

Agency, Structure, and International Politics

From ontology
to empirical inquiry

Friedman and Starr

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AGENCY, STRUCTURE, AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Debates surrounding agency and structure, and how these two concepts interrelate—debates which have long been of seminal importance to the social sciences as a whole—are of increasing and defining importance to international relations and politics as a field of inquiry and knowledge.

Agency and structure—actors, social entities, and the environments within which they act and exist—are the defining components of society and of the explanation of social phenomena. The agent-structure problem refers to questions concerning the interrelationship of agency and structure, and to the ways in which explanations of social phenomena integrate and account for them. This work examines the ontology of agency and structure in the international system and derives from these ontological considerations a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis of international relations.

Building on Most and Starr's view of opportunity (structural constraints and possibilities) and willingness (agency choice) as both necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for social action, Friedman and Starr argue that the causal interrelationships of agency and structure require these concepts to be defined autonomously, and to encompass explicitly delimited parameters of variability. The authors show that structuration-theoretic approaches to international politics inadequately attend to the variability of agency identity and interest, and to the social-structural foundations of this variability. From these, and from other metatheoretical considerations, the authors derive and propose a methodologically individualist model of the relationship between, on the one hand, multidimensional and dynamic socio-political contexts and, on the other, particular international political elite choice-processes. This is the first book to explore this subject in such depth; it is an important contribution to the study of international relations and politics.

Harvey Starr, Dag Hammarskjöld Professor in International Affairs at the University of South Carolina, is a widely experienced and respected academic in the field. **Gil Friedman** is pursuing his Ph.D. in Political Science, also at the University of South Carolina.

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PREFACE

What is it about the way back that makes it seem shorter? Most likely it is the familiarity and the increased understanding that we acquire along the way out. This study began as a circumscribed critique of Alexander Wendt's discussion of various ontological, epistemological, and methodological dimensions of the ever-illusive "agent-structure problem," and of Wendt and Dessler's claim that structuration theory represents a progressive research program for the study of international relations. We believed that the works of these scholars were limited and weakened by their omission of earlier contributions to the international politics agent-structure problem. These were initially presented in the work of Harold and Margaret Sprout, later revised and popularized in the work of Harvey Starr and his collaborators, especially the publications with Benjamin A. Most. Through the opportunity and willingness framework, Starr had devoted fruitful attention to the agent-structure problem for over a decade prior to the work of Wendt and Dessler.

Despite the relatively limited objectives characterizing the initiation of this study, we soon came to perceive a broader enterprise. We came to recognize that contribution to metatheoretical analysis required attention to some meaningful subset of the vast body of literature contemplating social theory and epistemology. Concomitantly, we came to support the normative view that the ultimate value of metatheoretical considerations derives from their contribution to the construction of compelling frameworks for the conduct of empirical inquiry. The analytic parameters of this study thus evolved from a rather narrow critique of a handful of works by international politics scholars concerned with the agent-structure problem to nothing less than extensive metatheoretical and substantive-theoretic deliberation.

The magnitude of the task has ensured the modesty, if not the incompleteness, of the arguments to follow. The metatheoretical analysis suffers from a most cursory reading of social theory and philosophy of science, and from a failure to represent a thorough review of the international politics agent-structure literature. Similarly, the development of substantively meaningful implications for

empirical analysis from these metatheoretical considerations raises at least as many questions as are answered.

These caveats in mind, the primary thesis of this study can be crudely coerced into the following sentence:

International politics can be fruitfully studied from a positivist methodological individualist perspective which attends to the multidimensional and dynamic socio-political contexts in which intentional elite action is embedded.

We neither presume (nor do we hope) to have settled debates concerning agency, structure, and international relations theory, nor do we claim to have produced in this book a self-contained and progressive theory of international relations (if we can even speak meaningfully of such methodological ideals). Our hope for this book is that it shortens future journeys across the metatheoretical-theoretical divide.

Harvey Starr would like to acknowledge with gratitude the congenial environment provided by the Department of International Relations of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University, during the spring and summer of 1996. During that time, as Visiting Fellow, he worked on revising an earlier draft of this book and benefited from his conversations with colleagues and students. Much of this took place during his seminar presentation of "Agency, Structure, and the Contextualisation of International Relations Explanation," in the Department of International Relations Seminar Series on "International Relations Theory in the Late 1990s: New Challenges, Different Agendas." He would especially like to thank Wynne Russell, Greg Fry, Jim Richardson, and John Ravenhill for their willingness to engage in friendly, but provocative, conversation and debate. Gil Friedman wishes to thank Christilla Roederer and Sten Rynning for their constructive criticism, and Sharough Akhavi, not only for his substantive insights but also for the inspiration he has perhaps unwittingly afforded. While we have also discussed our ideas with many others, the responsibility for the book that follows must fall upon us alone.

Gil Friedman
Harvey Starr

Part I

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INTRODUCTION: AGENCY, STRUCTURE, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPLANATION

INTRODUCTION

Agency and structure are the defining components for the understanding of human interaction within a society and of the explanation of social phenomena. The agent-structure problem refers to the general set of questions concerning the interrelationship of these two components, and to the ways in which explanations of social phenomena integrate them.

International political systems, like all social systems, are comprised of agents and structures. What is more, agency and structure are interrelated. This basic tenet of social theory is shared by the three most widely acclaimed modern social theorists—Durkheim, Weber, and Marx. Durkheim recognizes that social facts “consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.” But concomitantly, social facts “are the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively” (Lukes 1982:52, 54). For Weber, quite similarly, collectivities such as states, firms, and so on at once are “*solely* the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons,” and “have a meaning in the minds of individual persons, partly as of something actually existing, partly as something with normative authority...such ideas have a powerful, often a decisive, causal influence on the course of action of real individuals” (Weber 1968:31–32). Finally, Marx’s attention to the agent-structure dialectic receives eloquent expression in his oft-cited statement: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” (1978:595).

If we accept this most basic of sociological premises, attention to three questions becomes imperative: What do the terms “agency” and “structure” mean? How are these concepts interrelated? How might these concepts or properties of these concepts be combined to acquire knowledge about various social phenomena? These questions comprise the core of the agent-structure problem.

The agent-structure problem is thus one of the most fundamental problems in the study of social phenomena. Suppositions concerning agency, structure, and their interrelationship bear directly upon the role of social structure in the understanding of social action, and, conversely, the role of social action in the construction, or reconstruction, of social structure. In addition, scholars have argued that such suppositions have important implications for the logic underlying the discovery and validation of knowledge concerning social phenomena. Therefore, answers to these three questions have epistemological, methodological, theoretic, and substantive implications. However implicitly or explicitly stated, suppositions concerning agency and structure are in one form or another necessarily embodied in any explanation of social action and social change. Hence, explicit attention to the logic of the agency-structure dynamic contributes to the construction, comparative analysis, and empirical application of the theory of international politics.

It is the primary aim of this book to address the three basic questions raised above. We will do so using a set of issues originally raised in the review and critique of the extant international relations literature debating the nature of the agent-structure problem (involving the work of Wendt, Dessler, Hollis and Smith, and Carlsnaes, among others). Another aim of this book derives from the premise that the value of metatheoretic deliberations is ultimately realized in their contribution to the conduct of empirical inquiry. Accordingly, this book seeks to derive implications for substantive theory of international politics from the metatheoretical arguments that it offers.

THE ECOLOGICAL TRIAD AND OPPORTUNITY AND WILLINGNESS

It is useful to contextualize the content of this book within a “natural history” of explicit attention to the agent-structure problem by contemporary scholars of international politics. Towards this effort, we may consider the Sprouts and Starr as the first generation of international politics agent-structure theorists. The work of Harold and Margaret Sprout (1956, 1965, 1968, 1969)—especially as refined and applied by Starr (1978) and Most and Starr (1983, 1984, 1989)—has been used explicitly to address the agent-structure problem, and in so doing has made significant contributions to our understanding of the study and substance of international politics. The Sprouts’ (1968:11–21; 1956:17–19; 1969:42) notion of the “ecological triad”—i.e., entity, its environment, and entity-environment relationships—addresses the relationship between agency and structure. The Sprouts provide three useful ways to address the ecological triad: environmental possibilism, cognitive behaviorism, and environmental probabilism. Environmental possibilism refers to structure and is defined as “a number of factors which limit human opportunities, which constrain the type of action that can be taken as well as the consequences of that action” (Most and Starr 1989:27). Cognitive behaviorism represents “the simple and familiar principle that a person reacts to his

milieu as he apperceives it—that is, as he perceives and interprets it in light of past experience” (Sprout and Sprout 1969:45; cited in Most and Starr 1989:28). Environmental probabilism is a third way to look at the entity-environment relationship. It represents both the core concept of uncertainty in political behavior (Cioffi-Revilla and Starr 1995:451) and what may be viewed as a synthesis of these first two relationships. Environmental probabilism refers to “explanation or prediction by means of a generalized model, of the average or typical person’s reaction to a given milieu” (Sprout and Sprout 1956:50). In other words, the attributes of an agent’s environment “provide cues as to the probability of certain outcomes” (Most and Starr 1989:27).

The Sproutian alternatives concerning the relationship between entity and environment—i.e., environmental possibilism, environmental probabilism, and cognitive behaviorism—were developed by the Sprouts “as alternatives to environmental determinism, where, by definition, decision makers are incapable of choice given the characteristics of the environment, or ‘milieu’ (Sprout and Sprout 1969:44)” (Most and Starr 1989:27).¹ Most and Starr’s (1989:27, 29) discussion of the virtues of the ecological triad can itself be viewed as a statement of the agent-structure problem:

The advantages of this framework...derive from its applicability to any number of levels of analysis. That is...the concept of the ecological triad argues that we need to look at the ongoing policy/choice processes within that entity [the unit of analysis], its context or environment, and then the interaction between the entity and the environment.... It should be clear that the ecological triad calls for the study of *both* entity and environment, and most importantly, how the two are related. The ultimate entities—single decision makers or small groups of decision makers—are surrounded by factors that structure the nature of the decision, the options available, the consequences, costs, and benefits of those options. Individuals, then, make choices within a complex set of *incentive structures*. This can be captured only by looking at all three parts of the ecological triad.

The opportunity and willingness framework as developed in Starr (1978) and Most and Starr (1989) represents a reformulation of the Sproutian discussion of the agent-structure problem. “Opportunity,” based on environmental possibilism, refers primarily to the “possibility of interaction.” In other words, “it closely parallels the idea that what humans do is constrained by the actual possibilities in the ‘objective’ environment.” Important sources of possibility include geopolitical factors such as proximity and borders (see Starr and Most 1976; Most and Starr 1989; Starr 1991c), as well as the various means by which humans manipulate this environment—technology (see also Most and Starr 1989:30–31). Opportunity, following environmental possibilism, also refers to “the existence of capabilities that permit the creation of opportunities.... Capabilities, then, not only may promote, but actually permit interaction” (Most and Starr 1989:30).

Willingness, closely related to cognitive behaviorism, refers to “the choice (and process of choice) that is related to the selection of some behavioral option from a range of alternatives. Willingness thus refers to the willingness to choose (even if the choice is no action), and to employ available capabilities to further some policy option over others” (Most and Starr 1989:23).

Most and Starr demonstrate that these two pretheoretic concepts can serve as organizing concepts for the international relations literature. In other words, Most and Starr demonstrate that the various explanations of international conflict can be categorized according to opportunity and willingness. This endeavor is valuable not only because it demonstrates the pedagogic utility of the opportunity and willingness framework but also because it highlights the notion that all independent variables explaining social phenomena can be characterized as either agentic or structural variables.

Moreover, Starr and his collaborators depict the interrelationship between agency and structure in the terms of Russett’s menu metaphor (Russett 1972:112–113; see also Russett and Starr 1996:22–23). The menu “provides a number of behavioral/choice possibilities, not determining the diner’s choice, but limiting it” (Most and Starr 1989:28). First, the agent must be able to “read” the menu (cognitive behaviorism). This also reflects the Sprouts’ insistence that agents must be aware of the possibilities made available by the environment. The menu presents such possibilities to the agent (environmental possibilism). Factors based in both the agent (values, preferences, resources, etc.) and the structure (prices, size of portion, reputation for certain dishes, etc.) will make certain choices more or less likely (environmental probabilism).

The menu is also useful for thinking about the relationships between opportunity and willingness. Most and Starr (1989) as well as Cioffi-Revilla and Starr (1995) demonstrate how opportunities (the menu) create the incentive structures for willingness (the food orders actually chosen). Indeed, a common theme in those works (as well as Siverson and Starr 1991) is how opportunity can generate greater levels of willingness; but they also treat how willingness can lead to different levels of opportunity. The latter idea reflects the notion that an agent can ask for something that is *not* on the menu.² By so doing, the agent may also change the menu itself. As noted in Siverson and Starr (1991) and Starr (1991c), technological innovation both changes the meaning of the geopolitical context (see also Goertz 1994) as well as the available set of environmental possibilities. Similarly, all human innovation, including the creation of new ideas, ideologies, modes of organization, or production, changes the “menu.” Many of these changes are unintended, but others, such as weapons development, are clearly aimed at revising environmental possibilities.

A fundamental premise of the opportunity and willingness framework is that “both the environmental/structural level and the decision-making/choice level are required for a full description and explanation of international relations phenomena” (Most and Starr 1989:23).³ This pretheoretic hypothesis itself might be viewed as a statement of the agent-structure problem, and as such, represents a

central prescription for theories of international politics. But Starr and some of his collaborators have additionally derived significant methodological, theoretical, and metatheoretical implications from a synthesis of this pretheoretic agent-structure hypothesis with the conceptualization of international political outcomes such as war as the spatio-temporal intersection of agency choice.⁴

The first such implication concerns what Thomas Cook and Donald T. Campbell (1979:39–41) subsume under the term statistical conclusion validity. Specifically, since all parties to an outcome must have opportunity and willingness for particular decisions constituting the components of an international outcome, research designs which do not account for the joint necessity of opportunity *and* willingness for *all* actors involved may commit the error of concluding in favor of the null hypothesis. Most and Starr (1989:82–83) state this research design problem in the context of the explanation of war:

Even if the hypothesis of an *intranational* interactive effect between opportunity and willingness is valid to the extent that having high levels of both is sufficient for being war ready, the consensual definition of war suggests another series of interactive relationships at the international level that involve characteristics or attributes of each of the opposing parties in such a conflict. As a result, it is not at all clear, and certainly not logical to expect, that attributes of individual countries...should be sufficient for, or covary with, such states' degrees of war involvement. The only world in which such covariations would exist would be one in which each and every war-ready actor is counterposed with at least one other war-ready party. Short of such a world, the occurrence of war should not be expected to covary with individual states' level of opportunity or capacity or even with the outcome or product of individual states' levels of opportunity *and* willingness.

This means, of course, that scholars would be likely to be led astray if they were to test any of the following hypotheses:

- 1 if O_i , then war
- 2 if W_i , then war
- 3 if O_i or W_i , then war
- 4 if O_i and W_i , then war

While all four of these hypotheses are of the “If..., then...” variety in which one or more attributes is posited as a sufficient condition for the occurrence of war and together they constitute the standard way in which scholars probe for underlying relationships, none of them would be supported by the empirical evidence. Scholars examining the *i*th actor's capacities, its willingness, or even the interaction of those two factors with a view toward discovering whether or not they are sufficient for war would be led to the conclusion that such variables are not important for determin-

ing that actor's war participation. Because they would be searching for sufficient relationships and for covariations that are consistent with that type of logical connective, they would be likely either to abandon a focus on capacity, willingness, and their interaction, or to conclude that such factors are at best only marginally important.

(Most and Starr 1989:82–83)

Another contribution concerns the logical structure of the opportunity and willingness hypothesis and implications of this structure for the frequency of international political outcomes (Cioffi-Revilla and Starr 1995). Drawing on the menu analogy, Most and Starr (1989: ch. 5) note that opportunity or willingness can operationally occur or be made available in a *number* of alternative, non-unique ways. Alternative possibilities or bases for choice produce “substitutability,” which Most and Starr see as crucial for understanding the logic of causality, and thus, research design.

Looking at opportunity and willingness and substitutability, Cioffi-Revilla and Starr (1995) distinguish between a first-order causality of world politics (willingness and opportunity) at the analytical level, and a deeper second-order causality of substitutability at the operational level. The first order (necessary) elements of opportunity and willingness are linked by the Boolean AND, while the range of possible modes of (sufficient) second order substitutability are connected by the Boolean OR. Cioffi-Revilla and Starr then formalize and analyze political uncertainty of international behavior, along with willingness, opportunity, and their substitutability, at both the analytical and operational levels. In so doing, they mathematically derive a number of interesting insights into the agent-structure problem, especially in regard to the relationship between agency and structure.

For example, they demonstrate that “the basic laws” that govern the occurrence of political events in real world politics are nonlinear and often counterintuitive. On the one hand, regarding first-order causality, “international behavior is *always less likely* than the necessary conditions (willingness and opportunity) that bring it about” (1995:469; emphasis added). However, when looking at second-order causality, willingness and opportunity “are *always more likely to occur* than any of the substitutable modes (operational events taken from an actor's ‘menu for choice’) that specifically produce them” (1995:469; emphasis added). Cioffi-Revilla and Starr's model, by dealing with the linkages between opportunity (structure) and willingness (agency), also explains the phenomenon of turbulence—change and complexity—in world politics. They present proofs to indicate that as new and substitutable forms of opportunity and willingness increase, they induce sharp increases in the observed variety and frequency of international behaviors. These analyses cast the notions of causality, proximity, and historical context into an entirely new light.

To summarize, agency and structure are the defining components of society and accordingly of explanation in the social sciences. The need to theorize about

the meaning and interrelationships of these terms and to combine them in explanations of social phenomena forms the crux of the agent-structure problem. Explicit attention to the agent-structure problem within the context of international relations began with the work of the Sprouts and the extension of this work by Most and Starr. Motivated largely by the intention of overcoming the problems inherent in structurally determinist theory, the Sproutian notion of the “ecological triad”—i.e., entity, environment, and entity-environment relationships—emphasized the need to combine agency and structure into probabilistic explanations of international politics. The opportunity and willingness framework, in turn, reconfigured the Sproutian ecological triad to formulate the pretheoretic hypothesis that opportunity and willingness are jointly necessary conditions of social action. This pretheoretic hypothesis was utilized by Starr and his collaborators to organize the international conflict literature, and derive various useful metatheoretical, methodological, and theoretical conclusions.

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP CONCERNING AGENCY AND STRUCTURE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Since the publications of the works of the Sprouts and Most and Starr, certain scholars of international relations have explicitly attended to the agent-structure problem (for example, note Wendt 1987, 1992a; Dessler 1989; Hollis and Smith 1990; Carlsnaes 1992). This literature has emphasized at least two important sets of issues which did not receive extensive attention by the first generation of international relations agent-structure theorists.

The first set of issues, which may be referred to as the “ontological agent-structure problem,” concerns the conceptualization and interrelationships of agency and structure. Wendt (1987, 1992a) argues that theories of international relations can and must endogenize—or explain change—in both agency and structure. The thesis holds that “ontologically reductionist” theories, i.e., theories which do not endogenize both agency and structure, are inferior to those which do (see also Dessler 1989; Carlsnaes 1992). Wendt (1987, 1992a) and Dessler (1989) critique structural realism as an exemplar of international relations theory which inadequately attends to the dynamic logic of the interrelationship between agency and structure. Notwithstanding differences, the general solution to the problem of capturing the agency-structure dialectic proffered by these scholars is an intersubjectivist ontology which draws heavily from structuration theory (Giddens 1984) and scientific realism (Bhaskar 1978, 1979, 1986).

The second set of important theses forwarded in this literature is epistemological and can thus be termed the “epistemological agent-structure problem.” The primary thesis is that a subjectivist ontology is incompatible with a positivist epistemology and instead requires an interpretivist epistemology (Wendt 1987; Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Hollis and Smith 1990). In addition, “agent-based” explanation is associated with the explanation of the actual, the “why,” and his-

torical analysis, while “structure-based” explanation is associated with the possible, or “how,” and abstract causal explanation (Wendt 1987).

Defining the agent-structure problem

The first aim of this book is to refute and redevelop these arguments. We begin analysis of the ontological agent-structure problem by distinguishing between this problem, on the one hand, and the methodological agent-structure problem on the other. The methodological agent-structure problem, in turn, is comprised of two distinct components. First, the postulation of causal relationships between two or more variables requires that one or more variables in this explanation be exogenized. This point can be elaborated and illustrated by reference to the statistical technique of causal modeling, which requires that one or more variables be exogenized in order to uniquely identify a set of simultaneous equations. The second methodological agent-structure problem issue concerns the historically embedded nature of the agent-structure problem (dialectic). Simply, given that social phenomena are historically embedded, it is necessary to slice into history *at some point in time*. Thus, some historical manifestations of the interrelationship between agency and structure are exogenized. Finally, theoretical and empirical exogenization of one or more variables is not only required on logical grounds, but also serves useful methodological functions. As elaborated in Lakatos’s (1970) discussion of sophisticated methodological falsificationism, the need to leave certain assumed conceptualizations and hypotheses unrefuted is useful because it both provides continuity to theoretical development and affords research programs the needed time, and thus the occasion, to discover novel facts, corroborate these facts, and resolve anomalies.

The methodological agent-structure problem is crucial *inter alia* because it points to the importance of deliberation about exogenization in the construction of theories of international relations. It is especially relevant in the present analysis because it points to the fact that all theories must remain incomplete, but that theoretical incompleteness is not *ipso facto* a sign of a degenerative research program. Yet, despite the significance of the methodological agent-structure problem, this problem does not speak directly to the conceptualizations of agency and structure and to the implications of these conceptualizations for the postulation of causal relationship(s) between agency and structure. These concerns are the terrain of the ontological agent-structure problem.

Given the centrality of conceptualization in the ontological agent-structure problem, it is useful to preface this discussion with a model of concept formation. Of particular use is Sartori’s (1970, 1984) view of a concept as a term with general, abstract defining properties which can be disaggregated into continuously more refined and specific attributes. In other words, conceptualizations may be viewed as ladders of abstraction on which analysts can climb up and down as theoretical and empirical requisites dictate.

More to the point, this model of concept formation allows for the explicit and

systematic derivation of empirical concepts, including variables, from general, abstract concepts which may be viewed as the defining properties of the terms “agency” and “structure.” To understand the ontological agent-structure problem, the conceptualization of agency is especially vital. At the apex of the ladder of abstraction, agency is comprised of agency consciousness. Agency consciousness is a generative property of agency in the sense that it allows for agency choice. Together, consciousness and power of choice capture the core meaning of agency—the ability to interpret and the power to choose among not only different behavioral options, but also among different interests, identities, decision-making procedures, etc. It follows quite deductively from these properties, in turn, that agents are intentional beings. Given this deduction, Elster’s (1986) delineation of the components of intentional choice allow us to further disaggregate agency choice into desires, beliefs, and behavioral options. Though these properties can of course be disaggregated further, for the purposes of explicating the ontological agent-structure problem this general conceptualization of agency suffices.

While the definition of agency will receive more attention later, the primary concern at present is to emphasize that, given the Sartorian model of concept formation, it is possible to identify two ontological criteria for causal explanation. In other words, conceptualizations of agency and structure must fulfill two criteria in order to postulate causal relationships between the defining properties of these pretheoretic concepts. First, they must be conceptualized as autonomous, irreducible entities. The problem of conceptual autonomy refers to the following question: does the term “agency” refer to a defining property of the term “structure?” If so, then our conceptualization of agency is not conceptually autonomous from our conceptualization of structure.

While this criterion may seem quite obvious, important theories of international relations, such as world systems theory, do not satisfy it. In organismic conceptualizations of society more generally, agents, or more accurately, roles, represent one of the defining properties of structure. As a result, it is impossible to posit causal relationships between agency and structure because these relationships are given by definition. For example, we cannot speak of an organism causing organs, or vice versa. Thus, organismic conceptualizations do not satisfy the conceptual autonomy criterion of causal explanation.

Furthermore, while the conceptual autonomy criterion applies to any two or more theoretical concepts which the theorist wants to combine into a causal explanation, when agency and structure are not conceptualized autonomously, this failure has an additional detrimental consequence concerning the specification of their interrelationship. Social facts exist externally to any particular individual rather than to the set of individuals comprising the social system as a whole, and whether or not agents reify social structures, and the extent to which they do, is variable. Conceptualizations of agency and structure which treat agents as defining components of structure, however, fail to preserve these attributes of the interrelationship between agency and structure. Accordingly,

ontologies that fail to satisfy the criterion of conceptual autonomy preclude the ability to propose agency intentional behavior, or agency choice amongst a plurality of identities and interests.

This brings us to the second criterion for causal explanation—the variability criterion. The variability criterion means simply that in order to posit theoretical relationships between the attributes of agency and structure, these attributes must be defined as variables. In general terms, this criterion is warranted by the simple tenet of logic that only variables, and not constants, can explain the variance in other variables.

While the variability criterion for causal explanation is easy to grasp, the actual postulation of such variation is a central problem in international relations theory, for this criterion begs crucial questions for theorists of international relations: What is change? When theorists of international politics claim that we need theories which explain variation in agency and/or structure, what kind of variation do they mean? What are the theoretical and empirical parameters of such variation? What are the functional forms of variable relationships? How enduring is such change? At least three general types of variation are implied by the preceding: (1) variation in agency desires, or interests; (2) variation in the relative importance of assorted agency roles; and (3) transformation of the very social roles adapted by agents.

Amongst those theoretical approaches which do not satisfy the ontological criteria for causal explanation is, in fact, Wendt's (1987) theoretical prescription for resolution of the ontological agent-structure problem. Wendt proposes a generative approach to the ontological relationship between agency and structure which derives agency identity and interests directly from social relations. According to this approach, agency identities refer to the substance of social relations. Thus, for example, a slave-master relation means that agents are either slaves or masters, a parent-child relation means that agents are either parents or children, and so on.

Wendt's generative approach is problematic because it conflates agency with social role. Specifically, what are given by social relationships are social roles not agents. The generative approach to agency and structure, then, fails to satisfy the conceptual autonomy criterion because it treats agency, or more to the point social roles, as defining components of social relations. Accordingly, this approach obscures precisely those elements of agency which are central in a worthwhile conceptualization of agency-agency interpretability and choice. Such an approach fails to recognize that agents may play a plurality of oftentimes competing social roles associated with divergent interests, and that agents may value each of the roles in this set to a different extent in any given decision-making context. Thus, Wendt's prescription of a generative approach to the ontological agent-structure problem fails to satisfy the variability criterion of causal explanation. For these two reasons, then, it is unable adequately to theorize about the interrelationship between agency and structure.

Having delineated the ontological and methodological agent-structure prob-

lems, we are able to address the issue of whether or not theories which do not endogenize both agency and structure are degenerative. If theories of international relations do not endogenize all attributes of agency and structure because of the need to bracket, then their failure to endogenize these attributes is not degenerative. If a theorist exogenizes certain elements of agency and/or structure because he or she believes these elements to be empirically constant, then, on logical grounds, and given the key role of empirical corroboration in the adjudication among theories, this absence of variation is not degenerative. If, however, a theory is incapable of explaining variation in both agency and structure because it fails to fulfill one or both of the conceptualization criteria of causal explanation, then it is defective. Ultimately, as Lakatos emphasizes, theories must be evaluated relative to other theories. And in three-cornered fights between two theories and empirical evidence, the satisfaction of the ontological criteria of causal explanation may serve as one of the bases of comparison. Finally, theories which explain variation in defining attributes of agency and structure must be analyzed in light of the above criteria for theoretical evaluation. That is, a theory which explains social transformation is not in itself superior to one which proposes stasis.

Much of Wendt's discussion has been centered on a critique and comparison of neorealism and world systems theory. In so doing he tries to show how his conceptualization of the agent-structure problem provides a more powerful critique of neorealism. Having delineated our view of the ontological basis for comparative analysis, it is therefore of use to apply our framework to a critique of structural realism. Specifically, a critique of structural realism's invariant premise of self-help demonstrates the utility of our formulations, especially in relation to other critiques of structural realism. Our critique also provides possible methods of integrating variation into the realist model of self-help.

This analysis begins with a dispositional statement of the self-help hypothesis. Given that the agent-structure problem and the opportunity and willingness framework posit the inevitability of both agency and structure in the explanation of social phenomena, self-help derives from the *conjunction* of anarchy and agent insecurity. It follows that a shift from self-help can result from a shift in the ordering principle of anarchy and/or a shift from agency insecurity. Given that most scholars concerned with the problem of international cooperation have tended to frame their explanations *within* the context of an anarchic system (e.g., Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1984; Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1992a), and given that the assumed nature of state interests is a central element of Wendt's charge that structural realism is individually ontologically reductionist, we focus attention on the ontological foundations of structural realism's postulation of agency insecurity.

Although Waltz explicitly frames his suppositions concerning the state in microeconomic terms, state insecurity derives directly and necessarily from Waltz's conceptualization of international structure. Each of the three vertically arranged dimensions of structure clearly implicate, one might even say generate in the Wendtian sense, agency insecurity. Functional specification is implied in

the “sameness” of the units in an anarchic system and in Waltz’s position that the capabilities of the system refer to those relevant to the performance of the function of the actors. Given that the capabilities in Waltz’s model of structure are generally those pertinent to the preservation or enhancement of geopolitical security, agent insecurity is quite clearly given by Waltz’s model of structure. Returning to the issue of movement away from self-help, this argument implies two points. First, we may view structural realism as placing a double lock on the self-help system in that it both assumes and derives state insecurity. Second, if we accept the structuralist foundations of state insecurity, then Waltz’s self-help thesis—resulting again from the conjunction of state insecurity and anarchy—is given by Waltz’s definition of structure. Note, however, that the logical inconsistency in structural realism’s hypothesis of balance-of-power politics does not bear upon the empirical validity of the self-help claim.

Waltz’s theory fails to satisfy both of the ontological criteria for causal explanation. To recognize how it fails the conceptual autonomy criterion, we point out that Waltz’s theory does not adequately distinguish between the ordering principle and structural differentiation. Put differently, anarchy itself refers to the coaction of *like* units, and these units are similar for Waltz precisely because they are self-interested actors pursuing security. Accordingly, the identities and interests of states, i.e., to pursue security through the norm of self-help, is basically given from Waltz’s conceptualization of anarchy.

The above analysis also points to deficiencies in other critiques of structural realism’s inability to explain social transformation (Ruggie 1986; Dessler 1989; Wendt 1992a). One general point propounded in these critiques is that Waltz’s theory is unable to explain social transformation because it precludes unit-level processes from his conceptualization of structure. Another point emphasized by proponents of an intersubjectivist ontology is that the central structural property is the set of constitutive and regulative rules which signify and enable agency social action (Dessler 1989; Wendt 1992a).

In response to Ruggie’s suggestion that structural realism would benefit from integration of the Durkheimian notion of dynamic density, it should be pointed out that this notion is fundamentally incompatible with structural realism. Of the incompatibilities in Waltzian and Durkheimian theory, at least two deserve mention. First, dynamic density was important for Durkheim precisely in his efforts to account for functional differentiation, a structural property which does not even exist in Waltz’s vision of structure. Second, it is wholly consistent with the realist approach to contend that an increase in dynamic density as defined by Durkheim (i.e., increased volume and frequency of interactions resulting from such social trends as increased population growth, urbanization, and improved transportation and communication, similar to Choucri and North’s [1975] concept of “lateral pressure,”) reinforces if not intensifies the need of each state to focus on geopolitical self-help.

More central to present concerns are the critiques of Dessler and Wendt that an intersubjectivist ontology is generally superior to the Waltzian model, and,

relatedly, is capable of explaining social transformation. While these scholars usefully underscore the importance of social construction in the transformation and very conceptualization of international politics, their arguments do not provide an adequate model of social construction. These scholars insufficiently recognize that shared meanings, institutions, etc. can constrain. That is, such shared meanings can operate as social facts, just as much as those properties of Waltz's international political structure (anarchy and the distribution of capabilities). Conversely, anarchy and the distribution of capabilities enable as well as constrain social action no less than do the constitutive and regulative rules emphasized by Dessler and Wendt.

More importantly, these theorists do not adequately present meaningful parameters of variation in international politics, or the mechanisms responsible for such variation. In other words, given the assumption that actors in the international system subscribe to the institution of self-help, an adequate model of social construction must clearly embed the norm of self-help within other equally empirically meaningful norms, and identify the mechanisms which would move agents towards these other norms. Wendt's discussion of the symbolic interactive processes of identity transformation proposes an important component of social construction. But such processes might best be viewed as the nuts and bolts of identity formation which do not address the very stimuli which cause, say, a move away from self-help.

A central deficiency in the works of these scholars is their failure to adequately consider that the ultimate source of such variation is in the agent-structure dialectic itself. It is in this regard that their criticism of structural realism, and claim of the superiority of intersubjectivist accounts of international politics, is most troubling, for the very (re)construction of international politics which they emphasize is dependent in significant part on the distribution of power. In other words, power, among other factors, plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning.

The intersubjectivist accounts of Dessler and Wendt advance the notion of a set of international system-level shared meanings, rules, institutions, etc. This postulation of a single-level, more or less monolithic intersubjective structure has at least two deficiencies. First, if agents of international politics identify with a plurality of roles and institutions, system-level intersubjectivist ontologies preclude consideration of the *complete* set of rules which signify and enable agency social action. Such a monolithic conceptualization of intersubjective structure also undermines consideration of the variability in the structural milieu in which different agents of international politics are embedded. If an actor may choose among a set of rules indigenous to different social systems, then it follows that those rules of any single social system are not necessarily operative for the agent at any particular time. It follows, in other words, that those rules are not necessarily *the* rules foremost in the psyche of the agent in the moment of social action. In fact, these two problems lead to a final problem with the intersubjectivist approach: that in the explanation of social action the set of operative constitutive

and regulative rules might best be viewed as an individual-, rather than system-level, property.

Having delineated the ontological and methodological agent-structure problems and having applied these problems to neorealism and the constructivist model of international structure, it is necessary to analyze the epistemological agent-structure problem. International relations scholars concerned with the agent-structure problem have made erroneous arguments concerning the relationship between the agent-structure dichotomy and epistemological approaches to the study of social phenomena. Three such arguments can be identified. First, Hollis and Smith (1990) contend that, on the one hand, agency-based explanations are related to understanding, and that, on the other, structure-based explanations are related to explanation. Similarly, Wendt (1987) holds that agency and structure refer to qualitatively distinct components of an explanation of social phenomena, with the latter explaining the possible and the former the actual. Wendt adds, moreover, that explanation of the possible requires abstract analysis and that explanation of the actual requires historical analysis. Thus, despite differences, these scholars generally contend that interpretivism and positivism represent two distinct epistemological orientations and that a subjectivist thesis of agency is incompatible with a positivist epistemology.⁵

Contrary to this widely endorsed view, interpretive sociology and its emphasis upon the interpretive subjectivist thesis of agency *are* commensurate with positivist epistemology. Interpretive sociological analysis must inevitably rely on nomothetic explanation, i.e., abstract concept formation, classification of singular or empirical statements according to these general concepts, and causal explanations based on laws. Given both the probabilistic nature of explanation of social phenomena and the joint necessity of agency and structure, Wendt is incorrect in associating agency with explanation of the actual, and structure with explanation of the possible. The inadequacy of the distinction between explanation of the actual and the possible in conjunction with the inevitable role of theory in the interpretation of singular statements, undermines Wendt's association of abstract, causal explanation with explanation of the possible, and historical analysis with explanation of the actual. Finally, values emphasized by interpretivists, notably intelligibility of explanation to the subject, empathic understanding, and context, are methodological predispositions subsumable under positivism. In fact, one may argue that these values receive more precise and comprehensive treatment within rather than outside the context of a positivist epistemology. A notable example of this concerns the conceptualization of context embodied in Most and Starr's (1989: ch. 5) treatment of "nice laws." While working through the logic of research design, Most and Starr (1989:98) argue the importance of recognizing "the potential existence of 'sometimes true,' domain specific laws." As with classic laws of physics, causal relations should be seen as quite specific, and to hold only under explicitly specified conditions.

FROM ONTOLOGY TO EMPIRICAL INQUIRY

While clarifying the agent-structure problem is important in its own right, the value of these philosophical deliberations ultimately rests upon the contribution they make to the quality of our empirical theories.⁶ That is, what are the implications of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological agent-structure problems for the substantive-theoretic and empirical analysis of international politics? It is the second general aim of this book to address this question.

A useful place to begin this endeavor is with the unit of analysis problem. Indeed, true to Sartori's dictum that the extension of a concept derives logically from its intension, or defining properties, the conceptualization of agency presented above has clear implications for the unit of analysis. Simply, the interpretive and intentional choice defining attributes of agency dictate an extension to individual human beings. That agents are "powerful" actors whose social actions influence outcomes, moreover, is captured by a broadly conceived notion of elites. These are individuals who by virtue of their *de jure* or *de facto* power exert influence over the formulation and implementation of decisions which affect the course of international relations. Thus, the unit of analysis implied by this conceptualization of agency is the individual international political elite.

While recognizing that substantive theories and empirical analyses must rely, indeed are comprised of, simplifying assumptions, of which the unit of analysis may be one, we will pursue the theoretical implications of focusing on individual international political elites as the unit of analysis. Indeed, we find not only that such a focus is warranted given the conceptualization of agency, but that such a focus also entails fruitful theoretical implications. A first and absolutely vital advantage of focusing on individual elites as the unit of analysis is that doing so provides the conceptual space for recognizing that agents of international politics are situated within concentrically arranged layers of structure. Theorizing from the individual international political elite's point of view allows the analyst to pull together in a logically coherent fashion the various layers of agent structure. Furthermore, because each agent is faced with a *set* of structures, it is highly unlikely that agents of international politics share the same set of structures. For example, agents interacting on the international level might face similar international structures but different regional ones. Or, agents might share similar international and regional structures but different domestic ones. It is certainly probable that agents involved in international relations with each other do not share the same set of layers of structure. Importantly, the layered agent-specific properties of structure capture the interpretive emphasis on webs of significance. These properties also provide the foundation for incorporating variability into the agent-structure relationship.

A second theoretical advantage of focusing on individual elites as the unit of analysis is that such a focus points to the centrality of *social choice* in the explanation of international political outcomes. Important work along these lines has already been developed, for example, by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and his col-

laborators (1985, 1990, 1994, 1996) and Zeev Maoz (1990). Relatedly, focusing on individuals as the units of analysis lends itself to the incorporation of networks analysis into the study of international politics. Such analysis can map elites according to interests, policy preferences, and resource exchange networks. In general the variables emphasized in this literature contribute to an explanation of international social choice outcomes and processes, and the structures of conflict and consensus.

Agency values comprise an integral component of the processes and outcomes of social choice and conflict. Perceptions of the (potential) impact of external developments upon satisfaction of particular values constitute levels of opportunity and threat, which in turn motivate agency (in)action, and, contribute to levels of stress. Agency beliefs concerning the linkages among a set of particular choice options and the realization of agency values provide the basis of agency utility functions and preference rankings. Agency values also directly impinge upon risk propensity, resolve, and issue salience—factors which in turn are vital elements in an account of the competitiveness and policy outcomes of social choice systems. To the extent that the relative salience of issues is based upon differences in the relationships of these issues to agency values, agency values also represent an integral element in the development of the probability and parameters of bargaining situation issue-linkages. It follows from all of these linkages between agency values and other components of agency social action, finally, that a model of agency values lies at the heart of an interpretive understanding of social action.

Accordingly, we seek to develop a model of agency values which enables the development of meaningful manifestations of the linkages identified above. This model should permit hypotheses concerning variation in both the absolute and relative significance, if any, of any particular value in any particular issue space, and the relative salience of particular issues, both across a set of actors and for any particular actor over time.

