



**Natália Maria Félix de Souza**

## **Crisis and Critique in International Relations Theory**

### **Tese de Doutorado**

Thesis presented to the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais of the Instituto de Relações Internacionais, PUC-Rio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doutor em Relações internacionais.

Advisor: Prof. Robert Brian James Walker

Rio de Janeiro  
April 2017



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## Abstract

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The dissertation investigates the narratives of crisis and critique expressed at significant moments in the history of international relations theory in order to explain how recent debates on the “end” or “crisis” of international relations theory expose the paradoxical limits of critique in this field. The dissertation is structured by two organizing movements. The first movement, Chapters 2-4, examines the recent debates about a crisis of theorizing, placing them in their historical and conceptual context, and highlighting their axiological and political stakes. The second movement, Chapters 5-7, explores the contemporary theoretical status of claims to critique, the tendency for critical analysis to relapse into dogma, and the possibility of resisting the dogmatic potential of narratives of crisis in international relations. The overall analysis presents crisis and critique as two different possibilities of framing modern politics, predicated on diverging assumptions about (i) temporality, (ii) sovereignty, and (iii) knowledge. As a consequence, the dissertation argues that the points at which claims about crisis and international politics become most vulnerable to dogmatic tendencies occur in relation to the limits of the subject of knowledge and the sovereign politics of friends and enemies. A more effectively critical approach to politics in this context must work through a different framing in which the aesthetic subject may pursue claims to universality that rest on much stronger affirmations of difference and plurality and a much greater awareness of the limits of established and even progressive accounts of a sovereign subject of knowledge. Thus international relations theory must consider what it means to go beyond itself.

## Keywords

Crisis; Critique; International Relations Theory; Modern Politics; Politics of Crisis

## Resumo

Souza, Natália Maria Félix; Walker, Robert Brian James. **Crise e Crítica nas Teorias de Relações Internacionais** Rio de Janeiro, 2017. 231 p. Tese de Doutorado – Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

A tese investiga as narrativas de crise e crítica na trajetória das teorias de relações internacionais, a fim de compreender como o atual debate acerca do “fim” ou “crise” da disciplina expõe os limites paradoxos da crítica neste campo. Para tanto, a tese está dividida em dois movimentos estruturantes. No primeiro movimento (Capítulos 2 a 4), questiona-se as atuais narrativas da crise teórica em sua trajetória histórica e conceitual, a fim de debater suas implicações políticas e axiológicas. No segundo movimento (Capítulos 5 a 7), explora-se o status teórico das narrativas críticas contemporâneas, a tendência para a análise crítica incorrer em dogmatismo, e a possibilidade de resistir o potencial dogmático das narrativas de crise nas relações internacionais. De maneira geral, a análise apresenta “crise” e “crítica” como diferentes possibilidades de articular a política moderna, apoiadas em pressupostos distintos sobre (i) temporalidade, (ii) soberania, e (iii) conhecimento. Consequentemente, a tese argumenta que os pontos mais vulneráveis das narrativas de crise na política internacional se dão em relação aos limites do sujeito do conhecimento e da política soberana de amigos e inimigos. Nesse contexto, uma abordagem mais efetivamente crítica da política deve oferecer um enquadramento distinto do problema, no qual o sujeito estético abra a possibilidade de buscar formas de universalidade que se baseiem em uma afirmação mais profunda da diferença e da pluralidade, bem como em um maior entendimento dos limites das narrativas – mesmo as mais progressistas – sobre o sujeito soberano do conhecimento. Esse argumento aponta para a necessidade de as teorias de relações internacionais irem além de si mesmas.

## Palavras-chave

Crise; Crítica; Teorias De Relações Internacionais; Política Moderna; Política de Crise



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## Introduction

This dissertation tells a story: it tells another story about international relations theory. Steve Smith (1995) has once argued that a discipline is nothing other than its self-images, and that international relations theory has been built around a number of such self-images: diverging stories about its own identity, of how it got where it is, of how it became what it is. As with any kind of identity, international relations theory's self-images are not a matter of describing its innate traits, discovering its essence; nor is it about presenting its destination or *telos*. Such narratives and stories that compose international relations theory's self-images are *performative*. As such, they play out against a norm that they cannot be, and yet that they must affirm in order to be able to ground any identity whatsoever. International relations theory, in this sense, is seen here as the story of such performative utterances, which work to both dislocate and reaffirm a number of norms concerning knowledge production and the appropriate object of study of an autonomous discipline.

This performative story that I offer here about the (de)construction of international relations theory is built around the concept of crisis – crisis as both the identity of international relations theory, and the impossibility of this identity ever being completed. Crisis has been present throughout the history of this discipline, either as its unique object of study – and perhaps my first memory of this rapport becomes E. H. Carr's *The Twenty-Years Crisis* – or else as the analytical condition of its existence – in which case my first memory echoes Stanley Hoffman's portrayal of international relations theory as the poor cousin of political science, a realm of inquiry still looking for its own theoretical autonomy; for, as he put it, “a flea market is not a discipline.” (Hoffman, 1959, p. 348)

As a series of performative utterances concerning the political or analytical state of crisis, an important self-image of international relations theory has been of a discipline which suffers from a chronic “identity crisis;” or else, the most compelling stories to the contrary argue instead that international relations theory finds its autonomy – and therefore, its identity – precisely as the study of the realm of crisis. This doubled self-image of international relations theory as a

theory in/of crisis is the starting point of the narrative I build in this dissertation. The reasons for engaging this problem are threefold.

The first reason is remarkably subjective. Having been integrally trained in international relations theory, I found myself constantly bumping into narratives that were very similar to each other, and yet were celebrated – by themselves and others – as great new discoveries about the state and purpose of international relations theory. So I became increasingly suspicious of the supposed “Great Debates” which were presented as dealing with completely different problems – after all, the political and intellectual conditions giving rise to them were radically distinct – and yet seemed to me to offer variations on a single theme. The more I dug into these narratives, the more I saw a growing skepticism with the “debatist narrative,” for it simplified complex positions in favor of a dualistic reading that would then become easy to teach and easier to debunk. Hence, in the 2012 International Studies Association (ISA) Conference, when I came across a roundtable on “The end of IR theory?”<sup>1</sup> – which later became a special issue of the *European Journal of International Relations* – I was both excited for perhaps finding the possibility of moving beyond international relations theory, and yet discomforted with the kinds of discussion that appeared there, for they again seemed to be rehearsals of the by-now tiring “debatist narrative.” This paradoxical excitement/discomfort offers the first reason why I felt I should engage this literature from my point of view, in order to spell out the questions I think are most relevant about international relations theory today, but that seem to me to become every time more buried under the accumulative disputes about theorizing and the exhausting attempt to find middle grounds and joyous celebrations of pluralism.

A second and ensuing reason then comes from how this narrative of crisis is constantly deployed for various different purposes – political, practical, theoretical; for indicating a tragic predicament of reality, proposing a solution, justifying the need for radical transformation – and yet few are the problematizations of what it means to frame something as “crisis.” What does these presuppositions – that we live in a time of crisis, or that the international is

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<sup>1</sup> The 2012 International Studies Association Annual Convention held in San Diego, California, was entitled *Power, Principles and participation in the Global Information Age*. Available at: <<http://www.isanet.org/Conferences/San-Diego-2012>>.

the realm of crisis, or still that international relations theory is in crisis – share and how they foreclose spaces for pursuing more satisfactorily critical inquiries about international relations theory? Thus engaging the recent debate on the “crisis of theorizing” seemed like a good starting point for inquiring into the political and axiological underpinnings of contemporary politics and contemporary practices of knowledge. I do not presuppose to exhaust this discussion in any way – I certainly leave more things out than I can pack in. And that is why I offer only one of many possible narratives. In this sense, I believe that distinct framings of this problem could be tried in order to provide a similar discussion. Of course, by framing it differently I could have engaged larger audiences – perhaps even more relevant ones for the purposes of my argument. But deciding for debating such issues in the context of the contemporary debates on international relations theory’s crisis seemed like a more appropriate outlet to advance my ideas in light of my own historical, disciplinary, discursive situatedness.

The third reason for turning to this literature is again partially subjective. I am a “Brazilian” “woman” who wants to discuss the “axiological” stakes of a discipline that discourages all of these positivities: this is a remarkably practically-oriented, mannish, Anglo-American, English-speaking discipline. This is not to say that my training has not somehow prepared me to speak precisely this language; on the contrary, sometimes it is harder to think as a “Portuguese-speaking Brazilian woman” than it is to think as an international relations theorist<sup>2</sup>. And yet, I feel that precisely because of these internal contradictions I have something to say to international relations theory that might be of worth. Hence, engaging this recent literature in international relations theory has been a way to voice out my concerns to a specific audience – and a remarkably practically-oriented, mannish, Anglo-American, English-speaking audience at that – in a language that is more theirs than mine, in an attempt to find some *turning-points*: “points of divergence at which they started down one of several possible paths.” (Strong, 2012, p. 5) In the course of my argument, I will find moments of both proximity and distance from their endeavors, and I will try to point to how I

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<sup>2</sup> The experience here reminds me of Carol Cohn’s narrative about learning the rationalist language of defense intellectuals during the Cold War and finding it difficult to formulate her previous problems in their terms. Cohn’s argument in fact seems very appropriate for understanding in simple terms the impact a discursive formation has on opening and foreclosing realities. See Cohn (1987).

think even the most critical engagements with this problem of theorizing in international relations theory have tended to fall into dogmatic turns of hand, precisely by getting too close to the sovereign subject of knowledge.

In this sense, the approach to theorizing and knowledge production that I propose takes me down a path of theory that is in stark contrast to much of what has been produced under the prevailing self-images associated to the idea of international relations theory. I call this approach *critical* in a sense that requires engaging with what has been historically associated with the idea of critique as to dislocate the most common norms of critical work. In this sense, I propose an engagement with critique that takes knowledge beyond itself, so as to point to what cannot be grasped through knowledge by means of knowledge alone – and thus requires a different theoretical, practical and aesthetical positioning. Critique as I discuss it throughout this work is not a juridical court of reason which must be constantly in session so as to prevent reason from trying to know that which is beyond experience; rather, critique is seen as an ethical, aesthetical and political instance that may allow us to reach precisely that which cannot be known or framed through knowledge. It thus requires moving beyond the conventional dichotomies within which the usual knowledge practices have operated – especially those that situate subjects of knowledge at a distance from their objects, and sees theoretical work as being a basis on which appropriate political practices can be formulated. This movement requires problematizing the primacy of the intellectual in the production of knowledge, as well as all claims to knowledge that put thinking and doing at a distance.

The form of critique that I pursue, therefore, cannot be accommodated inside the pluralizing narratives that have gained the upper hand in the recent debates over theorizing inside the discipline of international relations. As feminists have been claiming for some time now, if you think it is just a matter of accommodating multiple legitimate approaches to knowledge production, “you just don’t understand.” (Tickner, 1997) What is being called for throughout these pages is for the imperativeness to move knowledge production and its presuppositions – the subject of knowledge, the object of knowing, the practices of theorizing and the approaches to political practice – beyond themselves. There can be no critique as long as we keep separating what is done in the academy from what is done by everyday people “out there” in the world; for there is no

individual apart from the collective, no particular without universal, no subject without object. They are always already *in-relation*, and this is the ultimate predicament of human finitude bestowed to us by the post-Kantian legacy of critique – and that has been forgotten by intellectuals more often than not.

This is not to say that what I propose is new in any way. In fact, I believe we can find many instances of such *critical attitude*, but they are rarely found in the traditional knowledge practices, and especially in the theoretical debates over international relations theory. This inability to think beyond the subject of knowledge has thus tied knowledge production – and this is particularly acute in international relations theory – to the figure of the sovereign subject (individual, state, international). Once you buy into the rules of the game, you can do many things, except question these rules and whatever lies beyond them. In this sense, my approach to critique in this dissertation and my argument about international relation theory follows closely Constantin Fasolt's claims concerning the practice of History:

History [...] needs not at all to oblige its followers to render allegiance to a specific party. It rather places limits on their choice. History helps to determine what counts as politics and what does not. It makes the politics of liberty, responsibility, and progress seem natural while ruling others out as nonpolitical. It leaves much room to fight over the meaning and possibility of liberty, progress, and responsibility. But there may be no other fight in town. Someone must be responsible, and someone must be free (Fasolt, 2004, p. xviii)

This is precisely how international relations theory seems to me to be built around the “politics of crisis.” By organizing all of its possibilities around claims concerning the status of crisis in the international realm, international relations theory has been framed as a theory of/in crisis. In doing so, it has allowed for much debate over the meanings and possibilities of sovereignty, law, violence, progress. What it has not been possible under international relations theory is to think beyond these terms and thus to think what would be a politics that is not framed in terms of friends and enemies. Perhaps this is the predicament of all knowledge practices as they have come down to us. But I will limit myself here to understand how these practices have condemned international relations theory to its own worn-out self-image of a discipline of/in crisis.

In what follows, my argument is structured in two organizing movements. The first movement, articulated in Chapters 2-4, examines the recent debates

about a crisis of theorizing, placing them in their historical and conceptual context, and highlighting their axiological and political stakes. The second movement, performed in Chapters 5-7, explores the contemporary theoretical status of claims to critique, the tendency for critical analysis to relapse into dogma, and the possibility of resisting the dogmatic potential of narratives of crisis in international relations. The overall analysis presents crisis and critique as two different possibilities of framing modern politics, predicated on diverging assumptions about (i) temporality, (ii) sovereignty, and (iii) knowledge. In light of this, I will briefly present the main discussions of each chapter.

Chapter 2 discusses the recent debates over the “end” or “crisis” of theorizing, in an attempt to provide the historical framework in which this debate can be seen as replaying some of the same problems that have been debated throughout the disciplinary history of international relations. The chapter thus turns to the most central arguments developed concerning the hypothesis of a “theory in crisis,” so as to account for the different perspectives over whether this is a crisis and, if so, what is it a crisis of. I argue that, whereas there are different interpretations of this crisis, and some of them carry a remarkable potential for disrupting the traditional boundaries that are said to exist between theory and practice, they all end up appealing to the “sovereign subject of knowledge,” which implicates in their inability to ask the more relevant question of what it means to pursue knowledge in the first place. The chapter thus argues for the need to account for the political, intellectual, and philosophical conditions that make it possible for the same kinds of questions to be posed anew and yet claim novelty.

Chapter 3 moves one step further in this problematization by connecting the discussion on the “crisis of theorizing” to a more encompassing discussion over the problem of the twentieth-century political crisis that occupies the center stage in the debates leading to the very invention of international relations theory. In order to do so, it turns to two of the most central figures in the articulation of international relations theory – E. H. Carr and Hans J. Morgenthau – so as to situate them in a trans-disciplinary and trans-continental conversation about the ongoing political crisis. Thus the chapter argues that the “crisis of theory” discussed in the previous chapter stands in direct relation to the political, philosophical and intellectual problems leading up to the consolidation of international relations theory as an autonomous realm of inquiry. The argument



points to the way international relations theory might engage a more relevant discussion on the conditions of possibility for political thought and action in a disenchanted world.

Chapter 4 then provides a deeper understanding of the concept of crisis, by showing how it works to produce a very specific temporal and political account of reality, in which certain forms of subjectivities are (re)produced by excluding alternative possibilities. The chapter articulates the relationship between crisis and modernity: it follows the path from the articulation of crisis as a temporal category that periodizes time to the conception of politics predicated on the sovereign state, in an attempt to account for how international relations theory's "politics of crisis" is implicated in more difficult questions concerning the role of the state, law, violence, politics, morality. In the overall, the chapter argues that appeals to crisis serve more often than not to reproduce a specific account of politics predicated in the state, sovereignty and law, which indicates the limits of "crisis theory" to question the form of politics that emerges from the temporality that crisis itself inaugurates.

Having laid out the limitations that are inherent in the narrative of crisis, Chapter 5 changes the register of the investigation and starts looking for claims to critique so as to find a different possibility of framing the issue of thought and action under human finitude. In order to find a different interpretation of finitude that is not already constrained by the predicaments of crisis, the chapter proposes investigating not the traditional claims to critique encompassed by the Kantian postulate of the court of reason, but a path of critique discussed by Michel Foucault in light of Kant's approach to the Enlightenment. Foucault's critical attitude provides an account of human finitude that moves away from the sovereign subject of knowledge and requires instead an aesthetic interpretation of the critical status of subjects. The aesthetic subject never finds completeness in itself, and thus can never be contained under a sovereign identity; yet, this "lack" is precisely what puts him always already in-relation to others.

Critique for this subject requires an "ethos of creativity:" it cannot be defined in terms of a universal project of reason, aiming at providing universal rules of conduct; critique is going to be, instead, a political, aesthetical and ethical positioning against forms of governmentalization that try to attach an identity to the always fluid subjectivities. This ethos allows for inquiring the problem of the

subject and of rationality *in history*, rather than in some universal condition. In this sense, Chapter 5 argues that critique cannot be seen as an intellectual tool for arriving at some “better” form of knowledge; it instead requires taking a political stand to change oneself – to create oneself as a work of art – in order to be able to know. Thus the chapter argues that the aesthetic must be understood as the locus of the political *par excellence*, for it is the realm in which the subject has to negotiate the relationship between the universal and the particular, the public and the private, identity and difference. Modernity itself appears as a question; not something to be peremptorily accepted or rejected, celebrated or lamented.

Chapter 6 then moves back to international relations theory so as to find the legacy of critique. It inquires primarily the revisionist literature that in the past decade or so has reengaged classical realism so as to find the possibility of critique in its tragic understanding of politics. The aim of this chapter is to assess the kind of critique these authors purport to do and whether it allows them to evade the risks of a narrative of crisis as discussed earlier in the dissertation. The chapter thus follows three argumentative spaces within which a debate over the critical potential of classical realism was nurtured: i. a discussion over tragedy that questioned the boundary between politics and morality; ii. the debate over Morgenthau’s historical juncture and his opening to a normative theory that could move realism to consider a post-sovereign form of politics; and finally, iii. a consideration of wilful Realism as a tradition that is able to undo familiar disciplinary misconceptions in order to lead international relations theory into a more productive and reconstructive engagement with contemporary liberal politics. In light of this discussion, the chapter argues that contemporary “critical realism” cannot evade the sovereign politics of friends and enemies and its ensuing consequences. The main reason for this inability resides in its incapacity to move beyond the subject of knowledge, thus leaving no room for properly considering difference and pluralism, which leads critical realism to side with the superiority of the Western liberal and humanist values.

Finally, Chapter 7 asks the question concerning the possibility of critique in international relations theory and rehearses an answer that is somehow at odds with itself. The argument is built on an agonistic play between the potentialities and limitations of the project developed throughout the dissertation. It discusses the limits of the project of “sustaining critique” that is predicated on a tragic ethos

and a constellational approach to knowledge. The chapter thus entertains the importance of thinking the role of difference and coloniality for reconstructing the project of international relations theory beyond “Europe” – and therefore, beyond itself. Finally, the role of the postcolonial critic is discussed as a way to respond to the dislocation of the sovereign subject of knowledge and inquire into the limits of representation.

Some concluding remarks try to assess the accomplishments and limitations of the arguments advanced in the previous chapters.

## 2

### A discipline in crisis?

#### 2.1

##### The new(est) debate

Recently, international relations theory has begun another concerted round of inquiries into its status as an academic enterprise, a body of knowledge with its ontological, epistemological and methodological commitments. This has been especially evident in two recent issues of important journals in the area dedicated to inquiring into the meaning, limits and possibilities of the current pluralism of the area – the 2013 Special Issue of the European Journal of International Relations<sup>3</sup> (EJIR) debating the question of “the end of international relations theory?” and the 2014 Special Conference Issue of Millennium<sup>4</sup> on “Methods, Methodology and Innovation.” The questions posed and answered by mostly senior theorists in these two journals seem to be part of a larger movement inside the field which is invested in questioning the changes in the current practices of international relations scholars concerning their theoretical and methodological approaches to political issues, and inquiring into the meaning of the by-now well-established pluralism of the area – represented by the increase in the number of journals, researches and conferences on multiple issues and perspectives, as well as by the growing representativeness of these perspectives on the International Studies Association (ISA)<sup>5</sup>.

According to the editors of the EJIR Special Issue, there is an apparent “theoretical peace” in the field, which is evident from the fact that there has been “less and less inter-theoretic debate across paradigms (or isms)” in the last few years<sup>6</sup>, and as a consequence the “pieces engaging solely in theoretical development are now largely rare” (Dunne, Hansen & Wight, 2013, p. 406). The question about “the end of international relations theory,” in this sense, opened an outlet for discussing the existence – and therefore the implications – of a more

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: < <http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/19/3.toc>>

<sup>4</sup> Available at: < <http://mil.sagepub.com/content/current>>

<sup>5</sup> For an account of this increase see: Sylvester, 2007, p. 553.

<sup>6</sup> Their argument refers to the submission of articles to the journal between 2008 and 2012.

general pattern in the theoretical production across the discipline, in order to assess whether this stage of “paucity” of theoretical production, pluralism and absence of inter-paradigmatic conversation represented a crisis in/of the field.

At the center of the EJIR’s provocations were questions concerning a possible state of “stagnation, crisis and end” (Berenskoetter, 2013) of theory and theorizing in international relations, questions which seemed to be triggered by the end of the “paradigm wars” which characterized the so-called “great debates” in the discipline, a moment of accepted “pluralism,” in which “theory testing,” rather than “theory development” seems to be the case across the multiple traditions that characterize the discipline (Dunne, Hansen & Wight, 2013)

Engaging similar questions and trying to assess the future perspectives of the field concerning its theoretical and methodological commitments<sup>7</sup>, the Millennium articles, for their turn, engage more directly “issues related to what constitutes science and how IR scholars relate to these debates” (Lacatus, Schade, & Yao, 2015, p. 769). Especially concerned with addressing the links connecting methods-methodology-epistemology-ontology, these articles – some written by the same authors that responded to the EJIR – invited a (self)reflection on the deeper philosophical presuppositions which usually remained silent within the authors’ choice of how to treat data and proceed with research.

These concerns are not limited to these journals and issues, but seem to be in blatant growth since the late 2000s, as evidenced by Christine Sylvester’s question “whither the international at the end of IR” (Sylvester 2007); and perhaps more exemplary of this growing trend has been the theme of the 2008 ISA Annual Conference, *Bridging Multiple Divides*, which stated that:

The landscape of international relations research is diverse and vibrant, with a wide variety of ontological, epistemological, and methodological perspectives. IR scholarship is empirical and normative, conservative and liberal, systemic and individual, activist and academic, material and ideational, positivist and post-positivist. While these different viewpoints give us great leverage for studying international relations, they often create artificial barriers between scholarly communities. Our theme for the 2008 ISA meeting *seeks to bridge multiple divides in the international relations community by creating dialogue and integrative research between scholars from different communities and viewpoints*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> According to the editors, their aim was to promote a discussion over Cynthia Weber’s question – “where do we go from here?” – formulated during the 2014 Millennium Conference.

<sup>8</sup> Document obtained through personal correspondence with the ISA Staff.

Such and attempt to confront the field's fragmentation and inquire into its underlying underpinnings has not been contained into one specific "tradition" or group of theorists, having by now been rehearsed by theorists from multiple conceptual positions – including well-known authors such as Peter Katzenstein, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, David Lake, Christian Reus-Smit, Chris Brown, Stefano Guzzini, Christine Sylvester, Michael C. Williams, Arlene Tickner, amongst others. Also, they have been the centerpiece of some of the most celebrated books of the last few years, such as Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's acclaimed *The conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics* (2011)<sup>9</sup> – which has already ran its second edition; and Daniel Levine's *Recovering International Relations: The Promise of Sustainable Critique* (2012). Furthermore, this debate has not been limited to these formal venues or to the scrutiny of senior scholars, having spanned further engagements of younger scholars and graduate students throughout blogs and virtual platforms<sup>10</sup>.

However, despite of a generalized sense that international relations theory is (once again?) at a crossroads, there seems to be a myriad of interpretations about the causes of this state of affairs – as well as diverging diagnoses about what "is" this state – leading to different accounts about the best way to relate to it and "move on." In the first place, it is not clear whether this "state" is a state of crisis after all: some of the diagnosticians appear to suggest that there is nothing new with this sense of crisis, for it is as old as the discipline itself, and it ensues precisely from such concerted attempts to take stock of the discipline, i.e. to discipline it (Kristensen, 2016)<sup>11</sup>. Those who accept that something new is going on, differ however on whether this something is a crisis: perhaps the discipline has become mature enough to live with pluralism; it may even be better now than it

<sup>9</sup> Millennium promoted a forum on Jackson's book in its 2013 second issue.

<sup>10</sup> The international relations blog "Duck of Minerva" promoted a symposium on the 2013 EJIR issue, which is available at: <<http://duckofminerva.com/2013/09/the-end-of-ir-theory-symposium.html>>. Also, Jackson's book generated a series of responses in the blog "The Disorder of Things," available at: <<https://thedisorderofthings.com/2011/01/17/demarcation-problems-the-conduct-of-inquiry-between-politics-methodology/>>. A guest post by Felix Berenskoetter at "The disorder of things" further debated the excessive focus on the position of senior theorists concerning the end of IR theory, in detriment of younger scholars' experiences in researching and teaching introductory on international relations theory. See: <<https://thedisorderofthings.com/2012/08/03/the-end-of-ir-theory-as-we-know-it/#more-5893>>

<sup>11</sup> See also debate spanned by Berenskoetter at "The disorder of things:" <<https://thedisorderofthings.com/2012/08/03/the-end-of-ir-theory-as-we-know-it/#more-5893>>

was before (Guzzini, 2013). And even those who accept the idea of a disciplinary crisis do not agree on the prescriptions about how to deal with it: maybe we are not willing to do what has to be done to overcome the crisis (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013); or else what we need is a more constructive way to deal with our pluralism (Bennett, 2013; Dunne; Hansen; Wight, 2013; Reus-Smit, 2013; Sil & Katzenstein, 2010; Sylvester, 2007). Perhaps, even, the crisis is not so generalized, and it has reached some “paradigms” more deeply than others (Lake, 2011, 2013); perhaps this is a crisis of critical or reflexive approaches, which have yet to rise to the occasion (Brown, 2013; Epstein, 2013; Hamati-Ataya, 2013). Or even, just another fruitful opportunity to think anew what are (or should be) international relations theory’s beginnings and its ends (Williams, 2013)

In light of these different approaches to “the end” of international relations theory, the next section tries to map out some of the diverging positions found in this debate concerning the question of crisis in international relations theory. This may allow me to identify more clearly what are the main questions international relations theorists’ are currently interested in, as well as clear the air for questions that, I will argue, are still underspecified in this debate and which go beyond the crisis of a discipline, pointing to a much more encompassing problem concerning the possibilities of human knowledge in a disenchanted world.

## 2.2

### Coming to terms with pluralism

There seems to be a range of disagreements concerning the existence or not of a disciplinary crisis, as well as the meanings of such a crisis and the prospective futures. As Jackson and Nexon (2013) have argued, some of the diagnoses are based on the end of the “paradigm wars,” concerned more deliberately with the waning of the traditions or “isms” that are said to have historically organized the field. Others understand this crisis in terms of the end of the “great debates” that animated the field since its inception, and are concerned with the blow such a “post-paradigmatic era” could bring to grand theorizing, since there is not much competition among theorists espousing different traditions. For others still, the moment offers more causes for celebration than despair, and they focus on the vibrancy of middle-range theorizing, which is far

less concerned with grand epistemological commitments than with making coherent sense of world politics.

In light of such different contributions, it is possible to devise some disagreements and even opposition among the diagnosticians. The waning of the “isms” or the “Great Debates,” or even the turn towards “middle-range theorizing” whilst posing serious concerns for some, are the cause for celebration for others. For instance, while Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) see the abandonment of grand theories in favor of mid-range theories and hypothesis testing as a major myopia on the part of theorists, Lake (2011, 2013), and Sil and Katzenstein (2013) find much to celebrate with the possibility that the field may finally focus on practically oriented research.

However one maps these different stocktaking accounts, what appears to be the problem underlying them is a widespread conviction that we still have to come to terms with the pluralism of the area. Whilst no one makes an explicit case against the greater plurality of the field, there is broad disagreement concerning how to manage this plurality towards more constructive dialogue. The debate is thus permeated by a concern that pluralism, if unchecked, may hinder rather than boost progress and accumulation, which leads to different accounts on how to avoid unproductive “fragmentation” and “cacophony.”

As a case in point, Christine Sylvester reminds us that the state of the field by the late 2000s already demonstrated a growing concern about the way theoretical pluralism had developed in the discipline. If, on the one hand, this pluralism indicated “a much more expansive sense of the international and its relations than it did prior to the third debate era that started in the 1980s,” on the other hand, it had “ironically” led international relations theory to develop a camp structure “which both promotes further field enlargement and narrows disciplinary vision to camp topics, logistics, and performances.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 552) In light of such a contradictory development, she argues, “much of contemporary international relations eludes IR.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 551)

Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein (2010) also share a similar suspicion that “the advances in theory and method” in the social sciences in the last thirty years have done nothing to engage more properly the world of policy and practice, opening academic scholarship to well-deserving criticism from both “suppliers and users of social research.” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 411) The authors make



a case for the adoption of “analytic eclecticism” – a different intellectual stance towards academic production and disputes, one that steers clear from “unresolvable metaphysical divides and presumptions of incommensurability” and fosters instead “efforts to complement, engage, and selectively utilize theoretical constructs embedded in contending research traditions.” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 411)

Lake (2011) joins in this discussion to declare that, in fact, “the isms are evil:” even if “diversity of theory and method is necessary” and “intellectual monocultures” must be feared, “the current cacophony is not what we should aspire to.” (Lake, 2011, p. 478) Thus, the author manifests his concerns about the relationship between the pluralization of the field and its growing inability to bridge the gap between academic research and social practices. The problem is not plurality per se, but the way we have been dealing with it, by reifying research traditions, rewarding extremism, confusing research traditions for actual theories, limiting our research objects to fit the strengths of our preferred tradition and defending the intellectual hegemony of this tradition, appealing to its exclusive claim to being scientific.

In this manner, the “isms” have become like “sects,” “religions,” or “mutually exclusive churches,” gathered around theories and epistemologies that present themselves as incommensurable world-views. Endorsing Sil and Katzenstein’s analytical eclecticism, Lake makes a further case for the development of “a lexicon for translating otherwise incommensurable theories and making them mutually intelligible,” a “Rosetta stone” aimed at “facilitat[ing] conversation across research traditions.” (Lake, 2011, p. 466)

It is again similar concerns about the fragmentation and lack of conversation among theorists from different traditions that seem to animate Jackson’s *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations*. According to the author, “one possible result of field-wide diversity is not a freewheeling and problem-driven eclecticism (Sil, 2000), but instead an archipelago of small groups of scholars doing their own thing in blithe disregard of the rest of the field.” (Jackson, 2011, p. 39) The reasons behind this state of fragmentation of the field relate, according to Jackson, to the lack of more philosophically mindful research. In this sense, the field has devoted much more attention to questions of ontology and epistemology and relegated the importance of methodology to secondary

status. This has led international relations to be ultimately divided, either between “schools and research communities based on substantive topics and preferred causal factors,” or else, by theorists’ preferred choices of techniques or tools. Even more explicitly, for Jackson, the field has been split up among the “isms,” “that often seem, in practice, to be little more than groups of scholars who maintain that military, economic, or ideational factors exercise the most influence over the course of world politics.” (Jackson, 2011, p. 39) As a result, international relations scholars “lack any good and defensible way to make choices, or to evaluate the choices that other scholars make, about how research is conducted.” (Jackson, 2011, p. 39)

Together, these diagnosticians – who come from very dissimilar traditions and preoccupations – paint a picture in which pluralism coupled with the inability for concerted dialogue has ultimately put international relations at a crossroads. If the Kuhnian paradigms and Lakatosian research traditions were once celebrated and replicated, now they seem to have posed a difficult problem that must be circumvented. Presumptions of incommensurability are the enemy of today’s pluralism, and it is now time to find space for broader field conversation – or else international relations theory might really be at an end. Where the potential for constructive dialogue might lie, however, is a question to which there are multiple answers.

### 2.2.1

#### **International relations after the “isms”?**

By putting on the spotlight the issue of fragmentation, these contributions opened grounds on which questions concerning a “crisis,” an “end” or the “health” of international relations theory could abound. To be sure, Sylvester had already declared in 2007 that “IR is at an end,” if only to qualify that the discipline is not alone in this. Actually, she believes that “endism might seem one of those mumbo-jumbos afflicting our time.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 562) However, for her, this is not an indication that the academic discipline is over; on the contrary, “we are just beginning to identify the range of our fundamental disagreements.” There is no longer a single view of what international relations

theory means; in fact, both the field (IR), as its substance (the international) “is what the camps turn it into.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 566)

What seems to be the heart of Sylvester’s concern is that the current “abundance of knowledge” in the field did not make it a more integrated or dialogic one, leading instead to the development of a “camp structure” in which “members frequently attend only to their own camp’s panels, conferences, workshops, and journals, like horses going to the trough to feed;” as a result, “only graduate students, loners, and IR visitors breach camp barriers and wander about the field.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 554-55) In the meanwhile, “international relations *where it is not expected to be* moves at will beyond and between many campfires.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 552, my emphasis)

What Sylvester argues is that international relations theorists are unable to capture much of what goes on in the international: at the same time that there was an increase in the ability to identify and look closely to practices that mark international relations, theorists have also become more baffled before happenings that were not being expected – and cannot thus account for them. On the other hand, this crisis might offer an opportunity for particularly productive reflection, since there is “less overdetermining gatekeeping in the field” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 567) and it is possible to start looking for international relations theory’s afterlives. For the author, “the third debate did a magnificent job of taking the field ‘after’ as in ‘post’ its narrower vision of the past. Now IR needs *d’apres* – as in turning towards a variety of knowledges while following hard-won paths of expansion.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 571)

Sylvester is not arguing for some reunification of the field, neither for the need to discipline its multiplicity, but for treating it differently. Since pluralism has been successful in showing that no knowledge can be complete unto itself, we should stop trying to cling to one position and start acting like collagists, juxtaposing “the realities of disparate worlds in a space that no one finds especially simpático.” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 571) In the disagreements and apparent incommensurabilities of different positions may lie the ability to account for multiple interpretations that do not stand completely at odds to each other, neither compose an unified picture. It creates a space where answers will not be provided by “the artist,” but only by the different gazes of “the viewers.” If international relations are rarely where we expect them to be, “the challenge is to pose

juxtapositions that illuminate diversities while also getting us talking about the international we each see a bit differently” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 572).

With a different take on the issue, Sil and Katzenstein (2010), for their turn, have also pointed to the inability of theories to account for the complexity of practices. They also seem to be concerned with the way social disciplines – and international relations theory is not alone in this – have become fragmented due to researchers excessive focus on the incommensurable differences of their approaches – which the authors see as part of social sciences’ fascination with Kuhnian paradigms or Lakatosian research programs. Resorting to Laudan’s concept of research traditions, they propose, instead, that research be guided by the problems facing the theories, which demands a more flexible position concerning epistemological commitments, and an ability to combine analytic elements from different traditions. A combinatorial logic is, for them, the best way to account for the complex issues that international relations theory faces.

According to Sil and Katzenstein (2010) excessive concern with epistemological commitments have taken away researchers’ ability to conduct social science guided by the substantial – rather than analytic – complexity of problems, thus making their academic contributions ever more disconnected from the realm of practices. Analytic eclecticism is offered not as a substitute for research traditions<sup>12</sup>, but as complementary, since “its contribution depends largely on continued engagement with these approaches” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 425-6). This analytic-eclectic stance is guided by a threefold sensibility: a pragmatist ethos directed to the development of mostly middle-range theories capable of dealing with “concrete issues of policy and practice;” a recognition of the complexity of social life leading to research directed at problems of wide –

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<sup>12</sup> The authors prefer to work with Laudan’s understanding of research traditions, rather than Kuhnian paradigms or Lakatosian research programs, because they see a potential of coexistence and cross-fertilization in the former that is not afforded by the latter. This allows for accounting for greater complexity. According to Sil and Katzentein: “Research traditions have crucial advantages in generating and organizing initial stocks of knowledge. Given the infinite complexity of social reality and the limited resources available to scholars, it is helpful to establish some common assumptions, parameters, vocabularies, and conventions to facilitate a focused examination of selected aspects of that reality. These common understandings also enable adherents of research traditions to establish a consensus on what criteria might be appropriate for assessing the quality of research and for evaluating progress in a given field. Moreover, “creative confrontations” among rival scholarly traditions serve as models or foils that prod adherents of research traditions to apply concepts and theories to new arenas of research, demonstrating their relevance to substantive issues on which other traditions claim to have more insights to offer” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 413).

rather than narrow – scope; and, therefore, the development of complex causal explanations guided by a comprehensive understanding of causal mechanisms<sup>13</sup>, bringing variables that are usually kept separate in different research traditions to bear on the explanation of complex social processes.

Recognizing criticisms concerning the incommensurability of some approaches, the loss of parsimony, the lack of resources and formal knowledge adequate to conduct research in all traditions, the authors argue that analytic eclecticism is not a position for the unlimited acquisition of methodological skills, nor the ever-expanding list of all imaginable causal factors. Rather, the combinatorial logic of analytic eclecticism privileges attention to the multiple connections between mechanisms and social processes over the multiplicity of methods, in order to identify “how the problems as defined within research traditions might (or might not) relate to each other and to concrete dilemmas related to policy and practice,” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 418) accepting the need for assessing “the relative strengths and trade-offs of different methods.” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 415)

While endorsing the analytic eclecticist position, Lake sees the “isms” as ultimately pervasive, and argues for the need to go beyond eclecticism and develop “a lexicon for translating otherwise incommensurable theories and making them mutually intelligible.” (Lake, 2011, p. 466) This lexicon might be built around a “Rosetta stone” based on the disaggregation of all theories into their basic common concepts: interests, interactions, and institutions. For Lake, any complete theory should “think of politics as composed of some actor pursuing interests while engaged in interactions with other actors within institutions.” (Lake, 2011, p. 473)

However, Sil and Katzenstein (2011) and Nau (2011) have argued against Lake that his attempt to give up on the “isms” altogether might seem a bit hasty and perhaps utopian. For the authors, Lake seems too dismissive of “how the

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<sup>13</sup> In order to eschew disputes concerning the observability, generality and source of causal variables and thus allow such analytic disputes to reduce the explanatory capacity of an eclecticist approach, Sil and Katzenstein (2010) define mechanisms as “all entities—whether individual actions or choices, social relations or networks, environmental or institutional characteristics, specific events or contextual factors, individual cognitive dispositions or collectively shared ideas and worldviews— that generate immediate effects through processes that may or may not recur across contexts and that may be, but often are not, directly observable.” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 421)

metatheoretical priors of a given approach shape the manner in which its adherents view the world, articulate research questions, define core concepts, and develop explanatory or interpretive schemes.” (Sil and Katzenstein, 2011, p. 482) Analytic eclecticism should not entail a complete abandonment of the “isms,” as Lake seems to suggest, but a decentering of their supposed centrality in order to find points of dialogue.

For Henry Nau (2011), Lake’s position is ultimately unattainable: “seek[ing] a profession or world without theoretical or ideological walls is hopelessly utopian.” For instance, his “Rosetta stone” entails exclusively a rational choice framework, which “privileges agency over structure, interests over identities, interactions over sovereignty, and institutions (hierarchy) over anarchy.” (Nau, 2011, p. 489) Theorists do not even agree whether “the world” is a reality “out there,” waiting to be grasped, which leads them to treat and approach “it” differently. If such differences are not amenable to conversion under a single lexicon, theorists should “recognize that the ‘isms’ are inevitable,” and instead strive to promote more conversation among them. Progress, for him, depends on “a greater emphasis on replication and more jointly drafted author–critic discussion of theoretical and methodological differences.” (Nau, 2011, p. 489)

Andrew Bennet (2013) also joins in the debate, arguing that this reluctance to jettison the “isms” is ultimately damaging to the eclectic or pluralistic approach. According to the author, because they “fear losing the theoretical and empirical contributions made in the name of the isms,” Sil and Katzenstein “miss an opportunity to enable a discourse that is structured as well as pluralistic, and that reaches beyond IR to the rest of the social sciences.” (Bennet, 2013, p. 461) For Bennet, the solution lies on the development of a “structured pluralism,” which takes the post-positivist critique of causal explanation seriously, advancing a mechanism-based approach underpinned by scientific realism. Superior to the covering-law model predominant in the field, the scientific realist approach to mechanisms allows not only for identifying individual causal mechanisms, but to understand “how *combinations* of mechanisms interact in specified and often recurrent scope conditions or contexts to produce outcomes.” (Bennet, 2013, p. 470) Such approach should be able to provide “a framework for cumulative theoretical progress” and to constitute “a useful, vivid, and structured vocabulary

for communicating findings to fellow scholars, students, political actors, and the public.” (Bennet, 2013, p. 461)

According to Bennet (2013), theorists should focus on theories, rather than the incommensurable “isms.” He builds a taxonomy of theories that could provide explanations about causal mechanisms that mirrors the main “isms” in the field – realism, liberalism and constructivism – without prioritizing one position over the other<sup>14</sup>. Such theories aim at providing more comprehensive views of complex phenomena, by making a trade-off between parsimony and verisimilitude. Differently from the paradigmatic “isms,” theories about causal mechanisms allow for middle-range approaches “that are more localized, if also more complex.” (Bennet, 2013, p. 475) Such taxonomy might be able to bridge the conceptual divide among the “isms,” animating a cross-paradigmatic and cross-disciplinary dialogue more conducive to progress.

As varied as they are, all of the aforementioned perspectives appear to be certain that the “isms” – whether seen as presently inadequate or ultimately evil – can no longer provide the framework for theoretical advancement in the field. The future of international relations theory, in a sense, is predicated on its ability to overcome the incommensurable “isms” and provide grounds for more fruitful cross-paradigmatic dialogue. Both analytic eclecticism and structured pluralism are presented as alternatives to the traditional covering-law model which has underpinned much of the rationalist research in the field, due to the latter’s inadequacy to account for the world of practice. From different approaches, these two alternative frameworks ultimately believe that the future of the social science depends on theorists’ ability to give up on parsimony or epistemological correctness in favor of more practical theorization, able to restore progress in the field. Both answers to the present conundrum rely on knowledge practices – the improvement of our methods, taxonomies, research practices – that are ultimately in the hands of researchers so as to produce more adequate knowledge.

For Sylvester, in contrast, even if the “isms” offer an insufficient approach to capture the shifting landscapes of the international, there seems to be no answer possible in the realm of our knowledge practices alone. International politics is not made up of a series of facts that may be apprehended by the improvement of our

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<sup>14</sup> See Bennet, 2013, p. 473



theories. What her argument encompasses, instead, is that theorists assume a different ethos towards research, one that is perhaps less self-conscious and more aware of its own limitations, and that invites people in. Theories can only broaden our horizons by creating multiple spaces where everyday people who are part of “the international” – wherever it may be – get to participate on the production of knowledge about it. Sylvester’s argument claims then, that the present crisis in international relations theory needs to be solved by developing a more critical attitude concerning the production of knowledge<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.3

### Beyond pluralism: what is (international relations) theory for?

The debate mapped out above ultimately leads to a consideration of what is the role that theory plays – or should play – in the world. However, none of the positions previously discussed can settle the issue, since they are ultimately speaking of different things with particular languages, even when they all refuse the “isms.” Lake’s 2013 article, in fact, makes a gesture towards recognizing this fact by addressing Nau’s argument concerning the specific kind of theorizing that was possible under his approach. In this sense, Lake admits the existence of an incommensurable dispute in the field between positivists and post-positivists, only to “loathe to see International Relations split into two separate disciplines sharing the same subject matter and intellectual history but divided by epistemology and ontology.” (Lake, 2013, p. 579) He is, however, content to admit that, in this front, there might in fact exist an *unbridgeable rift* between approaches – no pluralism can settle the issue.

The problem with these kinds of pluralism, however, is that even when they recognize the existence of different metatheoretical presumptions underlying distinct approaches – which would justify some of the current fragmentation of the field – they ultimately refuse to engage in this kind of debate, assuming that it is precisely this kind of dispute that is responsible for the move away from practice. Faced with this conundrum, Lake suggests that we abandon

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion on this critical attitude and what it could mean.



metatheoretical disputes altogether, for it is better to have “progress *within* paradigms rather than war *between* paradigms.” (Lake, 2013, p. 580)

Mearsheimer and Walt (2013), for their turn, seem to accept the rifts that mark the field, and focus instead on the status of theorizing in the United States, where positivism predominates. In this context, they argue, the problem of international relations theory is not pluralism, but the focus on practice-approaches, which ultimately endorse the abandonment of grand theorizing and focus instead on middle-range theorizing as a way to produce practical, useful knowledge. Faced with the debate on the future of a discipline that either has superseded or that should supersede the “isms,” Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) lament precisely what they see as the most direct result of this absence of interparadigmatic confrontation: the lack of theory production.

According to the authors, “the field is moving away from developing or carefully employing theories and instead emphasizing what we call simplistic hypothesis testing.” (Mearsheimer; Walt, 2013, p. 428) Even if authors may celebrate the move away from grand theorizing towards middle-range theories, this is not what is happening today. On the contrary, they argue, the field “is paying less attention to theories of all kinds and moving toward simplistic hypothesis testing” (Mearsheimer; Walt, 2013, p.429) – particularly in relation to quantitative research, where most efforts are devoted to collecting data and testing empirical hypothesis. Whatever the incentives of contemporary academia towards this kind of research<sup>16</sup>, however, the authors find this move profoundly flawed and ultimately impeditive to *progress*, since the lack of understanding behind the collection of data and use of models – which can only come from proper theoretical knowledge – leads to misleading measures, poor data, no proper explanation, and ultimately lack of cumulation. And they conclude with a grim note on the future prospects of the field: “powerful professional incentives encourage an emphasis on simplistic hypothesis testing, and the rise of think tanks and consulting firms has reduced demand for academic scholarship on policy issues.” (Mearsheimer; Walt, 2013, p. 449)

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<sup>16</sup> Such as the already great availability of grand theories; the advancement of modern technologies which facilitate collection and test of hypothesis; the instrumentalistic tradition diffused by KKV’s Designing Social Inquiry; the expansion of PhD programs, among others.

Chris Brown (2013) concurs with this negative assessment concerning the current state of international relations theory. He points out however, the importance of separating out developments in the field, and remarks that, at closer inspection, *progress* has occurred in the standard canons of the discipline (liberalism and realism), and that the crisis has been more evident among “critical/‘late modern’” scholarship. Relying on Cox’s (1981) classic categorization of the field, Brown understands that critical theory has been unable to produce “action-guiding and world-revealing insights,” whereas problem-solving theory, despite being progressive, has been of no value for those at the margins of society. For Brown, a possible solution entails the development of “critical problem solving” theories, that can engage reality – as realists and liberals do – but considering the problems of the dispossessed. (Brown, 2013)

Brown’s assessment of “the health” of theorizing in the field is based on a summary comparison between “grand theoretical” works produced in the 1980s and the 2000s coming from different “isms” – realism, liberalism, constructivism, late moderns. Upon such comparison, he arrives at the general conclusion that it is not true that we face a deficit in grand theorizing per se, but that what is actually lacking is a contribution on the part of those authors situated outside of the problem-solving side of theorizing, in terms of offering solutions to problems that the problem-solvers are not interested in. His conclusion, in brief, is that *progress* has been achieved in the field since the publication of Waltz’ *Theory of International Politics*, in 1979, but that this progress has come especially from liberals and realists that have been able to account for the practice of the great powers – especially the US – and offer alternative paths to understand their protagonism in international politics.

What has not yet been done and thus needs to be further pursued, according to Brown, is a form of “critical problem-solving,” that may be able to offer the some *progressive propositions* in terms of the realities that do not usually concern the more conservative theorists. He thus calls for greater protagonism of theorists concerned with “the needs and problems of the dispossessed, the ‘wretched of the earth’ as the old song has it, rather than with the problems of the masters of the universe.” (Brown, 2013, p. 494) For Brown, what afflicts critical theorists is not poor theoretical imagination, but their “refusal to engage with ‘real-world’ issues.” (Brown, 2013, p. 485) Therefore, “critical

problem-solving” should aim to join Cox’s two modes of theorizing, bringing “problem-solving theory” to work with “critical theory” in producing knowledge that is both progressive and attentive to issues of the margins.

