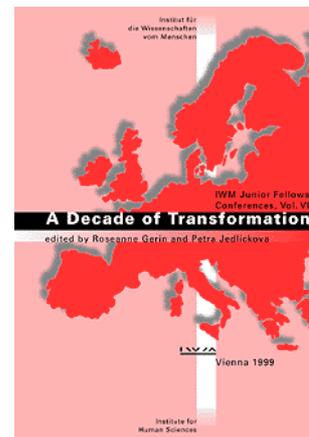


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Moral Rule and Rule of Law in International Politics: Common Sense, Political Realism, Skepticism

Iulia Voina-Motoc

Can a state be moral? The question does violence to common opinion-arousing reactions which might be attached to irony. Wouldn't it prove better for the speech on ethics in international relations to be included in a history of utopia? The notion of morals in an oversimplified acceptance as it is implied in this sentence is that of the religions of salvation or of Kantian autonomy applied to states after World War I.

Accordingly, one can understand how deeply and generally prevalent are the postulates of political realism when applied to international relations today, thus amounting to reductionist assertions of the definition of morals. Taking into account the association between political realism and empiricism, one also can understand the massive refusal of political philosophy to analyze politics beyond the state borders. Are international politics a phenomenon which must be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and from which one can hardly extract general features?

Is it possible to endow the fictitious person who is the state with the ability or disability to act in a proper manner? Or is it in fact just another way of conceiving

relations between individuals beyond the borders of their own state? How can one explain that the theory of international relations is in the first place a theory aimed at denying international morals?

The cliché commonly attached to the theory of realism in international relations is that of moral skepticism. There are two fundamental ways of conceiving moral skepticism nowadays. On the one hand, there is the skepticism which equates ethics to an ensemble of purely subjective conceptions deprived of any rational basis. On the other hand, there is the antitheoretical approach or cognitivism-wanting principles or theories, denying any dogmatic morals based on unique principles and proposing the morals of circumstances.

The Reactivism of Political Realism and Its Effects

Let us begin with a simple finding which defines not only realism but also the whole evolution of the theory of international relations. In Giovanni Sartori's view, political realism is the expression of a deception.¹ The reason for this deception is idealism. As far as international relations are concerned, idealism is embodied in the creation of international institutions. It is undoubtedly the best description of the beginning of the theory of international relations.

In his book *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, E.H. Carr argues that the political science of international relations has two facets, idealism and realism. He defines realism as a "reaction to the initial dreams" which tends to emphasize the overwhelming authority of the existing relations of power. Realism insists on an emphasis on desire implied by utopianism, thus constituting the latter's corrective.²

The main device of this reaction is transparently comprised in the works of Hans Morgenthau, who used the term "will-power" as a ruling principle of international relations. Morgenthau is the only realistic classic author who began his career as a theorist of international law. In 1929 in Paris, Morgenthau was publishing his first book in which he attempted to demonstrate the supremacy of politics over law in international relations. The best articulated reaction, a hallmark for the realistic core, is given in the book he published in 1934, *La réalité des normes, en particulier des normes de droit international*.

The main aim of this study was to conceive the doctrine of the fundamental legal norm in all its consequences in order to prove the impossibility of the international

¹ Sartori (1987: 39).

² Carr (1981: 7).

law. Hans Kelsen's influence in those times was overwhelming, and Morgenthau does nothing else but apply Kelsen's conception in a very simple manner to the norms of international law. The Kelsenian postulate, which is taken as a starting point, is that any legal system is fundamental, representing the basis of a valid concatenation established between the other norms. If validity is the essential principle of normativity, then the association of the moral norm to the legal norm is deprived of its consistency. The legal normativity is independent from the moral value of the law. But what happens in international law? Precisely this validity is precarious. The essence of this state of affairs has to do with the fact that a fundamental element of the legal norm in its structural acceptance, namely the sanction, is lost.

It is true that Morgenthau's theory of international law is fundamentally different from that of Kelsen. It could be posited that there is a contradiction between the two. International law has a key role in Kelsenian theory. The development of international law is the only fact that could ensure the lack of permeability of the domestic order during the revolutions and thus the autonomy of the law. This is the reason why Kelsen foresaw the evolution of law towards a supranational order in which the international law takes absolute priority.³

The starting point for the realistic criticism is found in the norms of international law laid down in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Political realism appears as a reaction to international law. Morgenthau explained the creation of the League of Nations and of the legal norms comprised in the Covenant as an attempt to transform moral norms into legal norms of a binding nature. The legal norms formulated within the Covenant of the League of Nations can restore nothing from the essence of international relations. But if law cannot restore anything, then what is the essence of international politics?

According to Morgenthau, the "friend-enemy" criterion used by Carl Schmitt represents a tautology and, therefore, cannot represent a criterion for politics, at least in respect to international relations. Morgenthau does not radically distance himself from Schmitt when he formulates the will of each state to increase its power as the criterion applicable to international relations - "the whole foreign policy is nothing else but the will to maintain, enhance or assert power."⁴

Reverting to the issue of law and its role in international relations, Morgenthau will infer its impossibility from the political criterion in its international sphere,

³ Kelsen (1963: 420).

⁴ Morgenthau (1933: 61).

namely will power. If everything connected to will power is political, then there is no realm of the law in international relations. The political rationale is added to the legal demonstration.