Grand-theoretic approaches to international politics generally emphasize legitimate types of agency values, but afford minimal insight into the development of a model which can account for the type of variation described above. Realist, Marxian, and bureaucratic politics approaches generally associate agency interests with single and narrowly conceived social roles, the state, class, governmental organization, etc., and rational choice theory tends to exogenize the substance of agency values altogether. Idealist/liberalist theories of international politics generally either exogenize agency values and point to the added utility and/or effectiveness of cooperation in the context of these exogenized values, or view norms associated with cooperation as the very values realized. Given the general myopia of grand-theoretic approaches to agency desires, and recalling the problem of the centrality of variation in agency interests in order to hypothesize a move away from self-help consistent with realist tenets, we should expect an adequate model of agency values to explain variation in the relative salience of

the many substantive values emphasized by diverse approaches to international politics.

We propose that Abraham Maslow's (1943, 1954) theory of motivation can provide the foundation for a general model of agency values which satisfies these criteria. The general notion of a need hierarchy is that agents harbor a hierarchy of needs organized in order of priority and that they move to higher levels of needs only after having satisfactorily fulfilled lower, more basic, needs. While we presume that individual international political elites indeed harbor an *individual-level* hierarchy of needs such as the one devised by Maslow, we emphasize *organizational* need hierarchies. In other words, we assume that international political elites attribute need hierarchies to the politically relevant organizations with which they most closely identify, e.g., states, state bureaucracies, multinational corporations, international governmental organizations, and the like.

Finally, the theory of international political motivation suggests an integral dimension of social change. The parameters of variability in agency values are derived from the hierarchy of needs and layered nature of agency structure. More specifically, it is necessary to differentiate among within-system value change and value system transformation. Two types of within-system change in elite intentional behavior can be identified. First, elites' most important values can shift within the international political needs hierarchy from basic needs through to higher needs, or vice versa. Second, the level of those values of primary importance in elite evaluation of international political issues may shift, as can the outright amount of attention paid to international, rather than internal, political issues. Transformation of value systems, meanwhile, refers to a change in the very nature of the need hierarchies of political elites. In other words, elite conceptualization of basic needs may shift, e.g., from geopolitical security to environmental, technological, security. Such shifts in the quality of basic (and higher needs), in turn, may contribute to a shift in the primary bases of power, conflict/cooperation, and socialization, and, consequently, in the most prominent group identities of political elites. Given the importance of attention to variation *within* and *of* international political elite value systems, finally, this study presents a preliminary review of some mechanisms which may be useful in accounting for these variations. At least four types of mechanisms may contribute to such understanding: technological development; instrumental stimulus-response; elite (i.e., cohort) circulation; diffusion and inter-elite social linkages.

Though we do not claim to provide a logically consistent and self-contained theory, our arguments point to theoretically grounded and fruitful puzzles for future theorizing about international politics. In particular, at least three puzzles may be identified. First, the incorporation of networks analysis into international relations deserves further consideration. Second, the notion of an international politics hierarchy of needs requires further elaboration. Moreover, reliance on the need hierarchy to develop useful conceptualizations and operationalizations of particular variables integral to explanations of international bargaining outcomes, such as risk propensity and resolve, deserve further consideration.

Finally, one implication concerns theorizing about the need to integrate and balance the very opportunities and constraints *each* of these layers of structure present. Importantly, an agent's set of layers of structure are often *linked*. Agent behavior within one structure or arena may influence the agent's standing in another structure or arena, and the structural change in one arena may influence the agent's standing in another arena.⁷ In this way, we hope to encourage far-sighted analysis in international politics. We hope to encourage both empirical analysis and substantive theory firmly grounded in explicit and compelling social theory, and, conversely, metatheoretical deliberations which are explicitly linked to the empirical inquiry of international politics.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into eight chapters. [Chapter 2](#) delineates the ontological agent-structure problem. It first presents the methodological agent-structure problem, and then develops the ontological criteria of causal explanation. Given these ontological criteria, it turns to a critique of Wendt's generative approach to the ontological agent-structure problem, demonstrating that this approach fails to satisfy the two ontological criteria. Finally, it invokes these considerations to determine the relationship between a theory's ability or lack thereof to explain both social transformation and the utility of the theory. [Chapter 3](#) applies these considerations to neorealism, arguing that neorealism generally fails to satisfy the two ontological criteria. It also argues that a positional model of structure and an intersubjectivist model of structure are mutually interdependent rather than competing. [Chapter 4](#), concerned with the epistemological agent-structure problem, advances the thesis that the subjectivist thesis of agency is compatible with a positivist epistemology, and that the central tenets of interpretive sociology can be subsumed within such an epistemology.

The second part of this book begins, in [Chapter 5](#), with a discussion of the theoretical implications of focusing on individual international political elites as the unit of analysis. The advantages of this focus, including its affinity to a multidimensional conceptualization of structure, its facilitation of the study of social choice, and incorporation of networks analysis, are reviewed. [Chapter 6](#) presents a first cut at an international hierarchy of needs. This conceptualization is largely based on Maslow's theory of motivation and Ronald Inglehart's theory of political culture. Given this international politics hierarchy of needs, this chapter turns to a critique of extant theories of risk propensity and resolve, and suggests that the hierarchy of needs may serve as a useful basis for the conceptualization and operationalization of these concepts. [Chapter 7](#) elaborates upon the implications of the arguments made in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#) for theorizing social transformation. In this chapter, three types of change will be considered—change in primary agency interests within any given environmental milieu, change in primary agency interests from one organizational milieu to another, and change in the set

of needs themselves. Finally, we conclude with [Chapter 8](#), which reiterates the utility of further attention to some of the puzzles identified in this book, such as the further development of an international politics hierarchy of needs, the utilization of this theory of agency needs for the further elaboration of risk propensity and resolve, and the further elaboration of the implications of this argument for the linkage between internal and external politics. Above all, most importantly it stresses the view that knowledge of international politics depends on an understanding of the connections linking theory and metatheory.

THE ONTOLOGICAL AGENT- STRUCTURE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

The “ontological agent-structure problem” derives directly from two of the most basic sociological premises. These are that society is comprised of agency and structure and that agency and structure are nonrecursively related. The ontological agent-structure problem, then, embodies two distinct yet closely related questions: What are agency and structure, and how are they interrelated? The ostensible simplicity of these questions should not belie their importance. These questions have been a primary source of debate within various disciplines and sub-fields within the social sciences. Suppositions concerning the meaning of agency and structure and their interrelationship, whether stated implicitly or explicitly, are necessarily embodied in any explanation of social action and social transformation. Accordingly, the answers which theorists afford these questions drive their theoretical formulations. Thus, a clear understanding of the ontological agent-structure problem contributes to both the construction and comparative analysis of theories of international politics. Some scholars of international relations have further argued that the answers afforded these questions by theories of international relations serve as the basis for adjudication among these theories (e.g., Cox 1986; Wendt 1987; Carlsnaes 1992). Crucially, these scholars have argued that theories of international relations must endogenize, or problematize, both agency and structure, and that those theories which do not are degenerative.

The aims of the present chapter are to define the ontological agent-structure problem, specify the ontological properties necessary for the postulation of causal relationships between agency and structure, and appraise particular “solutions” to the agent-structure problem, most notably that advanced by Alexander Wendt (1987). It is useful to approach the ontological agent-structure problem by distinguishing it from the methodological agent-structure problem. This latter problem refers to the need to exogenize one or more elements of a causal explanation and to the need to slice into the historical interrelationship between agency and structure at some point in time. These logical requisites are signifi-

cant because, given the nonrecursive relationship between agency and structure, they mean that no single explanation can account for all of the aspects of the reciprocal relationship between agency and structure. Explicit attention to the problems of theoretical and empirical bracketing in the analysis of international politics is warranted by the positive impact that such attention may have upon the validity and the explanatory power of explanations of international political phenomena. Thus, exogenization of elements of agency and/or structure does not by itself represent a degenerative tendency in a theory of international politics.

Rather, the validity of theories of international politics is based most fundamentally not on whether or not these theories endogenize both agency and structure, but on whether or not they logically enable the positing of causal relationships between agency and structure. In other words, a proper ontology of agency and structure permits explanation of both the impact of structure on social action, and the impact of social action on the (re)construction of structure. We propose that fulfillment of these theoretical objectives requires conceptualizations of agency and structure which satisfy two criteria. First, agency and structure must be conceptualized as autonomous, irreducible, entities. Second, in order to posit theoretical relationships between the attributes of agency and structure, these attributes must be defined as variable.

Among the metatheoretical models which fail to satisfy these ontological criteria of causal explanation is Wendt's generative approach. Here, Wendt argues that agency identity and interests should be derived from internal social relationships. The problem with this approach is its conflation of agency and role. This conflation, in turn, precludes treatment of subjectivity as a defining property of agency, and is bound to a limited conceptualization of agency intentionality. That is, identification of agency with particular roles denies the ability to theorize about choice processes and the variability of the agency interests, decision-making procedures, and perhaps even behavioral options, that characterize these processes. Thus, Wendt's generative metatheoretical model of agency and structure undermines both compelling theoretical analysis of social action and the constructivist foundations of social transformation.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part presents the methodological agent-structure problem, arguing that theoretical explanations of whatever sort must exogenize at least one variable in an explanation and that empirical analysis requires the slicing into and thus exogenization of history at some point in time. The second part presents the ontological agent-structure problem. It lays the foundation for this discussion by presenting Sartori's model of concept formation, and then delineates the ontological criteria for the explanation of causal relationships among agency and structure. The third part criticizes Wendt's generative approach to the ontological agent-structure problem, arguing that this approach fails to satisfy the ontological criteria of causal explanation. Finally, this chapter concludes by considering the evaluation of theories of international politics based on their ability or inability to explain change in both agency and structure. We argue that exogenization of key attributes of agency and/or struc-

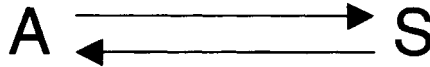


Figure 2.1 A simple nonrecursive model of the interrelationship between agency and structure

ture is not degenerative if this exogenization is methodologically legitimated and/or believed by the theorist to accurately reflect empirical reality. In contrast, if theories of international relations cannot endogenize both agency and structure because they have not fulfilled the conceptual criteria for causal explanation, then they are defective. By the same token, however, the standards of theoretical and empirical validity must also be brought to bear on theories which *do* postulate social change.

THE METHODOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

To understand the ontological agent-structure problem, it is useful to begin by distinguishing it from the methodological agent-structure problem. This latter problem is comprised of two issues. The first issue concerns the logical necessity of bracketing, or exogenizing, at least one or more elements of an explanation. Second, as explanation of social phenomena must slice into the dynamic agency-structure relationship at some point in time, some historical manifestations of the interrelationship between agency and structure are exogenized. Each of these methodological issues will be discussed in turn.

The first dimension of the methodological agent-structure problem is the need to exogenize at least one set of attributes of agency and/or structure in causal explanation of social phenomena. This results from the nonrecursive relationship between agency and structure as presented in [Figure 2.1](#). A two-variable nonrecursive model is problematic because both variables cannot be simultaneously treated as cause and effect of one another. As elaborated by Blalock (1961:56–57):

Probably most persons would agree that *A* cannot be a cause of *B* and *B* simultaneously a cause of *A*. Yet we may wish to speak of *X* and *Y* being “mutual causes,” or we allow for “reciprocal” causation. What we usually mean would be something like this: a change in *X* produces a change in *Y*, which in turn produces a further change in *X* at some later time, which produces a still further change in *Y*, and so on.

The need to exogenize can be generalized, if only metaphorically, in mathematical terms. In order to conduct an empirical analysis of a causal model, the model must be uniquely identifiable. The full nonrecursive representation of the

relationship between agency and structure, however, is not uniquely identified. In other words, it is a mathematical impossibility to determine for a full nonrecursive model “the direction of causation between two variables X1 and X2 simply by knowing their relationship (e.g., their correlation) at a single point in time” (Berry 1984:18). Furthermore, as Berry (1984:18) points out, “by allowing for reciprocal causation between the variables, we must not simply determine a single parameter expressing the strength of the relationship between X1 and X2; we must also sort out what ‘part’ of the relationship goes in one causal direction and what part in the other.”

Data collected for two variables are insufficient to determine the model’s parameters. A two-variable nonrecursive model is overidentified or nonidentified because “knowledge of the conditional probability distribution of the endogenous variables in the model given the exogenous variables does not determine a unique set of parameters for an equation and, instead, multiple sets of parameters for the equation are consistent with the probability distribution” (Berry 1984:25).¹ To solve a full nonrecursive model, then, it is necessary to restrict the set of relationships analyzed.

To identify a nonidentified equation, a priori assumptions must be made that further restrict the equations in the model. The restrictions may take a variety of forms. Among the possibilities is an assumption that a pair of parameters in the model are equal or have a known ratio. In addition, various types of restrictions on the distribution of error terms in the model are sometimes sufficient for identifying an underidentified equation. In practice, however, *the most common type of a priori assumption* used to identify equations in a nonrecursive model is a so-called *zero-restriction*, i.e. *an assumption that certain variables do not have direct causal effects on certain variables in the model.*

(Berry 1984:25–26; emphasis added)

Thus, to identify the basic agent-structure nonrecursive causal model, it is necessary to exogenize one of the two variables.

The need to exogenize one or more elements of agency and structure is closely related to the second component of the methodological agent-structure problem. This component holds that meaningful analysis requires that elements of agency and structure be linked to empirically oriented values. That is, we must locate agency and structure within some particular historical context. The exogenization of elements of agency and/or structure must involve making substantive determinations about the state of social reality by way of assumption. In other words, explanation of social phenomena *must* slice into the dynamic agency-structure relationship at *somepoint* in time and space. This aspect of the methodological agent-structure problem is expressed diagrammatically in [Figure 2.2](#).

Figure 2.2 reflects the cyclical and continuous nature of the causal relationship between agency and structure over time. This dimension of the methodological

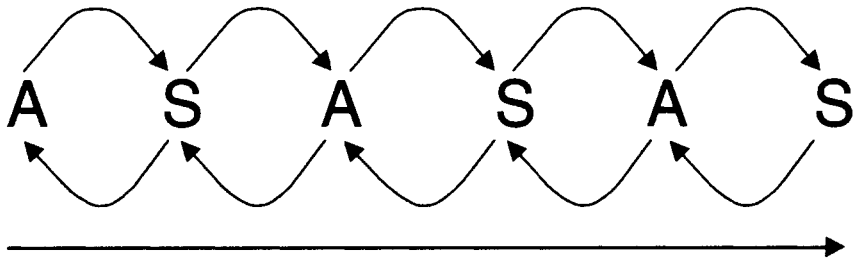


Figure 2.2 The agent-structure reciprocal relationship over time

agent-structure problem may thus be restated as follows: To explain agency behavior or structural change, it is necessary to begin the inquiry *at some point* along the spiral. As this spiral has no identifiable origin, any point along the spiral from which research is initiated must necessarily exclude from consideration an analysis of the causal history leading up to the point from which research is initiated. That is, there does not exist some ideal “state of nature” as a beginning point analytical device for the analyst of international relations. Research must be initiated at some point in history; some historical context exists, some structure of possibilities exists, some overall environment of opportunity exists, as well as some set of agents.

This nonrecursive spiral can be seen in a wide range of international phenomena. For example, in the relationship between international law and international politics we find that: politics/behavior creates law, which becomes part of the context/opportunity for politics/behavior, which creates new law, which becomes part of the context/opportunity for politics/behavior, and so on. Similarly, the polarity (or alliance structure, etc.) of the international system affects the probabilities of war among great powers, while such war alters the system, which then affects the probabilities of war among great powers, and so on. Various models of system change (and/or war) which are based on the differential growth of power (such as found in Gilpin 1981, or Organski 1968) are further examples of the nonrecursive spiral of agent and structure or opportunity and willingness.

Carlsnaes’s (1992) call for application of the morphogenetic approach (Archer 1985, 1988) to foreign policy analysis provides a good illustration of the inability to circumvent the methodological need to historically bracket the agent-structure relationship. Carlsnaes (1992:264) describes the morphogenetic approach as follows:

In this perspective, actions are not only causally affected by structures (A>B), but in turn—in terms of both intended and unintended outcomes—subsequently affect them (B>C), and so forth (C>D), indicating both the

dynamic interaction between the two and hence the inherently constraining *and* enabling aspect of the structural domain. In other words, to explain an action at point T4, this dynamic model indicates the necessity of considering not only its underlying structures, but also previous actions and both the structural effects *and* structural antecedents of the latter.

Clearly, such a morphogenetic approach does not circumvent the need to make either agency or structure primitive, for, as the independent variable at T1 is primitivized, the model only sets the primitive entity back in time. It is not clear why an analysis should not begin at a time before T1 or continue to a time after T4.

Ultimately, then, as Michael Taylor (1989:119), another scholar concerned with the agent-structure problem, quite nicely puts it, “the explanatory buck has to stop *somewhere*.”² But it must be added that theoretical and empirical bracketing is not only inevitable on logical grounds, but also may in fact contribute positively to the growth of knowledge. For Lakatos, the concept of the “research programme” is precisely defined by a set of “methodological rules” which differentiate between “what paths of research to avoid (*negative heuristic*),” and “what paths to pursue (*positive heuristic*)” (Lakatos 1970:132). Lakatos elaborates as follows:

All scientific research programmes may be characterized by their “*hard core*”. The negative heuristic of the programme forbids us to direct the *modus tollens* at this “hard core”. Instead, we must use our ingenuity to articulate or even invent “auxiliary hypotheses”, which form a *protective belt* around this core, and we must redirect the *modus tollens* to *these*. It is this protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses which has to bear the brunt of tests and get adjusted and re-adjusted, or even completely replaced, to defend the thus-hardened core.... This “core” is “irrefutable” by the methodological decision of its protagonists: anomalies must lead to changes only in the “protective” belt of auxiliary, “observational” hypothesis and initial conditions.

(1970:133)

For Lakatos, this irrefutability of the hard core allows for continuity amongst a series of theories which “plays a vital role in the history of science” (Lakatos 1970:132). At the heart of this role is protection against the premature abandonment of particular theories. Lakatos demonstrates that some of the most important examples of successful research programs, such as Newton’s gravitational theory, Prout’s theory of atomic weights, and Bohr’s work on light emission, appeared to be refuted by corroborated anomalies. According to Lakatos, “we may be frustrated by a long series of ‘refutations’ before ingenious and lucky content-increasing auxiliary hypotheses turn a chain of defeats—with *hindsight*—into a resounding success story, either by revising some false ‘facts’ or by adding

novel auxiliary hypotheses” (Lakatos 1970:134). In fact, “it may take decades of theoretical work to arrive at the first novel facts and still more time to arrive at *interestingly testable* versions of the research programmes, at the stage when refutations are no longer foreseeable in the light of the programme itself” (Lakatos 1970:151). Thus, sophisticated methodological falsificationism, by protecting the hard core and research program itself (as long as it has significant heuristic power), provides continuity to theoretical development. In so doing, research programs are also afforded the time and opportunity to discover novel facts, to corroborate those facts, and to resolve anomalies.³

The general point to gather from this discussion is that the need to bracket, or exogenize, some aspects of agency and/or structure, then, is a *methodological* rather than an ontological problem. Explicit attention to the need for theoretical and empirical bracketing in international politics research programs can contribute to the external and internal validity of international political inquiry. For example, basic bracketed entities may be usefully treated as the axioms upon which nice laws can be differentiated. Explicit attention to the methodological agent-structure problem might also help scholars develop coherent strategies for the program of research agendas, bracketing one set of elements in one analysis, another in the next, etc.

In the context of the present analysis, however, the methodological agent-structure problem derives special significance from its direct bearing on suggestions made by some scholars of international politics that the endogenization of both agency and structure represents a standard by which to evaluate the worthiness of particular theories. Specifically, this is the argument that theories which do not endogenize both agency and structure are deemed to be degenerative. The impact of the methodological agent-structure problem on this argument, in turn, is that such failure to exogenize all key elements of both agency and structure is not by itself a sign of theoretical degeneracy; in fact as we have shown, such exogenization is a methodologically *necessary* element of *theory* itself.⁴ Evaluation of the adequacy of a theory’s ability to explain the interrelationship between agency and structure, i.e., the *ontological* agent-structure problem, represents instead the core element of the agent-structure problem which we must consider in the construction and comparative analysis of international politics theory.

THE ONTOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

The ontological agent-structure problem refers to the meaning of agency and structure and the interrelationship between the two. The “problem” is to conceptualize agency and structure in such a fashion that enables postulation of the *causal* interrelationships between the two concepts. In other words, conceptualizations of the two concepts should enable analysis of the impact both of structure upon agency social action, and of agency social action upon structure. The primary thesis advanced below is that the postulation of causal relationships

between the defining properties of agency and structure requires that conceptualizations of agency and structure satisfy two criteria: they must be conceptually autonomous, and their defining properties must be defined as variables. We call these requirements the ontological criteria of causal explanation. To understand the logical implications of conceptualizations of agency and structure for the elaboration of theoretical relationships among them, and thus to specify the ontological criteria for causal explanation, it is useful to introduce Giovanni Sartori's (1970, 1984) model of concept formation.

Sartori's model of concept formation

Linguistic precision is an elemental requisite of cumulative knowledge. In the words of Sartori (1984:22): "Clear thinking requires clear language. In turn, a clear language requires that its terms be explicitly defined." Conceptual clarity, we propose, is especially important in the analysis of concepts and theoretical relationships:

the semantic import of words entails that (1) what is *not named* largely remains *unnoticed* or, in any event, impervious to cognitive development; and that, (2) the *naming choice* (selecting a word with a given semantic field) involves a far-reaching *interpretive projection*. All told, then, projective semantics brings to the fore both the *constraints* and the *pathways* that any given natural language imposes upon and affords to our perceiving, thinking, and knowing.

(Sartori 1984:16; emphasis in original)

We begin this section, therefore, by invoking Sartori's model of concept formation. According to this model, a term is comprised of two elements—intension, or connotation, and extension, or denotation. Intension, or connotation, refers to "the ensemble of characteristics and/or properties associated with, or included in, a given word, term, or concept" (Sartori 1984:24). Sartori differentiates between two types of characteristics—least-observable characteristics, on the one side, and tractable, observable characteristics, on the other—and labels the latter type as *extensional* or *denotational*.⁵

The extension of a term "consists of the class of all objects to which that word correctly applies" (Salmon 1964:90, quoted in Sartori 1984:24). Extensional properties are responsible for making a concept empirical. "A concept is empirical if, and only if, it can be rendered in *testable propositions* that confirm it (in some respect or extent); and a concept cannot be so confirmed or falsified—with respect to the propositions it generates—unless we identify its extension" (Sartori 1984:28). To put it differently, concepts must contain empirical referents, so that they can be operationalized, observed, and subjected to empirical analysis. Referents are the "real world counterparts (if existent) of the world in our heads" (Sartori 1984:24). Importantly, intensional and extensional properties are cate-

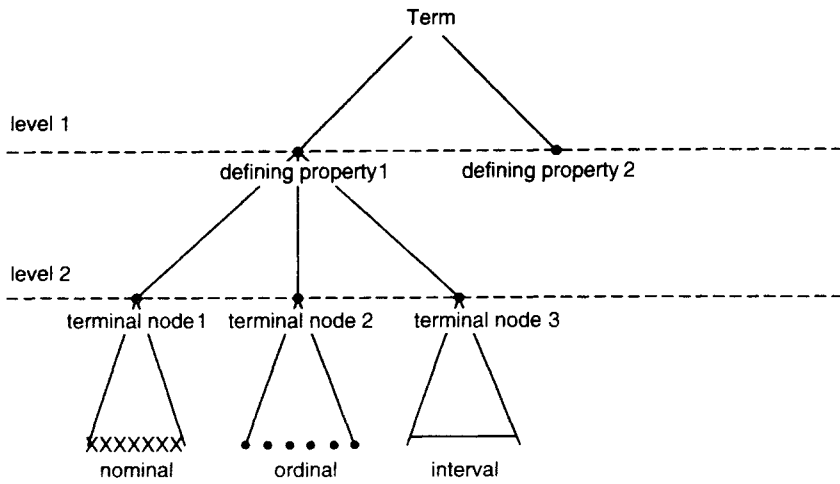
gorical and thus delimit the empirical boundaries within which concepts are applicable.

It is precisely this dichotomous (or poly-chotomous) nature of concepts which allows us to develop causal theoretical explanations, for theorizing about variation requires categories of variation. Lazarsfeld and Barton (cited in Sartori 1970:1,038) elaborate: “before we can investigate the presence or absence of some attribute...or before we can rank objects or measure them in terms of some variable, *we must form the concept of that variable.*”

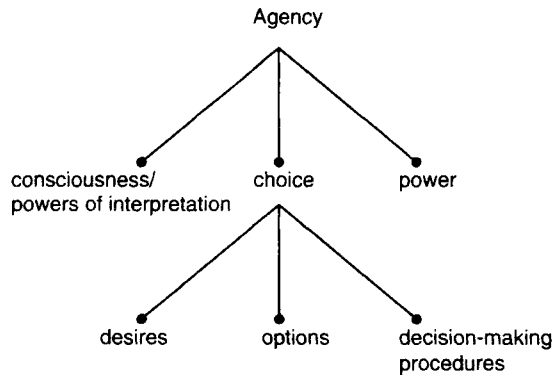
Furthermore, this model of concept formation allows our concepts, in Sartori’s words, “to travel on the ladder of abstraction.” Sartori (1984:44) explains that the connotation and extension of a concept are inversely related. Concepts are made more abstract, general, and thus applicable to many cases by reducing the concepts’ number of characteristics. Conversely, concepts are made less abstract, and applicable to a narrower set of empirical cases, by augmenting the number of characteristics they contain. Sartori points out the inverse relationship between intension and extension—as one increases the number of characteristics used for intension, the number of cases that can be thrown into the conceptual box decreases; as one decreases the number of characteristics or properties that make up intension, the number of cases/”things” to which the term applies, increases.

We take the liberty of providing our own diagrammatic schemata of these points in [Figure 2.3](#). At least three important points can be discerned with the aid of [Figure 2.3a](#). First, the dashed lines serve to differentiate vertically among different levels of abstraction. Thus, for example, dashed line 1 is more general and applies to a larger number of cases than dashed line 2. For example, on level 2, each of the two properties has a *unique set* of defining properties. Notice, furthermore, that on the lowest level, the terminal nodes are connected in distinct ways. Terminal node 1 refers to nominal variables, terminal node 2 refers to ordinal variables, and terminal node 3 to interval level variables. Finally, notice that the lines connecting properties from a node at one level of abstraction to a node at another level of abstraction do not have arrows. This helps emphasize that there are no causal relationships between a term and its defining properties.

The approach to conceptualization presented in [Figure 2.3](#) also seeks to minimize what Sartori terms concept ambiguity and vagueness. Concept ambiguity refers to the use of the same word for different meanings, or the use of different words for the same meaning. Such ambiguity can occur on both the individual and collective levels (Sartori 1984:35). Individual ambiguity refers to conceptual confusion in individual and more or less self-contained theoretical discussions. Such ambiguity impedes the internal validity of the theory. Collective ambiguity refers to confusion over the meaning across a community of scholars and as such clearly poses an obstacle to meaningful theoretical cumulation. Vagueness, or undenotativeness, meanwhile, refers to confusion concerning the boundaries of the set of empirical cases implicated by the concept.



2.3a General model of a concept



2.3b Model of the concept agency

Figure 2.3 Schematic diagram of a concept

Having delineated the general structure of a concept, we can turn to the conceptualization of agency presented in Figure 2.3b. The universal conceptualization of agency contains three defining attributes—consciousness, power, and intentional choice. Consciousness may be viewed as the most primitive and generative attribute of agency. Giddens’s term “knowledgeability” captures the meaning of consciousness. He defines knowledgeability as “[e]verything which actors know (believe) about the circumstances of their action and that of others,

drawn upon in the production and reproduction of that action, including tacit as well as discursively available knowledge” (1984:375).⁶

Consciousness enables the next two properties of agency, power and choice. For Giddens, it is these two attributes which capture the core meaning of agency. Giddens (1984:9) writes that agency refers to the capability of people *to do*

things in the first place (which is why agency implies power: cf. the Oxford English Dictionary definition of an agent, as “one who exerts power or produces an effect”). Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently, whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened.

Giddens (1984:14–15) elaborates by indicating the centrality of the idea of choice, that choice involves both action and *non*action, and that choice is linked with power:

To be able to “act otherwise” means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to deploy...a range of causal powers, including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to “make a difference” to a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. An agent ceases to be such if he or she loses the capability to “make a difference”, that is, to exercise some sort of power.

Note that Giddens’s comments point to two distinct and crucial properties of agency—the power to choose and the power to influence social outcomes. Given present purposes, we reserve more elaborate discussion of these properties to later chapters. It is imperative, however, to make two comments concerning the property of choice. First, the ontological statement that agents exercise choice should not be confused with the notion that on some meaningful level agents in the world often do not have much of a choice. For example, it may be argued that a nation-state invaded by the full force of another nation-state has no real choice but to take up arms. No doubt, as explained in Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman’s (1992) interaction model of war, states will sometimes capitulate (as in the case of Denmark in World War II); but such occurrences are quite rare, and may thus only serve to prove the rule. Siverson and Starr (1991) investigate exactly such “decision latitude” in their study of the growth of wars. Rather, the ontological statement that agents exercise choice points to the fact that agents are choosing beings, and can choose inaction as well as action (Giddens 1984; Most and Starr 1989).⁷

The second point to gather concerning agency choice is that this defining attribute of agency is itself comprised of three components which will be dis-

cussed at greater length in following chapters but need mention here. Simply, agency choice, or intentional behavior, is itself comprised of desires, values, interests, etc.; behavioral options; and decision-making procedures.

Defining the ontological criteria for causal explanation

The Sartorian concept model allows us to specify in simple terms two criteria which are jointly necessary for the postulation of causal interrelationships between agency and structure. Each of these two criteria—the conceptual autonomy criterion and the variability criterion—are discussed in turn.

The conceptual autonomy criterion of causal explanation can be simply stated as follows: In order to propose causal relationships between two terms, these terms must refer to autonomous concepts. Such autonomy is achieved by defining these two terms independently of one another. Simply, if one term refers to a defining property of a second term, then it is conceptually dependent, i.e., part of the definition of the latter term. Conversely, if two terms are defined by sets of properties which do not share any single property, then these terms satisfy the criterion of conceptual autonomy. This can be understood with reference to Figure 2.3a. Defining properties #1 and #2 are comprised of different elements, i.e., and are thus conceptually autonomous. Note that it clearly follows that causal relations can be hypothesized between these two nodes. In contrast, node 1 represents an element of defining property #1; it is thus meaningless, indeed logically impossible, to postulate causal relationships between these two terms.

Therefore, satisfaction of the conceptual autonomy criteria concerning agency and structure is determined with reference to the following question: does the term “agency” refer to a defining property of the term “structure”? If so, then agency is conceptually dependent upon structure. Organismic conceptualizations of social systems generally fail to satisfy the conceptual autonomy criterion. Nagel (1961:391) elaborates on organismic conceptualizations of system as follows:

Organic or “functional” wholes have been defined as systems “the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole.” What is distinctive of such systems, therefore, is that their parts do not act, and do not possess characteristics, independently of one another.

That such a conceptualization of social system does not satisfy the conceptual autonomy criterion can clearly be seen in a diagrammatic schematization of an organismic theory of the relationship between agency and structure depicted in Figure 2.4. This figure shows that the parts of the system, i.e., agents, along with relations, are themselves defining components of the system. Thus, it cannot be said that the organism causes the parts or the relations, or that the parts or rela-

tions cause the organism. A human being does not influence the respiratory or cardio-vascular systems, nor these systems the human being. We can thus see how world systems theory fails to meet the conceptual autonomy criteria of causal explanation. The world capitalist system is the unit of analysis. The various parts—core, semi-periphery, and periphery—and the relations among them are the *defining properties* of the system. We cannot say that the world system influences its parts, that it influences its defining criteria, or that the parts influence the system, or the terms which they connote.

Another critical deficiency in such conceptualizations of agency and structure is their exclusion of subjectivity as a defining property of agency. As Nagel (1961:400) emphasizes, only the system is purposive in such conceptualizations. The *raison d'être* of the parts is to serve the system, by contributing to such system goals as self-regulation, self-maintenance, and self-reproduction (Nagel 1961:400). Furthermore, such a conceptualization lends itself toward a reified view of social structure. In such a reified view, social structure is an objective entity not created by, but independent of, agency social action.⁸

The problem with such reification is not that agents do not in fact reify social structures. They do, and it is precisely for this reason that social structures act as social facts; that is, as external constraints upon agents. But notwithstanding Durkheim's lack of clarity on the subject, social facts exist externally to any particular individual rather than to the set of individuals comprising the social system as a whole (Lukes 1982:4). More to the point, social facticity is ultimately a product of subjective attribution and social constructivist processes. It follows then, that the extent to which agents reify any particular social institution or role, or, alternatively, the distance between an actor's complete or entire identity, on the one side, and his or her socially defined roles, on the other, is variable. For Berger and Luckmann (1966:89), the decisive question for the agent "is whether he still retains the awareness that, however objectivated, the social world was made by men—and, therefore, can be remade by them." Berger and Luckmann (1966:73) also note: "a segment of the self is objectified in terms of the socially available typifications. This segment is the truly 'social self,' which is subjectively experienced as distinct from and even confronting the self in its totality."⁹ Thus, conceptualizations of social systems which reduce agents to properties of the system are unable to account for the nonrecursive, dialectical interplay between subjectively grounded social construction and social facticity.

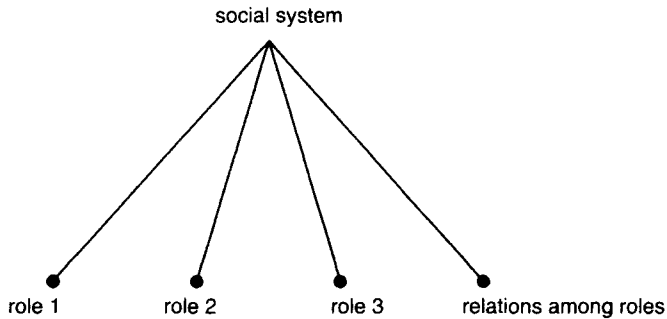


Figure 2.4 A model of an organismic view of agency and structure

Conceptualizing agency and structure autonomously might appear to be a complex task because of the part-whole, micro-macro, unit-system, etc., relationship between the two. We define these terms precisely with the understanding that somehow they are mutually implicating; to define one is to point to the meaning of the other. Specifically, since a system refers to some organization of agency and structure, the universal intensional property of each relies on the term of the other.

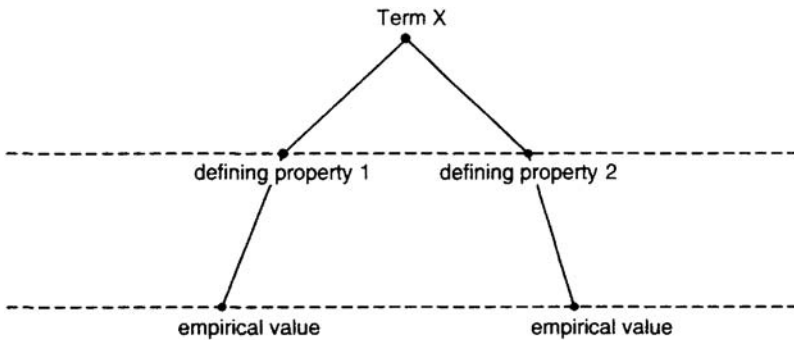
A general example is as follows. If we define “agency” with defining property, *A*, and if we define structure as some “function, in the mathematical sense, of property *A*,” then “property *A*” becomes one component of the defining property of structure. More concretely, the *distribution* of capability *A* among a plurality of actors is conceptually autonomous from agency even if we define agents as possessing some absolute amount of this capability. Though in these examples agency appears in the definition of structure, its presence in the clause does not undermine the autonomous meaning of the clause in its entirety. With such conceptualizations of structure, structure is not “greater than the sum of its parts” but rather “different than its parts.” These types of definitions of structure, which may be called aggregative, positional, or organizational, thus satisfy the conceptual autonomy of agency and structure, and do not preclude inclusion of subjective disposition as a defining property of agency.

The variability criterion of causal explanation

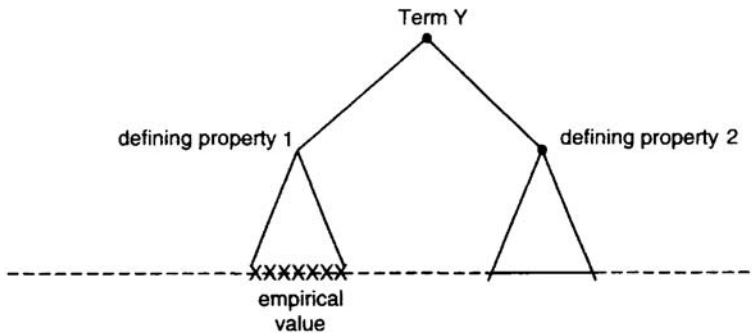
On a general level, the variability criterion holds that, to be able to postulate any sort of causal interrelationship between the defining properties of agency and structure, these properties must be defined as variables. This criterion derives from the simple notion that variation in an explanandum cannot be explained with a constant. Stated positively, only variation in one or more properties can account for variation in one or more other properties.

This criterion might be better understood by reference to [Figure 2.5](#). Figure 2.5a shows a concept which contains defining properties that are not variable. In other words, these general concepts can take on only one value on the lower, empirical level. By contrast, Figure 2.5b depicts a concept in which a defining property is variable, as can be seen from the fact that a plurality of empirical possibilities derive from the term connoting them.

While the variability criterion for causal explanation is easy to grasp, the actual postulation of such variation is another affair. Indeed, the variability criterion begs one of the crucial questions for theorists of international relations: What is change? When theorists of international politics claim that we need theories which explain variation in agency and/or structure, what kind of variation do they mean? What are the theoretical and empirical parameters of such variation? Is such change nominally defined, ordinally defined, or interally defined? How enduring is such change? What are the patterns of variation? As Sartori (1970) points out, measurement must be preceded by conceptualization. That is, for our theories to be able in other than *ad hoc* fashion to model transformation meaningfully, they must explicitly delineate the parameters of such variation.



2.5a A hypothetical nonvariable concept



2.5b A general variable concept

Figure 2.5 The variability criterion of causal explanation

A model of the interrelationship between agency and structure

Given satisfaction of the two ontological criteria of causal explanation, we are able to model the interrelationship between agency and structure. This model is depicted in Figure 2.6. This figure shows that international political outcomes and material structures are filtered through agency consciousness to formulate agency perceptions of both material and institutional social structures. These perceptions, in turn, influence the elements of agency choice which, in turn, lead to agency action. International political outcomes are a result of the conjunction of material social structures, and the social actions of one or more other agents. The broken arrows leading from structure and outcomes to agency consciousness capture the notion that structure and outcomes are interpreted by agents. The unbroken arrow from structure to outcomes, conversely, demonstrates that struc-

ture has an “objective” impact on agency social action, and as a result on agency itself. In the explanation of social structure, agency properties are antecedent variables resulting in social action, and social action in turn directly influences structure. Social structure, in other words, results from the aggregation of agency social action.

This model points to some crucial elements in the ontological agent-structure problem. First and perhaps foremost, it illustrates the logic behind the ontological agent-structure problem itself. Simply, it demonstrates the notion that agents of social action are both conditioned by their social environment and that structures are themselves constructed by agency social action. It demonstrates that agent cognition, choice, and behavior play a part in the generation of structure, which in turn acts to influence (through constraining and enabling effects) agency cognition, choice, and behavior. Accordingly, this model demonstrates how attributes of both agency and structure are necessary in a complete explanation of both social action and structural transformation, and thus captures the necessity of incorporating both agency and structure into our explanations of social action. This, of course, is consonant with Most and Starr’s metatheoretical hypothesis that opportunity and willingness are jointly necessary concepts in the explanation of social action. Similarly, we can see from [Figure 2.6](#) how opportunity and willingness, or agency and structure, are implicit in *any* explanation of social action. Accordingly, we can see how these two concepts can be used to organize substantive theories of empirical phenomena (as done by Most and Starr). Specifically, not only can we organize the variables emphasized by various theories into agency and structure, we can also point to which components of these elements theorists have bracketed.