Reus-Smit (2013), for his turn, argues against the series of “solutions” that present themselves by excluding the need to delve profoundly into metatheoretical debate. Above all, he argues that the practically oriented progress aimed by theorists can only come in light of their clarity concerning their epistemological and ontological assumptions. According to the author, this entire discussion on the end of international relations theory has been built on the narrow assumption that theorizing should be guided mainly – if not exclusively – towards practically-oriented knowledge, making a case for the abandonment of disputes concerning the underlying metatheoretical assumptions guiding research, and their corresponding effects. He argues strongly against this tendency, because “our metatheoretical assumptions, however subliminal they might be, affect the kinds of practically relevant knowledge we can produce.” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 590)

This problem persists even in the face of a sophisticated intellectual project such as Sil and Katzenstein’s analytic eclecticism. For Reus-Smit, even if the authors recognize the importance of metatheoretical assumptions when they dismiss Lake’s claim for the abandonment of the “isms,” they still remain oblivious to their own underlying assumptions. For instance, by glossing over the ontological differences of the traditions, Sil and Katzenstein understand that what makes dialogue between “‘positivists and interpretivists’ so difficult is their ‘epistemologic absolutism’.” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 595) It is almost as if traditions could find a common ontological basis, making it necessary only to bridge the epistemological gaps. By not taking the ontological differences seriously and, especially, by not seeing how these ontological premises carry epistemological assumptions with them and vice-versa, analytical eclecticism ties itself up to a very specific understand of what theory is for: practically relevant knowledge.

In doing that, analytic eclecticism remains dismissive of normative questions, which ties it to the political assumptions of the already established mainstream traditions – realism, liberalism and constructivism. Thus, “the ‘combinatorial logic’ it calls upon situates analytical eclecticism in a rather empirical-theoretic frame, “confined to a prefigured set of structural factors, causal mechanisms, and social processes,” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 591) thus limiting

the kinds of practically relevant knowledge it can produce. As a consequence of this dismissal of normative framings, analytic eclecticism becomes incapable of addressing the explanatory bias of American international relations theory. “There is, therefore, a *grund* epistemological choice circumscribing analytical eclecticism, one that places normative forms of knowledge off the table.” (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 596) This choice leads to a very narrow conception of what is “practical.”

Recovering an entire philosophical tradition that runs from Aristotle through Kant, Reus-Smit (2013) tries to show that questions of practice are deeply intertwined with normative concerns, since the problem of political action is not only about what one does, but above all about what one should do, how one should act. In this sense, Reus-Smit calls for a more ambitious form of eclecticism than the one designed by Sil and Katzenstein, and I add, by either Lake or Bennet. Eclecticism should do more than transcend already established American paradigms. It should challenge the theoretical and analytical boundaries that are so ingrained in our practices, which ultimately depends on the aliveness of the metatheoretical debate.

From a similar standpoint, Guzzini (2013) argues that the problem lies in the way the theoretical debate in international relations theory keeps reproducing two longstanding reductionisms: on the one hand, it tends to confuse or limit theorizing to the ability to offer practical knowledge (something that is a the basis of the complaints of Sil and Katzenstein, and Lake, for instance); on the other hand, it associates scientific knowledge to an empirical task. Both of these reductionisms, Guzzini claims, have a long history that is profoundly ingrained in the historical emergence and development of the discipline in the twentieth century.

Relying of Norbert Elias’ research on the emergence of the diplomatic culture of Court Aristocracy, Guzzini claims that a certain “diplomatic habitus,” which was “obsessed with prestige, honour and status, and hence etiquette” (Guzzini, 2013, p. 525) came to impact the articulation and establishment of the “international realm” and its practices. This process created demands for a particular form of knowledge that was neither reflexive nor theoretical, but instead focused on the production of practical knowledge. According to Guzzini, this habitus would clearly impact the early days of the discipline of international

relations, polarized in a debate between “idealists” and “realists.” In this moment, “the discipline was not there to produce knowledge;” instead, “already-existing (practical) knowledge produced its discipline.” (Guzzini, 2013, p. 523)

Guzzini sees Morgenthau as responsible for trying to transform this practical knowledge designed for acting politically in a form of science. As a consequence of his impact on early disciplinary construction, international relations theory developed around a normative narrative of *what international politics should be* disguised as an account of *how it already is* or works. In this way, concepts such as “*raison d'état*” were transformed from a historical practice into a logical or natural necessity. “In this circular move,” the author claims, “the end(s) of theorizing are also the end of it, since no knowledge which goes beyond and against the nature of international politics, as asserted by Morgenthau, is tenable.” (Guzzini, 2013, p. 530)

Despite of this early influence, however, Guzzini argues that later developments of the discipline represented steps of increasing reflexivity over theorizing. For instance, he sees the “Inter-Paradigm Debate” and especially the “Third Debate” as bringing forth questions concerning the importance of second-order reflection, which allowed to disentangle practical from scientific knowledge. By making the observer independent from the practitioner, second-order theorizing allowed glimpsing into “the underlying assumptions of theories and how they structure the understanding of the research subject, problematiques and techniques.” (Guzzini, 2013, p. 532) By bringing a greater level of reflexivity, this development shows the insufficiency of trying to move past the debate on the “isms,” for even when this debate is not carried out openly, it continues to underlie particular perspectives on issues.

According to Guzzini, then, it is not surprising that a discipline accustomed to think in terms of only one truth shows such resistance to cope with theoretical pluralism. However, rather than fighting it, international relations theory should continue to move towards greater levels of reflexivity, by accepting “the constitutive function of theories” and thus recognizing the importance of different forms of theorizing, as well as the potential for cross-fertilization. Even if *empirical theorizing* remains an important source of reflection in the discipline, there should be greater efforts to appreciate the importance of different forms of theorization, such as: *normative theorizing* to bring an ethical philosophy inside

theorists aspirations; *meta-theorizing* to reflect on the underlying assumptions of theories and concepts; and *constitutive/ontological theorizing* to problematize the central phenomena of inquiry. (Guzzini, 2013, pp. 533-5) “Taking seriously the difference between practical and scientific knowledge and the richer pedigree of modes of theorizing,” Guzzini claims, “may not only make the centrality of theory more visible, but contribute to rethinking the relation to international practice and practices.” (Guzzini, 2013, p. 538)

Fully accepting the implications of Guzzini’s argument concerning the constructive function of theories, Jackson and Nexon start form a definition of international relations theory as “(social-) scientific claims about the ontology of world politics, including its actors, proper units of analysis, and how such elements fit together.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 544) According to the authors, then, the debate on the end of international relations theory – whether portrayed as the fragmentary “isms,” the demise of the great debates or the promise of mid-range theorizing – continues to reproduce a series of inconsistencies and to misidentify the actual lines of contention and the productive dialogue they could generate. By abandoning these insufficient portrayals of the field, and understanding international relations as centered around a series of debates over scientific ontology, it becomes possible to retrieve the potential for conversation where we used to see incommensurability.

Their argument gravitates around what they see as a generalized confusion in these debates concerning issues of theory, methodology and different understandings of reality. For instance, the failure to distinguish between substantive and methodological differences “risks obscuring the fact that we purchase certain kinds of theoretical innovation at the cost of methodological monoculture.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 544) This is especially evident in the perspectives that emphasize the importance of practical knowledge over (meta)theoretical debate. The consequence of the way these debates are conducted is the (usually silent) privileging of explanatory over other forms of theorizing, with debates varying around different forms of explanation.

In order to point a way forward, the authors propose differentiating between scientific and philosophical ontologies, and considering international relations theories to represent a debate over the former. Jackson and Nexon define a scientific ontology as “a catalog — or map — of the basic substances and

processes that constitute world politics,” by which they try to indicate that theories’ disagreements revolve around: i. the degree of autonomy of actors in relation to their contexts; and ii. the importance of contextual analysis. Philosophical ontologies, for their turn, concern “the ‘hook-up’ between the observing mind and the observed world.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 552) Scientific ontologies are about theorizing; philosophical ontologies are about methodology.

Most times – as for instance in the debate between explaining vs. understanding – there tends to be a confusion between these two issues. Even though they refer to one another, “the failure to clearly differentiate between philosophical and scientific ontology sometimes muddles discussions about the state of IR theory;” in this sense, “although scientific ontologies of IR serve explanatory functions, they need not imply a specific mode of explanation.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 551) The different gradations of disagreement should no imply incommensurability.

By switching their focus to scientific ontologies, then, Jackson and Nexon claim that there is room to be “cautiously optimistic about the state of IR theorizing.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 552) In this new light, they argue, much is being produced around three clusters of theories, which they call *choice-theoretic*, *experience-near*, and *social-relational*.<sup>17</sup> Their disagreements concerning questions of agency and structure (as pointed out in i. and ii. above) do not make them incommensurable. To the contrary, they cut across the outdated “isms” and “debates,” and find on each other legitimate contenders. According to the authors, this change in the stakes of the debate concerning theorizing might indicate the insufficiency of the rigid rationalist-constructivist divide, and instead point to the different focus of theories, rather than their mutual exclusion. As way of conclusion, they argue that “the future of international theory may be bright, but it will not look like a linear extrapolation of what came before. This, perhaps, is ‘progress’.” (Jackson & Nexon, 2013, p. 560)

Indeed, it is remarkable how much the idea of *progress* is played out across the different positions surveyed here. In a sense, this shows how much “crisis” is interpreted as a break in a teleological path – even when this *telos* is not

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<sup>17</sup> For a fuller understanding of the different scientific ontologies, see Jackson and Nexon (2013), esp. pp. 553-560



read linearly. The fear is to fall into obsolescence and stagnancy. Whether hopeful about the future prospects or not, most of the authors debating pluralism and crisis seem to call for a change in the “course of treatment.” In this sense, the allusion to the “health” of international relations theorizing is indicative of the way crisis narrative points us to the medical uses of crisis to diagnose the critical, turning point of an illness, which demands a change in the treatment that could lead to life or death. These uses and expressions will become the focus of my discussion of crisis, especially from Chapter 4 onwards. For now, I wish only to take account of their recurrence, so as to be able to escalate the present discussion into different levels in the chapters to come.

## 2.4

### International relations theory in/as crisis

Recently, Peter Marcus Kristensen (2015) offered a quite reinvigorating counter narrative concerning this debate about the “end” or “crisis” of international relations theory. According to him, there is a certain presentism in this debate which grossly ignores similarities between this contemporary round of disputes on the status of international relations as a discipline – especially concerning matters of what counts as theory and how methodologies do or should impact the production of knowledge – and earlier stocktaking accounts. In fact, Kristensen revisits the “stocktaking genre” being produced during the heyday of the so-called great debates, and offers a compelling case about the lack of novelty and the persistence of questions about a disciplinary crisis or end of IR. For him, the contemporary tendency of stocktakers to claim that fragmentation is a novelty “neglect[s] that the narrative about the fragmentation of IR has a prominent historical record and that academic disciplines look more chaotic to stocktakers in their own time than they do to posterity.” (Kristensen, 2016) There is always the benefit of hindsight, which imparts a coherence on disciplinary debates that did not exist in the time they were happening.

Furthermore, his analysis indicates that there is a politics behind this genre which is, perhaps, deserving of more attention than the present attempts to singularize and define the present pluralism in terms of some crossroads. As most of the recent historiography shows, the great debates – whatever they were – were



much less coherent than the conventional narrative would have it, and the current attempt to portray the discipline at a crossroads can only survive while it ignores this fact.

In fact, Kristensen argues that “few stocktakers ever had a sense that *one* conversation or debate was driving the discipline, not during the first, second, third or fourth debates.” (Kristensen, 2015, p. 4) This is not to say that the discipline remains the same: “lines of division and fragmentation work at different levels (disciplinarity, theories, methodologies, paradigms, epistemologies, etc.).” (Kristensen, 2015, p. 5) Nonetheless, a general sense of fragmentation and lack of dialogue is a persistent feature of the disciplinary stocktaking narratives.

Looking at stocktaking efforts during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Kristensen sees multiple diagnoses of fragmentation competing in the debate about the autonomy of international relations as a discipline *qua* political science. For instance, in 1946, Waldemar Gurian would question whether the discipline was “a hodgepodge:” “a kind of mixture, concocted from various subjects [and thus] an unsystematic putting-together.” (Gurian *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 5) His question reflects the anxiety that existed at the time to find a coherence or unity for the discipline. In 1947, Grayson Kirk would argue that “today, after a quarter-century of activity, the study of international relations is still in a condition of considerable confusion.” (Kirk *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 6) The general sense of fragmentation at the time “concerned primarily the teaching of IR and whether it was a separate branch of higher learning;” (Kristensen, 2015, p. 6) it differed, however, from later accounts in that “there was no golden age nostalgia yet. There was no imagined historical unity against which to benchmark the present sense of crisis.” (Kristensen, 2015, p. 7)

The same disquiet permeated the following decades – late 1950s and 1960s – which became known as the “Second Great Debate” characterized by the Bull-Kaplan exchange in the journal *World Politics* (1966). Despite of the consistency that is said to characterize the two warring camps in this context, Kristensen demonstrates that both sides advanced a series of caveats concerning their lack of internal coherence, which were consistently brushed aside in later disciplinary narratives. Stocktakers of this period – which included W.T.R. Fox, Stanley Hoffman, Bruce Russett, Arend Lijphart, among others – saw the idea of a dual split as extremely oversimplified, and lamented the “confusion” and

“fragmentation” of the area. According to Kristensen, despite of the “general sense that more IR research was now being done,” Waltz himself lamented the fact that “nothing seems to accumulate, not even criticism” (Waltz *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 9) when writing his *Theory of International Politics*, in 1979. In fact, Kristensen reports that as early as 1973, John Burton had already responded affirmatively to the question “The end of International Relations?” arguing that “IR had moved into an ‘adisciplinary’ phase.” (Burton *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 9)

From the 1970s to the 1990s, once again the discipline would witness stocktakers of all colors lamenting the fragmentation of the field, if only this time to oppose the “present crisis” to “a golden age” of coherence. It was the time for Kal Holsti, Michael Banks, Fred Halliday, Steve Smith, Yosef Lapid amongst others to attest to the “Babel of discordant theoretical voices” (Lapid *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 12) that populated the discipline and to lament that there was “less anarchy in world politics than in theories about it.” (Mansbach & Ferguson *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 12) James Rosenau even called it “a fragmented non-field;” (Rosenau *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 13) and Linklater diagnosed the discipline as suffering from “identity crisis” due to the break on its “previous consensus.” (Linklater *apud* Kristensen, 2015, p. 13) By now, the incommensurability narrative had taken hold of the disciplinary stage.

Having laid out his groundwork, Kristensen claims that by the time the endist lamentations of the 2000s (re)surfaced – as seen provocatively in Sylvester’s 2007 piece and Lake’s 2011 presidential address discussed earlier – there was no longer any novelty in the bid. In fact, “the image of a dividing discipline in crisis and split into fragments is an intrinsic part of the identity of IR.” (Kristensen, 2015, p.18) In conclusion, Kristensen argues that

The latest bout of stocktaking concerned with the fragmentation of IR inscribes itself, somewhat unintentionally it seems, into a prominent lineage of pessimistic stocktaking exercises that identify fragmentation, confusion, a lack of dialogue and cacophony. When current stocktakers portray fragmentation as a post-Cold War novelty, they forget that Cold War IR also seemed complex and confusing to its contemporaries and that even post-Second World War IR scholars faced problems of disciplinarity and import of/engagement with other disciplines. (Kristensen, 2015, p.17)

Nicolas Guilhot's study on the events and decisions that led to the "invention of international relations theory" allows me to take one step further in Kristensen's problematizations. Guilhot (2011) provides a window into the developments leading to the establishment of the discipline in the aftermath of the Second World War. In light of this, it is possible to argue that what afflicts international relations theory is less an "endemic identity crisis" – in the sense that it is something characteristic of the field only – than a more general "sense of crisis" concerning the relationship between knowledge and the world. The events of the twentieth century are, in this case, especially conducive for the kinds of reflections concerning the limits of human rationality that motivated the entire field of political and philosophical thought in the period. As Guilhot tries to show, the grounds for an autonomous discipline of international politics is forget through a deeply political – and also moral – move, which tried to safeguard the realm of politics from attempts at rationalization and scientificization coming especially from the United States.

In this sense, the discussion over the specificity of international relations theory served, ironically, to keep the rationalist emphasis of American political science from trying to trump down the importance of power and formulate a new legal-institutionalist approach to "correct the evils" of politics during the Cold War. What is central to Guilhot's argument is that political realism was born out of a form of counter-enlightenment thought that was particularly prominent in Europe and which came to bear on American soil especially through the presence of German émigré scholars – most of them trained jurists, such as Morgenthau. For these realists, not only was the hope in a reformed international politics inadequate, it was also detrimental to the actual ability of states to conduct sound national and international politics and therefore promote peace.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This argument is particularly well rehearsed in E. H. Carr's pre-war opus, *The twenty-years Crisis*, and it would persist in other authors writing after the war – unaltered or even magnified in face of the growth of behaviorism in the American scenario. See discussion in Chapter 3.

## 2.5

### Conclusion

Not everything that comes out of these different (yet somehow related) questions that are being posed by international relations theorists today is of a kind. Yet a number of them remind of some enduring problems with which international relations theory has struggled since its very articulation as a discipline. When the EJIR issue poses anew the question of “crisis” or “end” of international relations theory, and Millennium brings back the problem of science; or when Jackson and Nexon want to assess the “health of international relations theory;” or even when Brown and Williams, in different ways, speak of some limit of contemporary critical approaches to think politically about the future; they all seem to be rehearsing some familiar themes which have animated international relations theory.

A gnawing sense of crisis has in fact been a constant feature of the discipline. When one looks back to the works of Norman Angell, or E.H. Carr, Reinhold Niebuhr, or even Hans Morgenthau, one is struck by the fact that, despite their significant differences, they all shared a certain sense of urgency to respond to some impending political crisis, both conceptually and politically. For all of them, it seemed clear that the ideas men held about the world had a direct impact into the workings of such a world, and therefore, creating a better world – or simply countering the development of a tragic future – depended on the ability to formulate ideas, concepts or theories that could adequately comprehend and address the grave issues that afflicted politics in the twentieth century.

Paying attention to this “self-reflexivity” tied to the diagnosis of crisis present in the works of international relations’ “classical theorists” – which seemed to disappear from disciplinary discussion during the 1970s and 1980s – has allowed some contemporary scholars to understand, contrary to more conventional accounts of the disciplinary history, that such an all-encompassing sense of crisis does not ensue from the specificity or exclusivity of international relations as the realm of violence and disorder. Rather than being a characteristic or specificity of the field of international relations, this sense of crisis – at once moral, political, intellectual – refers to a much bigger and more profound aspect of

modern politics and modern subjectivities.<sup>19</sup>

As such, the questions posed by these journals point to the growing recognition among international relations theorists of the normative commitments and political implications of their theories in the constitution of reality. Furthermore, they tie international relations theory to a much wider problematization concerning the limits and possibilities of human knowledge and action. They ultimately point to international relations theory's involvement with the questions of the Enlightenment – something Williams' article in the EJIR issue tries to articulate, and which will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 6.

Instead of trying to decipher the meanings of each of these contributions, I would rather inquire about the conditions of possibility for their existence; i.e. what is the historical-philosophical scenario which allows for the same kinds of efforts to be made anew and claim novelty, even though, as Kristensen shows, they very much rehearse some of the same questions – if only in light of a different set of circumstances? This seems to me to be the question still lacking in this debate – and therefore, a question that might take us away from the exclusive disciplinary narrative.

Before embarking on the next step of the argument, it is important to remark that, no matter how authors situate themselves in the theory versus practice debate, or how they interpret the role of theory in producing knowledge about international relations, they all ground their arguments in terms of an unquestioned “subject of knowledge.” All of the positions find fault in the others for the way they arrange or structure their understanding of the world, and provide a different grid for doing so. Rarely we find a position – optimistic or pessimistic towards the crisis of theorizing – that questions the stakes of “pursuing knowledge” in itself. Even when authors open space for the peaceful coexistence between differing positions – and therefore celebrate pluralism – the subject doing the knowing remains unchanged, unaccounted for, uninquired. In this sense, Sylvester (2007) certainly offers something else to the debate when she proposes

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<sup>19</sup> A growing body of literature has been reengaging classical theorists – especially Morgenthau – with a concern in writing the “normative moment” back into international relations theory. This constitutes important part of the context for this discussion on critique and crisis in international relations theory that I try to engage in the larger scope of my research, and will be discussed in more detail on Chapter 6. This literature includes authors such as: Richard Ned Lebow, Michael C. Williams, Oliver Jütersonke, William Scheuerman, and Séan Molloy.

to move our knowledge practices more towards the arts, in which both artist and viewer participate on the knowing process, thus making the search for unity or the attempt to control pluralism a Sisyphean task.

What I am signaling at with this brief provocation is the need to connect the disciplinary sense of crisis that accompanies the development of international relations theory – and that has become a pervasive account in the most immediate engagements in the field<sup>20</sup> – to the political, intellectual, and philosophical conditions of its existence. These are related to the debates leading to the creation of an autonomous field of international relations in the mid-twentieth century – and, I will argue, with a much more encompassing and difficult question of the possibility of knowledge in a disenchanted world. Thus, the next chapters will try to tackle each of these links, in order to assess the possibility of critique in international relations theory.

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<sup>20</sup> As I drafted this dissertation, another indication of the importance of this debate about crisis came to light. The theme of 11<sup>th</sup> Pan-European Conference of International Relations to be held in Barcelona, Spain, in September 13-16, 2017 concerns *The politics of International Studies in an Age of Crisis*. This offers some further indication that the problems discussed throughout these chapters are not likely to go away anytime soon.

## Crisis and the invention of international relations theory

The almost natural association between the birth of the discipline of international relations and the unparalleled destruction brought about by the wars of the twentieth century, in particular the Second World War, makes of crisis a commonplace of the discourses in/about the field. As Martin Wight's prominent portrayal of the discipline stated, "what for political theory is the extreme case (as revolution or civil war) is for international theory the regular case." (Wight, 1960, p. 48) Furthermore, the longstanding practice of superposing international relations theory and the "canon of realist thought," which is then premised on the ancient wisdom of a Thucydides or a Machiavelli, has also gone a long way into creating a self-image of the discipline as particularly prone to reflecting about those critical instances of human relations that fall short of the rules, laws and moral parameters of modern societies – "the realm of recurrence and repetition." (Wight, 1960, p. 43) In these visions of the discipline, international relations theory can be distinctively framed as a political theory of crisis.

My argument, however, is that we need both a larger understanding of crisis, as well as of international relations theory in order to begin to grasp the full implication of their interrelationship. As every political concept, that of crisis is not a purely descriptive and representational one which allows us to grasp instances of disorder and disruption of the normal structures of society; the concept of crisis is deeply productive of a temporal and political account of reality, in which certain forms of subjectivities are (re)produced by excluding alternative possibilities.

By navigating through some of the recent historiography of the field and reengagements with the so-called "founding fathers" of the discipline, this chapter aims to indicate a much more profound aspect which makes international relations theory so deeply intertwined with the idea of crisis. In this sense, this and the next chapters are intricately intertwined: while the present chapter engages with the problems that spanned the creation of international relations theory in the middle of the twentieth century, in order to show how crisis is at the basis of these

narratives, and therefore, it is an integral part of the constitution of international relations theory as an autonomous realm of inquiry; the following chapter tries to engage with the full implications of a narrative of crisis by looking at how it can be traced back to the Enlightenment attempts to offer parameters and banisters in light of a world of disenchantment, from which the gods have departed, and finitude has to ground all of the possibilities for knowledge, action, hope. Together, I hope these chapters may offer a clearer understanding of the role international relations theory plays in this larger problem of modern politics.

Whereas the previous chapter tried to present the narrative of a discipline in crisis as being a recurring way of framing the theoretical engagements – and disengagements – in the field, this chapter will look for deeper political, philosophical and axiological roots of this narrative of crisis. The aim is, first, to be able to understand the crisis of theory as the intellectual, perhaps more manageable side of a theory of crisis. But this is not a way to argue once again that international relations is the realm of crisis, chaos and power, as much as it is a way to point to international relations theory as the locus where modernity as crisis gets reproduced.

Recent scholarship has been effective to show that “classical” realists are not exactly bloodthirsty guardians of *realpolitik* as they were portrayed in the traditional canon. Rather, by dislocating the disciplinary narratives and the already-settled seats these authors were said to occupy, it was possible to present their contributions in more nuanced colors, as participating in difficult and relevant debates about the role law and morality could play in both national and international politics, and offering insightful commentaries as to the nature and functions of the political. By inquiring them outside of the disciplinary cage in which they were for a long time made to fit, and instead locating them in a trans-disciplinary conversation between philosophers, political thinkers, historians, jurists; as well as a transatlantic conversation of sorts between European sensibilities and America’s new realities and responsibilities in the twentieth century, the criticism and skepticism that they bring to bear in the study of politics becomes more stimulating, even if one is not willing to concede a special place for them in the hall of the great critical theorists of international relations theory (Guzzini, 1998; Levine, 2012).



Recognizing the importance of posing such questions anew, and the quality of the contributions that have emerged around these figures, this chapter starts to inquire into the way early realist thinkers brought “crisis” to bear in the heart of international relations theory. In fact, the argument developed along these pages signal to the way the “crisis of theory” shown in the last chapter to constitute a familiar narrative about the field connects back to the political, philosophical and intellectual problems leading up to the consolidation of international relations theory as an autonomous realm of inquiry. In tracing such connections, I aim to provide grounds on which to open international relations theory to what I consider a much more important discussion on the conditions of possibility for political thought and action and, above all, the possibility of critique in international relations theory.

### 3.1.

#### **The politics of theory and the invention of a discipline**

In his perhaps path-breaking research on the origins of international relations as an autonomous academic discipline, Nicolas Guilhot (2008; 2011) has provided a provocative and insightful approach to international relations theory, which dislocates both traditional and revisionist historiographies in the field. One of the great contributions of his work has been to call attention to the fabricated coherence that is imposed on the discipline of international relations by different kinds of historiographical approaches to the field, and the ensuing consequences of such impositions.

His argument targets not only the conventional “Whig” histories that used to represent the field as being develop through a series of “great debates,” but also the kind of revisionist historiographical literature which has been responsible for much of the contemporary disciplinary accounts (Lebow, 2003; Williams, 2005; 2007; Molloy, 2006; Tjalve, 2008; Bell, 2008). The latter, even if it revolutionizes the internal organization and stories that historically structure the narrative about international relations theory, still keeps intact the canon of the field, both in the images of the main authors and the central concepts, works and ideas. In so doing, “they rarely move beyond the hermeneutic horizon of the officially constituted

field,” which may “actually reinforce it by restoring its ‘true’ identity.” (Guilhot, 2011, p. 3)<sup>21</sup>.

In this sense, Guilhot’s narrative takes a somewhat different route towards its object: first, it does not start from the “classical texts” and attempts to restate their meaning and importance. Rather, it looks into the “set of upstream decisions, external resources, and processes of differentiation” (Guilhot, 2011, p. 7) through which international relations theory was established as a separate disciplinary project, giving an account of the conditions of possibility for some authors, ideas and texts to assume a classical status in the first place. By focusing on the transcripts of the 1954 meeting organized and sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation with the aim of discussing and encouraging the development of a theoretical scholarship in international politics, Guilhot’s enterprise provides a different narrative about the profound intertwinement between the intellectual move to erect a theory of international politics and a political and normative stance towards issues afflicting mid-twentieth century. In doing so, he has been able to argue that there is nothing that makes international relations theory particularly related to the timeless wisdom of power politics; erecting the autonomous field was, instead, a strategic position against both the liberalist faith on rational social reform and the associated belief on value-relativism.

According to Guilhot, the rift opened between social scientists and international relations theorists in the years following the end of the Second World War owed primarily to the different understandings of authors concerning the role rationality could play in guiding or controlling politics. This rift, clearly demarcated in Morgenthau’s *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (1947) – the first book written upon his arrival in the United States – has been differently framed as the science/politics conundrum, and sometimes as the morality/politics chasm. But, as Guilhot argues, international relations theory and political theory did not exist in their demarcated form in the aftermath of the war. Quite on the contrary, there was widespread agreement about the similar natures of domestic and international politics, even if their processes might operate differently. In this

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<sup>21</sup> A deeper incursion into the prevailing narratives of this revisionist bibliography will appear in Chapter 6.

sense, nobody seemed determined to advance an argument in favor of the autonomy of international relations theory.

However, the years after the war would witness the advance of a bahavioralist revolution in the field of political science, which generated much discontent among those thinkers – mostly émigré scholars – who saw politics as ultimately impervious to rational manipulation. The argument in favor of the autonomy of international relations theory *vis-à-vis* political science was devised and socially engineered precisely in the course of this disagreement taking form mainly inside American universities. Behaviorally-inclined scientists attempting to devise a science of politics to match the advancements of economy, for instance, were countered by scholars that understood scientific methods to be ultimately inadequate – and even outright dangerous – for thinking about politics. For Guilhot, then, the creation of international relations theory as a distinct field of inquiry must be understood as a “boundary work,” a process that aimed to articulate “an alternative view of politics,” which could only be done “through increased field differentiation vis-à-vis mainstream political science.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 283)

Guilhot’s research makes it possible to argue that, what has been variously portrayed as a methodological difference (between behaviorists/scientists and traditionalists) reflected in fact a much deeper disagreement, revolving around competing understandings about the *limits, purposes and possibilities of knowledge in the modern world*. They offer different philosophies of knowledge concerning the relationship between theory and the world, which leads them to think of politics rather differently. The move that invents international relations theory has a politics behind theory, which cannot be resolved by theoretical engagement alone. Debates over theory are at once ontological, epistemological, methodological and ultimately axiological, for they revolve around the relationship between mind and the world – the question which animates modern philosophy at least since Descartes.

### 3.1.1

#### The politics of knowledge: the role of values and power

Can one arrive at a science of politics? What is the role rationality can or should play in the political arena? Is it an instrumentalist role of allowing more predictability and control over the practical processes, an ends-means calculation of political processes? These are the problems animating theoretical discussion in political intellectual scenario during the 1940s and 1950s, in the threshold of the invention of international relations theory. (Guilhot, 2011)

Postwar political science was marked by a certain anxiety concerning its lack of methodology, which put it in a significantly weaker position *vis-à-vis* economics, for instance, which had already understood the importance of a systematic inquiry into matters. In a scenario in which the discipline was driven more by its subject-matter than by its methods, political scientists stood in an unprivileged position in the production of knowledge about politics, following outside pressures instead of an agreed upon agenda, and leaving much to non-academic figures. According to Guilhot, “what was at stake in these debates was the legitimacy of political science as a scientific project,” which led to a generalized sense “that this project was in crisis.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 285) Most of this debate revolved around two separate but interdependent issues: the role of values and the rationality of politics.

Those arguing in favor of a science of politics would particularly stress the need for value relativism, i.e. for a kind of knowledge concerned with causal relationships rather than with ultimate ends. Science should be committed to empiricism, objectivism and rational inference, steering away from normative considerations. However, such a detachment between theory and values had been profoundly questioned after World War II, especially (but not exclusively) by émigré scholars who had problematized the moral blindness of a rationality driven only by instrumental interests. The divorce between knowledge and morality that was at the heart of the scientific project was seen by such figures as the greatest danger to be avoided by a politically mature thought.

In parallel to such a discussion concerning the proper character of legitimate knowledge, another issue would provoke a rift between scholars

concerning the proper relationship between reason and politics. Here, it was less the case of demarcating legitimate from illegitimate knowledge, and more about the capacity of reason to penetrate, comprehend or alter politics. Much of this discussion revolved around the question of *power*, a concept that was certainly not new, but which acquired a different meaning in the rhetoric of those who wanted to ground the primacy of the political, thus trying to convey the view of an ultimately limited scientific rationality. An immanent irrationality – historical, psychological, natural – was proper to the human condition – in a view largely inherited from Nietzsche<sup>22</sup> – and it put a final barrier to the capacities of scientific reason. According to Guilhot, “the new focus on power [...] was very much the symptom of the *crisis of confidence* that affected scientific rationalism.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 287, my emphasis)

Scholars concerned with international relations were deeply engaged with these issues that, at the time, were being debated inside the discipline of political science. This created the opportunity for a proto-disciplinary discussion on the nature of international politics. However, since this discussion was premised on the idea that there was no method proper to the study of international politics, and that the latter was an interdisciplinary subfield, there followed a tendency to simply import the dominant criteria prevailing in the other disciplines. However, a number of scholars – realist scholars – were radically against the idea of a value-free political science, and they came to realize that disciplinary and theoretical autonomy was the only way to resist the positivistic tendencies of science.

As Guilhot makes clear, despite their reduced numbers and influence, this group of scholars would however grow in importance due to sustained support from the Rockefeller Foundation – especially from the Division for the Social Sciences, which “acted as the midwife of IR theory.” Thus, “by assembling a network of scholars who shared similar views but belonged to different institutional or disciplinary areas,” Guilhot argues, “the [Rockefeller] Foundation

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<sup>22</sup> Morgenthau’s intellectual biographer, Christoph Frei (2001) has offered an acute insight into his early commitment to a Nietzschean worldview, in a narrative that dislocates the centrality usually ascribed to Weber in his thought. According to Frei, the difficulties that made him turn to Nietzsche are deeply related to his social awkwardness and the difficult relationship with his father and friends. His background as a German Jew is a source of much insight into the formulation of his thought. For a better account of Morgenthau’s formative years, see Frei, 2001, pp. 11-26; for the importance of Nietzsche and the will to power, see pp. 93-113.

contributed to the emergence of an intellectual counterforce to the confident liberalism of the 1950s and its scientific manifestations in the study of international politics.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 289)

Inquiring into the incentives of the Foundation to sponsor this debate, Guilhot finds that it was driven by the perception that the work of these realists, many of which were émigré scholars who were trained jurists, gave enough credentials to mount a counterargument against the current legalist approach to international affairs going on in the American culture. After the war, the Division of Social Sciences of the Rockefeller Foundation was deeply influenced by “the crisis of the philanthropic model” which led to “the crisis of scientific rationalism placed at the service of social reform.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 290) Furthermore, the entrance of Kenneth W. Thompson as Head of the Program on International Relations established in 1953–1954 brought the institution very close to Morgenthau’s views on the need to ground a separate discipline of international relations.

Thompson had been Morgenthau’s student and his close colleague, and he is a central figure to understand why the Rockefeller Foundation would come to support the emergence of the new field of study. Along with other institutions, the Foundation helped to finance a cycle of regional conferences in 1946, from which a perception grew that the realist power position was more adequate to think politics during the Cold War. Law could not prevent political escalation, since it was profoundly amenable to being itself politicized; diplomacy was not a statistical calculation; and international disputes could not be solved by social science. Thus, the decision to advance a “theory of international politics” was taken in 1953 by Thompson, who argued that all the criteria for making it an academic discipline had already been met. According to the Program for International Studies that he had drafted,

[...] the field had a core focus (the state and power politics); efforts were made toward developing appropriate methodology; and ‘inventories have been drawn up by individual scholars, universities and institutes, of topics and concrete projects which would best serve the development of general principles in the field and their validation through systematic inquiry’ (Thompson *apud* Guilhot, 2008, p. 292)

Despite of his relative invisibility inside the traditional historiography of international relations theory, Thompson played a central role not only in furthering the autonomy of the field, but also in the definition of the main lines according to which the discipline should develop. He was the academic entrepreneur who argued for the need to counter the behaviorism of the Princeton School, drafting by February, 1954, a list of centers and scholars researching about international relations in Chicago and Columbia, from which were selected the participants for the 1954 Conference on Theory, which set the stage for the official foundation of the discipline of International Relations.

According to Guilhot, the organization of this conference represented “an exercise in social engineering,” by bringing together a group of handpicked scholars who shared an anti-behaviorist position and an interest in the study of power politics to discuss “the possibility and the nature of a theory of international politics, its relevance to foreign policy-making, and the institutional resources available,” such as “PhD opportunities, publication outlets, regular seminars, departmental bases, relations with statesmen and policy makers, etc.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 294-5) Participants included: Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, William T. R. Fox, Arnold Wolfers<sup>23</sup>, Dean Rusk, Paul Nietze, Kenneth W. Thompson, Dorothy Fosdick and a number of nonacademic observers.

But besides their common position against a science of politics, this group did not agree on much else. Contrary to the disciplinary lore which posits a clear rift between “realism” and “idealist liberal internationalism,” “a closer look reveals indeed that realism provided a common language for ultimately divergent intellectual and ideological projects.” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 295) Guilhot’s account of the conference and its participants shows, instead, how the idea of a “science” of international politics was instrumentally appropriated as a way to counter the prevailing position of behaviorist political science, without any intention of making the study of international relations a *de facto* science.

Rather, “science” became a trump card, which was used by these scholars to charge against “objective, empirical, data-gathering social science,” (Guilhot, 2008, p. 298) seen as the ultimate cause for the social, political and moral decay

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<sup>23</sup> Having developed an interest for behaviorist methods since the 1940s, Wolfers represented a dissenting voice in the group. For a better understanding of his position, see his contribution to the 1954 conference in Guilhot, 2011, pp 281-4 (Appendix 6).

of the Western world. In fact, Jackson (2011) argues that such disputes over theory and science have always been part of the life of international relations, having a history as long as the field itself.<sup>24</sup> However, playing the science card has more often than not been a way to delegitimize alternative approaches without engaging with their arguments and merits – thus showing no substantive commitment to a philosophical stance. Indeed, it is Morgenthau himself who argued that “no political thinker can expect to be heard who would not, at least in his terminology, pay tribute to the spirit of science.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 33) In this sense, the multiple references to a theory of international relations at this point were nothing more than paying lip service to a scientific-political position against which realists were trying to make a stand.

The point of discussing ‘theory’ was to establish a demarcation line vis-à-vis the behavioral sciences and to build into such theory the antibodies that would prevent the capture of IR by the social sciences. The items on the agenda included a discussion not only of the ‘nature’ of theory but also, more significantly perhaps, of the ‘limits’ of theory: a clear reminder, against the cognitive pretensions of the social sciences, that power politics was restive to complete rationalization. In fact, IR theory not only had limits: it was essentially defined by these limits. (Guilhot, 2008, p. 297)

As it turns out, Jackson (2011) argues that this strategic or instrumental use of the concept of science throughout the early years of the discipline was not significantly changed during the so-called second debate. The return of the abject behaviorists against whom the discipline had first been structured drew a blow into the realists’ hopes of sustaining a political rationality in which there was room for “the political” – one that could articulate the importance of prudence and virtue on political matters, instead of resorting to mathematical equations or abstract logics. As the behaviorists made their foray into the discipline, they increasingly tried to define the methodology proper to a “science of politics” that could go beyond the speculative propositions offered by historical and philosophical inquiries. One would expect, then, a more mature discussion on the role of science, what it could hope to achieve and its limits to account for the political realm.

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson discusses at length the multiple ways in which science was used in the early disputes over the discipline. See Jackson, 2011, esp. Chapter 1.



However, as Jackson (2011) goes out to show, this hope never materialized: in the following decades, the (by-now) established discipline of international relations saw few mature discussions about the meaning, potentiality and limits of a scientific endeavor, and instead witnessed a growing division between two opposite camps, neither of which necessarily had much internal coherence, but that served to legitimize an account of science as a logical, deductive, empiricist and numerical endeavor, and delegitimize those that refused to speak in the name of science. In this sense, the simplification of the Bull-Kaplan polemic helped the entrenchment of two opposite positions, without ever truly debating what would a political science be about. So much was the internal incoherence of these groups that, when Kenneth Waltz – who Bull (1966) considered to be a “traditionalist scholar” – wrote his seminal work, in 1979, he opened with a quasi-manifesto against the incoherence of scientific accounts that could not recognize the difference between mathematical equations and hypothesis-testing. (Waltz, 1979) It seems, then, that this lack of serious – philosophically, normatively and politically aware – debate on the role of science and knowledge had a direct effect on the current-but-familiar claim about a discipline in crisis.

For all its impetus to stand aside the scientification of political thought, the project that led to the invention of international relations theory, according to Guilhot (2008; 2011), ultimately failed. Scientific rationalism soon made its inroads into the newfound discipline, and by the early 1960s, the traditionalists were being attacked for their lack of a proper theory of international relations. Their contradictory and shifting positions towards the role of science and normativity were ultimately defeating and invited a lot of misunderstandings in later interpretations of the field.

What comes out of these studies into the invention of an autonomous discipline, however, is an image of international relations theory evolving from a negative consensus: not already sure what it should be, it was nonetheless necessary to counter the liberal account of science as an instrument of rational social reform. Its founders saw in scientific rationalism a continuation of the utopian view that characterized the legalism of the interwar years. A political – and not only intellectual – crisis had to be countered in order to regain a realistic

view of politics: it was not a new crisis, but one that traced back to the Enlightenment. In this sense, Guilhot argues, *international relations theory was born out of a critique that was not essentially academic or methodological: it was a critical stance against the Enlightenment's faith in progress and rational social reform.*

In what remains of this chapter, then, I will trace how the concept of crisis came to bear in the idea of international politics, by engaging specifically with the works of Morgenthau and Carr. Due to their central position in any narrative international relations theory tells of itself, this engagement allows me to glimpse at the high stakes involved in a discipline that is mired by the problematic of crisis through and through.

### 3.2

#### **Crisis and the role of a science of international politics: Carr's critical realism**

The ambiguity of E. H. Carr's treatment of both utopianism and realism has made room for much controversy concerning his position in the field of international relations theory. Easily mistaken for an arch-realist, a thinker who put the final nail in the utopian coffin; sometimes depicted as an earlier critical thinker (Linklater, 1997), a post-positivist of sorts (Jones, 1997), and a precursor of the international society tradition of the English School (Dunne, 1998); the only conclusion one can draw is that a nuanced reading of his oeuvre does not let him fall easily into any single category.

Nonetheless, Carr is certainly one of the authors who most profoundly contributed to the way the idea of crisis came to bear within the realm of international relations. In his disciplinary masterpiece<sup>25</sup> *The twenty years crisis (1919-1939): An introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Carr sets out to understand the interwar period as being marked by "the final and irrevocable breakdown of the conditions which made the nineteenth century order possible."

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<sup>25</sup> Carr's later works would specially focus in a diligent study of the history of the USSR, as seen in his 14-volume work on *A History of Soviet Russia*. Some of his major works would also attest to the failure of the liberal philosophy in the twentieth century and the waning of the liberal state, such as in *Conditions of Peace*, published in 1942; *Nationalism and After*, published in 1945; and *The Soviet Impact on the Western World*, in 1947. See Cox (2010).

(Carr, 1946, p. 236) His formulation offered one of the most profound attacks on the liberal philosophy of peace sustained by the concept of the harmony of interests – a concept that structured political life in the nineteenth century. This attack was deeply intertwined with the conviction that realism was a critical weapon to be used against a political account that had become utopian for its incapacity to accept empirical evidence – thus leading to a generalized, international crisis.

To be sure, Carr was not making a case against “crisis” per se, since he acknowledged that “periods of crisis have been common in history.” (Carr, 1946, p. 224) Rather, his criticism concerns the breakdown of an order that could not be salvaged from its ruins through right reasoning or the right principles. This generalized crisis had affected the very validity or applicability of such principles. Hence, Carr is not trying to account for the minutiae of the international political scenario during the interwar years; nor is he trying to understand the political, social and economic aspects of turbulences taking over different national constituencies. Instead, this generalized crisis was “the real international crisis of the modern world.” (Carr, 1946, p. 236) It is worth recalling his critical characterization of the crisis at length:

The characteristic feature of the crisis of the twenty years between 1919 and 1939 was the abrupt descent from the visionary hopes of the first decade to the grim despair of the second, from a utopia which took little account of reality to a reality from which every element of utopia was rigorously excluded. The mirage of the nineteen-twenties was, as we now know, the belated reflexion of a century past beyond recall – the golden age of continuously expanding territories and markets, of a world policed by the self-assured and not too onerous British hegemony, of a coherent ‘Western’ civilisation whose conflicts could be harmonised by a progressive extension of the area of common development and exploitation, of the easy assumptions that what was good for one was good for all and that what was economically right could not be morally wrong. The reality which had once given content to this utopia was already in decay before the nineteenth century had reached its end. The utopia of 1919 was hollow and without substance. It was without influence on the future because it no longer had any roots in the present. (Carr, 1946, p. 224)

The roots for liberalism’s widespread acceptance during the nineteenth century rested, for Carr, in the way it had made moral action – which means action sustained by the pursuit of the good – a matter of right reasoning. After the

breakdown of the medieval system “which presupposed a universal ethic and a universal political system based on divine authority,” (Carr, 1946, p. 41) political philosophy became concerned with justifying obedience to immanent rules of conduct. In the absence of transcendental guarantees for human behavior and the realist attack on the idea of universal ethics, Benthamite liberalism managed to provide some degree of faith in the power of human rationality to unveil the universal laws of nature.

This form of utopian faith in reason, designed in a British context of expanding markets, was predicated on a supposed harmony of interests that brought the individual and the group together in a path of righteousness through reason. By subsuming the possibility of identifying and following the moral path of progress and maturity, this faith in reason would be the basis upon which the postwar order was thought and designed. The hallmark of such thought is identified in Woodrow Wilson’s activism, predicated on the belief that “dispassionate scientists” (Carr, 1946, p. 18) would assure the achievement of peace in international issues<sup>26</sup>.

According to Carr, however, this intellectual transposition of Western liberal theories “to a period and to countries whose stage of development and whose practical needs were utterly different from those of Western Europe in the nineteenth century” could only lead to “sterility and disillusionment.” (Carr, 1946, p. 27) The continued defense of *a priori* rational principles and abstract wishful thinking against the careful observation of reality made international political thought ultimately impervious to political experience, thus leading to the grave crisis that ravaged the world in the interwar years, which saw the unleashing of brutalities inside the “civilized world.” Contrary to a common view at the time that attributed the crisis to the ascendance to power of totalitarian regimes, Carr argued instead that “the relation of totalitarianism to the crisis was clearly one not of cause, but of effect. Totalitarianism was not the disease, but one of the symptoms” of the grave international crisis of the twentieth century. (Carr, 1946, p. 225)

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<sup>26</sup> Carr builds his arguments strongly against the views held by Alfred Zimmern, Hersch Lauterpacht, Norman Angell, and Arnold Toynbee, who, according to him, saw the current crisis as exceptional, rather than built into the very fabric of modern politics – and therefore thought it could be resolved through rationalist solutions. See Carr, 1946, p. 40.

In the aftermath of the First World War, efforts to build a workable League of Nations on the basis of rationalist principles were coupled with the faith in the moral and rational superiority of the public opinion. However, the failure of these premises to achieve in political reality generated diagnoses about the stupidity and wickedness of the age, instead of calling attention to the inapplicability of those premises to the current political scenario. Against this positions, Carr argues that a more realistic assessment of reality would show that a rift had been opened between theory and practice, and therefore, the current theories and hopes were inadequate and incapable of forging reality at will.

No matter how popular the doctrine of the harmony of interests had been in the past, Carr argues that the rise of mass societies made them ultimately untenable, by showing that the real problem was one of distribution, and not only production. In Britain, the breakdown in the consensus about the harmony of interests led to the development of a planned economy right after the war, as a way to provide for those who did not benefit from *laissez-faire*. American economy, however, having deeply benefited from the war, would continue to endorse *laissez-faire* politics at least until the Crash of 1929. According to Carr, the postwar prominence of the United States thus helped to expand an already corrupt imaginary to international political thinking. In light of this, he claimed that the challenge facing political thought at the time was “nothing less than the complete bankruptcy of the conception of morality which has dominated political and economic thought for a century and a half;” as a consequence, he concluded that “the synthesis of morality and reason, at any rate in the crude form in which it was achieved by nineteenth-century liberalism, is untenable.” (Carr, 1946, p. 62)

According to Carr, the moral philosophy behind the harmony of interests had been eroded in the moment it was realized that it was not possible to accommodate the good of the individual with the good of the entire society. Appeals to social Darwinism were able to give an afterlife to the idea of harmony of interests, by coupling the possibility of progress to the elimination of the weak. However, as Carr remarks, neither Germans, Italians, Poles, nor Frenchman, sat well with the liberal-rationalist idea that war was not beneficial; in fact, they regretted losing the war more than fighting it.

In light of this, the international defense of a common interest in peace was interpreted by Carr as a weapon serving the interests of the economically strong

nations (who had won the war) against the weak and defiant ones. For him, “the clash of interests is real and inevitable; and the whole nature of the problem is distorted by an attempt to disguise it.” (Carr, 1946, p. 60) In light of his grim diagnosis of the state of political thought in the threshold of the Second War, Carr believed that the only way to rebuild the crumbling foundations of the international order was “to examine the flaws in the structure which led to its collapse,” and the best way to do this is “by analysing the realist critique of the utopian assumptions.” (Carr, 1946, p. 62)

### 3.2.1

#### **Realism as critique: the solution for the international crisis**

In this sense, Carr’s concept of crisis served both as a diagnosis of the critical political situation afflicting the world in the interwar years, and as a call for an immediate transformation on the kind of political knowledge being produced. For him, these two aspects were deeply intertwined: the political crisis had its roots in the “the rift between theory and practice” which had “assumed alarming dimensions,” (Carr, 1946, p. 32) and therefore, it could only be corrected by a thoroughly realist – historical – analysis. Hence, the realism Carr asks for is not based on any defined substance, but serves as a critical weapon against the utopian aspirations characteristic of the initial stages of the infant science of international politics.

