer of complexity is added to European emotional life. Grown men cry when they read Rousseau, they cry for Rousseau and the world, but also for their own predicament (Skjervheim, 1964b, p. 24, emphasis in original, my translation).

The inability to go back to immediacy once immediacy has been destroyed by awareness of itself is an example of an existential inability. Even if one wants to go back, as Rousseau wants, one can't. Romanticism is, in the end, built on an illusion, and the insight into this illusion is the beginning of a more pessimistic mode of European thought. After Rousseau comes Nietzsche. However, it is not only inability that closes off existence possibilities, but also, I would argue, existential *progress*.

Simply put, existential progress entails that "once you have been through the transition [. . .] you can't *rationally* go back" (Taylor, 2003, p. 176, emphasis added)—that certain transitions in history are of such a nature that *reason* precludes going back. Let us return the example of the Reformation once more. The break with the mediaeval world was definitive. We can poetize or analyze the life world, but we cannot *live* it. It is, of course, a myriad of reasons why we cannot go back to a medieval horizon (for one thing we would have to forget a good deal of scientific advances). However, one of the ways that reason stops us from going back—the one that is most interesting for our discussion—is connected to the very fact that we can analyze the medieval horizon as a delimited intersubjective world in the first place, namely the (implicit or explicit) insight into human freedom that makes constructivism possible.

Gadamer once claimed even "[t]he consciousness of being [historically] conditioned does not supersede our [historical] conditionedness" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 465). But is this true? In one sense, Gadamer is right: historical self-awareness itself has a historical origin. However, as I have tried to argue in this chapter, the self-awareness of our own historicity actually shows us something that transcends history, namely our freedom to define ourselves. This freedom, which is a condition of possibility for being social-historical, is certainly *restricted* by social-historical circumstance (I cannot be a renaissance Italian, for instance), but it is not *reducible* to social-historical circumstance (I can still be something).

One source of progress in history, then, is self-insight into our own freedom—an insight, I have tried to show, that transcends social-historical barriers and represents a latent universal community. This emancipatory piece of self-insight shuts the door to a certain way of being. Specifically, it shuts the door on ways of being sustained by essentialist beliefs in a natural order of things, and prepares these now-historical forms of life for deconstructive *post mortems*, as instances of "a shape of life [that] has grown old, and [that] cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized" (Hegel, 1991, p. 24).

Once self-definition has been discovered it cannot be undiscovered. This is, in many ways, where modernity begins: with the recognition that we live in a world of our own making (Onuf, 2013)—"that we *make ourselves* what we are" (Sartre, 1992, p. 101, emphasis in original)—and with trying to come to terms with this realization and disclose the new horizon we find ourselves

under. The negative side of this horizon is directed at what we have emancipated ourselves *from*, namely the “the illusion that there is only one way of thinking” (Mannheim, 1997, p. 11). The contrast between the middle ages—“the ages of authority” (Lewis, 2012, p. 5)—and modernity is very pronounced on this point: “[i]n their political thought, and in the discussion of political questions, [modern, liberal] citizens do not view the social order as a fixed and natural order” (Rawls, 2005, p. 13).¹⁷

The positive side of this transition is the radical responsibility for our own situation that has been granted us; That, according to Kant, is the true source of our moral being:

[i]f we look back upon all previous efforts that have ever been made to discover the principle of morality, we need not wonder now why all of them had to fail. It was seen that the human being is bound to laws by his duty, but it never occurred to them that he is subject *only to laws given by himself but still universal* (Kant, 1996c, p. 82, emphasis in original).

Of course, if we believe that our social-historical differences go “all the way down” then there would be nothing in which to root an universal moral law (and the ideology of anti-universalism looms), but I hope I have given some reason to resist such reification of social-historical differences. However great these differences may be, the illusion that they are absolute can only be maintained by refusing to engage in dialogue with each other. I am not primarily referring to the fact that once people start talking *with* each other instead of *about* each other it often turns out their disagreement was not that fundamental after all. Rather, I am referring to the very condition of possibility of dialogue itself, namely that we are all existing human beings in the sense introduced earlier in this chapter, i.e., that we are all first and foremost self-relations and not social-historical things.