Notice, finally, that this argument helps us to understand the temporal relations between agency and structure. Michael Taylor (1989:149) points out that to conflate structure and action, as structuration theory proposes, “is to rule out from the start the possibility of explaining change in terms of their interaction *over time*.” Carlsnaes, relying on Archer (1985, 1988), describes this problem as follows:

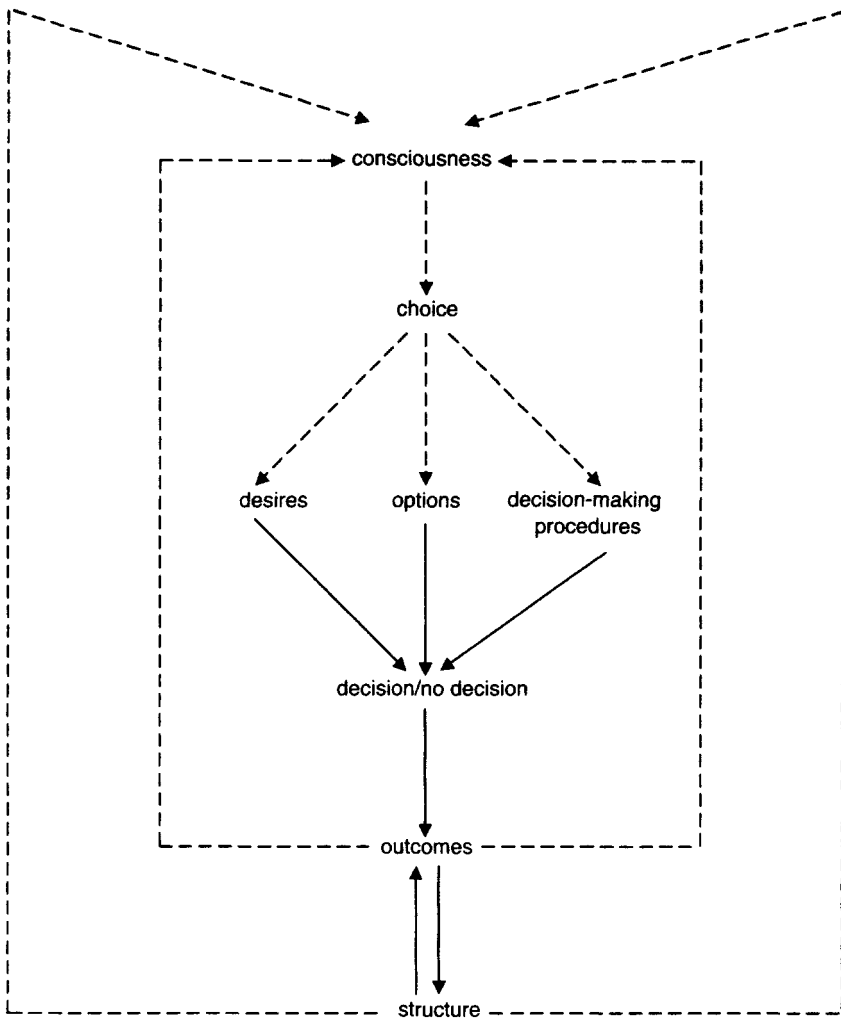


Figure 2.6 The interrelationship between agency and structure

Giddens's conception of *duality* is crucial here. As Archer has forcefully argued, his use of this notion leads him to preclude the possibility of analyzing the empirical *interplay* between action and structure, since the notions of action and structure ontologically *presuppose* each other.... The problem with collapsing action into structure and structure into action à la Giddens—of giving neither explanatory autonomy—is that it precludes a

realistic possibility of conducting *historical* analyses along the lines proposed by Wendt. More specifically, the absence of *temporal relations* between actions and structure must surely entail the conclusion that Giddens cannot incorporate the notion—quintessentially historical—that structure and action work on different time intervals.... This is clearly a grave shortcoming if the intention is to provide an historical analysis of the link between actions on the one hand and their structural consequences—intended or not—on the other.

(Carlsnaes 1992:258–259; emphasis in original)

Our model of the interrelationship between agency and structure contributes to an understanding of the historically or temporally embedded linkages between agency and structure. The dotted lines in [Figure 2.6](#) allow for both the possibility that agents view their structure instantaneously but also that over time, through learning, agency perception of the external environment may change. Meanwhile, the solid arrows point to those elements of the agent-structure interrelationship—i.e. the choice process, agency social action, and the outcomes of such social action—which necessarily occur over time. Though not evident in the diagram, it must be pointed out that social action does not automatically change structure. First, social action can reinforce as well as alter social structures. Second, as will be elaborated in the following chapter, the magnitude of the impact of social action on social structure depends on such factors as the frequency and relative power of those engaged in particular forms of social action.

A CRITIQUE OF WENDT'S GENERATIVE APPROACH TO THE ONTOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

These considerations allow us to critique Wendt's "generative" approach to the ontological agent-structure problem. Wendt's (1987) definition of the ontological agent-structure problem mirrors the two ontological questions identified above. He writes that the ontological agent-structure problem "concerns the nature of both agents and structures and, because they are in some way mutually implicating, of their interrelationship. In other words, what kind of entities are these (or, in the case of social structures, are they entities at all?), and how are they interrelated?" (Wendt 1987:339).

According to Wendt (1987:339), three types of answers—individualism, structuralism, and structurationism—can be afforded to these questions:

Neorealism and world-system theory embody, respectively, the first two of these positions, both of which ultimately reduce one unit of analysis to the other. Thus, neorealists reduce the structure of the state system to the properties and interactions of its constituent elements, states, while world-system theorists reduce state (and class) agents to effects of the reproduc-

tion requirements of the capitalist world system. The structurationist approach, on the other hand, tries to avoid what I shall argue are the negative consequences of individualism and structuralism by giving agents and structures equal ontological status.

Though Wendt does not explicitly and systematically define ontological primitivity and reduction, it is quite apparent that he takes both of these terms to refer to the exogenization of central independent variables, be they attributes of agents or structures. This point is implicit in the following statement by Wendt (1987:337) describing the ontological reductionism of structural realism and world system theory:

each of these approaches solves the agent-structure problem by making either state agents or system structures ontologically primitive units. The resulting effect on neo-realism and world-system theory is an *inability to explain the properties and causal powers of their primary units of analysis*, a weakness which seriously undermines their potential explanations of state action. This situation can be prevented by adopting an approach to the agent-structure problem which does not preclude a priori making both agents and structures “*problematic*” or “*dependent variables*” [emphasis added].¹⁰

Wendt holds that the solution to the ontological agent-structure problem resides in a “generative” approach. Wendt argues that world-systems theory and structuration theory alike view system structures as “generating” agents. Wendt (1987:344) holds, moreover, that world systems theory marks a progressive problem shift over neorealism precisely because it provides a generative model of structure. In fact, for Wendt, a generative model is *the* solution to the problems resulting from individual ontological reductionism. Wendt (1987:344) writes that “if neorealists want to avoid these problems...they *must* make the state theoretically ‘problematic.’ This would *require* an attempt to theorize directly about the generative structures of the world and domestic political economy which constitute states as particular kinds of agents with certain causal powers and interests.”

Wendt defines the “generative” approach to agency and structure as follows:

Internal relations are necessary relationships between entities in the sense that the entities depend upon the relation for their very identity. Standard examples of internal relations are parent-child and master-slave; neither entity is conceivable without the existence of the other. This implies that an internal relation cannot be reduced to the properties or interactions of its member elements; on the contrary, the relationship itself explains essential properties of each entity, and thus the character of their interaction.... Generative structures are *sets of internal relations*. To adopt a generative

approach to theorizing about the structure of the international system, therefore, is to understand the state as an *effect* of its internal relations to other states and social formations in the world political economy, rather than purely as an untheorized *cause* of international events. The strength of the generative approach to structural theorizing, then, is that in contrast to neorealism's individualist approach it is able, in principle, to explain the causal powers and interests of state and class agents, to make these theoretically and empirically problematic.

(1987:346–347, see also 357; emphasis in original)¹¹

The primary problem with the generative approach as specified by Wendt is that it robs agency of its conceptual autonomy. This is so because the internal relations at the heart of the generative approach identify and define not agency but *social roles and equate agency with social roles*. To illustrate, a generative conceptualization begins by defining a social relationship, say a slave-master relationship, and then defines agents as those phenomena which complete the relationship. That is, to say that structure generates agents is to say that agents represent, along with relations, the defining properties of structure. Accordingly, Wendt is incorrect in holding that a generative conception of structure “causes” agents or treats agents as “effects” of structure. Rather, such an approach derives agency by definition. Thus, to attempt to solve the ontological agent-structure problem by identifying the social structures which generate agents violates the conceptual autonomy criterion of causal explanation.

Conflation of agency with role also precludes theorizing about the defining properties of agency, subjectivity, and choice. Specifically, it treats structure as a social fact which is external to the entire set of agents playing the roles it defines, thus reifying structure improperly. Accordingly, it also fails to allow for distance between an agent's identity and particular social roles and for variability in this distance. That is, slaves *qua* slaves and masters *qua* masters, or classes *qua* classes, or states *qua* states are not interpretive entities. Slaves, masters, classes, and states cannot ask themselves, respectively, “am I a slave, master, class, and state? To what extent does my relationship with the master, slave, other class, and other state define my identity? Do I like being a slave, master, class, and state?” These units cannot ask these questions because subjectivity is not a defining element of a social role. There can be no distance between an agent and a role if the defining property of an agent is its role. Thus, we see that Wendt's call for theories which do not treat agents as “passive bearers” of social facts, on the one side, and a generative view of agency and structure, on the other side, not only are contradictory, but also that agents themselves *are* oftentimes “passive bearers” of social facts, or, that the extent to which agents are passive bearers is variable. Equating agency with social role precludes theoretical incorporation of one of the defining properties of agency which Wendt himself and other structuration theorists emphasize—the powers of subjectivity.

Accordingly, a generative view of agency and structure impedes the nature

and role of *choice* in the analysis of the interrelationship between agency and structure. At worst, the ability to choose is not even a defining property of agency defined as social roles. At the least, a generative approach fails to recognize the plurality of interests, options, and decision-making procedures within any given social role, that agents are embedded in a plurality of social relationships and social structures, and that agents may value these various social roles to different extents. Accordingly, a generative approach to the conceptualization of agency and structure does not advance our understanding of agency engagement in particular forms of social action. The generative approach to the ontological agent-structure problem, therefore, is precisely the type of conceptualization of the interrelationship between agency and structure that we seek to avoid.

Our critique may find disagreement from those who purport that to identify agency social roles is precisely the stuff of *social theory*. There are others who would purport that ontological reductionism so defined is precisely the stuff of *social theory*. To the former, we respond that we are not suggesting the adoption of a strict methodological individualist approach, in which the desires, beliefs, etc. of agents are somehow nonsocially derived. Indeed, agents, whenever engaged in social action, invoke identities and interests based on their interpretation of their social milieu. But these roles and interests do not *define* agents *qua* agents. That is, they do not generate or produce agents themselves but rather certain elements of the agency choice process. What is more, as was pointed out by Berger and Luckmann (1966), these social roles are mediated by agency interpretation.

To those who disagree on the grounds that theory is by definition simplification, we respond that we recognize that theories must simplify, that indeed they are simplifications of reality by definition. But it must be recognized that as such they again by definition do not precisely capture "what is out there." What is more, we are not *ipso facto* condemning theories which rely on simplification *per se*; rather, we are condemning theories which purport a monocausal or a monosocial relational view of social phenomena. Even then, we are not claiming that such theories should be discarded. Following Lakatos, such considerations must be done by assessing the heuristic power of theories *relative* to that of other theories. And this theoretical competition would benefit from the infusion of the dictum that scholars should seek to develop theories that integrate the various social relational structures within which agents are embedded, and that to do so by explicit incorporation of the notion that international relations are the outcomes (though often unintended) of the intentional behavior of individuals; again raised in two-level analyses (see, for example, Tsebelis 1990; Starr 1994).

Finally, it deserves mention that in the generative view of agency and structure there is no *individual* or *structural* reductionism, but only reductionism. That is, one can begin building a theory with conceptualizing agency, i.e., role; that is, by describing the role that an agent fulfills *vis-à-vis* other roles. Or one can begin by delineating the set of roles which comprise a system. The definition of a social role emphasizes a basis of social relations. In either case, we are left

with the same definitions of role and system. If we define agency as role, then the definition of the system is directly given. If we define system as a set of roles, than agency is directly given. In this case, the claim that either agency or structure is ontologically primitive *vis-à-vis* the other reduces to the chicken and egg question applied to the issue of conceptualization. The question of ontological reductionism is whether or not it leaves space for the agents to define themselves in ways outside of any *single* social relation, and, secondarily, of how much distance they place between themselves and a social structure. We imagine that many will find this formulation of “reductionism” intuitively appealing, and indeed theoretically meaningful, for such a definition reduces all agency behavior to the one set of social relationships emphasized by a particular theory.¹²

CONCLUSION: EVALUATING THEORETICAL MODELS OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ATTRIBUTES OF AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

This chapter concludes by critiquing the claim by scholars such as Wendt, Cox, and Carlsnaes that theories which do not endogenize both agency and structure are *ipso facto* deficient. We begin by pointing out that Wendt himself is inconsistent on the matter. Wendt is of course at first critical of “individually ontologically reductionist” theories including rational choice theories such as Bueno de Mesquita (1981) and Snidal (1986) and implicitly Axelrod (1984), as well as structural realism (see Wendt 1987:342–344). But later Wendt suggests that game theory may prove useful in the historical analysis of social construction.

The analysis of iterated games and the “new institutionalism” in the study of political institutions in particular have proven useful in generating insights into the emergence of and reproduction of social institutions as the unintended consequences of strategic interactions, and there is no a priori reason why we cannot extend the logic of such analyses to the analysis of generative structures. We must recognize, however, that game-theoretic models focus attention on the technical decision problems of *given* agents, and that they therefore tend to neglect the ways in which the structure of social interactions constitute or empower those agents in the first place. The use of game theory to develop an historical understanding of the emergence of social structures, therefore, would have to be complemented by a generative understanding of the construction of agents and situations of strategic interaction.

(1987:368; emphasis in original)

What is more, Wendt (1987:349) abandons emphasis on the ontological basis of theoretical evaluation when he writes in reference to the ontological reductionism of neorealism and world systems theory: “This does not mean that a particu-

lar research endeavor cannot take some things as primitive: scientific practice has to start somewhere. It does mean, however, that what is primitive in one research endeavor must be at least potentially problematic (or function as a 'dependent variable') in another—that scientists need *theories* of their primitive units."¹³ With this shift, then, the core of Wendt's critique of neorealism and world systems theory, or at least the importance of this critique in the comparative evaluation of these and other theories, collapses!

We are also brought back to the level of degeneracy or progressiveness of a theory's ability or lack thereof to explain variation in the defining components of agency and structure. That is, a theory cannot defend its inability to explain certain types of variation simply by asserting that it was done in the name of bracketing. Indeed, the need to bracket begs the question of what and for what purpose to bracket. At worst, such decisions can be made arbitrarily. More likely, they can be made in conformance to certain resource restrictions (time, money, and energy) of the researcher. Our conclusion, following the discussions in Most and Starr (1989), is that such decisions should be based upon the theoretical and empirical concerns of the researcher—upon the research design which is dictated by the relationships among theory, extant research, and logic. That is, the need to bracket does not obviate the need to evaluate a theory's conceptualizations of agency and structure. We propose that the ontological criteria of causal explanation serve as one important source of such evaluation.

In fact, the need to exogenize aside, there appears no a priori reason to prefer theories which explain some sort of change to those which posit stasis. Ultimately, the value of a theory must rest neither on its substantive conclusions nor, for that matter, on the normative orientation of the theorist, but on its theoretical and empirical validity. In other words, treating the ability of a theory to explain transformation, or any variation, as a criterion for theoretical evaluation assumes that such transformation, or variation, is indeed an empirical fact or likelihood of past and future history. If this is not the case however—if some fundamental aspects of agency and/or structure are static across time—then theories which posit such stasis are not deficient for doing so. Similarly, arguments concerning the continuity or change in fundamental attributes of agency and/or structure are only legitimate to the extent that they are logically derived from the premises of the theoretical framework from which the scholar begins. Thus, the obvious implication of the centrality of theoretical and empirical validity as criteria for theoretical evaluation is that theories which postulate social transformation are not *ipso facto* superior to those which do not.

Given the elusive nature of the objects of analysis in international politics, and the limitations concerning empirical falsification, the prospects of identifying winners in three-cornered fights, pitting two theories against each other and empirical analysis, are dim. Perpetual debate among realist and liberal theorists as to the mutability of international politics is of course clear testament to such constant disagreement (see Keohane 1983; Goldmann 1988; Shimko 1992; O.Holsti 1995; Kegley 1995). It must nonetheless be kept in mind that to explain

social change adequately requires satisfaction of the ontological criteria for causal explanation delineated above.

A CRITIQUE OF NEOREALISM AND ITS CRITICS

INTRODUCTION

We have now presented some basic argumentation about the ontological criteria of causal explanation and the causal interrelationships between agency and structure. Given that Wendt (and others) developed their analyses in part as a component of a critical analysis of structural realism, we too turn our attention to structural realism. A critique of structural realism, in particular structural realism's inability to explain social transformation, permits us both to demonstrate the utility of our formulations and to demonstrate weaknesses in the arguments of other agent-structure analysts. What is more, this critique reveals some elements of a strategy for the explanation of variation in the institution of self-help recognized as a crucial object of analysis by a number of scholars.¹

Consistent with the emphasis of the preceding chapter and Starr's opportunity and willingness framework on the inevitability, however unwittingly, of invoking elements of both agency and structure in the explanation of political phenomena, we begin by stating the logical structure of the Waltzian self-help thesis, in dispositional form. This statement emphasizes that self-help derives from the *conjunction* of anarchy and agent insecurity. It clearly follows that a shift from self-help can result from a shift in the ordering principle of anarchy and/or a shift away from agency insecurity. Given that most scholars concerned with the problem of international cooperation have tended to frame their explanations *within* the context of an anarchic system (e.g., Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1984; Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1992a), we focus attention on the ontological foundations of structural realism's postulation of agency insecurity.

Our analysis emphasizes a fundamental inconsistency in Waltz's conception of state insecurity. Consistent with Wendt's vision of an individualist ontology, Waltz frames his theory as microeconomic and treats state insecurity as given by assumption. Concomitantly, however, Waltz postulates agency insecurity as a result—indeed a necessary result—of his conceptualization of international structure. In fact, each of the three vertically arranged dimensions of structure—

including functional differentiation which does not “drop out” of Waltz’s model but is in fact at most a defining property of anarchy and at least an ever-present, albeit static, attribute of structure—clearly implicate, one might even say generate in the Wendtian sense, agency insecurity. This finding has at least two meanings. First, and perhaps less important, structural realism may be viewed as supporting, on its own terms, a double-lock on the immutability of agency interests. Alternatively, one might view this as an inconsistency for realists to address. Second, the view that state insecurity derives directly from Waltz’s model of structure entails that self-help is essentially given by Waltz’s model of structure.

Consistent with the dialectical interplay between agency and structure, the implications of international political structure (agency structure more broadly conceived), is in fact a necessary object of analysis in the investigation of change in, and transformation of, agency interests. This point is relevant for the analysis of arguments emphasizing that Waltz’s inability to explain social transformation results largely from his preclusion of process, state interaction, and/or unit-level processes from his conceptualization of structure (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Dessler 1989; Wendt 1992a). The thrust of our critique of this more or less coherent set of models is as follows: While these models usefully underscore the need to emphasize the causal link from behavior to structure, they inadequately (and perhaps ironically given their emphasis on the constitutive, i.e., interest and identity imbuing rules) attend to the social structural context within which this social construction occurs. Explanation of unit-level processes are most compelling when they integrate both the causal role of the positional model of structure as well as the subjective, and thus nonmonolithic, foundations of the inter-subjective international structures they emphasize.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part demonstrates that a dispositional statement of the Waltzian self-help thesis emphasizes that self-help results from a *conjunction* of anarchy and agency insecurity. The second part of this chapter then turns to an analysis of the ontological foundations of the supposition of state insecurity. Here we propose that, notwithstanding Waltz’s explicit *assumption* of state insecurity, state insecurity derives quite directly from Waltz’s conceptualization of structure. In the third part we critique Ruggie’s argument that structural realism could benefit from the introduction of dynamic density. We argue that dynamic density affects neither the primacy of security concerns nor the rule of self-help. In the final section we direct our critique to Dessler’s (1989) and Wendt’s (1992a) claims to improve upon structural realism’s approach to international politics. Our critique argues that these scholars inadequately emphasize that a meaningful social constructivist analysis requires explicit and systematic integration of (1) power; (2) variability in agency interests; and (3) the direct linkage of this variability in agency interests to agency structural milieus.

THE NEOREALIST CONCEPTUALIZATION OF STRUCTURE AND SELF-HELP

Waltz bases his conceptualization of international structure on a conceptualization of domestic structure. Domestic political structures, for Waltz, are defined “first by the principle according to which they are organized or ordered, second by the differentiation of units and the specification of their functions, and third by the distribution of capabilities across units” (1979:88). According to Waltz, the parts of the international system are ordered according to the principle of anarchy, or the decentralization of authority. Waltz contends that the second aspect of structure, functional differentiation, “is not needed in defining international political structure, because so long as anarchy endures, states remain like units...the ends they aspire to are similar” (1979:93, 96). Given his belief that the units of an anarchic system are functionally undifferentiated, Waltz argues that, “[t]he units of such an order are then distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks” (1979:97). This is Waltz’s third ordering principle. Pulling these three principles together, Waltz summarizes: “What emerges is a *positional picture*, a general description of the ordered overall arrangement of a society written in terms of the placement of units rather than in terms of their qualities” (1979:99; emphasis added; see also 1986b). Waltz’s conception of structure gives him two types of structural change—systemic change or a change in the ordering principle of the system (that is, a change from anarchy to hierarchy or vice versa), and a change in the relative distribution of capabilities across the units of the system, or, within system change (see also Gilpin 1981).

Within this system, the most fundamental behavioral pattern is egoistic self-help. “If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it” (Waltz 1979:117). It is the explanation of variation in this general result of structural realism (if not realism more generally) which represents one of the most crucial puzzles of both the theory and practice of international politics.

The preceding chapter presented useful guidelines for the analysis of the self-help result. In particular, social outcomes are necessarily the result of the conjunction of agent- and structural-level factors: alternatively, manifestations of opportunity and willingness. Waltz’s theory explicitly adheres to this pretheoretic hypothesis, proposing that “[b]alance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive” (1979:121). Given that social outcomes result from intentional behavior, it is useful to state the balance-of-power thesis from the agent’s point of view. The realist argument can thus be stated in the form of a dispositional explanation as follows:

(C₁) *i* was in a situation of kind *S* (anarchy)

(C₂) *i* has the property *M* (seeks security)

(L) Any x (state) with the property M will, in a situation of kind S , behave in manner R (self-help).

(E) i behaved in manner R

In order to aggregate this unit-level explanation, it is necessary to assume that *all* i in S , i.e., all states in the international political system, have property M , i.e., seek security. One might usefully view the assumptions that all states accurately perceive their structural milieu, and that all states are rational (e.g. Keohane 1986:167, 191; Dessler 1989; Levy 1989; O.Holsti 1995), as corresponding, respectively, to C_1 and C_2 . Together, then, the dispositional explanation of unit behavior in conjunction with the assumptions required for aggregation lead to the system-wide institution, or practice, of self-help.

Variation in perception and misperception and instrumental rationality aside, it directly follows that a shift from self-help can result from a shift either in the ordering principle of anarchy and/or a shift away from agency insecurity. Stated positively, in order to explain change, we must introduce into this model the possibility for the conjunction of nonsecurity interests with either value for the ordering principle (anarchy or hierarchy), or a conjunction of security interests with a hierarchically arranged system.

Of the two general components of the dispositional explanation, agency insecurity deserves special attention. Certainly, most scholars concerned with the problem of international cooperation have tended to frame their explanations *within* the context of an anarchic system (e.g., Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1984; Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1992a). Furthermore, one might even question the relative significance of an *ideal*-typic dichotomy between anarchy and hierarchy. As Starr (1994), for example, has argued, general social conflict processes transcend the international-domestic nexus. Thus, it might ultimately be best to view anarchy as other than a strictly necessary condition for power politics processes. In any event, the present discussion turns to the integral issue of the ontological foundations of structural realism's postulation of agency insecurity.

STATE SECURITY, INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE, AND CONCEPTUAL AUTONOMY

Waltz's conception of agency insecurity is generally viewed as given by assumption within the context of a microeconomic model of international politics. Waltz himself explicitly emphasizes the microeconomic foundations of his treatment of agency interests: "In a microtheory...the motivation of the actors is assumed rather than realistically described. I assume that states seek to ensure their survival" (1979:91; see also 89-92, 118).² As we have seen, moreover, neorealism has been criticized precisely for what Wendt terms its individual ontological reductionism: "adopting the individualistic metaphors of microeconomics restricts the effects of structures to state behavior, ignoring how they might also constitute state identities and interests" (Wendt 1995:72).

Despite the general acceptance of the microeconomic foundations of Waltz's view of state insecurity, agency interests in fact derive directly from the Waltzian conceptualization of international structure. Each of the three vertically arranged dimensions of structure clearly implicate, even generate in the Wendtian sense, agency insecurity. A preliminary point to recognize in this regard is that the unit of analysis, i.e., the state, itself derives from Waltz's conceptualization of structure. Ruggie (1986:134) elaborates:

States are the constitutive units of the system. Waltz advances empirical arguments why this should be so (pp. 93–95), but it follows logically from his premises: because legitimate authority is not centralized in the system, states—as the existing repositories of the ultimate arbiter of force—*ipso facto* are its major units.³

Turning to Waltz's conceptualization of international political structure, we begin by pointing out that the self-help norm is itself directly derived from the anarchic arrangement of the international system. Waltz notes that self-help “is necessarily the principle of action in an anarchic order...units in an anarchic order act for their own sakes and not for the sake of preserving an organization and furthering their fortunes within it” (1979:111–112; emphasis added).⁴

The close correspondence between Waltz's conceptualization of structure and state interests is further reinforced by Waltz's conceptualization of anarchy as including the property of functional homogeneity (the convergence of the first and second dimensions of social structure). Waltz does not adequately conceptually differentiate between these two dimensions of structure. Waltz explicitly associates the anarchy-hierarchy dichotomy with Durkheim's mechanical-organic solidarity dichotomy. Waltz argues (1979:115): “Emile Durkheim's depiction of solidary and mechanical societies still provides the best explication of the two ordering principles, and his logic in limiting the types of society to two continues to be compelling despite the efforts of his many critics to overthrow it...”⁵ Simply, Waltz associates anarchy with mechanical solidarity, by which Durkheim, in turn, means functional homogeneity.

In addition, Waltz's definitions of anarchy and hierarchy explicitly include the attribute of functional specification. Waltz (1979:81) describes hierarchical organization as follows:

The units—institutions and agencies—stand *vis-à-vis* each other in relations of super- and subordination.... In a polity the hierarchy of offices is by no means completely articulated, nor are all ambiguities about relations of super- and subordination removed. Nevertheless, political actors are formally differentiated according to the degrees of their authority, and their distinct functions are specified...broad agreement prevails on the tasks that various parts of a government are to undertake and on the extent of the power they legitimately wield.

Anarchy, conversely, is defined at least in part by functional homogeneity:

The states that are the units of international-political systems are not formally differentiated by the functions they perform. Anarchy entails relations of coordination among a system's units, and that implies their sameness. The second term is not needed in defining international-political structure, because so long as anarchy endures, states remain like units.

(Waltz 1979:93)

Thus, Waltz treats functional specification as a property of the "ordering principle." At the least, there is conceptual ambiguity (in the Sartorian sense) because functional specification and anarchy share the attribute that actors are "the same." Functional homogeneity, then, may be viewed, like anarchy, as an important constant in Waltz's model of structure. As such, it drops out of the model no more, and no less, than does anarchy itself (see also Keohane 1986:166).⁶

The significance of functional homogeneity in Waltz's conceptualization of structure is that the function all states perform is the egoistic pursuit of geopolitically defined security. That self-help is the function of states follows necessarily from Waltz's discussion of the third layer of structure. Waltz (1979:96-97) writes: "States are alike in the tasks that they face, though not in their abilities to perform them. The differences are of capability, not of function." The units of a functionally undifferentiated order "are... distinguished primarily by their greater or lesser capabilities for performing similar tasks." Waltz's emphasis that the only structural difference among units concerns the relative amount of capabilities they possess to perform tasks in conjunction with his emphasis on military capabilities, clearly implies that self-help, or security, is the primary function of states.

Thus, the generative disposition of the structural realist system, in Wendtian terms, assumes and reduces agency to the role of an insecure state. This presumption of agent as insecure state undermines the ability of realism to recognize the subjectivist quality of international political agents. Failure to recognize the subjectivist quality of agents further undermines the variability criterion of causal explanation. Accordingly, the conjunction of agency insecurity and anarchy—the two conditions jointly necessary for the institution of self-help—is assumed by Waltz by his very definition of structure! For present purposes, we must note that Waltz's structural realist treatment of state interests can be viewed as double-locked: insecurity is both assumed and generated (in the Wendtian sense of the term) from international political structure. However, remember that to claim that Waltz's model fails does not mean that the world is not significantly characterized by the patterns of behavior described by structural realism.

DYNAMIC DENSITY AND NEOREALISM

We are interested in explaining and understanding behavior, especially in terms of decision-making choices (agency). We also wish to explain and understand system change (structure). To do either or both, we contend that we need to theorize about the *variability* of agency interests. Various scholars of international politics concerned with social transformation have also argued that such transformation requires attention to unit-level attributes and processes (e.g., Ruggie 1986; Dessler 1989; Wendt 1992a). Our present analysis focuses on these proposed agent-level solutions to social transformation. One such solution refers to the Durkheimian conceptualization of dynamic density; another might be called, in conformance to its ontological foundations, the intersubjectivist approach to social transformation. Both of these arguments usefully underscore the need to emphasize the causal link from behavior to structure. Both fail, however, to provide an adequate model to account for social change. Each of these two approaches to international political change will be discussed in turn.

Ruggie (1986:148–152) is critical of Waltz for omitting dynamic density from his framework:

If he [Waltz] takes his Durkheimian premises seriously, then a *determinant* of change is missing.... According to Durkheim, “growth in the volume and dynamic density of societies modifies profoundly the fundamental conditions of collective existence” (1982:115). Both are capable of altering “social facts”...Waltz...banishes...[dynamic density] to the level of process, shaped by structure but not in turn affecting structure in any manner depicted by his model... The problem with Waltz’s posture is that, in any social system, structural change itself ultimately has no source *other than* unit-level processes. By banishing these from the domain of systemic theory, Waltz also exogenizes the ultimate source of systemic change.... As a result, Waltz’s theory of “society” contains only a reproductive logic, but no transformational logic.

In contrast to Ruggie, Durkheim’s model of the impact of dynamic density on functional differentiation is inappropriate to structural realism. Durkheim’s thesis on the role of dynamic density in system transformation can be summarized as follows. Dynamic density refers to proliferation of interactions that result from such social processes as increased population concentration, urbanization, and increased and improved communication and transportation. Durkheim argues that this increased interaction alters the survival requisites of the members of society. In Durkheim’s functionalist model, individual survival is contingent not only upon satisfaction of material needs but also upon the ability of the individual to become integrated into, and contribute to, the integration of society. Unit specialization contributes to both of these processes. Durkheim (1933:56, 60–61) notes of the division of labor that: “its true function is to create in two or

more persons a feeling of solidarity...the most remarkable effect of the division of labor is not that it increases the output of functions divided, but that it renders them solidary.”

The incompatibility of Durkheim’s theory with structural realism is evident. The units in Durkheim’s model in essence specialize because this specialization serves to integrate the members of a system undergoing dramatic change. The units in Waltz’s system are guided by no such system-maintenance function. Furthermore, while for Durkheim the development of self-interest is associated with functional differentiation, for Waltz of course the opposite holds.⁷ Thus, the problem of integration that might be posed by increased volume and intensity of interaction simply would not impose on the system units the need to specialize.

Indeed, it is wholly consistent with the realist approach to contend that an increase in dynamic density as defined by Durkheim reinforces if not intensifies the need of each state to focus on geopolitical self-help. One manifestation of this argument is provided by Choucri and North’s (1975) concept of “lateral pressure” (see the elaboration in Starr 1994). The pressure to extract resources externally leads states into greater opportunities for interaction with other states, and thus, to interstate “intersections.” Such interactions can be handled either conflictually or cooperatively. If the (strongest of these) agents deem resources to be scarce, then they will see interaction as a competitive process. Conversely, if they deem resources to be abundant, then they will be more willing to cooperate with other agents.⁸

To acknowledge the incompatibility of Durkheim’s analysis of functional differentiation with structural realism, however, does not bode ill for structural realism. On the contrary, the nonfunctionalist ontology of structural realism is a saving feature of this model. For his discussion of dynamic density, Durkheim turned to an extrasystemic force to explain the move toward modernization for several reasons. He did this, in part, because the very functionalist ontology of his organismic conceptualization of society afforded him no built-in mechanism for the postulation of social transformation. We are thus reminded of the concluding discussion in [Chapter 2](#), that a conception of social change is not in and of itself desirable or progressive. Rather the utility of a model of social change must ultimately rest on the theoretical and empirical validity of this model. Thus, Waltz’s omission of Durkheim’s model of dynamic density is indeed to be endorsed.⁹

THE INTERSUBJECTIVIST APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION

The second general approach to international political transformation to which we bring to bear our insights on agency and structure might best be termed the intersubjectivist approach. The arguments forwarded in this approach have a broad and diverse etiology including phenomenology, structuration theory, scien-

tific realism, and social constructivism. Along with these terms, within international politics this general approach has also been referred to as reflectivism and institutionalism. What all of these approaches share is an intersubjective ontology, or, alternatively an emphasis on the rule governed signification and construction of social reality.

The crux of our critique of this more or less coherent set of models is that while these models usefully underscore the need to emphasize the social construction of social reality, they inadequately attend to the social structural context within which this social construction occurs. These approaches fail adequately to recognize that transformation results not from unit-level processes *per se* but rather from variation in these unit-level processes, and that the ultimate source of such variability is the nonmonolithic structural milieus surrounding international political agents.

The adherents to the intersubjectivist approach considered here are Dessler (1989) and Wendt (1987; 1992a). For these scholars, the key property of social structure is the intersubjectively realized set of rules which serves to signify, enable, and transform agency action. Dessler's "transformational" model of intersubjective structure, for example, with its emphasis on constitutive and regulative rules, is representative of this general school of thought. Constitutive rules (also termed "conventions" by Dessler) are "standardized, relatively unchanging practices that constitute a 'vocabulary' (a stock of meaningful actions, or signs) for international communication" (Dessler 1989:456). Regulative rules are "public claims, backed by sanctions, that prescribe, proscribe, or permit specified behavior for designated actors in defined circumstances. Such rules take the form, 'Actor A should do X in context C' " (Dessler 1989:457).

The signifying quality of the intersubjective structure refers to the notion that the rules embodied in this structure imbue meaning to agency action. Giddens (1984:10) defines rules of signification as those that are "drawn upon as interpretive schemes to make sense of what actors say and do, and of the cultural objects they produce." The centrality of the meaning of social action and ultimately social being, as well as the rules which signify this meaning, is evident in Wendt's (1992a:401) argument that the international political system as described by Waltz may exist, but that the meaning of social action and social being within this system depends on the intersubjective complex of meanings:

anarchy and the distribution of power only have meaning for state action in virtue of the understandings and expectations that constitute institutional identities and interests. Self-help is one such institution constituting one kind of anarchy but not the only kind. Waltz's three-part definition of structure therefore seems underspecified. In order to go from structure to action, we need to add a fourth: the intersubjectively constituted structure of identities and interests in the system.

We arrive at the end of the above passage at the next property of the intersubjec-

tive dimension of structure—the central role that these rules play in social action. Dessler (1989:458–9) elaborates that these rules enable social action:

Scientific realism insists that *all* social action depends on the preexistence of rules, implying that even under anarchy, rules are an essential prerequisite for action. It asserts the impossibility and inconceivability of social behavior without rules.... Rules are, in the transformational model, both logically and praxiologically necessary for social action.

Related to the first two properties of an intersubjective ontology—that they signify and enable agency action—is a third property, or perhaps more accurately, a third assumption. By virtue of the fact that rules signify and enable behavior, these rules enable not only social action but also social transformation.

The differences between these ontologies lies in their conception of the *relation* between rules and action.... Positional structure persists as a set of relatively fixed causal conditions, reproduced unintentionally; and while behavior is shaped, shoved, constrained, and disposed, structure endures without measurable change. Structural change is rare, and when it occurs, revolutionary. In the transformational view, by contrast, structure is *a medium of activity* that in principle can be altered through that activity. Any given action will reproduce or transform some part of the social structure. Agency invocation of these actions, in turn, serves to (re)construct these meanings. Simply, meaningful social action and attendant social construction are the defining elements of the international political system.

(Dessler 1989:460–461)

To reiterate, proponents of an intersubjective ontology to international politics contend that constitutive and regulative rules serve to signify, enable, and transform agency action. Given that this approach emphasizes the meaning underlying agency action and the constructed nature of agency social reality, its proponents hold it to be superior to the Waltzian model. Dessler adds that the ontology of the Waltzian model is incapable of integrating intentional rule structures because, as we gather, Waltz incorrectly views these rules as nonstructural properties (see Dessler 1989:462–463). The superiority of the intersubjective ontology and its relationship to the positional ontology is encapsulated by Wendt (1992a). He argues that the condition of anarchy does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the primary institutions of the international system will be founded on the requisite of self-help (that is, the structure has no specific link to any specific action): “self-help and power politics do not follow either logically or causally from anarchy and...if today we find ourselves in a self-help world, this is due to process, not structure... Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy” (1992a:394–395).

The intersubjectivist emphases upon intentional social action and the socially

constructed foundation of social structure, as was discussed in the preceding chapter, represent integral elements of an understanding of international politics. Despite Dessler and Wendt's contribution to and cultivation of scholarly attention to the subjectivist and constructivist elements of international politics, however, the arguments forwarded by these scholars have important deficiencies. The general tendency to treat intersubjective structure as enabling and the positional structure as constraining is misguided. But much more importantly, despite the centrality of social action and social construction, these scholars offer little insight into a meaningful model of social action and social construction.