According to Carr, “purpose, whether we are conscious of it or not, is a condition of thought; and thinking for thinking's sake is as abnormal and barren as the miser's accumulation of money for its own sake.” (Carr, 1946, p. 3) In the social sciences, particularly, the purpose could not be separated from the facts, since “it is itself one of the facts.” (Carr, 1946, p. 4) In practice, “purpose and analysis become part and parcel of a single process,” since political analysis – differently from the physical sciences – always affects the object under investigation, becoming itself one of the facts to be analyzed. This profound intertwinement between political thought and action leads Carr to define political science as “the science not only of what *is*, but of what *ought to be*.” (Carr, 1946, p. 5) This tension between reality and values runs throughout the entire realist

contribution in the early years of the discipline.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, attempting to build a science without accounting for reality was, for Carr, as utopian as trying to get entirely rid of purposes in order to conduct inquiry. After all, “the wish is father to the thought. Teleology precedes analysis.” (Carr, 1946, p. 3) Rather than aiming at a value-free social science, theorists should instead search for proper historical assessment and judgment of their position, so that their desires and purposes do not impair their ability to conduct analysis. In this sense, realism should act critically and cynically, for “no political utopia will achieve even the most limited success unless it grows out of political reality.” (Carr, 1946, p. 10)

Carr traces the development of realism to Machiavelli, to whom he attributes the formulation of a threefold realist sensibility: the idea of history as a sequence of cause and effect not amenable to rational manipulation; the conviction that theory should derive inevitably from practice, and not the other way around; and, finally, the view according to which ethics ultimately derived from politics, having no ulterior basis. A German realist tradition flowing through Hegel and Marx is considered by Carr to have updated the tenets of realism to the modern imaginary, by positing the possibility of progress through history – a progress that was however unknown and ultimately resistant to direction. In its historical development, realism thus became more deterministic, even if less pessimistic. “Progress became part of the inner essence of the historical process; and mankind was moving forward towards a goal which was left undefined, or was differently defined by different philosophers.” (Carr, 1946, p. 65)

According to Carr, then, reality was conditional upon the historical process, and the job of the analyst was to carefully investigate and reveal the latter – for “history creates rights, and therefore right.” By approaching the functioning of history, realism showed “the relative and pragmatic character of thought itself,” (Carr, 1946, p. 67) making way for the development of a political science premised on rigorous analysis. A proper “sociology of knowledge” was the key

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<sup>27</sup> As I will argue in the following pages, the tension between *Sein* and *Sollen* runs through the entire intellectual architecture built by Morgenthau – and is one of the main reasons for his reference to Niebuhr’s dualistic characterization of politics. The trained jurist would begin his investigations deeply concerned with the legal positivist attempt to bridge the gap between the *is* and the *ought to be*. This concern would persist even during the twists and turns his career would take upon his arrival in the US and his turn to political science.

for a realist assessment of the historical bearing of values and standards deemed universal by the utopians.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, this historical sensibility showed how the defense of the absolute validity of such values was ultimately a political weapon used to further situated interests.

With their critical weapons turned against the universalist pretensions of the utopian, realists provided the basis for understanding that peace was not neutral: it served the purposes of those who were satisfied with their position in the political equation. Morality, and especially that kind of morality which tries to claim universal validity, was seen by Carr as a weapon to disguise the national interest and produce generalized conformity. Thus he claims that

[...] theories of social morality are always the product of a dominant group which identifies itself with the community as a whole, and which possesses facilities denied to subordinate groups or individuals for imposing its view of life on the community. (Carr, 1946, p. 79)

For Carr, there is no international morality apart from a balance of power. Collective security becomes a slogan when peace by a single dominant power is not possible. Human inability to adjust perfectly to moral principles is not a failure to be corrected by right reasoning; it is instead the evidence that universal principles do not exist, and that the interests they disguise are not universal.

### 3.3

#### The issue of power and morality

Having established the importance of a critical turn of realist tools of analysis against the utopian aspirations which led to the “real” international crisis of the twentieth century, Carr is however adamant that it is spurious to try and live without any utopia, and therefore, puts forth the faith that a “new utopia” will have to be built to guide action – even if it must “one day fall to the same weapons.” (Carr, 1946, p. 93)<sup>29</sup> A close reading of this account immediately shows that neither realism nor utopianism are, for Carr, philosophies defined by

<sup>28</sup> For the influence of Karl Mannheim and the sociology of knowledge in the development of Carr’s dialectic between realism and utopia, see Jones (1997).

<sup>29</sup> As his turn to a diligent study of the Bolshevik revolution and the building of the soviet republic will show later, he would find this new utopia in the communist philosophy and its critique of the nationalist liberal state.



any fixed substance. The role these concepts have in his framework is formal: they should serve as practical and analytical guides to be employed dialectically depending on historical conditions. Together, realism and utopianism should provide the only possible basis for “sound political thought and sound political life.” (Carr, 1946, p. 10)

What this dialectical tension between realism and utopia demonstrates is the existence of an unsolvable antagonism between power and morality. For Carr, “two conflicting aspects of human nature” were at the basis of the construction of the modern state: “utopia and reality, the ideal and the institution, morality and power, are from the outset inextricably blended in it.” (Carr, 1946, p. 96) In this sense, the gravest mistake of the interwar utopians had been their attempt to expunge power from politics, turning it into a technical arena to be solved by “dispassionate scientists.” Nonetheless, as much as “it is utopian to ignore the element of power,” one cannot expect realism to be real if it “ignores the element of morality in any world order.” (Carr, 1946, p. 235) In this sense, Carr argues,

[...] the utopian who dreams that it is possible to eliminate self-assertion from politics and to base a political system on morality alone is just as wide off the mark as the realist who believes that altruism is an illusion and that all political action is based on self-seeking. (Carr, 1946, p. 97)

Power offers the basis for authority, but cannot create consent among the governed. This must be achieved through a moral basis that may generate consent, even if it does not create universal and uncontestable validity. Thus, Carr admits that, while “power goes far to create the morality convenient to itself” and that “coercion is a fruitful source of consent,” no international order can rest on these sources alone. In light of the circumstances of the time, he argues, “a new international order and a new international harmony can be built up only on the basis of an ascendancy which is generally accepted as tolerant and unoppressive or, at any rate, as preferable to any practicable alternative.” As a consequence, “the moral task” of any aspiring Power would be to promote the conditions for its creation. (Carr, 1946, p. 236)

Carr thus argues that the basis of any social order rests in its dual role as both that which obliges and which protects: coercion and conscience, morality and power. Politics is always already power politics: power is not something that can

be eliminated from politics as an abnormality which threatens a healthy life. Thinkers would do well to stop laboring on such hypothesis, for “the assumption of the elimination of power from politics could only result from a wholly uncritical attitude towards political problems.” (Carr, 1946, p. 103-4) Power politics, however, cannot be thought of as devoid of a moral consciousness. Indeed, “political action must be based on a co-ordination of morality and power.” (Carr, 1946, p. 97) Any attempt to think of the two spheres as separated cannot be but a convenience predicated on the evasion of “the insoluble problem of finding a moral justification for the use of force.” (Carr, 1946, p. 100)

Based on his dialectical reading of history, Carr sees power politics as the opposition between “haves” and “have-nots” – an opposition that cannot be subsumed under any universal category or solution. For him, *politics is predicated on conflicting systems of morality, and therefore morality itself cannot pose a solution to it*. In this sense, the interwar attempt to see politics as divided between power (the means employed by the dissatisfied powers) and morality (the values pursued by satisfied powers) is seen by Carr as ultimately dangerous. In fact, “it is a clash in which, whatever the moral issue, power politics are equally predominant on both sides.” (Carr, 1946, p. 105)

It was Carr’s conviction then that political thinking had to dwell within this insoluble tension. Any attempt to rid one of the other and to divorce the spheres of morality and power, while “superficially attractive,” ultimately “evades the insoluble problem of finding a moral justification for the use of force.” He thus argues:

We are not in the long run satisfied to believe that what is politically good is morally bad; and since we can neither moralise power nor expel power from politics, we are faced with a dilemma which cannot be completely resolved. The planes of utopia and of reality never coincide. The ideal cannot be institutionalised, nor the institution idealised. (Carr, 1946, p. 100)

Carr’s interpretation of the relationship between power and morality is one of the most important differences of his position *vis-à-vis* that of Morgenthau. In the latter’s assessment, Carr’s work offers an unparalleled contribution to political thought; according to him, “no contemporary thinker, with the exception of Reinhold Niebuhr, has seen more clearly and exposed with more acute brilliance

the essential defects of Western political thought.” (Morgenthau, 1948b, p. 133) Nonetheless, Morgenthau claims that in trying to go beyond a critical assessment of Western political thought and provide “a new synthesis” between realism and utopianism, morality and power, “the overall impression of Mr. Carr’s work is one of failure.” By understanding morality as a historical value, open to criticism and reformulation, Carr turns it into a function of power. Contrary to this position and pleading for a separation between the realms of power and morality, Morgenthau would charge Carr’s position, arguing that “it is a dangerous thing to be a Machiavelli. It is a disastrous thing to be a Machiavelli without *virtú*.” (Morgenthau, 1948b, 134)

What comes out of these accusations is an important debate animating political and philosophical thought in the mid-twentieth century concerning the role power, morality and knowledge should play in molding social reality. Once we confront these problems, the so-called realist canon becomes interestingly more complex than the conventional disciplinary narrative usually portrays it. The point of Morgenthau’s criticism resides specifically in his endorsement of a universal morality that could not be challenged by the political function – anymore than the political sphere could be tainted by moral presuppositions. Morgenthau’s intellectual biographer, Christoph Frei, has been able to offer an insightful portrayal of the apparently contradictory convictions he held as both an analyst and a moralist. In fact, Frei’s assessment is that the same experiences that turned Morgenthau into a dispassionate analyst of empirical reality were at the basis of his strong sense of morality, which gave his thought complex nuances. (Frei, 2001)

Thus, contrary to Carr, to whom any attempt to keep morality and power apart was self-defeating, Morgenthau saw the problem in exact opposite terms: one should learn to recognize the different spheres of morality, mores, law and politics. In his early work on the reality of norms, when he was still a law student in Europe, Morgenthau already addressed the problem of the distinction between *sein* and *sollen*, the *is* and the *ought to be*. Following an entire tradition that goes from Kant to Kelsen, Morgenthau strongly endorses the need to keep these realms separate from each other. His position, instead, tries to account for the way the realm of the *ought to be* could come to influence the realm of the *is*, i.e. to understand what gave reality to norms and values. Having a psychic or physical

bearing, the ought was not, for Morgenthau, a “purely aprioristic category independent of experience, but one in relation to an empirically ascertainable reality.” (Frei, 2001, p. 135) In this sense, the ought functions as the transcendental *a priori* of the empirical, which means that values only find their reality empirically.

Norms cannot be thought of as having validity without this empirical bearing: norms need sanctions, an economy of pleasure and displeasure, which gives them their validity<sup>30</sup>. Law, mores and morality are distinguished not in terms of their content, but for “the modality of the sanction following upon the violation of that rule.” (Frei, 2001, p. 136-7) Unlike law and mores, moral norms are autonomous, since their validity comes from inward sanctions provided by individual conscience. Mores and law, on their turn, are heteronomous norms, deriving their validity from outside sanctions – convention and normative regulation, respectively. For Morgenthau, then, “these normative realms are [...] functionally dependent on social reality. In particular, the law depends on power understood as a potential for psychic or physical sanctions.” (Frei, 2001, p. 137)

Morgenthau’s early debate on the reality of norms already made him skeptical of international law. Since international sanctions were necessarily decentralized, they utterly depended on the “constellations of power and national interest.” (Frei, 2001, p. 139) In light of this, Morgenthau came to espouse the logical necessity of developing a world state, as early as 1934 – long before his turn to realism in political thought. According to Frei, “until the end of his life, he would hold on to this belief in the rational necessity of the world state, ‘unattainable in our world, yet indispensable for the survival of that world’.” (Morgenthau *apud* Frei, 2001, p. 141) Since mores and law had no ability to constrain actions in the international realm, morality had to be given priority as the only restrainer of the use of force to obtain individual benefits.

Morgenthau’s diagnosis of crisis has to be understood in light of his positions concerning morality. For him, God and reason – the usual foundations of morality in the West – had been undermined as foundations for moral action, and this led to a crisis on the moral bearings of modernity. In a letter to his former employer Hugo Sinzheimer, Morgenthau manifests his concern for the way ethics

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<sup>30</sup> According to Frei, this again is Nietzsche’s argument.

had entered into a state of total dissolution: “European morality has been replaced by a multitude of value systems that are irreconcilable in content and – in their ideological guises – sharpen political conflict rather than act to inhibit it normatively.” (Morgenthau *apud* Frei, 2001, p. 142)

In international politics, the only thing that can limit a state’s drive for power is another state’s correlate drive for power. Therefore, war and a precarious balance of power were, for Morgenthau, the only things sustaining the existence of international law. However, the crisis of liberal humanism had made the impact of power politics explosive and dangerous; in his assessment, liberalism was the main responsible for this crisis, by putting too much emphasis on the role of rationality and dismissing the importance of accounting for power. Therefore, it was necessary to rescue humanist values from the liberal equation by which morality had been likened to reason.

These were the questions animating Morgenthau’s thought before embarking to the United States. In his last treatise written in Europe, entitled *Can an objective moral order be established in our time?*, Morgenthau turned to the study of the moral philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Comte, and Nietzsche. Morgenthau argued that “each of these thinkers attempted to reestablish the normative power of moral systems in a specific way, either by ridding metaphysics of any substantive content or by giving it a new substance” (Frei, 2001, p. 175) – they all had failed. For Frei, Morgenthau’s restlessness with such issues demonstrates that he was, in fact, “a fighter on moral grounds against the very essence of politics;” (Frei, 2001, p. 173) he was a humanist and a liberal in the European sense.<sup>31</sup>

His position, as described by the biographer, is *transcendent idealism*, “a system that will be outlined anew exactly thirty years later in *The Purpose of American Politics*.” For Morgenthau, moral values transcended individual human existence, even if their validity and reality were always historical. Following Kant, and against Kelsen, Morgenthau understood that *a priori* values should be protected, for they “serve as ultimate goals and also as standards for evaluating

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<sup>31</sup> For Frei, Morgenthau would sustain a minimalist version of the humanist liberal tradition: life and liberty, peace and order. For an account of his contradictory position as both a critic and a supporter of liberal humanism, see Frei, 2001, pp. 168-177.

thought and action. In their absence, life must remain uncivilized, trivial, barbarian.” (Frei, 2001, p. 166) For Morgenthau, then, the assessment of the crisis is deeper still than in Carr, for it refers to the values that sustain human life, rather than to a historical morality in need of being updated:

It is a ‘crisis of metaphysical consciousness,’ a collective disease of the time, against which isolated individuals are powerless. ‘This verdict confines the moral element to the realm in which it can still retain its objective existence even at this time: the soul of the individual. *To preserve the timeless ethical values here, in their full conceptual clarity, is the moral mission of mindful human beings in our time.*’ (Morgenthau *apud* Frei, 2001, p. 176)

This is the Sisyphean task Morgenthau sets out to fulfill: preach morality knowing its objective existence would never be established. So deep was the analyst’s assessment of this crisis that, according to Frei, “it drove the moralist to the brink of despair.” (Frei, 2001, p. 174)

### 3.4

#### **Crisis crosses the Atlantic: Morgenthau and the Scientific Man**

*Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (1947) was Morgenthau’s first contribution to the new setting he encountered upon his arrival in the United States. While its publication meant a new stage in his academic career, and his engagement with a different audience and debate<sup>32</sup>, Frei argues that it however did not introduce any significant novelty in relation to his previous thought. “What must have looked to outsiders like a penitential turning away from his realist past, was, in fact, a seamless continuation of Morgenthau’s own idealist path.” (Frei, 2001, p. 213) For Frei, then, while the idealist in Morgenthau became more reticent in face of the new historical context, in no way was he absent.

Of course, he now had new targets – as well as new friends. His task was to warn America against her deviant path – morally, politically, scientifically. The crisis he denounces in this context, however, is the same one, referring to the loss of normative validity of ultimate moral values. Thus, *Scientific Man* turns its guns

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<sup>32</sup> After spending a difficult period in New York and Kansas, Morgenthau found a permanent teaching position at the University of Chicago, where he would meet with a strong opposition from the Political Scientists.

against the Chicago School, whose program was “‘essentially atheoretical,’ with a strong emphasis on ‘application’ and an equally strong commitment to the strictest ‘empiricism’;” and he continues, “above all, it was totally imbued with historical optimism and its unshakable faith in progress – and confident that man is capable of understanding, through reason, himself and the world’.” (Morgenthau *apud* Frei, 2001, p. 190) In this context, Morgenthau will offer an ontological argument against behaviorism and rationalism, critiquing its naïve empiricism and the trivialities of quantification.

Morgenthau’s critique of the scientific method and the extreme rationalism populating American politics hinged now on the defense of the autonomy of the realm of politics. His new partners in this crusade would, however, no longer be found in the despised German tradition, but among the American political authors still resisting the turn to scientism. This “candid but gloomy” (Frei, 2001, p. 188) Morgenthau in America remains the realist disciple of Nietzsche – even if the latter is nowhere mentioned in the book; he appeals, instead, to the pre-rationalist thought of Augustine, very much present in the work of Niebuhr.

For Morgenthau, America had the wrong answers to all of the questions posed by critical philosophy since Kant, concerning man’s existence, knowledge and expectations. His *Scientific Man* sets out to understand and critique the crisis of philosophy: “an intellectual moral, and political disease which had its roots in basic philosophic assumptions of the age.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 12) This was a crisis of Western civilization, expressed in the hyper-rationalism that populates political philosophy in the middle of the twentieth-century. What is most striking about this crisis is, for him, the insurmountable gap that had been opened between philosophy and experience in ways that were detrimental to thought as well as action. Again, he targets the political philosophy of liberalism for trying to substitute politics with science, contradiction with certainty, inventiveness with technique. In so doing, liberalism had entirely dismissed the importance of history, which was now seen as an epiphenomenon of a rational scheme, having no productive force on its own.

Morgenthau’s charge is damaging: any philosophy that steers away from experience, that cannot give meaning to the senseless routine of human life,

cannot hope to succeed. His diagnosis at this point is very similar to Carr's, in that he argues that liberalism's failures were responsible for the rise of Nazism.

Man will not live without answers to his questions, and when the answers are not forthcoming from the traditional custodians of Western thought, he will look for them elsewhere. He will turn to any philosophy which seems to be less at variance with his experience than the one in which he can no longer believe. So the Germans rejected, with rationalism and liberalism, the whole Western tradition and embraced in fascism a philosophy which promised to reinterpret their experiences, to guide their actions, and to create a new society. (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 15)

In this way, Morgenthau charges rationalism for being “an intellectual, moral and political disease” whose outward manifestations were evident in the radical political and military crises of the 1930s and 1940s (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 12). This was not to say that reason had no role to play in politics; quite on the contrary, in order to be able to eliminate the destructiveness of power politics, reason had to be coupled with wisdom and moral strength of a form that was not available on the scientific age. Rationalism, instead of using reason to improve politics, had rather tried to obfuscate, or merge politics into science. Social problems came to be seen as intrinsically technical, amenable to social reform; the arbitrariness and chance pertaining to politics were to be reformed or rationalized in the name of order and regularity possible only through science. In this process, “the very field of politics becomes a kind of atavistic residue from a pre-national period.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 31)

For this form of thought, legal positivism would offer the necessary support for a rational perfection of the world. By building a coherent system of positive legislation, rational liberalism was supposed to perform the dual task of keeping at bay the irrational forces from within and without, further expanding the borders of the rational world. The entire state apparatus was seen as a political perversion that hindered progress.

The state, tradition, politics, and violence come to be regarded as something alien to the true order of things, as a kind of outside disturbance like a disease or a natural catastrophe. Society *vs.* state, law *vs.* politics, man *vs.* institutions, reason *vs.* tradition, order *vs.* violence – such are the battle cries of liberalism, and this dichotomy between the true, good order of things, dominated by reason, and its political perversion has determined the course of nineteenth-century political thought. (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 26)



According to Morgenthau, however, the liberal erasure of politics led to a second, more problematic, kind of erasure: that of ethics. For the belief in the definite perfectibility of man and the world through reason involves a further faith in the convergence of politics with ethics, of *sein* and *sollen*. Both realms are thus deprived of their positive functions: politics is emptied from all its inventiveness, the play of rationality and irrationality, of history and time, being instead reduced to a mere rational calculation; ethics, for its turn, completely disappears as an autonomous system of norms, only to become a rationalized principle, one that can be exclusively achieved by the rational, enlightened mind. “The scientifically correct, hence politically sound, solution is of necessity the one required by ethics.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 37) Scientific dominance becomes a reaffirmation of political and moral superiority – and, therefore, of the necessity of expurgating the irrational and immoral enemy.

At this point, Morgenthau’s criticism of liberalism becomes deadening: liberalism does not reject war; in fact, war is only ethically and philosophically condemnable when it contradicts liberal aims, for “the just end may justify the means otherwise condemned.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p.50) At the basis of such a conception lies, according to Morgenthau, liberalism’s misleading confusion between the natures of the individual and the state: national freedom becomes a manifestation of individual freedom; legal principles created to guarantee this freedom become transposable to the international sphere, where they must guarantee the freedom of the nation.

Liberalism’s premises, translated to international law, become even more dangerous. Since the state is not constrained by the same moral imperatives as the individual, international law cannot be but a very weakened attempt at tempering the imperatives of politics and power – specially in the absence of an overarching government. By confusing the natures of these different realms, then, Morgenthau believes that liberalism threatens to empower exactly that which it was destined to exterminate, in that “national unification and democratic liberation, instead of doing away with the only remaining causes of war, intensified international antagonisms and made the broad masses of the peoples active participants in them.” (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 63) To make matters even worse, liberal rationalism does not accept its fallibility, interpreting any contradicting experiences in terms

of an error of calculation. What drives reason in such cases, Morgenthau charges, is irrationality.

In his first contribution to the American political debate, then, Morgenthau's earlier critique of legal positivism and the independency between politics and morality will be translated to his new audience, focusing now on the political effects of liberal rationalism. "Against liberal hopes that politics will soon be replaced if not expunged altogether, Morgenthau thus underscores the permanent nature of the 'political' and politics." (Frei, 2001, p. 198) Rooted in the depths of the human soul, the political is seen as a permanent feature of human existence<sup>33</sup>. As a consequence, in the second edition of his *Politics Among Nations*, in 1954, when Morgenthau had already captured his new audience, he presented *political realism* as a plea for the autonomy of the political.<sup>34</sup>

According to Frei, the nuances on Morgenthau's position must take account of the different setting he encountered in the US, which was opposed to the one he lived in Europe: "optimistic, pragmatic, ahistorical." (Frei, 2001, p.184) His tragic view of human nature was to serve now as a corrective against the overly optimistic view of life and "an insipid faith in progress." As Frei remarks, "the tragic calls attention first and foremost to the limits of human existence, *eo ipso* to the permanence of the abyss between desire and capacity, between the ought to be and the is, between ideal and reality." (Frei, 2001, p. 187) Morgenthau's "tragic sense of life" – which gets much more pronounced in this scenario – emphasizes "the awareness of unresolvable discord, contradictions, and conflicts which are inherent in the nature of things," a sense without which reason is subverted into its opposite, made incapable of judgment. For him, grounding the specificity of the political becomes a safeguard for both politics and ethics:

Neither science nor ethics nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony. We have no choice between power and the common good. To act successfully, that is, according to the rules of the political art, is political wisdom. To know with despair that the political act is inevitably evil, and to act nevertheless, is moral courage. To choose among several expedient actions the least evil one is moral judgment. In the combination of political

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<sup>33</sup> Late in his life, Morgenthau would continue to emphasize the (Nietzschean) will to power, relating it to the same source of the will to love. See Morgenthau (1962).

<sup>34</sup> According to Frei, an older and passionate Morgenthau now becomes deeply set in his own political and intellectual position, and thus unwilling to compromise, which leads him to fall into many contradictions.

wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgment, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny. That this conciliation is nothing more than a *modus vivendi*, uneasy, precarious, and even paradoxical, can disappoint only those who prefer to gloss over and to distort the tragic contradictions of human existence with the soothing logic of a specious concord. (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 173)

If, on the one hand, he saw the lust for power<sup>35</sup> as an ubiquitous political fact – since it was grounded on human nature – on the other hand, he was sure that it could never become a universal ethical norm. Here he stands with Kant against Nietzsche (and Carr): giving up on this necessary tension between the moral command and the political fact would mean renouncing human nature altogether. Morality could never ensue from power; it should, instead, limit the destructiveness brought by the political lust for power. The political leader, who was also a man, should act in accordance with the political necessity, but do so in a way as to produce the “lesser evil.”

The evil that corrupts politics is, in this sense, no different than the one that afflicts other spheres of life; the difference, rather, is on the degree to which they deviate from the ethical norm. Man needs political wisdom to temper ethical imperatives in order to reconcile (but not resolve, or harmonize) his doubled nature; “his personal abstention from evil, which is actually a subtle form of egotism with a good conscience, does not at all affect the existence of evil in the world,” and man becomes a source of greater, rather than lesser, evil. (Morgenthau, 1947, p. 169-173)<sup>36</sup>

### 3.5

#### Conclusion

This review of how Morgenthau transposed his views on morality and politics developed during his polemics with legal positivists to American political thought is very important to understand the complexity of the views he held. It is perhaps ironic that the great realist thinker would be one of the most ardent

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<sup>35</sup> He defines this lust for power, or *animus dominandi*, as the desire to maintain, increase or demonstrate power over other men. See Morgenthau (1948a).

<sup>36</sup> This theme of tragedy will be further explored in Chapter 6, once I have exhausted my discussion on crisis.

defenders of the importance of morality in grounding sound political thought and action. It is remarkable, then, that as late as 1980, when *The purpose of American Politics* was published, he would still be arguing – now even more explicitly – for the need of ultimate values. For Frei, contrary to much literature that saw the American Morgenthau as a deviation or corruption of the normative views supported by the European Morgenthau, he was still based on “a moral-philosophical system that the author had developed thirty years earlier, that is, a system of transcendent idealism.” (Frei, 2001, p. 213)

Carr’s and Morgenthau’s contributions to the nascent discipline of international relations theory were separated by the Second World War, not to mention their distinct backgrounds – one was an English diplomat and a historian whereas the other was a German trained jurist. Their realism, in this sense, can be traced to distinct sources: for instance, Carr traces the realist critical weapon to a tradition running from Machiavelli to Hegel and Marx. For him, the idea of power politics was intimately tied to the inequalities between nations and the impossibility of grounding morality in the absence of power. Morgenthau, for his turn, would build realism out of a Nietzschean worldview developed during his youth and which stressed less the dialectical nature of conflicts than human nature and the will to power. Still, he was profoundly Kantian in his views concerning the importance of morality.

Nonetheless, they both articulated their accounts of crisis in light of the failure of liberalism and rationalism to solve the political problems of their time. In fact, a distorted perception of human knowledge was responsible for producing the crisis they hoped to solve. In inquiring international politics in terms of crisis, they brought crisis to bear at the heart of the discipline of international relations. Neither a “science” nor a “theory” of international relations would be able to shake the crisis off. As a consequence, international relations theory, as seen in Chapter 2, has been marked by an “identity crisis” ever since. As I tried to show, the crisis that brought the discipline about is the same crisis that keeps it constantly in fear for its health, and impels international relations theorists to incessantly discuss whether international relations theory is at an end.

In the next chapters, I hope to be able to explore more extensively this account of crisis that populates twentieth century political thought. As will be

evidenced, the reasons why Carr and Morgenthau arrived at similar diagnoses of crisis even though they came from quite distinct “realities” are not arbitrary. To the contrary, both authors are deeply concerned with the tension between morality and politics in a context of a world deprived of ultimate foundations. As a consequence, this concern remains at the heart of classical realism, connecting international relations theory to a much larger tradition of thought – and significantly more important problems than the crisis of theory. These are the problems to which I now turn.

## Crisis and Modern Politics

In his acclaimed *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (1988[1959]), Reinhart Koselleck argues that under modernity as *neue Zeit*<sup>37</sup>, crisis and critique entered in a complex relationship that impacted the entire structure of temporality and politics. In fact, the historian has tried to understand the twentieth-century political crisis – a crisis manifested in two destructive wars, the ascendance to power of criminal regimes, the confrontation between two superpowers, both of which deemed to encompass the future unity of the world – as part of a “state of permanent crisis” that is the very condition of modernity since the Enlightenment – a condition which inaugurates “the modern age” as the age of crises. (Koselleck, 1988)

Koselleck’s narrative has many similitudes with the narrative of the invention of international relations theory as discussed in the previous chapter. Not only is he trying to account for the political developments that are said to be responsible for the emergence of international relations theory; he also gives a powerful point of entry to inquire international relations theory as crisis theory, as well as the deeper stakes of this narrative of crisis to think modern politics. No matter how contested his particular framing of the problem may be<sup>38</sup>, it nonetheless points to something worthy of attention. Tying crisis and critique to the Enlightenment – understood not as a historical moment, but as the crystallization of a certain narrative about the world – opens questions with which political and philosophical thought have still to come to terms. Least of all, it has brought to attention and invited much reflection on the inauguration of different forms of understanding the world temporally, politically, socially, aesthetically.

In this and the next chapter, I will try to investigate more deeply this relationship between “crisis” and “critique” under modern politics, of which Koselleck has been one of the most forceful promulgators. Crisis is used as a

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<sup>37</sup> According to Koselleck, under modernity the concept of *neue Zeit* (new time) gets unified as *Neuzeit*, indicating a change in the temporalization of time. See: Koselleck, 2004, chapter 13.

<sup>38</sup> See: Davies, 2008, esp. ch. 3, pp. 87-95. The author criticizes Koselleck’s reliance on periodization. Also see discussion below.

commonsense throughout the discipline of international relations – both as a way to account for the objective political conditions of contemporary times, as to characterize the development of a theory of international relations. In fact, it is the argument of this dissertation that a certain “politics of crisis” has come to organize our knowledge about the international and that the stakes of this discourse are rarely recognized. Therefore, I will now turn to an investigation of crisis not in terms of its meanings, but of its performative function. The limits of representation have already been accounted for by an extensive literature on the subject; turning to the performative function of language allows me, instead, to understand how the different uses of the concept of crisis instantiate specific interpretations of reality, and how this impacts the possibility of international relations theory.

This investigation takes me through the conceptualization of “modernity” as a secularized politics hinging on the need to find banisters – some form of uncontested authority – to ground human knowledge and action. In this narrative, it becomes central to understand the role of the Enlightenment, not as a historically defined period, but as a *locus* where the articulation of a certain view of human finitude was consolidated. This movement – to be accomplished in two steps – takes us from crisis (Chapter 4) to critique (Chapter 5). Chapters 6 and 7 will finally address the implications of this intertwining to think the possibilities and limits of international relations theory.

The present chapter, then, follows the path from the articulation of crisis as a temporal category – a category that processes a certain periodization of time and therefore, separates past, present and future in a way that opens it to the possibility of novelty and progress – to the conception of politics predicated on the sovereign state. I cannot offer an exhaustive narrative of such problems; instead, I try to articulate one possible way to account for how this “politics of crisis” that organizes the production of knowledge about the international brings forth much more difficult questions concerning the role of the state, law, violence, politics, morality. In fact, this inability to think beyond a politics of crisis keeps international relations theory constantly tied to frames of intelligibility in which crisis is both the beginning and end of modern order.

## 4.1

### Crisis as a temporal concept

The relationship between critique and crisis has a long trajectory. In fact, the terms criticism and crisis derive etymologically from the same Greek word (*krinein*) meaning “to differentiate, select, judge, decide.” (Koselleck, 1988, p. 103) The term found resonance in the spheres of law, medicine and theology, indicating the need to arrive at a decision “between stark alternatives – right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or death.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 358) At this point, the same word encompassed the dual meaning of “objective crisis” and “subjective critique,” pointing not only to the presence of a situation that demanded a decision – a tipping point, so to speak – but also to the decision itself.

The term was also central to politics, presenting the need for a verdict or judgment. For Aristotle, “crisis” referred both to a situation that called for a decision and to the political choice through which the citizen participated in the political decision; i.e. crisis was representative of the very moment that defined citizenship (Dodd, 2004, p. 45). In this sense, “crisis” was necessary for the ordering of any community, representing the possibility that “justice and the political order could be harmonized through appropriate legal decisions.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 359) This legal-political use of the concept connected it directly with theological uses of the term and the idea of the Last Judgment, seen as the only path to salvation. “While the coming crisis remains a cosmic event, its outcome is already anticipated by the certainty of that redemption which grants eternal life.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 360)

However, according to Koselleck, it is from medical terminology that the modern understandings of crisis derive their use, with the adoption of the term in Latin and its subsequent entrance in the national languages. In this realm, a crisis marks the turning point of an illness, when the patient’s condition becomes critical, and therefore demands a fundamental change of treatment. This is the point at which crisis becomes a choice between life and death: a decision must be made, but it has not yet been reached. (Koselleck, 1988)

From the seventeenth century on, the medical concept was applied to the “body politic” referring to political and economic decisions, and would soon acquire a historical dimension. In this process, an important change in the uses of



the term would lead to the loss of its dual meaning: whilst “criticism” retained the sense of decision, judgment, discrimination; “crisis” came to refer to the diagnosis of a crucial, critical moment which demands a solution, but not to the solution itself. The term crisis, however, never stabilized in a single coherent concept, assuming a metaphorical quality which allowed its use to be dispersed through many fields – including the social, economic and political fields – and sometimes representing a catchword that encompassed a whole set of contradictory positions.

From the moment “crisis” made its way into the political vocabulary, its uses were multiplied and signaled an entire spectrum of political situations, ultimately becoming “a formula legitimating action.” Ranging from the descriptive to the diagnostic, “crisis” was indicative of the presence of “external or military situations that were reaching a decisive point;” it was also used to account for “fundamental changes in constitutions in which the alternatives were the survival or demise of a political entity and its constitutional order;” but crisis could also describe a “simple change of government.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 369) Such uses of crisis would press for action in a way so as to “reduce the room for maneuver, forcing the actors to choose between diametrically opposed alternatives.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 370)

However, it is only under modernity as *Neuzeit* that, according to Koselleck, “crisis” and “critique” entered into a complex relationship that impacted the entire structure of temporality and politics. In fact, the change that was processed in the political uses of “crisis” during the eighteenth century would make it a fundamental grid for the interpretation of historical time. On the one hand, following the medical use, a crisis could point to a historically unique situation that, however, could continue to recur – such as in the case of an illness. On the other hand, brought to a post-theological connotation, crisis became closely associated to a vision of the Last Judgment, signaling to its operation as an epochal concept.

In the latter sense, a “crisis” pointed to a unique and definitive moment, a “critical transition period after which – if not everything, then much – will be different.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 371) This transition was, however, to be understood immanently, rather than transcendently. This ambiguity retained by the concept of crisis turned it into something that was at the same time, descriptive of a situation, diagnostic of a structural condition, and also a unique

occurrence. Crisis became an enduring and pervasive concept of history, and therefore, “a structural signature of modernity.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 372)

According to Koselleck, it is Rousseau who becomes responsible for turning “an eschatological concept into a philosophy of history,” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 372) thus presenting the first use of crisis in the modern sense. With Rousseau, crisis became a new concept, referring to a present social order – monarchical rule – that had become untenable and would inevitably succumb. Not only prophetic, this claim was also *prognostic of a radically new future* in which crisis would be its hallmark; i.e. the political upheavals of the eighteenth-century would inaugurate the nineteenth-century as the century of crises and revolutions<sup>39</sup>.

Different uses of the concept would crystalize its prognostic/prophetic character, as crisis was further associated with a secularized image of an apocalyptic history. In this historical connotation, the unknown future can only be understood in a dualistic framing: it will either bring success and salvation; or end up in failure and doom, *depending on the actions of man*. Crisis is progressively dissociated from a natural, even theological understanding, in order to enter into the realm of human finitude<sup>40</sup>. Man is the only being that is morally responsible: for acting or refraining from acting. “By incorporating the theological idea of the Last Judgment,” the political concept of crisis was thus “elevated into a concept making a new epoch in the philosophy of history.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 375)

In this way, Koselleck’s genealogy tries to convey the way through which, in modern politics, crisis progressively loses its descriptive connotation and assumes a primarily evocative role: regardless of how the ultimate outcome was portrayed – as a closed or open image, optimistic or pessimistic – the appeal to crisis became a demand for immediate and adequate human action. As a consequence, history is totalized by the superposition between the particular and the universal: as indicative of a *critical present condition*, crisis becomes a nodal point of a *universal history*. Crisis thus becomes “an inevitable and necessary phase of history,” in need of “proper prognosis and planning,” which gives rise to an entire apparatus for devising a “science of crisis.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 377) In

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<sup>39</sup> Rousseau’s formulation appears as follows: “*Nous approchons de l’état de crises et du siècle des révolutions.*” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 372)

<sup>40</sup> The discussion concerning finitude and human action will be taken up in more detail in Chapter 5.

this framing, crisis becomes the condition of possibility for a radically new, but ultimately unpredictable order; for modern order inaugurates the time of crises, upheavals, revolutions. This is what makes it a properly new and humanly constructible order, one in which man is responsible for limiting the crises, keeping them at bay – even if man can never guarantee the complete halting of further crises.

According to Koselleck, then, the nineteenth century inaugurated the “age of crisis,” in that the concept of crisis became ubiquitous in referring both to everyday experiences, and to exceptional moments. Crisis found secure bearings in the German theories of history, starting with the young Hegelians. Its expansion and proliferation into economic theories would further spread the uses to which the concept was put. This expansion in the use of “crisis” in all areas of inquiry would not amount to greater clarity or specificity, but rather deepened its philosophical-historical character. In fact, twentieth-century wars would further boost the proliferation of such uses, pointing to how the concept “continues to demonstrate the ongoing novelty of our epoch, still perceived as a transitional stage.” (Koselleck, 2006, p. 398) Overall, what Koselleck’s genealogy of crisis indicates is that the vagueness of its uses is only paralleled by its status as a key concept in the multiple areas of inquiry, pointing to the ongoing inability to understand the stakes of the problem we are still left to cope – politically, philosophically, historically.

## 4.2

### History, progress, periodization

In Koselleck’s account, the transformations that can be identified in the uses of crisis is a sign of a larger transformation in the experience of time itself – or better, a change in the “temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history, at the end of which there is the peculiar form of acceleration which characterizes modernity.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 11) Koselleck’s argument is not only conceptual, but it provides an empirical basis through which one should be able to understand the breaks through which a secular modernity comes into being and the stakes it poses. In his narrative, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment will bear the mark of a transition from the multiplicity of natural histories that had an

exemplary power – limiting the future to past experiences – to an understanding of History as a “collective singular” – a unified world history – in which novelty was possible and the future was further and further differentiated from the past.

In order to understand this transition, Koselleck offers a pair of metahistorical categories: “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation.” By naming them metahistorical, Koselleck makes a first claim that such concepts are not used to designate a specific event in time, or try to account for the unification of an empirical experience. Rather, metahistorical concepts offer a window into the temporality of history without getting “caught up in the vortex of its historicization.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 259) To put it differently, by offering experience and expectation as metahistorical categories, Koselleck opens the possibility of understanding the different ways through which historical time was understood, without claiming to approach historical time objectively/empirically.

He then moves on to his second claim: once we have defined these metahistorical categories, we can finally understand how the historical temporalization of time characteristic of modernity is both similar and different from other forms of interpretation of time. Both experience and expectation are categories that bring together the subjective and the intersubjective: experience is present past, or the past as we remember it, individually and collectively. As all memory, experience is never complete or completeable; it is a version of what is remembered under a certain guise, and it is open to being remembered otherwise as we collect more experiences/memories. The same operates with expectation: it reflects the future made present, a hope of what is to come but has not yet happened, and thus, cannot be remembered, but only anticipated. This anticipation – at once personal and collective – is also open to transformation and fated to incompleteness as we approach the horizon and see it from a different angle; for “the unexpected undermines the expected.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 261)

As epistemological categories, neither of them guarantees the factual/empirical knowledge of history, but they are together the condition of possibility for history to exist, since there is “no history which could be constituted independently of the experiences and expectations of active human agents.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 256) As indicative of the human condition, experience and expectation require and complement each other, without ever allowing for the linear transition between past and future, because they are not

statically related to each other. In fact, “they constitute a temporal difference in the today by redoubling past and future on one another in an unequal manner.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 263)

The structure of the prognosis allows us to understand how the tension between experience and expectation creates historical time. The prognosis is based on past, lived experience, and thus is somehow limited by it; however, the prognosis also exceeds the space of experience because it requires an expectation of something that cannot be already contained in the past. As we move into the horizon of expectation, we create new experiences that, for their turn, guide new expectations; i.e. “the connection they alternately renew has itself a prognostic structure.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 263) The temporal difference between experience and expectation is always negotiated in the present, opening history to human agency.

However, for Koselleck, during the “modern age” this temporal difference between experience and expectation will increase to such a degree as to detach future expectation from previous experience. With this transformation, *the truly human dimension of time is revealed*, revoking the timelessness of experience that supposedly marked the previous epoch, and opening the future to the unexpected – something completely new. According to this argument, the naturalist understanding of history of the Middle Ages – in which any tension between experience and expectation was limited by Biblical interpretation and Church administration – gave way to an understanding of *history as progress*. As “the first genuinely historical concept,” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 268) progress “temporalized and brought into the process of worldly occurrences” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 265) the search for completeness that was formerly encompassed by eschatology. In this transition, time is seen as historically immanent and history becomes the realm of human affairs and determinations. Man becomes morally responsible for historical events, either by acting or refraining from acting.

If the whole of history is unique, then so must the future be: distinct, that is, from the past. This historicophilosophical axiom, a result of the Enlightenment and an echo from the French Revolution, provided the foundation for “history in general” as well as for ‘progress.’ Both are concepts which achieve their historicophilosophical plenitude only with their lexical formation; both indicate the same substantive content; that is, no longer can expectation be satisfactorily deduced from previous experience. (Koselleck, 2004, p. 268)

To say that time was historicized means that it no longer was seen as “the medium in which all histories take place;” it rather “becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right,” (Koselleck, 2004, 236) a collective singular that puts things in motion. This periodization of time introduced by history separates the “before” and the “after” in a way that puts the past out of reach – “fundamentally ‘other’” – turning the present into the realm of change and transformation, where world history has to be rewritten. The past gains a “world-historical quality” that can only be identified and narrated *a posteriori*; this quality subsumes the individual and subjective histories under a systemic narrative of the passing of time – thus making room for the “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous”<sup>41</sup>. This passing of time becomes history in itself, a “history in emergence” which opens space for claims concerning “the whole of history.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 240)

What is important to understand is that this inaugurates an epochal understanding of time, which situates the present as always a period of transition – neither beginning nor end, but the space where the expected otherness of the future could be negotiated and, above all, judged. “Progress and historical consciousness reciprocally temporalize all histories into the singularity of the world-historical process.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 243) The present enters into a different relationship both to the past and the future, in which concerns with “world history” take precedence over the individual histories, or the time of one’s own existence. This makes it harder to register the history of one’s own time, which is seen under the lights of rapid, epoch-making transformations.

With such temporalization of history, Koselleck argues that time comes to color “the entire political and social vocabulary,” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 248) i.e. everything that happens in the unified view of history is to be read in terms of a temporal structure, and central concepts can no longer be used authoritatively without claiming a temporal perspective. This is precisely the trajectory of concepts of crisis and revolution, which translated this temporal perception of a constant change that affected the present. Through this process, these concepts

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<sup>41</sup> The “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous” is one of three modes of historical experience discussed by Koselleck, one that accounts for the coexistence of multiple temporal strata of different extensions into one single chronological line. See Koselleck, 2004, p. 95.

“become *instruments for the direction* of historical movement,” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 251) bringing forth the changes that they describe. The crisis which allows for future progress – instead of repetition – turns lived time into an experience of rupture, “a period of transition in which the new and the unexpected continually happened.” (Koselleck, 2004, p. 246)

This trajectory narrated by Koselleck to understand the emergency of a unique account of time as historical time brings forth an important issue of periodization, or the tracing of lines in history in order to demarcate the past from the present from the future. As Kathleen Davis remarks, periodization is “not simply the drawing of an arbitrary line through time, but a complex process of conceptualizing categories, which are posited as homogeneous and retroactively validated by the designation of a period divide.” According to her, “the grounding of political order upon periodization” is never neutral and thus has important political implications to the way we conceive of the “modern” as a totality that ruptures with a dead, fixed past – often read as “medieval.” (Davis, 2008, p. 3)

Periodizing history has the effect of creating a temporality of points and lines, in which a homogeneous order is possible only between those points (Narby, 2014). Crisis effects these moments that cut past from present, and present from future: in between points of crisis, time flows linearly – empty and homogenous, as famously put by Anderson<sup>42</sup>. The homogeneous totalities condensed in between points “not only masks the existence of modern characteristics in the Middle Ages and medieval characteristics in modernity,” but also “occlude minority histories such as those of women and the racially or religiously oppressed.” (Davis, 2008, p. 4)

Such knowledgeable acts of demarcation are always political, in that they ground political order precisely by unifying categories that try to homogenize experiences in the very process of knowing, thus exercising a regulatory function. This operation, used even in the most critical historical narratives, is a problem not in terms of the empirical content it generates, but for the exclusionary force it exercises, and the occlusion of the reifying operation that goes on with every

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<sup>42</sup> Davis (2008) shows how in fact the formulation popularized by Anderson concerning the nation as an imagined community predicated on a “homogeneous, empty time” is a misquotation of Benjamin’s theses on history. For this critique, see Davis, 2008, p. 101. Also see the discussion on Benjamin below.

attempt at periodization. The result of such acts is to legitimize claims for radical newness that end up silencing the implications of partitioning time in such a manner. While the implications of periodization are not investigated, modernity unequivocally becomes the only explanatory basis through which we can think of time, order, politics, morality and so on. (Davis, 2008)

In fact, Davis' questions lead her to argue that "the history of periodization is juridical, and it advances through struggles over the definition and location of sovereignty." (Davis, 2008, p. 6) By creating the "modern" and the "medieval" as counterconcepts, periodization was able to attribute religiosity and slavery to the latter in order to ground claims for secularity and freedom/sovereignty to the former. Thus, "the liberation of Europe's political, economic, and social life from ecclesiastical authority and religion was defined as the very basis of politics, progress, and historical consciousness;" as a counterpart to this process "Europe's 'medieval' past and cultural others, mainly colonized non-Christians, were defined as religious, static, and ahistorical." (Davis, 2008, p. 77) Through a "complex pattern of identification and rejection," (Davis, 2008, p. 9) then, "feudalism" was diametrically opposed to "secularization," serving to aseptically clean each of the categories from that which was associated with the other, in a way so as to prioritize the latter over the former.

For Davis, therefore, periodization works as a form of "sovereign decision" which offers a substitute for the "absent foundation of sovereignty," (Davis, 2008, p. 15) occluding any serious discussion on this paradox of sovereignty<sup>43</sup>. According to her, the effects of this occlusion are evident both in the "triumphalist" narratives of sovereignty that justify modernity through a narrative of secularization – such as those seen in Weber, Schmitt, Benjamin – and in those who, like Koselleck, criticize this reading of history without, however, questioning the importance of periodization as such.

While acknowledging that "some of Koselleck's essays explore temporalities of modernity in rich ways – such as negotiating the gap between experience and expectation, or encountering a once imagined future," (Davis, 2008, pp. 89-90) Davis however criticizes the historian for relying on periodization to ground his claim about the novelty of *Neuzeit*. In so doing,

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<sup>43</sup> On the question of the absent foundation of authority, see the discussion below.