The starting point of the theory of international relations is the opposition between idealism and realism:

The history of modern political thinking is the story of a dispute between two schools of thought that fundamentally differ in their conception of human nature, society and human beings. One argues that a rational and moral order exists which arises from universal and abstract principles and which can be reached here and now. This school also considers that a fundamental kindness and an infinite malleability of the human nature exists and blames the failure of social order to apply these rational standards on the lack of knowledge and understanding, on certain outdated institutions, of the vitiation of certain isolated individuals and institutions. The authors belonging to this school believe in education, reform and in the sporadic use of force to rectify these flaws.⁵

Opposed to this school is realism which in Morgenthau's opinion "believes that moral principles can never be entirely fulfilled, but...can draw near their accomplishment through a balance of interests and a precarious solution of conflicts."⁶

Will power, as an essence of international relations, is explained by Morgenthau's postulates of political realism formulated in *Politics Among Nations* in order to give a clear definition to political realism. These postulates, as the author formulated them, are:

1. Theory has the role to ascertain and rationally explain international politics which are governed by objective laws.
2. The concept of national interest defined in terms of power has the greatest explanatory force.
3. National interest and power vary from one epoch to another.
4. The moral character of the international action has to be historically circumstantiated and not inferred from universally applicable rules.
5. All states are liable to some moral rules, but these rules cannot be imposed by a single nation.

⁵ Carr (1981: 6-7).

⁶ Morgenthau (1973: 6).

6. Intellectually, there is a clear distinction between international politics, economy and morals.

It is relatively easy to see that all the postulates of political realism comprise references to international morals.⁷

As a central theory of international relations, political realism is thus the expression of a deception due to the functioning of international institutions conceived as an expression of "universal morals." The reactivism not only is the beginning of the rational theory, but also illustrates its entire brief history. This is why the evolution of the theory of international relations represents the history of four debates or reactions: idealism-realism, traditionalism-behaviorism, neorealism-institutional neoliberalism and rationalism-reflectivism.

The perverse effect of reactivism, of this series of debates which marks the theory of international relations, is the relative immobility of some concepts, such as power. Morgenthau defines political power as a psychological relation between the one who is exercising it and the one on whom it is being exercised. The degree of control of the person who has the power is articulated depending on the benefits expected, the fear of drawbacks or the respect or affection for certain people or institutions. The definition of power is based on four fundamental distinctions: power and influence, power and force in terms of physical violence, power that can be resorted to and power that cannot be resorted to, such as nuclear power, and legitimate or illegitimate power. Morgenthau conceives legitimacy as legal or moral authority.⁸

The main criticism Morgenthau brings to those who had defined power before him is their tendency to reduce political power to its material aspects. The criticism can be analyzed as a bridge between Morgenthau and Raymond Aron.

Aron acknowledges that there is a fundamental distinction between force and power, which is recovered at the linguistic level in the distinction between *puissance et force*, power and strength, *Macht und Kraft*. Undoubtedly, one of the main theses of realism, of Vilfredo Pareto's sociology particularly, is the error in interpreting power. In Pareto's view, the struggle for power is by no means averted by the legislation regulating power. Or, Aron writes that politics has another meaning in that it represents the search for a fair order at the same time with the fight between individuals and groups in order to access power:

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 4-17.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 31-35.

The one who rules by virtue of laws is actually holding more or less violence, or the ability to impose his will, according to his influence over partners, rivals or subordinates, or to the prestige he has in the eyes of many or few of them. Or, irrespective of whether we refer to leaders or groups of pressure, this power is never defined in an accurate manner using the legal distribution of tasks or prerogatives. The level of influence individuals actually possess, one's or another's role in the State's decision-making on relations with foreign States or the relations between the factions of the same community, depends on the means of action available to one or another, but at the same time on the skills one has in making use of these means. The Constitution excludes open violence but lays down the framework which also includes the guiding rules for the fight for power.⁹

Aron resumes the elements Morgenthau used to define power, but organizes them to the same level of generality. Power is made up of the weight of political entities, the materials available and the science to turn them into weapons, and the number of individuals and the skills to transform them into soldiers capable of collective action, meaning "the organization of the armed forces, fighters' discipline, quality of the civil and military headquarters during times of war and peace, citizens' solidarity during good or bad periods of time."¹⁰ It is true that in Aron's works the emphasis shifts from the description of power and the criticism of materialist realism to the uncertainty of any forecast that could be attached to the evolution of a given power.

James Rosenau, using different explanations and terminology in *Turbulence in World Politics, a Theory of Change and Continuity*, describes the same phenomenon. In order to anticipate the results, which might turn away from the expectations, based on power differences we have to admit that political relations mean much more than the power foundations of the actors. Equally important is the way in which a party to a relation perceives the other party's intentions and power, and consequently, the way in which it reacts towards the other. Subtle dynamic forces are involved here, forces connected to perception and psychology. In any relation important actors are at least twice as concrete as empiric ones since each also exists in the minds of certain other participants involved in the given relation. For instance, in a dyadic relation, actors A and B are related by the perception A has of

⁹ Aron (1983: 62).

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 65.