We may begin by pointing out that realist thought *can itself* be expressed in terms of constitutive discourse. For example, Morgenthau (1985:5) observed, "We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined as power.... That assumption allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene.... Thinking in terms of interest defined as power, we think as he does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the political scene, does himself." Cox (1986:218), similarly observes that, "Examples of intersubjective meanings in contemporary world politics are the notions that people are organized and commanded by states which have authority over defined territories; that states relate to one another through diplomatic agents; that certain rules apply for the protection of diplomatic agents as being in the common interest of all states; and that certain kinds of behavior are to be expected when conflict arises between states, such as negotiation, confrontation, or war."¹⁰

Furthermore, the positional model of structure should also be acknowledged as enabling agency social action. Anarchy quite clearly embodies a permissive quality. Just as clearly, Waltz asserts that war results from the "permissive" nature of anarchy (e.g., Waltz 1959:232). Most and Starr (1989: ch. 2), more generally, have demonstrated that the anarchy of the Westphalian system is a necessary condition which permits or allows certain behavior to take place. In addition, as the anarchic nature of the international system derives from the legal status of sovereignty enjoyed by the state actors, this anarchy recognizes the formal equality of the various state-agents in the international system.¹¹

In addition, the enabling quality of capabilities must also be acknowledged. Following the usage of the Sprouts, Most and Starr (1989) include "capability analysis" under both opportunity and willingness. Recall that opportunity involves not only the existence of possibilities in the system, but also their distribution. As such, capabilities can be seen as *one aspect* of the distribution of possibilities. If this is the case, then capabilities—and the distribution of capabilities—clearly reflect *possibilities*. And, possibilities imply not only constraint but enablement as well.¹²

Conversely, intersubjectively constituted rules themselves act as social facts. In Dessler's transformational model, for example, regulative rules, at least those that are prescriptive, are quite clearly constraining aspects of structure. It could

be further argued that constitutive rules are also constraining, in at least the sense that any given language of social communication relied on by agents in a social system precludes the reliance on other languages. Indeed, various scholars of international politics who take explicitly nonrealist positions based upon an international society of rules and norms—whether called idealist, neoliberal, pluralist, etc.—have emphasized the constraining role of institutions and norms; (see, for example, scholars from Bull (1977) through Kegley and Raymond (1990) and Kegley (1995)). Finally, we recall Berger and Luckmann’s explanation that agents objectify institutions and roles, and thus these social structures act as social facts upon agents; moreover, the extent to which agents objectify social structures is variable. Wendt (1992a:411) himself recognizes that “once constituted, any social system confronts each of its members as an objective social fact that reinforces certain behaviors and discourages others.” Thus, in sum, there is good reason to believe that the intersubjective elements of structure neither enable nor constrain agency social action more or less than the positional model of structure.

A second, and more meaningful, deficiency in this literature is that it does not provide adequate insight into the process(es) of social construction. The position forwarded by Dessler that structure is realized and possibly transformed in the process of agency social action is flawed. For one, it does not adequately attend to the reality that to become *intersubjective*, socially constructed meaning must be *shared*, and social construction thus entails interaction among agents.¹³ Suffice it to say for present purposes that Dessler does little more than simply *assert* the presence of an intersubjective structure which signifies, enables, and transforms agency social action.

Wendt, meanwhile, speaks to the interactive dimension of social construction at considerable length:

This process of signaling, intercepting, and responding completes a “social act” and begins the process of creating intersubjective meanings. It advances the same way. The first social act creates expectations on both sides about each other’s future behavior: potentially mistaken and certainly tentative, but expectations nonetheless. Based on this tentative knowledge, ego makes a new gesture, again signifying the basis on which it will respond to alter, and again alter responds, adding to the pool of knowledge each has about the other, and so on over time. The mechanism here is reinforcement; interaction rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other and discourages them from holding others. If repeated long enough, these “reciprocal typifications” will create relatively stable concepts of self and other regarding the issue at stake in interaction.

(1992a:405)¹⁴

Wendt adds, further, that certain dispositional factors, including uncertainty, anxiety, and trust, influence the process of agency identity change.

The processes and dispositional attributes Wendt identifies may indeed contribute to our understanding of the unit-level processes characterizing the construction of (novel) social meaning. This contribution, however, provides insight into little more than the psychological or cognitive nuts and bolts of the process. It tells us nothing about the (possible) substance of the identity (re)constructions which (may) characterize international relations.

We thus arrive at the central deficiencies of the work of Dessler and Wendt. First, these scholars lose sight of the fact clearly implicated in the agency-structure dialectic that structure is the ultimate source of transformation in agency meaning, and consequently crucial in the construction of social meaning. Second, these scholars provide little insight into the empirically meaningful parameters of variation in the meanings around which international politics revolve. In other words, these approaches fail to satisfy the ontological criterion of variability.

For example, Dessler argues that the introduction of intentional rules into what by his terms would amount to an intersubjectivist variant of realism is progressive. But it is clear that the mere introduction of intersubjective rules would by itself have no transformational impact on the international system. The predominant intentional rule structure of realist agents is self-help. It is precisely this result, in fact, that serves to prevent system transformation as defined by Waltz's model. As discussed above, the positional structure persists not because of the omission of intentionally produced social forms but because of the conjunction of anarchy and insecurity. This is so because Waltz *assumes* the substance of agents' intentionality—the realist assumptions of security interests and international efforts at self-help. Thus, the synthesis of the intersubjective structure with the positional model would entail no retreat from self-help whatsoever! Without specifying empirically meaningful variability in agency intentionality, no amount of interaction will lead to social transformation.

Two important elements of a model of social construction should briefly be discussed. First, the positional elements of international political structure themselves represent important factors influencing social (re)construction. We have already mentioned that the anarchic nature of the international system plays a permissive role in international political processes. But the primary source of structure requiring emphasis here is power.¹⁵ The uneven distribution of material forces across agents serves to weight the particular impact on international institutions and intersubjectively held meanings of particular agents. Any particular agent is concerned with those agents in its environment which have the greatest ability (based largely on the possession of material resources) to actualize their intentions. Indeed, the significance of power in social construction is endorsed by the realist and modified structuralist schools of thought.

What is more, social constructivists themselves have emphasized the centrality of power in the social construction of meaning. Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend that the success of "conceptual machineries" developed to legitimize

particular social orders are dependent upon the power of those upholding these machines. Berger and Luckmann elaborate:

the success of particular conceptual machineries is related to the power possessed by those who operate them. The confrontation of alternative symbolic universes implies a problem of power—which of the conflicting definitions of reality will be “made to stick” in the society. Two societies confronting each other with conflicting universes will both develop conceptual machineries designed to maintain their respective universes.... Which of the two will win...will depend more on the power than on the theoretical ingenuity of the respective legitimators.

(1966:108–109)

Berger and Luckmann also explain that power can be employed not only to destroy but also to segregate and marginalize the proponents of competing social visions.¹⁶

In addition, they emphasize that other forms of social structure, indeed of a positional structure, influence the social construction of meaning. Berger and Luckmann (1966:164) contend:

Maximal success in socialization is likely to occur in societies with very simple division of labor and minimal distribution of knowledge.... Since every individual is confronted with essentially the same institutional program for his life in the society, the total force of the institutional order is brought to bear with more or less equal weight on each individual, producing a compelling massivity for the objective reality to be internalized. Identity then is highly profiled in the sense of representing fully the objective reality within which it is located. Put simply, everyone pretty much *is* what he is supposed to be.

In fact, Berger and Luckmann’s discussion of functional differentiation and the plurality of agency roles points to an important mechanism of agency social action and (re)construction which is generally absent from the work of Dessler and Wendt. Berger and Luckmann propose that individuals may engage in a plurality of roles in a society characterized by a modicum of division of labor. In addition, when faced with a plurality of possible roles, individuals may become more cognizant of distance between themselves and those roles. Individuals then may accordingly approach these various roles in an instrumental fashion. Berger and Luckmann (1966:172) write:

One could speak here of “cool” alternation. The individual internalizes the new reality, but instead of its being *his* reality, it is a reality to be used by him for specific purposes. Insofar as this involves the performance of certain roles, he retains subjective detachment *vis-à-vis* them—he “puts them

on” deliberately and purposefully. If this phenomenon becomes widely distributed, the institutional order as a whole begins to take on the character of a network of reciprocal manipulations.

This implication of agency association with a plurality of social roles entails two related problems with the intersubjectivist school. To understand these problems, it is helpful to differentiate explicitly among two versions of subjective ontology—*intersubjective* and *subjective*. The first refers to a *structural*-level property, and more particularly to the idea presented above that a system is comprised of one more or less generally pervasive set of rules which signify and enable social action and transformation. If, as Berger and Luckmann suggest, agents of international politics do indeed identify with a plurality of roles and institutions, structural-level versions of a subjectivist ontology which embody those rules indigenous to only some subset of this plurality clearly preclude consideration of the *complete* set of rules which agents may invoke. In other words, if the “inter” in “intersubjective” refers to the interaction between a particular system of agents who are concomitantly engaged in interaction in other systems, then the rules of the focal system (however the boundaries of this system are delimited) represent only a subset of the complete set of rules which these agents may invoke in social action. In this scenario, the problem with the intersubjective structure is that from the agent’s point of view it is incomplete.

Conversely, if an individual may choose among a set of rules indigenous to different social systems, then it follows that those rules of any single social system are not necessarily operative for the agent at any particular time, in other words, that those rules are not *the* rules foremost in the psyche of the agent in the moment of social action. It follows, then, and this is the second additional shortcoming of the intersubjectivist approach: that this approach treats as system-level what is ultimately an individual-level property. Indeed, if we take the structuration-theoretic claim that rules are instantiated in the moment of action at its word, then these rules exist at some *subsystemic* level if they are not sufficiently instantiated by all of the members of the system. They do not require, indeed they do not merit, treatment as system-level attributes. In this painstaking differentiation between “process” and system-wide “structure,” by the way, Waltz is to be commended.

Finally, Berger and Luckmann’s postulation of agents as identifying with and selecting among a multiplicity of roles has two direct implications for the ontological criteria of causal explanation. First, this notion of agents as standing apart from any particular role promotes the conceptual autonomy of agency *vis-à-vis* structure. That is, in this view agents clearly stand external to any and all particular social roles; indeed, agents may move through conscious selection from one to another of these roles. Second, the multiplicity of roles poses a useful source for developing conceptualizations of agency and structure which satisfy the ontological criterion of variability. In other words, variability may be introduced into

the agency-structure dialectic through a multidimensional conceptualization of structure.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, this chapter has pointed to the centrality of variability in agency interests in the explanation of social change. Stating the structural realist theory of self-help in dispositional form pointed to the centrality of agency interests in the postulation of stasis/change in international institutions. An analysis of the ontological foundations of the assumption of constant agency insecurity led to the conclusion that agency insecurity is not only assumed by Waltz's microeconomic tendencies but also directly derivative from Waltz's conceptualization of structure. This result has several implications. It points to an inconsistency which realist thinkers might want to address. It highlights a further deficiency in Wendt's critique of realism. Most importantly, the conjunction of the joint necessity of state insecurity and anarchy in the explanation of self-help, along with the necessary correspondence of state insecurity from Waltz's structure, point to the fact that Waltz's theory of self-help is given by definition.

We then turned to an analysis of certain critiques of structural realism emphasizing attention to unit-level processes to explain social transformation. Ruggie's argument that Waltz's model would benefit from incorporation of the Durkheimian notion of dynamic density was shown to be unfounded given the distinct ontological foundations of the two approaches. We also argued that the intersubjectivist approach to international politics is valuable in its contribution to and cultivation of interest in the subjectivist and constructivist foundations of international politics. Wendt's and Dessler's work, however, suffers from sparse attention to an empirically meaningful model of social construction, ignoring the crucial role of power in social construction and failing to satisfy the ontological criterion of variability. Their work underemphasizes the notion that it is precisely within the social structure—or at least within the dialectic between structure and agency—that this variability resides. Instead, their work relegates all meaning associated with international politics agency to the level of the international system.

On this note, the work of Berger and Luckmann proved enlightening. These scholars point to the correspondence between a multiplicity of agency roles and two important elements of a valid ontological foundation—preserving the subjective and intentional character of agency, and enabling an approach to modeling social systems in a way that satisfies the ontological criterion of variability. Indeed, these themes are elaborated upon in the second part of this book which seeks to derive an empirically meaningful framework faithful to the ontological criteria developed in the preceding chapter. Before turning to this endeavor, however, it is necessary to consider the epistemological agent-structure problem.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding two chapters we have highlighted the need to attend to the (inter) subjective element of social phenomena. More directly, we have argued that the analysis of international politics inevitably needs to account for the intentional nature of agency, and benefits from the introduction of sets of rules and practices which agents of international politics invoke in the process of social action. The question addressed in the present chapter is whether these subjectivist ontological infusions require an epistemology distinct from that of theories, such as structural realism, which emphasize “objective” ontologies of international politics.

Despite some differences, proponents of (inter)subjective ontologies of politics tend toward the general claim that a subjectivist ontology of agency and/or structure is incompatible with a positivist epistemology, and instead requires an interpretive epistemology. Hollis and Smith (1990) differentiate between two approaches to international politics. On the one side, international politics can be *understood* from the agent’s point of view through an interpretive analysis. On the other side, this subject matter can be *explained* through the application of a causal, positivist epistemology. Wendt (1987:340) describes this ontological-epistemological connection as follows:

approaches to social inquiry that conceive of human beings as reflective, goal-directed subjects, such as rational choice theory, generate agent-explanations that are, broadly speaking, “interpretive”—that is, cast in terms of the goals, beliefs, and self-understandings of agents. On the other hand, approaches that conceive of human beings as nothing more than complex organisms processing stimuli—such as behaviorism—generate agent-explanations that are more mechanistically causal in form.

Wendt (1995:75) does claim that he and other constructivists “are modernists who fully endorse the scientific project of falsifying theories against evidence.”

He also recognizes that analysis of agency intentionality is compatible with a scientific approach (Wendt 1991:391). Despite these claims, however, Wendt (1987:362–364) endorses a qualitative epistemological distinction between agency and structure, associating the latter with explaining the possible through abstract causal analysis, and the former with explaining the actual through historical analysis.

Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986), similarly, argue that an intersubjective ontology requires an interpretive epistemology. They hold that the emphasis of regime scholars “on convergent expectations as the constitutive basis of regimes gives regimes an inescapable intersubjective quality” (1986:764). According to Kratochwil and Ruggie, positivist epistemology’s emphasis on “objective” forces “causing” “overt” behavior is incompatible with the analysis of the intersubjective meanings constitutive of international regimes.¹

Thus, despite differences—and indeed ambiguities—in the epistemological claims forwarded by these scholars, they share the view that agency- and structure-based explanations require distinct epistemologies, with the former associated with understanding, explaining the actual, and historical analysis, and the latter associated with explanation, explaining the possible, and causal analysis. Stated differently, these scholars generally contend that interpretivism and positivism represent two distinct epistemological orientations and that a subjectivist thesis of agency is incompatible with a positivist epistemology.

The general thesis of the present chapter is that contrary to this widely endorsed view, interpretive sociology, or, more specifically, interpretive sociology’s emphasis upon the subjectivist thesis of agency and/or structure, is commensurate with positivist epistemology. In fact, we argue that interpretive sociological analysis must inevitably rely on nomothetic explanation, i.e., abstract concept formation, classification of singular or empirical statements according to these general concepts, and causal relationships. In addition, interpretivist methodological predilections toward explanation intelligible to the subject, empathetic understanding, and context specificity are all subsumable under positivism. In fact, one may argue that these techniques receive more explicit and systematic definition within than outside positivist discourse.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part provides the foundation of the ensuing analysis by identifying the core properties of the interpretive and positivist approaches. The second part presents the thrust of the thesis by reducing Weber’s notions of “observational understanding” and “explanation understanding” into the defining components of nomothetic explanation. The third part points to the probabilistic nature of the explanation of social phenomena, and demonstrates that it is improper to associate structure with the explanation of the possible through causal analysis, on the one side, and agency with the explanation of the actual through historical analysis, on the other. In the last part we present a critique of interpretive discussions of context and, building on the concept of “nice laws,” develop the foundations for a “causal modeling” approach to context.

DEFINING POSITIVIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND INTERPRETIVE SOCIOLOGY

To analyze the relationship between positivism and interpretive sociology, as well as the relationship between this dichotomy and the agent-structure dichotomy, it is first necessary to identify the defining components of these approaches. In this section we associate positivist epistemology with two basic properties clearly central in the works of thinkers such as Nagel (1961) and Hempel (1965): the dual-language structure of explanatory statements, and causation. We then discuss Weber's observational and explanatory understanding.

Positivist epistemology

We take the nomothetic, or covering-law, model of explanation to be the primary defining property of positivism. This model is oriented toward what Hempel (1965) terms "explanation-seeking-why-questions," or questions which ask: "Why is it the case that p ?", where ' p ' refers to particular empirical occurrences or uniformities of law."² Covering-law explanation consists of two sets of components—an explanans (S), and an explanandum (E). The explanans in turn consists of two elements: (1) initial conditions (C_k), or singular or instantial statements, "which assert that certain events have occurred at indicated times and places or that given objects have definite properties" (Nagel 1961:31) and (2) laws (L_r), or general statements about the correspondence of classes of things which serve as causes of the explanandum. Particular facts or singular statements cited in the explanans have explanatory relevance by virtue of their membership within the concepts comprising these general statements. Accordingly, the singular statement of causation that x caused y corresponds to the statement that individual event x , as an instance of X , caused individual event y , as an instance of Y (see Hempel 1965:350). Explanation of the occurrence of a phenomenon, then, consists in the demonstration that this explanandum resulted from an empirical manifestation of a nomothetic statement of causation.³

Two general models of nomothetic explanation must be distinguished—deductive nomological (D-N) and statistical. The D-N and statistical forms of nomological explanation are differentiated according to the quality of their laws. Whereas D-N explanation attributes "a certain characteristic to all members of a certain class," or states universal laws, statistical nomological explanation attributes a certain characteristic "to a specified proportion of its members," or states probabilistic laws (Hempel 1965:379). In other words, whereas "because" in D-N explanation connotes the property of determinism, the term in statistical explanation connotes the property of probabilism.⁴

Interpretive sociology

The conceptualization of the "interpretive" approach presented below is based

primarily on the work of Max Weber and Alfred Schutz. Weber merits attention given his status as one of the primary founders of interpretive sociology (*Verstehen Soziologie*).⁵ Schutz, in turn, is a crucial reference because he conducted an explicit and authoritative analysis and elaboration of the central concept of Weber's interpretive sociology—i.e., meaningful agency behavior. Thus, by analyzing Weber and Schutz we have a coherent and authoritative statement of interpretive sociology.⁶

Weber characterized sociology as “a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects” (Weber 1968:20). The term “action” refers to behavior which for the acting individual is meaningful. This meaning “in no case” refers “to an objectively ‘correct’ meaning or one which is ‘true’ in some metaphysical sense” (Weber 1949). Rather, the meaning of an action is subjective; it is a construct of the actor's mind. Action is “social” meanwhile, “insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course” (Weber 1968:20). Understanding this subjective meaning, then, becomes the locus of analysis for interpretive sociology.

Weber distinguishes between two such forms of understanding of agency social action—“observational understanding” and “explanatory understanding”:

Understanding may be of two kinds: the first is the direct observational understanding [*aktuelles Verstehen*] of the subjective meaning [*gemeinter Sinn*] of a given act as such, including verbal utterances. We thus understand by direct observation, in this sense...an outbreak of anger as manifested by facial expression, exclamations or irrational movements...

Understanding may, however, be of another sort, namely explanatory understanding [*erklärendes Verstehen*]. Thus we understand in terms of motive [*motivationsmassig*] the meaning an actor attaches...in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances... This is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning [*Sinnzusammenhang*]...[W]e understand the motive of a person aiming a gun if we know that he has been commanded to shoot as a member of a firing squad, that he is fighting against an enemy, or that he is doing it for revenge.... [T]he particular act has been placed in an understandable *sequence of motivation* [*Sinnzusammenhang*], the understanding of which can be treated as an *explanation* of the actual course of behavior. Thus for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the complex of meaning [*Sinnzusammenhang*] in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs. In all such cases, even where the processes are largely affectual, the subjective meaning...of the action, including that

also of the relevant meaning complexes, will be called the “intended” meaning.

(Weber 1968:25–26)

According to Weber, then, interpretive sociology involves the identification of an action as an instance of a type of action and, consequently, the explanation of this action by associating it with a motive. As Parsons points out, moreover, the methods of these two types of understanding are distinct. Specifically, observational understanding is derived from “immediate observation” and explanation understanding is derived from the location of this action “in a broader context of meaning involving facts which cannot be derived from immediate observation of a particular act or expression” (Weber 1968:25).

THE COMMENSURABILITY OF THE SUBJECTIVIST THESIS AND POSITIVISM

Some evidence of the compatibility of the interpretive metatheoretical agenda (or interpretive approach) with positivist epistemology is quite clearly embodied in the above discussion. The present section seeks to demonstrate in more depth that the subjectivist ontological foundations of interpretive sociology are commensurate with the defining elements of nomothetic explanation—i.e., the dual-language logic, and explanation based on causal relationships between nomothetic concepts.

Dual language

We begin by elaborating on a point clearly implied in the above discussion of observational understanding—that the dual-language dichotomy represents a defining property of the methodology of interpretive sociology. Interpretivists are in fact quite explicit in both the distinction between nomothetic and instantial statements, and in the crucial role nomothetic statements play in explanation. The most notable manifestation of Weber’s reliance upon nomothetic statements is to be found in his notion of ideal types:

it is no “hypothesis” but it offers guidance to the construction of hypotheses. It is not a *description* of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description.... In its conceptual purity, this mental construct...cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a *utopia*. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality.

(1949:90)

Weber explicitly applies the distinction between nomothetic and observational statements in his discussion of the key interpretive sociological term “meaning”:

The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived *pure type* of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action.

(Weber 1968:21; emphasis in original)

Interpretive scholars in fact emphasize the necessity of the distinction between abstract analytic and empirical entities. Schutz (1967:227; emphasis in original) argues that “since what is thematically pre-given to sociology and every other social science is the social reality which is indirectly experienced...it follows that even when social science is dealing with the action of a single individual, it must do so in terms of types.” In a similar fashion, Geertz (1973:27) notes that the task of the interpretivist is “to uncover the conceptual structures that inform our subjects’ acts...and to construct a system of analysis in whose terms what is generic to those structures...will stand out against the other determinants of human behavior.”⁷ Along the same lines, finally, Charles Taylor (1979:33) writes: “Meanings cannot be identified except in relation to others, and in this way resemble words.... The relations between meanings in this sense are like those between concepts in a semantic field.”

The interpretive distinction between typifications, on the one side, and empirical statements, on the other, applies to Weber’s explanation understanding as well as observational understanding. That is, abstract classification, or typification, is applied to actual instances of social action and subjective meaning or motive underlying this action. Thus, interpretivist reliance upon the dual-language structure of analysis is evident.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the role of causation in interpretive analysis, we wish to explicitly emphasize that observational understanding, at times held by proponents of interpretivism to be a lacuna in positivist analysis and a strength of interpretive analysis, is intrinsic to positivist epistemology. In Sartorian terminology, observational understanding refers to linking any particular datum to the intensional categories of a concept or classificatory scheme. In line with Rosenau’s (1980) admonition to would-be theorists always to ask, “Of what is this an instance?”, a similar point is argued by Most and Starr (1989:107; see also 1984:392) in the context of international relations theory:

If scholars are genuinely interested in understanding why states do what they do, they need to move beyond efforts to focus separately on particular concrete behaviors. Rather than asking middle range questions about specific empirical phenomena, they should begin with that initial “grand” question with which they were allegedly concerned in the first place; rather

than asking why countries arm, form alliances, import arms, negotiate, attack, and so on, they should begin by asking themselves what each behavior does—or at least could represent.

Furthermore, attention to the very logic of the connection between observation and meaning, and to the implications of this logic for the substance and validity of empirical analysis, is an obviously integral component of positivist analysis. These concerns are manifest in the extensive and sophisticated attention to such concerns as construct validity, measurement error, and multiple indicators (see, e.g., Campbell and Fiske 1959; Sullivan and Feldman 1979; and a more sophisticated treatment in Bollen 1989). Indeed, such explicit and systematic methods of data collection and analysis are sorely absent in the works of many if not most proponents of an “interpretive” approach. Eckstein has observed that, given the lack of hard rules for interpretation, the interpreter may discern in observations “any number of patterns that are more or less equally plausible” (1975:98). Geertz has made much the same observation (1973:24): “The besetting sin of interpretive approaches to anything... is that they tend to resist, or to be permitted to resist, conceptual articulation and thus to escape systematic modes of assessment.”

Causation

Having established interpretive sociological reliance upon nomothetic statements, it is necessary to demonstrate that interpretive sociologists combine singular and nomothetic statements to provide causal explanations of social action. We might begin by pointing to the explicit endorsement by interpretive sociologists of the centrality of causation in interpretive analysis. For example, Weber writes that “a *valid* imputation of any individual effect without the application of ‘*nomological*’ knowledge—i.e., the knowledge of recurrent causal sequences—would in general be impossible. Whether a single individual component of a relationship is, in a concrete case, to be assigned causal responsibility for an effect, the causal explanation of which is at issue, can in doubtful cases be determined only by estimating the effects which we *generally* expected from it and from the other components of the same complex which are relevant to the explanation” (Weber 1949:79). And elsewhere Weber writes that cultural science “is entirely *causal* knowledge exactly in the same sense as the knowledge of significant concrete... natural events which have a qualitative character” (Weber 1949:82).⁸

More to the point, interpretive sociology, as embodied in Weber’s notion of explanatory understanding, relies on subjective meaning precisely as the central causal mechanism in the explanation of social action. In Weber’s own words, “‘purpose’ is the conception of an *effect* which becomes a *cause* of an action” (Weber 1949:83). Schutz (1967:28) elaborates that the actor experiences or expresses motivation in two distinct ways:

First, there appears to me, as the meaningful ground of my behavior, a series of future events whose occurrence I propose to bring about. I am orienting my behavior to this end...second.... I refer to those past experiences of mine which have led me to behave as I do. In the first case I regard my behavior as the means of accomplishing some desired goal... In the second case I regard my present behavior as the result of past experiences, as the effect of preceding "causes."... Note that in both cases the motive being sought after lies outside the time span of the actual behavior.

The distinction between the two kinds of motives can be expressed as follows: "the in-order-to motive explains the act in terms of the project, while the genuine because-motive explains the project in terms of the actor's past experiences" (Schutz 1967:91).

Two contemporary advocates of methodological individualism, Davidson and Elster, explicitly delineate the causal logic of intentional explanation. Davidson conceptualizes the "primary reason" of social action as the action's cause. Stated formally: "*R* is a primary reason why an agent performed the action *A* under the description *d* only if *R* consists of a pro attitude of the agent toward actions with a certain property, and a belief of the agent that *A* under the description *d*, has that property" (Davidson 1968:46–47). Elster (1986:12–13) identifies three components of intentional behavior: "An intentional explanation of a piece of behavior...amounts to demonstrating a three-place relation between the behavior (B), a set of cognitions (C) entertained by the individual, and a set of desires (D) that can also be imputed to him." The optimality condition necessary for intentional explanation is that "C and D caused B *qua* reasons" (Elster 1986:13). In other words, the action must not only be rationalized by the desire and the belief; it must also be caused by them.

Finally, scholars closely associated with the positivist tradition, here we are thinking of Nagel and Hempel, also often explicitly subscribe to treatment of agent intentionality as cause. Hempel (1965:487) elaborates as follows:

an explanation of the form "x did y because he wanted z" does not refer to a causal relation between two events...in the sense that the statement "x wanted z" does not describe an event, but ascribes to x a broadly dispositional property. But a because-sentence of the specified form surely affords an explanation only on the further assumption that x was in circumstances in which, at least by his lights, doing y could be expected to lead to z; and when supplemented by this further statement, the account...cannot be said to be noncausal.

Two possible critiques may be levelled against viewing the models of intentional explanation advanced above as "causal." First, some scholars, e.g. Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986), generally attribute to positivist epistemology a strict Humean or essentialist definition of causation, which emphasizes an explicit, determinis-

tic, and mechanistic conceptualization of causation (see, e.g., Cook and Campbell 1979:9–36). Given the incompatibility of this conceptualization of causation with the subjective foundations of social action, these scholars conclude that positivism is inappropriate for the study of international politics. To this argument we respond simply that causation need not be restricted to such a narrow meaning.

A second critique is that the relationship between intention and action is given by definition and thus cannot represent a causal relationship. J. Donald Moon (1975:162–166) argues that a nomothetic explanation of social action requires that the link between an agent's reasons, on the one hand, and action on the other, be contingent; that is, it must be possible to “determine the existence of the action apart from ascertaining the intentions,” and to “ascertain an agent's intentions without thereby verifying that he acted in a certain way.” Note that these criteria amount to a call for the conceptual autonomy which was discussed in [Chapter 2](#). According to Moon, if particular intentions cannot be treated as other than defining properties of types of intentional action, then the explanation of the action reduces to a practical syllogism, whereby explanation of the action is guaranteed by the definition of the action. Alternatively, the logic underlying the practical syllogism is that “the ‘rationale’ of an action is (part of) what establishes something as an action in the first place!”

Moon proceeds to argue that intentions or reasons for action are not contingent. First, agents justify statements of intentions and beliefs through action. Second, agency knowledge of the substance and reality of his or her own intentions can only be realized in the moment of action. Thus, actions and intentions are not contingently related. Therefore, explanations of social action do not conform to the nomothetic model of causal explanation. Rather, a practical syllogistic inference, “by providing the intention of an action, explains why the agent performed it and enables us to understand at least part of the meaning of the action—what the actor intended in doing what he did.”

This argument fails for at least two general reasons. First, actions can be identified independently of intentions. Recall, first, the interpretive dictum that a plurality of interpretations can be bestowed upon any particular behavioral datum. To understand why this is so in more concrete terms, we (re)turn to Most and Starr's (1989) thesis of foreign policy substitutability. Simply, this thesis distinguishes between particular concrete behaviors and the goals to which they are oriented. For example, concrete behaviors such as armaments, alliances, negotiation, and conflict escalation, can be grouped into a set defined as means of self-help. Stated in more general terms, a practical syllogism tells us that a certain form of social action, *A*, is that action necessarily motivated by a particular intention, *I*. In accordance with the thesis of foreign policy substitutability, we define *A* as a term which refers to a set of less general forms of social action, i.e., $\{a_1, a_2, a_3 \dots a_x \dots a_i\}$. Thus, given the thesis of foreign policy substitutability, the central “why” question becomes not “why *A*?” but rather “why a_x ?” The practical syllogistic inference, as presented by Moon, is incapable of explaining social action so defined.

Furthermore, social actions which are motivated by various intentions—and perhaps a majority of political actions fall under this category—pose an important problem for the practical inference rule of meaning attribution. The concept of an alternate trigger problem (Most and Starr 1989) points to the distinctiveness of actions and because-motives, as well as to the plurality of because-motives associated with any type of action. In fact, actions in interpretive terminology can be motivated by various intentions, or to put it differently, an agent most likely recognizes that any particular action has implications for a plurality of agency values or interests. Accordingly, it becomes imperative to define behavioral options separately from these values and interests.

The second central deficiency of Moon's argument is that its claim that a person cannot know an intention unless and/or until he or she acts upon it is simply empirically and theoretically unjustified. Despite the self-evident nature of our claim, a number of interpretive thinkers are explicit on this point. Schutz emphasizes that both because and in-order-to motives "lie outside the time span of the actual behavior" (Schutz 1967:28). Schutz notes that for Weber, too, "intended meaning refers...to the point in time before the completion of the act" (Schutz 1967:227). Thus, intentions and actions satisfy the contingency criterion of nomothetic explanation which is posited by Moon, and are thus compatible with nomothetic explanation.

It is imperative to add that interpretive sociological emphasis on the causal role played by agency intentions does not preclude attention to the antecedent impact of external or environmental variables in interpretation. Indeed, interpretive sociologists explicitly attend to such antecedent factors. Recall Weber's concern with intentions as effects as well as causes. Note also that Schutz's because-motive similarly links agency in-order-to-motives to antecedent external conditions.

In sum, the intentional meaning serves as a (indeed the) central causal mechanism in the interpretive sociological analysis of social action. Arguments to the contrary, based either on a strict Humean or essentialist conception of cause, or on an association of explanatory interpretation with practical syllogism, are not persuasive. This is especially so in light of the explicit and systematic conceptions of intentional explanation advanced by central proponents of interpretive sociology, among others. Thus, recalling interpretive sociology's emphasis on a dual-language structure, we can conclude that the analytic approach of interpretive sociology is subsumable under positivist epistemology, and that, consequently, a subjectivist ontology is compatible with a positivist epistemology.

AGENCY, STRUCTURE, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The commensurability of the subjectivist thesis with positivism, in conjunction with the probabilistic nature of nomothetic explanation of social phenomena, undermine the dichotomy that Wendt presents: (1) his association of "agency-

based explanation” with explanation of the actual, and historical (and one might add ideographic) analysis; as opposed to (2) “structure-based explanation” with explanation of the possible, and causal analysis.

To demonstrate how this is so, it is imperative to first establish an important insight in its own right, that nomothetic explanation is necessarily non-universal and probabilistic. At least two factors militate against the realization of universal laws of social phenomena. One widely recognized factor involves inadequate model specification. In other words, theories of social phenomena adequately specify neither the complete set of pertinent variables nor the functional forms of the relationships between these variables (e.g. see Most and Starr 1989). This inability adequately to specify the complete set of operative variables and relationships and to isolate the posited model from the (potential) impact of extraneous variables point to the centrality of the *ceteris paribus* clause. Thus, given model misspecification, “we are unable to state the precise conditions upon which different types of human conduct invariably depend” (Nagel 1961:504).

Another major obstacle to universal laws of social phenomena derives from the subjective quality of agency. Nagel (1961:504) notes, “since the responses men make to social situations vary because their interpretations differ...we cannot establish strictly universal generalizations relating external stimuli and human reactions to them.” Nagel continues, that “even when generalizations about social phenomena and predictions of future social events are the conclusions of indisputably competent inquiries, the conclusions can literally *be made invalid* if they become matters of public knowledge and if, in the light of this knowledge, men alter the patterns of their behavior upon whose study the conclusions are based” (Nagel 1961:468).

The probabilistic nature of nomothetic explanation of social phenomena helps to undermine Wendt’s association of “agency-based” explanation with explanation of the actual, on the one side, and “structure-based” explanation with explanation of the possible on the other. The actual-possible dichotomy is itself troublesome. The juxtaposition of the “actual” with the “*possible*” implies that the former term refers to a deterministic, certain explanation of the social action. Given the inevitability of the probabilistic nature of the explanation of social phenomena, however, it is not possible to explain any explanandum with certainty. Moreover, agency-level factors are just as necessary as structural factors for the probabilistic explanation of social outcomes. This is clearly evident in the above discussion of interpretive sociological explanation, and is also evident in Most and Starr’s metatheoretical hypothesis that opportunity and willingness are jointly necessary components of explanation. Wendt’s distinction between causal analysis and historical analysis is also misconceived. That this is so is clearly given by the emphatic and indeed necessary combination of singular and nomothetic language in the explanation of social action. In other words, any analysis of history requires reliance upon nomothetic concepts. This point is emphasized by both Nagel and Hempel. Nagel explains that “a given pair of past events can be shown to be causally related only with the help of causal general-

izations (whether strictly universal or statistical in form)... Accordingly, the causal imputations historians make in explanations of human actions in the past are based on assumed laws of causal dependence. In brief, history is therefore not a purely ideographic discipline” (1961:550). Hempel (1965:243) presents the argument this way: “Even if a historian should propose to restrict his research to a ‘pure description’ of the past, without any attempt at offering explanations or statements about relevance and determination, he would continually have to make use of general laws. For the object of his studies would be the past—forever inaccessible to his direct examination. He would have to establish his knowledge by indirect methods: by the use of universal hypotheses which connect his present data with those past events.”

Weber himself recognizes the historian’s need for theory. He directs our attention to the central issue of theory-ladenness within any observer:

If the historian...rejects an attempt to construct such ideal types as a “theoretical construction,” i.e., as useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable consequence is either that he consciously or unconsciously uses other similar concepts without formulating them verbally and elaborating them logically or that he remains stuck in the realm of the vaguely “felt.”

(1949:94)

Finally, given the problematic differentiation between causal and historical analysis, the problematic differentiation between explanation of the possible and explanation of the actual, and the joint relevance of agency- and structural-level factors and processes to the dual-language probabilistic explanation, it necessarily follows that Wendt’s epistemological differentiation between agency and structure is unfounded. Stated positively, contrary to Wendt, agency- and structural-level variables and processes are nomothetically equivalent—they serve the same epistemological functions and subscribe to the same epistemological logic.

ALTERNATIVE FEATURES OF INTERPRETATION AND POSITIVISM

Some proponents of an interpretive approach may contend that nomothetic explanation does not represent the defining property of interpretive sociology. Instead, they could assert that the defining and distinguishing properties of the interpretive approach are an emphasis on the intelligibility of explanation to the subjects themselves, the importance of empathy in uncovering these subjective states, the invalidity of a strict dual-language logic, or the emphasis upon the crucial role of context in interpretation. Accordingly, these scholars would contend that the arguments set out here, even if internally valid, do not undermine the distinctive quality of the interpretive approach. We therefore address each of these claims in turn.

The first contention is that the intelligibility of explanation is emphasized by interpretivists but not by positivists. According to this position, positivist analysis of social phenomena succumbs to what Geertz (1973:12) has called the “cognitivist fallacy”—a belief in contemporary social science that culture consists of “mental phenomena which can...be analyzed by formal methods similar to those of mathematics and logic.”

Rational choice theory is viewed by such critics as the most egregious violation of the intelligibility of theoretical constructs to the subjects. Moe (1979:216), for example, notes that “all rational models are grounded on assumptions that are not empirically valid and in most cases are not even close to descriptive accuracy.”⁹ As concerns the cognitivist critique of rational choice, we suggest that rational choice mathematical decision-making constructions could be viewed as representing a *systematic* attempt to *approximate* typifications of an extremely *complicated* sort, i.e., agency intentionality. That is, given that agents weigh costs and benefits in some way, we *have* to model such processes *somehow* and mathematical models provide perhaps the most logical way of doing so. This position has the distinct advantage over the *as if* assumption in that its validity is based primarily on its truthfulness and only secondarily on its ability to predict successfully. Furthermore, the argument that actors acted *because* rather than *as if* they were rational makes rational choice theoretic arguments more properly causal rather than descriptive.

But, our primary point is that the value of explanation intelligible to the agents themselves is compatible with a positivist epistemology. The criterion of intelligibility is important because it generally contributes to the empirical validity of concepts and theoretical constructions.¹⁰ In fact, the centrality of empirical validity points to an important limitation of the emphasis on intelligible explanation in positivism. Though the intelligibility criterion often serves the empirical validity of an explanation, if cognitive processes of which the agent is unaware are causally operative, then the intelligibility criterion becomes an insufficient if not invalid methodological principle. Giddens’s (1984) three-tiered conceptualization of agency consciousness—differentiating between discursive, tacit, and unconscious motives/cognition—points out that only one out of three potentially operative levels of motivation/cognition is clearly intelligible to the agent. Thus, agents may clearly be motivated by actions which they cannot explain.¹¹ It follows that in such cases, the empirical validity of a theoretical construct must take precedence over the intelligibility of actions if our goal is to explain agent behavior. Weber himself subsumes intelligibility under validity, writing that “‘conscious motives’ may well, even to the actor himself, conceal the various ‘motives’ and ‘repressions’ which constitute the real driving force of his action” (Weber 1968:27).

Defenders of interpretive sociology’s distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* positivism might also claim that interpretivist methodology emphasizes empathy. However, as Hempel points out, empathetic understanding itself relies on nomothetic statements: “the historian tries to realize how he himself would act under the

given conditions...he tentatively generalizes his findings into a general rule and uses the latter as an explanatory principle in accounting for the actions of the persons involved” (Hempel 1965: 239–240).

More importantly, it is necessary to preserve the *ideal-typical* distinction, *for analytic purposes*, between the logic of discovery (which includes where theory comes from) and the logic of verification (which includes how to compare and evaluate theories). Nagel (1961:485) observes:

the fact that the social scientist, unlike the student of inanimate nature, is able to project himself by sympathetic imagination into the phenomena he is attempting to understand, is pertinent to questions concerning the *origins* of his explanatory hypotheses but not to questions concerning their validity. His ability to enter into relations of empathy with the human actors in some social process may indeed be heuristically important in his efforts to *invent* suitable hypotheses which will explain the process. Nevertheless, his empathic identification with those individuals does not, by itself, constitute *knowledge*. The fact that he achieves such identification does not annul the need for objective evidence, assessed in accordance with logical principles that are common to all controlled inquiries, to support his imputation of subjective states to those human agents.