Koselleck “substitutes a medieval/modern break for the absent foundation of sovereignty,” supplying “this substitution with a narrative form.” (Davis, 2008, p. 88) His argument about changing historical conceptions of time, then, continues to privilege knowledge emerging in the now and condemning “medieval time” to exclusion. Therefore, she argues,

[...] his theory of periodization may be persuasive when viewed from within the self-defining ‘modern European’ political discourse [...] but cannot be separated from the contemporaneous and interrelated discourses of ‘world order’ such as anthropology and Orientalism. (Davis, 2008, p. 90)

According to Davis, then, if periodization is the basis upon which secularization narratives reside – and “the ‘secular’ is above all a bid for sovereignty” (Davis, 2008, p. 78) – then while we do not succeed in questioning this periodization we cannot rethink sovereignty. But, as Fasolt clarifies, it is not only historical forms of knowledge that promote this sovereign act of periodization. In fact, scholarship itself makes a break in time every time “it distinguishes what we know now from what we formerly believed.” (Fasolt, 2011, p. 423) Scholarship is always already a political activity, in that the act of knowing evidence historically is “an act of self-determination by which the sovereign subject assumes her rightful place in time.” (Fasolt, 2004, p. 14)

For Fasolt, this practice of periodization of history is an enduring symbol of the victory of European humanism against the form of governance represented by the Roman Empire and the Church, putting an end to the belief in the temporal unity of the period inaugurated by the birth of Christ. In this process, “the affirmation of the self that was integral to the rise of history extended across the entire realm of thought and action,” (Fasolt, 2004, p. 20) thus shaping new forms of science, law, religion and art. Thus, the historical approach – which is always already modern – by making the interpretation of time a matter of human agency, emancipated it from every transcendental authority.

This same operation that objectifies the past makes the subject fully present, thinking and acting in the other side of the line, the side which is not absent, and not immutable – being, therefore, open to change. By erecting borders in time, history also assures a realm for the development of the modern subject,

that can reunite his reason and autonomy in the workings of the present and the future; by doing that, it stipulates a moment of foundation – of history and (modern) politics, of past and present, of the modern subject, with its freedom, its citizenship, its sovereignty, its future. In this sense, all forms of knowledge predicated on the autonomous, knowing subject are already modern in the sense that they are always already predicated on periodization. This form of knowledge “leaves much room to fight over the meaning and possibility of liberty, progress, and responsibility. But there may be no other fight in town. Someone must be responsible, and someone must be free.” (Fasolt, 2004, p. xviii)

Thus, Fasolt concludes that trying “to undo [scholarship’s] links to politics without undoing scholarship itself can only come to a dead end.” (Fasolt, 2011, p. 423) To question periodization is to question our contemporary practices of knowledge, which can only result from questioning the sovereign subject of knowledge, problematizing the role of language. For language does not belong to the individual, and it can thus break with the illusion of sovereignty. Through this process one can perhaps appreciate that “the past is not an object that must be represented because it is absent from the present;” rather, “the past is something that we have [...] right here and now, just as we have a body and a mind.” (Fasolt, 2011, p. 423)

These questions are important not because they help to refute periodization altogether, but because they point to the decisionistic, sovereign function of historical modes of thought. Indeed, they indicate how periodization is “a fundamental political technique – a way to moderate, divide and regulate – always rendering its services *now*.” (Davis, 2008, p. 5) In this sense, they try to open the possibility of accounting for different temporalities/temporalizations; different forms of knowledge and subjectivity. Correspondingly, they also bring to discussion the question of the present that is no longer tied linearly to the (immutable) past and the (completely new) future: they might help to account for a temporal experience that is not predicated on the pair immutability/novelty – either nothing has changed, or everything has.

This section tried to illuminate, then, how appeals to crisis are inherently appeals to a very specific form of temporality and temporalization tied with the presupposition of the sovereign subject. In fact, the appeal to crisis serves more often than not to reproduce a specific account of politics which is predicated in the

state, sovereignty and law. This discussion points to the limits of “crisis theory” to question the form of politics that emerges from the temporality that crisis itself inaugurates. In what remains of this chapter, I will inquire what kind of politics is this, by turning to the works of Weber and Schmitt – two of the most important and clear articulators of this view of a secularized modernity. This will allow to question modernity as built out of “secularized theological forms,” and consider some criticisms of this narrative that may point some way forward in this discussion.

### 4.3

#### Politics and morality in a disenchanted world

There is a widespread conviction that the First World War marks the coming of age of the idea of international politics as a distinctive realm of inquiry. Carr offered a compelling account of this relationship when he claimed that the nascent science of international politics had found its purpose in the course of the atrocities and devastation created by the war. Politics had become mass politics – entire populations had become part of the political sphere and had been called out to participate in the devising of a different political rationality. Wars became so devastating that they were said to be irrational and therefore, needed to be replaced by another form of politics, one that could provide rational grounds for progress to ensue. In this sense, the war had fueled what Carr considered to be an outdated, ahistorical – utopian – conviction that peace could be fashioned through an arrangement of collective security built out of the idea of a harmony of interests and of the internationalization of commercial relations.

In a narrative that complements the one provided by international relations theory, Koselleck claimed that the crises of the twentieth century could not be understood in relation to particular empirical conditions alone, but should rather account for the kind of political, temporal and moral consciousness that was at the basis of the Enlightenment project. In this sense, his *Critique and Crisis* was meant to cultivate “a more politically and historically aware brand of criticism” (Davis, 2008, p. 88) which he deemed necessary to cope with the crisis. In his narrative, the “twentieth-century crisis” is seen an enduring effect of the artificial break between the realms of morality and politics by which the Absolutist state

was conveyed. The latter could only ground its secular authority by separating the political from the moral and claiming rule over the former – thus leaving the realm of morality as independent of the political and vice-versa. However, he goes on to explain, this unfounded sovereign decision had severe implications in the consolidation of modern politics.

The period of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment saw the emergence of a certain criticism against the state coming from the bourgeois classes. The legitimacy of this criticism was predicated on the previous division between morality and power, which created a nurturing environment for the articulation of a bourgeois revolt against the state and the political in the supposedly apolitical realm of morality. In this process, the rift between morality and power was further opened, making room for a utopian philosophy of history to declare “war on politics” – thus negating its own political stand. This utopian criticism was, according to Koselleck (1988), responsible for the crisis that characterized the entire history of modern politics up to the opposition between the superpowers during the Cold War.

This question concerning the relationship between politics and morality, as well as its relationship to criticism and crisis since the eighteenth century, organized much of the development in political thought since the late nineteenth century. In fact, Koselleck’s particular framing of the problem, while limited, offers a glimpse at some of the nodes being investigated in this dissertation concerning the way crisis theory refers always to a particular account of subjectivity encompassed by the concept of critique. A long debate concerning critique and the possibility of knowledge and action in a secularized world gave the tone of political and philosophical discussion in the twentieth century. This debate had – and still has, as I try to argue – a direct impact in the way the discipline of international relations was organized, and therefore, it affects the present limits of international relations theory to understand the stakes of its own discourses – which is why it keeps rehearsing the same kinds of questions, while claiming to be at a crossroads of something new.

Nietzsche and Weber are perhaps the first diagnosticians of the “twentieth-century crisis,” and both trace their discourses to this problematic dialectic between politics and morality. In fact, both tried to provide a critical understanding of the impacts of secularization after the “death of God,” leading

them to account for the way morality and politics had been separated from each other. In different but complementary ways<sup>44</sup>, these authors have advanced very disillusioned perspectives concerning human rationality and the legacy of the Enlightenment<sup>45</sup>. In fact, Strong claims that Nietzsche anticipated the destructiveness that was to characterize the twentieth century when he claimed that “great politics” would bring “all members of society into political conflict,” leading to truly ideological wars: “wars the like of which none has ever been on earth.” (Nietzsche *apud* Strong, 2012, p. 2) These would be wars for the *lógos*, no longer concerned with distribution, but with *deciding who gets to decide* what there is to distribute. (Strong, 2012)

Deeply influenced by Nietzsche’s reflections, Weber’s interpretation of secularization in terms of disenchantment had a great impact in the twentieth century political debate. In the context of Germany’s defeat in the War and its acknowledgment of guilt, Weber’s lecture *Politics as a Vocation* systematizes much of his thought concerning politics and the political, as well as the importance of “remagifying” the world that had become dehumanized through rationalization – politics had to be reconciled with morality. According to Owen and Strong (2004), Weber seeks to caution and disillusion his audience concerning the political predicament of their age. However, disillusionment should not lead to despair and paralysis, but to a change in the political course. For that, Germany would need a true leader, one who had a vocation for politics and could thus face the failure of a disenchanted liberal politics, which had bureaucratized the state and emptied the political from meaning. The political, as the realm of human existence, needed to rescue precisely the human element.

Weber describes his historical context as “characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world.” For him, this meant that “the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life” and retreated “into the abstract realm of mystical life or into the fraternal feelings of personal relations between individuals.” (Weber, 2004, p. 30) In such a context – “alien to God and bereft of prophets” – it was imperative to

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<sup>44</sup> Strong explains how a new literature on these authors shows the profound links between their works. In fact, as pointed out by Strong, “Weber suggested that any honest modern scholar must admit ‘that he could not have accomplished crucial parts of his own work without the contributions of Marx and Nietzsche’.” (Weber *apud* Strong, 2012, p. 103)

<sup>45</sup> The Enlightenment will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

cultivate men's abilities to think and act vocationally<sup>46</sup>, without forsaking reality and falling back into religious beliefs – or else into despair. Thus, a true human being should be able to gather the courage to “endure the fate of the age like a man.” (Weber, 2004, p. 30-1)

In a world of rationalized procedures, rules rather than people had become the source of authority and, thus, of obedience. According to Weber, bureaucracy had led to “the increasing destruction of affective or status relations between individuals and the progressive domination of the economic over the political.” (Weber, 2004, p. 118) In doing so, bureaucracy forged a false sense of autonomy, substituting human decision for rule-governed procedures, on the expectation of ridding the world from irrationality. This was the tragic predicament of modern, secularized society: having developed technologically, it “no longer possessed a conception of the world other than one of lawlike relations between entities that in themselves had no meaning.” (Strong, 2012, p. 95)

By trying to eliminate all human error from the decision-making procedures, rationalization had produced the evasion or emptying of the political realm as the realm where decisions are made. However, history is for Weber only the effect of the series of decisions, having no ulterior meaning beyond them. Thus, by privileging impersonal functions over human decisions, the bureaucratic organization of the world had emptied the political from all that was nonrational and therefore, all that was irremediably human. A bureaucratic democracy was no longer a democracy: there could be no room for debate, disagreement, genuine decision-making.

This reading of the status of the political under rationalization leads Weber to place his hopes in the character of the person navigating through a demystified world. If, as Foucault said, the world does not turn a legible face towards us, Weber believed that meaning and validity should be found somewhere else. This took him to engage in a discussion over politics and the quality of character of the person who should know and act in this world – and, specifically, on the character

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<sup>46</sup> For Strong, Weber devotes his life work to teach man how to do these two things, and this is reflected by the end of his life in the two vocational lectures: *Science as a Vocation* and *Politics as a Vocation*.

of the political leader, responsible for taking a stand against bureaucratization and retrieving the political from the profound suspicion in which it had been cast.<sup>47</sup>

This discussion on the character of man is dependent on Weber's understanding of politics which is profoundly tied to the state. According to his famous formulation, "the state is the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a particular territory." (Weber, 2004, p.33) According to this view, *politics is the realm of power, where violence can and must be wielded legitimately*. The task of the leader is to accept his finitude as part of a historical process: his character must be developed *in history*, by means of actions and decisions. Merely following rationalized procedures could not be the route for building character.

Therefore, Weber claims, he who decides to engage in politics must understand that "he is entering into relations with the satanic powers that lurk in every act of violence," (Weber, 2004, p. 90) and that the salvation of his soul will be compromised in the process. For politics faces "tasks that can only be accomplished with the use of force." (Weber, 2004, p. 90) The Faustian lesson is offered as both encouragement and warning for those who really want to get involved with politics: "Reflect, the Devil is old, so become old if you would understand him." (Goethe *apud* Weber, 2004, p. 27) Therefore, the leader must not be moved by his personal pride; instead, he must take responsibility for his decisions. He must be at all times wary of the realities of the world, never avoiding that which is unpleasant. Decisions must be made even when – or especially when – there can be no certainty concerning the consequences of such acts.

For Weber, however, the modern inability to accept the tragedy of politics – and therefore, the role of struggle and violence among humankind – risks eliminating the last traces of the human. One must bear the costs of this tragedy: for no matter how despairing may be the consequences of the rationalization of the modern world, there can be no "way out" of it, since reality is the effect of a much larger historical process. Above all, arguing that the use of violence is just

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<sup>47</sup> As important as this development of the human character is for Weber, he denies that such a possibility is available to all. In fact, the figure of the leader assumes a great importance in his scheme.

and will bring a final and enduring peace is to demonstrate the ultimate incapacity to bear the political costs of living in the world after the “death of god” and trying to rid the world from its ethical irrationality.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, one must know the historical conditions in which knowledge and action are possible.

As a historical construction, there can be no “solution” to politics, which is why he believes that only “mature human beings” can be able to face the challenges of the age. Maturity, here, does not refer to a trait of age, but of character<sup>49</sup>: to be mature is to endure the consequences of knowing that there is no moral solution to political problems, and acting nonetheless (Weber, 2004, p. 86). One cannot shy away from one’s responsibility – and one’s responsibility only – for the decisions made. According to Weber, no profession of faith or good intentions can aid the true political leader: he has to be responsible for bearing the costs of acting politically, without giving up on his convictions. Thus, Weber finds it “immeasurably moving” when a mature human being, acting on the basis of both responsibility and conviction, can finally claim: “Here I stand, I can do no other.” (Weber, 2004, p. 92) Acceptance of historicity requires disillusionment, not faith, in order to produce something great.

Politics means a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards, with a mixture of passion and a sense of proportion. It is absolutely true, and our entire historical experience confirms it, that what is possible could never have been achieved unless people had tried again and again to achieve the impossible in this world. But the man who can do this must be a leader, and not only that, he must also be a hero<sup>50</sup> – in a very literal sense. (Weber, 2004, p. 93)

The difficulties surrounding this position come precisely from the recognition narrated earlier by Koselleck that morality and politics, while different, are constantly referring to each other. In this constant and mutual referral, politics and morality come into conflict precisely at those hard contexts in which refraining from acting on the basis of an act being evil is conducive to a worse evil. In politics, it is necessary to recognize that “no ethic in the world can ignore the fact that in many cases the achievement of ‘good’ ends is inseparable

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<sup>48</sup> See discussion on violence below.

<sup>49</sup> This shows the links of Weber’s narrative and Kantian moral philosophy. This discussion on maturity reappears on Chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> Strong discusses how this theme of the superhuman runs through the legacy of radical critique.



from the use of morally dubious or at least dangerous means,” and therefore, “we cannot escape the possibility or even probability of evil side effects.” (Weber, 2004, p. 84) The charismatic leader – who must be a hero – is Weber’s answer to the questions facing contemporary political ethics.

In fact, Weber anticipates a major theme of Schmitt’s political theology, when he argues that “the experience of the irrationality of the universe has always been the driving force of the entire history of religion,” (Weber, 2004, p. 86) and thus, cannot be reduced to “the product of the modern rejection of faith.” (Weber, 2004, p. 89) In fact, a central aspect of Schmitt’s political theology is the recognition that “the experience of politics requires a theology to be viable—that is, politics must rely on a source of authority that has the quality of being beyond question.” (Strong, 2012, p. 225) Similarly for Weber, the notion of the state’s use of legitimate force, which animates the entire trajectory of political thought, reflects the difficult paradox which all religions had to face of reconciling violence and ethics to explain human suffering. In this sense, the question of *legitimate violence* which today is encompassed by the state is “what determines the particular nature of all ethical problems in politics.” (Weber, 2004, p. 89) One cannot escape it by resorting to ethics, for ethics is always already concerned with justifying violence.

#### **4.4 Sovereignty, violence, decision**

The problem of violence and power became a central tenet in the debates over the failure of liberal politics in the aftermath of the First World War, attracting special attention in the context of German thought. Benjamin and Schmitt tried to articulate fierce positions concerning the role of sovereign violence which rendered them harsh criticisms in light of the development of fascist regimes – especially in the case of Schmitt, who personally joined the Nazi party. However, the importance of this formulation in terms of pointing to the limits of liberal politics have not disappeared, which is evident from the recent revival of interest on the thought of these authors. This section, then, will offer a brief account of this debate, pointing to the high stakes involved in the kind of sovereign politics discussed throughout this chapter.

In his well-known opposition to positivist jurists such as Hans Kelsen, Schmitt formulated his “paradox of sovereignty” by further developing the argument which demonstrates that a decision can never ensue from the law. Rather, the application of law always resides in an absolute decision – a sovereign decision – which establishes an authority; this authority has no previous grounding, emanating from the moment of the decision itself. Relying on the Hobbesian dictum “*autoritas, non veritas facit legem*” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 33) – authority, not majority makes the law – he sided with a theory that rescued the role of the subject who is entitled to think and act – and thus decide – in a secularized world. Secularization here – as anticipated by Weber – was not seen as the expulsion of theology from the political realm; on the contrary, it was a result of the transposition of theological imagery, and specifically the figure of God, to the immanent realm of politics and the state.

According to Strong, “Schmitt accepts from Max Weber the idea of the demagification or disenchantment of the world” (Strong, 2012, p. 240) when he affirms that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 36) By signaling to the fact that political concepts were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, Schmitt is implicating that they share the same systematic structure. Their analogy – something already indicated in Koselleck’s discussion of temporality and crisis – works precisely as an attempt to ground authority in a secularized world. The sovereign emulates the figure of God, in that it is him that “established the borders that make politics possible.” (Strong, 2012, p. 240) Schmitt’s 1922 and 1929 oeuvres – *Political Theology* and *The concept of the political*, respectively – together offer a way of rescuing this understanding of the role of the political in a disenchanted world, by discussing sovereignty as the decision on the exception. For this reason, Strong argues that Schmitt’s sovereign offers “the existential equivalent of the noumenal in Kant” (Strong, 2012, p. 240) – his decision being the transcendental presupposition that makes modern politics possible in the first place.

Disenchantment here is read in terms of a world that has been neutralized and depoliticized by liberalism, which no longer offers the resources necessary to cope with problems. Liberalism substituted the political calculation for an economic-technical thinking that cannot articulate an alternative political theory,

only a critique of politics. Thus, Schmitt concludes that “the modern state seems to have actually become what Max Weber envisioned: a huge industrial plant.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 65)

It is important to remark that, despite the many similarities with the argument advanced by Weber, Schmitt’s concept of the political tries to take some distance from Weber’s, by differentiating between the political and the state. This difference is important for Schmitt in order to salvage the political from his attack on the legitimacy of the liberal, institutional state. Thus, he argues that “the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political,” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 19) indicating that the legitimacy of the former is conditional on the latter. Whereas Schmitt succeeds in criticizing liberalism is a question open to debate, but his attempt to make the political independent of the state certainly points in this direction.

In this sense, the task he sets up in 1929 to define the concept of the political reflects his understanding that in the process of its democratization, the state became so intertwined with society that its quality as “the ultimate authority” no longer was clear. Criticizing those who fall into the vicious circle of defining the state in terms of the political and the political in terms of the state, he instead looks for “the specifically political categories.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 25) These are found in the distinction between friend and enemy, which he defines as the “utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation.”<sup>51</sup> (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 26) This definition has two immediate effects: first, it marks the political as a specific domain of experience independent from other domains (such as juridical, moral, economic); and second, it defines the political in existential – Hobbesian – terms, by seeing it as the arena where there is always “the real possibility of physical killing.”<sup>52</sup> (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 33) In this sense, every opposition – be it economic, juridical, moral, religious – can, at some point, become so intense as to threaten

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<sup>51</sup> This formulation appears only in the second edition. In fact, Morgenthau charges Schmitt with plagiarizing his own understanding of the political in terms of intensity, for the unacknowledged inclusion of this discussion happens after Schmitt reads Morgenthau’s *The concept of the political*. See Frei (2001). Also see discussion in Chapter 6.

<sup>52</sup> The political for Schmitt carries the same characteristics of Hobbes’ state of nature, in that the possibility of struggle for survival is what grounds the legitimacy for the use of violence in politics. However, whereas the Hobbesian state of nature is thought of in terms of individual subjects, for Schmitt it is defined in terms of the collectivity of subjects. The implications of these similarities and difference will be explored in the discussion that follows. For a careful assessment of these issues, see Strauss (2007).

the existence of one of the parties in dispute.

Two further conclusions are drawn once this definition has been established. First, the enemy is seen as a public category: it exists “only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 28) This means that the political enemy is neither a figure of personal hate nor an economic competitor – “the enemy is *hostis*, not *inimicus* in the broader sense.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 28) Being an enemy does not automatically makes him “morally evil” or “aesthetically ugly.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 27) Consequently – and this is the second conclusion – this existential distinction is not amenable to final reconciliation. Therefore, the existence of the political is predicated in the friend-enemy distinction. This means that where there is no possibility of a struggle for life and death, there is no politics.

Here, it becomes clear that behind Schmitt’s claim for the political is a profoundly moral argument. As with Weber, the political domain is for him the realm of what is properly human. The friend-enemy distinction serves as a way to prevent universalist claims in the name of “humanity:” humanity has no enemies, it is a totalizing concept. To claim to be fighting a war in its name is only a way to disguise the particularly intense political meaning of your action. For “humanity is not a political concept,” and it should not be used thusly: denying another people, whatever the reasons, its humanity is to side with the possibility of extreme inhumanity, opening the path for incalculable evil. Consequently, the liberal attempt to demoralize the enemy on the basis of supposedly absolute concepts – freedom, justice – has led, according to Schmitt, to a form of depoliticization which carries grave consequences. Ultimately, his concern with the political shows a deeper concern with what it means to be human in an age of neutralizations and depoliticizations. (Strong, 2012; Owen & Strong, 2004; Strauss, 2007)

If the friend-enemy distinction is what singularizes the political, the political unit is never single, which means that a world state of humanity can never exist: “as long as the state exists, there will [...] always be in the world more than just one state.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 53) When a political grouping decides on its enemy, it is deciding who is the “we” to which one reports and therefore, what is considered rational for this particular “we” – i.e. only through

the decision on the enemy one can define who is the friend.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, rationality is not universal, but dependent on the circumstances. When liberalism negates this multiplicity – with the inherent potential for struggle that it carries – it does not erase the political, but only demonstrates its utter incapacity to account for the political. As a consequence, Schmitt argues, “this allegedly nonpolitical and apparently even antipolitical system serves existing or newly emerging friend-and-enemy groupings and cannot escape the logic of the political.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 79)

According to Schmitt, then, what defines the political is not struggle itself – in its tactics and strategies – but *the moment of decision* on the existence of an enemy. “What always matters is the possibility of the extreme case taking place, the real war, and the decision whether this situation has or has not arrived.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 35) It is the extreme case that confirms the decisive character of a situation; “from this most extreme possibility human life derives its specifically political tension.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 35) The political entity, as the decisive friend-enemy grouping, is par excellence sovereign. With this formulation, Schmitt is arguing that the state does not need to be absolute to be sovereign; it needs only be the ultimate decision-maker in existential matters. “The political entity is by its very nature the decisive entity, regardless of the sources from which it derives its last psychic motives. It exists or does not exist. If it exists, it is the supreme, that is, in the decisive case, the authoritative entity.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 43-4)

Therefore, it is the decisive character that defines the political: if this character is removed, the political is also removed – along with its limiting effects on struggles. If a people abdicates from its right to decide on its enemies, it renounces its freedom and its existence as a political unity. In this case, politics does not vanish from the world: “only a weak people will disappear.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p.53) This is why war can never be outlawed: it is always incumbent upon the sovereign decision of a political entity. In accordance with Hobbes, Schmitt concludes that “the *protego ergo obligo* is the *cogito ergo sum* of the state.” (Schmitt, 2007a, p. 52)

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<sup>53</sup> Derrida discusses this relationship and how the enemy, for Schmitt, is always the brother enemy – and thus war is a fraternal war. This has important implications for Schmitt’s moral argument against universalism and in defense of the European values. See Derrida, 2005, esp. chapters 5-6

We thus arrive at Schmitt's definition of sovereignty, which has significant tensions with Weber's formulation. Since Schmitt wants to dissociate the immediate link that is presupposed by Weber between the political and the state, and rescue the political as the friend-enemy distinction, his concept of sovereignty becomes defined not as the monopoly of legitimate violence, but as "the monopoly to decide." (Schmitt, 1985, p. 13) This will have a number of implications to his understanding of politics. Perhaps the most important of all is to establish the political – and therefore the state – as conditional on the decision, and not the other way around. In other words, the state has no automatic legitimacy in defining the enemy – and thus in wielding violence legitimately. Instead, the state is consequent on the existence of a genuine decision. Only authority can create order, never the opposite. I will try to unravel this argument in parts.

The exception for Schmitt works as "a borderline concept" (Schmitt, 1985, p. 5): it is neither inside nor outside the law, but rather defines what falls on each side. In fact, Schmitt goes on to explain that "the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology." (Schmitt, 1985, p. 36) First, it is important to consider Schmitt's analogy between the exception and the miracle. The concern with the theological structure of sovereignty informs much of the critique of bourgeois liberalism going on in the context of a struggling Weimer Republic, and will also appear in Benjamin's *Critique of Violence* (1986[1921]), with an ultimately differing position.<sup>54</sup> Schmitt briefly defines miracle as the "transgression of the laws of nature through an exception brought about by direct intervention." (Schmitt, 1985, p. 36) The miracle breaks with the smooth course of history, with what is expected, and introduces something unexpected. Through the decision, the sovereign makes an analogous movement, cutting through the established order and introducing something new, an unpredictable decision that makes him, in fact, the sovereign.

This paradox of the miracle, however, became inexplicable and uncomfortable in the course of the nineteenth century, during which the deistic and theistic concepts of God emerging from the process of secularization expelled the miracle from their theories of the state. In this process, jurisprudence became

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<sup>54</sup> See Benjamin (1986); Strauss (2007); Derrida (1992). Also see discussion below.

an attempt to evade the concept of authority in favor of a pure concept of law. As a result of their “inability to master intellectually contradictory arguments or objections, some jurists introduce the state in their works by a mental short circuit,” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 39) becoming therefore incapable of explaining state sovereignty without recurring to some mystical figure. In this way, Schmitt argues, “the decisionistic and personalistic element in the concept of sovereignty was thus lost.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 48)

When arguing for decisionism, however, it is important to remember that Schmitt explicitly condemned what he considered to be a brand of “degenerate decisionism,” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 3) by which he refers to a form of thought that prefers a decision over the absence of decision in any circumstance, without considering what makes a “genuine decision.” If liberalism assaulted the political by advancing a claim for endless discussion, a decisionism which negates the importance of discussion and reasoning altogether is seen as equally mistaken and dangerous: for “the core of the political idea, the exacting moral decision, is evaded in both.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 65) This kind of decisionism, he concludes, “is essentially dictatorship, not legitimacy.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 66)

This brings me to a third important remark concerning the relationship between the decision and the political order. According to Schmitt, “the exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing, the exception proves everything: it confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 15) On a close inspection, this formulation points to the idea that, despite of the centrality accorded to the exception in Schmitt’s scheme, its function is ultimately one of sustaining order. In fact, he claims that “like every other order, the legal order rests on a decision and not on a norm.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 10)

What Schmitt is offering is a juristic account of sovereignty. The legal order needs the sovereign authority, without which it has no ascription. “What matters for the reality of legal life is who decides.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 35) Therefore, sovereignty is neither inside nor outside the law – or it is both inside and outside at the same time – since the sovereign is not defined by the normal conditions which predate him, but instead must name the existence of the exception or normality and, in naming it, create the inside and the outside. In fact, it is only through the political – human – decision that “the power of real life

breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 15) In this sense, he offers a definition of the exception that is not contrary to order: even when the decision suspends the norm, it however does not destroy order – it reinstates order under different, sovereign, circumstances.

Indeed, Schmitt turns the argument on its head: it is not that the exceptional decision suspends the normal state, but this decision is the condition of possibility for normality to exist, and the legal order to be applied. Schmitt thus claims that “for a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist, and he is sovereign who definitely decides whether this normal situation actually exists.” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 13) As the responsible for creating this normal situation, the sovereign must acknowledge his role of making a decision upon the normal circumstance. We can understand, then, that no order can exist – or be created – without a prior decision on its existence. It cannot be always already conditioned by the formal rules of the game, and the attempt to extricate all historical and sociological elements of law are a major problem identified in positivist theory of law. In this sense, the question of decision is imperative for the existence of order, for no order can be implemented without a decision on it.

Every legal order is based on a decision, and also the concept of legal order, which is applied as something self-evident, contains within it the contrast of the two distinct elements of the juristic – norm and decision. Like every other order, the legal order rests on a decision and not on a norm. (Schmitt, 1985, p. 10)

Consequently, the legal order can offer a substantive guidance on what to do, but it cannot decide who is entitled to do it, for “the legal idea cannot translate itself independently.” (Schmitt, 1985, 31) This means, ultimately, that the legal has no authority apart from the “concrete body” that decides on how and when to apply it. Therefore, the absolute decision – the moment of “decision in the true sense of the word” (Schmitt, 1985, p. 6) – cannot be defined inside the law. Consequently, the sovereign does not exist as a subject independently of the decision. It is the decision that makes the sovereign; and sovereign is he who makes a decision on the exception. The decision is never only descriptive: it creates the exceptional and in so doing it also creates normality. In this performative role, the sovereign decision is what defines the political.

This reading connects Schmitt’s concept of the political to his definition of



sovereignty through the decision. It is the decision that makes the sovereign, and the ultimate political decision in that on the enemy (which takes precedence over the friend). But the decision has as its ultimate goal that of creating normality/order. In this sense, Schmitt emulates the Hobbesian move through which the Leviathan suspends the state of nature and installs the civil state. In his *Notes on Schmitt's The Concept of the Political*, Leo Strauss (2007) makes an important claim concerning this position. According to him, even though Schmitt opens the way for a radical critique of liberalism, he cannot see beyond liberalism's horizon.

The key to understand the limits of Schmitt's critique of liberalism is Hobbes. According to Strauss (2007), Hobbes erects a system upon which the liberal thesis of the social contract could build its claims for the juridical concept of the state that Schmitt tries to criticize. This is because his understanding of the state of nature allows for human perfection through the civil state. What creates the state of nature is human evil; however, this evil is read in terms of natural inclinations rather than moral perversion. The civil state can correct man's animality through education, reconciling him with his goodness. However, the work of the Leviathan is never completed: the state of nature is always looming in some other place or some other time. Therefore, order is possible through a sovereign decision that inaugurates the state as the founder and sustainer of order. Outside of order – before and after; here and there – there is the possibility of war/disorder and this possibility is what justifies the need for the sovereign.

Therefore, Strauss claims that rather than being antiliberal, Hobbes has been successful in providing the basis in which liberalism could flourish, by defending the civil state as the condition of possibility for order.<sup>55</sup> By siding with Hobbes' view of politics, and trying to rescue it from liberalism's failed attempt to erase it, Schmitt's "critique of liberalism occurs in the horizon of liberalism" and therefore "his unliberal tendency is restrained by the still unvanquished 'systematics of liberal thought'." (Strauss, 2007, p. 122) In fact, it is Schmitt himself who acknowledges that concepts "can only be understood in terms of

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<sup>55</sup> A similar argument is advanced by Foucault (2003) in his discussion of how the juridical model of politics came to predominate over the war-repression discourse. While it would be fruitful to follow on this discussion, the limited character of this dissertation cannot but signal to the productive legacy of Foucauldian reflection on politics and liberalism to think through the crisis narrative of international relations theory.

concrete political existence.” (Schmitt, 2007b, p. 85) In this sense, it is no surprise that his own thought, while it takes place in a context of “incredibly coherent systematics of liberal thought, which, despite all reversals, has still not been replaced in Europe today,” (Strauss, 2007, p. 71) cannot see beyond liberalism – or beyond Hobbes and the political defined in terms of the state.

It is at this point that it becomes important to think about Benjamin. In fact, Derrida (1992) claims that it is Benjamin rather than Schmitt who effectively offers a critique of liberalism which tries to move beyond law and the state. He does that by moving the sovereign decision beyond law, and the critique of violence (*Gewalt*) beyond the means-ends analysis. For Benjamin, human violence is always juridical: it either creates the law or preserves it. In fact, violence in the juristic schemes has always been appreciated as a justifiable means depending on the justness of the ends it helps to achieve. Because of that, no one has succeeded in performing a true critique of violence, for which it is necessary to reflect about violence as a pure means.

Benjamin’s argument thus opposes two forms of violence – and therefore two forms of justice: human (or mythical); and divine. Whilst human violence as means is always already juridical, divine violence is pure and destructive of law – it is revolutionary violence. Benjamin takes up the German concept of *Gewalt* – which Derrida (1992) reminds us is both violence and authorized violence – in order to understand how European law not only accepts violence as its counterpart, but it necessitates it. For no law can exist without a founding violence (a *coup de force* that precedes all legality and all authority), and without the conserving violence of law itself (which aims at its preservation). Therefore, his argument tries to show how a critique of violence can never happen without a critique of law. For law carries the performative tautology through which law exercises violence while denying it.

Benjamin discusses at length the role of the right to strike<sup>56</sup> to show how law exercises the violence it denies. Law guarantees the general strike; however, when this right is exercised, it may threaten the law’s existence by appealing to a different order. The right becomes unlawful in the moment it threatens to show the limits of law. In this situation, Derrida reminds, it becomes evident “the

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<sup>56</sup> Derrida will argue that the right to war suffers from the same pathologies.

homogeneity of law or right and violence, violence as the exercise of *droit* and *droit* as the exercise of violence.” Thus, the intimate relationship between law and violence is made clear: for “violence is not exterior to the order of *droit*. It threatens it from within.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 34)

Through this move Benjamin shows how foundational violence is always already conservative violence, because it carries the promise of its iteration. There is always what Derrida calls a “*differantielle contamination*” between the violence that founds the law and that which conserves the law; for “a foundation is a promise” and “even if a promise is not kept in fact, iterability inscribes the promise as guard in the most irruptive instant of foundation.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 38) It is the promise of its iteration that makes the founding moment originary. This double bind is what Benjamin calls the mystical force of law: “it interrupts the established *droit* to found another. This moment of suspense, this *épokhè*, this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 36)

Therefore, the critique of violence cannot discriminate between the founding and the conserving aspects of violence; lawmaking and lawpreserving. It is not possible to disentangle both, for they are linked logically and historically in the foundation of every state and in the declaration of every war – which is why one cannot be for law and against violence. “And so a purely moral critique of violence is as unjustified as it is impotent” because it cannot account for the “juridical essence of violence;” thus, “an effective critique must lay the blame on the body of *droit* itself.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 41)<sup>57</sup> Differently from human justice – which is juridical – Benjamin offers divine justice as destructive of law:

If mythical violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythical violence

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<sup>57</sup> This critique of law takes Benjamin to formulate a damaging critique of parliamentary democracy: its “amnesic loss of consciousness does not happen by accident. It is the very passage from presence to representation.” In this trajectory, democracy shows its degeneracy, its “Verfall.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 47) This degeneracy of parliamentary democracy is identified more prominently by Benjamin in the figure of the police, which is entitled to enforce the law, however shows how the law is made in the process of being applied, i.e. there is no pure application of the law, its foundational violence is also the conservative violence that it negates. See the discussion below. For a better discussion on the role of the police, see Derrida, 1992, p. 46-7; Benjamin, 1986, p.286-8. This critique rests, in fact, in the critique of the representational character of language and the recognition of its performative aspect, as reminded by Derrida (1992).

brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood. (Benjamin, 1986, p. 297)

A few considerations concerning this comparison are worthwhile. First of all, by considering divine justice as a justice of ends no longer tied to law, Benjamin points to the need to rupture with the universalizability – and therefore, the iterability – of law. In this sense, divine violence – “which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred execution” – is a truly “sovereign violence.” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 300) Here Benjamin indicates that this form of violence is unique, singular, particular. It cannot be known in advance, nor be recognized as such. It breaks with the cycle of violence instituted by law and its necessary iterability by accepting the “irreducible singularity of each situation.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 51) Thus, Benjamin concludes, “neither the divine judgment, nor the grounds for this judgment can be known in advance.” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 298) Man is left in the dark, so to speak, for he cannot know what this violence is, only experience its effects, which are not amenable to conceptual generalization; “for only mythical violence, not divine, will be recognizable as such with certainty, unless it be in incomparable effects, because the expiatory power of violence is not visible to man.” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 300)

Benjamin’s divine violence shows that there is no sacredness in the mere fact of life, but only in the *justice of life*. That is why, according to him, divine violence never destroys “the soul of the living.” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 298) Benjamin hopes, then, that by breaking the cycle of mythical violence, divine justice may inaugurate “a new historical epoch” predicated on the “abolition of state power” – and with it, of law and the temporality of crisis. In this sense, Benjamin’s critique of violence offers with poignant acuity “a thinking that knows that there is no *justesse*, no justice, no responsibility except in exposing oneself to all risks, beyond certitude and good conscience.” (Derrida, 1992, pp. 51-2)

The paradox of this critique of violence is that, in presenting itself as the “philosophy of *its* history” (Benjamin, 1986, p. 299) it points to the only properly critical attitude, one that can allow for a real choice (*krinein*) to be made only on the suspension of law; for Benjamin, this is the only attitude “that permits us, in respect to present time, to take a decisive position.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 54) However, through a deconstructivist reading of Benjamin’s text, Derrida shows

that it “does not escape the law that it states,” thus becoming “the specter of itself.” Derrida is here arguing that Benjamin’s critique of the violence inherent to law – because law is the iterative aspect of foundational violence – is so successful that it “threatens the rigor of the distinction between the two kinds of violence.” (Derrida, 1992, p. 43) There can be no origin or foundation without the promise of its iteration, and so the expressive character of the sovereign act of creation – as the expressive character of language – cannot be dissociated from its representational character.

This discussion also has implications to Schmitt’s decisionism. According to Barbour (2010), the decision for Schmitt has no history: “it inserts a sudden, abrupt, miraculous wedge into the normal, mechanical, repetitive application of rules” – it is “a pure event, without past or future.” (Barbour, 2010, p. 149) However, it is responsible for inaugurating both a spatiality – inside/outside; norm/exception – and a temporality – the decision as the origin of order. In its instant application, the decision creates “both a ground and a horizon.” (Barbour, 2010, p. 144) This paradoxical performativity of sovereignty creates a “sovereign time” – “a temporality of the sovereign exception” that is marked by instantaneity and singularity: the moment of the decision creates exception and normality; enemy and friend; time and space. It creates everything: the sovereign, the state, authority, order, law. Nothing precedes it, not even the crisis, for the crisis can only come to existence through the decision. As a consequence, “crisis, decider, and decision all leap into existence in the blink of an eye, as one compacted singularity.” (Barbour, 2010, p. 149)

However, Derrida’s reading of Schmitt’s “sovereign time” through Benjamin shows that the decision, while singular, is never locked into the instant, for the decision already contains the promise of its “iterability.” Schmitt’s juridical account of sovereignty depends on the decision to institute normality and law. For instance, when Schmitt defines the political in terms of “a real possibility of killing,” he is already inscribing the temporality of iteration in the heart of the decision. This is because the idea of the “real possibility” already institutes the war as promise, and therefore, as future presence. War thus becomes “the *telos* of the political,” (Derrida, 2005, pp. 130-131) and the decision on the enemy effectuates this transition from possibility to actuality. So, for Derrida, “as soon as war is possible, it is taking place.” (Derrida, 2005, p. 86) Analogously, since the

state is the actuality of the combating collectivity which makes the political exist, Schmitt's attempt to separate the state from the political cannot sustain; the state and the political continue to be "the teleological pole of the other." (Derrida, 2005, p. 120) Thus, Barbour concludes that "perhaps the decision is a fiction that casts us into the abyss of time, and all the uncertainties it entails, rather than delivering us from it." (Barbour, 2010, p. 152)

This shows how it is Benjamin instead of Schmitt who really points to the dangers of taking the critique of liberalism and law to the limit. Indeed, Derrida argues that the most "intolerable" effect of his text is the "temptation" it leaves open "to think the holocaust as an uninterpretable manifestation of divine violence insofar as this divine violence would be at the same time nihilating, expiatory and bloodless." (Derrida, 1992, p. 62) After all, the technologies used by the Nazi regime made killing bloodless. In trying to break with the legal cycle of violence, Benjamin's essay shows the risks of taking the impossibility of representation to its limit.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter was written as a cautionary tale. In so doing, it followed the footsteps of the figures it interpreted/performed. It was a tale of disillusionment, of limits. It tried to take this disillusionment as far as possible. In that narrative, it took us from crisis to the sovereign subject of decision, and argued that one cannot offer the solution to the other. The tale, however, was not meant as a tale of despair – perhaps only of finitude. As long as we keep the sovereign, we keep its temporality and its politics. Therefore, to think alternatively about modern politics implicates thinking alternatively about sovereignty.

With Koselleck, I argued that modernity, as the distinctively *Neue Zeit*, is possible only under a condition of crisis – a crisis that, however, is only intelligible under modernity. This aporetic character in Koselleck's characterization of modern crisis, one in which crisis is both the beginning of a new order and also the possible disruption of this order, shows how crisis becomes the condition of both stabilization and destabilization of modern order –

and thus the possibility of history as progress and also a constant menace to historical progress. Modernity needs crisis as its foundation, as the condition for its justification; it however has to keep crisis constantly at bay in order to persist. Therefore, modernity derives its legitimacy from the performativity of crisis; this is why crisis cannot be solved in terms of modernity. Or, as Narby has analyzed, “modernity and modern order cannot be formulated as circumstances under which crisis can be analysed since crisis is thought of as the beginning, middle and end of modern order and modernity *qua* modern order.” (Narby, 2014, p. 76)

Posing the problem of modernity in terms of crisis took us to a specific account of the political predicated on the sovereign subject – a subject whose structure is analogous to that of God in order to cope with secularism. The subject’s potentiality as (super)human is translated in his capacity for a genuine decision, ungrounded and unanticipated. The human decision – as the godly act of creation – creates modern politics, with its enemies/friends, insides/outside, before/after.

Furthermore, this chapter indicated that this modern politics, defined in terms of Schmittian decisionism, already contains the antinomy between norm and exception. It is not one or the other, but both: sovereignty can only be because, through decision, it guarantees the functioning of order and the existence/survival of the state. This existentialist understanding of politics is precisely what Schmitt’s definition of the concept of the political in terms of the friend-enemy dichotomy presupposes. The political disappears where the possibility of conflict between enemies disappears. Thus exceptional politics does not negate normality, order and the homogeneity of time. Rather, through the decision as miracle, it instantiates a dual temporality of crisis, where again crisis cannot be comprehended so long as it is the moment where the modern arises; this is the moment in which time is periodized, knowledge becomes possible for a finite being, a sovereign, autonomous subject, who despite living as a transcendental being, can only know the world empirically.

In this sense, transcendental idealism defines the stakes and possibilities of the modern, posing the limits of thinking beyond it. International relations theory as crisis theory seems to be trapped precisely inside this conundrum; the more one attempts to solve its aporias through a narrative of crisis, the more one gets knee-deep into this very complicated problematic. Because “it is not only the problem

of exceptionalism, or of crisis, that is at stake in the problem of crisis, but the very possibility of politics.” (Narby, 2014, p. 106) In this sense, it is imperative to understand the size and depth of the problems international relations theory engages when it mobilizes this narrative of crisis, and perhaps find different ways of constructing the problem.



## Kant's Enlightenment and the possibility of critique

Understanding the temporality of crisis was one possible way to glimpse at the acute problem at the heart of international relations theory. It allowed me to look at the links that connect secularization, politics, sovereignty and law under modernity. Starting with crisis, I could look at effects of temporality and periodization. This signaled to the place of the knowing subject – the sovereign subject with his autonomy, freedom, rationality. This, for its turn, pointed me to politics as secularization and the role of sovereign authorization. I ended at the limits of the sovereign narrative – its seductions, its dangers. With Benjamin, I pointed to the risks of trying to move beyond the human towards the divine. After all, as Derrida pointed out, bloodless justice has become all too common in times of technology.

I could, then, take the last chapter to be telling there is no way out of this sovereign subject of knowledge – with all of its implications. In fact, this seems to me to be the route taken by all of those who tried to establish the conditions of possibility of true knowledge, pursuing a critical philosophy defined in juridical terms – the Kantian critical court of reason that must always be in session in order to prevent knowledge from going beyond the limits of experience, and attempting to know that which cannot be known. This is the route that, in the twentieth century, led to the path of “science,” with its criteria, correlations, limits<sup>58</sup>. And this is also the path that would seduce international relations theory in the years that followed its invention – after all, as Guilhot (2008) argued, the project which international relations theory was invented to preserve would soon be defeated and give way to the political scientists.

Waltz certainly offered a seductive view of this path. He was convinced that, given the limits of representation, we must have our concepts well defined in

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<sup>58</sup> I am not claiming here that “science” can be reduced to any specific account of knowledge production. Rather, I try to emphasize how twentieth-century philosophy of science has been “hijacked” by a limited interpretation on the conditions of possibility of true knowledge, in a sense that strongly reduces alternative possibilities of understanding knowledge and its purposes. For an account of this limitation in the heart of the philosophy of science and its implication to the development of international relations theory, see Jackson (2011).

order to claim that we can in fact know/explain anything. Knowledge is conditional upon human finitude: give up on this finitude, give up on the critical court of reason, and risk to be left in a world in which claims cannot be made authoritatively. Or instead, stick with finitude and you still have to make authority emerge as magic. Waltz's magic was the system, and with this move, he was able to avoid all the decisionistic embarrassments that alarmed America after fascism and the Second World War (Bessner & Guilhot, 2015). One way or another, this path leads incessantly to the sovereign subject – individual and/or collective. I do not want to tell this story; I feel we already know it too well.

Therefore, when I, like international relations theory, begin with crisis, I stop at the limits of the subject of knowledge, of sovereignty and therefore, of law and/as violence. What if I started from somewhere else? What if I could start not from the tragedy of human finitude that leads to the acknowledgment of modernity as a friend/enemy politics, and instead moved to an ironic heroization of my own “thrown-ness,” in which my becoming-in-the-world is always already a becoming-with-others, a belonging together in difference that respects alterity instead of policing boundaries? Where would I find myself then? This is the path that I will try to follow in this chapter by beginning with critique.

But what is critique? Aren't critique and crisis tied from their birth? How can beginning with critique lead anywhere else? Haven't I told this story already? My simple answer here is no. This is a different story, in that it frames the problem differently. In order to do that, I will find recourse in Foucault's discussion of critique in relation to Kant's Enlightenment. Again, this is one of multiple possibilities to tell this story; and, again, a contested one. In any way, I hope to be able to offer a compelling narrative as to how we can move beyond the knowing subject – and therefore, beyond sovereignty and law – without necessarily looking for the divine. Human finitude will still ground the limits of this second narrative, but this finitude will not be interpreted in its tragedy, but in its potentiality. Like Foucault, I believe our best hope is to stay with Kant, against Kant.

## 5.1

### The doubled tradition of critique

In the last decade of his life, Foucault reengaged the work of Kant and the theme of the Enlightenment through a more positive assessment, in what has been a very criticized and debated move. At this moment, Foucault tried to clearly associate his oeuvre to the political position taken by first generation Frankfurt School, which rendered multiple engagements with – and criticism by – Jürgen Habermas. Also, at this moment he performed another change in the focus of his investigations: if at first his archeological concern with discursive practices that encompassed the frames of possible forms of knowledge had been displaced by a genealogical investigation of power relations and regimes of governmentality, at this point his thought was refocused on the different forms through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects – what he called “forms of subjectivation through the techniques/technologies of the relation to self” or “pragmatics of the self.” (Foucault, 2011, p. 5)

In this context, Foucault set out to formulate a different account of critique that would bring a more positive light to bear on the Kantian legacy for modern philosophical and political thought. Foucault’s account of critique came to be framed between the Nietzschean genealogical critique of the earlier phase – which emphasized struggle, war, and the recovery of counter-narratives, counter-histories and counter-memories that had been silenced by normalized structures of power-knowledge – and a Kantian critique concerned with the limits of knowledge and the possibility of human autonomy – if only by redefining its borders and historicizing its *a priori*. (Hanssen, 2000)

In order to delineate this account of critique – which Foucault will call a “critical attitude” that performs an “ontology of ourselves” – it is important to consider in particular three lectures in which he formulated more clearly his reengagement with Kant and the Enlightenment: *What is critique?* (2007b), delivered in 1978; *The art of telling the truth* (1983), which was published as the first lecture in the volume entitled *The government of self and others* (2011); and *What is Enlightenment?* (1994b[1984]), which engaged Kant’s homonymous text, published in a German newspaper in 1784.