B and the perception B has of A. "Briefly, in any relation, dynamic forces are at work, which are inherent because of the parties' interaction and not because of the power each of the parties has."¹¹

Rosenau distinguishes the fact of holding power from the relational element, using for the first one the word "possibilities" and for the second one "control." For Rosenau, politics are defined by those activities attempted "by an actor, citizen, politician, terrorist, group of interests, bureaucracy, Government, State, transnational agency or international organization, to modify or preserve behavioral models of other actors, located, from a functional point of view, at a distance."¹² It is noteworthy that although Rosenau admits the central role of the possessive aspect in defining power, he considers it tedious and proceeds to describe exclusively the relational aspect and control on the basis of relations of authority, negotiations and compulsion, as well as of relations based on proofs.

The entire theory of power seems to be marked by the monotony Rosenau claims when he describes the element of possession in the equation of power. The three articulations of power in which theorists of international relations (from Morgenthau to Rosenau) are interested include the relationship between various material elements of power, the relational elements and the ability to predict the evolution of power relations. Morgenthau is the first to describe them, persuaded that the aim of the theory of international relations is to predict the evolution of power relations. Aron reorganizes the elements Morgenthau describes, brings them to the same level of abstraction and argues the impossibility of prediction. Rosenau makes a detailed analysis of the relational element, considering it more interesting, in order to integrate the psychological aspects of power with a much more accurate science of international relations. Reactivity leads to intellectual poverty.

The theory of international relations is brought forward by one school's criticism of another. The refusal of political philosophy when it comes to the theory of international relations has a biunivocal meaning. Because the philosophers avoid addressing international relations, the political theory formulates its concepts starting from facts, not from ideas or beliefs. The reactivism is natural within realism because the *verrita effettuale* it discovers has dynamism difficult to recover in the pure world of ideas.

¹¹ Rosenau (1990: 149).

¹² *Ibid.* p. 150.

International Politics Between Historicism and Antitheory

Undoubtedly, one of the roots of moral skepticism applied to international relations is historicism. If the individual living in an epoch of pluralism can find a personal moral order, he can never reach out to absolute or universal solutions. Historicist positions join the antitheoretical positions of moral philosophy.

The acceptance of historicism given by Karl Popper in his book published in 1957 is a definition which does not correspond to the one given to historicism or historism by specialized literature. Aron explains this distinction at the beginning of his lectures on German historicism at the Collège de France in 1971 and 1972. Defined by Friedrich Meineke¹³ and Ernst Troeltsch at the beginning of this century, historicism and historism are conceptions about human history, according to which human evolution is defined through the fundamental diversity of the epoch as well as through the plurality of the epochs and societies. One of the consequences is the relative nature of values opposed to the conceptions of the Enlightenment.

Can the meaning of historicism be limited to a discussion that takes into account only the modern era? Leo Strauss identifies early contestation of the existence of natural law - which is proper to historicism - in the conventionalism of ancient Greece, as described by Aristotle.¹⁴ As a part of classical philosophy, conventionalism assumes that the distinction between nature and convention is the most important one and that law and justice have no foundation in nature, but rather in more or less arbitrary decisions taken by the community. The essential difference between the conventionalism of classical philosophy and modern historicism consists of the criterion used for denying natural law. If for conventionalism the criterion is given by replacing natural law, historicism is based on the denial of the possibility to know the natural law. Historicism appears in the nineteenth century as a reactionary rhetoric. Paradoxically, historicism, born under conservative auspices, ends up carrying on revolutionary judgements in that it denies any transcendental link. Historicism is marked by social skepticism and invokes the artificial character of the uniformity of the latter. "Historicism does not discover local and temporal variations of the notion of justice: the obvious must not be discovered."

The analysis of international relations is substantially marked by historicism. This is one of the assertions James Der Derian made at the beginning of his book on the genealogical table of diplomacy.⁴ At the same time, it represents one of the

¹³ Meinecke (1963).

explanations why the Foucauldian approach applied to the history of diplomacy was a relevant methodology. It is a belated explanation of the evolution of international relations and of its links to history. It has to be mentioned that at least classical realism lays out its assumptions starting with the study of history.

The low interest political philosophy shows for this field becomes accountable and directly linked with the influence historicist authors have on international relations. One of the fundamental reproofs generally formulated by Aron to political philosophers when he commented on Friedrich Hayek was their refusal to study international relations.¹⁴

The antitheoretical philosophical rhetoric is also associated with historicism. An analysis of morality in accordance with the circumstances and specificity of a given situation accompanies the refusal of principles and theories as instruments that can validly explain a concrete situation. Moral practice cannot be governed on the basis of certain principles. It involves a metaphysical, epistemological refusal to identify a moral universal knowledge and reality. The values are not only distinct but also immeasurable.

The notion of obligation is a loose one, taking into account the ensemble of ways in which we are related to the world. The impossibility of describing this relation leads to the absence of a validity test for the ethical theories, to a negative ethic as Bernard Williams describes it. These theories cannot be abstractedly assessed, but only assessed in respect to each situation. In fact, the theorization is not aimed at explaining a certain moral behavior since this behavior is the result of an experience. There are internal arguments of a certain moral behavior, and thus there is no way of trying to rationalize such relations. Endorsing certain conceptions and moral behaviors merely represents the result of a certain experience, of a moral faith.¹⁵

In the analytical version, inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein, this skepticism accounts for the lack of viability of the moral-abstract points of view by the fact that the employment of ethical language depends on common practices. This type of reflection does not proceed from a profound study of moral thinking but from extrapolating the issues related to semantics and linguistic analysis. Thus, the analytical antitheoretical skepticism is accompanied by a denial of the distinction between facts and values.¹⁶

¹⁴ Aron (1978).