The discovery of dialogue as the highest form of intersubjective relation is not new—Socrates knew this. What *is* “new,” or at least seems to be better understood in modernity than in any other age, is the universal nature of the dialogical ideal, i.e., that a true dialogue (an ideal) suspends all particular social-historical differences (see, e.g., Linklater, 2001, p. 30). One can, in principle, have “dialogue” with ancient Greeks and renaissance Italians just as one can have a dialogue with one’s contemporaries—and one can have a dialogue with one’s worst enemies just one can have a dialogue with one’s closest allies—as long as we all share the experience of being self-reflective human beings. A universal community of reflection (still more an ideal than a reality) is accessible once one starts thinking of people—scholars or practitioners, friends or enemies, ancient Greeks or renaissance Italians—as “not primarily objects to be studied, but potentially partners in reflection” (Skjerveheim, 1964b, p. 174, my translation).

I am not saying that international politics or the study of international politics is, as a matter of empirical fact, dialogical in this sense. Indeed, it is fairly obvious that it is not—that “the order of the current system is no true order at all, for it has [. . .] little [place] for humans as humans rather than humans as members of discrete communities” (Rengger, 2001, p. 92). What I am saying is that this ideal is our “inescapable framework” (Taylor, 1989, p. chap. 2) that represents the outer limits of self-knowledge—the most fundamental horizon we have dialectical access to—and therefore provides the criterion for judging IR theory that tries to explicate our current horizon in order to say something about where we are in the historical dialogue.¹⁸ Our position is one of insight into the dialogue itself—something that both precludes going back to a past before this insight and sets the stage for new kind of future.

NOTES

1. Cf. discussion of “constructivism as ideology” in chapter 4.
2. Behr himself does not really suggest a specific direction so much as general caution. Since all kinds of concrete political-theoretical stances, in Behr’s view, are “imposing” and “violent,” their practical effects should at least not be irrevocable; political activity “must not bring about irreversible consequences” (Behr, 2015, p. 37).
3. Note that when I say “ontology” I do not mean merely “scientific ontology” (Jackson, 2011, p. 28) as opposed to epistemology; i.e., I do not merely refer to the constitution of the social world *qua* subject matter for an observing epistemological subject (e.g., the IR scholar), but to the constitution of the social world as such—including the part of it inhabited by the epistemological subject. When I endorse Bernstein’s idea that “we are dialogical,” the “we” in question is universal; it refers to all us, whether we are scholars, politicians, students, Americans, Chinese, ancient Greeks, renaissance Italians, or whatever.
4. Of course, the topic of this thesis—the relation between IR and international politics—takes us well beyond merely existing. To theorize on international politics is to participate in the dialogue in a very specific manner on a very specific topic. My point is simply that IR theorizing does not take place *outside* of the historical dialogue, which would mean that it somehow took place outside of inter-subjectivity or even language itself.
5. Husserl uses the term “phenomenological,” a philosophical term, to describe the second Ego. To avoid introducing more philosophical terminology than necessary, I use the more immediately understandable term “analytical.”
6. Husserl’s term is “phenomenology.”
7. Compare with the methodological ambition of reflexivity “as a way of making sure that one’s knowledge-claims are as close to being disinterested as it is possible for them to be” (Jackson, 2011, p. 172). Reflexivity is a constitution of an appropriate epistemological subjectivity through an existential movement from a participant to an observer position: the self begins *in* the world, but through a process of reflection extracts itself (existentially, if not actually) out of the world and into a position where it is “free from the ‘biases’ linked to his or her position and dispositions” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 114).
8. A horizon, after all, is “not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 247).
9. Whether this reflection is done by academics or practitioners is less important. The aim of reflection is to clarify the larger inter-subjective horizon under which both international politics and IR is conducted—and you do not have to occupy any special social position in order to do this (although I am sure it helps if you get paid to do it).

10. “the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the Church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgements concerning civil ordinances and contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth.” The Augsburg Confession (1530), article XXVIII. Available at: <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>.

11. “Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed” (1523). Available at: <http://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.no/2005/11/secular-authority-to-what-extent-it.html>.

12. Cf. article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on “the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.” Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

13. Luther was not a modern, human-rights respecting person. Among other things, he believed “that witches exist and that the devil practices harmful sorcery through them” and that they should be “executed swiftly” (Brauner, 2001, pp. 54, 55).

14. From the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

15. As such, even if Protestant theology is in one sense apolitical since it walls of the church from worldly affairs and vice versa, this walling off is in itself deeply political—at the time it was even revolutionary. The political implications of the Reformation were staggering: it would fuel one of the most devastating wars in European history (the Thirty Years War); and its nascent ideas of individual freedom would find its way into Enlightenment philosophy and from there violently into actuality again in the French Revolution. And, importantly for our purpose, the Reformation would leave in its wake (although not in its *immediate* wake) a system of independent, constitutional states—“no Reformation, no Westphalia” (Philpott, 2001, p. 108).