Foucault's movement of rapprochement to the Kantian legacy at this point generated very contradictory responses on the part of his followers and critics. In particular, it rendered special attention and criticism from Habermas, who having already extensively criticized Foucault's "totalization of power" and aesthetic conception of politics which led to the erasure of the normative, now would take a hit against his attempt to stain the legacy of the Enlightenment. In any case, Foucault seemed more prone to find a point of conversion between his own explorations and those of the Critical Theorist. The attempts to further explore this conversation were cut short by Foucault's death in 1984 – which happened a few months before a private conference that was scheduled to happen between the two thinkers in order to discuss Kant's *What is Enlightenment?*. (Hanssen, 2000)<sup>59</sup>

In fact, the reappraisal of Kant's legacy occurred precisely through an assessment of this quite marginal essay published in 1784 – which Foucault would consider to be "something of a blazon, a fetish for me." (Foucault, 2011, p.7) In any case, all of Foucault's engagements with the text would contribute to a reassessment of the legacy of the Enlightenment, not as something to be despised and dismissed, much less celebrated and rescued at any cost; it was presented, instead, as an important legacy on present modes of thinking, acting, being – one still to be accounted for.

What is interesting in Foucault's later discussion of Kant's reading of the Enlightenment is that it opens a second, less traveled by, route for critical thought. As he puts it, this reading shows that Kant founded not one, but "two great traditions which have divided modern philosophy." One of these traditions is found in the Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, a form of "critical philosophy which posed the question of the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge." (Foucault, 2011, p. 20) This tradition followed the path put forward by Kant in his major critical oeuvre, and during the course of the nineteenth century, it fully developed into an analytic of truth, intended to find the conditions of possibility for true, reliable knowledge.

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<sup>59</sup> Foucault's lecture *The art of telling the truth*, which was published in the edition of his Lectures at the *Collège de France 1982-1983: The government of self and others* (Foucault, 2011), is thought to contain his contribution to this conference, to which Habermas would write a response eulogy, *Taking Aim at the heart of the present* (1994). Despite of Foucault's death, the conversation between the two theorists would span a whole set of exchanges between Foucauldians and Critical Theorists. For an overall account of the positions on this debate, see Kelly (1994).

In fact, this seems to be the path international relations theory followed when confronted with the theory of crisis of its earlier proponents, and the crisis of theory that followed from a narrow conception of science and knowledge. The opening of the discipline in the late 1960s to more formal accounts of science—which were willing to move past the “human” element and instead focus on the systemic variables that could be generalizable – points exactly to this attempt at finding the adequate criteria for making international relations a proper science which could produce reliable knowledge about the international, affording some possibility of control and progress. Independently of the success or adequacy of the approaches developed in this guise, it is incontestable there was a significant turn to the philosophy of science – Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos – for some guidance on how to make international relations theory more scientific.

This path has been traveled by extensively – both inside and outside international relations theory – and it has certainly constructed a powerful view of knowledge, its appropriate objects, subjects, goals, methodologies – of its limits. However, this is not the path of critical thought that I want to stress. Instead, I will try to pursue what Foucault considered to be a second critical tradition inaugurated by Kant. This tradition is found not exactly in his well-known critical works, but instead in an ethos inaugurated by Kant when discussing the Enlightenment and the Revolution<sup>60</sup>. According to Foucault, in such texts Kant was not posing the question of the universal subject and universal reason, but instead the problem of the subject and of rationality *in history*. Specifically, Kant will bring forth an inquiry concerning the ontological status of the present, and of the subjects who live in this present. He calls this second brand of critical thought “the ontology of the present” or the “ontology of ourselves.” In fact, Foucault puts forth a choice to be made by critical thought: “We have to opt either for a critical philosophy which appears as an analytical philosophy of truth in general, or for a critical thought which takes the form of an ontology of ourselves, of present reality.” (Foucault, 2011, p. 21)

This view of critique as an attitude – at once political, ethical, aesthetical – offers a historical-philosophical practice “which has nothing to do with the philosophy of history or the history of philosophy.” (Foucault, 2007b, p. 55) The

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<sup>60</sup> The two texts to which Foucault makes allusion here is Kant’s *An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’* (1784), and his *The Contest of Faculties* (1798). See Kant (2008a; 2008b).

present is inquired on its own terms, as allowing for a kind of knowledge that is particular, conditional, and not universal. For Foucault, then, this is the form of critical inquiry that should be taken up: one that looks not for the limits of true knowledge, but instead poses the question of the present, and of the kinds of subjects “we” – who live in the present – are. This critical practice articulates the links between rationality, truth and the subject, not as a way to find “formal structures with universal value,” but to find the “events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 315) According to Foucault,

[...] this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method. Archaeological – and not transcendental – in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge [*connaissance*] or of all possible moral action, but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events. And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think. It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom. (Foucault, 1994b, pp. 315-6)

In order to understand this critical attitude and whether it helps to move beyond the temporality, subjectivity and politics of crisis as discussed in the last chapter, I must first assess this legacy of the Enlightenment.

### 5.1.1

#### Productive power and the possibility of critique

Despite of the focus many interpreters devoted to the way this late movement of rapprochement to Kant marks a break with Foucault’s speculations about power, and specially from his earlier indictment of Kant as responsible for throwing modern philosophy in its “anthropological sleep”<sup>61</sup> (Foucault, 2002), I

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<sup>61</sup> This is actually the view taken by Habermas himself in his eulogy to Foucault, where he argues: “Equally instructive is the contradiction in which Foucault becomes entangled when he opposes his critique of power, disabled by the relevance of the contemporary moment, to the analytic of the true in such a way that the former is deprived of the normative standards it would have to derive

however find it more productive to understand how Foucault's sharp account of the nexus power-knowledge is in fact at the basis of his revision of the legacy of the Enlightenment. I find support to follow this line of argumentation in Foucault's own claim – which he delineates clearly in *The Subject and Power* (2000[1982]) – that his entire research has been concerned with the subject, rather than power. In this text, Foucault claims to have tried to create “a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 208) According to this understanding, his discussion on the “how” of power was meant as an inquiry into the ways by which power works in the production of subjectivities, more than in their repression.<sup>62</sup>

At this point, Foucault also already situates his research in relation to the Frankfurt School, in that he identifies a common concern in questioning the relationship between rationalization and the excesses of political power – a problem that becomes particularly acute in the transition between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but that however was tied with the articulation of the modern state itself. In fact, he finds in Kant the first manifestation of this doubled concern of modern philosophy: on the one hand, to “prevent reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience” and, on the other hand, “to keep watch over the excessive power of political rationality.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 210) Differently from the Frankfurt School, however, he claims to have opted for questioning “the specific rationalities rather than always invoking the progress of rationalization in general.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 210)

Foucault's approach to power takes him precisely to understand a particular structure of power articulated by the state and which, contrary to most contractualist accounts of sovereignty, does not stand above society and its individuals; rather, this form of power integrates a technique which is associated with the Christian church and its pastoral power, and which is predicated on the

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from the latter. Perhaps it is the force of this contradiction that drew Foucault, in this last of his texts, back into a sphere of influence he had tried to blast open, that of the philosophical discourse of modernity.” For the full account of Habermas position in relation to Foucault's reengagement with the Enlightenment, see Habermas (1994). Michael Kelly's edited volume on the Foucault/Habermas debate is also instructive in this account (see Kelly, 1994). Also see discussion below.

<sup>62</sup> Foucault introduces an important clarification concerning the two senses of the word subject: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge;” as he explains, “both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 212) This clarification will be important to think the implications of his discussion of power and freedom below.

“conduct of conducts.” For the modern state, Foucault claims, it was necessary to develop a “very sophisticated structure” that is both totalizing and individualizing – looking after every single individual and also the entire flock.<sup>63</sup>

Foucault clarifies that what is most distinctive of this technique of power is the way it “does not act directly and immediately on others; instead, it acts upon their actions.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 220) In fact, two conditions are absolutely necessary for the operation of this form of power constitutive of the modern state: first, “‘the other’ (the one over whom power is exercised) [must] be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts;” and second, for those participating on a relationship of power, “a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 220) In other words, what Foucault is delineating here is an account of power that is not only compatible with freedom<sup>64</sup>, but that in fact depends on its subjects’ freedom in order to act – to act upon their actions, to conduct their conduct. Foucault goes on to explain about this form of power:

It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of actions. (Foucault, 2000, p. 220)

This definition has implications both for his concept of power – that cannot be equated to possession nor repression – and for his concept of freedom – that dismisses any possibility of an essential and primordial trait of the individual in need of being discovered or rescued. Power exists always “in relation,” and it

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<sup>63</sup> According to Foucault, this governmental form of power which was secularized and exercised by the state has four main characteristics: i. it is directed towards individual salvation; ii. it involves the sacrifice of the pastor for the flock; iii. it exercises power over all of the population collectively, and each subject individually; iv. and it necessitates knowledge over people’s minds. Such a form of power is concerned, above all, with the administration and government of the conduct of individuals. For a general view of pastoral power, see Foucault (1978; 2007a). For an insightful appraisal of the contemporary implications of Foucault’s pastoral power, see Klausen (2011).

<sup>64</sup> As the discussion below will attempt to clarify, freedom here cannot be understood in any simplistic terms, as liberation from an external imposition, or as an unimpeded capacity to do as one pleases. In fact, Foucault will distinguish the notion of freedom and liberation, precisely as a way to advance a different account of freedom that is always in relation to power.



can only be exercised “over free subjects and only insofar as they are free.”<sup>65</sup> (Foucault, 2000, p. 221) As a consequence, Foucault concludes, “the relationship between power and freedom’s refusal to submit cannot [...] be separated.” (Foucault, 2000, p. 221)

In Foucault’s productive approach to power, power is seen at its most strong when it produces subjects – when it individualizes and totalizes them; when it subjects them – rather than when it represses. In such an articulation, Foucault points to the way power and knowledge are not tied in any illegitimate way; for instance, the knowledge produced by the state and the state institutions and which supports its individualizing and totalizing operation, cannot be seen as illegitimate because it is associated to a form of power. In fact, as his previous studies aimed to show, knowledge is itself a power operation, and power can only be exercised through knowledge – after all “knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.” (Foucault, 1984a, p. 88)

In this way, by placing his concern with the constitution of multiple rationalities, rather than with the general process of rationalization, it is understandable why, for Foucault, critique will not be defined in terms of a universal project of reason, aiming at providing universal rules of conduct. Critique is going to be particular, and it is going to confront the question of the links between reason and power – not in a way as to search for their illegitimacy, but instead to refuse the forms of governmentalization that tried to impose specific forms of subjectivity while denying others. In this framing of the problem, the role of critique cannot be subsumed under the juridical function of the court of reason. If power is not juridical, neither should critique be. In this sense, criticism is always a particular operation that takes place historically and can only be defined by its operation – never as a generalization. Therefore, Foucault will characterize critique as an “attitude,” an “ethos,” and even as “virtue in general.” It requires not the operation of a judge, a turning of reason upon knowledge; it

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<sup>65</sup> It is particularly interesting that Foucault demarcates power from violence in this text – and also from consent. Indeed, by including the possibility of a form of human relationship not based on power – a relationship based on violence, for instance – Foucault seems to be making a gesture towards critics of his “totalizing view of power.” His account then, distinguishes power from violence not as a way to say that power is carried out without violence; to the contrary, he only aims to delimit that a relationship based exclusively on violence does not involve power because there is no room for maneuver on the part of the subject over whom power is exercised. For a clearer account of this perspective, see Foucault (1994a; 2000).

asks instead for the production of the subject by the subject, a turn of the subject upon itself in order to understand ‘what I am’ and also to refuse to be what I no longer wish to be.

By showing the indissolubility of this link between truth, power and the subject, Foucault has performed a number of operations that allowed for a change in the kinds of questions a critical form of thought could pursue. First, he showed that power does not necessarily operate on the juridical model, which meant abandoning the repressive hypothesis according to which power says “no,” and embarking on an approach which searched for the productiveness of power. As a consequence, since one cannot escape power, freedom must be negotiated within it, and not as a liberation from it (as the usual models of emancipation posited). This view on power and freedom also amounted to a different relation to knowledge: if reason cannot accede to a form of knowledge that approaches us to truth – for our will to truth is deeply intertwined with forms of power – we would do better if we no longer strived to inquire into the limits of knowledge, and instead looked for ways to desubjugate ourselves from those institutions and discourses that try to define who we are and what we are legitimized to do, and instead strive to locate ourselves on the limits of what we have become in order to become something else.

Therefore, through his genealogical approach to the ways power produces and subjugates, Foucault has been able to advance a form of ethics that, following Owen (1994), I will call an “ethics of creativity.” This ethics is not guided by the law which allows or prohibits, but by a certain ethos, a positioning, an attitude towards things and towards ourselves. This ethics is always also political and aesthetical: political in that it is predicated on struggle, struggle against structures of subjection that are both outward and inward; it is also political in that this struggle is never individual, but always positions the subject in relation to other subjects, in negotiation, in difference, and it asks of the subject to look not for the same, for identity, but instead for “the other” that lies within and without, something that was denied, excluded and silenced, in order to find the possibility of becoming something else – a possibility that is always limited by our own “thrown-ness” in power. This ethics is also aesthetical in that it presents the subject as a “work of art,” an artistic creation (and not a natural necessity) that is never completely achieved, but is always in constant (re)production, a

(re)production that is citational: at the same time that it reaffirms the same, it opens itself to the other.

The subject seen from this political-aesthetical ethics, as a (self)creation in power and through power, involves a constant referral to the present, the ontology of the now: this subject asks “what I am in this present moment, and what therefore can I hope to be considering the present conditions in which I have been made subject?” Therefore, this is a historical ethos as well, an ethos which asks for a historical attitude that ruptures with the flow from past-present-future, and does not derive the future possibilities from the past determinations, but asks how the present may be interpreted as a difference, a moment to negotiate between past and future as a differential relation, and not as a continuity, a sign or a transition. This difference that the present institutes in relation to the past(s) is then to be seen as a resource to question both the present and the subject who lives in this present.

Finally, Foucault calls for a heroic yet ironic ethos, one that looks not so much for tragedy – in the sense of a lamentation concerning human finitude –, but for an “ironic heroization” of the subject and of the present: heroic because it demands of the subject a courage, a will to change, a will to become something else in his freedom; but also ironic, because it knows the limits of this present and of this subject, which has to pursue his heroism all the time knowing that it cannot be other than an ironic hero – but a hero nonetheless.

These are the opportunities that I think are unleashed by Foucault’s reappraisal of Kant – in fact, by his situatedness in between Kant and Nietzsche, his attempt to walk with one against the other, and vice-versa. In this in-betweenness, he attempts to formulate an approach to critique that is both Kantian and Nietzschean, in that it looks for autonomy and self-creation, but knows that there are no guarantees; that, in fact, in the limits of the self and of the present there is danger, and no law, no normativity, no universal can save the subject from this danger – again, it asks for heroism. And Foucault will connect this ethos of creativity, this interpretation of critique as an attitude, precisely to Kant, to the way, according to him, Kant has been the first to mobilize this kind of ontological question concerning the present and, with it, reenacted a view of knowledge and ethics predicated on an ascetic, self-creative attitude.

In this sense, Kant, according to Foucault, understood that the subject could not accede to knowledge by means of knowledge alone. Knowledge was not simply available to be discovered; rather, knowledge depended on a transformation of the subject by the subject, in his rational and moral capacities, in his autonomy and freedom – in a nutshell, in his maturity. Only a mature human being – something that could not be accomplished by theoretical reason alone – could act and think for himself, autonomously; only the autonomous, mature human being could legislate his own law and have the courage to abandon all forms of heteronomous authority. In order to understand how Foucault will derive his own non-humanist ethics from Kant's autonomy, I will now turn to Kant's discussion of the Enlightenment, a text in which, according to Foucault, Kant introduces this problematic of the ontology of the present and of the subject who creates himself as artifice – a work of art – in order to know and act autonomously.

## 5.2

### **Kant's Enlightenment: maturity as self-creation**

In the short essay written in 1784 as a response to a question being posed by the German magazine *Berlinische Monatsschrift – Was ist Aufklärung?* – Kant will define the Enlightenment as “man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.” He goes on to define immaturity as a self-incurred “inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of others,” which puts immaturity as a condition not of outward domination, but of a “lack of resolution and courage” to use one's own understanding without the guidance of others. (Kant, 2008a, p. 54) This definition presents the Enlightenment negatively: as “a way out,” or the capacity to leave something self-imposed behind. Therefore, Enlightenment is described as a calling [*beruf*] for man to abandon his “laziness and cowardice” and make use of reason – something he already possesses, but *lacks the will to use*. Maturity – which is not a matter of age, but of character – is conditioned to this capacity to make free, autonomous use of reason.

Foucault calls attention to the way Kant employs the term “mankind” rather ambiguously in this text. According to him, Kant's use of the word *Menschheit* can be read in two ways: either it refers to the entire human race, in

which case Kant is claiming that the Enlightenment is to be achieved universally by all man; or instead, it refers to the understanding of what is properly human, in which case Enlightenment is read as “a change affecting what constitutes the humanity of human beings.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 306) The ambiguity of his formulation leaves room still to think in between both possibilities, which makes of Kant’s Enlightenment a rather complex account of what it means to be human under modernity.

In this sense, Kant’s definition of immaturity as *man’s lack of will to use his own understanding* – not as a lack of understanding itself – implicates in a view of maturity that is not connected simply to the acquisition of more knowledge. Enlightenment, as the “way out” of this state of immaturity, is a call for man to have courage to use his own understanding – therefore, it involves a change in the disposition of man *qua* human, a transformation in his very soul. In this sense, Kant’s Enlightenment implicates the existence of one’s humanity, as both a promise and a duty. Working towards autonomy/maturity is working on one’s soul.

Because of this view of maturity as something to be constructed, the Enlightenment of man cannot be an immediate accomplishment. For, as Kant argues, “a revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking.” (Kant, 2008a, p. 55) Working on human will, on his soul, is a slow, diligent, inward task; it cannot be given to man by some outside authority. Enlightenment, then, becomes a slow transformation towards the achievement of man’s human potential – his autonomy and maturity. But how does this transformation become possible? For Kant, this is precisely the role of critical reason – reason used publicly and autonomously to help man achieve his maturity. In fact, Strong argues that, for Kant, “to be truly human, one is to be called to be self-critical and, thus, free.” (Strong, 2012, p. 28) This means that, achieving one’s own voice is not a simple matter of having freedom of speech – something that can be given by outside authority – but a question of finding a truly autonomous, non-determined speech – and this involves a diligent work of the

subject upon himself.<sup>66</sup>

How can man, then, exercise his autonomy, his reason? Indeed, as Foucault argues, Kant introduces “two essential conditions under which mankind can escape from its immaturity,” conditions that are “at once spiritual and institutional, ethical and political.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 306) First of all, he introduces a distinction between the realm of reason and the realm of obedience, which means that, in the Kantian scheme, autonomy is fully compatible with obedience. The second and complementary condition is the distinction between the public and private uses of reason.<sup>67</sup> Here, Kant introduces not only the possibility, but the necessity for man to be at the same time autonomous in the use of his own reason, and yet a diligent member of society.

These distinctions form a complex picture of human autonomy, one that is not contained in the more common formulations of “freedom of conscience.” On the contrary, autonomy is to be pursued through the public use of reason. In this capacity, man acts as a scholar (*Gelehrter*)<sup>68</sup>, as a true human being. In this capacity, he is “completely free as well as obliged” to pursue his duties towards human progress without outside guidance. In the private realm, however, man should act in the capacity of a civil servant, a subject who must perform his duties to society – for instance, the citizen must pay his taxes even when he disagrees with them; the priest must teach the bible to his congregation, even if his personal conscience shows him otherwise. However, when they are speaking as scholars, they must put their public reason to use and speak as free, autonomous human beings. From these distinctions follows Kant’s injunction to “argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!” (Kant, 2008a, p. 59) If any of these distinctions are ignored; if man confuses them and tries to use his public

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<sup>66</sup> In fact, Kant will argue that some forms of restrictions hinder Enlightenment, whereas other kinds help to promote it. What he is signaling at here is that the enlightened ruler – the one who helps to promote Enlightenment – is one who understands these distinctions between obedience and autonomy, and respects the individual when he is acting as an autonomous human being – for that, freedom of speech may be necessary, even if not sufficient. When the individual acts as a citizen, however, the enlightened ruler may well demand obedience, for keeping the republic is his political and moral duty.

<sup>67</sup> By doing so, Kant can be seen as inaugurating two forms of discipline: one of domination and one of resistance. For a fuller account of this discussion, see Cutrofello (1994).

<sup>68</sup> As Strong remarks, this idea of scholar brings the notion of “a person whose speech puts him or her in relation to a universal audience,” (Strong, 2012, p. 30) i.e. it puts forth the relationship between the individual conscience and the universal appeal. In the public realm, “I am [...] my human self only when I speak in such a manner that my words are potentially the words of everyone, irrespective of ‘commission’.” (Strong, 2012, p. 31)

reason privately; or else, if man submits to all authority and remains obedient when he should publicly take a stand, in both cases, maturity does not ensue. Man remains trapped in his immaturity due to his own lack of will, and not because of anyone else's fault.

In this discussion, it seems relevant to note that Kant specifies three ways by which man gives up on the use of his own faculties, and lets an outside authority take the place of his own reason: when he lets a book take the place of his own understanding; when he lets the spiritual adviser be responsible for his conscience; and when the doctor is called to judge upon his diet.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, what Kant does is to point out how immaturity rests ultimately on a person's own laziness – because “it is so convenient to be immature!” (Kant, 2008a, p. 54) Therefore, Enlightenment is more likely to happen in an entire public than in each person individually – and this process ultimately depends on guardians that have themselves become enlightened and, therefore, realize their duty in disseminating “the spirit of rational respect for personal value and for the duty of all men to think for themselves.” (Kant, 2008a, p. 55)

The link made in this text between Enlightenment, the use of reason and autonomy/maturity presents its direct relation to the theme of the three critiques. For when Kant “describes Enlightenment as the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority” he also points to the precise moment when “critique is necessary, since its role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 308) Critique is necessary for reason to be used legitimately, and the Enlightenment is the age of critique. In thus placing the burden of critique on this historical subject living in an age of Enlightenment, Foucault argues, Kant's text can be seen “at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 309) According to Foucault,

It seems to me that it is the first time that a philosopher has connected in this way, closely and from the inside, the significance of his work with respect to knowledge [*connaissance*], a reflection on history and a particular analysis of the specific moment at which he is writing and because of which he is writing. It is in

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<sup>69</sup> As Foucault remarks, these three heteronomous authorities are directly related to Kant's three critiques – even if Kant himself does not make this explicit.

the reflection on 'today' as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task that the novelty of this text appears to me to lie. (Foucault, 1994b, p. 309)

For Foucault then, this particular positioning of the text inaugurates a certain attitude of modernity which, he claims, should be characteristic of what we call modernity and Enlightenment. Foucault thus gives up on the periodization of modernity that was common in his earlier research on the *epistêmes*, and tries to approach a more genealogical account of this attitude, which becomes associated to critique itself – at least with the second tradition of critique that has been in a certain way silenced during the nineteenth century. Before taking up this discussion on the “critical attitude,” I however find it important first to clarify the links between Kant’s discussion of the Enlightenment and the general theme of his moral philosophy, in order to understand how it is possible to claim that Foucault’s critical attitude is intimately tied to Kant’s notion of autonomy.

### 5.2.1

#### **Kantian autonomy: what it means to be human**

According to Jerome Schneewind (1998), Kantian moral philosophy is “revolutionary” for the way its account of autonomy presents morality as self-government. In fact, notions of autonomy had already made their way into moral philosophy before Kant offered his critique. However, it was Kant who offered a “fuller and more radical” form of morality as self-government by arguing not only that reason was able to discover transcendental rules of conduct, but that “human will” itself had a legislative function. This meant that, for Kant, rules of morality did not exist independently from human capacity to reason – and therefore, could not be “discovered.” On the contrary, rules of morality were a product of reason’s ruling, and only when emerging from autonomous reasoning – reasoning for reason’s sake – could they ground human moral behavior. Therefore, in the Kantian scheme, obedience to the moral law became ultimately obedience to a law given by myself to myself. Only the radicality of this understanding of self-government allows actions according to the moral law to be considered truly autonomous actions.

For Schneewind, none of the earlier views of morality as self-government



considered human beings as legislators of the moral law.<sup>70</sup> Even when man was seen as equipped to independently recognize what was morally right or wrong – and was, therefore, able to govern himself without outside supervision – such laws were seen as emanating from some higher source of authority. By refusing to accept this foundational authority, Kant turns moral philosophy on its head, developing a view of the moral law as being given by man, through reason. According to Schneewind, Kant “believed that in the unique experience of the moral ought we are ‘given’ a ‘fact of reason’ that unquestionably shows us that we possess such freedom as members of a noumenal realm.” (Schneewind, 1998, p. 3)<sup>71</sup>

What is important to note here and which connects this discussion to the Foucauldian interpretation of Kant, is how Kantian autonomy makes morality “a matter of the heart rather than the head,” (Schneewind, 1998, p. 529) which means that the ethical conduct cannot be achieved through cognitive reasoning. In fact, Schneewind argues, for Kant “we all always know the one thing we need to know for moral perfection: the moral law;” (Schneewind, 1998, p. 529) therefore, “the task is not to improve our knowledge, but to increase our virtue – our strength in obeying the law in the right spirit. Because moral perfection is a condition of the will, we can strive for it only for ourselves.” (Schneewind, 1998, p. 529) In this sense, morality involves a duty to oneself as a member of humanity; and it is only through this individual duty towards perfectibility that a more general perfection of the world can be achieved. In this view of perfection as the achievement of autonomy, perfectibility is not a matter of right reasoning and increased knowledge, but instead of a virtuous inner discipline. As a result, Kant argues that the moral law cannot be judged by the external consequences of human action.

The boldness of the Kantian invention of autonomy lies, then, in the “astonishing claim” that the membership humans share with God in a single moral community comes not from their sharing the same moral law, given by God or

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<sup>70</sup> Schneewind is however clear to remark that attempts to move morality away from obedience had already appeared in earlier works, such as Machiavelli’s and Montaigne’s. However, he understands that a self-conscious effort to ground morality on self-government cannot be found before the eighteenth century.

<sup>71</sup> According to Schneewind (1998), Kant’s conception of morality as autonomy comes from a double heritage in which he was raised: on the one hand, a Wolffian morality which connected self-government to knowledge (even if this was achievable only by some human beings); on the other hand, a Rosseauian (English) egalitarian view of self-governance.

made perceptible by him, but by *equating man to God in his ability to legislate the moral law*. This revolutionary account of morality offered by Kant through practical reason – a reason that is the key to understand how man can become a free causality in the world, breaking with natural necessity and his quarrelsome nature and engaging in an autonomous path of self-improvement<sup>72</sup> – thus allows a vision of man “as analogous to the divinity.” (Kant *apud* Schneewind, 1998, p. 512)<sup>73</sup>.

In light of this discussion, Strong argues that, by introducing an idea of man as independent of any outside authority, Kantian invention of autonomy has in fact set the beginning of what Nietzsche would later call “the death of God.” As Strong argues, however, this death of God is not “a declaration of atheism;” rather, “what is lost with the death of God is not just God but the human being who had an understanding of God.” (Strong, 2012, p. 18) In casting man free from God’s will and instead making human will responsible for the construction and improvement of the world, Kant inaugurated a question that would preoccupy an entire problematic of critical thought in the twentieth century, and which concerns the lack of outside authority to ground human thought and action. The demands imposed by this form of thought implicate the question of *what it means to be human* and *the changes necessary in order to do so*. In this light, Strong claims that “one should read Kant’s concerns in the establishment of the categorical imperative, not as an attempt to say what is moral, but as the elaboration of those criteria that entitle one to claim that one’s acts are, indeed, moral.” (Strong, 2012, p. 51)

Morality seen not as acquisition of more knowledge, but as the taking up of a certain character, of a certain will to be better and to act according to the categorical imperative, advanced a central question for modern political thought about the kind of person who can live life in a disenchanted world. Therefore, the changes brought about by Kantian view of autonomy led to something even more profound: a complete revolution in the understanding of what it is to be human. In

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<sup>72</sup> I have discussed the role of practical reason in the Kantian scheme somewhere else. See Souza (2011).

<sup>73</sup> More radical conceptions of morality as autonomy can be found in the works of Hume and Rousseau. However, Kantian autonomy is different in that, being grounded on a transcendental freedom, it enables man to go beyond natural causation. For a more profound discussion on the nuances of this argument, see Schneewind (1998), Chapter 23.

doing so, “Kant set the framework within which and to some degree against which the next two centuries of thought must work.” (Strong, 2012, p. 24)

### 5.3

#### Critique beyond the blackmail of the Enlightenment

In *What is critique?*, Foucault will define the “critical attitude” as a response to the “governmentalization of life” through which the modern state had secularized and multiplied the “art of governing” employed by the Christian pastoral over its subjects. In this sense, the critical attitude is not characterized as an abstract, general practice, but as an emergence, a strictly historical attitude which found its conditions of possibility in the opposition to the practices of governmentality.

According to Foucault, this critical attitude cannot be characterized by its content or meaning, but instead for its function: it is always an “act of voluntary insubordination,” a disposition and an imperative “not to be governed too much.” This critique “only exists in relation to something other than itself;” (Foucault, 2007b, p. 42) in this sense, it does not refer to a primordial will not to be governed at all, but a will not to be governed *thusly, under such circumstances, by such powers*. In this sense, Foucault likens the critical attitude with “virtue in general,” for it requires this historical, particular positioning against forms of governmentalization that try to create subjection.

[...] If governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that *critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth in its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth*. (Foucault, 2007b, p. 47)

Following from what has been discussed earlier in this chapter, this formulation has two immediate implications: first, critique is an attitude – and not only a juridical procedure, as originally formulated by Kant; an attitude that involves the figure of the turn – the subject gives himself, nobody else gives him this right. He empowers himself, in a sense, to question truth and power. Well, the second implication is to connect critique to historical practices; for it is against governmentalization that the subject gives himself the right to question truth and

power. As Foucault points out in a number of occasions, this is not a voluntarism, nor a general, *a priori* right given by the subject to himself. It is built out of the real practices of power and governmentalization, as a way of saying: “I don’t want to be governed like that, through these practices.”

This attitude, however, is not seen by Foucault to negate the Kantian critical legacy. Instead, it focuses on a different operation of critique – not as the operation of knowledge upon itself, as a negative prevention against error; but an attitude of the “autonomous” subject, who exercises his will, his decision, not to be governed thusly. And as seen before, it is in Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment as “a way out” of immaturity, that Foucault finds for the first time the formulation of this will not to be governed. Therefore, even if we follow Kant instead of Foucault, it is possible to see that autonomy coexists with obedience; following Foucault, we could say that freedom must negotiate within power, emerging from it, under particular historical circumstances.

Without appreciating this aporetic legacy, the nineteenth century would contemplate the Enlightenment exclusively from the standpoint of rationalization and disenchantment. This led, in the twentieth century, to a profound skepticism towards reason and rationality – a legacy that was covered in the last chapter’s discussion of Weber, Schmitt, Benjamin, and which also permeated the entire contribution of the Frankfurt school, as well as the invention of international relations theory. The only question “critique” would ask was: “for what excesses of power, for what governmentalization, [...] is reason not itself historically responsible?” (Foucault, 2007b, p. 51) According to Foucault, the always-existing nexus between knowledge and power was discovered at this juncture, and resisting it – resisting the form of rationality associated to the science of the state – became a stance against the Enlightenment.

However, as Foucault has argued extensively, the legacy of the Enlightenment is much more complex: after all, “the Enlightenment, which discovered the liberties, also created the disciplines.” (Foucault, 1984b, p. 211) Therefore, understanding the correlations between these two legacies of critique, and finding room for the exercise of the critical attitude, becomes an imperative to resist the “blackmail” through which the Enlightenment is seen as either disciplining or liberating; and therefore, the injunction to be with or against the

Enlightenment<sup>74</sup>. In fact, if the Enlightenment refers to “a set of political, economic, social, institutional, and cultural events on which we still depend in large part,” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 312) it is not possible to stand apart from it. “As beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment,” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 313) we should instead assume a limit-attitude that tries to grasp how we have become what we are and how to move past it.

For Foucault, then, it is important to pose the question of the Enlightenment anew in order to understand the relationship between power, truth and the subject; “between the art of being governed and that of not being quite so governed.” (Foucault, 2007b, p. 57) The analytical tradition, by seeing a fundamental illegitimacy behind the association between knowledge and power, tried, through rigorous “scientific” procedures, to undo any links between a knowledge that was true and legitimate from a knowledge that exceeded its limits and became associated to forms of power and domination. By following an alternate route and accepting the contradictory legacy of the Enlightenment – accepting, then, the indivisibility between knowledge and power – one might be able to reassess the legacy of critique contained in the *Aufklärung*, and follow the path of a critical attitude, “a certain decision-making will not to be governed.” (Foucault, 2007b, p. 67)

In *The Art of Telling the Truth*, Foucault (2011) will further expand his understanding of the possibilities released by Kant’s response to the question of the Enlightenment in terms of formulating this problem of critique as an attitude one should constantly reactivate before articulations of regimes of truth and their effects of power. At this moment, Foucault reads Kant’s text on the Enlightenment together with his considerations on the French Revolution, in order to explain how Kant mobilizes the question of the present for the first time – a question that he believes accompanies us until today.

Differently from Descartes’ universal knowing subject, who is understood from a timeless perspective, Kant’s considerations on the Enlightenment and Revolution inaugurate a new type of question concerning the present,

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<sup>74</sup> As Hanssen remarks, without acknowledging it Foucault is here clearly making a statement against Habermas’ position concerning his own work and the need to salvage the Enlightenment from a narrative of counter-Enlightenment that risks destroying the emancipatory potential it brought about.

acknowledging the historicity of the philosopher as both subject and object of the present reality. His question then will be “what are we in a very precise moment of history.” To this effect, Kant would be introducing the present as a philosophical event to which the philosopher who speaks of it belongs, which puts both the present and the subject in a process of becoming – thus bracketing the very possibility of universality. Modernity itself appears as a question; not something to be peremptorily accepted or rejected, celebrated or lamented.

[...] It seems to me that philosophy as the surface of emergence of present reality, as a questioning of the philosophical meaning of the present reality of which it is a part, and philosophy as the philosopher’s questioning of this ‘we’ to which he belongs and in relation to which he has to situate himself, is a distinctive feature of philosophy as a discourse of modernity and on modernity. (Foucault, 2011, p. 13)

The originality of Kant’s reflection on the Enlightenment, then, refers to the way it tries to connect three different problematizations concerning: i. man’s relation to the present; ii. man’s historical mode of being; and iii. the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject. In this sense, critique thought through Kant’s Enlightenment can be understood as a call for the permanent reactivation of this philosophical ethos, which Foucault describes as “the critique of our historical era.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 312) This means that, as an ethos, the critical attitude brings together a politics, an ethics and an aesthetics of existence. It is a call to practice a limit-attitude that refuses to look for the universal and necessary limits imposed on human existence, and instead looks for the historical conditions which created man in the present – and therefore to ways of transgressing these historical limitations. This critical attitude as a historical ontology of ourselves cannot offer “projects that claim to be global or radical,” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 316) because it radically recognizes its own limits.

## 5.4

### **The critical ethos between ethics, politics, and aesthetics**

As argued in the beginning of this chapter, Foucault claimed that Kant’s question concerning the Enlightenment brought forth a form of critique that was not only concerned with human finitude in terms of the limits of knowledge, but that in fact instituted a certain ascetic ethos predicated on the questioning of one’s

own historical time and the need to refuse forms of power and governmentality that seemed oppressive. From the standpoint of the argument being developed here, what interests me is the way this critical ethos discussed by Foucault is an attempt to remobilize the self-creative ethics brought about by Kantian invention of autonomy by moving it away from a notion of universality and authenticity, and towards *finding the resources of self-creation in particular historical struggles*. This problematization of the present not in search of a universal category or history, but *in terms of a difference*, is precisely what he tries to rescue from Kant's discussion of the Enlightenment and Revolution.

Read in this light, what the critical tradition offers is ways to answer the philosophical questions of modernity<sup>75</sup> without relying on any transcendental guarantees. Strong will argue that, in fact, Kant's noumenal realm was not meant as an attempt "to posit a realm of that which could not be known;" more importantly, it served "to show that human understanding was not exhausted in the act of knowing." (Strong, 2012, p.13) The noumenal was thus offered as a transcendental presupposition; i.e. the presupposition that something lies beyond all knowledge and understanding and this something is what provides the conditions of possibility for everything to appear. Therefore, the critical edifice built up by Kant serves as "a reflective elaboration of what has to be the case for something to be what it is (and, thus, available as knowledge)." (Strong, 2012, p. 23)

Following this Kantian reappraisal of human finitude, Strong claims that "to be modern means, first, to have the possibility of experiencing the world, or portions of it, as if it or they raised self-referential questions. A self-referential question," Strong explains, "is one that raises the question of what something (actually) is—it is a *critical question*." (Strong, 2012, p. 9) To work within the critical tradition in this sense means inquiring into the limits of human thought and action in a world devoid of authority.<sup>76</sup> This means that one needs "to provide, not only arguments, but also the framework in which those arguments make sense." (Strong, 2012, p. 10) Similarly to Foucault, Strong is here arguing

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<sup>75</sup> The Kantian questions are: What can I know? What ought I to do? For what may I hope? And, pivotally: What is a human being? The centrality of the latter will be debated on Chapter 7.

<sup>76</sup> Like Foucault, Strong also defines this critical tradition as flowing from Kant to Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche, all the way until the twentieth century radicalization of critique – the turning of critique against itself.

that critique cannot be seen only as “an intellectual tool;” it rather stands for a demand, an attitude or an ethos concerning the (internal) work necessary for the individual who wants to live a critical life – in the Kantian terminology, a mature, autonomous human being.

This understanding of critique points to its concern with the ontological status of the present – a question concerning not appearances, but existence – an existence that however is beyond the reach of our knowledge. To the critical question “what is the quality of the world that is hidden from us?” Strong claims, “there can never be an answer.” (Strong, 2012, p. 12) Two consequences ensue from this construction of the problem of critique: first, it connects critique to the problem of the present – what Foucault calls the “ontology of the present” – and to the question of the “illegitimacy of all pasts” in terms of providing foundations. Secondly, and again connecting Strong’s claims to Foucault’s, it raises the problem of reflective judgment – of how to make a universal out of a particular judgment. It is true that the importance of this discussion will become more apparent in Kant’s *Third Critique*, concerning his reflections on the aesthetic experience. However, Strong claims, when Kant demarcates a realm for the public use of reason in his Enlightenment essay, he is already anticipating this theme of his *Third Critique*, which concerns “the relation between individual judgment and the universal,” (Strong, 2012, p. 31) the ability as well as duty of the subject to think both for himself and in the place of everyone else.

According to Strong, in his *Critique of Judgment*, “Kant shows that to be a (human) subject—to have a voice of one’s own—is not a simple given, like arms and legs, but something to be achieved.” (Strong, 2012, p. 22) When the subject summons his own voice authentically, he is also acknowledging his participation in a larger humanity to which he has duties – and thus the limits of his own comprehension alone. This concern for the Enlightenment, and therefore maturity of the subject *qua* human, is also the concern with the constructedness of the world and the subject’s role in it, his limits and potentialities. Kant’s discussion on the Enlightenment, then, advances the need to acknowledge that “one is tied to those with whom one shares a world” and therefore, that “any judgment I make in the first-person singular (“I”) may command the attention of my fellows, although it cannot compel their agreement.” (Strong, 2012, p. 22-3)

The ethical-political argument advanced by Kant through his discussion of



the Enlightenment actually signals to the fact that “the (authentic) subjective is in an important way more difficult to attain than the universal.” (Strong, 2012, p. 31) After all, as discussed earlier, the courage demanded by the Enlightenment from man in order to exit the state of immaturity could not be compelled from without, but had to be born from within, from a sense of duty to the human being that lies in me. Therefore, Kant argued that achieving maturity individually was in fact much harder than when “an entire public” had already entered into the age of Enlightenment. This signals to how, despite of the work the subject has to do upon himself in order to achieve his own maturity, Kant connects this personal task to the historical conditions of his time, clearly separating his notion of autonomy from any simplistic voluntarism. And this is precisely what Foucault seems to be trying to tackle by reengaging Kant’s text.

For Strong, then, reading as a modern – i.e. posing a critical question – means opening oneself to the existence of something that cannot be known and to which there can be no adequate words. Be it in terms of “the noumenal realm” or not, a transcendental presupposition becomes necessary for any knowledge to be possible – since knowledge rests on the presupposition of this *a priori*. It does not mean, however, that the *a priori* needs to be universal. This is where Strong connects his discussion of politics to Kant’s approach to the aesthetic: according to him, the aesthetic experience – the experience of something beautiful – is always an individual experience and yet it claims universal validity. In this aporetic movement between the particular and the universal, “the aesthetic opens up the space for the political.” (Strong, 2012, p. 23)

In this view, the aesthetic and the political negotiate and intertwine precisely by being realms in which one has to negotiate the relationship between the universal and the particular, the public and the private. “The question,” according to Strong, “is how one is to pass from ‘I’ statements to ‘we’ statements, or, more accurately [...] whether, if political, all such ‘I’ statements are necessarily an appeal to a ‘we’ statement.” (Strong, 2012, p. 50) It raises the question of authorization and grounding whilst knowing that all such grounds and authorities are of this world (are human creations), without dismissing the need for some form of commonality or universality. This is indeed the great political

question imposed by the death of God, and which this radically critical<sup>77</sup> tradition must confront.

Because of this, Strong in fact argues that the most important political position designed by Kant is to be found in the Third Critique. Kantian discussion of the role of aesthetics approaches the relationship between the comprehensible (that which is attainable in language) and the incomprehensible (which can never find a place in language). The aesthetic experience opens precisely a realm of that which cannot be known through knowledge, since its effects are to be achieved only subjectively; and yet, despite of being subjective, the experience of something beautiful makes a claim to some form of universality.

Beauty, in other words, is not something in the world. It is in the eye of the beholder, as we say, but it is, nonetheless, (intended as) universally valid. And, for it to be beauty, it is something I must experience—you cannot compel me to think. (Strong, 2012, p. 37)

Experiencing for oneself, however, brings the idea of experiencing for all – which is similar to the discussion of the public use of reason required by Kant in his Enlightenment piece. In this sense, “the work of art is known to be artificial—to be art—but it is experienced as if it had a natural necessity. Furthermore, it is experienced, not as the product of this or that person, but as valid for me.” (Strong, 2012, p. 38) Differently from his discussion on theoretical reason, the aesthetic introduces for Kant what Cutrofello (1994) called “a surprise witness,”

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<sup>77</sup> Strong distinguishes the critical tradition in three levels. First-level critique refers to the kind of skepticism that accompanied Hume concerning the possibilities of knowledge. Second-level critique aimed precisely at showing that Hume’s impasse concerning knowledge was not to be derived from knowledge, but from the way error was inscribed in the paths of reason itself – and, therefore, was not something one could get rid of. In this sense, second-level critique recognized that one should not aim at a complete and absolute knowledge of things, as much as try to use reason critically so as not too claim to know that which was not available to experience. This is precisely where the work of Kant becomes so relevant. A third-level critique is seen as radicalizing this understanding of the limits of knowledge “into the suspicion and argument that the structures of reason itself are also the sources of deceptions, deceptions made all the more powerful by the fact that we will not resist them.” (Strong, 2012, p. 55) Knowing that there is nothing to correct reason, this radicalized critique ontologically questions the very being of things, knowing that knowledge alone cannot provide a sufficient answer to such questions. Hence, the critical thinker has to bring himself to acknowledge his incorrigible flaws and retain a permanent critical attitude towards knowledge, an attitude of a “creator of worlds” – with the ensuing responsibilities which such a position entails. According to Strong, authors working within this tradition have to build “the equivalent of a noumenal realm” in order to proceed with the exercise of knowing. See Strong 2012, pp. 53-56.

precisely because it could not fit under any universal law. Unable to apprehend the universal, the aesthetic experience requires a form of reflective judgment which must make an universal for itself. This is why, according to Strong, the activity of artistic creation can be said to “[create] a kind of a particular *a priori* that serves as the constitutive world for those who come after it and work and live within it. Such a constitution would be specific and, thus, historical, although not [...] relativist.” (Strong, 2012, p. 48)

In light of this, Strong will argue that in fact, “the paradigm of our stance in relation to the noumenal [...] is the aesthetic.” (Strong, 2012, p. 13) This is because the aesthetic raises the concern with human construction – “with the acknowledgment of the presence of the incomprehensible and the consequent recognition that what one says about it is necessarily in and only in one’s own voice.” (Strong, 2012, p. 13) Something else – something human – must be brought forth in order to ground the possibility of saying anything.

This aporetic relation between the particular and the universal – the “I” and the “We” – points to the possibility of human existence in a post-Kantian modernity. In doing so, it serves to discourage all attempts to solve modern political problems by trying to evade the aporia and find a solution by appealing to one of the sides of a duality: either one or the other. As this discussion tried to argue, modern politics predicated in terms of the death of God and the invention of autonomy must somehow negotiate inside this aporetic relation between the particular and the universal.

#### 5.4.1

##### **The self as a work of art**

In this realization of the aporetic character of modernity – of a modern politics born out of the death of God and the search for autonomy as self-constitution – Foucault thus characterizes the attitude of modernity as an ethos of heroic ironization. He thus so by appealing to Baudelaire’s discussion of modernity and the subject of modernity, in terms which require to rethink both historical temporality and the sovereign subjectivity. I will untangle the argument in parts.

First, Foucault's reappraisal of historical time through this attitude of modernity is not simply a celebration of discontinuity, novelty, ephemerality or vertigo. Instead, the attitude of modernity requires not a celebratory acceptance of the movement of time, but the adoption of "a certain attitude with respect to this movement; and this deliberate, difficult attitude consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it." (Foucault, 1994b, p. 310) In fact, this attitude is one that requires an ironic heroization of the present.

What does this mean? It means, first, that it is not an attitude that treats the present – the fleeting moment – as sacred, so as to try to perpetuate it. It rather tries to capture the heroic character of the present so as to understand the "difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom." (Foucault, 1994b, p. 311) In other words, this attitude claimed by Foucault is one that, in the recognition of the unstoppable fluidity of time does not sacralize the present but understands that "the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is." (Foucault, 1994b, p. 311) Thus, it does not negate reality, but tries to understand its ontology precisely as a way of finding spaces for the practice of freedom.

However – and this is a second consequence of Foucault's ethos of ironic heroization – this reinterpretation of the value of the historical moment cannot be done without re-evaluating the very constitution of the subject. Indeed, a Baudelarian interpretation of modernity requires a certain relationship to oneself, "an indispensable asceticism," a recognition that the subject is not some hidden truth awaiting to be discovered; rather, it is the object of his own constitution. This constitution is always done within the limits of the present, therefore, reinterpreting the present means reinterpreting the constitution of the self. In this sense, "to be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 311) – an elaboration that is done in full awareness that the subject's historical limits can never be known from the stance of absolute knowledge.

This ascetic ethos is associated to the figure of the dandy, "who makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of

art.” (Foucault, 1994b, p. 312) The ethos of ironic heroization requires, then, to work at the limits of the present – to know its ontology, its reality, so as to look for its transformation; this work is also a work on the self that does not try to discover the subject in its authenticity or veracity, nor liberate his essential being from repressive powers. The dandy has the task of creating itself as a work of art. According to Owen, then, “the significance of Baudelaire’s elaboration of dandysme is that it radicalizes Kant’s position by opposing an ethics of creativity to an ethics of authenticity.” (Owen, 1994, p. 202) Foucault’s stance is, in this sense, an anti-humanist ethics claiming “there is no essential truth to what we are;” (Owen, 1994, p. 203) more than that, it is an ethics whose *telos* is the constitution of the self as a work of art.