¹⁵ Williams (1994).

¹⁶ MacDowell (1995).

What kind of link could possibly exist between this type of antitheoretical reflection and the moral analysis of international relations? Is there any link between their tendency to refuse universal principles and to replace them with the nonconceptual and nonpropositional results of consequences devolved from psychology and the trend of realism to accept the existence of certain final principles aimed at the regulation of international institutions?

Both of them merely illustrate forms of partial and precise skepticism. For political realism, the refusal of universals represents the consequence of taking into consideration the diversity of the states' behavior. For moral behavior, there cannot be unique principles and unique backgrounds, and furthermore, we cannot dogmatically adhere to these principles.

Pretending that these principles aimed at regulating international relations actually exist represents, in fact, the history of political realism in the theory of international relations. Realists believe that the League of Nations is the illustration of these principles. The antitheorists¹⁷ estimate that all major moral systems proceeding from a unique system such as Kantism or utilitarianism operate in this way. In the theoretical model used by antitheorists we recover the same refusal of a constant moral rule and the same trend of moral circumstantiation according to a given experience or situation. In this sense, we can consider that the authors close to classical realism have an antitheoretical stand: Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carr, Aron, and Martin Wight. Liberalism, understood in its proper meaning and concretely determined by the creation of international institutions, is the theory that realism rejects in its entirety, considering it a "fundamentalism."

The impossibility to conceive the existence of morals in international relations due to the diversity of people and their moral conceptions joins the relativity argument formulated by Mackie. The fallacious character of moral judgements stems from the huge diversity of judgements that claim, without exception, impartiality.¹⁸ It is true that there are major differences between the moral norms of the different people that form the international community and that many of them have a tendency to consider these realities as absolute. At the same time, the said diversity is now bigger than ever. But if we pursue this judgement to its last consequences we can be confident that the same diversity exists not only among nations, but also within the same nation.

¹⁷ Clarke, Simpson (1989).

¹⁸ Mackie (1977).

In this context, Jean Jacques Rousseau is an interesting case. On the one hand, he illustrates the philosophers' difficulty in approaching a topic such as international relations, and on the other hand, he criticizes empiricism and historicism. Although Rousseau intended to write a second book following *The Social Contract*, which would have been dedicated to international relations and entitled *Political Institutions*, he never did so. His ideas on international relations, limited in those times to the issues of peace and war, can only be derived from his studies on the works of Abbé Saint-Pierre: *Projet de la paix perpetuelle*, *Extrait du Projet de paix perpetuelle* and *Jugement sur le Projet de la paix perpetuelle*.

The intellectual construction that Rousseau attaches to the law of war and peace is also emphasized in his criticism of Hugo Grotius. The two axes of this criticism are empiricism and historicism. Grotius cannot be a genuine jurist, only a justifier. The roots of his law are the facts. In Rousseau's opinion, the examples Grotius used are not only as uncertain as the entire history, but they also lead to fallacious judgements. For Rousseau, explanations are based on concepts, not on facts. Therefore, Rousseau's skepticism will have a metaphysical root, not an empirical one.

The temptation to apply the social contract to international relations was important; this should have been the intention of *Political Institutions*. Was it possible for the powers of Europe, divided by religion and customs, to aggregate their interests? Rousseau changed his ideas once he read Abbé Saint-Pierre's project. Unlike the abuses and evil, which find their own way, anything else useful to the public can only be brought by constraint. That is why, Abbé Saint-Pierre, who drew up a good project, thinks in a child-like manner when it comes to implementing his ideas.

There is no way in which international law could possibly regulate the plurality of existing legal systems. At the same time, neither the international law nor the cosmopolitical one can possibly exist: the former because there is no sanction; the latter because it merely represents the transfer of the social contract to the states. It not only is a utopia, but also it runs counter to the state's autonomy which merely represents the expression of the general and indivisible internal will.

Being a world citizen undermines the idea of being first of all a citizen in the same manner in which Rousseau conceived being a man. States must not participate in the venturesome game of an international juridical union since they need to preserve their national sovereignty.

Deploring historicism, Rousseau formulates one of the most important ideas and explanations of international relations: the opposition between the national state

and *jus cosmopolitanus*. At the same time he formulates one of the sources of a different type of skepticism applied to international relations - political skepticism.

International Relations - An Irrevocable Separation Between Politics and Ethics

Born in the modern age, political realism will find a perfect pendant in the theory of international relations. Justice loses its primordial position with the beginning of *Aufklärung*. Utilitarianism and positivism will accelerate this process. The reference to natural law or justice almost ceases to exist. Nominalism and anchorage in the reality of "the ethics of responsibility" marked the analysis of the political realm. If law parts with justice, justice will be deprived of any relation to politics.

This is the framework in which international relations were analyzed. At least in the first stage, positivism had to gain support from a certain history of political ideas. The three authors who represent cogent sources of political realism, but have different visions about the reasons of separation between politics and ethics, are Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes and Niccolo Machiavelli.