16. But will not any such progress criterion be internal to a social-historical horizon? Yes, but this would only be a fundamental problem if we insist on sticking with the dogma that universal truth cannot have a social-historical origin—which is a self-undermining dogma since that dogma itself would be a universal truth with a social-historical origin.

17. Both constructivism and political liberalism share a common origin in the turn that Western thought took during the Enlightenment, liberating the subject from the world and thereby introducing the specter of political change. Nietzsche (2003, p. 114), not without reason, called Descartes the grandfather of the French revolution.

18. For instance, Andrew Linklater has argued that “the commitment to dialogue [. . .] requires the development of societies that regard the differences between human beings as less important than their shared experience in pain and suffering” (Linklater, 2001, p. 30). The argument developed in this chapter suggests that a different kind of “shared experience” is more important, namely mutual respect for each other as self-relations.

Chapter Six

Hope, Tragedy, and Dialogue

When then president of the United States, Barack Obama, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, he held a rather unorthodox acceptance speech. One particularly interesting tension in his speech concerned his self-conscious identification with non-violent struggle in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. (another Peace Prize laureate) and his position as a leader of a great power, at the time involved in two wars. It is worth quoting at length from what he had to say:

I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence. I know there's nothing weak—nothing passive—nothing naïve—in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King. But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.¹

In this passage, Obama is making the case for a tragic dimension of international politics—a dimension that becomes tragic precisely because of a clear-eyed appreciation of a moral horizon that remains just out of reach, frustrated by stubborn realities. What Obama is doing, in effect, is theorizing: attempting to establish clarity concerning the context and purpose of his practice (Taylor, 1985), in a way that combines self-reflective disclosing of a value horizon with an understanding of the tensions between this “utopia” (Carr, 2001) and the actual circumstances in which he is forced to act.

Obama's self-reflection is not "reflexivity" in a narrow, methodological sense, and even if he invokes his own self as a "living testimony to the moral force of non-violence," this is not an example of a "narcissistic narrative [. . .] shrouded in sociological garb" (Knafo, 2016, p. 33). Instead, he is trying to say something about good and evil, and if we want to gainsay him we should be prepared to involve ourselves in a similar discourse. Part of such involvement should be to properly historicize Obama's moral horizon—pointing to its Christian overtones, for instance—but if we do this merely in the interest of deconstruction, we would miss an opportunity for true engagement with our subject matter.

To analyze and critique Obama's worldview we should approach it as any other theoretical perspective on international politics: dialectically, with an aim to arrive at a higher understanding of the issues at stake. Insofar as the argument put forward in this book is valid, such an approach would further disclose a value horizon—specifically, the dialogical ideal that is inescapably encoded into the dialectical project itself. Although this is not the place for a proper dialectical treatment of Obama's worldview, a few remarks might illustrate how the dialogical horizon would re-interpret some of Obama's claims.

In effect, Obama postulates a limit to dialogue when dealing with "evil" actors such as Hitler and al Qaeda, who are on the other side of the "limits of reason." However, both Hitler and al Qaeda had *reasons* for their actions—reasons their followers might consider well founded and noble. Still, Hitler and al Qaeda belong to ideological worlds, with their own internal political projects, that are so alien to the dialogical horizon that a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer) through dialogue becomes exceedingly difficult. I have argued elsewhere that is not impossible to envisage engaging such disparate outlooks through reasoning rather than force. Such an engagement would, however, require a commitment to the dialogical ideal that in itself, if self-reflectively realized, would amount to a transformation of positions such as Fascism and Islamism (Hvidsten, 2018). In the absence of such a dialogical transformation, positions not committed to the dialogical ideal will remain an evil "Other" to be met with force—and arguably rightly so.

We should take notice of this moral commitment to the superiority of dialogue over coercion in political relations, not because this commitment removes the tragic aspects of international life or the need for coercion, but because it helps us put into perspective exactly what is tragic about international relations. Without a clear sense of our hopes, we will not gain a clear sense of our tragic circumstances. I will end the book by excavating some aspects of this hope as it relates to the project of IR theorizing and the overall argument of this book.