Owen thus proposes that the reinterpretation of the theme of autonomy and maturity by Foucault’s engagement with Kant’s Enlightenment advances an ethics of self-constitution which recognizes the intersubjective character of human experience. In this sense, “by locating our activity of self-transformation within historically contingent relations of subjectivity, Foucault may be read as claiming that our becoming-in-the-world is always already a becoming-with-others;” (Owen, 1994, p. 205) i.e. the aesthetic subject has his finitude negotiating with the finitude of multiple others. Therefore,

[...] the intersubjective situatedness of our aesthetic labor on ourselves entails that just as our ascetic activity aims beyond itself towards a certain mode of being, that is, a certain form of subjectivity, so too it aims beyond itself in the sense of aiming towards relations of intersubjectivity which foster this mode of being. Ethics is always already politics. (Owen, 1994, p. 206)

This struggle seen from the perspective of the aesthetic – non-sovereign – subject is not one that opposes friends and enemies in a struggle for survival and sovereignty; rather, it is a struggle of the subject to guarantee the conditions both for his own struggle and the struggle of others. The search for the ontology of what I am is not a transcendental search for the universal limits of my existence; it is rather a search for the historical conditions through which I have been made subject – and I have made myself subject – so as to find ways of no longer being what I am, which means finding ways of resisting the historical limits which presently define what I am and what I cannot be. Thus, “politics is the activity of

struggle in which we produce and reproduce our freedom through its exercise.” (Owen, 1994, p. 207) Critique is, in this sense, a political, ethical and aesthetic attitude, which cannot be translated into a generalized practice, or a practice conducted from the standpoint of the subject of knowledge. It requires a historical working on the limits of ourselves and the limits of our present and therefore, can only be a partial and situated attitude in need of being constantly reenacted.

## 5.5

### **Critique and normativity: acknowledging a polemic**

One of the main injunctions formulated by Habermas against poststructuralism in general – and Foucault’s work in particular – refers to its supposed attempt to “establish an implacable opposition to modernism precisely through a modernist attitude.” (Habermas, 1997, p. 53) What Habermas seems to find the most problematic aspect of this form of critique is that its view of an aesthetic modernity – “namely the revelation of a decentered subjectivity liberated from all the constraints of cognition and purposive action, from all the imperatives of labour and use value” – is self-defeating, for it tries to get out of the modern aporias – which Habermas is much too willing to concede – by giving up on the accomplishments of the Enlightenment altogether through an appeal to aesthetics. In fact, the aesthetization of politics is, according to the Critical Theorist, one of the great diseases of twentieth century modernism.

The roots for such criticism lie in the way Habermas interprets modernity in terms of the breaking up of the “three realms of value:” knowledge, morality and aesthetics. Following Weber, he argues that in the course of modernity’s rationalization, these realms have been subjected to profound specialization; as a consequence, “there arises in the modern period a differentiation of the value spheres of science and knowledge, of morality and of art.” Such a process, he censures, has provoked a disconnection “between these expert cultures and the general public” leading to and impoverishment of “the lifeworld.” (Habermas, 1997, p. 45) Devoid of such guidance, life has become indeed cruel – as the examples of the twentieth century show.

The project of modernity to which Habermas refers and that he tries to rescue – one that was elaborated by the Enlightenment philosophers – is defined

as “the relentless development of the objectivating sciences, of the universalistic foundations of morality and law, and of autonomous art, all in accord with their own immanent logic.” However, something that Habermas argues that went missing in this historical development is the capacity to “[release] the cognitive potentials accumulated in the process from their esoteric high forms and attempt to apply them in the sphere of praxis, that is, to encourage the rational organization of social relations.” (Habermas, 1997, p. 45) Therefore, the optimism concerning the potentials of the Enlightenment has been lost as a consequence of a disenchanted modernity; fragmentation thus came to affect all contemporary traditions: from those representing the Enlightenment rearguard, such as Karl Popper, to those following “the spirit of Nietzsche,” such as Foucault and Derrida (Habermas, 1997, p. 53).

As a consequence of this fragmentation, Habermas argues, the project of modernity has become a target of much pessimism and led to the association of the Enlightenment with a “terroristic reason” in need of being stopped. This confusion of an entire project with the errors of some of its representatives has been responsible, according to him, for unleashing a “mentality of aesthetic modernity” – one that takes shape in Baudelaire’s theory of art – which valorizes the “ephemeral,” “momentary” and “transitory.” This “self-negating movement” is seen as “heroizing the present” at the expense of all that is associated with tradition.

The anarchistic intention of exploding the continuum of history accounts for the subversive force of an aesthetic consciousness which rebels against the norm-giving achievements of traditions, which is nourished on the experience of rebellion against everything normative, which neutralizes considerations of moral goodness or practical utility, a consciousness which continually stages a dialectic of esoteric mystery and scandalous offence, narcotically fascinated by the fright produced by its acts of profanation – and yet at the same time flees from the trivialization resulting from that very profanation. (Habermas, 1997, p. 41)

As seen in the quote above, Habermas is utterly concerned with what he understands to be “nonsense experiments” that try to remove the frontier between the objective and subjective, and make “everything art and everyone an artist.” (Habermas, 1997, p. 49) Against these attempts to abandon modernity as a project, Habermas endorses the need to “learn from the aberrations which have

accompanied the project of modernity and from the mistakes of those extravagant proposals of sublation,” suggesting that philosophy try to “at least suggest a possible escape from the aporias of cultural modernity.” (Habermas, 1997, p. 51) In a sense, rescuing the Enlightenment project has to do with rescuing the importance of the value-realms which have been made independent, and looking for their interconnection in order to bring their applicability to the everyday life. That is the role his communicative rationality aims to deploy.

Without going into more detail in Habermas’ proposal, what the argument developed in this chapter tried to indicate is that his reading of the role of aesthetics to renew the critical project seems at least simplified, and at worst, dishonest. Through Foucault’s and Strong’s discussion of a critical attitude that renounces the blackmail of the Enlightenment, I pointed out at how rescuing the role of aesthetics – what Foucault called “aesthetics of existence” and Strong claimed to be the inherent politics of the aesthetic – is in a sense rescuing the possibility of a different account of knowledge and morality which does not give up on the Enlightenment, but gives up on its dualistic blackmail. That is why Foucault’s limit-attitude, Strong’s critical question, Baudelaire’s dandysm were discussed in their attempts to move past the duality and reach the aporia. The subject of knowledge, as analytical philosophy has seen it, is the sovereign subject that aims to find the universal conditions of possibility for knowledge. His freedom and his taste are in a sense dependent on the first operation.

The aesthetic subject is situated at the limit: neither here nor there, but at the juncture where here and there get (re)produced, and critically problematizes this (re)production. It is not the sovereign subject of knowledge, and as such, cannot look for the universal. It settles instead for the historical, particular, conditional – but just like Kant did, it tries to see this as a resource, rather than a burden. It finds that its freedom is conditional on the circumstances – never absolute; so must be its knowledge. In a sense, it pursues all of the three realms of value in the spirit of the aesthetic – not by substituting them by the aesthetic.

In this sense, the aesthetic points to the limits of the critical tradition in terms of a juridical court of reason; or, as Strong argues, the aesthetic experience allows the subject to create a historical *a priori* that speaks to a collectivity of other subjects with whom it shares the world, even if demands the acknowledgment of the limits of this attempt. For Judith Butler, then, instead of



reading Foucault as responsible for aestheticizing existence, it is important to retrieve the sense in which he dwells that “there can be no ethics and no politics, without recourse to this singular sense of *poiesis*.” (Butler, 2001) She thus asks for the recognition that

The subject who is formed by the principles furnished by the discourse of truth is not yet the subject who endeavors to form itself. Engaged in ‘arts of existence,’ this subject is both crafted and crafting, and the line between how it is formed, and how it becomes a kind of forming, is not easily, if ever drawn. For it is not the case that a subject is formed and then turns around and begins suddenly to form itself. On the contrary, the formation of the subject is the institution of the very reflexivity that indistinguishably assumes the burden of formation. The ‘indistinguishability’ of this line is precisely the juncture where social norms intersect with ethical demands, and where both are produced in the context of a self-making which is never fully self-inaugurated. (Butler, 2001)

In line with this argument, Andrew Cutrofello (1994) has claimed that Foucault’s rereading of Kant has allowed to uncover a certain potential inside the latter’s work that could not be accessed by reading the categorical imperative in terms of a universal operation of reason. For him, searching for universality already implicates accepting the terms of the present – playing inside the rules of the present game so to speak. An ethics of resistance could only be formulated by accepting that one must try, to the limits of his possibilities, to get out of the limits of the present, looking for ways to exercise one’s freedom.

For Cutrofello, then, the resources to think of a discipline of resistance are to be found in Kant himself. This is because, if at first his critique tried to offer a court of reason to which everything must submit, the *Third Critique* represented his confrontation with precisely the kind of “surprise witness” that he had not anticipated – after all, he recognized that the “aesthetic experience arises from a breakdown of the understanding.” Therefore, Kant opens the possibility for accounting for the categories that are not already contained in a universal reason – even if, Cutrofello claims, it was only Hegel that “took seriously the view that reflection occasions the invention of new categories.” (Cutrofello, 1994, p. 5)

Recognizing the limits of a juridical court of reason as formulated by Kant, Habermas became “the foremost proponent” of metacritique today, by claiming that “the only thing standing at the beginning of critique is the radical project of unconditional doubt.” (Habermas *apud* Cutrofello, 1994, p. 8) However, his attempt at putting critique itself on trial has left the legitimacy of the court of

reason untouched. This is because, although Habermas rejects the role Kant ascribes to epistemology as the supreme judge of all sciences, and therefore the role of the philosopher as judge, he does not question “the a priori legitimacy of the juridical model of Kantian critique.” (Cutrofello, 1994, p. 11) Consequently, he remains locked into the idea of a court where competing claims are to be heard and judged. In his fear of falling into “performative contradiction,” Habermas cannot escape the presupposition of universalist standards of rationality. In light of this, Cutrofello argues that similarly to Kant’s, “the Habermasian court of reason – the community of rational agents – is willing to hear all appeals that are brought before it, except for one. The authority of the court itself cannot be challenged.” (Cutrofello, 1994, p. 12)

In light of this, both Butler and Cutrofello have argued that Habermas’ stance towards the normative in fact becomes “curiously uncritical about the very sense of normativity he deployed.” (Butler, 2001) As a consequence, he is not able to recognize that Foucault’s notion of critique has “strong normative commitments that would be difficult, if not impossible, to read within the current grammars of normativity.” (Butler, 2001) In order to grasp this potential, one must be willing to think of critique as the problem of ethics beyond judgment – or, in Cutrofello terms, in a form of non-juridical critique. Only then can one appreciate that critique is for Foucault “precisely a practice that not only suspends judgment [...] but offers a new practice of values based on that very suspension.” (Butler, 2001)

Butler will, then, point out to the way Foucault’s ethics of creativity is one that takes place not by voluntarily escaping from political reality, but precisely by negotiating at the limits of the “politics of norms;” or, as she puts it, “he makes clear that there is no self-forming outside of a mode of subjectivation, which is to say, there is no self-forming outside of the norms that orchestrate the possible formation of the subject.” (Butler, 2001) After all, if “one asks about the limits of ways of knowing,” this is “because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives.” This means that remaining inside the grammars of the present – the ontology of the present as Foucault puts it – is to accept and help to reproduce “entire realms of unspeakability,” reproducing forms of life which are silent and abject. By proposing a non-juridical account of critique, Foucault aims precisely at opening spaces where these realms of

unspeakability can once again – or for the first time – speak.<sup>78</sup> As Butler argues, then, “the very debate in which the strong normative view wars with critical theory may produce precisely that form of discursive impasse from which the necessity and urgency of critique emerges.” (Butler, 2011)

## 5.6 Conclusion

Without aiming to provide a single interpretation of critique; or else, to provide a generalized account of what is it to do critical work, this chapter instead opted for pointing out that to think critically is to adopt a certain stance towards reality that ultimately contests its limits. In this sense, the discussion tried to entertain the possibility that critique can never be an intellectual tool for arriving at some “better” form of knowledge, but that it implicates a political stand and the compromise to transform oneself in order to be able to know. Knowledge cannot ensue from a fully formed subject of knowledge, for the production of knowledge is also the production of a subject. In this sense, however it is practiced, critique involves an ethical, political and aesthetical stance.

Derrida has argued that “there is no contrary to sovereignty, even if there are things other than sovereignty.” (Derrida, 2001, p. 76) If we try to dwell within sovereignty, our possibilities remain constrained precisely by the tragedy of modern politics narrated in Chapter 4. There is no outside to a politics framed in terms of inside/outside, friends/enemies, sovereignty/law. This seems precisely to be the route constantly taken by international relations theorists, either when they appeal to structures of knowledge that can bring about progress; or else, when they resort to the presence or absence of the sovereign subject – something already pointed out to exhaustion by Rob Walker (1993; 2006; 2010).

Continuing with Derrida, then, “the choice is not between sovereignty and nonsovereignty, but among several forms of partings, partitions, divisions, conditions that come along to broach a sovereignty that is always supposed to be indivisible and unconditional.” (Derrida, 2001, p. 76) This has been the choice made in this chapter: its tale was not predicated on the negation of sovereignty, but on the acknowledgement of its aporias, contradictions, limitations. In doing

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<sup>78</sup> I will reengage this discussion on the abject subject and its ability to speak in Chapter 7.

so, it has tried to produce a different myth, no longer of the sovereign subject of knowledge, but of the aesthetical subject that produces itself as a work of art, that practices a political ethics of ironic heroization at the limits of sovereignty – where certainties and identities get (re)produced – to search for ways of no longer being identical to itself. After all, “a divisible sovereignty is no longer a sovereignty.” (Derrida, 2001, p. 76-77)

Refusing to embark on the duality of the subject of knowledge – and thus recognizing the divisibility of sovereignty – the discussion of critique entertained here has aimed to provide another grid of intelligibility to speak about international relations theory – a task to which I must now return.

## Back to international relations theory

In light of what has been discussed so far, this chapter now turns back to international relations theory in order to find the legacy of critique. Again, this seems like an insurmountable task; after all, some decades after the “dissidents” have made their way into the disciplinary history, critique became a common appearance in all sorts of writing that somehow question the conventional portrayal of the discipline in terms of a rationalist enterprise. In fact, the 1990s seemed to propel a form of critique that was meant to rescue the role of normative values in international politics, bringing the “human” element back in, in a movement that was clearly skeptical of rationalism and its legacy, and therefore, questioned the relevance of what Waeber (1996) called the “neo-neo synthesis.” However, the more the critical label was used, the more it seemed to confuse any attempt to clarify what critique could stand for, sometimes leading to a simple correlation between critique and “post-positivism.”

The ongoing disciplinary conversation, however, showed how many differences lie within these “critical” perspectives, which makes a complete survey of all self-named critical works an impossible accomplishment for the purposes of this dissertation. This chapter, then, will focus on a specific form of critique that reappeared in the last decade or so, and which has tried to point to the critical potential of the “classical theorists” or “classical realists” for thinking through cotemporary political dilemmas. This growing body of literature – one that in many senses defies attempts at categorization<sup>79</sup> – has mounted its challenge to conventional narratives about the conservative bent of realism, by engaging with the complex and much debated history of realist political theory.

Realism, after being wholeheartedly targeted by anyone claiming to offer a critical stance towards international relations theory, was put once again under scrutiny, this time by people trying to make a case about its complex history. This still emerging literature continues to raise questions concerning what has become of realism under its structural variant, trying to clarify the terms in which any

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<sup>79</sup> Scheuerman (2012, p. 472) summarizes some of the central names in this debate.

realism exists at all, sometimes to claim even the obsolescence of the very term realism. But instead of dismissing its authors, we see an attempt to qualify their contexts and engagements, in a way as to tell a much more interesting story about the international discipline.

A first reason for engaging this literature stems from its contemporary relevance to the disciplinary debate. A number of works certainly helped this reinscription of realism, of which perhaps are worthy of mention Stefano Guzzini's *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: the continuing story of a death foretold* (1998), which performed a historical sociology of realism so as to retrieve the external and internal contexts of its development, thus pointing to the multiple variants of realism(s); William Scheuerman's *Carl Schmitt: The end of Law* (1999), which not only participated on a more generalized effort to exhume Schmitt's thought from the grave it had been cast during the years after the Second War, but also pointed to the links between his thought and Morgenthau's; Jonathan Haslam's *No virtue Like Necessity: Realist thought in International Relations since Machiavelli* (2002), which points to the trajectory of realist notions in works of authors thought to be opponents of realism (such as Kant); Richard Ned Lebow's *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (2003), which retrieved the role of tragedy for politics and its relevance in the world of realist thinkers, including Morgenthau; Martti Koskeniemmi's *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960* (2004), which called attention to the profoundly intertwined trajectories of international relations theory and international law, bringing Morgenthau's pre-American background for intense reflection; Michael William's *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (2005), which retrieved the critical potential of a certain "wilful Realism" which is engaged in a reconstruction, rather than destruction of liberal politics. The list could go on<sup>80</sup>. In these studies, the importance of assessing realism outside of the disciplinary straitjacket of the previous decades was made plainly clear, leading to subsequent

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<sup>80</sup> Also worthy of mention for the rich insights on Morgenthau's views on politics and morality is Anthony Lang's edited volume, which includes transcriptions and analysis of Morgenthau's seminars on Aristotle's *The Politics* conducted during the years 1970-1973. See Lang Jr. (2004).

engagements and attempts to account for the role realism could have in thinking through contemporary political issues<sup>81</sup>.

Well, a second and related reason to turn to this literature also comes from what I see as a retreat on the part of “critical thinkers” of different bents – feminists, postcolonialists, poststructuralists – from the theoretical arena where international relations has tried to discipline itself. Recently, these critical theorists from the 1990s and early 2000s no longer seem intent to fight for a room for critique inside international relations theory; many of these authors have instead become concerned with issues that no longer try to address the critical potential of international relations theory per se, and instead have moved on to different things. So we see the emergence of new debates, such as “international political sociology,” “narrative politics,” “feminist theory,” “queer theory,” “critical security studies” and so on – which in a sense is what fuels the debate about pluralism and the end of international relations theory. The “critical realists” who this chapter tries to engage, for their turn, seem to be willing to fight for critique on home turf by, in a sense, re-inscribing the history of the discipline. It is the meanings and possibilities of such an endeavor that is under investigation in this chapter. My aim is to account for what kind of critique they purport to do and whether it allows them to evade the risks of a narrative of crisis as discussed in the first part of this dissertation.

## 6.1

### **Retrieving the critical resources of Classical Realism: questioning the boundary between ethics and politics**

The insight that classical realism has much more to offer for critical political thinking than what neorealism has made of it is by now old news. Indeed, as early as 1981, Robert Cox had already pointed out to the profoundly historical roots of E. H. Carr’s legacy and the need for critical theory to resume this form of historical and dialectical approach towards international politics, as a way to escape the profoundly limiting account of the sovereign state that had become the

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<sup>81</sup> For an overview of the importance of this early reinscription of realism, see Jütersonke, 2010, Chapter 1. Even though I cannot engage each of these works individually, my argument is greatly indebted to them. For a general overview of these works, see the edited works by Bell (2008) and Williams (2007).

common ground for international relations theorists. Even more profoundly than him, Richard Ashley's (1984) condemnation of the poverty of neorealism pointed to the need to rescue the political wisdom and philosophical sensibility of classical realism from under the piling stock of neorealist works. Many people followed on Ashley's footsteps in trashing neorealism and building a more sophisticated understanding of politics; not many, however, were interested in engaging his claims about the importance classical realism could have in such a venture.

It was not until the first decade of this century that scholars decided to systematically inquire realism's intellectual and political contexts, and reassess its relevance for thinking about contemporary politics. The reasons for doing so vary immensely, coming from authors with varying assumptions, different theoretical commitments, and no less contradictory political ambitions. They nonetheless share a sentiment – the one Ashley had expressed some twenty years before – that “classical” or “first generation”<sup>82</sup> realism has much more to offer to contemporary international political thought than what neorealism has made of it by turning it into the “tradition,” the “canonical fathers” of the discipline, by identifying their writings with “grand theorizing” and even, in some cases, by associating them under the homogenizing label of “Realism.”

At the center of this attempt to grasp the critical purchase of classical realism lies the recognition – which had been absent from the neorealist variant that predominated during the 1980s and that was despised during the 1990s – that early realist authors have a central concern with the role of values, and fiercely tried to tackle the issue of the role of morality and law to limit or contain the destructive potential of political life. As already discussed in Chapter 3, such normative concerns were absolutely vital to the way early realist thinkers involved in the foundation of international relations theory saw the political realm – which by then was not distinctly separated between domestic and international politics.

In this sense, the recent concern to write the “normative moment” back into international relations theory by reengaging classical realism<sup>83</sup> – which in

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<sup>82</sup> Scheuerman (2012) defends the use of “first generation” rather than “classic” realism for judging it more appropriate to summarize such a varied range of authors.

<sup>83</sup> See Shilliam (2007) for an overall account of this reinscription.



many senses has meant a reinscription of the sense of tragic in political life<sup>84</sup> – has allowed a further questioning of the supposed boundary between ethics and politics – a boundary that plays a constitutive role in the imaginary of international relations theory (Walker, 1993)<sup>85</sup>. In this sense, this literature has been able to signal once again to the way such a division is not an inherent, definitive feature upon which politics can then be constructed; in fact, the absence of such clear-cut boundaries is just what gives international politics such a destructive potential, for the desperate need to guarantee them denounces precisely their fragility.

There is not much agreement on who can be framed as a classical realist. For this reason alone, much of the revisionist literature tries to relativize the very use of the term “classical realism,” even if it does not give up on its heuristic use altogether. Duncan Bell (2009) maps these critical reenactments, suggesting the existence of an expansive and a restrictive views of realism: whereas the former relies on a more abstract and generalizing approach towards the notion of realism, the latter is more concerned with the developments of the twentieth century, and focuses more explicitly on authors that have written, among other disciplines, in the context of international relations and international political thinking more generally<sup>86</sup>.

In both of these approaches, however, Morgenthau seems to be the unequivocal figure when it comes to re-inscribing the sense of tragic to think international politics. In fact, as I argued in Chapter 3, a distinctive characteristic of Morgenthau’s brand of realism was his emphasis on the independence of the different realms of human existence, including the moral realm. If, on the one hand, the moral realm is characterized by its own values and inner workings, Morgenthau understood, however, that it ultimately had to serve to contain the destructiveness of the political realm – after all, the decision-maker is both a private and a public figure, and therefore, he must act politically according to the inner workings of the political realm, but, when possible, must strive for

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<sup>84</sup> See Lebow (2003) and Frost (2003) for more detailed accounts of tragedy and international political thought. Also see discussion below.

<sup>85</sup> See Walker (1993), esp. Chapter 3, pp. 50-80.

<sup>86</sup> The first encompasses authors such as Thucydides, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Clausewitz. The second focuses mostly on Morgenthau, Carr, Niebuhr, Herz, Aron. See Bell (2009).

conducting his public function guided by the imperative to produce the least destruction possible. Thus, much of his debate on political ethics endorsed the imperativeness of striving for an ethics of the “lesser evil.”

According to the argument I developed earlier in the dissertation, this ambiguity inside Morgenthau’s thought derived much from his engagement with the neo-Kantians which tried to move away from the realm of morality and into the realm of law so as to provide a basis for the improvement of social and political relations. Against this position – manifested mainly in the work of Kelsen – Morgenthau tried to retrieve the role of morality as an independent and, even more importantly than that, a transcendental realm of universal values to be negotiated inside human finitude. Thus keeping with Kantian transcendental idealism, Morgenthau’s attempt to synthesize or accommodate politics and morality came from his complex understanding between the transcendental values of morality and the empirical existence of man. Politics was the realm where this ambivalence had to be negotiated. Due to this complexity inside Morgenthau’s thoughts about politics and morality, much of the recent re-inscription of the critical potential of classical realism has revolved around his views so as to grasp more comprehensively the intellectual and the political context in which he was brought up. For this reason, this chapter reflects a similar bias towards his work.

## 6.2

### **Tragedy and the possibility of critique**

Tragedy has made an important comeback into international relations theory in the last decades, especially from the standpoint of realist scholarship<sup>87</sup>. By entertaining the conflict between ethical conduct and unethical results, a tragic view was particularly important for Morgenthau, since, as argued earlier, his realist account was formulated precisely by a consideration on the complex relations between morality and politics. However, far from being a privileged terrain of realism, tragedy has been important for discussing the possibility of ethical conduct in international politics from a more comprehensive standpoint.

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<sup>87</sup> See, for instance, Mearsheimer (2001) and Lebow (2003).

For instance, Mervyn Frost has recently argued that tragedy offers an important resource for normative theories in the field of international relations as a way of devising possibilities and spaces for change in the current international political practices. According to Frost, it is important to recognize that “at the core of every tragedy is an ethical struggle” (Frost, 2003, p. 479) that addresses situations in which people act in accordance to ethical principles and yet find themselves facing consequences which ultimately undermine such principles. In this sense, there is a consequentialist logic behind every tragedy which points to the inevitable conflict between ethical causes and their unethical consequences.

A second ensuing aspect of tragedies, then, is that they portray “an ethical *agon*,” (Frost, 2003, p. 482) according to which the world is not divided between the Manichean alternatives of good and evil, but involves a conflict inherent to a single ethical space. According to this view, tragedy portrays an internal conflict of a single individual or a single society that is obliged to face the unintended consequences resulting from its actions – actions that most often than not bring great sorrow for the individual or society itself. Hence, Frost argues that tragedy does not refer to the traditional political opposition between friend and enemy, but to a conflict emerging from the impossibility of controlling the results of ethical conduct inside the realm of the friend itself. In this sense, tragedy often involves an appreciation of *irony*: “what the actors intend does not come about and quite often their acts cause an outcome antithetical to their own judgment about what would constitute a good ethical result.” (Frost, 2003, p. 483) Hence, the subject himself becomes, in a sense, responsible for his suffering.

The issue of inevitability offers a third aspect to this consequentialist and agonistic logic. Even when the suffering ethical subject looks back to his own conduct, he is obliged to face the fact that things could not have been otherwise, and that there is no ultimate “ethically harmonious whole” to be achieved over time. To the contrary, tragedy is supposed to indicate that different ethical commitments are not necessarily compatible with one another – for instance, what is ethical for the private person is not necessarily what is ethical for the good of the community. Thus, “those who write on tragedy (whether they be play-wrights or IR scholars) wish to make it clear to us that it would be wrong to think that were people to act ethically, humankind’s condition would progress or improve.”

(Frost, 2003, p. 484)

From Frost's point of view, however, accounting for tragedy should not dissuade actors from pursuing ethical conduct. For him, "tragedy reveals to us how we are constituted as actors in a whole range of different social practices, each with its own ethic." (Frost, 2003, p. 487) Thus, a tragic view should provide an adequate framing of ethical behavior, one that, at the same time, illuminates the fact that the ethical conduct is not a "free choice" available to actors, and yet allows an appreciation of the context in which individuals are constituted as ethical subjects so as to find ways for changing it. Such a general view of conditions is usually only offered to appreciation *a posteriori*, and is not available to the acting subject in the moment he devises his action. Tragedians, in this sense, are constantly challenging the audience to ponder over the ethical contexts of acting subjects, which may help to avoid a form of atomistic consideration of human autonomy.

It is precisely this tragic sensibility that Ashley (1984) diagnosed as a resource of classical realism that made it stand apart from the neorealist "orrrery of errors" and offer relevant insights for thinking through contemporary political debates. The author recognizes classical realism as a practical scheme that, captured in the image of a "balance of power," postulates the dynamic tensions between what he called the "particularity of the universal" and the "universality of the particular," which together form a dialectical unity of plural totalities. According to Ashley, classical realism advances a postural scheme that, contrarily to structural realism, "is misunderstood at the very moment that it is objectified or 'captured' within some conceptual system, formal logic, or set of rules external to practice." (Ashley, 1984, p. 266) In this scheme lies the recognition that, on the one hand, every universalizing claim conceals parochial interests and, on the other hand, that particularistic claims bear implicit commitments to what the whole should be.

In this sense, the classical realist scheme is able to refer to the inherent and unbridgeable difference that populates the world, "the necessary ambiguity of political life" (Ashley, 1984, p. 272) – something that is not amenable to a final (rational or ethical) reconciliation. Realism, in this tragic sense, allows a profound questioning of the kind of subject that can think and act politically only by

keeping a heightened awareness of the always problematic reproduction of the state itself. According to this perspective, what a tragic sense of international politics potentializes is a more comprehensive awareness of the limits of a political imagination in which the national state came to encompass the possibility of universality within particularity, and particularity within universality.

It is toward just this balance of forces, a balance of power embedded in and producing the state, that statesmen strive. This, and nothing else, is the national interest, the 'national interest defined as power.' This equilibrium, and nothing else, is what defines the state's boundaries and secures the effective distinction, however momentary, between domestic and international political life. The state, to borrow from Foucault, is an 'effect of power.' (Ashley, 1984, p. 269)

Ashley's praise of classical realism's practical interests allowed him to mount an extremely sharp criticism of neorealism's "positivist structuralism," indicating how this position builds an "idealist circle" that traps political thought in an unproductive rationalist calculation. In doing so, Ashley claims that the neorealist position naturalizes and de-historicizes the political order, excluding it from proper political discourse; as a consequence, neorealism "subordinates all practice to an interest in control, bows to the ideal of a social power beyond responsibility, and thereby deprives political interaction of those practical capacities which make social learning and creative change possible." (Ashley, 1984, p. 228) Early on in the emergence of a critical discourse about international relations, Ashley thus provided a view of classical realism that could help to mount a critical opposition to the rationalist atomism of structural neorealism.

It has been Richard Ned Lebow, however, who most forcefully brought the reflection on the role of tragedy to reclaim the critical potential of a realist view of politics. Disrupting the narrative of political realism as an ultimately amoral discourse on *Realpolitik*, Lebow offered a view of realism for which "ethics are not only instrumentally important," but assume a central position in the definition of interests. For Lebow, realists understand "that it is impossible to formulate interests intelligently outside of some language of justice" and, therefore, try to find ways in which foreign policy can conform to ethical standards, "if only for practical reasons." (Lebow, 2003, p. 16) Tragedy was an important resource for realist wisdom. According to Lebow,

Greek tragedy was rooted in the empirical observation that there is no relationship between justice and suffering. It advanced a counterintuitive thesis:

that efforts to limit suffering through the accumulation of knowledge or power might invite more suffering. Tragedy confronts us with our frailties and limits, and the disastrous consequences of trying to exceed them. [...] Tragedy encourages us to develop and use our analytical facilities, but to be equally attentive to our imagination and feelings, to balance inference with prophecy and to recognize that the world is full of contradictions that we cannot resolve. (Lebow, 2003, p. 20)

In order to understand how this “tragic understanding” may offer an important account of ethical possibilities in the political realm, Lebow discusses three central realist figures – Thucydides, Clausewitz and Morgenthau – who are seen as profoundly confronting ethical issues of their days. Contrary to the modern realist lore, Lebow sees Thucydides not as a founding father of *Realpolitik*, but as “the last of the great tragedians.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 20) As such, he was deeply aware of how the accumulation of knowledge and power, instead of bringing control over reality, actually tended to bring more suffering. Sharing a similar sense of the tragic, Clausewitz and Morgenthau are equally aware of the limits of human abilities to control reality.

According to Lebow, their view of political life as tragedy manifested, in different contexts, as responses to radical transformations on the realm of traditional values – something he named generally as modernization. In each of their historical conditions, they saw “economic, political and social changes threaten traditional values and encourage the emergence of new ones.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 25) In such scenarios, the recognition of the insufficiency of human reason to provide a secure foundation on which to adjudicate between opposing systems of values led them to develop a tragic view of politics. They were, thus, fully aware of the need to make compromises and accommodations.

In the case of Morgenthau, Lebow claims that his theory of international politics was based “on his tragic understanding of the world in the hope that it would help statesmen to avert another major and perhaps fatal war.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 49) Deeply influenced by Nietzsche in his youth, Morgenthau understood that a balance had to be struck between man’s contradictory drives if he was to achieve some form of order, community, and justice – even if in an incomplete manner. According to Lebow, then, even if Morgenthau’s sense of tragic achieves great prominence in the pages of his *Scientific Man versus Power Politics*, it was his European experience during the rise of the Nazi state and his intellectual

circle<sup>88</sup> that particularly contributed to the way he became acquainted with tragedy, since “early twentieth-century German social science was deeply influenced by tragedy, largely through exposure to Hegel and Nietzsche.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 308)

In a view similar to Ashley’s, then, Lebow calls attention to how Morgenthau’s understanding of theory ties it to a practical knowledge, one that is capable of intervening and eventually changing political reality through action. Therefore, he was deeply suspicious of abstractions that pulled theorists away from empirical reality, for he understood that such a trend “would make political theory sterile by cutting it off from contact with current issues, and deprive political science of a working knowledge of the Western tradition.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 249) Political knowledge, for him, was meant to assist statesmen in the conduct of foreign policy, in an attempt to help their moral responsibility in face of a deeply flawed political reality. In a context of decay of the European values, in which “*nomos* had lost its ability to constrain,” Morgenthau would argue that “status quo countries had no choice but to base their security on their economic and military capability and the skill of their diplomats.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 49)

Hence, according to Lebow, the denunciation of a false dichotomy between ethical and political behavior and thought was at the basis of Morgenthau’s charges against Wilsonian liberalism and modern scientism. Power was not a material, but a psychological relation, an intangible quality that demanded wisdom on the part of those exercising it; the leader should be able to “transform raw capability into influence and maximize that influence efficiently through a judicious mix of activism and restraint.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 50) Without this ability, material capabilities were seen as meaningless. Therefore, failing to recognize the role and importance of power for checking the destructiveness of a politics claimed by different moralities was a major mistake of liberal rationalism.

According to Lebow, Morgenthau understood that, more often than not, hubris stood in the way of prudence, and his theory was meant to guide political action so as to avoid the tragic consequences of such aspects of human nature. In this sense, morality was at the center of his concerns, and he understood that “security and international order depended on the moral qualities of leaders and

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<sup>88</sup> Lebow calls attention to Morgenthau’s proximity to Hannah Arendt, who he describes as “his colleague and fellow *émigré*.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 307).

their ability to practice restraint in the face of pressures on them to use their power in adventurous and unethical ways.” (Lebow, 2003, p. 50) His theory was not an attempt at posing a solution to problems, as much as an attempt to provide a better understanding of the range of such problems and therefore of the most effective ways to deal with it.

### 6.2.1

#### **The limits of tragedy**

In light of this discussion, it is possible to see how tragedy, by denouncing the illusory boundary separating ethical goals and political action and retrieving the importance of values for politics, becomes an important resource for thinking about the critical purchase of classical realist insights for contemporary politics. However, Ashley had also warned about the limits of such a tragic view in providing a productive alternative to the contemporary political predicaments. According to him, a tragic view “honors the silences of the tradition it interprets and participates in exempting the ‘private sphere’ from public responsibility,” remaining ultimately blind or strikingly passive to the economic forces that intertwine and disrupt political life. In these silences and omissions rest, according to Ashley, the conservative roots of realism which tend to reproduce an order of domination and inequality; in this, he claims, “are the seeds of realism as a tradition forever immersed in the expectation of political tragedy, an expectation that realists can explain only euphemistically, in terms of the antinomies of fallen man.” (Ashley, 1984, p. 281)

More recently, Rengger (2007) has also briefly addressed these limits of the classical realist view of politics by illuminating the disagreement between Morgenthau and Oakeshott over the matter of tragedy. According to Rengger, while both thinkers shared a diagnosis concerning the profoundly conflictual aspect of politics, and therefore, were very skeptical about the possibility of science bringing about progress, they however differed over whether tragedy was the adequate way of portraying such difficulties. In fact, Oakeshott understood that reading the human condition in terms of tragedy was, at the end of the day, a celebration and reenactment of an idyllic (non-human) condition of perfection or perfectibility. For him, then, Morgenthau’s sense of tragedy ensued from a



comparative measure of human necessity in relation to some ethical criteria considered to be superior; hence, reading the political complexities in terms of tragedy allied Morgenthau to the views he aimed to combat, which stressed the need for progress and rationality to solve the nasty consequences of the political realm.

Picking up on this very disagreement, Shilliam (2007) questions precisely the limits of this reinscription of Morgenthau for the purposes of reformulating the discipline of international relations beyond the battle between a “universalist idealism” versus a “particularist realism.” For him, Morgenthau’s tragic account of the liberal project was itself limited by his inability to account for the international dimension of knowledge production, which ultimately led him to maintaining the liberal project as the universal criteria against which his particular account of politics could be judged. Therefore, Shilliam argues that Morgenthau’s position was ultimately a *faux pas* into universalism – the same universalism that he wants to contest<sup>89</sup>. His tragic assessment of the crisis of liberalism aims at re-instantiating an ideal of historical unfolding of liberal freedom, which led him to formulate a conservative liberalism. For Shilliam, much like for Ashley and Rengger, “presenting the fate of Liberalism as tragic *in its own world-historical unfolding* is therefore what ultimately gave Morgenthau’s reformulated ‘liberal’ project its conservative quality.” (Shilliam, 2007, p. 317)

Morgenthau was unable to recognize the international, inter-societal dimension in which his own thoughts concerning German backwardness were formulated. Thus he became ultimately blind to the way “political thought is generated in and through intellectual engagement with the problem of alterity presented by the ‘border’ of political community.” (Shilliam, 2007, p. 302) Without being able to recognize such dimension, his presentation of the tragedy of liberalism aimed at the resurrection of liberal values – if only in a different, immaculate form. From this *faux pas* into the universal criteria of liberal values, it was a short step to Morgenthau “paradoxically claim[ing] American liberal society as the vanguard of a singular world-historical Liberal project.” (Shilliam,

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<sup>89</sup> Shilliam offers an extensive account of how this *faux pas* into universalism was characteristic of an entire tradition of German thinking, which includes Kant, Hegel, Weber and Morgenthau. For a full account of this argument see Shilliam (2009a). For the shorter version of the argument, see Shilliam (2007).

2007, p. 317) Trying to clarify this tension whereas Morgenthau's tragic view is both an opening for critique and yet a conservative claim for a renewed liberalism, Shilliam argues:

[...] it is undoubtedly true that one can unwrap Morgenthau's star-spangled disguise to reveal a figure of tragic sensibilities, and that this figure can then be used to critically write a 'normative moment' back into theoretical debates within the IR discipline. (A similar effect can be achieved with Hegel's *Aufhebung* and Weber's vocations.) *Yet this still remains an exercise of political theory: it is not yet an exercise of international political theory* [emphasis added]. For the latter can only be undertaken if one takes the step of considering inter-societal difference to be not simply an object of political theory, but at a deeper level generative in the historical construction of that thought itself. Crucially, the 'liberal' project of German intellectuals that Morgenthau emerged from and responded to failed to recognize this generative aspect of their own thought. In resurrecting Morgenthau, we should be careful not to replicate his and their *faux pas* into universalism. (Shilliam, 2007, p. 318)

For Shilliam, then, critical thought should strive to account for a more serious ambiguity in Morgenthau's – and realist – thought than that between ethics and politics; for him, it is urgent to account for the generative structure of inter-societal differences and how they affect the development of political thought in a process of comparison and substitution, *if we are to pursue an international political theory*. "This is the ambiguity," he claims, "we need to clarify if we are to develop further self-awareness of the criteria by which we might judge the modern human condition to be tragic, or indeed, any other quality." (Shilliam, 2007, p. 319) I will come back to Shilliam's argument as the chapter draws to a close.

### 6.3 Morgenthau, Schmitt and the world state

Mostly missing from the discussion over tragedy in Morgenthau's work is an account of his early engagements as a training jurist in Weimer Germany. Even though Lebow acknowledges that Morgenthau's tragic view comes from an earlier influence of a German tradition that runs from Hegel to Nietzsche, he however does not carefully investigate Morgenthau's European upbringing. In this sense, Martti Koskenniemi's *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations* (2004) provided one of the first and most serious engagements with Morgenthau's legal debates, mostly from

the standpoint of International Law<sup>90</sup>. A few years later, Oliver Jüterssonke would provide “an elaboration of some of Koskenniemi’s core insights, but from the perspective of International Relations.” (Jüterssonke, 2009, p. 28) An important nuance of this debate about Morgenthau’s early background has concerned his relationship with Carl Schmitt. In fact, Jüterssonke wrote his book on the conviction that the existing literature on Morgenthau tended to somehow overemphasize the importance of his “hidden dialogue”<sup>91</sup> with Schmitt while neglecting the rich debates with other important jurists at the time.

In significantly different ways, Jüterssonke and Scheuerman have both been concerned with indicating how Morgenthau’s thoughts formulated in relation to the juridical debates of Weimar Germany deeply impacted his later writings – even while recognizing that his thought went through significant transformations. Jüterssonke (2010) has been adamant to argue that Morgenthau’s legal formalist heritage is at the basis of his call for the “reality” of international legal norms, and therefore, of his later formulation of political realism. In fact, during his post-graduate studies in Weimar Germany, Morgenthau participated on a debate that was mainly based on the “crisis of legal positivism” that dominated the Wilhelmine period. Increasing calls for the congruence between constitutional law and political power marked this crisis, which was polarized by the figures of Hans Kelsen and Carl Schmitt.

It is in light of these earlier exchanges that Scheuerman has tried to claim the potential for a critical theory being developed inside Morgenthau’s work that could have lasting contemporary relevance – offering a significantly different account from that surrounding the discussion over tragedy. Especially concerned with the normative import of his early theorizing, Scheuerman’s investigations try to undo a central dichotomy that has organized the disciplinary conversation, concerning the opposition between communitarians and cosmopolitans. According to the author,

The most basic justification for describing Morgenthau’s early theoretical interventions as representing a brand of critical realism is that its normative

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<sup>90</sup> It is important to recognize that Koskenniemi’s depiction of Morgenthau relies extensively on Frei’s intellectual biography.

<sup>91</sup> This expression is used by Scheuerman to account for the many unspoken discussions going on behind Morgenthau’s formulation. See Scheuerman (1999), Chapter 9.

starting point is modern international law's own underlying quest to minimize violent conflict: even when Morgenthau criticizes influential positivist ideas about international law, he does so from the same implicit normative standpoint as his positivist opponents. In short, the young Morgenthau can be read as offering an *immanent critique* of modern international law which aims to preserve its valuable normative kernel while insisting that it can only be realized in novel ways. (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 49)

In order to account for this critical import of Morgenthau's early thinking, Scheuerman highlights his exchanges with a group of left-wing jurists discussing the future of Weimar democracy – the most important among them being his employer and friend Hugo Sinzheimer. Sinzheimer was critical of the incompatibility of a coherently formulated system of positive law in face of changing social conditions. In this context, Morgenthau developed a “*normatively minded critical sociology of law*” (Scheuerman, 2009, p. 28) which saw the rigidity of law as its greatest weakness. Seeing that “the main pathologies of international law derive from its lack of dynamism” the young Morgenthau would argue that “the only way to overcome them is by establishing an elastic or adaptable international legal system.” (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 50) According to Scheuerman, these exchanges left in Morgenthau a close concern for the possibility of social, economic and legal reform; by transposing these concerns to the global arena<sup>92</sup>, Morgenthau would have “anticipated the possibility of major shifts in the traditional European state system and a clear break with the tradition of *Realpolitik* with which it had been linked for centuries.” (Scheuerman, 2009, p. 24)

Morgenthau's views on international law makes him particularly concerned with the way it could be instrumentalized as a weapon in the hands of the great powers. In this sense, he demonstrated acute sensibility to the way the “pathologies” of international law were made worse by the inequalities of power, since “amid dramatic power inequalities, the potentially egalitarian and protective functions of general law risk taking a back seat to its exploitation by the great powers.” (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 51) For this reason, Morgenthau understood that “legal, political, and social reform at the global level must go hand-in-hand,” since

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<sup>92</sup> Scheuerman treats the international in terms of the global throughout his reflections. The problems of this position are insightfully advanced by Walker (2010). Also see: Walker (2006).

“the lack of a system of shared sovereignty” was ultimately impeditive to progressive forms of international politics. (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 51)

Despite of the critical potential of Morgenthau’s early reflections, Scheuerman claims that a growing skepticism and impatience towards social reforms appears in his writings in the 1940s – something he attributes to the profound influence Schmitt had in Morgenthau’s trajectory (Scheuerman, 2009). The author argues that, just as Morgenthau was right to claim that Schmitt’s 1932 edition of *The Concept of the Political* borrowed from him the idea of “intensity” of political conflicts without acknowledging it<sup>93</sup>, so Morgenthau also unavowedly borrowed from Schmitt a series of impressions concerning politics and the failure of liberalism. This indebtedness to Schmittian notions of politics would ultimately be responsible for the setbacks his critical sensibility about the limits of sovereign politics would suffer, which left Morgenthau with a deeply conflictual position in the late stages of his career.<sup>94</sup>

Without neglecting Schmitt’s influence over Morgenthau, Jütersonke however cautions against attributing too much emphasis to their exchange, while neglecting other contributions that were similarly (or even more) important for his ideas – such as Hans Kelsen, Hersch Lauterpacht, Arthur Baumgarten, Hugo Sinzheimer, among others. In fact, whereas Scheuerman characterizes a significant break between the German and the American Morgenthau, Jütersonke seems more aligned with Christoph Frei’s view<sup>95</sup> in stressing the significant similarities between Morgenthau’s legal debates and his ideas developed in the hyper-rationalist American political scenario. Thus, Jütersonke’s research stresses how some of his earlier legal dialogues and influences continued to ground much of his insights in the American discipline of political science. In this sense,

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<sup>93</sup> Authors still dispute whether Morgenthau’s claim about Schmitt’s intellectual dishonesty concerning the appropriation of his ideas is in fact accurate. For instance, Jütersonke disagrees with both Koskenniemi and Scheuerman concerning this. See: Jütersonke (2010); Koskenniemi (2004); Scheuerman (2009).

<sup>94</sup> According to Scheuerman, the central argument of *Politics among Nations* is that a world state was necessary to avoid “the terrors of atomic warfare.” However, this view could not find resonance with Morgenthau’s realist account of power politics and balance of power inherited from Schmitt, leaving him unable to entertain serious possibilities for a cosmopolitan order. In this sense, whereas Lebow’s tragic view of realism is what gives its critical purchase, Scheuerman sees realism as what prevents Morgenthau from developing a sound critical theory. See Scheuerman (2008). Also see discussion below.

<sup>95</sup> The views of Morgenthau’s intellectual biographer were discussed with more detail in Chapter 3.

Morgenthau's more popular American works of the 1940s and 1950s are seen as an attempt at translating some of his earlier discussions and assumptions to the new scenario and audience – transforming into critique some substantive aspects of his juridical thinking.

In what concerns Schmitt's influence on Morgenthau, Jütersonke argues that it was the former's criticism of legal positivism and his acknowledgement of the centrality of power relations that mainly interested the latter. Schmitt was arguing against the equation between the political and the state that had become all pervasive during that period, since it mainly restricted the concept of the political to the realm of law. The context Schmitt was speaking to was one in which Europe had lost its predominant role in the system, and the European states found themselves deprived, in many instances, of their monopoly over decision-making, being thus subject to international settlements. Contributing to this debate, Morgenthau's doctoral dissertation discussed the gap between international law and international practice in what related to the justiciability of disputes. In the realm of international law, this debate translated into the attempt to address the relationship between sovereign states and the supranational legal community.

By embracing a sociology of law, Morgenthau argued that law should become a dynamic, rather than a static order, so that it could cope with the political transformations and power relations that were constantly under way, and were not amenable to being suppressed – positive international law could not address the political. For Jütersonke, then, his engagement with the issue of the “reality” of norms marked indefinitely his *rendezvous* with neo-Kantianism, and specifically with the work of Kelsen<sup>96</sup>. Morgenthau was mainly critical of the moral relativism of this position, derived from the strict separation it performed between the “is” and the “ought,” (*Sein* and *Sollen*) as to purify the system of law by divorcing it from the system of morality. Morgenthau wanted to explore the

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<sup>96</sup> See Scheuerman (2012) for a discussion of how Kant impacted the thoughts of both “first” and “second-generation” realists. In general lines, his argument is that these scholars were influenced by both Kantian and neo-Kantian traditions. Many of the first-generation scholars had personal encounters with Kelsen, against whom they built their arguments, while recognizing the importance of his thought. In this critique of neo-Kantianism, many of them would have been deeply influenced by Kant's thought itself.

reality of the “ought,” of the moral imperatives on the international political arena. According to Jütersonke, then,

Morgenthau’s engagement with the ‘reality’ of norms left a lasting mark on the way he thought about the role of law in the international arena, the potentialities and limits of norms to rein in the pursuit of power, as well as the prospects of attaining a world state. (Jütersonke, 2010, p. 75)<sup>97</sup>

As a consequence, when Morgenthau turns to a discussion of international law in *Politics among Nations*, he is in fact stressing the double need for, on the one hand, not exaggerating the importance of international law and, on the other, not jumping to a denial of its existence. In this sense, his insights on power politics and the balance of power owe much to his views about the effectiveness of national law and the importance of sanctions. In the international sphere, lacking any overarching government, the very existence of law was dependent on a state of equilibrium among the social forces – the balance of power was *a sine qua non* condition for the effectiveness of law. (Jütersonke, 2010)

Morgenthau defended a “radical legal realism” against legal positivism, making a plea for engaging the social substratum. His claim, therefore, was not for a separation between the political and international law; rather, he wanted to point out how the former was an intrinsic and ubiquitous element of the latter. His refusal of “legalism,” then, was a charge against this extinction of the political from the heart of law – against “the artificial separation of the juridical sphere from not just the other normative spheres of mores and morals, but also of all insights from the social sciences and psychology.” For Morgenthau, the result of this separation “was a culture of irresponsible statecraft and the identification of ‘the moral aspirations of a particular state’ with ‘the moral laws that govern the universe’.” (Jütersonke, 2010, p. 146)

When Morgenthau finally turns to a defense of the national interest, his claim is that the latter was a political problem, not to be confused with a moral quest – warning against the instrumentalization of the universal and the attempt to

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<sup>97</sup> Jütersonke suggests a profound influence of Arthur Baumgarten in this aspect of Morgenthau’s thought, in that he would continue to explore throughout his career Baumgarten’s suggestion that the world state was the only way to cope with the problems of international law. See Jütersonke (2010). For a fuller account of the world state on realist scholarship, see Craig (2003). For a shorter version on Morgenthau and the world state, see Craig (2007).

clothe particular interests with a disguise of universalism. Quoting Morgenthau, Jütersonke explains that “the choice was not one between moral principles and the national interest, but between ‘one set of moral principles divorced from political reality, and another set of moral principles derived from political reality’.” (Jütersonke, 2010, p.159) This is the context in which to understand his attacks against Wilsonianism – whose irresponsibility would have led to the war – and against American liberal foreign policy more generally. In his view, it was morally condemnable and politically dangerous to use a legal system of law to depoliticize claims to ideational supremacy.