The remotest source of classical realism is Thucydides. His works are the mandatory and sometimes final reading for all the theorists of international relations. Thucydides's multiple disciplinary claim derives from political philosophy. Is *The Peloponnesian War* a work of political philosophy? Thucydides does not claim to be either historian or political philosopher. He merely attempts to explain why and how Athens went down in almost thirty years of war. As Thomas Hobbes, one of Thucydides translators, noted, his text secretly briefs the reader in a manner that concepts could never do.

It is relatively easy to understand why this claim, which also represents a closing of the theory of international relations, exists. The theory of international relations is not able to consider Thucydides outdated; for the trama of his book, namely the war, maintains its central place. Until the 1960s, it represented the single subject on the theory of international relations. Are there any clear separations between foreign and domestic politics and between the manner in which international relations are conducted nowadays and the manner in which they were conducted during the time of Athenian democracy?

One of the most interesting theses in *The Peloponnesian War* is not necessarily the description of the mechanism of the balance of power, the actual cause for the irruption of the Peloponnesian War, but the subtle links between the pretext and the real motivation, between justice and war. The Spartan Assembly decided to

intervene in the war to put an end to Athenian injustice. The Oracle of Delphi promised to help the Spartans end the injustice perpetrated by Athens.¹⁹

The place ascribed to justice in the description of the Peloponnesian War draws up the realistic parentage of Thucydides. Injustice accompanies war, thus being inextricably tied to it. The most relevant episode is the one in which the Thracian mercenaries kill all the innocent people as well as all the animals in the small borough of Mycalessos. Commenting on this episode, Thucydides notes that it represented one of the most recurrent phenomena of wars, as it also occurred in Sicily and Macedonia. It is the moment when justice vanishes in order to set free peoples' actions. Human actions have no limits in times of war.

But the major discovery Thucydides made is much more profound. It refers to human nature whose violence cannot be limited by law or justice. Thucydides can be placed at the outset of a genealogical table of masters of suspicion. The description of justice in respect to international relations rounds his gloomy picture.

Justice is always on the side of the powerful. This is the Athenian thesis embodied in the well-known excerpt of *The Peloponnesian War*. This is also why Athens found it right to expand and to legitimate to become an empire. Isn't that, in fact, the law governing the conduct of fortresses in the relations between them? Isn't the increase of power by any means what actually fuels any foreign policy?

Again Thucydides's answer does not have an explicitly universal or definitive nature. It can be inferred from the analysis of other fortresses' foreign policies. The hegemonic tendencies of Athens were not mirrored in Sparta, which could not afford them due to its large and important number of slaves. Only out of fear of a slave revolt was Sparta pushed to act, as it would have been natural, augmenting its power by means of territorial expansion.

What then about justice inside the fortress? It could be contaminated, in turn, by these wars, but is not. On the contrary, it preserves its hierarchies, which allows it to impose certain rules for government - rules and hierarchies that are not reflected in the policy between the fortresses. Thucydides is the first author to determine that there is a separation between foreign and domestic policy as far as the role of justice and rules is concerned.

Where does this first separation between the politics and the ethics come from? Certainly, war is the term which intercedes and produces it. War opposes violence to justice and excludes the latter. At the same time, when internal circumstances allow, each fortress attempts to increase its power, and eventually to obtain hegem-

¹⁹ Thucydides (1954).

ony. As a consequence, war becomes inevitable. Excluding justice from the sphere of war is still a long way from anticipating Machiavellian explicitness. According to Machiavelli, not just war, but politics in its entirety, are fated to injustice.

Hobbes, who is Thucydides's translator, is the one who for the first time uses the argument of the state of nature in international relations. As long as people live outside a power which holds them together, they cannot be but in a state of war. Hobbes formulates one of the classical arguments of the realistic theory of international relations.

Political theory, in all its interpretations, retained from the Machiavellian works the idea of political autonomy and excluded the idea of a permanent conflict between politics and ethics. The same might not be necessarily valid as far as international relations are concerned. In postulating the irrevocable separation between ethics and politics, Machiavelli has a decisive influence. The same applies for the conflict between politics and ethics and, in fact, between real and normative.

Which of Machiavelli's interpretations have influenced the theory of international relations? The closest description of the way the theorists of international relations thought is the one formulated by Ernst Cassirer. Machiavelli was not a philosopher, but an author who studied and interpreted the political phenomenon in the same way Galileo Galilei analyzed the falling corps phenomenon a century later. Both the argument of Machiavelli and the theory of international relations resort to history as a methodological tool. History is less a spiritual adventure than a place of repetition where passions and human interests are identically expressed. Historical knowledge covers past, present and future.²⁰

The instrumentalization of history by the theory of international relations will be twofold. On the one hand, history will allow conclusions with a legitimation pretense stemming from classical realism. On the other hand, the empirical material for the entire scientific theory of international relations will be history condensed in statistics. Ritter and Meinecke place Machiavelli between two types of adventures which mark human history: the truth of power and the truth of utopia. In Ritter's opinion, Machiavelli is essentially different from the ancient thinkers because, starting from the thesis regarding evil's influence on human behavior, he is in search of the ways in which the state becomes possible.

Here we reach a fundamental point of demonstration. The history of conversion is the one determining the irreparable difference between internal and foreign pol-

²⁰ Cassirer (1946).

icy. Converting the fundamentally evil person into a political subject beyond state's borders proves impossible.