It must be emphasized, however, that the distinction between discovery and verification is an analytic one necessary for the evaluation of theory. In fact, the attribution of a categorical distinction between “brute data” and interpretation (e.g., C.Taylor 1979:40–42) is applicable only to a naive form of positivism. Sophisticated positivist-oriented scholars have traditionally and explicitly recognized the interpretability of sense data (e.g., Sartori 1984; Jacoby 1991).

Another claim forwarded by proponents of an interpretive approach is that explanation of social phenomena should be context-specific. Interpretivists have generally defined context in “cultural” terms. Culture refers generally not to more intuitive conceptions involving ritual or religion, *per se*, but rather to a body of shared meanings as reflected in the intersubjective conceptualization of structure discussed in the prior chapter.¹² Note, Weber’s definition of culture as “webs of significance” captures the individual level specificity of structure emphasized in [Chapter 3](#). Georg Simmel describes such webs:

the larger the number of groups to which an individual belongs, the more improbable is it that other persons will exhibit the same combination of group-affiliations, that these particular groups will “intersect” once again in a second individual.... As individuals, we form the personality out of particular elements of life, each of which has arisen from, or is interwoven with, society. This personality is subjectivity par excellence in the sense that it combines the elements of culture in an individual manner.... As the person becomes affiliated with a social group, he surrenders himself to it.

A synthesis of such subjective affiliations creates a group in an objective sense. But the person also regains his individuality, because his pattern of participation is unique; hence the fact of multiple group-participation creates in turn a new subjective element.

(quoted in Scott 1987:145)

In response to the claim that positivist epistemology does not adequately address cultural context, three points require mention. First, the extension of context as defined by proponents of an interpretive ontology is vague. That is, cultural-specificity often pertains to particular geographic locations such as nation-states and historical eras. But such boundaries have no a priori connection whatsoever to the interpretive definition of culture. Some of the most important perspectives on political culture concur in delineating typologies of political culture which transcend national boundaries (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963; Pye and Verba 1965; Inglehart 1990).

The bases of cultural differentiation are all the more problematic in the analysis of international politics agents. In fact, note that the interpretive emphasis on cultural specificity is undermined by the assumption of a monolithic system-wide intersubjective structure as found in Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986), Dessler (1989), and Wendt (1987).

Second, nomothetic discourse, in fact, provides the means with which to develop explicit and compelling conceptualizations of context. Conceptualization of context is usefully addressed by viewing context as variable complexes which influence the relationships of direct concern.¹³ To advance this claim, we first point out that the term “context” has two defining properties, which are identifiable in the following definition: “1. the parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specified word or passage and can influence its meaning or effect. 2. the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.” (*Oxford Dictionary* 1996:294). The first definition emphasizes the crucial property of influence; that is, context can influence the meaning, or classification, of a particular term or observation, or it can influence causal relationships. The second definition captures the integral notion that context *surrounds* that which is of direct concern (see also Goertz 1994). Thus, we treat these two properties of context as the defining properties of the concept.

Indeed, the significance of a nomothetic conceptualization of context corresponds with Most and Starr’s conception of “nice laws,” or “‘sometimes true,’ domain specific laws” (1989:98). Most and Starr remind us that while we should aim for generality, the “right type of law” is one which is clearly specified; that the relationships among variables that it proposes will work only under specified conditions. Most and Starr question whether social scientists will ever generate important “universal” laws. They note, however (1989:117) that:

it may be useful to recognize that there could very well be laws that are in some sense “good,” “domain specific,” or “nice” even though the relation-

ships they imply are not necessarily very general empirically...it may be more productive to think of laws each of which is always true under certain conditions (or within certain domains) but which is only "sometimes true" empirically because those conditions do not always hold in the empirical world.

Most and Starr (1984:396–397) have emphasized the nomothetic quality and methodological implications of context:

analysts may be led astray when they associate laws and theories with questions of universal truth or empirical generalizations because a given phenomenon may occur for a variety of distinct, totally incommensurable reasons.... Just as the possibility of foreign policy substitution suggests that a given factor may lead to different results (a one-to-many-mapping), the logical reverse is also imaginable. Different processes may lead to similar results; different factors may trigger similar responses (a many-to-one mapping). If policy makers can use different options in their pursuit of similar goals (i.e., substitute), they can also adopt identical options for different reasons, or employ similar means to pursue different goals.

The causal complex nature of context is also approached through what Goertz (1994:2) calls the "problematique of context." Goertz's (1994:21) discussion emphasizes three forms of context. The first and perhaps most important is context as barrier: "Barriers are *negative* forces, they keep events from occurring." Specifically referring to environmental possibilism and opportunity, Goertz sees contextual barriers as a "counteracting cause," which prevents agents from achieving their goals. As such, a *necessary condition* for the occurrence of some event or attainment of some goal is the *removal* of the barrier (Goertz 1994:23). In this way Goertz (1994:95) provides a compelling demonstration of how constraining structure—here, context as barrier—can explain both stability and rapid change: "Barrier models provide one possible answer to the question about dramatic change. The collapse of a barrier presents new opportunities that are quickly seized upon by interested parties." Context as "cause" means that "the context is neither individually necessary nor sufficient, but in conjunction with other factors it explains the outcome or makes it more likely" (Goertz 1994:3). Context as "changing meaning" means that changing contexts alter the *meaning* of concepts as well as their indicators; are things "the same," do they mean the same thing within different contexts? As with nice laws, context is here concerned with which theories or relationships hold under what specific conditions (Goertz 1994: ch. 3). Ultimately, the causal complex approach to context recognizes that the meaning of context depends on the focal object of explanation.¹⁴

Finally, the third response to the charge that positivist epistemology ignores context is that scholars would benefit from the recognition that the parameters of the extension of a concept or model itself depends on the substance of the con-

cept or model. This is clearly evident in Sartori's view of concept formation, which explicitly presents an inverse relationship between the richness and external validity of a model. By increasing the intension, we gain the advantage of enriching the concept of the agent and thus of enriching the explanatory power (by potentially invoking a larger set of variables). At the same time, however, we are reducing the extension of our concept.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, this chapter has refuted three theses concerning the relationship between the agent-structure dichotomy and epistemology advanced by Wendt (1987), Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986), and Hollis and Smith (1990). We have demonstrated, first, that the interpretive approach does not present an epistemological orientation distinct from the positivist epistemology. On the contrary, the interpretive approach relies on the defining elements of nomological explanation, i.e., dual-language structure of explanation, and reliance upon causal relationships between nomothetic concepts.

Furthermore, we have shown that the subjective thesis of agency entails that laws concerning social phenomena can only be stated probabilistically. This reality, in turn, undermines the distinction between explanation of the actual and explanation of the possible, since explanation of the actual can never be determinate. In addition, we have demonstrated that "historical" analysis (or thick description) depends upon positions, if often only implicitly held, concerning law-like relationships. Thus, we have demonstrated that the subjectivist thesis of agency is compatible with a positivist epistemology.

We have also seen that interpretivist emphases upon empathetic understanding, intelligibility of explanation, and context specificity are subsumable within a positivist epistemology. Given the centrality of context, we elaborated upon the meaning of nice laws developed by Most and Starr (1989). We define context as the impact of particular variables on the relationships that exist in the causal complex of central concern. Thus, to determine the key contexts of particular variable complexes, we must first identify these variable complexes—concepts and their relationships—and then locate the set of variables which may alter one or more causal relationships within this context. Finally, we should be sensitive to the tradeoff between conceptual richness and external validity.

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Part II

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SOME THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALIST APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

The ontological and epistemological issues relating to agency and structure discussed in the first part of this book ultimately contribute to the substance and quality of our understanding of international politics through their implications for the formulation and conduct of meaningful, i.e., theoretical and empirical, analysis. The second part of this book thus seeks to derive from the preceding analysis of the agent-structure problem some foundations for the theoretical and empirical analysis of international politics.

This movement across the metatheory/theory divide begins with consideration of the unit of analysis problem. Simply, the conceptualization of agents as subjective, intentional, entities with the power to choose and influence social phenomena suggests, perhaps dictates, that the proper extension of the abstract conceptualization of agency is the individual international political elite. Focusing on individual elites as the units of analysis, in turn, has at least two significant implications for the analysis of international politics.

First, it enables postulation of the multidimensional and more or less agent-specific nature of the structural milieu in which agents are embedded. Consequently, the individual elite focus provides empirically grounded meaning to the interpretive sociological emphasis on “webs of significance.” Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of agency structure provides a foundation for theorizing about the variation in the agency-structure interrelationship.

Second, the focus on international political elites and the more general interpretive sociological emphasis on social action, underscores the need to attend to effective choice processes involving international political issues. Thus, the international political system can be viewed as comprised of a set of social choice issue subsystems, each in turn comprised of some arrangement of elites. These social choice subsystems may be modeled in a fashion that enables analy-

sis not only of social choice outcomes but also of intrasocial choice conflict processes.

Note, finally, that explicit attention both to the multilayered environments and social choice processes of agents dovetails with the call by various scholars of international politics to integrate substate level processes into international politics theory (e.g., Most and Starr 1989; Ruggie 1986; Morrow 1988; Putnam 1988; Mastanduno, Lake, and Ikenberry 1989; Maoz 1990; Lamborn 1991; McGinnis and Williams 1993; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Russett 1995). For example, Russett (1995:280–281) argues, “A thoroughgoing critique of realism needs to get down to microtheory (utilizing public choice approaches, among others) and micro-analysis. It needs to incorporate not just the dynamics of decision making within governments but also the dynamics of interaction between government and opposition.” Thus, the present chapter and the second part of the book seek to derive theoretical formulations which are not only grounded in strong metatheoretical foundations but are also relevant to a general lacuna in the international politics literature.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part explains the necessity of focusing on individual elites as the units of analysis by pointing to the clear correspondence between individual elites and the abstract conceptualization of agency presented in [Chapter 2](#). The second part of this chapter elaborates upon the notion of the layered and more or less agent-specific nature of agency structural milieus. The third part develops the rough parameters of a conceptualization of international political social choice systems—identifying variables relevant to the explanation of social choice outcomes and intrasystem conflict processes. The chapter concludes by implying the need to develop models of international political elite values, interests, etc., and hypotheses accounting for continuity and change in international politics.

INDIVIDUAL ELITES AS THE UNITS OF ANALYSIS

This chapter explores the theoretical implications of focusing on individual elites as the actors in international politics. The primary justification for this investigation is that the empirically meaningful notion of individual international political elites is faithful to the abstract conceptualization of agency presented in [Chapter 2](#). It is also faithful to the model of rule-guided agency behavior emphasized by the intersubjectivist school. In the terminology of the Sartorian model of conceptualization, individual international political elites represent the extension of the intensional abstract properties of agency. Indeed, reliance upon individual elites may be viewed as being *dictated* by the abstract conceptualization of agency. Two of the three defining properties of agency—subjectivity (or consciousness), and intentional behavior, refer with theoretical and empirical validity only to individual human beings. The individual-level location of subjectivity is explicitly emphasized by interpretive sociologists. Schutz (1967:6) writes, for exam-

ple, that the meaning of “all the complex phenomena of the social world...is precisely that which the individuals involved attach to their own acts. The action of the individual and its intended meaning alone are subject to interpretive understanding.” The third defining property of agency, in turn, the power to choose and to influence social outcomes, is clearly consonant with the empirically meaningful notion of elites, as those individuals with effective influence over the allocation of international political values.¹

We understand that reliance upon individuals as the units of analysis in the study of international politics tends to undermine theoretical parsimony and methodological tractability. Thus, we also understand that the anthropomorphization of social aggregates can be a legitimate simplifying assumption. However, our objective here is to analyze the *implications* of the metatheoretical considerations developed in the first part of this book for the meaningful analysis of international politics. That is, we will attempt to delineate the parameters of a framework for the investigation of international politics which is faithful to the ontological foundations of the agent-structure relationship discussed in the first part of the book.

Wendt and Dessler’s discussions of the agent-structure problem have inadequately attended to this necessary implication of a subjectivist ontology. For Dessler, it is generally states (or at least neither explicitly nor solely individuals) which engage in meaningful social action. Wendt, similarly, classifies himself as a “statist and a realist,” and notes that states are still the dominant actors in the international system (1992a:424; see also 1992b). Wendt does indeed acknowledge and defend his anthropomorphization of the state:

There are at least two justifications for this anthropomorphism. Rhetorically, the analogy is an accepted practice in mainstream international relations discourse, and since this article is an immanent rather than external critique, it should follow the practice. Substantively, states are collectivities of individuals that through their practices constitute each other as “persons” having interests, fears, and so on. A full theory of state identity- and interest-formation would nevertheless need to draw insights from the social psychology of groups and organizational theory, and for that reason my anthropomorphism is merely suggestive.

(Wendt 1992a:397)

Again, given that reliance upon individuals as the units of analysis tends to undermine theoretical parsimony and methodological tractability, the anthropomorphization of social aggregates is a generally defensible simplifying assumption.² But the widespread reliance on the state, or for that matter any other large-scale aggregation of individuals, as the unit of analysis, is illegitimate for an analysis intended precisely to uncover and rectify deficiencies in the metatheoretical foundations of substantive theory.³ Indeed, the individual-level location of the subjectivist thesis is implied quite strongly in the structuration-theoretic

claim that rules which signify and enable are activated and instantiated in the *moment of action*, given that action is an individual level phenomenon (see also, e.g., Giddens 1984). Simply, the state as unitary actor assumption is incompatible with a subjectivist ontology!

Though the following analysis of individual elites is motivated solely by the subjectivist ontology of agency, and makes use of formal models of foreign policy, we must place it in the context of prior international relations theorizing. It is useful to precede our own analysis with identification of some of the prior studies of international politics concerned with elites and individual human beings as the units of analysis. In so doing, we both credit these prior works, and highlight literature with which the following discussion might be fruitfully compared.

One important work on international politics is Rosecrance (1963). While ostensibly studying international systems, Rosecrance saw the basic “determinants” of those as residing in the political elites of each state. In delineating and analyzing a set of nine historical systems from 1740 and 1960, Rosecrance ultimately focuses on the attitudes of political elites, the resources at their command, and their ability to control both domestic and international politics. The primary conclusion of Rosecrance’s analysis, one which will be echoed in following chapters, is that domestic elite insecurity is linked to international instability.⁴

An important approach to the analysis of those actors with the power to make binding foreign policy choices is to be found in the work on “decision units” (see, for example, Hermann, Hermann, and Hagan 1987). Hermann, Hermann, and Hagan (1987:311) define the decision unit as follows:

At the apex of foreign policy decision making in all governments or ruling parties is a group of actors—the ultimate decision unit—who, if they agree, have both the ability to commit the resources of the government in foreign affairs and the power or authority to prevent other entities within the government from overtly reversing their position.

The decision unit framework associates variation in foreign policymaking processes with variation among three types of ultimate decisions units—(1) predominant leader (a single individual); (2) single group (a set of individuals who belong to a single body); and (3) multiple autonomous groups (“the important actors are members of different groups or coalitions, no one of which by itself has the ability to decide and force compliance on others; moreover, no overarching body exists in which all the necessary parties are members”) (Hermann, Hermann and Hagan 1987:311–312).

The overall parameters of the analytic framework elaborated upon in the following pages is even more closely related to the bureaucratic politics approach. Recall that the first question asked by Allison and Halperin (1972) in their attempt to summarize and synthesize Allison’s Models II and III, was simply: “who plays?” In the analysis of individual elites, we are in essence asking the same question—which individual elites in particular “decision games” should

we be studying? Moreover, after they ask, “who plays?” and “what determines each player’s stand?”, Allison and Halperin then ask, “how are these stands *aggregated* to yield governmental decisions?” These scholars add that after decision and policy games, we need to investigate “action” games—how policy is implemented. We should point out that the bureaucratic politics emphasis on the organizationally defined identities and interests of the primary players is also evident, albeit in more general form, in the following discussion.

In sum, the intensional properties of agency described in the first part of this book clearly and necessarily implicate individual human beings. The subjective ontology of agency, in combination with the general attribute of the ability to choose and exert social influence, suggests more precisely that international political elites represent a valid empirical manifestation of agents of international politics. Though the anthropomorphism of aggregates of individuals is in general a defensible methodological device, the purpose of the second part of this book is precisely to postulate elements of a framework for the analysis of international politics which remains faithful to, and which indeed empiricizes the metatheoretical foundations established in the first part of this book. In the remainder of this chapter, we elaborate upon two general implications of focusing on individual elites as units of analysis—the multidimensional nature of agency structure and the postulation of systems of international political elite choice.

THE LAYERED NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ELITE STRUCTURE

One general implication of a focus on individual elites as the units of analysis is that it enables *embedding* international political actors not in any single structure but rather in layers of structure which transcend various levels of analysis. In other words, we may conceptualize international political elites as being situated within a plurality of distinct structural milieus. Furthermore, the multilayered nature of agency and structure suggests that agents may be situated within more or less unique structural configurations. Both the layered and agent-specific properties of structure, in turn, provide the foundation of a method for attending to variation across elites and for individual elites over time.

The layered nature of international political agency structure

A focus upon individual elites as the units of analysis provides the conceptual space for incorporating domestic and subdomestic as well as external factors into explanation of international political behavior. We can illustrate this point initially in a negative manner. Treating states as the unit of analysis requires “black-boxing” the state, and thus assuming out of theoretical models the causal relevance of domestic-, governmental-, bureaucratic-, and individual-level factors. For example, Wendt (1987:366) suggests that theories of international relations

view the state “as an inherently *social* entity,” which embodies “internal organizational structures of the state which condition its perceptions and responses to social structural imperatives and opportunities.” Wendt has in mind four such social structures which may be conceptualized as constituting states: domestic-economic, domestic-political, international-economic, and international-political structures. The point here is that, aside from the belief argued above that *states* cannot perceive, act intentionally, etc., the domestic structures which Wendt identifies exist *within* the state, and thus *cannot act as external* structural pressures upon the state. Stated positively, then, given that structures are deemed to exist externally to agents, focusing on the individual human being as the unit of analysis allows for the incorporation of structural variables at *every* level of analysis.

Individual elite structural milieus can certainly be variously conceived. The notion of the multidimensionality of elite structure will acquire more meaning in the following section. For present analytical purposes, it suffices to present the skeletal parameters of ruling foreign policy elite structural milieus. As [Figure 5.1](#) demonstrates, ruling elites are situated within concentrically arranged *layers of structure*—i.e., bureaucratic or organizational, governmental, domestic, regional, and systemic—each of which may impinge upon agency behavior by affecting levels of opportunity and/or willingness.

Within both the international and regional environments surrounding governing elites, governing elites interact with agents outside of their country’s borders. The governing elites interact with various types of actors in these arenas—states, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations. Note that while the elites of most powerful states in the international system tend to define their international concerns in systemic terms, the governing elites of smaller states tend to define their international interests in regional terms, to be less concerned with systemic issues, and to turn to the most powerful states in pursuit of their regional interests. Accordingly, the distinction between the regional and international layers of governing elites’ structure tends to be sharper for smaller states than for larger states.⁵

The domestic layer of the governing elites’ structure (following the lead of Tilly (e.g., 1978)) refers to elites’ interaction with those social forces within the ruling elites’ state’s borders which are most powerful *vis-à-vis* other social forces in society, and perhaps also *vis-à-vis* the ruling elites. They may be elites of economic classes, social organizations, or political opposition movements. In the bureaucratic layer of the governing elites’ structure, governing elites engage in interaction with other forces within the state apparatus. These forces may reside in the military, factions of the governing elites’ political party, other political parties, the police apparatus of the state, and/or other important administrative bureaucracies.

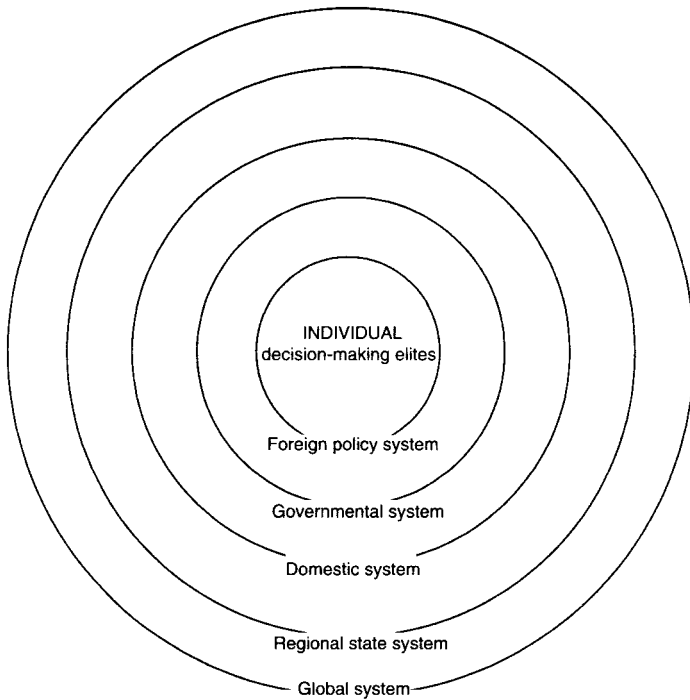


Figure 5.1 The concentrically arranged environment

A property of a multidimensional model of elite structure which is central to both the deduction of generalizable hypotheses and the preservation of some degree of parsimony is the postulation of a general conceptualization of political process/structure applicable to *each* layer of the elite structure. Following the argument of [Chapter 3](#) that social construction is best viewed as a process involving both intersubjective meanings *and* features of a positional model, notably power, each layer of elite structure might be viewed as containing its own more or less distinct institutional and positional structures.⁷ To anticipate the discussion in the next section, each of these layers of structure can be viewed as consisting of issue-based social choice systems; that is, policy spaces within which international political elites (possibly among other types of elites) participate and expend resources in the effort to achieve favorable policy outcomes.

The agent-specific nature of structure

International political elite structural milieus may be more or less unique for two reasons. First, elites are likely to be situated within different *sets* of layers of

structure. Although all foreign policy elites may be said to share the same systemic-level Waltzian structure as well as institutions, elites may also be situated in different regional, domestic, governmental, and/or bureaucratic structures.

The second general reason for agent-specific structures results from recognition of sublayer differences across agents. More concretely, elites within the same stratum may be active in different sets of issue areas. Similarly, elites on the same side of a policy debate in one arena may be adversaries in another. If we accept that the positional model applies to various layers of an agent's structure—in other words, if we accept that power relations and competition as well as cooperation characterize all layers of structure—then it follows that any two agents within a given social stratum may be engaged in more or less intense conflict (and, may be more or less threatened). This results largely from the discriminatory nature of agency action, e.g., any particular agent may harbor cooperative sentiments toward other members of the stratum and competitive sentiments toward other members of this stratum.⁸ Finally, if we were to follow Dessler and treat as structural constraints sublayer, or subsystem, institutions, practices, etc., then again it follows that within the same layer of structure two elites may face distinct sets of structure. In sum, it is unlikely that agents of international politics will share the same *set* of structures.

Conceptualization of the agent-specific nature of structure is crucial, because, recalling Simmel's discussion on the matter, it provides a socially based account of individual variability. Accordingly, meaningful conception of agent-specific structural milieus is key because it allows us to account simultaneously for the *social*, or structurally conditioned, interests, meanings, intentionality, etc. of agency; and for the *variability* in these agency attributes. Certainly, the conception of layers of structure also enables postulation of variation in agency intentionality. In particular, different agents within the same social action setting may face different incentive structures, based on differences within any particular layer and/or on differences in the set of layers the agents find relevant to the social action setting at hand.

STRUCTURES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ELITE SOCIAL CHOICE SYSTEMS

Adoption of the individual elite as the unit of analysis requires the analysis of international political elite social choice processes to account for international political outcomes. Elite social choice processes can also be investigated as the loci of *intra*-elite processes of conflict and cooperation. If we view choice as the elemental social action of international political elites, then it becomes evident that these choice processes represent the building blocks of a social constructivist approach to international political structure.

In accordance with this line of thought, the present section outlines the broad parameters of a model of international elite social choice systems. To do so, we

rely primarily on insights from Maoz's (1990) theory of international processes, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.*'s (1985, 1990, 1994, 1996) policymaking models, and networks analysis. The following discussion represents neither a thorough review nor a coherent synthesis of these and related works. Rather, it should be viewed as a stylized depiction of the structure of individual elite social choice systems which emphasizes those components of individual elite social choice processes which contribute to explanation not only of social choice outcomes but also to the formation, nature, and intensity of conflict groups.

The delimitation of system boundaries is a crucial first step in elite analysis. One can bound the system by including elites possessing a certain characteristic, such as incumbency in high-ranking governmental positions. Alternatively, one might bound the system by identifying a set of issues and then discerning which elites participated effectively in the corresponding policy debates. Each approach clearly allows some types of analyses and inhibits others. For example, inclusion of only those elites holding dominant formal positions of authority precludes the ability to consider those elites which exert influence derived from control over informal resources, and/or those issues which are not attended to by high-ranking government officials. Ultimately, scholarly decisions concerning system boundaries are dependent upon the research interests guiding analysis.⁹

The present analysis focuses on social choice defined by particular issue areas. One fundamental reason for specifying social choice system boundaries according to issue area is that such an approach is consonant with some of the most sophisticated models of social choice, bargaining, and conflict. This approach is also especially useful in the analysis of how diverse stands are aggregated to yield policy. For example, Maoz defines an international process as "*a chain of temporally related and spatially interdependent intersections of decisions made by two or more actors in the global political system, which pertain to a particular set of issues, over a relatively long period of time*" (1990:2; emphasis in original). The centrality of issues is also clearly evident in spatial theories of foreign policymaking (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 1985, 1990, 1994, 1996) and spatial theories of bargaining/conflict (Morgan 1984, 1994; Morrow 1986), as well as less formal approaches to international politics (e.g., Keohane and Nye 1977; Mansbach and Vasquez 1981). All of these approaches recognize issues as the axes around which policy preferences, choices, and outcomes are arranged.

Another reason for focusing on the set of elites participating in particular issue areas is that the composition of such sets may vary across issue areas (Rosenau 1966 and 1967; Keohane and Nye 1977; Mansbach and Vasquez 1981). Indeed, the scope of elite participation, as well as variation in the composition of particular social choice systems, represent two key subjects for analysis within this approach to social system delimitation. The issue-specific focus is further justified by the proposition that individual elite power is issue specific (e.g., Dahl 1961; Rosenau 1967; Keohane and Nye 1977; Baldwin 1979; Mansbach and Vasquez 1981; Hermann, Hermann and Hagan 1987; Maoz 1990).

One might add, finally, that the resolution of issues itself captures the very

essence of politics. As Morrow (1988:81) writes, “[b]y their very definition, issues imply the existence of conflicts of interest. If only one state cared about a particular policy, that policy would not be an international issue.” Similarly, Mansbach and Vasquez (1981:72–73) associate competition and cooperation concerning issues with the Eastonian conceptualization of politics as the authoritative allocation of values.

Before moving to a discussion of the key elements of elite social choice systems, we must differentiate among two types of social choice processes concerning international issues. There are foreign policy outcomes, or those issues resolved by (some subset of) the foreign policy elite of one state, state *i*. There are also social choice processes which transcend any single state’s boundaries. Such outcomes result from the interaction of elites of state *i* and elites residing outside of state *i*. We might also add social choice processes involving state *i* foreign policy and domestic elites, as well as decisions made by elites of international governmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The parameters of international social choice systems discussed below are generally compatible with all of these types of international issue social systems.

To facilitate the following exposition of social choice systems, it may be helpful to think of “issues” just as Mansbach and Vasquez (1981:58–59) define stakes: “*objects* that are seen as possessing or representing values... are regarded as *stakes* for which actors contend... *An issue consists of contention among actors over proposals for the disposition of stakes among them.* An issue includes both the characteristics of the stakes involved *and* the particular relationships among the actors participating in the process” (emphases in the original).¹⁰

Of the extant scholarly literature concerning international political issues, Maoz has perhaps most explicitly and extensively dealt with individual elite-level choice processes (e.g., 1990; Maoz and Astorino 1992).¹¹ Maoz identifies two general situational inputs—situational stress which is comprised of perceived threat, perceived opportunity, and time constraints, and situational ambiguity. Perceived threat and perceived opportunity serve as stimuli to decision making. Individuals may rely on cognitive, cybernetic or bounded rationality, or rational-choice or analytic decision-making procedures in the construction of policy preferences concerning the issue at hand.

Which (combination) of these decision-making procedures an individual elite invokes in the choice process (i.e., diagnosis, search, revision, evaluation, and choice) is a function of a conjunction of situational inputs and individual elite cognitive complexity and organizational role.

The search evaluation stage of decision making, taken from Maoz (1990) is displayed in [Figure 5.2](#). This stage deserves explicit attention. Construction of such matrices for individual elites provides important information concerning the decision-making procedures employed by these individuals. In particular, Maoz emphasizes that the number of options and value dimensions an agent con-

Option	Outcome	Value criteria				
		1	2	...	...	m
O_1	O_1	u_{11}	u_{12}	...	...	u_{1m}
	O_2	u_{21}	u_{22}	...	...	u_{2m}
...

...

O_k	O_{n-1}	$u_{(n-1)1}$	$u_{(n-1)2}$	...	...	$u_{(n-1)m}$
	O_n	u_{n1}	u_{n2}	...	...	u_{nm}

Based upon Maoz (1990: 232)

Figure 5.2 A general search-evaluation matrix

siders, as well as the extent to which the agent is cognizant of the necessity of tradeoffs across values, indicates which decision-making procedures, i.e., rational, cybernetic, or cognitive, agents relied upon. But more importantly for present purposes, the evaluation stage captures the core of the decision-making process regardless of which decision-making procedure the individual elite is using. The rows of the matrix refer to the set of outcomes, $\mathbf{O}=[1, \dots, n]$ which includes all perceived possible outcomes of a set of options $\mathbf{A}=[1, \dots, k]$, $n \leq k$. The columns of the matrix refer to the set of value dimensions relevant to the evaluation of each option or outcome, $\mathbf{VD}=[1, \dots, m]$. The entries in this matrix, u_{ij} , indicate the utility (or ordinal ranking) of outcome i on value dimension j (Maoz 1990:232).

To derive the subjective expected utility calculations of the agent then, it is necessary to sum the products of the utility of each possible outcome and the probability of this outcome.

Stated formally,

$$SEU_a = \sum_{i=1}^{na} U^i p_i$$

where na is the number of outcomes associated with option a , p_i is the probability of each outcome i , and U^i represents the weighted sum of each expected outcome i along each operative value dimension (Maoz 1990:269). Maoz holds that such subjective expected utility calculation is a necessary component of choice regardless of whether or not the individual relies on rational decision-making procedures.

It is important to note, as might be evident, that the search-evaluation matrix is

general and applies to any choice situation. It accounts for preference formation concerning concrete, *substitutable* behavioral options (Most and Starr 1989). Two of several significant examples would be choice among internal and external forms of balancing behavior (Waltz 1979), and balancing and bandwagoning alliance behavior (Walt 1987). The matrix also captures strategic interaction in both its two-by-two game-theoretic form (e.g., Snyder and Diesing 1977) and spatial modeling form (e.g., Morrow 1986; Morgan 1994). That is, Maoz's matrix is compatible with the two possible options—cooperate (c) or defect (d)—and with the four possible outcomes of cc, cd, dd, dc. Regarding spatial models, an important set of outcomes refers to the possible ways a stake found in the cc cell might be divided. Maoz's matrix leads to the somewhat unorthodox view that ideal points may go beyond reflecting an "all" or "none" division of one good, but also "some" amount of a good reflecting a compromise among value dimensions having contradictory relationships with the good.

Individual elite power plays a crucial role in the structure of social choice processes. According to Maoz, individual elite power is based on two general dimensions—formal authority and coalitional pivotness. The formal authority index rank orders each elite according to three dimensions: formal authority rank, expertise, and organization-based informational and implementative resources.¹² Importantly, the relative salience of these three dimensions may vary with political systems and with governments within a particular system. Expertise and organizational resources may also vary given the issue area under consideration. In accordance with a procedure developed by Rapoport, Felsenthal, and Maoz (1988; see also Maoz 1990:141–145), such data can be manipulated to derive a square reciprocal matrix reflecting the relative influence ranks of each dyad of individual elites. This matrix, in turn, can be submitted to a scaling method developed by Saaty (1977, 1980) to derive a single influence score with important analytical properties, including but not restricted to the property that the set of individual elite power scores sum to one. Thus, it is clear that there are useful methods that can be employed to determine the relative distribution of power across the elites in a social choice system. Maoz's work provides a particularly powerful example of such methods.

Maoz's second dimension of influence, based on the distribution of policy preferences across those elites involved in the focal policy decision, bears resemblance to a number of expected utility models of choice, as well as some legislative power indexes (e.g., Shapley and Shubik 1954). Maoz's method of determining degrees of coalitional pivotness, or an individual elite's influence derived from his location within the distribution of preferences, takes into account the variable quota property of a multiple-choice agenda, and the probabilistic nature of coalition formation based on policy preference proximity.¹³ An individual's coalitional pivotness in essence refers to the impact that an individual's presence or absence has on a coalition's prospects for victory.

The individual elite formal authority structure, as well as the structure of policy preferences, both affect the decision-making procedures utilized by the

group. Individual formal authority scores serve as weights in the aggregation of individual-level stress and situational ambiguity scores into group-level values of these properties, which in turn influence the type of group-level decision-making procedures. Again, drawing on Maoz's framework and empirical studies, we can say that extensive divergence over policy preferences combined with a pluralistic structure encourage rational decision making, while moderately polarized groups in a fairly pluralistic structure tend toward cybernetic decision making, and situations of extensive agreement over preferences combined with a highly hierarchical group structure tend to promote groupthink decision making.

Policy outcomes characterized by group-level rational choice decision making result from a weighted aggregation of individual preferences, where the weights refer to an index comprised of both the power index and coalitional pivotness. Group-level cognitive decision making entails policy outcomes reflecting conformance to an emerging group consensus or the preference ranking(s) of the elite(s) with the highest formal authority rank. The cybernetic model suggests an elimination by aspects (EBA) approach to group decision making which favors those elites with significant control over the agenda and informational or implementative resources. Maoz thus presents a model which explains international outcomes and processes largely through explicit and systematic reference to individual- and group-level choice processes.

As noted above, we wish for our model of elite social choice systems to be able to account not only for policy outcomes but also for intra-elite patterns of conflict and consensus. While particular variables emphasized by Maoz, i.e., the distribution of policy preferences and degree of commitment, play important roles in the analysis of intra-elite conflict, the integration of insights from other approaches enhances a model's ability to account for this phenomenon. Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues (e.g., 1985, 1990, 1994, 1996) devise a model of foreign policymaking in which intra-elite conflict processes play an important role.

These scholars explain policy outcomes as the result of four variables: actor power, policy preferences, issue salience, and risk propensity. Of these variables, issue salience and risk propensity have not yet been given attention here. First, issue salience refers to the importance of the focal issue relative to other issues. This factor is necessary in light of the assumption that actors have a finite amount of resources which they can allocate to influence particular policy debates. Simply, the more salient the focal issue to the actor, the larger the proportion of the actor's total amount of resources the actor will allocate to this policy debate.

Risk propensity refers to an actor's valuation of a sure thing relative to that of a gamble. Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues' discussion of risk propensity is especially useful for thinking about intra-elite conflict processes. Risk propensity (introduced as curvature in the utility functions) influences the utility that an actor derives in a lottery. Generally, risk acceptance is associated with greater utility from challenging the status quo or policy proposal of an adversary, and

risk aversion with disutility from such a challenge. Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* also utilize risk propensity to account for actor perceptions of the expected utility calculations of both adversaries and third parties. Generally, the higher an actor i 's $e(u)$ is "with regard to persuading some other actor j to accept i 's position, the higher the likelihood that i will confront j " (Bueno de Mesquita 1994:88). By analyzing the expected utilities of both i and j , then, we can assess the likelihood of various bargaining outcomes.¹⁴

In the terminology of networks analysis, individual elite power, policy preferences, issue salience, and risk propensity, are composition variables. That is, these are variables which refer to unit-level attributes. Along with composition variables, networks analysis utilizes structural variables. These variables refer to ties or relations between dyads or nodes, or, in the present context, elites. These ties can be dichotomous (i.e., present or absent in any given dyad of elites), or take the form of ordinal or interval scales. Among the various types and theoretical uses of structural variables are those which play an important role in the analysis of intra-elite cohesion.

Following Marsden and Laumann (1979), we assume that a compelling conceptualization of intra-elite conflict groups must include both intragroup cohesion and policy preference similarity. By including the property of relatively enduring social ties, conflict groups have a cohesive quality absent from instrumental and temporary coalitions. At least two network properties adequately capture group cohesion. The first property refers to variation in the mean of the geodesic distances of the members of the group. This measure, in other words, computes the average amount of paths, or intermediaries, which connects each dyad in a group. While this measure is based on the distances among members of the same group, the second measure of group cohesion, in contrast, is based on the cohesiveness of the members of any particular group *relative* to their cohesiveness in relation to members of other groups. One general method for deriving this measure is to calculate the ratio between the mean geodesic distance between each dyad in the group with the mean geodesic distance between each dyad external to the group. Various types of substantive ties can be utilized to capture these conceptualizations of cohesion. Among these are strong communication ties, intensity of social interaction, and sharing of particular social, economic, or political experiences.¹⁵

To recapitulate, this section has argued that the study of individual political elites—agency—benefits from the construction of *issue-based elite social choice systems*. At least five variables—policy preferences, power, issue salience, risk propensity, and intra-elite cohesion—enable explanation of both social choice outcomes and intra-elite conflict. This general model of elite systems allows us to study bargaining processes and social choice outcomes. Furthermore, it also allows for the analysis of a wide array of hypotheses not mentioned above. For example, this general model permits the analysis of the relative degree of centralization or decentralization in a state's foreign policymaking process. Another example is the question of the relative significance of state and nonstate interna-

tional political elites across specific issue areas. One can also compare different international issue areas in terms of levels and configurations of conflict and cooperation. Yet another type of analysis could assess the extent to which particular international issue areas are resolved by high- or lower-ranking state elites.¹⁶ The issue-based elite social choice systems approach also allows investigation of the relative importance of different elite resources in and across particular issue areas. The delineation of issue-based elite social systems thus proves fertile ground for a broad based theoretical and substantive approach to international politics choice and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly explored the theoretical implications of focusing on individual elites as the units of analysis. Focusing on individual elites enables recognition of the multilayered and agent-specific structures surrounding individual elites. We have argued that this focus lends itself to issue-based systems useful for explaining social choice outcomes. They also allow for comparative analysis of international political outcomes in terms of such variables as the types of elites involved, the level of centralization or decentralization in particular international political issue areas, and the most effective types of resources. Thus, these systems not only account for international political outcomes, but also provide a more or less unique image of the international political system itself.

TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS VALUES

INTRODUCTION

Agency values play a crucial role in the processes and outcomes of the issue-based social choice systems outlined in the preceding chapter. Agency perceptions of the impact of external developments upon satisfaction of particular values constitute the complex of opportunity and threat motivating agency (in) action, and, correspondingly, contribute to levels of value conflict and stress. Agency beliefs concerning the linkages among a set of particular choice options as well as the realization of agency values provide the basis of agency utility functions and preference rankings. Agency values also directly impinge upon risk propensity, resolve, and issue salience—factors which in turn are vital elements in an account of the competitiveness and policy outcomes of social choice systems. To the extent that the relative salience of issues is based upon differences in the relationships of these issues to agency values, agency values represent an integral element in the postulation of the probability and parameters of bargaining situation issue linkages. It follows that analysis of the various linkages between agency values and the central components of agency social action lies at the heart of an interpretive understanding of social action. Thus, models of agency values represent an integral component of the analysis of international politics.

More to the point, we seek a general model of the value dimensions of agency search evaluation matrices applicable to the set of issues, both international as well as noninternational, in which international political elites are involved. This model should permit hypotheses concerning variation in both the absolute and relative significance, if any, of any particular value in any particular issue space, and the relative salience of particular issues, both across a set of actors and for any particular actor over time.