THE ANALYTICAL-CRITICAL DUALITY AND DIALOGUE

The investigation of the analytical-critical duality in this book has served as a vehicle for disclosing the universal normative aspects under which modern IR theorizing takes place. Through a reflective engagement with the very practice of theorizing itself, I have attempted to unearth the value horizon that underpins not only the practice of *theorizing* international politics, but emerges as a political project in itself. This political project is reminiscent of what Richard Bernstein has called “the promise of dialogical communities” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 227), or

the coming into being of a type of public life that can strengthen solidarity, public freedom, a willingness to talk and listen, mutual debate, and a commitment to rational persuasion (Bernstein, 1983, p. 226).

In relation to this political project, both essentialism and constructivism² come up short. I do not mean that these positions are explicitly hostile to dialogue, but that they have unintended deleterious effects on the struggle to “increase the spheres of social interaction that are governed by dialogue [. . .] rather than [merely] power and force” (Linklater, 2001, p. 31).

It is fairly obvious how essentialism discourages dialogue: by reifying certain ways of being (and their associated social structures) as natural and inevitable, and therefore beyond discussion. Constructivism reopens the dialogue through debunking essentialist naturalness—and in the process unlocks the specter of (radical) social change. However, constructivism, if it is not checked by dialectical insight into its own conditions of possibility, discourages dialogue again in a different, but no less effective way. When applied consistently, the principle of particularization dissolves any ambition of developing “[u]niversalistic ethical concepts abstracted from specific forms of [social-historical] life” (Linklater, 1990, p. 141).

The constructivist ban on universalistic thinking (in itself, paradoxically, a universalist stance) is not meant as a hostile move. Far from it: “The case against universality is often concerned with safeguarding tolerance and diversity” (Linklater, 1990, p. 141). However, tolerance is not a goal in itself. When tolerance is totalized (with the best of intentions) it becomes a kind of “liberal tyranny” where

[o]ne is allowed to grow and develop freely; one is even encouraged to find one’s own personal world view. If one finds such a world view [whatever it is] then it is accepted with an overbearing goodwill and *Allesverstehen* that precisely hinders this world view from being tried out in dialogue. Human growth, which should also be a growth in wisdom, is only possible in a dialectical relation with others. If this dialectic is replaced by tolerance and *Allesver-*

stehen, human growth is stunted (Skjervheim, 1996a, pp. 142–43, my translation, emphasis in original).

Dialogue is founded on the commitment to a common search for insight. A *political* dialogue, for instance, may be concerned with the question of “rational authority”; i.e., “the question of [. . .] whether institutions might exist that can be accepted by all and with which we can all identify” (Skjervheim, 1996d, p. 105). This question cannot be asked in the climate of anti-universalism that is (at least) latent in constructivism. Thus, when elevated to an *-ism*, constructivism runs a particular danger, namely

[t]he danger of the type of “totalizing” critique that seduces us into thinking that [. . .] there is no possibility of achieving a communal life based on undistorted communication, dialogue, communal judgement, and rational persuasion (Bernstein, 1983, p. 227).

The point I have been trying to make is that both essentialists and constructivists are participants in the historical dialogue, but that their own participation is distorted by the horizons of essentialism and constructivism. Furthermore, I am trying to argue that the transition to a dialectical horizon—which includes acknowledging dialogue as the regulative ideal for the practice of IR theorizing—is an important step out of this confusion. In the last instance, this is a question of the right way of being with others in the world—of preserving and promoting that valuable but tenuous middle ground in political and social life where “there can be genuine mutual participation and were reciprocal wooing and persuasion can prevail” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 227).

This dialogical ideal is just as valid for the relation between IR theorists and practitioners as for relations between nations. However, even if we can recognize dialogue as the ideal to which we aspire in human relations, including our political relations, it by no means the case that we currently live in a global dialogical community where rational persuasion has replaced force. This is certainly true of international relations, which in many ways remain the sphere where human nature appears, as Kant once put it, in its least lovable guise (Kant, 1996d, p. 309). Coming to grips with this discrepancy between ideal and practice should be one of the primary tasks of contemporary IR theory. Hopefully, this book may contribute to clear away some of the conceptual obstacles to such a project.

NOTES

1. “A just and lasting peace,” Nobel Lecture by Barack H. Obama, Oslo 10 December 2009. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2009/obama/26183-nobel-lecture-2009/> [29 January 2019].
2. Which corresponds in important ways to Bernstein’s (1983) objectivism and relativism.

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