### 6.3.1 Morgenthau between crisis and critique

As argued earlier, Scheuerman saw Morgenthau’s critique of American liberalism and its ensuing foreign policy as mainly indebted to Schmitt’s influence on him. Schmitt was highly nostalgic of the early Westphalian system and the European model of international law that characterized the *Jus Publicum European* (JPE), whose destruction owed much to American emergence as a leading power in international politics. For Schmitt, the balance of power that sustained the JPE was possible due to the deep consensus on values and ideals shared by European states – a consensus that excluded the entire non-European world –, which had led to a “de-theologization” of international relations, and, consequently, a formalization of the concept of war. With the triumph of American liberal values, all forms of heterogeneity were brought inside this system – economic, political, cultural, social –, disrupting the balance of power and creating tensions that undermined any possibility of an effective international law. American “remoralization” of international politics would be responsible for the reenactment of the possibility of total war. In Scheuerman’s understanding, “Morgenthau offers a remarkably similar nostalgic portrayal of the trajectory of modern international law.” As a consequence,

For both writers, the history of modern international politics is essentially a *Verfallsgeschichte* [story of decay], in which a fundamentally sound early modern European-dominated system is destroyed by a far more explosive (liberal) twentieth-century model no longer based on the balance of powers and a shared European cultural background. (Scheuerman, 2007, pp. 66-7)



On a more conceptual level, Scheuerman (2009) understands that it was Morgenthau's engagement with Schmitt on the matter of the concept of the political that left him with a deeply conflictual account of politics. This position was, ultimately, the reason why his fruitful reflections about social and political reform were curtailed. Schmitt's influence, Scheuerman argues, would lead to a certain ahistoricism in Morgenthau's later account of political experience, mainly due to his incorporation of human nature and psychology as the sources of political action. For Scheuerman, then, so deep is Schmitt's hold on Morgenthau's thought that it offers the main reason why later in his career, when he turned to consider the world state as a distant but necessary political alternative in face of the threat of nuclear war and human annihilation, he could not overcome the tensions of his thinking to provide a more serious account of a novel global order.<sup>98</sup>

Despite of sharing similar impressions concerning Morgenthau's engagement with the legal debates happening in Weimer Germany, Jütersonke and Scheuerman arrive at ultimately divergent conclusions concerning the way these early formulations impacted his later writing. Such differences certainly reflect deeper commitments in their research endeavors. In fact, Jütersonke claims to want to avoid pursuing claims of continuity or contradiction in Morgenthau's work, thus distancing his project from any attempt to "hunt after the 'real' or 'right' meaning" of Morgenthau's writings. (Jütersonke, 2010, p. 20) Instead, he proposes to bring to light a clearer picture of the legal scholar, which he finds missing from most reappraisals of Morgenthau that claim to have been a big break in his trajectory. For Jütersonke,

[...] such inaccurate portrayals limit the usefulness and scope of potentially fruitful engagement with Morgenthau, skew our understanding of the origins and development of the field of International Relations, and ultimately undermine any attempts at understanding the 'image of law' held by the mainstream discourse in that field. (Jütersonke, 2010, p. 31-2)

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<sup>98</sup> Despite sharing a similar view about the centrality of Schmitt in Morgenthau's thoughts, Koskenniemi is less adamant about the perniciousness of Schmitt's positions. See Koskenniemi (2004), Chapter 6.

In accordance with the argument developed in Chapter 3, Jütersonke claims that Morgenthau's German background once transposed "onto the thought collective of US social science" will find itself "fundamentally at odds with the behaviouralist currents gaining momentum at the time," (Jütersonke, 2010, p. 33) leading him to translate his juristic thought into a critique of the formal scientific enterprise being conducted in America – the result of which is integrally expressed in *Scientific Man*. Instead of rupturing with such a position, Jütersonke sees *Politics Among Nations* as profoundly linked to Morgenthau's work in international law<sup>99</sup>. Keeping the resources of his legal background open seems to be, according to Jütersonke, the best bet to find some critical purchase against the conventional international relations tradition.

Scheuerman, for his turn, finds himself deeply invested in an attempt to reconcile realism and cosmopolitanism, trying to recapture insights of the former that help to legitimize views more favorable to the need of some form of politics beyond the nation-state. In this sense, Scheuerman counterpoises the influences of, on the one hand, "counter-Enlightenment thinkers" such as Nietzsche, Weber and Schmitt on Morgenthau's trajectory to, on the other, his engagement with "leftist Weimar legal sociology;" (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 51) from this opposition, he argues that any critical resources available in Morgenthau's work are to be found among the latter, and that the former in fact would only amount for a deviation of this path. For Scheuerman, despite of all the confusions and idiosyncrasies of Morgenthau's thought, it is important to retrieve his indebtedness to a certain leftist thinking that afforded his earlier works a critical edge that was not matched by his later writings.

As a consequence of this opposition, not all of Scheuerman's engagements with Morgenthau's legacy show the same excitement concerning his critical potential. If at some points Morgenthau is praised for purporting a sensible view about the construction of a cosmopolitan order, at others the lack of systematicity in his reflections – both conceptually and historically – are said to risk short-circuiting a serious critical project. For instance, Scheuerman ends his book on Morgenthau by arguing that "his international theory provides many rich and potentially useful insights about which anyone concerned with international

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<sup>99</sup> For a clearer view of his position concerning the legal aspects of Morgenthau's thought in *Politics Among Nations*, see Jütersonke (2007).

politics and indeed the fate of humanity will continue to argue.” (Scheuerman, 2009, p. 198) However, there are many instances of his works in which the reader is warned against being too much carried away by Morgenthau’s promises.

Thus, when discussing Morgenthau as a critical theorist, Scheuerman warns, however, that his lack of sistemacity “leads Morgenthau to short-circuit the broader project of what I have described as his critical realism in favour of an analysis of the (for him) unchanging dynamics of political conflict;” as a consequence, “a realistic sociology of law becomes, in effect, a rather one-sided realist political theory centered on an agonistic model of politics.” (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 55) Furthermore, his “troublesome tendency to reduce [...] a potentially wide-ranging critical and normatively sensitive sociology of international law to a philosophically minded analysis of politics” is seen as oftentimes getting him “waylaid by his preoccupation with rooting political action in a theory of psychological ‘drives’. A realist psychology, in this final move, tends to supplant both the sociology of law and political theory.” (Scheuerman, 2008, p. 55)

Without in any way dismissing the profound and rich research Scheuerman introduces concerning Morgenthau’s legacy, and with much appreciation for his efforts, I however was left with the impression that, at moments, Scheuerman’s hope to find “Morgenthau, the cosmopolitan” gets the best of him, preventing his narrative from properly appreciating the historically situated character of Morgenthau’s contributions, and the rich intellectual, political, and normative background in which he formulated his many insights. His search for an identity among writings spread across many densely politicized decades – both in political and intellectual matters – seems like a whiggish hope of translating Morgenthau’s reflections for his own present purposes. Thus, “Morgenthau, the political realist” ends up like a confused and naïve version of the leftist-engaged young cosmopolitan that he could have been – a view in many senses contrary to what this renaissance of interest in classical realism tries to pursue.

It is clear from the argument being developed so far that these conclusions go against the form of critical thinking envisioned in this dissertation. In fact, Chapter 5 particularly argued that the framing provided by Scheuerman – where one is either with or against the Enlightenment and its achievements – is the one I am trying to move away from, in order to find resources for thinking critique beyond traditional accounts of normativity, and therefore supplanting the figure of

sovereign subject of knowledge. Thus, Scheuerman's approach sides him with a view of critique quite distinct from the one advanced in this dissertation, and much closer to a Habermasian account of critique as a step towards building better forms of normative theorizing.

#### 6.4

#### **Wilful Realism: beyond the blackmail of the Enlightenment?**

If the kind of critical thinking discussed by Scheuerman's reading of Morgenthau does not provide an instance of "critical attitude" devised in this dissertation, I find instead in Michael Williams' *wilful Realism* some further resources for inquiring whether international relations theory may provide an adequate arena for advancing critique. Like most of the revisionist literature discussed so far, Williams' many contributions on the theme of realist thinking have been directed at problematizing conventional narratives about the discipline that are grounded on the categorical opposition between realism and liberalism. In this endeavor, Williams follows on the footsteps of the argument developed by Nicolas Guilhot (2008) and discussed in Chapter 3 concerning the profound intertwinement between the invention of international relations theory and the political and intellectual crisis which realists were trying to tackle then. Williams is fierce in his condemnation of the rationalist turn taken by the discipline in the 1970s, searching wilful Realism for resources that may allow a reconstruction of the legacy of liberalism and Enlightenment beyond rationalism.

In the recent context of the debate over the "end" of international relations theory, Williams (2013) has built on Ira Katznelson's argument to claim that international relations theory should in fact be considered an "international relations Enlightenment," much similar to what social and political thinkers of the Frankfurt School were doing. Thus, at the basis of many realists' thoughts was an attempt to understand and critique the crisis of liberal modernity, the limits of Enlightenment thinking and especially the path taken by postwar liberal thought. Critical of the politics followed by European countries, realists – especially Morgenthau – were fascinated by American politics, but in a way so as to rescue it from the fate of European liberalism. They were attempting to build a foundation

for a liberal polity that could meet and master Schmitt's critique of liberalism. Their "tragic vision of politics," in this sense, comprehended the full scale that evil had acquired as a political category – much through instrumental rationality, statism and mass politics – and wanted to find a way to deal with it, without ignoring or dismissing its political role.

It is then the productive – and even progressive – potential of realism that Williams wants to preserve from its longstanding association – one in great part promoted by neorealism itself – to an anti-liberal project, or even a rationalist project predicated on the assumption of rational actors and the anarchical system. In this sense, he seems intent to provide a view of wilful Realism not as a critique of liberalism *tout court*, but as "a critique of liberal rationalism," one that "does not involve a rejection of the Enlightenment tradition as either an historical legacy or, necessarily, as a set of practical political commitments to tolerant, liberal, democratic, or even liberal-democratic forms of politics." (Williams, 2005, p. 161)

In order to offer a clearer picture of wilful Realism, Williams provides an argument to counter three "false polarities" which together have organized the prevailing self-images of the discipline, and that are in great part responsible for the profound misconception of the role realist thinkers had in the philosophical articulation of international relations theory, as well as the current adequacy of such reflection for thinking about contemporary politics. Such polarities are: i. the opposition between realism and liberalism, which is perhaps the greatest and most encompassing divide through which international relations theory is articulated; ii. the opposition between rationalism and constructivism; and finally, iii. the opposition between modern and postmodern, which is at the heart of the "blackmail of the Enlightenment" discussed earlier. By engaging these false polarities and undoing the knots which tie them together, Williams seems hopeful to find another realm for the legitimacy and contemporary relevance of wilful Realism, one that cannot be contained by the problems concerning the hard realities of a power politics predicated on material capacities alone.

### 6.4.1 Untying the three polarities

Concerning the first polarity between realism and liberalism, Williams disputes the view that Morgenthau's reliance on a Schmittian account of politics ultimately ties him to a conflictual politics of friends and enemies and therefore, to an inability to think beyond sovereignty. In fact, Williams argues, Morgenthau does inherit a similar skepticism towards liberalism and the rise of modern science. However, contrarily to Schmitt, Morgenthau's is not an anti-liberal critique of liberalism, but one directed at "a reconstruction of liberal politics that takes account of the profound criticisms to which liberalism has been subjected."<sup>100</sup> (Williams, 2005, p. 94) In fact, Morgenthau does not limit his view of liberalism to "a rationalist philosophy and an objectivist vision of science" – one which he clearly sides against; neither does he restrict its legacy to the decadent liberalism that prevailed after the crisis of classical liberalism, which was based on a politics of tolerance. Rather, he sees liberalism as a "complex and misunderstood" tradition, profoundly indebted to Max Weber's tragic account of politics, according to which "a liberal polity must be self-consciously created in the context of a clear understanding of the relationship between constructions of knowledge and constructions of politics, and the inescapability of power and 'evil' in politics." (Williams, 2005, p. 94)

This latter view of liberalism is the one he ties to political realism, which refuses to dismiss all politics as a negative residue of and unenlightened society. Instead, it stresses the importance of accounting for the political as an autonomous sphere of activity, where power prevails and ethics cannot be comprehended through a narrow, instrumentalist view. Without accounting for the intricate yet unsolvable relation between politics and ethics, traditional liberalism has become unable to offer an objective foundation for a liberal political order. More than that,

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<sup>100</sup> In Chapter 4, I discuss an alternative to this prevailing view of Schmitt's as an anti-liberal critique of liberalism. In fact, as argued there, Schmitt keeps the humanist, European values – including the civil state – as the ultimate parameter for claiming the need for the sovereign decision. Refer to Chapter 4 for the implications of this argument. This is not to claim that Morgenthau offers exactly the same critique as Schmitt – after all, as seen in this chapter, many other influences stand in his way. In fact, in his intellectual autobiography, Morgenthau recalls thinking that, upon meeting Schmitt, he had met "the most evil man alive." (*apud* Schuerman, 2009, p. 34). However, it does point to some of the limits of the argument Williams is here trying to pursue concerning the critical potential of wilful Realism by distancing it from Schmitt's formulation. See discussion below.

by tying itself to an uncritical allegiance to rationality and knowledge, rationalist liberalism “has historically become positively destructive of such an order.” (Williams, 2005, p. 98)

Much similar to what was argued in Chapter 3, then, Williams claims that Morgenthau’s critique of liberalism rested on the belief that the coupling of rationalism and empiricism through modern science, and its instrumentalization in the realm of politics was directly responsible for the crises experienced during the first half of the twentieth century. Such a coupling had led liberal politics to be completely unable to reflect on its own deficiencies, reading every failed policy not as a sign of its flawed (or somehow in need of revision) philosophies, but as an error in calculation, one that required only another round of efforts to be implemented – thus turning into a profoundly conservative and dogmatic form of thought. For that reason, Morgenthau comes to attribute the rise of Nazism to liberalism’s incapacity to account for the reality of politics at mid-twentieth century and thus to offer some form of adequate response to the crises people were experiencing, leading them to search for any kind of alternative political philosophy. For Morgenthau, then, a critical stance towards liberal empiricism meant not a destruction of liberalism, but a reconstruction of Western Enlightenment traditions.

In this sense, according to Williams, realism’s concern with the political cannot be translated – as Scheuerman sometimes seems to imply – into a dismissal of the accomplishments of Enlightenment or even into a celebration of conflict. Instead, it translates into a recognition that it is in the political realm that the absence of ultimate foundations must be negotiated; more than that, such lack of moorings translates into a concern with “the construction of such a foundation and the principles, justifications, and limits (both spatial and juridical) of authority and order.” (Williams, 2005, p. 132) This raises at the heart of realism a political and ethical question about this search for constructed foundations: political because it recognizes that the construction must occur in a context of political power, and must find resource in it as well; and also ethical in the sense of inquiring into the kind of construction one envisions.

According to this wilful Realist tradition, Williams understands that the achievement of a constructed liberal order is tied to a “politics of limits” and a “politics of knowledge,” whereby one must recognize the importance of accepting

the limits of man and thus the impossibility of perfection. Thus he claims that “wilful Realism places an extremely high premium upon the knowledge of limits and the limits of knowledge, and upon the need for self-overcoming and self-discipline in both these regards.” (Williams, 2005, p. 134) Skepticism, in this sense, is not an outside stance that attacks the Enlightenment and rationalism from without; instead, it moves within this tradition itself, posing the need to reengage rationalism beyond the tradition of “cognitive liberalism”<sup>101</sup>. In this view,

To be faithful to the Western rationalist and Enlightenment traditions requires a commitment to critique not only at the level of epistemic rigour, but also in order to establish a cogent and realistic understanding of what is entailed in bringing into practice many of the liberal-political ideals of the Enlightenment itself. The critical appraisal of liberal empiricism is declared a necessary consequence of an ethical and political stance, not the denial or renunciation of one. (Williams, 2005, p. 144)

From this argument, we can see Williams trying to retrieve in the wilful tradition precisely the willingness, which I claimed for in Chapter 5, to move beyond the knowing subject. By arguing that wilful Realism practices a politics of limits, he is pointing to the way it recognizes that the lack of foundations of a post-Kantian political philosophy must negotiate the terms of human finitude beyond the realm of knowledge alone, but also through a mobilization of practical reason. However, as his argument progresses, I will try to point where Williams argument and mine part ways.

Moving to the next step of his argument, Williams reconsideration of the role of rationality inside the wilful Realist tradition provides a way to untying the second knot which keeps international relations theory locked into a philosophically poor and ultimately unproductive politics of knowledge – the supposed polarity between rationalist and constructivist accounts. In fact, this historical sociological account of politics mobilized by wilful Realism questions the reification through which the “rational subject” is turned from a historical construction into an epistemological premise. Once this move is made, one is ultimately trapped in the position according to which rationalist certainties are superior to constructivist contingencies, since the latter lacks an adequate

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<sup>101</sup> Following Rengger, Williams defines cognitive liberalism as “the conviction that an adequate approach to political practice requires the adoption of a universal approach to knowledge based on the principles of Enlightenment science.” (Williams, 2005, p. 139)



epistemological grounding for the conduct of proper analytical work.

As Williams claims, rather than buying into this flawed dichotomy, the wilful Realist position implicates “precisely the opposite” assumption: that retrieving the historical and social foundations of the self-interested liberal-rationalist subject is a necessary step in order to “defend the *social construction* of subjects and social practices that in many ways resemble the analytic postulates and assumptions of contemporary rationalist theory” (Williams, 2005, p. 147) – and thus disputing the view according to which the identity of the actors can be subsumed to a causal variable in a set of relations. Rather, the emphasis is put on identifying “the conditions under which the *rationalist identity* can dominate over other forms of identity and action, and the further practical and ethical challenges which – if successful – such a rational construction would then have to address.” (Williams, 2005, p. 147-8)

In so doing, Williams argues that wilful Realism finally problematizes the modern/postmodern divide, by showing that it shares much with the so-called postmodern thinking. First of all, both understand the lack of foundations that confronts political reality, which requires a different kind of responsibility from actors that is not predicated on instrumental rationality and a logic of consequences. Recognizing the importance of responsibility becomes a stance for, not so much getting outside of power and violence, but negotiating within it.

Responsibility in this grammar is “precisely an attempt to bring together a responsibility to otherness and a responsibility to act within a wilfully liberal vision,” (Williams, 2005, p. 165-6) which implicates a strategy of limitation. Power is not only seen from a materialist standpoint, but as an instance of coexistence – *a modus vivendi*, as Williams puts it – that requires mediation, negotiation, mutual limitation. In accordance to what was claimed by Jütersonke, when realism frames the problem of power politics in materialist terms – as when it mobilizes the idea of national interest – this serves as a way of refraining the destructive potential of a politics conducted in ideological, moral and universalistic presumptions; thus, this account of politics leads to the recognition of the other – the enemy – as legitimate in his claims to power. As the discussion about Schmitt in Chapter 4 pointed out, the enemy is necessary for a politics that guarantees the negotiation in a world deprived of ultimate authority. Thus, Williams argues, wilful Realism recognizes – just like postmodernist thinkers –

that the other is necessary to my own identity.

Notwithstanding the similarities, Williams however concedes that there are “significant differences” between wilful Realists and postmodernists, especially concerning their “divergent presentations of these issues,” which amounts to the fact that “the wilful Realist insistence on the importance of power and decision in politics often provides difficult challenges for these positions.” Therefore, on the one hand, he stresses the need to find important points of conversation and engagement between them concerning “the nature of politics in modernity;” (Williams, 2005, p. 161) on the other hand, however, he claims that deconstruction alone cannot provide a basis for the wilful Realist position, for the latter recognizes the need to provide a foundation for practice – which does not follow from the deconstruction of subjectivity per se. For the wilful Realist, then, “a responsibility to act must go beyond deconstruction to consider viable alternatives and counter-practices,” (Williams, 2005, p. 166) without fearing falling into essentialism. By pointing to these differences however, Williams does not believe to be falling into the blackmail of the Enlightenment. I will engage with this argument once I clarify how Williams portrays such wilful Realist claim for responsibility.

The kind of responsibility required by wilful Realism, then, is not, according to Williams, to be found in deconstruction, but instead in Weber’s ethic of responsibility. It requires a position of “disenchanted heroism” so as to perform a politics of limits. This heroic vision requires acknowledging that, “in a world without foundations, the heroically responsible individual is one who overcomes the desire for such foundations, who creates political order as an act of will, and yet who does so within the limits prescribed by an ethic of responsibility.” (Williams, 2005, p. 195) In this sense, the resource to be found in the wilful Realist position is, at the same time, “a *moral accomplishment* requiring self-knowledge and a form of self-denial,” and a demand for “political acumen to make such politics prevail in a world often unamenable to a politics of limits.” (Williams, 2005, p. 196)

This heroic responsibility, Williams concedes, is not without its dangers, for it risks to “devalue those who fail to live up to its demands,” or else, to associate responsibility with “act[ing] despite the objections of others.” The risk is built into the very figure of the “hero,” who many times becomes entitled to act in

the name of a collectivity which it ultimately subverts, thus becoming destructive of the very values it purports to defend. (Williams, 2005, p. 196) “Justifying themselves by positing a potentially chaotic world held together only by acts of will,” Williams avows, “heroic Realists risk falling prey to their own rhetoric, and losing sight of the responsibility which is the purported foundation for their acts.” (Williams, 2005, p. 196-7) As a consequence, “the heroism of limits is used to justify acts in the name of responsibility, and to limit criticism of those acts through the invocation of heroic responsibility and tragedy.” (Williams, 2005, p. 197) These risks were clearly the subject of my discussion in Chapter 4 – risks that Schmitt himself seemed to fall prey to, and that Benjamin tried to elude without much success.

Morgenthau, Williams claims, accepts Schmitt’s views on the intertwinement between politics, power and violence, but refuses to see it as reducible to the friend-enemy relationship and, above all, he refuses to let the ethical sphere to be obliterated, either by considering it as part of the political realm, or as radically inapplicable to it. The same autonomy enjoyed by the political sphere must be accorded to the moral sphere, so that one realm can serve to mediate and limit the other – and none can destroy the other’s specificity. Political conflict, whereas insoluble, is amenable to negotiation and limitation – which depends on the recognition of such conflicts, in the first hand.

The balance of power in Morgenthau’s account is not a balance of material capabilities, as in Waltz, but a balance achieved only through political negotiation and mutual limitation with the aim of limiting physical violence to a minimum, as medium rather than a principle of politics. “The capacity for coercion may be important (indeed essential) in upholding political structures, but it is not their essence.” (Williams, 2005, p. 119) After all, an unbounded politics was what gave rise to fascism. Thus, Williams qualifies Morgenthau’s narrow view of politics as being part of a comprehensive political philosophy – a moral and political project to save liberalism from itself –, rather than a methodological or analytical category. This position approximates Williams’ wilful Realism to Ashley’s portrayal of the superiority of classical realism’s practical scheme in relation to the neorealist structural position which turned this practical and historical scheme into a universal analytical grid. It does not, however, respond to the limits pointed out by Ashley. In the closing arguments of this chapter, I will consider some of

the limits of Williams' wilful realism

## 6.5 Conclusion

The chapter surveyed three argumentative spaces within which a debate over the critical potential of classical realism was nurtured: i. a discussion over tragedy that questioned the boundary between politics and morality; ii. the debate over Morgenthau's historical juncture and his opening to a normative theory that could move realism to consider a post-sovereign form of politics; and finally, iii. a consideration of wilful Realism as a tradition that is able to undo familiar disciplinary misconceptions in order to lead international relations theory into a more productive and reconstructive engagement with contemporary liberal politics. As I tried to argue, not all of these debates tried to rescue the same critical potential; in fact, I pointed to the way Scheuerman's particular framing of the problem put him at odds with some of the premises of the discussion on tragedy and wilful Realism, since it is realism itself that is ultimately seen by Scheuerman as the major obstacle to developing a critical theory.

While sharing much with the general discussion over critical realism, and especially with Lebow's view of tragedy, William's wilful Realism moved the argument one step further and tried to reconcile not only realism and liberalism, but also rationalism and constructivism, as well as modernism and postmodernism. In his discussion, Williams approximated a number of arguments I have made in the course of this dissertation, which might lead his critique to be somehow equated with the one I am advancing here. In fact, Williams himself points in this direction in the closing arguments of his book:

In the best wilful Realist sense, Michel Foucault once stated that: 'I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and so the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible.' As a statement of an ethic of responsibility, it seems to me, these words stand as a challenge which any claim upon the Realist tradition must live up to. The task of international political theory worthy of that tradition is to confront these difficult ethical and practical questions, to enquire into the multiple and shifting structures of power and possibility in contemporary world politics, and to engage with

limits in the dual sense of fostering limits upon the worst excesses and challenging limits which make those excesses possible. (Williams, 2005, p. 209-10)

Much similar to what was discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the wilful Realist tradition which Williams tries to delineate emerges from the tragic appreciation of the political aporias embedded in the modern predicate of a politics without foundations. Like Weber and Schmitt knew it too well, sustaining liberalism and the achievements of the Enlightenment in face of its profound setbacks and their twentieth-century manifestations was not an easy task. Knowing there are no solid foundations upon which to ground political thought and action – and yet knowing that one has to act – is the tragic predicament of wilful Realism to think through contemporary politics.

Hence, the impasse of the realist position – which Scheuerman seemed to attach to the mistaken account of politics inherited from the likes of Nietzsche, Weber and Schmitt – was seen by Williams and myself (see Chapter 4) as the inevitable stalemate of a politics of crisis. I argued that the stalemate ensues not from some particular error in calculation, but from how the problem is framed in the first place. In this sense, contrary to the blackmail of Habermas' and Scheuerman's position, the critical potential of wilful Realism does not ensue from its adamant faith on the urgency of the cosmopolis, but from its acute sensibility concerning the limits of such an imaginary. Above all, skepticism towards claims to universality is the basis for the kind of critique being advanced here.

However, there is an enormous blind spot in wilful Realism that, I claim, my position tries to evade. By presenting deconstruction as a necessary and yet insufficient step in the kind of responsibility claimed by wilful Realism, Williams tried to undo the dichotomy contained in the blackmail of Enlightenment, between a modernist and a postmodernist position. However, and following from the argument developed on Chapter 5, by putting the challenge of deconstruction in these terms, Williams is already buying into the blackmail according to which deconstruction and reconstruction are two different procedures. This framing is, ultimately, a misrepresentation of Derrida's claim that responsibility involves precisely the kind of deconstructive thinking that understands the lack of

foundation and the need to move beyond the subject of knowledge.

Without claiming all “postmodern thinking” to be of a kind – something I refuse to do on a number of reasons<sup>102</sup> – I do think that the kind of thinking Williams tries to move beyond – by offering wilful Realism as a superior alternative – does not amount to such a poor understanding of the political predicament. Especially, a deconstructive form of thought does not lead to this kind of impasse in which no decision is possible; in this sense, deconstruction is not an affirmation of inaction, and therefore, does not need to be supplemented by a reconstructive move. Instead, deconstruction as portrayed by Derrida is precisely a kind of reasoning that recognizes the risks that are always involved in decisions, and yet knows that one needs to make decisions. What deconstruction does try to move away from is offering any generalized claim to what a responsible decision can mean in every context. In this sense, I associate deconstruction to the sort of critical attitude claimed by Foucault when he discusses the ethos of ironic heroization, as presented in Chapter 5.

Therefore, while Williams’ “wilful Realist hero” portrays some of the same sensibilities I ask for here, I however understand a profound limitation to come out of his misconstruction of the aims of a deconstructive form of thinking. As much as wilful Realism claims to move away from the politics of friends and enemies encompassed by Schmitt, I argue, to the contrary, that Schmitt was aware of the same aporias that Morgenthau – and the wilful Realist tradition – was. The politics of friends and enemies was the inevitable consequence of a construction of the problems of finitude in terms of crisis. In this sense, I do not see Williams’ wilful Realism moving beyond this. What he does, instead, is misconstrue what Schmitt was doing, and in this sense, find in wilful Realism the solution to Schmitt’s problems. However – and I borrow directly from Shilliam’s argument in this chapter to say this – Williams is ultimately unable to criticize his own

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<sup>102</sup> My main objection here is to the label “postmodern.” I do not think there is anything “postmodern” in this account; at the limit, the authors usually equated to this position are trying to point to the profoundly modern predicaments we live at least since Kantian critical philosophy. Also, the attempt to group a number of different positions under a single label is always problematic for the way it allows one to evade important engagements that cannot be subsumed under a homogenizing position. In fact, my own argument performs this move at different instances of this dissertation, as a way to build a clear argument inside a disciplinary discussion. With this note, I hope at least to recognize some of the limits inherent to my own argument – and to all arguments that try to take part in an ongoing disciplinary conversation, for that matter.

universal criteria for judging the wilful Realist project as superior, which leads him to incur in the same *faux pas* into universalism that Morgenthau and the tragic vision of politics incurred. In fact, the problems of this tragic vision as debated by Ashley, Rengger and Shilliam here, are similar to the ones I am trying to delineate in this dissertation under the name of a “politics of crisis.”

In this sense, Williams reproduces the classical realist (conservative) focus on politics as a special realm – separate from private lives of ordinary individuals – where heroic subjects must act. Williams responsible hero continues to be some extraordinary/exceptional figure – the prudent statesman or the heroic intellectual – and he cannot escape the same consequences of the sovereign politics of friends and enemies as formulated by Schmitt. There seems to be no space for thinking politics and heroism from the standpoint of the everyday individual who navigates the aporetic conditions of a disenchanted world. Even if dislocated and decentralized, the subject of knowledge continues to occupy an exceptional role in his narrative.

Thus, and following with Shilliam’s argument, there is no space to question the values of liberalism in Williams scheme: after all, wilful realism, after deconstructing liberalism, must reconstruct it. There is no room for alterity in his discussion – at least, not to any kind of alterity that problematizes the superiority of the Western liberal and humanist values. In Shilliam’s language, Williams scheme does not allow for international political thinking, since it cannot confront the more profound ambiguity that emerges at the edge of the political community, where alterity meets, and limits can be properly negotiated. This, I would add, would be a proper politics of limits.

In the final chapter, then, I will try to face and own up to all the criticisms I have turned against the critical realists in this chapter – or at least to the ones I can recognize. First, however, I will consider a recent attempt to build a sustainable critique in international relations theory out of the limits of this revisionist literature.

## Is critique possible in international relations theory?

This final chapter attempts at answering the question concerning the possibility of critique in international relations theory. In light of the arguments developed throughout the dissertation concerning the limits of a narrative of crisis; also, having delivered a poignant critique of the recent attempts at reconstructing the legacy of the discipline by reengaging classical realism, can I find any grounds for claiming international relations theory as critical theory?

In fact, a recent publication has tried precisely to answer this question. Daniel Levine's book *Recovering International Relations: The Promise of Sustainable Critique*, which was published during the time I was structuring my research problem, has offered a pervasive account of the development of international relations theory since the aftermath of the Second World War, so as to identify in what grounds critique has been attempted in the field, and the problems faced by this literature. Levine's final assessment has been one of repeated failure: while international relations theory has striven for critique in its multiple fact-value traditions, it has been consistently incapable of sustaining it. As a consequence, Levine claims, international relations theory's vocation for critique has never been adequately fulfilled, leading it to recurrent rounds of reflexivity which have all ultimately failed – critique has persistently turned into reification.

Just as myself, Levine has also offered a sympathetic critique of the “critical realist” position discussed in the previous chapter; he has done it however from a perspective that is significantly at odds with the one advanced here. Thus, before proceeding with my own particular considerations on the matter of the possibility of critique in international relations theory, I provide an inquiry into Levine's project in light of his promise of producing a form of “sustainable critique” able to circumvent the limitations of preceding efforts to produce and sustain critique. Having laid out the strengths and weaknesses of Levine's sustainably critical project, I will be ready to provide my own propositions concerning the grounds for making international relations theory sympathetic and hospitable for the development of critical work. Also, I will provide some



indications as to how my own project might need to be supplemented by multiple other critical attitudes. Therefore, in what follows there is no great promise of solution, but only a very situated view of how international relations theory may claim to be critical – as long as it entertains the need of going beyond itself.

## 7.1

### **The promise of sustainable critique**

In his attempt to devise a space where the vocation for critique can be sustained inside international relations theory, Daniel Levine has resorted to an Adornian inspired approach that, while sympathetic to “critical realism’s” efforts to reassess the legacy of critique, however stresses the incapacity of classical realism to provide the basis for a sustainable form of critique. In this sense, Levine has adamantly argued that Morgenthau was not a critical theorist, stressing instead that, while he was inspired by some of the same problems that would confront the Frankfurt School, their positions differed greatly “over what theory was and how it could respond to the challenges of late-modern political life.” (Levine, 2013, p. 96) In this sense, Levine departs from a comparative measure between international relations theorist’s critical approaches and the critical analysis advanced by the Frankfurt School. He thus argues that, while Morgenthau’s practically-oriented theorizing was undoubtedly a stance of normative theory, his brand of it was “epistemologically and ontologically conservative,” (Levine, 2013, p. 96) in that it assumed an unchangeable ontology predicated on human nature, and a deeply flawed epistemology that relied in “trans-historical ideal types and master concepts.” (Levine, 2013, p. 97)

According to this view, even if Morgenthau was able to recognize the profound transformation provoked by the existence of nuclear weapons and the possibility of total war, his analysis “admit no engagement with late modernity as a radical, systemic break from earlier politics forms, modes, or orders.” (Levine, 2013, p. 97) Having acutely identified the crisis of late-modern politics, he however was incapable of sustaining it, which ultimately led him to “impasse,” “despair,” and “ressentiment.” In this sense, Levine claims, Morgenthau’s understanding of the twentieth century political crisis was rather intuitive, and

thus inept for providing an answer to the aporias he had discovered. Levine attributes such a predicament to his incapacity to sustain a fruitful interaction between the positive and normative moments of his theory. In this incapacity, Levine claims, Morgenthau was not alone. The entire history of international relations theory is, for him, marked by a critical vocation that cannot be sustained due to scholars' tendency to fall into reification, by confusing concepts with real-world things.

This is, in fact, the claim he advances in his award-winning book *Recovering International Relations*; in it, Levine argues that, having emerged out of long-standing normative traditions that were sensitive to the regressive potential of Enlightenment reason, international relations theory has always striven for a critical stance. Having to think politics in the postwar world, international relations theorists were fully aware of the contradictions posed by their dependency on normative and political traditions that were insufficient to deal with twentieth-century challenges. This is because “[t]he very worldviews that had brought humanity to catastrophe were now, clothed in new scholarly-theoretical idiom, expected to keep it *from* catastrophe.” (Levine, 2012, p.7)

Starting from a similar diagnosis to the one I offered in Chapter 3 concerning the intertwining between the twentieth-century political crisis and the self-reflectiveness of international relations theory – not to mention Williams' claim about the “international relations Enlightenment” – Levine stretches his argument one step further to claim that all of international relations theories – in their positive and normative strands – have a *vocation for critique*. Having being forged in the context of the unparalleled political crisis of the twentieth century, international relations theory was meant “to build a cumulative reservoir of knowledge for stewarding an increasingly dense, heavily armed, and persistently diverse world, whether by creation of new capabilities, institutions, or procedures.” (Levine, 2012, p. 3) Contrary to Ashley's pungent attacks on neorealism and positivist theories in general, Levine thus claims that “classical realism” is not exclusive in its self-reflectiveness: in fact, all fact-value traditions in international relations theory – independent of their epistemological and methodological premises – have shared a “deeply humanistic desire to play a role

in the postwar reconstructive project.” (Levine, 2012, p. 5)<sup>103</sup> According to the author, then, international relations theory has shared the same sensibilities of the Dialectic of Enlightenment thesis, and thus has looked to the interplay between theory’s positive and critical moments for a way to prevent the reifying tendency of thought.

However, just as it happened with classical realism, the other traditions could not sustain their critical vocation over time. According to Levine, “although the positive, knowledge-building side of IR flourished, its critical-reflexive side grew only in fits and starts.” (Levine, 2012, p. 10) Hence, the various traditions ultimately incurred into reification by focusing on outward criticism and failing to turn their critical gaze inwards. For Levine, if international relations theory is to offer a *sustainable critique*, it will require *criticizing, not the reifying tendency of particular forms of thought, but the reification inherent to all forms of thought*. In light of his own call, “sustainable critique” is offered as an ethical stance predicated on a passionate responsibility concerning “the specter of catastrophic violence” that marks late-modern politics coupled with a rigorous knowledge-building effort. By sustaining critical and practical theory in a single intellectual moment, “IR needs forms of critique in which theory’s ideologically agentic nature is accepted even as theorists continue to strive for ‘value freedom’.” (Levine, 2012, p. 12)

### 7.1.1

#### **The dialectical nature of reason and the need for sustainable critique**

Much like I have already argued throughout this dissertation, Levine understands post-Kantian philosophy as admitting of the inherent impossibility of trying to reach any essential truth about the world; working within this legacy implies dismissing any belief on a complete form of knowledge, for reification is

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<sup>103</sup> Throughout his book, Levine analyzes three fact-value traditions in international relations theory in order to identify their approach to critique and their inability to sustain it: Realism; Communitarianism; and Individualism. He parses each of these traditions in their different methodological approaches: metaphysical, middle-range and third way. See Levine, 2012, Chapters 3-5. It is telling that the traditions he puts under investigation do not include the “dissidents” or any of the more radically reflexive accounts to thought. Richard Shapcott’s review of his book points out precisely this gap in the analysis. See Shapcott (2014).

a necessary step of every thought experiment. Knowledge depends on the nominalistic definition of concepts that inevitably “freeze” some aspect of a much more complex reality. The problem emerges, however, when one forgets “the distinction between theoretical concepts and the real-world things they mean to describe or to which they refer,” (Levine, 2012, p. 15) and ends up occluding the fact that every conceptualization is not only a way of describing the world, but also a way of redacting it.

Thus Levine draws on a Frankfurt School inspired form of critique – especially on Theodor Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* – to claim that, if international relations theory is to provide a solid ground on which critique can be sustained, it has to find ways for *chastening reason*, so as to confront the limitation inherent to all conceptual thinking – its necessary reliance on reification. In this sense, countering reification requires first, giving a full account of how it operates, and second, offering “specialized tools” to assist on keeping that process of forgetting in check: after all, “critique is not made sustainable [...] merely by explaining why it needs to be so.” (Levine, 2012, p. 25) In fact, Levine claims that chastening reason is particularly important for international relations theory, because of its inherent connection to the possibility of mass destruction. Such form of chastening operation becomes important not only for empirical reasons – to prevent the confusion between concepts and things-in-themselves – but as a moral imperative to avoid the recurrence of massively destructive events. It seems worthwhile quoting him extensively on this:

Given these limitations [of thought], and given the connections between the academic study of IR and the real-world deployment of deadly (sometimes even catastrophically deadly) force, sustainable critique holds first, that students of IR have particular ethical obligations to reflective self-regard, and second, that fostering such self-regard can give their work a new kind of purchase. It combines the explicit normativity and sense of political urgency that characterized post-1945 classical realism with the deep skepticism and “dissident” sensibilities that animate critical, feminist, and postpositivist IR’s discussions of the normative and methodological deficits of the existing theoretical mainstream. (Levine, 2012, p. 18)

Just as Morgenthau and other classical realists, scholars from the Frankfurt School rose up against the progressivist project of knowledge erected by positivist

thinking. According to them, despite of positivist attempts to provide the adequate criteria for pursuing knowledge that could bring forth cumulation and progress – thus performing a political and moral regeneration of society – its project was ultimately unsuccessful due to the inherent dialectical nature of reason. In this sense, positivism had not been able to check the regressive potential of reason, thus making way for the instrumentalization of thought. Frankfurt scholars, however, charged positivism not for relying on reification – which they understood to be inevitable for all thinking – but for potentializing reason’s regressive tendencies by unreflexively pursuing an empiricist epistemology divorced from any consideration about the values that should be supported by critical reason. Furthermore, positivism became a form of “identitarian thinking,” which subtracted all uniqueness and multiplicity of the world in favor of general concepts and categories that were ultimately equated to reality as such – thus falling into reification. In divorcing theoretical from practical reason, positivism carried the necessary risk of dehumanizing thought.

This identitarian thinking would impact negatively the study of politics and society, destroying the very humanity it had once helped to create. The consequences of this process were exactly those pointed out by Max Weber: a growing social anxiety that tended to drive people from reason into superstition. To make matters even worse, the combination of this dialectical nature of reason with “the technical innovations of late modernity and the intellectual and moral-psychological effects of positivism’s identitarian tendencies had helped produce catastrophe.” (Levine, 2012, p. 51) For Adorno and Horkheimer, Levine argues, rationalization of society had neutralized the reflective tools of reason, making critique alone incapable of checking reason’s regressive tendencies.

Bringing these reflections to bear on international relations theory, Levine offers a typology of the different levels of reification and reflexivity found throughout the multiple fact-value traditions: i. analytical; ii. normative; and iii. vocational. *Analytical reification*, most common in the value-free tradition of thought, refers to a more superficial and apparent process, through which concepts are conflated with things-in-themselves, thus leading to a naturalization of what is conventional and freezing reality into a general, unalterable – thus natural – scheme. On a second level, *normative reification* represents a deeper form of

forgetting, which affects more clearly those traditions that criticize the notion of “value-freedom,” pointing to their perspectiveness and historicity. According to Levine, this form of critique falls into reification when it becomes uncritical about the form of emancipatory politics that it proposes. For him, the impossibility of affirming that the new reality achieved through emancipation is better or more valid than the previous one tends to lead not to the conflation between concepts and reality, but instead to a reification of the normative framework in which such traditions are grounded.

Finally, a third and deeper level of reification tends to pass by almost imperceptibly: *vocational reification* involves a kind of forgetting that takes place when the theorist ignores that, beyond the methodological and political implications of his practice, he is also a moral agent, responsible for the social realities he helps to bring forth. If the former levels of reification can be checked intellectually, giving the theorist the impression that he can resume his research practice, vocational critique requires *a restless effort*. It involves a form of reflexivity in which the theorist recognizes the inevitability of reification in all forms of thought, including his own. Because of that, vocational critique “requires IR theorists to be constantly vigilant – toward the insufficiencies of their own thinking no less than to that of others – and suggests that ongoing, free-standing critical methods must be developed to meet that requirement.” (Levine, 2012, p. 68)

Levine finds in Adorno the inspiration for vocational critique: his emphasis on the need to chasten the idealistic moments of thinking leads him to propose bringing thought into a “productive tension.” For Levine, the means for checking reification in the different fact-value traditions is “by artfully counterbalancing them, one against the other.” (Levine, 2012, p. 71) Negative dialectics – turning thought against itself – is the most effective means for countering the identitarian tendency of all thought – the tendency to conflate concepts with reality. Hence, Levine argues, a responsible and normative position must recognize the intricate relationship between thought and the production of reality; negative dialectics allows the theorist to avoid the tendency to unite diverging points of view into a single one – to find an identity between thought and reality – and forces him to account for the dialogical aspect of critical knowledge.

### 7.1.2

#### The *animus habitandi* and the constellational approach

In accordance with this narrative, Levine offers sustainable critique as the only possibility to avoid the *tragic consequences* of an unreflective reason associated with the technological tools of mass destruction. Following on the footsteps of the Frankfurt School, sustainable critique makes a plea for creating “thinking spaces in which one neither accepted the hopelessness of late modern international politics uncritically nor fled from it.” (Levine, 2012, p. 53) In this account, the task of chastening critique is never complete, for reason must remain at all times suspicious of its own risk of reification, by recognizing its own partiality, and therefore, the impossibility of offering any universal solution. “The fact remains that neither approach is inherently more valid or useful than the other, nor can either entirely encompass reality as a whole;” in order to take responsibility for this fact, Levine claims that sustainable critique is based on the recognition that “there are different forms of knowing, and each captures a slice of a complex reality that is irreducible to thinking.” (Levine, 2012, p. 56)

In light of this discussion, Levine proposes a twofold approach to sustainable critique: the ethos of *animus habitandi* coupled to the constellational approach to knowledge. First of all, sustainable critique must nurture a certain sensibility: “the will to dwell within or to abide.” Playing with Morgenthau’s *animus dominandi*, Levine calls this sensibility the *animus habitandi*, which requires accepting one’s own vulnerability to reification and thus, the need to keep one’s own tendency to reification in check by associating it to different fact-value traditions. *If no single tradition can encompass the whole of reality, the best way to keep the reifying tendency of reason in check becomes playing one tradition against the others, in a way as to sustain the coexistence of multiple traditions, not their dialectical synthesis.*

Thus, Levine claims, only a methodological approach which oscillates between different thinking paradigms without losing sight of its ethical-vocational aspirations would allow international relations theory to fulfill its vocation towards critique. Levine proposes that sustainable critique must work through a constellational approach: “a constellation reminds the theorist that different things



are true for different people and that noncontradiction is not an absolute value in the study of social and political things and kinds.” (Levine, 2012, p. 108)

The *animus habitandi* thus provides the affective position and the ethos according to which the theorist must frame his research in terms of constellations. The *animus habitandi* requires a “constant oscillation between positions of despair and hope,” so as to preserve the ambiguity of reality, dwelling within it, instead of hastily looking for a solution. Methodologically, this position must then translate in the constant “oscillation between different paradigms within IR theory.” (Levine, 2012, p. 63) In this way, constellations work as nodes where concepts juxtapose, retaining their generative contexts whilst checking each other’s identitarian tendency. Sustaining the critical moment becomes a matter of keeping multiple possibilities in check, without letting the scholar be carried away by his own preferences.

To be effective critique must return to the essential questions Kant raised: What can I know? For what can I hope? And most important of all: *What ought I do?* In the context of scholarly IR, *to what policies, actions, interests, and ideologies will my reifications give aid and comfort if unchastened; not only those I intend or state but also those I do not – mindful of the complex, stochastic processes by which ideas find their way into public sphere?* Thinking is part of the solution, but it is also part of the problem. Meeting the aims of IR is possible only if one can account for both aspects of reason’s dialectic. Admittedly, doing so is difficult, more difficult than even the foregoing survey can fully explicate. But that difficulty only helps explain why sustainable critique has proven so elusive, despite a long consensus as to the need for it. It is to documenting this difficulty – IR’s ongoing, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to wrestle the angel of reification and obtain the blessing of chastened reason – that the present work now turns. (Levine, 2012, p. 114, emphasis on the original)

In posing the question of sustainable critique in those terms, however, Levine appears to me to have forgotten perhaps the most important question formulated by Kant: *What is a human being?* Without confronting this problem of the human under conditions of disenchantment – under the “death of God,” as discussed in Chapter 5 – I argue that Levine’s sustainable critique misses an important nuance of post-Kantian philosophy which precisely allows for confronting the problem of knowledge, action, and hope, not for a transcendental subject, but for the subject in history and, as I argued earlier, as always in relation. Through this forgetting, sustainable critique again makes a *faux pas* into universalism, by stipulating a definitive roadmap for sustaining critique. In this



position, critique can have one and only one concern: “‘to rearrange [one’s] thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen’ again.”<sup>104</sup> (Levine, 2012, p. 89)

## 7.2

### What critique for what purpose?

Levine happily concedes to the fact that Adornian critique “smuggles in” a specific ontology that presupposes the “primacy of the political:” “that ontology is tragic: it negates any possibility of escape, mandating instead our reluctant acceptance. We are trapped in a world of our own reified mediations.” (Levine, 2012, p. 23) Along with this tragic ontology comes a recognition of international relations theory’s exceptionality: for “unlike other disciplines, IR deals with questions of mass violence, war, and death not as limit cases, but as part of its every day *problematique*.” As a consequence, it must “do justice to the potential costs of being misled in an era of constantly impending political-military catastrophe.” (Levine, 2012, p. 59)

In this light, Levine is able to side sustainable critique with the “mainstream IR” and against “Critical IR Theory”<sup>105</sup>: whereas the latter provides “a deeply optimistic enterprise,” the former share a similar tragic sensibility concerning the “grim inevitability” of reality. Critical IR Theories, for Levine, are not able to go beyond a normative critique: “such approaches presume that theorists know what emancipation is and that conceptual transparency will suffice to protect their understandings from unchecked reification.” (Levine, 2012, p. 86) They thus presume that critique is a one-time operation to right the wrongs of some aspect of politics, and that once finalized it will bring about emancipation.