Grand-theoretic approaches to international politics generally emphasize legitimate types of agency values, but afford minimal insight into the development of a model which can account for the type of variation described above. Realist,

Marxian, and bureaucratic politics approaches generally associate agency interests with a single and narrowly conceived social role: state, class, and governmental organization, respectively, and rational choice theory tends to exogenize the substance of agency values altogether. Idealist/liberalist theories of international politics generally either exogenize agency values and point to the added utility and/or effectiveness of cooperation in the context of these exogenized values, or view norms associated with cooperation as the very values realized. Given the general myopia of grand-theoretic approaches to agency desires, we may view an essential criterion of a progressive model of agency values to concern its ability to explain variation in the relative salience of the various substantive values emphasized by various approaches to international politics.

We propose that Abraham Maslow's (1943, 1954) theory of motivation can provide the foundation for a general model of agency values capable of addressing the various roles of agency values mentioned above. The general notion of a need hierarchy is that agents harbor a hierarchy of needs organized in order of priority and that they move to higher levels of needs only after having satisfactorily fulfilled lower, more basic, needs. While we presume that individual international political elites indeed harbor an *individual*-level hierarchy of needs such as the one devised by Maslow, we emphasize *organizational* need hierarchies. In other words, we assume that international political elites attribute need hierarchies to the politically relevant organizations with which they most closely identify, e.g., states, state bureaucracies, multinational corporations, international governmental organizations, and the like. Though the general notion of organizational need hierarchies is applicable to any organization relevant to international politics, this chapter, with the aid of Ronald Inglehart's (1990) theory of political culture, suggests the rudiments of a need hierarchy generally, but not exclusively, associated with the state.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part identifies important properties of a conceptualization of agency desires consistent with the parameters of the social choice system delineated in [Chapter 5](#), and proposes that grand theories of international politics do not adequately satisfy these criteria. The second part briefly outlines Maslow's theory of motivation, and provides a rudimentary conceptualization of a state need hierarchy. The last part utilizes this conceptualization to analyze the concepts of risk propensity and resolve.

THEORETICAL PROLEGOMENON

Criteria of a theory of political values

We must first reemphasize that our objective is to develop a needs hierarchy which international political elites attribute to the primary political organization (s) with which they identify (the state, a state bureaucracy, etc.). Maoz's search-evaluation matrix, presented in [Figure 5.2](#), can aid us in this task. Recalling this

search-evaluation matrix, what we mean by “values,” or “desires” is reflected in the value criteria in this matrix. Thus, the general objective of the present discussion can be simply stated as follows: to conceptualize a hierarchy of value criteria which an elite attributes to his or her primary political organizational affiliation(s). The essence of this objective is captured well by Davidson (1968:55):

Any serious theory for predicting action on the basis of reasons must find a way of evaluating the relative force of various desires and beliefs in the matrix of decision; it cannot take as its starting point the refinement of what is to be expected from a single desire.

But at least five more particular criteria for a useful model of value criteria need mention. First, it should satisfy the criterion of variability discussed in [Chapter 2](#); in other words, this model needs to include a plurality of organizational interests. The values of this model should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive. Second, such a model needs to bestow some primitive arrangement, if only in ordinal-level fashion, upon the assorted values. Third, it must be amenable to the assessment of the absolute levels of agent satisfaction of each value. For example, it is necessary to determine whether an agent has realized low, medium, or high levels of each particular value. Fourth, these variables must be somehow meaningfully related to the issue areas and policy options over which agents deliberate. Finally, these elements of a model of values should be sufficiently general to apply across organization types and issue areas. Together, these criteria allow us to assess the absolute importance of each value, and the relative importance of the various values, in any particular search-evaluation context. Accordingly, they enable the construction of hypotheses concerning agency perceptions of opportunity and threat, and agency preference rankings.

Theories of international politics and international political elite values

Despite the centrality of evaluation criteria in the explanation of intentional behavior, extant theories of international politics generally treat this problem inadequately. In fact, theories of international relations generally adopt myopic and static views of international political values. The predominance in realist thinking of external state geopolitical security has already been discussed.¹ Neo-Marxist theories of international politics generally assume that agents, i.e., classes, evaluate options according to the criteria of the satisfaction of material needs derivative of their location within the structure of the international economic system.² Allison’s (1971) Models II and III—which are based on organizations, governmental roles, and the pluralistic interactions of individuals representing organizations and role positions—propose that policy preferences are primarily a function of organizational role (“where you stand depends on where you sit”).³ Rational choice theorists, while of course relying on preference rankings

and utility measures, exogenize the *substance* of agency interests; that is, rational choice analyses do not generate an understanding of where preferences come from, only what choices would be made *given* some particular set of preferences. While these theories or approaches are invaluable in many respects, none of them provides an exhaustive, empirically plausible, primitive, and generalizable model of international political values.

The reflectivist or institutionalist approach to international politics deserves closer attention because proponents of this approach tend to claim precisely that it endogenizes agency interests, values, etc. To understand this claim, the reflectivist approach should first be distinguished from a modified structuralist or rationalist approach to international institutions.⁴ The rationalistic approach to international institutions argues that international institutions improve the pay-offs derived from cooperation by reducing transaction costs (e.g., Keohane 1984), and in cases of collaboration by increasing monitoring capabilities and costs of defection (Stein 1990; Snidal 1985; Martin 1993).

As with the general rational-choice framework, this approach to international institutions is indeterminate because it not only exogenizes but leaves unspecified agency interests. Keohane (1994:46) elaborates that this instrumental, or substantive, rationality “generates hypotheses about actual human behavior only when it is combined with auxiliary assumptions about the structure of utility functions and true formation of expectations.”⁵

One expression of the difference between the rationalist and reflectivist schools is in terms of the different ways in which they treat the institution of multilateralism. Caporaso (1993:53–54) defines the institution of multilateralism as an international-level property comprised of the conjunction of three attributes: indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity.

Indivisibility can be thought of as the scope (both geographic and functional) over which costs and benefits are spread.... Generalized principles of conduct usually come in the form of norms exhorting general if not universal modes of relating to other states, rather than differentiating relations case-by-case on the basis of individual preferences, situational exigencies, or a priori particularistic grounds. Diffuse reciprocity requires the utilitarian lenses for the long view, emphasizing that actors expect to benefit in the long run and over many issues, rather than every time or every issue.

According to the rationalist school, the first and third properties of multilateralism—indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity—especially capture the costs and benefits of particular choices. Diffuse reciprocity, in this view, is motivated as much as anything else by the utilitarian ideas that extended time horizons and issue-linkages serve to motivate cooperation.

Whereas the rationalist view emphasizes the role that such norms play on externally defined values, reflectivist scholars often treat those norms as goals or values in themselves.⁶ Yet, norms of cooperation as such comprise only *one*

goal. In addition, they may not be the goal for all actors. To treat the prevalence of cooperative norms as system-wide is *as myopic* as the treatment of egoistic security as the system-wide predominant norm. A second view of the reflectivist approach is that it holds that cooperation is the behavioral option of choice; that is, the behavioral option with the highest utility. But as such, this hypothesis clearly does not refer to the value dimension component of Maoz's search evaluation matrix, and thus makes little contribution to a conceptualization of value dimensions.

Third, in keeping to its integrationist roots (Deutsch *et al.* 1957; Haas 1958), the reflectivist approach may be viewed as emphasizing the *locus* of group identities more than the *quality* of collective interests. Thus, as Hedley Bull (1977) argues, phenomena such as European integration may contribute not to a *qualitatively* novel form of political association but simply to larger manifestations of the type of political association embodied in the state.

Finally, the reflectivist approach appears to be as much an ontological or metatheoretical claim for the social constructivist, generative approach to identity and interests as anything else. Recall that Wendt himself emphasized that the generative view of structure is a metatheoretical position devoid of substance. To argue that "anarchy is what states make of it" is not in itself a statement on the quality of this social construction. By this view, then, the primary contribution of the reflectivist approach as concerns agency values is to emphasize that these values are learned and transformed through social interaction.

In sum, theories of international relations generally tend to adopt inadequate conceptions of agency values; conceptions that fail to satisfy the criteria for a progressive model of agency values delineated above. Indeed, identifying the sweeping generalization that concerns the predominance of a single type of agency value is one powerful way to differentiate among these theories. That is, grand-theoretic treatments of agency values embody the core philosophical differences separating these theories. Clearly, we must look elsewhere for the foundations of a useful model of international political elite values.

TOWARD A HIERARCHY OF STATE ELITE VALUES

Given the inadequacy of the predominant approaches to international relations, it is not surprising that scholars have called for the need to give further attention to models of agency desires (e.g. Morrow 1988; Russett 1995). We suggest that a translation of Maslow's (1943, 1954) theory of human motivation into a theory of organizational motivation might prove fruitful in this regard. In this section, we present Maslow's thesis, and then provide a first cut at deriving an international politics needs hierarchy.

Maslow's theory of motivation

Maslow (1954:66) identifies a set of the most basic, universal, and irreducible needs "behind which we cannot go," and "that seem to be ends in themselves and seem not to need any further justification or demonstration." In order of descending priority, these needs are as follows: (1) physiological; (2) safety; (3) belongingness and love; (4) esteem; (5) self-actualization; (6) the desires to know and to understand; and (7) aesthetic needs (Maslow 1954:80–98).

Maslow hypothesizes that which of these needs is most important to an individual at a particular point in time depends on the extent to which the individual has satisfied lower (greater priority) needs. To the extent that an individual has satisfied lower needs, he or she may focus on needs at the higher end. Maslow articulates his thesis as follows:

If all the needs are unsatisfied, and the organism is then dominated by the physiological needs, all other needs may become simply nonexistent or be pushed into the background.... But what happens to man's desires when there *is* plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? *At once other (and higher) needs emerge* and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still higher) needs emerge, and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative prepotency.

(1954:82–83; emphasis in the original).

Maslow's theory of motivation satisfies our criteria for individual desires. It identifies a more or less exhaustive set of empirically plausible needs, and arranges them in a primitive hierarchical fashion. Furthermore, the hierarchically ordered utility of these needs combined with the notion of diminishing marginal utility embodied in this theory enables analysis of the absolute and relative magnitudes of the impact of behavioral options and expected outcomes on various desires. Particular desires may be significant either because they are greatly affected by circumstances, because they are inadequately satisfied, or some combination of the two. Thus, Maslow's theory of motivation is capable of linking external stimuli to agency values so as to account for agent perceptions of threat and/or opportunity, and of linking agency options to agency values so as to derive hypotheses concerning agency preferences.⁷

Toward a hierarchy of international political collective needs

Maslow's theory of the needs of individual human beings is a psychological theory rather than a sociological theory, emphasizing individual rather than collective needs. To the extent that one can identify the individual-collective need distinction in Maslow's hierarchy at all, it may be said that an individual harbors

collective needs only after he or she has fulfilled the more basic needs. The very pursuit of collective needs assumes the more or less adequate satisfaction of the basic physiological, security, and safety needs of individual human beings.

Individuals' egoistic needs, whether in the form of political elite concern for physical viability or tenure in office, are certainly operative in international politics. Furthermore, how an agent relatively weighs his or her individual interests and those of the collectivity for which the individual is an agent is a crucial question. This issue has been raised by Rosenau (1966) in his attempt to tease out the differential impact of idiosyncratic and role factors in foreign policy decision making. Individual and group interests may indeed conflict, and behavioral options pursued to achieve one interest may impede another. This conflict is clearly evident in social situations characterized by the prisoner's dilemma, or Mancur Olson's (1965) more general collective action problem, in which pursuit of an individual's self-interest entails the failure of a group to achieve a public good.

If an agent fails to preserve the security of the state then it will most likely fail to preserve its own position of power; this has been amply demonstrated in the research of Bueno de Mesquita, Siverson, and Woller (1992) and Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson (1995). The clash of individual and group interests is at the heart of Olson's (1982) analysis of the rise and decline of states, and Weede's (1996) analysis based upon rent-seeking behavior within societies. Weede (1996) uses two aspects of economic theory—the concept of rent-seeking (primarily as developed by Tullock) and Mancur Olson's theory of collective action—as the core of a dynamic which explains individual and collective choice, which in turn, provides the basis for a complex set of linkages between political organization and order, economic development, democracy and peace.⁸

The present discussion foregoes analysis of the relationship between individual and collective needs and emphasizes collective needs. All theoretical approaches to international politics generally emphasize group interests of one form or another. Moreover, group needs are demanded by the fundamental sociological proposition that agency desires concerning social action are conditioned by social structure. In order to develop a conceptualization of a hierarchy of needs applicable to agents of international politics it is necessary to delineate the primary political-social organizations to which these agents belong. Though the logic of a hierarchy of collective political needs is generalizable beyond the state system, the following analysis emphasizes those needs generally associated with the foreign policy, and more generally governmental, organization of the state.

Basic international political collective needs

At the root of Maslow's hierarchy is the distinction between existential and nonexistential needs. We hold that these existential needs are embodied by the term "security." The term "security" has most generally been associated—particularly by realists—with "the ability of a nation to deter an attack, or to

defeat it" (Wolfers 1985:43). Nonrealists have critiqued the narrowness of this conception of security; for example, Haftendorn (1991:5) points out that "[m]ost developing countries emphasize the economic and social as well as the domestic dimensions of security." Wolfers (1985:44–45) himself has pointed out that the terms "national interest" and "national security," "may not mean the same thing to different people. They may not have any precise meaning at all...the term 'security' covers a range of goals so wide that highly divergent policies can be interpreted as policies of security."⁹

For present purposes, we take Boulding's (1962:58) definition of "viability" to capture the defining property of "security." For Boulding, the nature and level of an actor's viability is defined by "the ability and the willingness of one party to destroy or eliminate another." This definition is attractive in its faithfulness to the existential quality of Maslow's basic needs, its emphasis upon the interdependent quality of security, its recognition that *both* opportunity and willingness are necessary elements of security, its generality, and, finally, its simplicity.

Bringing the concept of viability down the ladder of abstraction, of course, is a complex affair. A notable complexity concerns the relative salience and relationship of military and economic viability. As has been clearly recognized by realists themselves, geopolitical interests are closely related to economic concerns. Carr (1964:108), for example, emphasizes the interdependence of military power and economic power, as well as power over opinion, writing that "it is difficult in practice to imagine a country for any length of time possessing one kind of power in isolation from the others." Marxist-oriented scholars have also recognized the close affinity between economic and political needs. O'Donnell's (1973, 1979) theory of bureaucratic authoritarianism demonstrates that nations have been willing to accept severe costs in terms of domestic level repression and socioeconomic ills in order to achieve key stages of economic development. The notion of dependence upon the opportunity and willingness of powerful actors as a key property of viability is certainly present in a range of work on economic dependence/dependencia theory (see Dos Santos 1970).

Thus, it makes little sense to treat geopolitical viability as the singularly most basic of all needs, for clearly an organization cannot fulfill this need without at least minimal levels of economic viability. Conversely, an organization's political viability is relatively unimportant if the members of the organization are impoverished; (note, however, that state-level elites ruling over destitute populations may still value their own political viability highly).

For present purposes, it suffices to define the most basic of international political agency needs as those of geopolitical viability and the satisfaction of minimal economic welfare. Though perhaps vague and arbitrary, this conceptualization, as well as that of higher agency needs presented below, is partly justified given the preliminary nature of our conceptualization of a hierarchy of needs. It is also justified because it undermines neither the implications of the hierarchy we propose for the concepts of risk propensity and resolve discussed in the present chap-

ter nor the general implications concerning social transformation that we draw from this conceptualization in the following chapter.

Higher international political needs

As difficult as it may be to postulate the basic collective needs of foreign policy agents, it is even more difficult to discern these agents' collective higher needs.¹⁰ Those needs which Maslow identifies after safety—belongingness and love, self-esteem, self-actualization, the desires to know and to understand, and aesthetic needs—defy the intuitively direct translation into the political arena that could at least be approximated in the discussion of security needs.¹¹ It is also quite likely that there exists a larger diversity of interests at the top of the hierarchy than at the bottom. It may be the case that the type of higher values, and their priority ordering, are sensitive to both psychological and cultural variables, and thus vary across cultures and individuals within a particular collectivity.¹² In addition, the higher echelons of the hierarchy might themselves be characterized by ambiguity of purpose. That is, agents perceiving their primary collectivity to have satisfied the basic types of needs may themselves question the proper, worthwhile, etc., collective values to pursue. Finally, with satisfaction of basic needs in a primary collectivity, we may expect an agent to turn to basic needs in a secondary collectivity or to turn to individual-level needs. For example, the leader(s) of a rich and secure country may seek to ensure a favorable place in history. We may expect this to the extent that such leaders have satisfied more basic (but still on the high end) individual-level needs. For example, given a stable democratic polity, we might expect a leader to be more intent on ensuring his or her place in history after a successful election than during the campaign.

To gain purchase on higher international political needs, we draw primarily from Inglehart's (1990) theory of political culture. We preface a discussion of postmaterialist values by pointing out that it in fact represents, at times explicitly, an adaptation of Maslow's theory of motivation to political culture. Inglehart (1990:56) summarizes his thesis as follows:

The Materialist/Postmaterialist thesis is based on two key hypotheses: (1) a *scarcity hypothesis* that one's priorities reflect one's socioeconomic environment so that one places greatest subjective value on those things that are in relatively short supply; and (2) a *socialization hypothesis* that... one's basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during one's pre-adult years. Taken together, these two hypotheses imply that, as a result of the historically unprecedented prosperity and the absence of war that has prevailed in Western countries since 1945, younger birth cohorts place less emphasis on economic and physical security than do older groups, who have experienced a much greater degree of economic insecurity, and that, conversely, the younger birth cohorts tend to give a higher priority to non-material needs, such as a sense of community and the quality of life.

The implications of Inglehart's theory for social transformation will be considered in [Chapter 7](#). What concerns us presently is Inglehart's conceptualization of postmaterialist needs. Inglehart's surveys tapped six distinguishable postmaterialist needs: (1) beautiful cities/nature; (2) a society in which ideas are more important than money; (3) freedom of speech; (4) less impersonal, more humane society; (5) giving people more say on job, in community; and (6) giving people more say in important governmental decisions (see Inglehart 1990:74–75, 131–134). Postmaterialist values may be summarized as political and civil liberties, social welfare, and environmental protection.

Inglehart's conceptualization of materialist values overlaps with what we consider to be higher needs. This overlap ultimately points to the complexity of the relationship between geopolitical and economic viability discussed above. What is more, it underlines the need to interject economic developmental issues between the basic need of geopolitical security and the higher needs derived from Inglehart's conceptualization of postmaterialism.¹³ Indeed, history has witnessed the subjugation of political and civil liberties, and mass social welfare, to national transitions to import substitution industrialization (e.g., O'Donnell: 1973, 1979).

In sum, this section has provided some elementary thoughts concerning the construction of a collective need hierarchy of international political elites. While the treatment of geopolitical and economic viability as basic needs is intuitively compelling, conceptualization of higher needs is a challenging task indeed. Such collective values as promotion of political and civil liberties, social welfare, and environmental protection may represent some such needs. Furthermore, satisfactory realization of basic needs might entail explicit attention to the very mission of the collectivity, a move toward higher individual needs, and a move toward needs in other collective arenas. It seems reasonable to postulate additionally that the needs hierarchy is pyramidally shaped, with many more substantive values residing in the higher needs tier than in the basic needs tier. The higher stratum of the hierarchy might also be significantly influenced by psychological and cultural factors. It must be emphasized, finally, that levels of agent satisfaction of various needs is subjective. Despite the difficulties inherent in developing a complete need hierarchy, such a model could contribute significantly to the explanation of opportunity and threat, preferences, value tradeoffs, and to the synthesis of theories of international politics assuming unidimensional conceptualizations of values. To further illuminate the potential of a more fully developed need hierarchy, we turn to an analysis of the utility of such a model for the conceptualization of risk propensity and resolve.

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL NEEDS AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT: RISK PROPENSITY AND RESOLVE

In this section, we propose that a refined version of the hierarchy of needs devel-

oped above may be useful in the conceptualization of two concepts which are central in the study of international conflict—risk propensity and resolve. Simply, a general measure of risk propensity can be based on the structure of an actor's differential association of gains and losses with different rungs on the needs hierarchy. Furthermore, an elaborated international politics needs hierarchy may be especially useful in concepts generally reliant on interpersonal comparisons of utility, such as relative resolve and relative issue salience.

The hierarchy of needs, the security-autonomy dichotomy, and risk propensity

Recall from [Chapter 5](#) that risk propensity is a crucial variable in elite social choice systems, influencing the probability that such systems experience conflict. Proposed general measures of risk propensity in the context of international conflict, however, require refinement. Bueno de Mesquita (1985) develops the following indicator of risk orientation. He assumes that agent ideal points and agent security are inversely related, such that the closer an agent's actual policy positions are to its ideal point, the less security the agent has, and vice versa. This means that the closer actor *i* gets to achieving all of some policy goal(s), the more unsettling this is to other actors who may mobilize against actor *i*. Actor *i*'s total level of security or vulnerability is defined as the sum of the expected utility calculations of all other actors in the system concerning war with *i*. Bueno de Mesquita then establishes hypothetical policy portfolios that maximize and minimize actor *i*'s level of vulnerability, and then treats the proximity of actor *i*'s actual policy portfolio to these two extremes as an indicator of that actor's risk propensity. Risk acceptance is associated with low levels of security and risk aversion with high levels of security.

This conceptualization of risk, however, is problematic. Morrow (1987:435–437) notes two deficiencies in Bueno de Mesquita's measure of risk. The first is that Bueno de Mesquita's measure of security includes the gains in autonomy (as well as security) for states *j*, which is problematic when the expected utility of victory does not equal the expected costs of defeat, or, alternatively, when the status quo is not the midpoint between victory and defeat. Second, Morrow points out that constraints on the number of possible alliance partners also biases the validity of reliance upon chosen levels of security. As a result, Bueno de Mesquita's measure underestimates the willingness of those dissatisfied with the status quo to initiate and escalate hostilities, and overestimates the willingness of states satisfied with the status quo to take risks.

In addition, at least three other problems can be identified with Bueno de Mesquita's measure of risk propensity. First, it assumes that there exists an inverse relationship between proximity to ideal point portfolios and security. But whether this is so in actuality depends on the spatial distribution of the ideal points of the relevant actors. For example, if we assume that Israel's ideal point concerning the West Bank is to annex it, and if we assume that the United States

strongly favored Israeli annexation of the West Bank, then Israel's doing so would not come at the cost of increased insecurity. In more general terms, any assessment of security based on policy positions must take into account the particular policy positions of the other actors in the international system. If *i*'s ideal point corresponds to that of the most powerful states in the system, then *i*'s pursuit of this ideal point does not *ceteris paribus* decrease its security.

A second problem with Bueno de Mesquita's definition of security is especially troublesome when the very issues under contention are deemed to directly influence security. For example, if the issue over which actors are contending is the distribution of a territory valued at least in significant part for its strategic value, shifting a policy position which moves *i*'s policy position closer to actor *j*'s ideal point, i.e., agreeing to relinquish more of, or demand less of, the territory, does not necessarily increase *i*'s security. More accurately, this will decrease the utility that *j* would derive from fighting *i* but would simultaneously increase *j*'s probability of victory.

A third fault with this measure is that it does not take into account the expected utility calculations of intragovernmental and domestic-level actors. Certainly Bueno de Mesquita is after a general and thus rather parsimonious measure of risk. But his measure nonetheless fails to capture the reality that issue positions, to the extent that they do reflect a tradeoff between policy satisfaction and security, reflect such tradeoffs in the domestic arena as well. Thus, for example, if Israeli elites were found to support concession of all of the West Bank and the sharing or division of Jerusalem, these elites would register according to Bueno de Mesquita's measure as risk-averse. But such a policy position in reality would entail incredibly high risks in the domestic arena, as the tragic fates of Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin attest.

It is important to turn to a conceptualization of risk developed by Morrow (1987), not only because Bueno de Mesquita's conceptualization was found to be problematic, but also because Morrow's conceptualization is similar to that of a need hierarchy in seeking to differentiate security from other needs. Morrow's reasoning runs as follows. A nation's relative valuation of "security" and "autonomy" capture the meaning of risk propensity. These two terms are defined in relation to actors' objectives *vis-à-vis* the status quo resolution of some general set of international political issues:

The current resolution of international issues defines the status quo. Because no nation is ever perfectly satisfied or dissatisfied with the status quo, every nation will partition the issues into those it would like to preserve and those it would like to change. *A nation's security is its ability to maintain the current resolution of the issues that it wants to preserve.... Nations will want to change the status quo for some issues. These issues give rise to a nation's autonomy: its ability to pursue the internal and international policies that it wants. A nation's autonomy can be judged by the difference between its ideal point and its position on the issues in the*

status quo that it would like to change. As the difference between the two grows, its autonomy decreases.... If it had total free choice over its actions a nation would adopt those controversial policies. However, it abandons desired changes in the status quo to avoid provoking challenges that could cost it the ability to sustain its security values.

(1987:426; emphasis in the original)

The values of security and autonomy, the reasoning continues, represent two types of values which are derived from international alliances. The primary source of a loss of security from an alliance, according to Morrow (1987:427) is entrapment, or the process of being dragged into a war only to support an ally. Morrow's use of alliance portfolios as operational indicators of risk propensity follows logically from these two propositions: "Nations that choose alliance profiles that produce a relatively large amount of security are judged to be risk-averse; those that choose profiles that produce a relatively small amount of security are judged to be risk-acceptant" (Morrow 1987:424).

Morrow's argument, while ultimately of use to us, is problematic. First, there are difficulties with its conceptualizations of security and autonomy. Conceptualization of security and autonomy by reference to desires to preserve or alter the status quo across some complete set of issues undermines the centrality of viability in the conceptualization of security. Morrow (1987:424) sees issues as "the manifestations of disagreements" over values. So the wish to preserve the status quo concerning nonviability issues, and indeed any other relatively insignificant issue, is treated by Morrow's conceptualization as a manifestation of security-oriented behavior. Conversely, the wish to alter the status quo, even if the status quo poses a significant threat to viability, is, by Morrow's definition, treated as autonomy.¹⁴ Morrow's security-autonomy dichotomy does not allow us to theorize about the relative salience of whatever issues comprise the policy space over which states are competing. It treats, for example, differences over environmental protection policy on a par with issues concerning geopolitical security. Thus, in the effort to present an alternative to an overly narrow intentional explanation of state behavior, Morrow's own conceptualization of security robs the concept of its geopolitical viability connotation and of its theoretical power.

These problems in Morrow's conceptualization of security and autonomy undermine the linkage that Morrow draws between the security-autonomy dichotomy and alliance portfolios. It should be made clear first that only strong states gain autonomy (in the form of "assistance" from weak states). Bueno de Mesquita (1981:123–124) supports this view: "For weak states with little power to offer their potential allies, the formation of an alliance with a powerful protector may depend on the weak state's willingness to cooperate in the pursuit of policy objectives of the stronger potential ally." Now a strong state may or may not ally with a weak state precisely because it perceives the potential gains (losses) *in terms of security* to be higher than the potential losses (gains). For example, the US had been unwilling to provide Israel with a formal alliance not, as Mor-

row suggests, because the interests of the two countries were in harmony, but largely because the American leadership sought to minimize Arab elite movement toward the Soviet Union, and minimize damage to its standing with Arab oil-producing states while promoting stability in the region.

Thus, security gained from such an alliance is clearly security not in terms of preservation of status quo issue resolutions but security defined as geopolitical viability. It follows from these problems that the alliance profiles as defined by security and autonomy do not serve as an adequate operational indicator of risk.

This is not to say, however, that Morrow's analysis is not valuable. We propose that it is valuable, and that its value derives largely from the fact that it marks an attempt to incorporate the notion of need hierarchy into conceptualizations of expected utility theories of conflict. The dichotomy as presented by Morrow (1987) seems at least in part to be motivated by recognition of the need to differentiate between basic viability and higher needs. Morrow criticizes definitions of security which purport "that almost any foreign-policy act pursues a security interest," and argues that his definition "is more limited, and thus more useful" (1987:424-425). He adds that a second central insight of his analysis is that it "suggests that nonsecurity motivations (referred to here as autonomy) are often critical in alliances.... Merging all national goals into the concept of security blurs the distinction between goals and makes every act an attempt to gain 'security.' As a result of this blurring, any goal can be considered to be a security goal, robbing the concept of any theoretical power" (Morrow 1987:425-426).

Further evidence that Morrow's security-autonomy dichotomy converges with the basic-higher need dichotomy might be found in Morrow's expectation for a positive relationship between autonomy and security across states. Morrow (1987:427) writes: "Assume that all nations start with equal autonomy, but some nations start with more security. States with high security would trade some to states with less for additional autonomy...nations with above-average security should also have above-average autonomy." Notwithstanding Morrow's general, though not absolute, adherence to the nonviability meaning of security, this comment seems to capture the core of a Maslowian thesis. That is, it is precisely those agents which are adequately viable which would make the greatest effort to achieve, and thus, *ceteris paribus* achieve, higher levels of nonsecurity gains.

We can now return to risk. Defined in terms of conflict situations, risk propensity concerns the actor's relative valuation of expected gains and expected losses: "A nation's risk attitude reflects its subjective evaluation of the benefit of victory relative to the cost of defeat" (Morrow 1987:424). More specifically, an actor is risk acceptant when the utility the actor associates with the status quo is closer to the utility the actor associates with defeat than it is to that the actor associates with victory. That is, when the actor perceives that it has more to gain from victory than it has to lose from defeat, the actor is risk-acceptant. Conversely, an actor is risk averse when the utility the actor associates with the status quo is closer to the utility the actor associates with victory than it is to that it

associates with defeat. That is, when the actor perceives that it has more to lose from defeat than it has to gain from victory, the actor is risk-averse.

We propose that the need hierarchy can help us to conceptualize risk propensity so defined. More specifically, we can compare the ways in which actors evaluate defeat and victory. If actors evaluate one in terms of basic needs and the other in terms of higher needs, then the actor may be deemed not to be risk-neutral. For example, an actor which evaluates victory in terms of viability needs and defeat in terms of higher needs may be deemed to be risk-averse. In the real world, actors weigh both possible outcomes in terms of the same set of values. The conceptualization of risk propensity advanced here can be stated in more refined terms as follows: To the extent that an actor believes he or she has more security to gain than to lose, he will be risk-acceptant. Conversely, to the extent that an actor believes he or she has less security to gain than to lose, he or she will be risk-averse.

Relative resolve and issue salience

The logic of the hierarchy of needs can also be applied in similar fashion to other concepts central in the analysis of social choice bargaining spaces. For example, Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* (1985, 1990, 1994, 1996) postulate that the salience of an issue k to actor i relative to that of other issues with which i is engaged is positively related with the proportion of i 's total amount of resources which i devotes to k . The relative salience of any two issues for i can, in turn, be ascertained by investigating the extent to which and direction in which each impacts the various values in i 's need hierarchy, and the relative salience of these various needs for i .

A needs hierarchy may be especially useful for investigating relative resolve and issue salience *across* actors. Relative resolve, or balance of conflict-related motivations, has been hypothesized to exert an important impact on conflict outcomes. Maoz (1983), for example, finds support for this hypothesis in an analysis of militarized interstate dispute outcomes. Differences amongst two actors concerning the relative salience of two issues, furthermore, is postulated to increase the likelihood of peaceful conflict resolution amongst these actors (Morgan 1994:110–111, see also Morrow 1986). Despite the centrality of these variables, however, their incorporation into models of social choice systems is inhibited by the “cardinal sin” of interpersonal comparisons of utility (Zagare 1982). Yet, as in the words of Snidal (1986:47), such interpersonal comparisons are “treacherous but essential.”

Given both the vital role that relative resolve and salience play in social choice systems, and the problematic nature of comparison of interpersonal utilities, a needs hierarchy model may prove all the more valuable. This is so because a needs hierarchy model may serve to minimize the invalidity of interpersonal comparisons of utility. Anatol Rapoport (1990:100) elaborates upon this argument as follows:

While it may be all but impossible to compare interpersonal utilities in the realm of luxuries (i.e., items that satisfy appetites rather than needs), denial of interpersonal comparisons in the realm of basic needs amounts in effect to a dismissal of any social ethos in which empathy plays any role. For instance, there may be “no objective justification for taxing those who have motor boats and using the money to help others buy hunting equipment.” Yet, most will agree that there is ample justification for taxing possessors of yachts to provide a minimum standard of nutrition and medical care for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Earlier chapters have made clear that the values of international politics agents represent a crucial component of the interpretive understanding of international politics. These values play significant roles in agency perceptions of opportunity and threat and in agency preference formation. Given the importance of agency values, in conjunction with the lack of attention in the international relations literature to this subject, this chapter delineated the foundations of a model of international political elite collective values. We proposed that an international politics version of the needs hierarchy model presented by Maslow enables the analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal variation in the absolute and relative salience of various elite values and thus in agency preferences and the relative salience of particular issues. In addition, this chapter proposed that an elaborated needs hierarchy model may prove useful in the conceptualization of crucial elements of models of bargaining such as risk propensity, and in the comparison of interpersonal utilities.

One might even view an elaborated theory of an international politics needs hierarchy as progressive in the Lakatosian sense in that it accounts for the conceptualization of agency values within the predominant approaches to international politics. Liberal theorists (e.g., idealists, transnationalists, or neoliberals) would probably not deny that a primary need of agents is to preserve the security of their organizations, whether bureaucracies, NGOs, IGOs, or states. Much of the difficulty proponents of such liberal approaches have with realist thinking, however, may be related to the liberal claim that contemporary political actors *have* adequately ensured their politico-military viability, and thus can turn to concerns residing elsewhere within the hierarchy of needs. Conversely, realists deny neither that such higher needs are valuable nor valued by international political agents, but they simply assert that states have inadequately fulfilled these basic needs. Indeed, realists hold that states will never adequately perceive themselves to have fulfilled these basic needs.

At the least, the needs hierarchy model accounts for liberal and neorealist differences concerning the hierarchy of values or issues by introducing a crucial controlling variable. That is, debates about the primary interests or orientations

of international political actors, and perhaps also about the intentions behind particular patterns of action, must control for the extent to which international political actors believe they have satisfied their basic needs. Realist theory would be undermined, then, by evidence that actors which believe they have not satisfied their basic needs pursued higher needs, and liberal thinkers would be undermined by the reverse; that is, by evidence that states which perceive themselves to have satisfied these needs continue to place great value on gains in added security.

Finally, given the central role that values play in social action, and given that social action is the ultimate source of continuity and change in social structure, variation in agency values plays a necessary role in the explanation of this latter phenomenon as well as the former. Especially within the context of a methodological individualist approach to international politics, one might consider variation in the substance and distribution of these values as the most central form of structural variation. It is to an analysis of the needs hierarchy for the conceptualization and explanation of continuity and transformation in international politics that we now turn.

CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION OF VALUES UNDERLYING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter developed the foundations of a conceptualization of the collective values of international political elites. We argued that an elaborated version of this conceptualization may enable theory-driven explanation of agency opportunity and threat perception, option evaluation and thus preference formation. In addition, the needs hierarchy model of elite collective values should contribute to conceptualizations of such key concepts as risk propensity, issue salience, and resolve. Thus, the model of elite collective international politics values introduced in the preceding chapter contributes to understanding particular cases of social action and outcomes.

The present chapter elaborates upon the parameters of variation in international political elite values and investigates some mechanisms which may contribute to explanation of this variation. Treatment of elite values as a system permits differentiation among within-system value change and value system transformation. Two types of within-system change in elite intentional behavior, in turn, can be identified. First, elites' most important values can shift within the international political needs hierarchy from basic needs through to higher needs, or vice versa. Second, the layer or dimension of structure with which the elite is primarily concerned may vary. This scenario can be characterized either by a shift in the structural level of those values of primary importance in elite evaluation of international political issues, and/or in the outright decrease in the amount of attention paid to international political issues.

System transformation, meanwhile, refers to a change in the very nature of the needs hierarchies of political elites. That is, elite conceptualization of basic needs may shift, e.g., from geopolitical security to environmental, or technological, security. Alternatively, the very number of basic needs may increase or decrease. Such shifts in the quality of basic (and higher needs), in turn, may contribute to a shift in the primary bases of power, conflict/cooperation, and social-

ization, and consequently, in the most prominent group identities of political elites.

Continuity and change in international political elite values is an integral component of the analysis of the constructivist foundations of structure. It has been demonstrated above that agency values comprise an indispensable component of the explanation of stimulus to action, i.e., opportunity and threat, and preference formation. Accordingly, variation of elite value configurations, especially of the transformative, represents a cause of variation in patterns of social action. It is crucial to point out, however, that divergent value configurations can give rise to the same action, for this possibility entails that more or less stable patterns of social action may belie a significant shift in the values motivating these patterns. Thus, for example, we may find that both cooperative and competitive patterns of international politics are motivated by various combinations of higher and basic, and external and internal, needs.

Alternatively, it is possible to propound the view, more or less consonant with the structurationist school, that agency values represent the rules of signification, or, alternatively, the very meaning of international political action. Within the context of this approach, then, the variation in the distribution of value configurations across actors represents the distribution of types of instantiated meaning of international politics and the international system. In short, the analysis of variation in and transformation of agency value configurations is significant whether one approaches the issue of social (re)constructivism from a causal or noncausal or structurationist ontology of the agent-structure dynamic.

Given the importance of attention to variation *within* and *of* international political elite value systems, this chapter presents a preliminary review of some mechanisms which may be useful in accounting for these variations. At least four types of mechanisms may contribute to such understanding: technological development; instrumental stimulus-responsiveness; elite (i.e., cohort) circulation; and diffusion of inter-elite social linkages. Though we do not systematically address the differential impact of these mechanisms on variation within (and of) value systems, we propose that each can generally contribute to more elaborate explanations of both types of variation.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part distinguishes between within-system value change and value system transformation, and discusses the importance of such analysis for the postulation of both causally and noncausally oriented explanations of the (re)construction of international political structure. In the second part we consider causal mechanisms which contribute to change in and transformation of value configurations. In particular, technological developments, elite circulation, diffusion, and inter-elite societal linkages are proposed to influence one or both sorts of variation.

CHANGE IN AND TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ELITE VALUE CONFIGURATIONS

The present section establishes the foundations for an analysis of change concerning international political elite value configurations. It first elaborates upon the definitions of change in, and transformation of, international political elite value configurations. It then discusses the importance of the explanation of such variation in the accounting of change more generally. Indeed, variation in elite value configurations represents an integral element in the (re)construction of international political structure(s).

Change in international political elite value configurations

Within-system change refers to variation in the *distribution* of one or more properties across the system. This type of variation is within rather than of in the sense that it relies on a single conceptualization of agency values. That is, notwithstanding our insufficient efforts at conceptualizing higher political needs, the content of this needs hierarchy remains unaltered. Rather, only the relative salience of pre-given value hierarchies is variable.

The conceptualization of within-system value-configuration variation derives directly from the presupposition of a distinct needs hierarchy for each elite structural milieu. Two general types of within-system change must be differentiated—change in the relative salience of different layers of structure and change in the relative salience of basic and higher needs within any single structural stratum. Given adequate security *vis-à-vis* external rivals, international political elites may turn either to nonsecurity-related international political objectives, or to needs intrinsic to domestic and subdomestic arenas. Furthermore, even if international political elites are deemed to focus primarily on security or viability concerns, it is possible that the most important of these concerns shifts from one level of an elite's structure to another. Thus, a key source of variation is in the extent to which an elite is concerned with internal or external security (see, for example, Starr 1994 or Simon and Starr 1996).

Transformation of international political elite value configurations

Whereas variation in the distribution of the given set of values delineated above can be viewed as remaining consistent within the same conceptual framework, transformation in value configurations refers to a change in the very meaning or content of the very values in the hierarchy. While this type of change can refer to variation in the issues associated with higher needs as well as to that of issues associated with basic needs, the more crucial case is when the basic needs, i.e., existential requirements, come to be primarily associated with issues other than geopolitical security.