Machiavelli inextricably links power and relations of force with politics. The opposition Ritter creates between Machiavelli and Thomas Morus anticipates the evolution of international relations, a binomial in which Morus is placed in the proximity of the international institutions created by the Versailles system. The part of Ritter's analysis of Machiavelli that is original is his speech on the role of irrationalism, cited by Claude Lefort.²¹ It is only natural for irrationalism to play an important part where force and power relations prevail.

Is Machiavelli a moral skeptic? It is difficult to state that a criticism of morals applies with respect to Machiavelli, irrespective of its form. Machiavelli denies neither the two categories of good and evil nor the value of the truth. The essential change he brings is that these cannot be applied to politics, a field in which they have to be ignored. This accounts for Machiavelli being regarded as cynical and not skeptical.²²

Does a clear separation exist between internal and foreign policy in the works of Thucydides or Machiavelli? Another assumption will be that the forerunners of realism are in fact authors who generally identify politics with the will of power.

This latter assumption also represents Aron's reproach to realism since it did not emphasize this distinction enough. Obsessed with the rejection of contractualist philosophy, a version of liberalism according to which the individual can be disciplined by respect for law and morals, realists invented a new anthropology opposed to the old one, which proposed to replace law with power. They defined politics in terms of power and did not agree to define international politics by reference to the absence of a referee or police.²³

Is Classical Realism a Moral Skepticism?

For sure, it is impossible to consider that one single moral conception informs this model. Although all the authors have the same approach on the institutions created by Versailles as the dangerous application of a moral utopia, there are many differences in the ways morality is conceived in international politics. Assuming that

²¹ Lefort (1986).

²² Compte-Sponville (1990: 191-215).

²³ Aron (1983: 583).

moral realism is a skeptical doctrine, we shall attempt to discuss these differences starting from the criticism directed by the realist speech to morality.

The book which marks the moral skepticism of classical realism is *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, written by Reinhold Niebuhr in 1932. "With his will for power and his prestige deprived by both his own limits and the constraints of social life, the ordinary person on the street projects his own ego on the nation."²⁴ The autonomy of the state cannot be limited by international institutions, just as Rousseau's contract cannot be extended to international politics. Niebuhr's criticism is simple but suggestive.

Niebuhr is considered to be the one who inspired the moral skepticism applied to international relations. Apparently paradoxical, Kenneth Waltz, who introduced positivism in international relations, admits that pinning the political evil on human nature is a recurrent thesis in the thinking of St. Augustine of Hippo and Benedict de Spinoza as well as Niebuhr and Morgenthau.²⁵

Admitting there is no unity among classical realists, Morgenthau formulates the first criticism addressed to foreign policy. According to Morgenthau, the democratization of foreign policy is the cause of moral skepticism. He lives in an age when foreign policy is no longer conducted by aristocracy - a time when Alexis de Tocqueville was happy not to have lived.

For Morgenthau, the governing of a state by certain people is the prerequisite for the existence of international ethics. Where the government's responsibility is distributed to a great number of persons with (or without) different conceptions of international politics, international morality as an international system becomes impossible.

It is interesting to note that Morgenthau's skepticism regarding international relations is historically circumstantiated. Ethics become impossible in international relations at the beginning of the nineteenth century when international politics cease to be the making of the prominent aristocratic families, and become the product of the peoples. The morals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are the universal morals of sovereigns of the same aristocratic family. The morals of the nineteenth century are morals of the peoples and of the nation-states - that is, impossible.

²⁴ Niebuhr (1932).

²⁵ Waltz (1979: 27)

What happens when foreign policy ceases to be exclusively determined by aristocracy? Is the natural state of international relations only the consequence of the aristocracy losing its command over foreign affairs?

For Morgenthau there is no equivalence between the natural state and the absence of wars. On the contrary, universal morals, lost with the appearance of the nation-state, represent the conflict that lies at the foundation of international relations. The conduct of those wars was governed by certain rules which disappeared with the interference of people in foreign affairs.

It is interesting to note that Morgenthau's skepticism is one related to the modernity of politics. What brings international relations to the so-called "zero degree" of morality is the nation-state. His skepticism does not stem from the individual and from the inherent evil of individuals, but from the way they are organized - the nation-state. Once estranged from universal morals - the only morals possible prior to the formation of the state - the most significant danger becomes the universalization these morals. Morals are no longer naturally universal, but national morals pretending to be universal.

Morgenthau and the other realists share a certain conception of international action. Since international morals do not exist, acting in terms of morality is the most erroneous enterprise. This is why the arguments of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, whose philosophies were contrary to the ideas of Woodrow Wilson, won the unconditional admiration of Morgenthau.

Morgenthau's skepticism is precise and subtly differentiated. A morality of international relations cannot exist once the aristocracy no longer governs the states. The morality that international institutions are trying to introduce is completely different from the international morality of the eighteenth century.

Martin Wight, considered to be the founding father of the English School of international relations analysis, belongs to the same school of thought. In his book *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, he describes the theory of international relations through three tendencies: revolutionary, rationalist and realist. Although Wight realizes the former imperfections when he fails to define rationalism on this basis, he complies with a general temptation of the international-relations theory that summarizes a subject through schools, paradigms and models.²⁶

What sets apart and unifies the English School is the epistemological position, a traditional approach to classify and separate the theorists of this school²⁷ from

²⁶ Wight (1991: 15).