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<sup>104</sup> Levine quotes Adorno’s new framing of the categorical imperative.

<sup>105</sup> The approaches he is trying to account for under this label comprise the “Welsh School” critical security studies (CSS) and the Critical IR Theory (CIRT) that follows from the works of Habermas, Horkheimer, Beck and others. For a fuller account of his position concerning Critical IR Theory, see Levine (2012), Chapter 2. It is also worth noting that, in a manner different from Williams who claimed some proximity to the work done by “poststructuralism,” Levine clearly distances his own sustainably critical position from the “dissidents.” According to his view, “dissidence [...] has been confused with critique. Yet the two are distinct: the latter speaks to relatively stable conditions of intellectual possibility, given the limits of thought, its reliance on reification, and the demands of practice; the former to what a dynamic marketplace of political values and movements will bear.” (Levine, 2012, p. 82)

“Critique, on such an account, would be a defined moment in thought, bounded on either end by practical theory building, rather than an ongoing, continuous interaction with practical reason.” (Levine, 2012, p. 87)

Sustainable critique, on the contrary, requires pursuing a vocational critique, which does not take critique to be a second order activity necessary for righting the wrongs of value-free social science and reestablishing practical theory in a new footing, but rather puts critique as the main objective of thought, and sustains an active chastening of all theorizing. In this sense, Levine argues, “postwar Frankfurt scholarship was more than merely a critique of positivism; it had metamorphosed (or, some would say, metastasized) into a critique of thought itself.” (Levine, 2012, p. 88) Sustainable critique resides in this negative dialectics, and upon the ethical – not only methodological or political – decision to conduct inquiry in full knowledge of the horrors that it can produce.

Levine’s criticism of Morgenthau’s critical approach then becomes clearer: despite of his tragic sensibility which allowed him to properly identify the crisis, he was not able to create a sustainably critical space in which reason could turn on itself. His incapacity to dwell within this crisis by mobilizing the adequate methodological tools for sustaining critique leads him to side with a pessimistic view of human nature. Unable to sustain critique, Morgenthau – and international relations theorists in general – ends up reifying one single “paradigm,” which amounts to making the complexity of late-modern life “forever out of reach.” (Levine, 2012, p. 58)

Without intending to provide a critique of Adorno’s work, I however believe that a critique of Levine’s position is in order in light of the ideas advanced throughout this dissertation. For Levine’s framing of sustainable critique, I argue, puts his project entirely within the kind of “politics of crisis” that I target at the first part of this dissertation. Sustaining critique for him becomes an imperative to sustaining crisis, as he presents in a number of passages. Thus, for instance, Levine characterizes sustainable critique as “not the reconciliation of mutually incommensurate accounts of reality, but the tools by which to preserve those accounts alongside one another in their full irreducibility;” in order to do that, sustainable critique must be able ““to activate a crisis in the social sciences’ and sustain it, at least insofar as this applies to the study of world politics.”

(Levine, 2012, p. 25) Later on, when providing the basis to distinguish sustainable critique from Critical IR Theory, he once again argues that “sustainable critique does not aim to provide seamless reconstructions of world politics or promise coherent, continuous discourses of world politics;” it seeks instead “to make individuals and politics aware of how deep skepticism must go in an era when crisis has become endemic to the human condition.” (Levine, 2012, p. 112) In a different passage, he again claims that: “Viewing recent decades as a period of sustained political and philosophical crisis, the practices of sustainable critique called for here try to salvage those ideals that have historically animated IR, even as it fragments the conceptual tools most often used to realize them.” (Levine, 2012, p. 227) So, when he criticizes Morgenthau’s position for its epistemological and methodological poverty, Levine argues that “left with nowhere to go, [Morgenthau] redoubles its exhortations, deepening a sense of urgency and crisis, while providing no tools by which to either resolve or sustain it. With nowhere to go, it festers into backlash.” (Levine, 2012, p. 127)

It is no surprise then that crisis appears in his study not only as the condition of thinking, but also as the object of study proper to international relations theory. Indeed, Levine replays the very self-image of international relations theory in/as crisis that was discussed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation. To be sure, he does seem aware of the negative consequences of a discourse of crisis, in a way similar to what was proposed on Chapter 4: when discussing the Middle East conflict from a constellational approach, Levine argues that “a constant percussion-beat of crisis and emergency impoverishes policy discourses by inducing haste, and a penumbra of dreams, beliefs, prejudices, and hopes creates a minefield of partisan sensibilities.” (Levine, 2012, p. 254) However, any further reflection of this impoverishment brought about by a crisis narrative is obliterated and ignored throughout his presentation of sustainable critique’s objectives.

According to the argument made on the last chapter, an important aspect of this blind spot in Levine’s work comes out of the tragic sensibility he purports to sustain. However rich this tragic view may be, it cannot deliver Levine from the game he is trying to reinvent. As I see it, Levine seems intent to change the rules by which the game is played – and in doing that, change the game; however, he ends up accepting all of the rules, even while claiming to be reinventing the game.

According to the conceptual framework proposed in this dissertation, in buying into the narrative of crisis, Levine is also smuggling in: i. a very specific temporality which is connected with the presupposition of ii. a very exclusive form of subjectivity, which is tied to the sovereign subject of knowledge that remains unchanged in the course of knowing, and finally, iii. an account of politics that is tied to the opposition between friends and enemies. The temporality of crisis ties Levine's project to a strict form of periodization: thus, the twentieth century crisis is, for him, an exceptional moment to be dealt with by exceptional individuals (those that are able to sustain critique). As argued in Chapter 4, this temporality of crisis is one of points and lines: in between two points, order can be installed, but only on the condition that its disruption legitimizes all attempts to restore order – either in terms of the violence of law or the violence of the sovereign decision. Either way, the rules of the game remain unaltered.

This temporality of crisis is precisely the one which frees the sovereign subject of knowledge – the one who, speaking from the present, assumes that he speaks with a sovereign voice, and is thus able to change the course of history: to stop Auschwitz from ever happening again. The past – dead – becomes an object from which he can learn through evidence, but never change: therefore, this subject feels justified to judge all of his temporal others from his own point of view, mobilizing his own special kind of knowledge and his own historical *a priori*. This sovereign subject of knowledge – identical to himself, despite claims to the contrary – knows he cannot know everything. He thus searches for how to deal with his finitude by submitting his own certainties to the constant criticism of a court of reason that must be in session at all times. In doing so, he can hope, not to find the transcendental, but at least to stave off the consequences of reason gone unchecked.

These are exactly the rules of the “politics of crisis” that Levine buys into: his time is the time of crisis. He does seem to understand the problems with the imaginary of crisis, and the risk of trying to get out of it, to find a solution to it. That is why he wants to offer the resources for sustaining the crisis – and thus keeping the risks of reason gone unchecked at bay. The sovereign subject of knowledge is then summoned to do the only thing he can do: preventing himself from forgetting his own limits and thus pretending to know the world. How to do

that? One must sustain all traditions alongside one another: not to find a synthesis among them, but providing the means for chastening one another.

What is the problem with this framework? Just like Habermas', Levine's court of reason is always in session, and the presupposition of juridical critique remains unchanged. Even if the critical reason here is supposed to be hinged on the ethos to dwell within or to abide, this ethos emanates from a fully formed subject that remains unchanged in the course of knowing; his knowledge may change, but he remains identical to himself throughout the entire process. Levine thus comes full circle: unable to confront the subject of knowledge, he finds himself trapped in a crisis-ridden politics of friends and enemies, where the best one can hope for is avoiding catastrophe. International relations theory holds the special key for policing this boundary, since it is specially placed to deal with this inevitable crisis. In the temporality of points and lines, the present is a time of crisis separated from the (dead) past and the (not-yet) future by two points of crisis: the crisis that inaugurates modernity and the one that risks to put an end to it, to disrupt the order of crisis.

What I am arguing here, then, is that, once I accept Levine's solution for sustaining critique – sustaining crisis – I have already accepted the idea that human finitude must be seen as a tragic predicament from which there is no scape – this is a “grim inevitability” after all. In this scenario, treating all forms of knowledge as equally relevant – since no one holds the key to a superior form of knowledge – becomes our best hope to avoid mass destruction. The stakes are high, so we should be responsible – and responsibility becomes a matter of chastening reason and limiting the tragic consequences of reification. This is a presumption that I find very difficult to sustain.

By framing the problem of a constellational approach in terms of different forms of knowing, in which “each captures a slice of reality,” (Levine, 2012, p. 56) Levine completely dismisses a more important question that is not cumulative – more forms of knowledge give a clearer view of the total reality – but reconstructive of reality. We cannot assume all positions to be trying to approach a slice of reality: this presumption already leaves unquestioned the different understandings of what reality is and, therefore, what should be the best way to approach it. It is only by leaving these ontological questions unaccounted for – critical questions, as I presented in Chapter 5 – that Levine is then able to provide

his ethos for the *animus habitandi* with its ensuing methodology of constellations. As I argued before, this leaves the politics of crisis completely untouched.

The question that remains inaccessible in Levine's scheme – what is a human being? – is the one that allows for perhaps moving beyond the sovereign subject of knowledge, to properly treat knowledge in the context of human self-creativity. This is the ethical question that antecedes the court of reason and that remains circumscribed in this scheme. The challenge posed by framing the problem of modern politics through critique instead of crisis requires a deconstruction of the present ways of “doing IR” – which is at the same time a reconstruction of it. It cannot be found by accepting all of the rules of the game and trying to change the result. The constellational approach of sustainable critique is, from the standpoint of the critical attitude invited here, remarkably limited.

The decision upon the “best” way to “know” something can never occur in a vacuum, and thus it cannot rely on a universal proposition such as “to avoid Auschwitz again.” Just as Cox – and Horkheimer (2002[1937]) before him – argued, “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose.” (Cox, 1981, p. 207) Before assuming that the best way to approach knowledge is to sustain “multiple and incompatible ways of seeing” alongside one another, I first need to ask “for whom and for what purpose” I pursue knowledge. Thus, critique as I approach it here requires a previous ethical and political decision concerning what I want to do with knowledge. As I argued with Foucault in Chapter 5, critique is characterized by its own dispersion: it cannot be a matter of finding the illegitimacy of some forms of knowledge for their articulation with power; it instead should be based on an ethical, political and aesthetical decision to refuse the forms of governmentalization that try to impose specific forms of subjectivity and identity while making others abject. For such a critical framing of the problem, critique cannot be equated to the juridical function of the court of reason.

There is no room in Levine to debate crisis: crisis is presupposed, not argued; it offers the ultimate condition upon which he justifies the need to move into sustainable critique. This apparently unapologetic and neutral recognition – that we live in a time of crisis that is particularly problematic for the amount of destruction that is able to provoke – performs, in my opinion, one of the worst forms of reification. It reifies the ontological condition of modernity and, with it,

the kind of subject able to inquire and produce critical knowledge about it – knowledge that, once produced, may be able to avert catastrophe. Again, as Cutrofello (1994) argues concerning Habermas, Levine’s court of reason is open to critiquing all other positions but its own. In doing this, it obliterates all possibility of discussion of the critical project – there is only room for dialogue. And yet, the preconditions of a truly multi-vocal dialogue are not questioned, and the dialogue runs the risk of becoming a monologue, or a dialogue between subjects who accept a series of rational presuppositions concerning the world, its crisis, how to know it, why to know it. After all, knowledge can only serve to avert catastrophe. In the end, we are back at survival mode. Fear must guide the duty to dialogue – even if the stakes, the voices and the possibilities of this dialogue are already set in stone.

### 7.3

#### **International relations theory: inadequate and indispensable?**

Narratives about crisis such as the ones expressed in various works discussed throughout this dissertation fall prey to the unquestioned assumption that the history of Europe and the US is the history of the “international” – or even the “world.” There is no room in this narrative to question whether this humanistic crisis of the twentieth century has anything exceptional: it is just assumed so. And who would dare to question that? However, if we take a quick look at, for instance, Dependency Theory<sup>106</sup> that is being developed in South America during the Cold War, the assessment of “the twenty-years crisis” is quite at odds with the prevailing image of a “world” in disarray. For moments of crisis and war in the Anglo-European realm have had a counter-side of boosting development in South America, which may have impacted positively their economies and societies.

Without arguing that development is a good thing<sup>107</sup>, what I am merely trying to indicate is that the narrative of crisis works more often than not to assume a universality of experiences throughout the world that takes no account

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<sup>106</sup> For instance, Cardoso & Faletto (2010) bring a historical account of the twentieth century from the standpoint of the social and economic development of Latin America that strongly contrasts with the prevailing views offered by international relations theory.

<sup>107</sup> For a challenging critique of development and the construction of the “Third World,” see Escobar (1995).

whatsoever of the different histories experienced by multiple others, which might contest the view of a universal historical trajectory bringing the world into the international. Inviting such stories in without looking for a universalizing narrative concerning the world perhaps is the best hope for promoting a truly multi-vocal debate – and perhaps a truly international theory.

Furthermore, Krishna (2006) has also offered a sharp critique of the way in which these abstractions that work at the heart of international relations theory – and I add inside the politics of crisis – serve to silence and obliterate the particular contexts in which universal narratives have been put in motion, such as the narratives of international law, of freedom and equality, and so on. More recently, Pasha has made a similar case concerning the stubbornness of Western international relations “to embrace its own peculiarity.” (Pasha, 2011, p. 217) This stubbornness is always already encompassed in the narrative of crisis which I analyze here, one that “allows a *particular* intellectual practice with *particular* imaginaries and rationalities to serve as a universal reference for *all* IR theoretical practices with alternative imaginaries and rationalities.” (Pasha, 2011, p. 217) While international relations theory continues to be practiced in such a register, pleas for pluralization can only be read as pleas for marginalization of all that cannot be stated in terms of universal propositions – or that cannot hope to be sustainable throughout. There may be room for considering localized critiques inside international relations theory, as long as they do not shatter the image of a coherent – if only slightly confused – discipline. As Pasha puts it, “in extreme cases [...] naughty dissenters who refuse to be co-opted are given the option of exile to the borderlands of the discipline, stripped of effective power, but with the right of protest.” (Pasha, 2011, p. 217) While this inclusive exclusion is promoted,

[...] the boundaries are vigorously defended with strict enforcement mechanisms to determine what does or does not constitute IR. Epistemology and methodology provide the gatekeeping function to place questions of ontology or history on the margins. In other cases, a particular classification of the *international* becomes the determining factor to grant entry or rejection. (Pasha, 2011, p. 217)

This is the sovereign subject of knowledge of international relations theory at his peak: by a periodizing move through which History/Modernity is inaugurated, he gives himself the freedom to know and to act, under the condition that the borders he erected (in space, in time, in knowledge) be dully patrolled and



that those who are allowed entry may not risk disrupting the rules of the game and throwing him back into the atemporal nature from which he escaped by forging himself an identity.

In light of this, it is impossible to me to think how international relations theory could claim any ground for critique when it ultimately despises all stories about colonialism and the imperial encounter as secondary themes; when it treats those themes as objects of knowledge about the international, rather than nodal experiences that have allowed for knowledge production as we know it, and thus that may have a direct impact in the transformation of these practices. To rehearse an argument that has already been voiced many times and yet cannot be heard by international relations theory, there can be no theory of modernity – and therefore, of the international – without seriously thinking colonialism.

Walter D. Mignolo (2000) has expressed this point by encountering the “international” in terms of “the Modern/Colonial World System.” the only universality that is possible is not itself universal; it is historical and it is modern/colonial. This points at least to the profound differences that exist in the “world,” a world that cannot be fragmented into the “world of modernity” and the “world of coloniality.” As long as international relations keeps rehearsing its theories without taking stock of these multiple experiences and the lack of universality of any single one of them; while it keeps presupposing the purposes for which knowledge may serve and therefore who is entitled to pursue it and how, it will continue to participate in the very real and very bloody projects that the crisis narrative tells us it is trying to avoid. *In the meanwhile, I do not think that critique is possible in international relations theory.*

I do believe, like Levine, that international relations theory holds a very important place in the debate about critique, but not because it has any special vocation at that – just as it has no special claim to crisis – but because it presupposes that “we” have/live in the “international;” i.e. it presents itself out as the discipline appropriate for thinking not only about particular states, cultures or societies, but about their interrelations. In this sense, and for these ambitions, international relations theory has indeed a certain responsibility to critique in that it has to confront the question of difference and plurality, big and small – differences that mark particular bodies and that are reflected and manifested in personal relations just as much as in foreign policy decisions. There is no

possibility of claiming the international – let alone the world or the globe (Walker, 2010) – without at least providing some means for accounting for these differences. To quote Pasha again, “the task here, it seems, is not additive but reconstructive.” (Pasha, 2011, p. 218)

Having said that, my claim throughout this dissertation has not been for dismissing international relations theory entirely, as to claim its obsolescence. Rather, I start from the presupposition that the stakes of international relations theory are too high to be debated in terms of the adequate form of theorizing or pluralizing the field. Borrowing from Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) here, I claim that international relations theory is both inadequate and indispensable: it needs to be provincialized so as to dislocate its almost natural association to the canon of Western history, rather than being dismissed as irrelevant.

In claiming that international relations theory is indispensable I mean only that it is already part of who “we” – international relations theorists – are: it is part of the power relations which have made us subjects – which have subjected us – and thus, cannot be rendered dispensable by an emancipatory turn of hand through which a sovereign subject of knowledge declares himself free from international relations theory. It is already the resource through which “we” have created “ourselves,” and it is part both of our limits and potentialities. However, in saying that international relations theory is also inadequate, I point to how it cannot be carried on as if it could in itself contain all of the possible stories about the international. As a number of critical theorists have already pointed out, international relations theory’s most basic presuppositions – anarchy, sovereignty, Westphalia, the state, the inter-national – contain the very impossibility of thinking anywhere beyond them, or anywhere that may productively account for difference and plurality; for borders, boundaries and limits; for other temporalities, spatialities and subjectivities.<sup>108</sup>

Having said that, I also think that some critique of my own claim about international relations theory being both inadequate and indispensable is in order. Reflecting on Chakrabarty’s affirmation, Shilliam has provided an important way

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<sup>108</sup> With this brief mention I am making a case that there is much in international relations theory that already helps to move it beyond itself by disrupting its sovereign narratives. Some of the works I particularly have in mind when making this argument are: Ashley (1988); Bartelson (1998, 2002); Grovogui (2006); Jones (2006); Inayatullah and Blaney (2004); Inayatullah (2011); Krishna (2009); Shilliam (2011); Walker (1994, 2010). Many other works could equally fit the description.

to understand both the potentialities and limits of my own project. According to him, the Europe of Chakrabarty “is a fantasy through and through, but one that damages different peoples with different intensities.” (Shilliam, 2011c) This means that Europe is a product of the imagination, not a factual accomplishment; this fantasy encompasses the unattainable norms of production of both Europeans and their others – “the whys, hows and shoulds of people suffering, surviving, accommodating, avoiding, resisting and diverting the colonial relation and its many neo- and post- articulations.” (Shilliam, 2011c) For some people, these norms and promises of “Europe” are not dispensable for they were never indispensable. And yet, he claims, Europe must be dispensed with.

As Shilliam argues, to the European self there are two different externalities: the “other” and the “abject.” The “other” features in the stories of the self, if only as a voiceless object of knowing. The “abject,” for his turn, threatens to destroy the entire project of the European self’s identity, so it can only be internalized as a “primal fear.” By particularizing the claims of both, the European self can claim his universality and his historicity. And yet, if we are to subvert this universalizing narrative, there can be no single way to deal with it. For the “other” and the “abject” do not belong to the same structures of power and resistance; they do not occupy the same place in the visibility/invisibility game of the knowing subject; they do not speak in the same language – or even in the same voice<sup>109</sup>. As a consequence, there can be no single project for how to deal with Europe: perhaps it needs to be provincialized; or perhaps it might need to be dispensed with.<sup>110</sup>

The strategy I pursue here does not initially curtail any of these possibilities. And yet, by replaying the same discourses that it tries to subvert, it both dislocates and reinforces certain structures of knowledge and power. In his *History of Sexuality: Vol. 1 – An Introduction*, Foucault explains that discourses are always discontinuous, and their effects are never stable. According to him, “discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are.” In this sense,

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<sup>109</sup> See discussion below (section 7.4).

<sup>110</sup> I have discussed somewhere else the different implication for political action for these different “others” of European colonialism. See Sélis and Souza (2016).

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance. (Foucault, 1978, p. 100-1)

Even considering the discontinuity of discourses, however, it is prudent to have in mind that there are risks inherent to the construction of an argument that reinstates the centrality of critical European thought. For, as Shilliam claims, “as soon as it is canonized as *the* radical resource, [critical European thought] transforms into the mind of the European self to which all other bodies of thought have to be compared, assimilated, othered or abjected.” In light of this idea, he challenges: “why start with Foucault and not Fanon?” (Shilliam, 2011c)

To be sure, in his *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) poses a challenge similar to the one I mobilize Foucault here in order to make. According to him, once one has seen the impact that colonization has on people’s bodies and minds, in their thinking and action towards themselves and others; once one has seen how the language of the colonizer becomes the ultimate indication of the value of the colonized negro, “how can one then be deaf to that voice rolling down the stages of history: ‘*What matters is not to know the world but to change it*’.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 8)

Fanon was deeply aware of the antinomies which Kant so forcefully warned us against, and which I believe post-Kantians have mostly ignored. He knew that there could be no possibility of universality of any sort – let alone a universal humanism – without working with the individual man, and more than that, with the epidermal man, his body, his colored skin and its psychological consequences. There could be no actualization of reason or theory without the bodily transfiguration and magical interference in the realm of practice. There could be no easy accomplishment of History and Autonomy without working through the antinomies of the single individual – a singularity that, for its turn, did not make the individual whole, but rather connected him to the collectivity through an entire realm of cultural, racial, gendered, social, economical, political relations.

Accounting for the postcolonial relations frustrates, according to Fanon, any attempt to confine the individual into a single identity. The body, for him, experiences collective manifestations of power, both discursive and non-discursive. Therefore, freeing the body becomes a primary movement in order to find any possibility of reconstructing the figure of “man.” As Shilliam puts it, “for Fanon, freedom from the colonial complex is a project that requires violent means to break the Manichean segregation of human/subhuman so that the colonised actually *re-embody* themselves as human beings.” (Shilliam, 2009, p. 131) In the violent movement of liberation from the European self, the negro may be able to found a “new humanism.” However, there is no roadmap, no *telos*, to this new humanism, which puts it quite at odds with liberal humanism. To understand Fanon’s position as both humanist and anti-humanist, I quote Bhabha:

Fanon is not principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moment. He is not raising the question of colonial man in the universalist terms of the liberal-humanist (“How does colonialism deny the Rights of Man?”); nor is he posing an ontological question about Man’s being (“Who is the alienated colonial man?”). Fanon’s question is not addressed to such a unified notion of history nor such a unitary concept of Man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provide a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. Such a traditional sociological alignment of Self and Society or History and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon’s identification of the colonial subject who is historicized as it comes to be heterogeneously inscribed in the texts of history, literature, science, myth. (Bhabha, 1994, p. xxv)

Fanon’s narrative permits an understanding of postcolonial subjectivity as irreducible difference: this (non)subject<sup>111</sup> can only signify *in-relation*, never *a priori*. His prose, that is at once humanist and anti-humanist, can glimpse at the “universal to come”<sup>112</sup>: the ambition of a universal humanity read from a very

<sup>111</sup> Fanon argues that “the black is not a man:” he has to be liberated from himself, to extricate himself from a “zone of nonbeing” so as to be able to become a man again. See Fanon, 2008, pp. 1-7.

<sup>112</sup> The idea of the “to come” is introduced by Derrida to counter the regulative ideal of Kantian philosophy. As he argues, the regulative ideal refers to “an ideal possible that is infinitely deferred.” The to come refers, instead, to the *im-possible*: “what must remain (in a nonnegative fashion) foreign to the order of my possibilities, to the order of the ‘I can,’ ipseity, the theoretical,

historicized or contextualized position that negates all claims to universality. It shows the complexity of universality once we decide to open our narrative to the enunciation of the tormented psyche of the black colonized man. And yet, his experience cannot be unproblematically translated to that of every other colonized man. The aporetic relation between universality-particularity assumes a particularly acute place in Fanon's narrative, for no solution is clearly devised, only as a specter of the to come.

At this point, I can only acknowledge how fruitful starting with Fanon – or perhaps with Spivak or any of the abovementioned authors – could have been for problematizing the sovereign subject of knowledge that has been my main target throughout this dissertation. And yet I did not.

#### 7.4

#### Of silences and voices: the role of the critic

Spivak's work is the best way I find to begin to close the argument developed in this dissertation so as to assess the strengths and limitations of a project like this. In her polemical essay *Can the subaltern speak?*, Spivak illustrates well the point I tried to make earlier concerning the inexistence of a single form of resistance to the sovereign subject of knowledge. In this essay, Spivak particularly sets out to understand the limits of the poststructuralist critique of the sovereign subject for the way it works duplicitously to dislocate the Subject as multiple "subject-effects," while repositioning the subject of the West – or the West as subject – at the center of its narrative. Targeting specifically a conversation between Foucault and Deleuze – but amplifying her argument as to criticize even the project of the Subaltern Studies – Spivak entertains a discussion over "the limits of representation." Her aim is to indicate how sometimes the negation of representation may become precisely its opposite: the affirmation of

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the descriptive, the constative, and the performative." (Derrida, 2005b, p. 84) And as he goes on to explain, it refers to that which is not privative, to "the other in me," which escapes the law of what can be anticipated or idealized. In this sense, I use the "to come" here to refer to the way the universal in Fanon – just as the universal I touch upon in many instances of my argument – is nothing but a "to come," a figure of the im-possible, that is always already in the realm of the *in-relation*. See Derrida, 2005b, pp. 78-94 (Chapter 8).

an essence. In such cases, there is the risk of reinstating the sovereign subject even while denying he exists.

Spivak's argument hinges on the two senses of the word representation: *Vertreten* (speaking for, as in politics) and *Darstellen* (re-present, as in art). According to her, when the poststructuralists argue "there is no more representation; there's nothing but action," (Deleuze *apud* Spivak, 1988, p. 275) they tend to merge these two senses and lose sight of an important difference that must be kept alive if we are not to reinscribe the sovereign subject at a different level. Even while these two senses relate to each other, "running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics." (Spivak, 1988, p. 276)

She mobilizes Marx's discussion of the articulation of "class consciousness" to explain the importance of retrieving the political sense of representation. As she goes out to show, the formation of "class consciousness" for Marx is not a process of achieving the true conscience (or true desire) of a political group. She explains:

Full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring identity of the agents and their interest – the identity whose absence troubles Foucault and Deleuze. It is a contestatory *replacement* as well as an *appropriation* (a *supplementation*) of something that is 'artificial' to begin with – 'economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life.' Marx's formulations show a cautious respect for the nascent critique of individual and collective subjective agency. (Spivak, 1988, p. 277-8)

While the desiring subject appeals to an identity, class consciousness is built on the very idea that there is no possibility of identity: it refers exclusively to the act of representation as *Vertreten*. In this sense, the consciousness that exists in a class is not any kind of natural identity; at most, this is an artificial identity, one that is not identical to itself, and thus could not be represented in a single conscience. For this very reason, it requires a political representation – precisely because the individual, particularly the subaltern individual, is not a conscious existence that can represent itself and have full conscience of its interests and desires. In this sense, the historical role of the intellectual becomes relevant

because of this lack of genuine interest of class, so as to produce action where there is no primordial identity. It points to the irreducible identity-in-difference inherent to any one group – or any one individual for that matter.

With this discussion, Spivak signals to the way the (poststructural) critique of aesthetical representation should not obliterate the importance of political representation. Precisely because re-presentation is not possible that language (the sign) becomes politically relevant and open for appropriation. Between the macrological dynamics of capitalism and the micrological workings of power there is a space so big that accounting for both of them requires keeping the two senses of representation apart, so that the critique of one does not completely erase the importance of the other. It remains paramount to perceive, she claims, “how the staging of the world in representation – its scene of writing, its *Darstellung* – dissimulates the choice of and need for ‘heroes,’ paternal proxies, agents of power – *Vertretung*.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 279)

This discussion over representation leads Spivak to question the role of the intellectual, the critic, in representing “the other.” For, according to her, the tendency to disavow representation *tout court* tends to reinstate the constitutive subject at two levels: “the Subject of desire and power as an irreducible methodological presupposition; and the self-proximate, if not self-identical, subject of the oppressed.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 279) It reinstates the subject of desire by claiming the impossibility of re-presenting him – thus recreating him as an existence beyond representation. It reinstates the subject of the oppressed by refusing to represent him, claiming that he can know and speak for himself. In this double negation of representation, “the intellectuals, who are neither of these S/subjects, become transparent in the relay race, for they merely report on the nonrepresented subject and analyze (without analyzing) the workings of (the unnamed Subject irreducibly presupposed by) power and desire.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 279)

By dismissing the problem of the material structures that produce oppression and confusing them under the generalizing categories of power and discourse, Spivak argues, these authors tend to dismiss the importance of the structures that produce the subject and create privileges, contributing to reinstate realms of absolute unspeakability. This problem of representation is particularly acute when we try to represent the other, the “third world,” for the refusal to



represent can mark the ultimate invisibility and unrepresentability of the subaltern. In light of this discussion, Spivak claims that “one responsibility of the critic might be to read and write so that the impossibility of such interested individualistic refusals of the institutional privileges of power bestowed on the subject is taken seriously.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 280)

As becomes clear, her claim concerning the role of the intellectual hinges on the distinction between visibility and vocality. Spivak argues:

Foucault is correct in suggesting that ‘to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value.’ It is the slippage from rendering visible the mechanism to rendering vocal the individual, both avoiding ‘any kind of analysis of [the subject] whether psychological, psychoanalytical or linguistic,’ that is consistently troublesome. (Spivak, 1988, p. 285)

To be sure, making visible does not mean making vocal. The case in point is the figure of the sexed subaltern subject: the poor non-white woman. Among the multiple discursive (and non-discursive) violences that produce the subaltern subject – especially the woman – “the possibility of collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 283) For instance, in between the discourses of tradition and imperialism, any possibility of articulation of a collective consciousness or collective action was denied to the woman *sati*.<sup>113</sup> The hope to let the “other” represent itself – since re-presentation is impossible – leaves the subaltern forever out of voice.

Belief in the plausibility of global alliance politics is prevalent among women of dominant social groups interested in ‘international feminism’ in the comprador countries. At the other end of the scale, those most separated from any possibility of an alliance among ‘women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals’ (*FD*, 216) are the females of the urban subproletariat. In their case, the denial and withholding of consumerism and the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations. *On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow.* (Spivak, 1988, p. 288)

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<sup>113</sup> Spivak discusses the multiple discourses that produced the body and the conscience of the women who burned themselves in the pyre of their dead husbands. Between the nativist argument that “the women wanted to die” and the juridical discourse of protection of British imperialism, there was no possibility to hear what the woman *sati* had to say. She remained voiceless. See Spivak (1988), esp. pp. 294-308 (Part IV).

Just as I pointed out before concerning Fanon's narrative, Spivak calls attention to the fact that, even this ultimate concern for the voiceless female subaltern subject does not lead to equate her condition to the multiples "others" which inhabit the (postcolonial/subaltern) world. In fact, the irreducible multiplicity of people's consciousness is ultimately out of reach – it is unrepresentable. Therefore, "to confront them is not to represent (*vertreten*) them but to learn to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves." (Spivak, 1988, p. 289) In this sense, Spivak's claim to representation is not a claim for "speaking for" the subaltern, as if with her voice; instead, it is a claim for recognizing "the other within"<sup>114</sup> so as to dislocate both the illusion of the intellectual as a sovereign subject of knowledge, and of the "other" as a subject able to speak for herself. For this process, there can be no single category of the other, or single possibility of representation.

In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized. (Spivak, 1988, p. 295)

So her claim for postcolonial representation – and especially from the part of the female intellectual – is not a nativist claim for retrieving the lost origins of the subaltern – which is impossible on both ends (the impossibility of representation and the lack of some conscious desire to be represented). Instead, it is a plea for trying to read the "inaccessible blankness" that lies beyond the interpretability of a text. According to Spivak, then, "the postcolonial critics and intellectuals can attempt to displace their own production only by presupposing that *text-inscribed* blankness." The role of theory, for her, is precisely to work on this (inaccessible) blankness that lies before/beyond the text. The responsibility here lies on recognizing the politics of language and writing; otherwise, "to render thought or the thinking subject transparent or invisible seems, by contrast, to hide the relentless recognition of the Other by assimilation." (Spivak, 1988, p. 294)

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<sup>114</sup> Spivak invokes Derrida's concept of the "quite-other" (*tout-autre*) to reach this conclusion. See Spivak, 1988, p. 294.

In this sense, Spivak moves away from the idea of representation as a representation of some essence or identity: this is why she is able to claim that “representation has not withered away.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 308) It is only because there is nothing essential and primordial to represent that representation can fulfill its political role of standing in the shoes of the other, of inhabiting the narrative of the other, without presupposing that this translates the other’s conscience and identity. For this reason, “representation is always problematical, always double, and never adequate or complete. It entails both a standing-in-the-other’s-shoes and an imaginative and aesthetic representation, a staging in the theatrical sense.” (Spivak, Landry & Maclean, 1996, p. 15) Therefore, it involves “tell[ing] another person’s story without appropriating it.” (Spivak, Landry & Maclean, 1996, p. 16) Thus, to respect the other’s difference means acknowledging that I speak for the other that lies in me. And it is precisely because of this identity-in-difference that all claims to universality are always already more complicated than generalizing the particular.

Having considered some of the possible critiques of my own project and its delineation, I do not believe that the image of the aesthetical subject I provided on Chapter 5 stands in any kind of opposition to Spivak’s call for postcolonial representation – even if it does not develop this particular argument. The Fanonian subject is marked by race and class<sup>115</sup>; the Spivakian subject is marked by gender, race and class. For these different subject positions, there can be no single form of critique, and there can be no single role for the intellectual. Containing these possibilities under an appeal to the tragic just serves to obliterate all specificity. In this multi-vocal dialogue that can be envisioned by international relations theory – what Inayatullah and Blaney (2004) called Heterology – there must always be space for different voices and also for those aiming to represent voiceless positions.

While I do not think that my project forecloses the possibility of thinking the Enlightenment “from the other side” – the side of the other of Europe in its multiple forms – I do think it cannot alone account for it. In this sense, the project developed here is one that invites and grooms a multi-vocal debate, even while

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<sup>115</sup> Shilliam (2009b) makes a point that, when claiming to know nothing about the black women and refusing to speak for her, Fanon may be performing precisely the same kind of foreclosure that keeps the subaltern subject voiceless.

remaining quite univocal in its own contributions. And in this sense, my own project as part of the discourse on international relations theory is itself in need of being dislocated: perhaps it should be provincialized, or perhaps it should be made dispensable.

The question with voices and silences is not absolute. Sometimes, either silencing or voicing can be a way of dislocating and/or reinforcing structures of power. As Spivak claims, valorizing the concrete experience and actions of the oppressed cannot – and should not – be equated with dismissing the role of knowledge production of the intellectual critic. Not all action can be heard as having a voice – as the story of Bhuvaneshwari shows, sometimes the subaltern cannot speak, and when she does, she might not be heard.<sup>116</sup> Nor is “voicing” the only way to act – sometimes silences can be just as – or even more – performative than all possible discourses. Silences may speak more than voices.<sup>117</sup>

Without being able to ultimately define what constitutes the proper form of representation, or the proper role of the intellectual, or even the adequate language to voice her concerns, I can only hope with this dissertation to contribute to dislocate the self-centeredness of the subject of knowledge present throughout the familiar self-images of international relations theory, calling special attention to how even the most progressive attempts to define what operates as critical work have been contributing to reproduce complete realms of unspeakability beyond the sovereign subject of knowledge.

## 7.5 Conclusion

Writing from an almost exclusively Western literature, I am myself responsible for reproducing a series of patterns I try to resist. What I want to claim, however, is not that Foucault garners the sufficient tools for overcoming the extremely provincial disciplining mechanisms of international relations theory.

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<sup>116</sup> To illustrate her point concerning the subaltern’s inability to speak – and to be heard – Spivak tells the story of Bhuvaneshwari Badhuri’s suicide, a young woman who tried to intervene in the social-text of *sati*-suicide by dislocating a number of its norms. As Spivak shows, her act however could not be heard or read from the standard norms of her culture, leading to another image of “a case of illicit love.” See Spivak, 1988, pp. 307-8.

<sup>117</sup> A number of cases illustrate the performative role of silencing in political action. For an account of this approach, see Wagner (2012).

As I tried to make clear in a number of occasions, the narrative I offer here is one narrative among many, and it certainly reflects the resources I have encountered in my own particular journey. In this sense, by mobilizing the Foucauldian account of critique – which for its turn is built out of a conversation among a group of mostly white males – I do not claim to hold a unique solution to the problem of how pursuing critique.

What I did find in Foucault was an inspiration for thinking with the knowing subject, against the knowing subject; with man, against man; with modernity, against modernity; and therefore, with the West, against the West. Of course, his thought needs to be contested and supplemented: again, it is both inadequate and indispensable. Rather than suggesting a solution, I tried to build the problem in a different manner. I could have opted for building this problem differently by resorting to the same figures; or even build a similar problem by mobilizing different voices. This is one story: neither equal nor absolutely different from others. It offered my own particular look at specific nodes that animate contemporary discussions over international relations theory with the aim of provincializing it.

There are many silences to be recovered in Foucault; or else, there are problematizations that should be spoken about loudly<sup>118</sup>. But again with Foucault and Spivak, I think that it is not always that silence means domination, or that voicing means acting. Such dichotomies make no space for advancing a properly international or even global thought about politics. I know that the argument I try to develop here has been sounded in different voices, and I do not think my particular take has anything especially new about it. But it does perform its own set of dislocations from a particular ethical responsibility to change – and in light of this responsibility, I see that the many voices I mobilized here are talking in unison. I intended to resist a certain government of international relations theory that I feel still carries too much power over “us” – international relations theorists – in full acknowledgement that I do not carry a solution or singular path for making it better. I can only voice a very particular discomfort with the kinds of debates international relations theorists feel they have to keep rehearsing in order

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<sup>118</sup> The recent edited volume by Bonditti, Bigo and Gros (2017) tries to address some of these silences. See particularly the chapter by Fernández and Esteves, 2017, pp. 137-154.

not to fall into obsolescence. While doing that, I think – and hope – that this particularity speaks to larger audiences, as an identity-in-difference.

Furthermore, my argument was not meant as a plea for the disposability of the authors I sided against – only for their provincialization. I think international relations theory is too important to be left to theorists – mainly English-speaking Anglo-Saxon white males. In that sense, it should host other points of view, different stories, multiple voices. The relationality that is immediately apparent to the colonized subject – who knows s/he will have to speak in the voice of the colonizer in order to be heard – cannot be accommodated inside an intellectual script that is universally applicable. The sustainability of critique here is seen as its ability to dispersion and difference, and not for “dwelling within crisis” and accepting another version of the court of reason. It has to allow room for dissent concerning the multiple ethical resources available to people, and not only for the coexistence among different theoretical approaches. *Critique can only be possible in international relations theory if it stops patrolling the boundaries of adequate/legitimate ways of knowing/sustaining critique, and it becomes an invitation to different forms of knowing and different possibilities of dialogue.*

## 8 Conclusion

It is an impossible thing to conclude a dissertation like this one: but, to iterate Derrida (1992), the experience of the impossible is the only kind of justice there is. Against all of my will to keep the questions here open, all of the voices unsounded, all the criticisms to come, and therefore, avoid doing any injustice to the many and extremely rich voices I engaged throughout the chapters, I must make an unfounded decision to let them rest. There is no possibility of justice without this impossible decision – and yet no justice can survive it.

The argument made in this dissertation was erected in the intersection – proximity and distance; similarity and difference – of two narratives. I gave the names of crisis and critique to these two narratives. These names seemed appropriate precisely because they share the same etymological root, and yet point to distinct trajectories. These paths – as the story I proposed here – intersect in many points, and Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis* has been an important resource for thinking precisely on this agonism, particularly in relation to what we came to call modernity. His argument shows how “modernity” is inaugurated through crisis, as the age of crisis. The crisis to which he refers is that in the relationship between morality and politics in a world that had been deprived of its long-held authorities. Koselleck (1988) went to great lengths to approach this “modernity as crisis” historically, philosophically, politically – critically. According to him, critique created the crisis and made it unintelligible; better critique was required to retrieve the crisis and perhaps point out ways to solve it.

My own argument tried to follow a productive tension with his narrative. It redacted his narrative from a somehow different standpoint, approaching it when it allowed a greater insight into difficult processes discussed by international relations theory; and trying to stage some distance from it when it seemed to lead me too close to the knowing subject. In this negotiation with and iteration of Koselleck's narrative, my dissertation brought him into a productive tension with other figures that were thinking this crisis, and seemed to me to be equally ambivalent towards it. My argument fed out of these ambivalences, trying to take them as further as possible, and abandoning them when they seemed to get trapped into the sovereign subject of knowledge. The most I can hope with this

iteration and play is to have created a good enough case – a story compelling enough – about the limits of international relations theory as a theory in/of crisis.

If crisis was approached here in terms of its risks, its impossibilities, its limitations, I felt that I needed to offer a different story to counter the first one. This led me to critique. In a way, this choice created the very ambivalence with which I had to negotiate throughout the chapters: its story was too close to that of crisis, and yet brought a promise of something different. Again, I can only hope to have offered a compelling narrative as to this promise, even while denouncing its own inherent risks, impossibilities and limitations. I searched for critique in the same canon as I searched for crisis: a risky choice indeed. And yet, by asking different questions, I found myself with different answers. These answers were not proposed as definitive; neither they promised solution nor salvation. They only promised difference.

Identity requires difference: it requires excluding all that cannot fit within so as to forge itself. Schmitt shows the implications of playing the game of identity: you end up having to negotiate between friends and enemies, selves and others. In this game, sovereignty is the only (unfounded) foundation there is. This is the game of international relations theory. Its story is the story of identity, sovereignty, friends and enemies engaging in war. The story of crisis is the story of identity: you start with crisis and you can only look for the same, for that which is identical to itself – sovereignty.

Difference, for its turn, requires no duality: it is dispersed and multiple beyond any definition. Bhabha (1994) has made a case concerning the concept of difference: distinctly from that of diversity – which implies the existence of totalities existing alongside one another – difference pointed to the indefinable, irretrievable and yet ineradicable identity-in-difference, the other-within which dispels any hope of a subject identical to itself, and therefore, of sovereignty. The story of critique I proposed tried to emulate the story of difference: it allowed to look beyond the sovereign subject not by playing the game of sovereignty and trying to win it, but by creating a different game.

I found in Foucault's late discussion of Kant's Enlightenment the resources for mobilizing this narrative of what I called the aesthetic subject. Foucault retrieves Kantian critique from a standpoint not usually recognizable inside the conventional parameters of critique as a critique of knowledge, of the



juridical court of reason presiding over all claims to knowledge so as to decide on their (il)legitimacy. Rather, Foucault mobilizes critique as an attitude that in a sense precedes the court of reason and instead requires a practical – political, ethical and aesthetical – positioning of the subject in relation to the game of power-knowledge. He finds the resources for doing this in playing Kant against himself, exploring the ambiguities rather than trying to postulate the “right” reading of critique. As he argues, by doing this it was possible to see that any attempt at generalizing critique is as futile as trying to universalize the sovereign subject: critique is characterized by its own dispersion in the multiple games of knowledge-power that produce subjects, as variegated as the innumerable differences among and within aesthetic subjects. This story of critique, I claimed, is the story of difference.

Having arrived at the need for critique to account for difference, I also tried to entertain the limits of my own narrative focused on a Western canon of thought, and which tries to dialogue with a mainly Western audience. I disputed this view, showing the limits of my particular formulation of the problem. That is why I refused from offering it as a solution, but just as one of many possible differences. Finally, I tried to briefly rehearse some other – different – possibilities of engaging difference. It was unsatisfactory, but I hope to have made a point. This narrative allows for no simple closure or conclusion, so I briefly restate some of the movements that I tried to offer as a resource for provincializing and/or dispensing with international relations theory.

At points, my attempt was premised on a similar argument as the one advanced by Fasolt (2004) concerning the sovereign subject of History. In that light, I would gladly paraphrase him in saying: international relations theory is as good as it has ever been. It needs to be no better. The kind of knowledge we want about international politics cannot be achieved by knowledge alone, by collecting and collaging stories and keeping them in mutual chastening. If we keep trying to ask the question in terms of crisis and hope to find a solution to it in international relations theory, we are fated to tragedy. For, again paraphrasing Fasolt, international relations theory is burdened with tasks it cannot possibly fulfill.

The best hope against tragedy is not formulating the game on its terms and, therefore, not buying into the narrative of crisis. Human finitude can be explored from different angles than that of tragedy, and I hoped to have touched here in one

of these ways. International relations theory needs to be reconstructed so as to encounter difference and live with it. This requires moving beyond its traditional quarrels over theorizing and the legitimacy of reason and knowledge. International relations theory needs to encounter difference by playing the game differently. It needs to move beyond the usual knowledge practices that separate and grant a special, superior place to the knowledge produced by the intellectual – even while not giving up on its specificity.

In this sense, those that want to think beyond the sovereign subject of knowledge need to think beyond international relations theory: its canons, its concepts, its practices. International relations theory needs to be more and less than what it is: more in the sense of being able to tell more stories, account for multiple voices, erect different myths; less, in the sense of avoiding easy claims to the globe, to history, to humanity. Critique is impossible within the sovereign subject of knowledge: it is impossible within international relations theory in/as crisis. If, however, the discipline can problematize the international more broadly, as an irreducible difference that encompasses issues that cannot be subsumed under a single claim to politics, to theorizing, to sustaining critique; well, then practicing international relations theory may be seen as practicing critique. Perhaps, international relations theory needs to dismiss the inter-national to find a international; dismiss the universal to find a universal.

As I have already claimed, I could have told this story differently. I could have looked at the intersections between law, violence, power, autonomy, sovereignty and all their ensuing aporias by starting with Fanon, or Spivak, or a number of other theorists of the international. Eventually, I could have told a similar-but-different story starting from some indigenous cosmology or subaltern experience. There are many reasons why I did not, which include personal, institutional, contextual, intellectual limitations. Having been trained in a mostly Western tradition, I feel more comfortable speaking to it/about it rather than embarking on cosmologies which I feel have much to tell, but I cannot quite verbalize. So I did not start with them, but chose instead to speak to a mostly Eurocentric audience, composed of English-speaking white males. In doing so, I endorsed a number of boundaries and categories that I most certainly aimed to question.

However, this is the freedom that is possible in power. You have to learn the game so you can somehow dislocate it or even change its rules. There might be other ways, but they are not usually available to those who try to build a life through scholarship, knowing all the way about its inherent (im)possibilities, and yet knowing that this is the groundless ground in which I can try to make claims – and thus reinforcing and dislocating boundaries at the same time. This is the ultimate predicament of the postcolonial position: one has to speak through the language that has made her inferior. By refusing to speak in this language, the postcolonial subject might remain irretrievably silent; or else, she might find a different voice to sound her concerns. No certainty is possible here: neither silencing nor voicing carries the ultimate promise of salvation, for salvation is only available if you consider there is an outside to power. I claim no such thing; I believe no such thing. We speak from a time, and a place, and an interest, and a subjectivity, and a struggle. From this limited and critical locus of enunciation, I hope to have found my voice.

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