An obvious manifestation of this form of value-configuration transformation is captured by arguments exhorting a reconceptualization of security to include environmental protection and resource preservation. One such exhortation, of many, is forwarded by Mathews (1992), who argues that the definition of national security be extended to encompass resource, environmental, and demographic issues. The notion of environmental security of course is that material production demands and consumption outputs are outpacing environmental supply, leading to resource shortages and environmental, e.g., climactic, vicissitudes that undermine the basic ecological requirements of human (and other) life.

It is central to consider what impact this type of transformation might have on the institution of sovereignty as well as the predominant status of the nation-state. A large literature exists (e.g., see the review in Russett and Starr 1996: ch. 18) which indicates that most environmental problems demand regional or global solutions. Because such problems involve jointly supplied goods with strong externalities they ignore political boundaries and affect sensitive and vulnerable actors which do not want to be affected. By so doing, environmental collective goods problems present a major and central challenge to the Westphalian conception of the sovereign state (see especially Rosenau 1990). As Mathews (1992:555) notes, "the phenomena themselves are defined by the limits of watershed, ecosystem, or atmospheric transport, not by national borders."

Furthermore, one might postulate that dramatic change in economic production systems, necessitated by severe environmental degradation, could shift the locus of conflict to actors within the economic arena. What is more, if the primacy of states is given by the fact that states are the sole legitimate possessors of the final arbiter of disagreement, then we might look to those groups which contain the primary types of resources crucial to address the problems of environmental degradation and overpopulation. In such a scenario, those groups possessing key resources may become increasingly powerful. Finally, satisfaction of this new basic need of environmental and resource protection may increase the significance of a new form of technocratic expertise, one based on biological, and ecological knowledge.¹

Environmental decline, however, may itself exacerbate the traditional basic needs of international politics—generating conflict over scarce resources or generating conflict through the frustration of states vulnerable to interdependence. Environmental decline would, thus, reinforce rather than metamorphose traditional geopolitical security concerns, as states act to manage interdependence through traditional, realist, military means (see especially Starr 1997, forthcoming). If interdependence cannot be managed positively, and leads to greater conflict, then military capability and economic leverage will remain resources well suited for competition and regulation of a world marred by environmental strife and sustenance scarcity.²

Furthermore, cooperation concerning this tragedy of the global commons reflects a collective action problem captured by an n-person prisoner's dilemma (Hardin 1982; Ostrom 1990), and may thus require formal institutions with the

capabilities to detect and sanction defection (e.g., Stein 1990; Snidal 1985; Martin 1993). Whatever the international institutional context, states are still particularly well endowed with the capabilities necessary to perform the detection and sanctioning functions needed to make regimes work. Force *may* still be the *ultima ratio* in a world marked by environmental and demographic catastrophe. Our point is simple: to accept a redefinition of security away from traditional realist concerns toward environmental ones does not necessarily entail the dissolution of the nation-state system (again, see Starr 1997, forthcoming).³

Value configurations and the interpretation of international politics

Elite value configurations represent a central element in the construction of social structure commensurate with both the causal, conceptually autonomous, and structurationist approaches to agency and structure. Although precisely situating values within Giddens's rich and complex structurationist conceptualization of modalities is beyond the scope of the present discussion, we must note that these values appear to us to reflect a mix of constitutive and regulative rules. In the correspondence of values, or needs, with obligations, they approximate regulative rules. In their embodiment of rules which define or constitute the very meaning of agency (i.e., a goal-directed entity with hierarchically structured needs and limited resources), agency values approach constitutive rules. Thus, in structuration-theoretic terminology, values might best be viewed as comprising a crucial type of structural property instantiated in the moment of social action.

Consistent with this view, we may investigate the patterns of values which particular sets of international political elites instantiate at any instance or period of time. We might investigate the extent to which a certain set of international political elites are outward, i.e., internationally, or inward, i.e., domestically, oriented, and the extent to which such particular elites are concerned with basic or higher needs.

Value configurations, of course, represent an essential component of the causal, conceptually autonomous, agency-structure ontology. Once again, in this approach, value configurations contribute most significantly to agency perceptions of opportunity and threat, and to agency preference formation. In this view, value configurations contribute to an explanation of agency social action, which in turn results in the construction of patterns of international relations.

Attention to value configurations allows analysis of the important dimension of continuity and variation which may be obscured by emphasis upon patterns of *action*. Primary attention to patterns of action obscures this important source of variation because different value configurations may or may not be characterized by similar behavioral options. Analysis of the search-evaluation matrix, as presented in [Chapter 5](#), clearly illuminates this process. The utility of an option may achieve the same value with an array of distinct value configurations. For example, it is possible for international institutions and general patterns of cooperation

(or similarly for consistent patterns of self-help and conflict), to be motivated by divergent value structures. One general widely analyzed manifestation of this point is that international conflict may be motivated by domestic as well as external interests. Thus, for example, an interstate war between two states, such as the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, was fought by one party, the Jordanians, primarily to enhance elite domestic viability, and by another, Israel, to preserve if not enhance Israeli external security. Thus, value configurations comprise a crucial dimension of continuity and change in international political elite social action which may be obscured by primary attention to patterns of *action*.

MECHANISMS OF SYSTEM CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Given the significance of value configurations in social construction, it is important, in turn, to endogenize them. The present section represents a preliminary and rudimentary contribution toward this endeavor, by identifying a few causal mechanisms (potentially) useful in the explanation of variation concerning elite value configurations—technological development, elite cohort transitions, diffusion, and inter-elite linkages. These mechanisms, moreover, may be viewed as influencing both change within and transformation of value systems.

Technological development

We have already implicitly encountered a general type of technological mechanism in the specification of value system transformation, i.e., industrial, and postindustrial modes of production and consumption. Ultimately, the impact of technological developments on international political elite values is difficult to assess in the abstract given the open-ended nature of such innovations. Note, furthermore, that technological development should be distinguished from the causal mechanisms discussed below in that it is generally a nonstructural, extrasystemic parameter. As such, technological developments reside externally to the agent-structure dialectic. Nonetheless, previous technological developments have exerted considerable influence on agency values. For example, scholars of international politics have emphasized the impact of technological innovation on interdependence, the management of interdependence, and resulting processes of cooperation and/or conflict. Thus, technological innovation has been associated with both increased and decreased security.

Thomas Schelling (1966), for example, contended that nuclear weapons entailed not only a shift in the process of coercive diplomacy but a general aggravation of state insecurity. To Schelling (1966) the arrival of nuclear weapons revolutionized international conflict because they enable extensive damage to the enemy without military victory, and subject victors as well as losers of interstate conflict to significant costs. In fact, nuclear weapons require the destruction of the adversary's state prior to destruction of the adversary's military forces.⁴

In contrast, Jervis (1978) hypothesized that the differentiation between offensive and defensive military capabilities can contribute to amelioration of the security dilemma. Jervis's offense/defense balance theory involves two major variables—the distinctiveness of offensive and defensive capabilities and the relative advantage of one type of capability over the other. When defensive weapons and policies have the advantage over but cannot be distinguished from offensive ones, the security dilemma is ameliorated. When defensive weapons and policies have an advantage over *and* can be distinguished from offensive capabilities, the security dilemma is almost completely dissolved. In this scenario, a state can increase its security without diminishing the security of any other state.⁵

Conversely, when the offense has the advantage but the distinction between offense and defense is unclear, the security dilemma is at its most vicious, and four major consequences result: war is profitable for the winner; states are inclined to arm heavily and react quickly and decisively to another state's arms buildup; states are inclined to recruit allies in advance; and state leaders will tend to attribute aggressive intentions to other states. Here, the confusion between capabilities and intentions is maximized, and we find that the perceptions of (nonexistent) threat by decision makers drive a conflict spiral between two sets of essentially defensive policymakers.

Two possible types of technological developments have been discussed to illustrate that technological developments can influence levels of agency security. For present purposes, suffice it to say that social transformation is influenced not only by the intrasystemic agent-structure dynamic but also by external, material, truly objective forces. This being said, we can turn to intrasystemic, i.e., social, sources of variation concerning agency values.

Short-term rational variation versus elite cohort circulation

In this section, we juxtapose two mechanisms of change which have been directly associated with the needs hierarchy. The first of these treats agents as instrumental actors responding in flexible fashion to external stimuli. Such flexible, perhaps even *ad hoc* value-configuration shifts are clearly operative in the two-level conflict work of Starr and his collaborators (e.g. Starr 1994; Starr *et al.* 1994). That is, the relative salience of distinct political elite arenas is a function of contemporaneous levels of threat to the viability of the elite in these arenas—e.g., domestic and external. In the realist view, the treatment of agency preoccupation with security is assumed outright as covarying with levels of threat (and opportunity). This assumption of instrumental *ad hoc* responses to external stimuli, whether explicit or implicit, indeed prevails in most theoretical analyses of conflict processes.

Juxtaposed to this rationalistic flexible view of agency interest variation, Inglehart (1990) theorizes that individuals generally retain a particular disposition toward higher or basic needs depending on their socialization experience. In

other words Inglehart argues that variation across agents in the relative importance of material and postmaterial value configurations is a function of agency socialization during agents' formative years. This socialization hypothesis postulates that cohorts experiencing extensive political and/or socioeconomic insecurity during their preadult years tend toward a materialist political cultural orientation, and cohorts experiencing political and socioeconomic comfort during their formative years tend to develop an enduring and deeply engrained postmaterialist political cultural orientation.⁶ Such cultural proclivities are deeply entrenched and, the change associated with them "is likely to be disorienting and deeply disturbing to those raised under the previous value system...such changes take place slowly, generally through the socialization of new generations; and the transition tends to be painful" (Inglehart 1990:13).

It deserves explicit mention that the socialization hypothesis serves to preserve the importance of the needs hierarchy even for those who are not prone toward an instrumentalist view of international political agency. Indeed, Inglehart tends toward the socialization hypothesis concerning the needs hierarchy. Inglehart (1990:69–70) contends that "experimental tests of the need hierarchy have found no positive correlation between satisfaction of a given need at one time and increased emphasis on the next higher need at later time...for these experiments are based on the implicit assumption that one would find almost immediate changes in an individual's priorities." Rather, the emergence of political cultural orientations in elite positions associated with preadult socialization processes takes approximately thirty years, i.e., ten to fifteen years for this cohort to enter the electorate, another ten or so years to enter positions of power and influence, and approximately another ten years for this cohort to occupy the highest elite roles (Inglehart 1990:69).

The strong socialization thesis holds that these ingrained political cultural orientations not only mediate individual perceptions of "objective" external socioeconomic conditions, but also account for apparent deviations between objective structural conditions and agent value priorities. These political cultural orientations can account for the following two types of extremes: "on one hand, the miser who experienced poverty in early years and relentlessly continues piling up wealth long after attaining material security and, on the other hand, the saintly ascetic who remains true to the higher-order goals instilled by his or her culture, even in the face of severe deprivation" (Inglehart 1990:69).⁷

Ultimately, as Inglehart emphasizes, the instrumental and socialization hypotheses may operate concomitantly. That is, agency political value configurations are a function both of short-term fluctuations dictated by periods of relative scarcity or prosperity, and long-term cohort trends.⁸ Figure 7.1 captures the hypothesis that the extent to which actors are concerned with basic versus higher needs is an additive function of the scarcity and socialization hypotheses. The four cells represent the four possible conjunctions of the preadult socioeconomic and political experiences dichotomy and the contemporaneous environmental milieu dichotomy (i.e., threatening-nonthreatening). The numbers in the table

represent an ordinal scale with a value of one reflecting the predominance of basic needs and four representing the predominance of higher needs. Thus, this figure proposes that preoccupation with basic needs is most likely for those political elites who (1) were socialized in times in which basic needs were scarce *and* (2) currently perceive a high level of scarcity. Conversely, agent proclivity toward higher needs is most likely for those political elites who (1) were socialized in relatively abundant times *and* (2) currently experience satisfaction of basic political needs. Observe that the matrix attributes a two to the insecure environment-secure childhood cell and a three to the secure environment-insecure childhood cell. This rank ordering reflects the view, shifting slightly away from Inglehart toward most thinking on international conflict, that the magnitude of the impact of extant environmental constraints on international political elite value configurations is to some extent larger than that of formative childhood experience. This conforms, in other words, to the *realpolitik* view that one strong hawk can disrupt dovish patterns of political action (see also Schmookler 1984).

Finally, a mechanism closely related to socialization, which may also contribute to value change, is learning. A good example of the contribution of learning to value alteration is embodied in Jervis's (1986) explanation of the Concert of Europe. Jervis (1986:60) argues that the balance-of-power security institution usually predominates but that system regulators such as the Concert of Europe from 1815—"occur after, and only after, a major war fought to contain a potential hegemon." Jervis elaborates that general war undermines two critical foundations of balance-of-power politics: alignment based on short-term interests, and the legitimacy of the use of force. Alignment based on short-term interests is undermined by both the development of close ties between the allies as well as the postwar persistence in the belief that the defeated potential hegemon continues to harbor aggressive systemic intentions, and thus represents a potential future threat. The legitimacy of the use of force is undermined by strong aversion to the costs of war, in terms of social unrest as well as costs directly related to the war.

According to Jervis, a major force leading to a reintroduction of these pillars of self-help is essentially memory loss. The fading memory of the war gives way to decreased fear of the adversary seeking hegemony in the prior war, increased concerns about the equity of the distribution of contributions made to the public good of the security regime, and a weakening of the bonds that linked the counterhegemonic coalition together. In addition, over time the members of the concert tend to forget the costs of the prior war and so begin to deem military force a legitimate instrument of diplomacy.

Contemporaneous incentive structure

		threatening	nonthreatening
Political culture type	basic needs	1	3
	higher needs	2	4

Scale: 1=predominance of basic needs
 ⋮
 4=predominance of higher needs

Figure 7.1 Cross-tabulation of political culture and contemporaneous environmental inputs

Jervis's explanation of the rise and fall of the Concert of Europe is useful in the context of the present discussion for at least three reasons. First, and perhaps quite obviously, learning represents one mechanism through which value configurations might change. Second, we note that lessons learned are specific to individuals, and often to those individuals who acquired these lessons through direct experience. To the extent, correspondingly, that these lessons were not somehow codified or effectively transmitted to individuals who did not share the focal experience(s), we might expect such lessons to be "forgotten" with generational displacement. Finally, Jervis's argument is illuminating in its implication that certain transformations deemed by some to be manifestations of an evolutionary or at least unilinear process may be mistaken. In other words, there is no a priori reason for associating social *transformation* with relatively extensive tracts of history.

The diffusion of value configurations

Processes of diffusion/contagion developed by Starr and his collaborators (e.g. Most and Starr 1980; Siverson and Starr 1991), viewed in the context of the need of actors to attend to their most pressing security concerns, comprise a third mechanism of variation in international political value configurations. Four distinct patterns of variation in elite value configurations can be associated with four distinct types of diffusion processes. The first of these processes, *positive reinforcement*, refers to a process in which an actor's participation in a conflict on a particular level of analysis, e.g., interstate, intragovernmental, at time t increases the probability that this actor will participate in the same type of conflict at time $t+1$. *Negative reinforcement* refers to the converse linkage in which an actor's participation in a conflict of a specified sort at time t decreases the probability of this actor's participation in a comparable conflict at time $t+1$.

The two reinforcement processes, then, may be viewed as encouraging particular patterns of any given elite over time. In particular, positive reinforcement processes suggest that elite i will be primarily concerned with the same structural level over time. Conversely, the operation of a negative reinforcement process suggests that elite i will either (1) shift primary attention from basic to higher needs within the same layer of structure; or (2) shift primary attention from one structural milieu to another.

In contrast to reinforcement processes, spatial diffusion processes address linkages in conflict behavior *across* actors. More specifically, *positive spatial diffusion* refers to the process in which actor participation in a conflict increases the probability that one or more other actors will engage in the same type of conflict. *Negative spatial diffusion* refers to the process in which an actor's participation in a certain type of conflict decreases the probability that one or more other comparable actors will engage in this type of conflict. Spatial diffusion, then, may be viewed as influencing the distribution of primary actor concerns across the systems. Simply, positive spatial diffusion implies that those actors ensnared in the conflict will be primarily occupied with basic needs on that level of analysis upon which the conflict has diffused. Thus, for example, diffusion of domestic-level conflict across nation-state boundaries can lead to more pervasive patterns of state elite introversion. To the extent that a system is characterized by negative spatial diffusion, we expect, conversely, that the primary concerns of the conflict participants and those not ensnared by conflict to diverge.

The question becomes how to account for diffusion. Most and Starr additionally theorize that patterns of spatial interstate war diffusion are constrained and enabled by the quality and quantity of interaction opportunities among dyads of states; that is, the greater the interaction opportunities linking state i and state j , the greater the likelihood that the war participation of state j would influence the incentive structure of state i and thus affect state i 's war participation. While cognizant of the various forms of political, economic, social, and cultural agents of contagion, Siverson and Starr found, across their research projects, that geo-

graphic proximity and alliance linkages are positively related to the positive spatial diffusion of war. Siverson and Starr (1991), moreover, found that the interaction of various dimensions of interaction opportunity increased the probability of the positive spatial diffusion of war.

The implications of interaction opportunity for the present discussion then are clear. Diffusion is part of linkage politics; it involves the processes by which external cues are transmitted, received and learned by the actors in a system (see Most and Starr 1990). Networks of interaction opportunity serve as transmission belts through which the actions of international political elites are linked. Better understanding of the processes of conflict diffusion, negative as well as positive, would improve expectations concerning the distribution of actor value configurations across the system.

On this note, we might in fact turn to the work on resocialization, or identity transformation, of Berger and Luckmann (1966).⁹ According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:157), “[n]o radical transformation of subjective reality (including...identity) is possible without” the mediation or transmission of this new identity through a generally new set of significant others, with whom the subject “must establish strongly affective identification.” These strongly affective ties, in turn, are necessary to provide the extensive, or “emotionally charged,” legitimation of the actor’s new identity.

Note that Berger and Luckmann’s emphasis upon the primary role played by proximate, intimate, and affective linkages in the transmission of novel meanings corresponds, *at least* metaphorically, to Starr’s emphasis on the role of the centrality of interaction opportunity in spatial diffusion processes. One general notion common to these models is the positive relationship between the intensity of such linkages and the magnitude of the impact on the intentional disposition of agents of the stimuli transmitted along these channels. We can discern from Berger and Luckmann’s argument that the function served by the affective quality of the relationship is its *ability to confirm, or legitimate*, the new orientations. Moreover, new identity formation is effected in significant part by a legitimating apparatus which in turn requires the possession of power (Berger and Luckmann 1966:159). Thus, those linkages, or intentions, marked by the greatest (inter)dependence are those across which we should expect the largest and most frequent changes. More generally, networks analysis emphasizing various types of inter-elite linkages, e.g., resource exchange, frequency and quality of interaction, etc., may be especially useful in constructing such inter-elite linkages.

Finally, novel identities and institutions arise as the size and durability of individuals subscribing to the new definition increase (Berger and Luckmann 1966:166). This implies, in turn, the possibility that social change can snowball. This theme has in fact been emphasized in the international relations literature. Goertz (1994) contends that the larger the number of members of a social system that break a commitment in the effort to adopt new roles and interests, the less costly it is for other members of the group to break their own commitments. This barrier (constraint) once broken, permits behavior previously off limits in the

system, as reciprocity will not be used to constrain such behavior. For example, this reciprocity-based relationship is one of the main reasons states see it in their interests *to follow* international law.¹⁰ More generally, the breaking of a major commitment by an actor in its transition to new roles and interests may serve as a moment of truth for other members of the group if not the system at large, as each actor awaits to see the reaction of others.

CONCLUSION

To recapitulate, this chapter has suggested that variation in and transformation of elite values represent important objects of analysis in the study of international politics. Analysis of value-configuration variation, indeed, represents a focal component of a noncausal duality model of the agent-structure dynamic such as that propounded by structuration theory, as well as the causal model of the agent-structure interrelationship advanced in preceding chapters. Accordingly, this chapter elaborated upon the parameters of variation in value configuration derived directly from the multidimensional conceptualization of structure and the needs hierarchy developed in prior chapters. This conception of agency value configurations thus satisfies the variability criterion and does so in a fashion derived systematically from basic conceptualizations of agency and structure. Included in this systematically derived model moreover are more or less novel theoretical issues such as, for instance, variation in the relative salience of domestic and external interests underlying international politics, and variation in the political salience of international politics itself relative to other political realms.

Given the centrality of value-configuration variation for the study of international political change, the second part of this chapter briefly, and perhaps to some extent even superficially, presented four possible mechanisms of value-configuration transformation—technological development, instrumental response to external stimuli, generational change or socialization, and diffusion. Of these, perhaps the latter two have received least, and are deserved of more, attention in contemporary international relations scholarship.

Finally, at least three conclusions emerge from this discussion. First, acceptance of a subjectivist ontology does not entail that processes and patterns of international politics are significantly malleable. On the contrary, one might argue that barring a conjunction of major and rare technological and social conditions, the general structure of the needs hierarchy should remain intact. Second, the content of meaningful social transformation extends well beyond a shift from self-help to that of cooperation, for example. Nor must such transformation necessarily entail a shift in political elite identity away from the nation-state toward supranational organizations. Ultimately, to recognize the possible parameters of an empirically grounded conceptualization of continuity and transformation in international politics requires explicit and theoretically grounded, conceptualizations of agency and structure.

CONCLUSION

In this book we have sought to address three primary issues: to define the “agent-structure problem”; to critique prior literature on this topic by international relations scholars; and to derive implications of the ontological and epistemological components of the agent-structure problem for the empirical analysis of international politics. In this concluding chapter, we will first recapitulate the arguments presented in the preceding pages. This will provide us a basis for a discussion of the status and role of the metatheoretical/theoretical divide in the analysis of international politics.

We began our analysis of the agent-structure problem by differentiating among its methodological and ontological components. We have presented the methodological agent-structure problem as the need to bracket, theoretically and empirically, at least some subset of the concepts relating to agency and structure in any explanation of any particular international political phenomena. This general problem dovetails with and reinforces Most and Starr’s call for nice laws, i.e., the need to explicitly specify the conditions under which particular hypotheses are postulated to hold. The methodological agent-structure problem also bears upon the logic of research agendas, suggesting that scholars move through a research program in some logically coherent fashion, sequentially bracketing different elements of any particular research program.

Beyond the intrinsic significance of the methodological agent-structure problem, this problem is of particular importance in the critique of prior metatheoretical analyses of theories of international politics. More specifically, some scholars of international relations have called for theories which endogenize both agency and structure, characterizing those theories which do not meet this criterion as degenerative. Given the inevitable need to bracket, however, failure to exogenize all key elements of both agency and structure is a methodologically *necessary* element of *theory* itself rather than an *ipso facto* sign of theoretical degeneracy.

It is instead the ontological agent-structure problem that represents the core metatheoretical basis for the comparative analysis and indeed construction of international politics theories. Our analysis of the ontological agent-structure

problem is based upon the premise that an adequate model of agency and structure must allow for the postulation of broadly conceived *causal* relationships between agency and structure. Such a model must allow for the analysis of the impact of structural change on agency social action, and for the analysis of the impact of agency social action on variation in, and the transformation of, the defining parameters of structure. We have argued that in order to reach these metatheoretical objectives, conceptualizations of agency and structure must satisfy two criteria: conceptual autonomy and variability. The criterion of conceptual autonomy means that agency and structure are distinct concepts in the sense that neither represents a defining property of the other. The criterion of variability means that the defining properties of agency and structure be conceptualized as variables. In combination, these criteria permit the analyst to postulate causal relationships among the defining properties of agency and structure.

Despite their seeming simplicity, these criteria have been inadequately attended to by some important theories of international politics (in particular, structural functionalist theories such as that proffered by Wallerstein). International relations scholars explicitly concerned with the agent-structure problem have also missed the significance of these criteria. For example, Wendt has advocated the adoption of a “generative” metatheoretical model of agency and structure. According to this model agency is associated with the roles embodied in an internal social relationship, such as master-slave, parent-child, laborer-owner, etc. By associating agency with one of these types of relations, the generative model fails to satisfy both of our ontological criteria for causal explanation.

The treatment of agency as a role in a social relationship hampers our consideration of the subjective nature of agency. As argued by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the subjective nature of agents entails that agents may reflect upon and selectively adopt particular roles. In fact, agency reflection and consciousness is a central element of structuration theory, from which Wendt and Dessler draw. Additionally, the conflation of agency with role undermines analysis both of agency choice and of the variability in the elements of agency choice, i.e., values, decision-making procedures, and even behavioral options. Thus, contrary to the claims of Wendt, world systems theory does not represent a progressive problem shift *vis-à-vis* realism by virtue of its reliance upon a generative model of agency and structure. Nor does the generative approach to the ontological agent-structure problem represent a progressive model for the analysis of international politics.

We have attempted to demonstrate that the application of our own recommendations for the analysis of the ontological agent-structure problem in international politics theory has proved useful in the analysis of structural realism. Consistent with the metatheoretic hypothesis that agency and structure (or willingness and opportunity) are jointly necessary elements of the explanation of social action, we have contended that structural realism’s inability to explain self-help results from a conjunction of agency insecurity and an anarchic system. This dispositional explanation of self-help, in turn, necessitates analysis of variation

in the salience of security concerns relative to that of other interests. Parenthetically, one might also investigate variation in the ordering principle of the international system. The present study has not attended to this issue largely due to the belief that social conflict, or power politics, is a general phenomenon applicable to predominantly hierarchic as well as anarchic systems. Our lack of attention to this issue is also generally consistent with the tendency of critics of structural realism's inability to explain structural transformation to accept the anarchic organization of the system.

We found that in Waltz's theory state insecurity is not only assumed within the context of a microeconomic ontology, but is also directly implied by each and every layer of Waltz's conceptualization of structure. Waltz inadequately differentiates between anarchy and functional specification. Indeed, he often treats functional homogeneity as a defining attribute of anarchy itself. Functional differentiation, therefore, represents a constant element of Waltz's model which drops out as much or as little as does anarchy itself. But more to the point, the very content of the function of the system units is geopolitically defined self-help. This clearly derives from Waltz's claim that the distribution of capabilities in the system refers to those capabilities associated with unit functional requisites. Our assessment of Waltz's theory thus points to the schizophrenic (both microeconomic and structuralist) ontological foundations of Waltz's model. Furthermore, Waltz's reliance on both microeconomic and structuralist ontological foundations provides a double-lock on the constancy of state interests: they are simultaneously given by definition and dictated by structure. Most importantly, the direct derivation of agency insecurity from Waltz's model of structure, in conjunction with the dependency of self-help on insecurity and anarchy, entail that the norm of self-help is *given* by Waltz's conceptualization of structure.

With these (and other arguments) as a theoretical basis, we could then shift to other critiques of the metatheoretical foundations of structural realism. We argue against Ruggie's position that Waltz's model would benefit from integrating the Durkheimian concept of dynamic density. It should first be understood that dynamic density is employed in Durkheim's model precisely to explain that phenomenon which structural realism, and realist thought more generally, rejects—functional differentiation. Furthermore, Waltz's model rejects the sort of systems-theoretic functionalism on which Durkheim's explanation of the impact of dynamic density on structural differentiation significantly depends. In addition, these approaches diverge markedly in their explanation of social order: for Durkheim integration is based on normative solidarity, and for Waltz system stability is based on balances of power.

Instead, we propose that the Durkheimian notion of dynamic density is incompatible with Waltz's model. The extent to which Waltz's model is Durkheimian must itself be questioned. Waltz's model does not include—and at times explicitly shuns—a functionalist, organismic conceptualization of system. Waltz's conception of system favors an aggregative conception of structure (in Nagelian terms). Waltz's model also fails to pay attention to a normative structure which

would contribute to the peaceful integration of system units. Indeed, the normatively based legitimation of the system which plays such a crucial role in Durkheimian analysis is wholly absent in Waltz's model. The stability of Waltz's system is based on balances of power rather than normative solidarity! We find that dynamic density and related processes, as described by Durkheim, are quite explicitly rejected by Waltz and perhaps realist thought more generally. That is, for realists the functional differentiation (which for Durkheim is a result of dynamic density) is by assumption not characteristic of the international political system. Such functional differentiation, is in fact, prevented by the balancing tendencies that are ever-predominant in the structural realist international system.

The central problem with Ruggie's critique of Waltz for present purposes is his claim that Waltz's theory fails to explain transformation because it omits unit-level processes from consideration. As demonstrated by the dispositional model explanation of self-help, as long as the system is characterized by a conjunction of agency insecurity and systemic anarchy, no amount of unit-level processes will lead to movement away from the self-help system. In order to explain system transformation within the context of a structural realist framework, we have argued for the need to explicitly define variation in the causal complex of agency interest and system arrangement.

The scientific realist/structurationist critique of structural realism suffers from a similar deficiency. Dessler and Wendt, in slightly different language, both suggest that Waltz's model suffers from inattention to socially constructed patterns of action, communication, and interpretation. These scholars are, however, correct in showing that the causal power of the positional model of structure (i.e., self-help) depends upon constitutive rules or intersubjectively defined meanings about the international political world. Until we theoretically specify the substance of international politics agents' *interests*, as well as the relationship between the substance of interests and system structure, however, critiques such as those of Dessler and Wendt remain unproductive. Wendt and Dessler appear to miss, however, that the positional model of structure propounded by Waltz plays a crucial role in conditioning the construction of intersubjectively defined meanings. Social construction is especially relevant given the permissive nature of the anarchic system. More importantly, the distribution of power within the system exerts a crucial impact on the (re)construction of social meaning. This view of power and the construction of social meaning is common to realism and critical theories such as Marxism (notwithstanding important differences in these theories' conceptualization of power). This view is also found in the compelling work of Berger and Luckmann (whose work on social construction is prominently emphasized by Wendt). In addition, scholars promoting an intersubjectivist approach to international politics are incorrect in claiming that shared meanings, i.e., constitutive and regulative rules, enable more and constrain less than properties of a positional model of structure. Rules as well as anarchy and power constrain, and anarchy and power as well as rules enable, social action.

The critique of the work of Wendt, Dessler and others outlined here provides a

summary of the argument developed in the first part of this book. This critique was a reaction to the confusion found in the extant literature concerning ontology, epistemology, and methodology. This critique also developed from the opportunity and willingness framework—an alternative view of agency and structure which we felt, in Lakatosian terms, provided a superior purchase for the study of international politics. We have argued that our alternative statement of the ontological agent-structure problem, with its emphasis on the need to conceptualize the properties of agency and structure as autonomous and variable entities, more appropriately captures the basis for valid analysis of the causal interrelationships between agency and structure. Moreover, we hope to have demonstrated the validity of this definition of the ontological agent-structure problem in our analysis of structural realism. It follows, finally, that our model of agency and structure is valuable in the construction of empirically meaningful theories of international politics which adequately capture the interrelationship between agency and structure.

Before moving on to a discussion of the substantive theoretic implications of our agency-structure model, however, we turned to what we called (following Wendt) the epistemological agent-structure problem. Wendt, Kratochwil, and Ruggie, and Hollis and Smith, among others, present a general claim that the subjectivist conceptualization of agency and structure requires an interpretive *epistemology* unique from and incompatible with a positivist epistemology. We argue that this thesis is problematic. The thesis of incompatible epistemologies is problematic primarily because interpretive sociological analysis relies upon a dual-language conception of theory and nomothetic causal explanation. Prominent interpretivist scholars, such as Weber, Schutz, Taylor, and Geertz, have explicitly emphasized the ineluctable need to differentiate between typifications (or abstractions) and empirical phenomena, and to rely on the former in the interpretation of agency social action. Furthermore, interpretive sociologists have explicitly treated agency motivations as an integral *causal mechanism* in the explanation of social action. It should be added, that properties often held to distinguish an interpretivist epistemology—i.e., reliance upon empathy in explanation, emphasizing explanation intelligible to agents themselves, and context-specificity—are subsumable, and in fact more precisely specified, within a positivist discourse.

We have also argued that, contrary to the arguments of Wendt, it is inappropriate to associate agency with historical explanation and explanation of the actual, on the one hand, and structure with causal analysis and the explanation of the possible, on the other. This is so first because the probabilistic nature of nomothetic explanation of social phenomena undermines the distinction between explanation of the possible and actual. Second, the inevitable need to invoke theoretical suppositions in the interpretation of past events undermines the distinction between historical and abstract, causal analysis. Alternatively, historical analysis refers simply to the empirical component of research, while structural analysis

refers to the level of analysis on which the primary causal variable(s) reside in the theoretical explanation of social phenomena.

Therefore, the subjectivist ontological thesis is compatible with a positivist epistemology. We have used the opportunity and willingness framework of Starr (1978) and Most and Starr (1989) to exemplify this compatibility. The opportunity and willingness framework clearly attends to the subjectivist quality of agency, and indeed to the agent-structure problem more generally, within the framework of a positivist epistemology. Most and Starr (1989) and Cioffi-Revilla and Starr (1995) discuss structure in terms of opportunity and agency in terms of willingness. These authors analyze the causal relationship between opportunity and willingness. Most generally, they propose and establish that opportunity and willingness are mutually necessary and jointly sufficient causes for social behavior.

We have used the discussion in [Part I](#) to do the following: (1) to establish the contours of the agent-structure problem, (2) to identify the properties of the metatheoretical relationship between agents and structure that are useful for theory construction and comparative analysis, and (3) to seek to dispel the belief in the existence of and need for a distinct interpretivist epistemology for the study of a subjectivist ontological orientation. With [Part I](#) as a point of departure, in [Part II](#) we identified some foundations of an empirically meaningful framework for international political analysis.

The central foundation on which the transition to substantive theory is based is our conception of agency—that is, the proper empirical extension of the general conceptualization of agency is the individual international political elite. Only individual human beings are conscious entities which engage in intentional behavior. Note that while this point can be found in the foundational interpretive works of Weber and Schutz, for example, it is missed by scholars of international politics advancing an “interpretive” approach. In our development of an empirical framework in [Part II](#), we further emphasize that only international political elites, broadly defined, capture the agency property of the power to choose, and have the power to influence social, or international political outcomes.

A focus on individual elites as the units of analysis is not only warranted on theoretical and empirical grounds, but also entails important theoretical advantages. One significant advantage is that reliance upon individual elites provides the conceptual space for recognizing that agents are surrounded by layers of structure, i.e., the international, regional, domestic, and bureaucratic levels. This property, furthermore, may be viewed as a substantive theoretic foundation for the integration of the interpretive emphasis on webs of significance into theorizing about international political action. The multidimensional nature of structures, in turn, implies that structural milieus are agent-specific.

The agent-specific nature of structure that we present further undermines the supposition of a monolithic intersubjectively defined normative structure. Specifically, (1) if we recognize that each layer of agency structure is characterized in part by its own more or less distinct normative structure (and in part by the posi-

tional elements of structure), then (2) even if we believe that each layer of structure has a monolithic nature (3) agents are likely to be situated in different *sets* of structure. Thus, the assumption of a monolithic international normative structure is inconsistent with a social constructivist ontology of structure. Look at the flip side of this argument: taking the layered nature of agency structure in conjunction with the existence of a needs hierarchy indigenous to each of these levels suggests that social action may be fruitfully modeled as the result of decision-making processes in which agents consider the impact of certain decisions on each major agent interest. Following the logic of two-level or nested games, agents often must sacrifice the satisfaction of interests in one arena for the satisfaction of interests in another arena. More generally, then, a multidimensional conception of social structure provides the foundation for modeling variability in social action.

Another significant advantage of a focus on individual elites as the units of analysis is that it directs our attention to the centrality of *social choice processes* in the explanation of international political outcomes. International political outcomes can be (and should be!) conceptualized as the result of issue area based systems of social choice comprised of elites with significant influence in particular issue areas. Models of such social choice systems can be drawn from various extant models of foreign policymaking; here we have used the foreign policymaking models of Maoz and Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* as illustrations of the possible ways to study agency choice. Synthesis of existing models in fact is useful because such synthesis suggests that the same general set of variables—individual elite influence, evaluation criteria, policy preferences, risk propensity, and resolve—are central in the explanation of both policy outcomes and the likelihood of intrasocial-choice system conflict.

The centrality of choice processes as well as the movement from the self-help puzzle in the study of international politics, point to the generally neglected need to theorize about the values of international political actors. We argued that such a model of agency values should at least: (1) satisfy the ontological criteria of variability; (2) apply to each layer of agency structure; and (3) encompass the realist emphasis on agent security. A model that satisfies these criteria can contribute to the explanation of social action, the explanation of elite balancing behavior in regard to competing interests across as well as within particular structural milieus, and explaining movement away from (and toward) the predominance of external geopolitical insecurity. More generally, the integration of a model of agency values into more comprehensive models of agency decision making and social choice processes poses a crucial puzzle in the construction of models faithful to the causal interrelationships among agency and structure.

We are bold enough to propose that the conceptualization of an international politics needs hierarchy represents a model which, in fact, approaches satisfaction of each of the properties presented above. We recognize the thorny problem of defining the higher needs of such a hierarchy; indeed, this itself represents a useful area for future research. Nevertheless, the needs hierarchy model satisfies

the variability criterion, including a logic for theorizing about variation in the relative salience of different values in the international and regional arenas and across different layers of an elite's environment. And, as Rapoport (1990) suggests, such a needs hierarchy may serve as a rule of thumb for addressing the issue of the comparison of utilities across individuals. A more fully developed need hierarchy may thus contribute to the conceptualization of such key factors in the analysis of competitive social choice processes as risk propensity and resolve. Finally, as the realist concern with external viability is included as the primary basic need, this model can contribute to an explanation of movement away from self-help.

The parameters of social choice were deductively derived from the multidimensional conception of structure and the needs hierarchy. Variation within elite value systems refers, first, to a shift within the international political needs hierarchy from basic needs to higher needs, or vice versa. Second, variation within elite value systems also refers to a shift in the structural milieu of primary concern to the elite. Transformation of elite value systems refers to a change in the very nature of the needs hierarchies of political elites, e.g., from geopolitical security to environmental, technological, security. Such shifts in the quality of basic (and higher needs), in turn, may contribute to a shift in the primary bases of conflict/cooperation, socialization, and consequently, in the most prominent group identities of political elites.

It has been argued that this conceptualization of variation in the agent-structure relationship has quite profound significance. Given the crucial role of values in the explanation of social action, variation concerning values poses a central element of the explanation of change in patterns of social action. In light of the fact that the same behavioral option may be motivated by different value configurations, and that different behavioral options may be motivated by the same value configuration, emphasis on value configuration variation becomes especially important. Thus, for example, we may find that both cooperative and competitive patterns of international politics are motivated by various combinations of higher and basic, and external and internal, needs. In regard to the two-level dichotomy of internal and external needs, we may analyze the extent to which international politics is important to international political elites relative to other layers of these actors' social environment. Given the utility of this line of analysis, we have also proposed a variety of mechanisms (i.e., technological development, socialization, and diffusion) which may help account for variation in and transformation of elite value systems. We must emphasize that as agency values embody properties of constitutive and regulative rules, this model is relevant to intersubjectivist approaches to international politics tending toward structuration theory.

Our traverse across the metatheoretical/theoretical divide ends at this point. Some may be disillusioned with the culmination of our journey near the shores of methodological individualist approaches to international conflict. Our path was guided not only by the logic of our conclusions concerning the agent-

structure problem; we were also guided by a vision of a final destination where theories of foreign policy decision making were highly visible. Indeed, we see the construction of a path from agency and structure to methodological individualist models of bargaining and conflict as a significant contribution of this book; a similar contribution is the placing of methodological individualist models of bargaining and conflict on firm metatheoretical foundations. Ultimately, the validity of the traverse across the metatheoretic/theoretic divide must rest not on the final destination of the analysis but on the consistency of its logic; not only in the end product, but in the value of the lessons developed on the road to the final destination.