²⁷ Neumann, Weaver (1998: 25).

American political science which was dominated by behaviorism at the end of the 1960s. Wight wrote a fundamental book on the theory of international relations, creating at the same time a distinctive world that evokes the era prior to the radical and artificial separation of human sciences. In order to explain the politics of power, he refers to William Shakespeare and Edmund Burke, Aristotle and Bartolus, Giovanni Botero and Immanuel Kant. "Power politics" represents a world in which the typical character of the contemporary era, obsessed with immediate interests, balance of power and classified data, distrustful of theories and convinced of his inutility, feels lonesome.

The English School's refusal to formulate laws of international relations based on statistical data was firm. Hendley Bull, Wight's disciple and editor, was directly involved in the traditionalism-behaviorism debate which dominated the theory of international relations at the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s.

The theoretical scaffolding of "power politics" is built first and foremost with the help of history. Political history is the subject that fuels the emergence of international relations studies at the end of World War I. The realist school, built as a reaction to the creation of international institutions, used history as a validation criterion to prove that states' behavior in international relations runs permanently counter to the principles of the Covenant of League of Nations. The boundary between political history and the theory of international relations was sensitive in the 1930s and 1940s when it began to stand out as a subject. The concerns of the first theorists to explain the failure of the League of Nations converged with those of the historians associated with the Annals School, which attempted to explain the events of the 1940s through historical means. Next to Marc Bloch, Gheorghe Bratianu illustrates this latter tendency in his book *L'Organisation de la paix dans l'histoire universelle*.²⁸

Using history to theorize international relations, Wight perceives the risk of attributing finality to history, that is the risks entailed by historicism, as described by Karl Popper. Revolutionary powers are dangerous as they try to extend their ideologies to a universal scale. Wight is not seduced by the German realism of *Machtpolitik*. He implicitly identifies what Aron explicitly perceives in the analogy he makes between the German idealism of power politics and the juridical idealism of universal peace. Therefore, someone like Heinrich von Treitschke is hardly credible; his definition of dominant power is not the expression of generalized German hegemony in Europe.

²⁸ Bratianu (1997).

The refusal of social science as a type of ideological legitimization is visible in *Machtspolitik* in the pages dedicated to geopolitics. Geopolitics is a pseudo-science,²⁹ and Sir Halford John Mackinder's theory on the strategic advantage of the continental power is refuted by modern history. Mackinder's demonstration is based on the system of classical antiquity. Describing geopolitics makes Wight come closer to the postmodern authors of the theory of international relations.

The reason why Wight is reserved towards the possibility of international relations existing as a science is more complex than its utilization as ideological legitimization. A possible science of international-relations theory seems to him a largely mechanical presentation. Ignoring human conventions and motivations in international politics is for Wight one of the most serious errors that can occur in its study. Symmetrically, Kenneth Waltz, a pure theorist of international-relations science, found it necessary to exclude any reference to state foreign policy, purporting that he is theorizing international relations while foreign policy represents a distinct field. Any reference to subjectivism would have diminished the accuracy of the explanation.

A specificity that brings Wight closer to Raymond Aron is the marginal, if not non-existing, place reserved for economics. In his last text, which is the foreword to the eighth edition of *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, Aron explains the low interest of describing the world economic system by separating the domination of diplomatic-strategic relations from economic domination and, at the same time, by the central place diplomatic-strategic relations had at the beginning of the 1980s. There is yet another reason why both Aron and Wight avoid explaining the international system through the economic one, namely their common anti-marxist views. Representing the international system as one of economic domination is, for them, of Marxist inspiration. Closer to Marxism through his neoliberal theoretical sources, E.H. Carr, one of Wight's contemporaries, proposes economic equality among states as a solution to the international crisis of the 1930's.³⁰

Wight's book *Diplomatic Investigations*, published in 1966, includes an article entitled "Why is there no international theory?" Even though his book was supposed to defend the reintegration of the theory of international relations with the more ample and developed subject of political theory, Wight is unable to surpass his skepticism. He explains the inconsistency of international-relations theory by comparing it to political theory through the nature of the object of study. Theo-

²⁹ Wight (1991: 52).

³⁰ Carr (1981).

rizing international relations cannot achieve consistency since international relations themselves have not registered any progress.

Postulating the lack of progress in the evolution of international relations, explaining international politics as power politics, and distinguishing clearly between internal and external politics place Wight in the gallery of the realistic theorists of international relations.

Like Raymond Aron and the neorealist Kenneth Waltz, for Martin Wight the essential characteristic of international relations is international anarchy - the absence of a central government system. Wight does not deny the existence of international law, and deems that "while in internal politics the struggle for power is governed and framed by laws and institutions, in international politics, the laws and institutions are framed by the struggle for power."³¹ In Wight's opinion, there are two principles mitigating international anarchy. To the classical balance of power he adds the common interest represented by the dominant power. The common interest of the dominant power can bring genuine benefits or can lead to a dangerous ideology.³² Is the comparison of relations between states to that of a chessboard, which Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote of in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, a valid one to describe the mission the United States has at the end of the century?