Building on the work of Most and Starr the overall utility of any theory or empirical analysis is grounded upon (1) the validity of its metatheoretical foundations, however explicitly or implicitly identified; and (2) on the validity of the linkage(s) between its metatheoretical foundations and the resulting substantive theory/empirical analysis. Conversely, metatheoretical analysis provides little help in the cumulation of knowledge about international politics if such analysis is not validly linked to programs of substantive-theoretic and empirical action. In this sense, the bridge between metatheory and theory represents, if you will, a second-order praxis. The objective of "practice" should be brought to bear on essentially all metatheoretical consideration within the realm of international politics. The value of metatheoretical analysis that does not bring us closer to a valid and meaningful *program for action* is highly questionable.

Our discussion in the second part of the book embodies the rudiments of such a program for action, pointing to some (potentially) fruitful avenues for future empirical research in international politics. These include: (1) developing the concepts of individual elite-level influence, risk propensity, and resolve; (2) the elaboration of higher agency international political needs; (3) the elaboration of relationship types and patterns among individual elites within and across social choice systems which may contribute to the analysis of transformation in basic forms of group identity; (4) and, the specification of nice laws, or contextualized models characterized by explicit and systematic bracketing of various variables emphasized in this analysis, such as the value configurations motivating agency social action.

We wish to conclude by emphasizing that there is no logical relationship between metatheoretical considerations and a proclivity toward one side or the other of the realist-liberal debate. Metatheory *qua* metatheory neither adjudicates among competing beliefs pertaining to the aggressive or passive intentions of agents, nor the self-interested or altruistic intentions of agents. Neither does it adjudicate among competing beliefs concerning the treatment of norms as external constraints or resources invoked instrumentally by self-interested actors or as sources mirroring the actual motivations of agents. Neither does it deal with the general transformability of a realist, (or capitalist) world, etc. Metatheory is as compatible with the study of conflict as it is with that of cooperation.

It might be that the metatheoretical discourse within the international relations

discipline would itself benefit from metatheoretical analysis associated with less sanguine approaches to world politics. Conversely, scholarship pertaining to international conflict, or at least individual scholars studying international conflict, should not be deterred by the apparent monopolization of social-theoretic concerns by scholars inclined toward assessments envisioning, if we may play on Rosecrance, the rise of the integrated world.

Certainly, this exhortation may strike some readers as self-evidently naive. But our assessment is that the texture of the contemporary literature on international politics does not adequately reflect a balance between metatheory and substantive-theoretic focus. We hope that we have contributed to the ongoing construction of such a balance by demonstrating the centrality of both metatheory and substantive theory. Just as agency and structure are inextricably and ineluctably entwined as jointly necessary components of explanation and understanding, so are metatheory and substantive theory. Systematic, theoretically based empirical research must be grounded in metatheoretical considerations of ontology and epistemology. Metatheory, to reach its full value, must at some point touch the world. Hopefully, we have provided some guidance for scholars in doing both.

NOTES

1

INTRODUCTION: AGENCY, STRUCTURE, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPLANATION

- 1 See Starr (1991c) for a more detailed review of the Sprouts, and a discussion of how the use of possibilism has become a central characteristic of a “new geopolitics” in both geography and political science.
- 2 Those familiar with the film should recall the strategy of the Jack Nicholson character in the classic restaurant scene found in *Five Easy Pieces*.
- 3 Furthermore, Most and Starr introduce the notion of thresholds and utilize this notion to identify the dynamic causal relationship between agency and structure. They argue that, “both opportunity and willingness must exist at *some threshold level* before war can occur. Not only may those thresholds vary from state to state, or across historical periods, the threshold for each may vary with the magnitude of the other” (1989:41; emphasis in the original). The level of willingness—the location of a preference in an agent’s preference set—is thus important in terms of taking advantage of the opportunities available; the level of opportunity—the ease and cost and number of certain possibilities—is important for facilitating an agent acting on her wishes. These relationships are explicated at length in Cioffi-Revilla and Starr (1995).
- 4 The “spatio-temporal” dimension has been important in the study of the diffusion of international phenomena (an agent’s behavior being affected by the prior behavior of other agents) and the study of “reinforcement” (an agent’s earlier behavior affecting the probability of its own future behavior). Most behavior involves linkages between diffusion and reinforcement. Note that both rely on the order in which behavior occurs across both time and space. These ideas have informed: the study of war (i.e., Starr 1978; Most and Starr 1983, 1984, 1989, 1990; Siverson and Starr 1991); the study of the linkage between internal and external conflict (i.e., Most and Starr 1983, 1989; Starr

- 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1994; Starr and McGinnis 1992; Starr, Simon, and McGinnis 1994; Simon and Starr 1996; Friedman and Starr 1996).
- 5 The history of modern social science has witnessed various definitions of “positivism,” therefore, we must be explicit regarding our own use of “positivism” in this book. Given the importance and divisiveness of debates employing this term, we want to be clear that we take “positivism” to refer to the explanation of social phenomena which is based on: (1) nomothetic statements, or more accurately, the combination of nomothetic and singular statements; and (2) the reliance within such explanation on causation. We start with this rather precise, and thus restrictive, definition of positivism because it encourages the systematic and meaningful analysis of the commensurability between the subjectivist thesis of interpretive sociology and positivism. In addition, it is also faithful to a broader view of positivism to which we subscribe: “In its most general current sense, to be positivist means no more than to be self-consciously scientific” (Miller 1987:395). In turn, this simply means that our theories or models, in addition to explicit logic, have an empirical component—that in some way they “touch” the world; that their implications are potentially observable.
 - 6 As such, the empirical theoretic objectives of the present analysis dovetail nicely with the proponents of the opportunity and willingness framework’s emphasis on the development of an integrative and progressive international politics research program. Moreover, the need to develop empirical conceptualizations of the universal terms of agency and structure in order to achieve an integrative and progressive empirical theory of international relations converges with Starr’s expressed desire to move “opportunity” and “willingness” from pre-theoretic to theoretic concepts.
 - 7 Thus, our theoretical approach also permits us to capture the nonrecursive dynamic interplay which is at the heart of two-level games (e.g., see Putnam 1988; Tsebelis 1990; Starr 1994).

2

THE ONTOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

- 1 For a mathematical demonstration of underidentified and overidentified models, see Maddala (1992:358–363). For a discussion of the mathematical procedures necessary to determine whether a nonrecursive causal model is identifiable, see Asher (1984:56–72), and Maddala (1992:358–376).
- 2 Nagel (1961:579) similarly writes: “To suppose that no explanation is ultimately satisfactory unless all the elements out of which it is constructed are also explained, is to subscribe to the confusion underlying romantic philosophies of irrationalism, which despair of the capacity of discursive human intelligence to discover the ‘real’ nature of things because scientific inquiry cannot answer the question why something exists rather than nothing at all.”

Hempel (1965:423) also recognizes the need to bracket: "In an account with explanatory closure, nothing would be left unexplained. But completeness in this sense obviously calls for an infinite regress in explanation and is therefore unachievable; to seek such completeness is to misunderstand the nature of explanation."

- 3 This position is in contrast to the "recklessness" of the naive methodological falsificationist who recognizes the fallibility, i.e., undisprovable as well as unprovable nature, of theory, but nonetheless persists in confronting any single particular theory with empirical analysis with the objective of conclusive falsification.
- 4 Note that the central *variables* in the explanation of international political phenomena refer not to agency and structure *per se* but to the defining properties of these general, pretheoretic terms. While this does not undermine the logic of our arguments concerning the need to bracket provided above, it does further illuminate the ambiguity of the claim that theories of international politics must *endogenize* both agency and structure.
- 5 Sartori explicitly recognizes the highly gradated if not indefinite boundary between abstract and empirical language. This is evidenced, for example, by his specification of three increasingly empirical layers of extension: "First, the *border problem* (to be settled by denotative definitions); second, the *membership problem* (precising definitions); third, the *measurability problem* (operational definitions which generally hinge in turn on the search for valid indicators)" (Sartori 1984:34).
- 6 Elsewhere, Giddens elaborates upon this notion of consciousness by explicitly delineating between three levels of consciousness based on the extent to which actors are aware of, and are able to articulate knowledge. These three levels are summarized by Bryant and Jary (1991:8). One level, termed the "reflexive monitoring of action" and "discursive consciousness", refers to "what actors are able to say about the conditions of their own action." A second level, termed "rationalizations of action" and "practical consciousness," refers to "what actors know tacitly about the conditions of their own action but cannot articulate." The third level, termed "motivation for action" and "unconscious motives/cognition," refers to "repressed semiotic impulses, affecting motivation, but usually barred from consciousness." Giddens writes that "actors not only monitor continuously the flow of their activities and expect others to do the same for their own; they also routinely monitor aspects, social and physical, of the contexts in which they move" (Giddens 1984:5). This should be distinguished from the notion of false consciousness, which claims that agents do have some "true" interest which is hidden from them by the dominant class(es).
- 7 It should also be pointed out that in interdependent systems, where all actors are in some way sensitive and/or vulnerable to one another, all actors have some impact—and thus, influence—on all others. See, for example, the analysis of Ward and House (1988).

8 Berger and Luckmann (1966:89) define reification as follows:

Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in nonhuman or possibly suprahuman terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something else than human products—such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world. It is experienced by man as a strange facticity, an *opus alienum* over which he has no control rather than as the *opus proprium* of his own productive activity.

Durkheim (1982:59) stresses the following in defining a social fact: “A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint;...which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations.”

9 Alfred Schutz (1967:35–36), similarly differentiates between the subjective foundations of social facticity:

On the one hand, I can look upon the world presenting itself to me as one that is completed, constituted, and to be taken for granted. When I do this, I leave out of my awareness the intentional operations of my consciousness within which their meanings have already

been constituted. At such times I have before me a world of real and ideal objects, and I can assert that this world is meaningful not only for me but for you, for us, and for everyone. This is precisely because I am attending not to those acts of consciousness which once gave them meaning but because I already presuppose, as given without question, a series of highly complex meaning-contents.... *On the other hand*, I can turn my glance toward the intentional operations of my consciousness which originally conferred the meanings. Then I no longer have before me a complete and constituted world but one which only now is being constituted and which is ever being constituted anew in the stream of my enduring Ego.... As such, it is meaningful for me in virtue of those meaning-endowing intentional actors of which I become aware by a reflexive glance.

This tension between agency and roles within the context of the foreign

policy decision making process is raised by Russett and Starr, who define role as (1996:237):

those aspects of an actor deriving from the person's policymaking responsibilities and *expected* to characterize *any* person filling the same position. We can think of a role as the interaction between the individual and the political system, the expectations of that system working on the individual. Although the role may constrain what an individual might do, it also has to be perceived and interpreted by the individual in light of that individual's personality and idiosyncracies.

- 10 Walter Carlsnaes (1992) similarly criticizes theories that establish as the dependent variables only attributes of agents *or* those of structures. Carlsnaes (1992:246) citing Cerny (1990), notes: "since neither structures nor actors remain constant over time, a social theory worth its salt must be able to account not only for particular changes but also for social change itself as an inherently dynamic phenomenon, in respect of which neither factor 'determines' the other but are both, in the final analysis, independent variables in an inextricably intertwined temporal process..."

The argument to endogenize attributes of both agency and structure into theories of social phenomena is also made by critical theorists. For example, Robert Cox (1986:243–244), a Gramscian scholar of international relations, argues that a historicist approach to social science such as his "does not envisage any general or universally valid laws which can be explained by the development of appropriate generally applicable theories. For historicism, both human nature and the structures of human interaction change, if only very slowly.... One cannot therefore speak of 'laws' in any generally valid sense transcending historical eras, nor of structures as outside of or prior to history.... [The] research program is to explain transformations from one structure to another."

- 11 Gellner (1968:267) makes a similar argument: "As a matter of causal fact, our dispositions are not independent of the social context in which they occur; but they are not even independent logically, for they cannot be described without reference to their social context."
- 12 While we will return to this in [Chapter 4](#), we also need to understand that theories of international politics would benefit from explicit delimitation of the bounds within which these theories are applicable. That is, the study of different issue areas may entail distinct theories (e.g., see K.Holsti 1991; or Keohane and Nye 1977). The study of particular types of social actions may also benefit from differentiating among theories on the basis of agency interests. In short, what are needed are the nice laws called for by Most and Starr. And such incorporation, moreover, is consistent with solid foundations in the implications of the ontological agent-structure problem.
- 13 This is indeed quite clearly evident in Wendt's (1987:347) claim that "the

world system in effect seems to call forth its own reproduction by states; this suggests that *at least in their concrete research*, world-system theorists treat the world-system as at some level operating independently of state action, that *in practice* they reify the world-system.”

3

A CRITIQUE OF NEOREALISM AND ITS CRITICS

- 1 Indeed, structural realism’s failure to explain a shift from self-help has been widely criticized (e.g., Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1986; Ruggie 1986; Cox 1986; Ashley 1986; Wendt 1987; 1992a; Dessler 1989).
- 2 Waltz draws extensively from microeconomics. In one of his clearest statements (1979:90–91) he argues:

International-political systems, like economic markets, are individualist in origin, spontaneously generated, and unintended. The market arises out of the activities of separate units...whose aims and efforts are directed not toward creating an order but rather toward fulfilling their own internally defined interests by whatever means they can muster. The individual unit acts for itself. From the coaction of like units emerges a structure that affects and constrains all of them. Once formed, a market becomes a force in itself, a force that the constitutive units acting singly or in small numbers cannot control.... International-political systems, like economic markets, are formed by the coaction of self-regarding units...

- 3 Quite similarly, Gilpin (1986:305) characterizes the central actors in the realist world as Dahrendorfian conflict groups, which is to say, “that in a world of scarce resources and conflict over the distribution of those resources, human beings confront one another ultimately as members of groups, and not as isolated individuals” (see also Dahrendorf 1959).
- 4 Of course, some scholars, notably Bull (1977), contend that the domestic analogy of individuals in an anarchic state of nature does not adequately apply to the international state system. The argument holds that while individuals must be extremely concerned about their survival in an anarchic system, states do not need to be. This is because states are much more resilient and invulnerable social entities than are individuals; they possess, as Herz (1957) has argued, the “hard shell” which for substantial periods of time has provided human groups with the most potent organization for security. Thus, even in an anarchic system the state need not be (and has not been) concerned exclusively with survival and security.
- 5 Waltz (1986c:323), similarly, writes that Durkheim “distinguishes between societies of mechanical and organic solidarity, corresponding respectively to

the anarchic order of international politics and the hierarchic order of domestic politics.”

- 6 We also take issue with Ruggie’s distinction among the first and second dimensions of structure. Ruggie (1986:142) contends as follows: “If anarchy tells us *that* the political system is a segmental realm, differentiation tells us *on what basis* the segmentation is determined.” The primary variable concerning functional specification emphasized by Ruggie is the “heteronomous-sovereign” dichotomy. Ruggie (1986:143) writes that the medieval system of rules “was quintessentially a system of segmental territorial rule; it was an anarchy. But it was a form of segmental territorial rule that had none of the connotations of possessiveness and exclusiveness conveyed by the modern concept of sovereignty. It represented a heteronomous organization of territorial rights and claims—of political space.”

We contend that the heteronomy-sovereignty dichotomy does not capture the “basis” upon which the segmentation is determined. This term rather is properly reserved for the nature of the functions themselves. Indeed, Ruggie himself recognizes that the medieval system was segmentally organized. Recall that Ruggie proposes that in a segmentally organized system, those organizations which represent the “existing repositories of the ultimate arbiter of force...*ipso facto* are its major units.” Thus, by Ruggie’s own account, arbitration through force and the control over coercive capabilities characterized the medieval system. The transformation that Ruggie emphasizes then does not involve change in functional specification. Waltz concurs on this point, holding that what dynamic density transformed for Durkheim is the differences of the functions of the parts. “Durkheim’s transformation of society is not rooted in differentiation defined as a principle of separation; it is rooted in the differences of the parts” (Waltz 1986c:325). Finally, the transformation emphasized by Ruggie encompasses not only a change in the central conflict groups of the international system but also a change in the third layer of Waltz’s structure. In other words, sovereignty, defined as a territorially ordered privatization of political control, can usefully be viewed as specifying (if not clarifying) the ownership over property pertaining to the distribution of capabilities according to which international actors are organized.

- 7 Note how Durkheim demonstrates that individualism is a characteristic of societies typified not by mechanical, i.e., segmental, but rather by organic, i.e., hierarchical, solidarity. Durkheim (1933:130–131) writes:

Solidarity which comes from likeness is at its maximum when the collective conscience completely envelops our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it. But, at that moment, our individuality is nil. It can be born only if the community takes smaller toll of us... The social molecules which can be coherent in this way can act together

only in the measure that they have no actions of their own, as the molecules of inorganic bodies. That is why we propose to call this type of solidarity mechanical... The individual conscience, considered in this light, is a simple dependent upon the collective type and follows all of its movements, as the possessed object follows those of its owner. In societies where this type of solidarity is highly developed, the individual does not appear...

- 8 It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to analyze explanations of the structuration of property rights. But for present purposes we must point out that Durkheim did not emphasize this impact of dynamic density. Thus, Ruggie (1986:148–150) is incorrect in suggesting that one of the causes of Waltz's omission of dynamic density is his omission of the "privatization" of political space.
- 9 Structural realism and Durkheimian theory diverge in other respects not directly relevant to the issue of social transformation. Amongst these differences are the following: (1) Whereas for realists authority, or legitimate power, is based on coercive capabilities, i.e., "might makes right," for Durkheim, authority rests squarely on a legitimacy deriving from moral solidarity. In other words, legitimacy based on coercive capabilities is an inherently non-Durkheimian position, as is clear in the work on power deflation by Talcott Parsons (e.g., 1964) and Chalmers Johnson (1966). (2) Whereas overt conflict for realists is a characteristic of a stable system (as Clausewitz held, "diplomacy by other means"), for Durkheim such conflict is largely the result of anomic strains posed by social change. Lukes (1982:23) eloquently summarizes the wide gulf between structural realism and Durkheim: "the truly extraordinary thing about Durkheimian sociology is that it can find no room for [conflict and power]... In so far as conflict is discussed, it is either seen...as socially functional...or as pathological. As for power,...it is the massive blind spot of Durkheimian sociology...elites, classes, pressure groups, political leaders, power struggles do not appear."
- 10 On realist rules, see also Ruggie (1986) and Vasquez (1979).
- 11 We have not spent time in detailed discussions of sovereignty, nor in presenting any of a number of detailed discussions of the meaning and nature of sovereignty. Suffice it to note that we see it as the agreement among human agents that rulers were to have supreme internal authority along with external autonomy from higher authority that generated the anarchic system. Because there was no legitimate authority over states, they were formally and legally equal in their status as state actors.
- 12 In addition, Starr and colleagues, in their studies of diffusion, have emphasized the enabling nature of borders in international conflict (e.g., Starr and Most 1976).

Finally, it is useful to add that Callinicos, while a Marxist scholar, also

recognizes the enabling aspect of an agent's position in the structure of the system. In terms quite similar to those of Most and Starr, Callinicos argues that resources may enable as well as constrain agents, emphasizing "structural capacities," a term that refers to the

powers an agent has in virtue of his or her position within relations of production. Viewing structures from this perspective involves breaking with the idea of them as *limits* on individual or collective action, providing the framework within which human agency can then have free play. In so far as their position in structures delimits the possibilities open to agents, *they are also presented with the opportunity to pursue goals* in particular directions.

(1988:235; emphasis added)

- 13 Haugaard (1992) similarly criticized Giddens for holding that structure is re/created any time an actor follows a rule. Instead, Haugaard (1992:236) recognizes that "the re/creation of rules is not the same as the reproduction of structure. Rules are only converted into structures when they are verified by others."

In addition, it deserves mention that the question about when and how behavior becomes rules and rules become structures has been central to questions about the sources of international law—custom or treaty—and their interrelationship. The following questions have been of central concern in this regard: how many states need to subscribe to some set of behavioral expectations and for how long? Does the absence of leading system members dilute or nullify the behavioral patterns of the remainder? This latter-most question, for example, has been a central question in regard to the Law of the Sea treaty. In addition, similar questions arise when new state actors enter the international system; for example the position of non-Western states toward the European-centric system of law. Similar debates may be found concerning the nature of the emergence of international regimes (contrasting spontaneous regimes to negotiated ones), and in the differing theories of integration—Deutschian social communication models and Haasian neo-functional ones (see Starr 1995).

- 14 Note how Wendt's comments reflect both the discussions of learning and reciprocity in the growth of international law through custom, as well as the basic processes of integration presented by both Deutsch and Haas.
- 15 Wendt (1992a) must be credited for acknowledging a role for power in social construction; (see also Giddens 1984:134, 258). Rosecrance (1986:18) emphasizes the same phenomenon:

One of the difficulties facing the trading system throughout history is its inability to gain universal adherence so long as important and pow-

erful states are still primarily devoted to the territorial system. Unchecked gains by territorial nations would lead even the most conspicuous protagonists of trade to reconsider their position, and, ultimately, to renew their territorial defenses. Thus the territorial system could always nibble away at the fringes of the trading system and sometimes overturn it entirely as it did during World War I.

- 16 The classic thesis extolling the impact of power on social meaning is probably Marx's *The German Ideology* (1978).

4

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL AGENT-STRUCTURE PROBLEM

- 1 Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986:767–768) also suggest that a positivist epistemology is inadequate because it somehow necessarily points to violations of the norms constituting a regime as evidence of the regime's epiphenomenalism. "No single counterfactual occurrence refutes a norm. Not even many such occurrences necessarily do...whether or not violations also invalidate or refute a law (norm) will depend upon a host of other factors, not the least of which is how the community assesses the violation and responds to it." Clearly implicit in this claim is that a positivist epistemology is necessarily associated with a naive methodological falsificationist approach to theory validation. However, as the work of Lakatos clearly demonstrates, this is not the case, and positivist epistemology *is* compatible with, and indeed best served by, a sophisticated methodological falsificationist approach to theoretical evaluation.
- 2 We propose that a monolithic distinction between "why" and "how" questions is unproductive. First, there are many different forms of "why" questions (Nagel 1961:16–20), some of which do not call for the type of explanation delineated above (Hempel 1965:334). Second, many "why" questions can be asked with the term "how." For example, "questions of the form 'why is it not the case that p ?' might well be rephrased as 'how-possibly' questions: 'How could it possibly be the case that not- p ?' " (Hempel 1965:429). Third, in some instances the "why" question "calls for an account of *how* a certain system has developed into its current form from some earlier stage of the system... An admissible explanation for the historical fact in question will therefore have to mention sequential changes over a period of time, and not merely a set of occurrences at some antecedent initial time" (Nagel 1961:20; emphasis added). More generally, "how" as well as "why" can mean "for what reason." Finally, as will be discussed in this chapter, the distinction between the "possible" and "actual" in the study of social phenomena which Wendt associates respectively with "how" and "why" is itself

- highly problematic. (For another critique of the “why”—“how” dichotomy, see Hollis and Smith 1991:406.)
- 3 The categorical distinction between singular sentences about particular facts and general statements is an analytic, ideal-typical one, which does not undermine the logic of nomothetic explanation. Certainly, proponents of nomothetic explanation are explicitly aware of the ideal-typical quality of this distinction. See, for example, Nagel (1961); Hempel (1952, 1965), and Lakatos (1970).
 - 4 It is useful to distinguish, furthermore, between two forms of statistical explanation. *Deductive-statistical explanation* refers to “the deductive subsumption of a narrower statistical uniformity under more comprehensive ones” (Hempel 1965:380). *Inductive-statistical explanation* involves “the subsumption, in a peculiar nondeductive sense, of a particular occurrence under statistical laws” (Hempel 1965:380). “Explanations of particular facts or events by means of statistical-probabilistic laws thus present themselves as arguments that are *inductive* or *probabilistic* in the sense that the explanans confers upon the explanandum a more or less high degree of inductive support or of logical (inductive) probability; they will therefore be called *inductive-statistical explanations*, or *I-S explanations*” (Hempel 1965:385–386).
 - 5 As Helle (1985) points out, Weber’s own thinking on interpretive sociology was heavily influenced by the work of Georg Simmel.
 - 6 The following review of interpretive sociology will also refer to Berger and Luckmann, Geertz, and Charles Taylor. Among other exemplary interpretive works not considered are: Husserl (1960), Winch (1958), Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), and Garfinkel (1967). For a review of these and other microsociological exemplars, see Helle and Eisenstadt (1985). For a different list of exemplary interpretive works, see Moon (1975:216–217).
 - 7 “In short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a ‘native’ makes first order ones: it’s *his* culture)” (Geertz 1973:15).
 - 8 Weber (1949:80) characterizes the discovery of nomothetic causal relationships as “not the *end* but rather the *means* of knowledge.” It is perhaps in this statement—in the distinction between pursuit of nomothetic explanation for its own sake or for the sake of maximizing knowledge concerning one or more particular cases—that there is a central distinction. Suffice it to say, however, that this distinction refers less to the logic of explanation than to the intellectual objectives of individual scholars.
 - 9 Rational choice theorists themselves quite explicitly and readily acknowledge the empirical invalidity of their cognitive models, assuming only that agents act *as if* they were implementing the theorists’ rational-choice calculations (Friedman 1968; Bueno de Mesquita 1981 or 1989; see also Hempel 1965:483).
 - 10 An early and strong statement advancing the importance of the empirical

validity of theoretical premises is found in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Book 1, Ch. 2.

- 11 Anatol Rapoport (1960:1) opens his classic treatise on social conflict and international politics with a similar distinction in his discussion of the "semantic reaction" of Tom Sawyer based on identifications, convictions, and stereotypes; (see also Nagel 1961:475–476).
- 12 Taylor (1979:54–55) elaborates:

The comparison between societies requires on this [mainstream] view that we elaborate a universal vocabulary of behavior which will allow us to present the different forms and practices of different societies in the same conceptual web... The danger that such universality might not hold is not even suspected by mainstream political scientists since they are unaware that there is such a level of description as that which defines intersubjective meanings and are convinced that functions and the various structures which perform them can be identified in terms of brute data behavior.

But the result of ignoring the difference in intersubjective meanings can be disastrous to a science of comparative politics, namely, that we interpret all other societies in the categories of our own.

- 13 As Nagel (1961:462) observes:

the fact that social processes vary with their institutional settings, and that the specific uniformities found to hold in one culture are not pervasive in all societies, does not preclude the possibility that these specific uniformities are specializations of relational structures invariant for all cultures. For the recognized differences in the ways different societies are organized and in the modes of behavior occurring in them may be the consequences, not of incommensurably dissimilar patterns of social relations in those societies, but simply of differences in the specific values of some set of variables that constitute the elementary components in a structure of connections common to all the societies.

- 14 For some scholars, particularly in distinguishing transnational views of international politics from realist ones, context can be comprised of different issue areas (e.g., Keohane and Nye 1977). Geopolitics is concerned with context as location. For historians, for scholars who partition international politics into historical "systems" (e.g., Rosecrance 1963), context is seen as time period. As noted earlier, history plays an important part in Most and Starr's concept of the environment of opportunities. Time period or historical context can also be seen as crucial for the study of such phenomena as enduring rivalries; see, for example Goertz (1994: ch. 10).

SOME THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A METHODOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALIST APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

- 1 Reliance upon elites as the units of analysis should not be confused with adoption of the basic elite-theoretic thesis that society is dominated by a self-conscious, coherent, and conspiratorial ruling class, as in the classic elite theory works of Pareto (1935), Mosca (1939), Michels (1958), and Mills (1956). For a review of this and other elite theory literature, see Parry (1969).
- 2 It should be added that scholars reliant upon the state as unitary actor assumption should not be naively accused of not recognizing that individuals are the ultimate agents in international politics. Gilpin (1986:318), for example, writes:

...we “realists” know that the state does not exist; in fact, we knew that before Graham Allison told us so. But, then...neither do Allison’s bureaucracies, interest groups, nor even transnational actors exist for that matter.... Only individuals really exist, although I understand that certain schools of psychology challenge even this.

- 3 One must also question Wendt’s characterization of his critique of realism as “immanent,” given its emphasis on processes of social construction, identity formation, etc., and perhaps more importantly its rejection of the inevitable centrality of self-help and power politics in international relations.
- 4 Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1990:155) summarize Rosecrance’s conception of elite determinants:

First, was the elite satisfied with its position domestically or did it feel threatened by events in the international system? Second, the control or security of the elite within the society that it commanded was a determinant in each of the international systems: Did the elites perceive a weakening in their internal position? Third, emphasis is placed upon the availability of disposable resources to the elite and its ability to mobilize them.

At issue here, ultimately, is the survival of elites—the rise and fall, or circulation of elites. Rosecrance’s framework is thus specifically directed at how elites are related to system structure and system change.

- 5 The analysis of the governing elites of a powerful country may perhaps forego the distinction between the international and regional layers of structure, while the analysis of the governing elites of smaller states should maintain this distinction.
- 6 Note that Tilly’s (1986) view of collective violence, with emphases both on

- resource mobilization and the purposive calculus of participants, has components analogous to those found in the expected utility approach of Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues. For example, in a piece looking at the relationship between modernization and revolution, Tilly (1986:47) asks a set of questions concerning the structure of political relationships which closely mirrors those used by Bueno de Mesquita, Newman and Rabushka (1985): What groups contend for power? What claims do they make on the government? What capacity do they have to mobilize societal resources?
- 7 The layered nature of agency structure is also found in Giddens's idea of "zones" (1984:85; see also 164): "in contemporary societies individuals are positioned within a widening range of zones, in home, workplace, neighbourhood, city, nation-state and a worldwide system."
 - 8 For example, Walt (1987) and Inis Claude, Jr. (1962) make this point by arguing that threats are not constituted merely by particular distributions of power, but also by the aggressive intentions of strong actors toward particular actors in the system. Also see Wendt's (1995:73, 78) discussion of variability in intersubjective meaning deriving from the hostility and cooperative intentions of agents.
 - 9 For further discussion of elite identification, see Parry (1969:105–118), Laumann and Pappi (1976:95–98), Laumann and Knoke (1987:95–107).
 - 10 Morrow (1986, 1988) also takes "issues" to correspond to Mansbach and Vasquez's "stakes." Laumann and Knoke (1987) utilize the notion of "policy domains." Although the problem of conceptualizing "issue" is crucial to the type of analysis described below, this task is peripheral for present purposes. Notwithstanding the reality that issue areas are ultimately dynamic entities which are constructed, and reconstructed, by the actors under investigation, the conceptualization of issues is significantly dependent upon the particular theoretical and empirical interests of the researcher. The general logic underlying social choice systems to be delineated below is sufficiently general to encompass various conceptualizations of issue.
 - 11 More generally, in its systematic attention to the processes linking individual choice to group level outcomes, Maoz's model embodies the logic of the causal model of agency and structure presented in [Chapter 2](#).
 - 12 One might add other dimensions to and/or modify the three dimensions provided by Maoz. For example, personal attributes of individuals, such as charisma, or reputation for influence, may be important sources of influence (Laumann and Pappi 1976).
 - 13 Multiple-choice agenda settings require voting power based on variable quotas since the group choice is based on relative rather than absolute majorities. Policy preference proximity serves as a measure of group cohesiveness and is intended to correct for the assumption of the equiprobability of all coalitions. Both of these revisions serve as correctives on earlier measures of voting power, such as that by Shapley and Shubik (see Maoz 1990:278–293).
 - 14 A thorough review of the concepts of risk propensity and resolve are beyond

the scope of the present analysis. Note, however, that this hypothesis concerning risk propensity and the utility of challenging an opponent is similar to Maoz's (1983) hypothesis concerning resolve and the proclivity toward conflict escalation. Morgan (1994:45–46) also deals with risk propensity as an important dimension of “resolve.”

Morrow (1987:431) adds:

For the risk-acceptant actor, the utility of the lottery is greater than the utility of the median, and so an actor with this risk-acceptant utility function would choose the lottery over the median. In a parallel fashion, the utility of the median is higher than the utility of the gamble for the risk-averse utility function, leading to a decision to take the median for certain over the lottery.

- 15 Favorable actor location within communication networks may also be viewed as a resource which contributes to an actor's influence. Laumann and Knoke (1987) also point out that information transmission may serve to reduce situational uncertainty. Thus, networks analysis is useful for conceptions of individual (and group) resources and decisional inputs.
- 16 Laumann and Knoke (1987) argue that event features, primarily controversy, scope of impact, public visibility, and institutional locus, influence the nature of social action. Note that noncontroversial issues or events may activate lower-level elites. This is similar to Maoz's (1990:353–354) observation that high ranking elites tend to delegate authority to lower-ranking elites in situations characterized by low levels of stress and ambiguity. Thus, the importance of an issue influences who plays, which in turn influences the outcome.

6

TOWARD A THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS VALUES

- 1 Realist thinkers, in fact, generally agree with the presence of a hierarchy of political needs. But they assume that states simply do not adequately satisfy the basic need of security and thus evaluate options solely in terms of this basic need: “Only if survival is assured can states safely seek such other goals as tranquility, profit, and power” (Waltz 1979:126).
- 2 Marxian theory of course holds that agents are most acutely aware of their class interests in times of intensified economic crisis and class conflict. Yet for Marxian thinkers, alternative interests are generally epiphenomenal.
- 3 Allison understands that individuals in any particular role play a variety of games and have a cluster of obligations. He recognizes that individual personality plays a role, and acknowledges that in addition to organizationally defined interests, players also pursue other types of interests, including per-

sonal interests (Allison 1971:164–167). We must concur with Art (1973), however, that “if a *bureaucratic* politics approach is to claim any distinctness, much less validity, it must at the least assert” for one, that policy stance is a function of organizational position.

- 4 The terms “reflectivist” and “rationalist” are due to Keohane (1994).
- 5 Keohane (1994) thus advises that the rationalist approach would benefit from adoption of an historical, perhaps evolutionary approach. Indeed, Keohane largely emphasizes attention to idiosyncracies of particular leaders and random shocks, for example, “path-dependence” theories. But this is an ad hoc approach to agency interests which provides little theoretical structure to the search through history for important developments or bases of context.
- 6 Note the resemblance with Elster’s (1989) discussion of norms as both goals and means.
- 7 Note that Maslow (1954:72; see also 66, 101, and 104) emphasizes the subconscious nature of ultimate desires. This emphasis upon the unconscious nature of the ultimate goals directly precludes any ability of agents to explicitly evaluate behavioral options in light of these values. We do not believe that this is a significant problem, however. Though we obviously are not psychologists, it appears that this assumption is empirically tenuous especially in the context of organizational interest, and especially when agents are motivated by viability needs. That is, viability needs tend to be so obvious to agents that they are clearly aware that they are behaving so as to fulfill these needs. And, as Inglehart’s research demonstrates, people are able to articulate basic cultural orientations. Finally, Maslow (1954:77) at points in fact distances himself from this view: “we yearn consciously for that which might conceivably be actually attained. That is to say that we are much more realistic about wishing than the psychoanalysts might allow, absorbed as they are with unconscious wishes.”
- 8 Weede (1996) returns repeatedly to these two primary processes of market distortion: rent-seeking as “the quest for special privileges and safety from competition,” and collective goods which promote free-riding along with the special societal interest groups that arise to deal with their effects.
- 9 Morrow (1987:425) reports that only one of ten introductory international relations textbooks that he surveyed provides a definition of security. “The authors of the other texts must feel the concept is lucid upon introduction.”
- 10 Inglehart (1990:68), whose work is discussed below, concurs: “In its simplest form, the idea of a needs hierarchy would probably command almost universal assent... The rank ordering of human needs becomes less clear as we move beyond those needs directly related to survival.”
- 11 Though belongingness and love, the need to know and understand, and aesthetic needs seem to be wholly irrelevant on the collective level, the higher needs may be deemed as corresponding if only metaphorically to the needs of self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow (1954:90) disaggregates esteem needs into two sets: “These are, first, the desire for strength, for

achievement, for adequacy, for mastery and competence, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom. Second, we have... the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), status, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, or appreciation.” The need for self-actualization may be defined as the need “to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (1954:92). Though general and unparsimonious, such needs as prestige, status, mastery, and independence and freedom have meaning in a collective political context.

- 12 For example, for some groups in some cultures, efficiency might be seen as a higher value. Efficiency involves the reduction of transaction costs. Thus, some groups might value some regimes more than others, as regimes—and international organization more generally—are designed to reduce transaction costs.
- 13 For example, in terms of economic development, it is plausible to argue that the movement from the domestic production of primary to secondary goods is valued more highly than the postmaterialist needs identified by Inglehart.
- 14 As concerns the meaning of autonomy, furthermore, Morrow blurs the explicitly stated definition of autonomy quoted above with at least two other definitions. Morrow also defines autonomy as the proximity of publicly expressed and pursued policy positions to the actor’s ideal point, and as the state’s “ability to pursue the internal and international policies that it wants” (Morrow 1987:426).

7

CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION OF VALUES UNDERLYING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

- 1 A major commentary on the changing basis of power resources, including knowledge and expertise, is Rosenau (1990). See also the work of Peter Haas (e.g., 1992) on “epistemic communities.”
- 2 Again, see Starr (1997 forthcoming), or Russett (1981–1982). Such a scenario is supported by Mathews (1992:549–550), who holds that the general impact of environmental decline on national security “is felt in the downward pull on economic performance and, therefore, on political stability.... If such resource and population trends are not addressed...the resulting economic decline leads to frustration, resentment, domestic unrest or even civil war. Human suffering and turmoil make countries ripe for authoritarian government or external subversion.”
- 3 Though this transformation of values—and thus issues—may not undermine the state system itself, it may alter the distribution of capabilities across states. In a world marked by natural resource scarcity, one might expect, *ceteris paribus*, the relative influence of countries possessing larger amounts of these resources to increase.

- 4 Schelling, in his typical eloquence, describes the terror brought by nuclear weapons as follows:

Now we are in an era in which the power to hurt—to inflict pain and shock and privation on a country itself, not just on its military forces—is commensurate with the power to take and to hold, perhaps more than commensurate, perhaps decisive, and it is even more necessary to think of warfare as a process of violent bargaining.... Military strategy can no longer be thought of, as it could for some countries in some eras, as the science of military victory. It is now equally, if not more, the art of coercion, of intimidation and deterrence. The instruments of war are more punitive than acquisitive. Military strategy... has become the diplomacy of violence.

(1966:33–34)

- 5 Of course, the most prominent historical contradiction of this hypothesis was World War I. Characterized by a clear differentiation between offensive and defensive capabilities and an advantage in terms of the latter, World War I inspired a set of analyses which sought to explain why war erupted and persisted; e.g., see Sagan (1986), Snyder (1984), Van Evera (1984), and Levy (1984).
- 6 Note that this cohort socialization hypothesis relates to the more general elite-theoretic concern with elite circulation and replacement. Thus, the circulation of international political elites can be viewed as a general source of change in international relations.
- 7 Note that Maslow acknowledges this dynamic as well as the converse of this dynamic. Maslow (1954:100) proposes, for example, that inadequate security over an extensive period of time may lead to both habituation (i.e., the ability to withstand, or tolerate, significant levels of insecurity), and to frustration tolerance (i.e., people secure and strong early on “tend to remain secure and strong thereafter in the face of whatever threatens”). Alternatively, Maslow (1954:99) suggests that “when a need has been satisfied for a long time, this need may be under-evaluated.”
- 8 Inglehart also argues that aging and individual life-cycle trends influence variation in agency values. To retain some parsimony in exposition, aging effects need not concern us here.
- 9 Though Berger and Luckmann (1966:157) take “alternation” to mean total transformation of the subjective reality of an individual, and though they often liken it to intensive brainwashing processes such as cult and totalitarian political party indoctrination, they recognize that this concept is an ideal type which is only approximated empirically. Similarly, they (1966:129–147) differentiate between primary and secondary socialization, but it is fair to say that these ideal-typic distinctions are captured by the same general model. Accordingly, their discussion of alternation, and of socialization whether

primary or secondary, reflects a more general model of (re)socialization. Moreover, these might be more relevant to transformation of value structures than to change in their relative salience.

- 10 An applicable threshold dynamic is identified by Mark Granovetter (1978) in his model of collective violence. This suggests that the more powerful those actors who favor change, the more quickly change will occur because the lower other actor thresholds will be.

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