The unity of political realism in the theory of international relations represents the result of an unacceptable simplification, and Wight is one of the authors who consequently refused mechanical and restrictive descriptions. Classical realism is the most fertile theory because of the diversity of authors it comprises.

What individualizes Wight's figure is his conservatism. This appears clearly in Wight's confession addressed to Burke, "the supreme commentator," but especially in the role he sees for the revolution. The revolution, beginning with the French one, is for Wight, as for Burke, the most dangerous phenomenon. The hierarchical, but also individual order, which is the result of the English political order described by Burke, is extended by Wight to the universal order untouched by the revolution.

The evil in international relations does not arise from the existence of war, which is a natural phenomenon, but from the lack of distinction between peace and war introduced by the revolutionary powers. The revolution introduces passion and fanaticism in international relations, reduces the distinction between external and internal politics and mixes diplomacy with espionage.³³ The evil in international

³¹ Wight (1991: 102).

³² *Ibid.* p. 280.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 120.

relations is called "stasis" and appears in the international community when various groups of people gain loyalties which attach them more to some groups of people belonging to other states than to their own citizens.³⁴ Wight is not a nationalist. He is ironic about nationalist statements, saying that "small countries have produced the big culture," and considers them an inaccurate historical sentimentalism,³⁵ reminding his readers that Giuseppe Mazzini is the author of a guerrilla manual.

As every conservator, the author of *Power Politics* believes in a natural order. The system of states should be a hierarchical world, as the one of the Greek philosophy in which states compared with the Olympus deities take their natural places. Natural alliances are the expression of the natural and hierarchical order, a horizontal order. The feeling of compromise and measure, typically conservative, induces Wight to define a large mature power as a power that knows its limits. It is easily noticed that the skepticism of Morgenthau, the founding father of classical realism, is very close to Wight's. Both are better known as founders of a school of a different orientation than as "realists."

Aron adds to the classical distinction between idealism and realism, the one between ideological and juridical idealism at the institutional level, thus creating the difference between the German and English schools. American realism is nothing but a pragmatic version, and also an ethical version of the German idealism of power politics. The only author mentioned by Aron is Treitschke.³⁶ The most suggestive expression of Treitschke is the one by which he moots any moral debate within the state: "The human being fulfills the moral calling only within and for the State. States accomplish their calling only in togetherness, and in the end the war is not a barbary but the sacred that commands the destiny of peoples." We find again in this quote, in a genuine form, the fundamental ideas of German voluntarism and vitality. The state is the only person existing within the sphere of international relations; being a juridical and moral person, the state is also a will. The state is a "*macht*" power only if it maintains itself close to other independent states. Effective sovereignty is defined through the right to resort to war, called "*rechtspledge*." Only a really powerful state can meet these demands. A small state is ridiculous, and all the more if it wishes to seem powerful.

What then is the relationship between politics and morals? Certainly, it is not placed in Machiavelli's line. The lie is not a diplomatic means; on the contrary, it

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 140.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 62.

³⁶ Aron (1983).

diminishes the honor of the state. There is no conflict between morals and politics. In international relations, morals are identical to politics. It is morals (*staatliches Gesetz*) which imposes on states to fulfill their calls, namely to increase their power.

The absence of moral skepticism in Treitschke's works is manifest. The prestige and honor of the states is instrumental only through war. How can a state possibly maintain the internal order if outside it does not submit to legality? His enemies permanently threaten a state that does not abide by legality and faith. The state does not own the power for itself, but defend its highest values and assets. War does not create a foundation for the law, only honor does.³⁷

One recognizes in Aron's comments on Treitschke, Morgenthau's lost paradise - the golden age when war was a honor and the unique way for states to command recognition. Treitschke does not outlive the Versailles system; certainly he would have been one of its biggest enemies. The one who continues his ideas is Carl Schmitt. For him, the Versailles institutions represent one of the most dangerous achievements of the human spirit, precisely because the system tries to replace the moral conduct of states, which can assert themselves only through war, with a false morality of a rhetorical nature that outlaws war. In fact, the Versailles system places international morality on one side - the side of the winners.

The criticism of international institutions created around the interdiction of the use of force is not only an exclusively pragmatic criticism, but also a moral one. Introducing the moral criterion, as a legitimization of its own actions, the winning states are in fact acting immorally.³⁸

The argument is carried on in its entire genuineness in Aron's analysis of the idealistic illusion under its legal or moral form. The criticism of the idealistic illusion is not only pragmatic, but also moral. Idealistic diplomacy often slides into fanaticism. It divides states into good and bad, into peaceful and warring. It figures out lasting peace as a punishment inflicted on the first states and as a triumph for the newest states. Persuaded that it can put an end to power politics, idealistic diplomacy overestimates its negative aspects. Sometimes states abide by their principles irrespective of the color of the enemies to the very end of war and victory. Otherwise, when their interests are at stake or when they are forced by circumstances, the same states subject their conduct to those circumstances.

The link between Schmitt and Treitschke is profound and centers on vitalistic morals attached to the state. Their moral line of thinking is not particularly sinu-

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Schmitt (1976).

ous. If there is a moral skepticism about these authors, then it is certainly one of a historicist nuance. It is inspired by the Versailles system, which is not an illustration of morality in international relations, but rather of legal illusion.

We have reached an important point, namely the one of separation between morality and legality. In spite of a widespread opinion, there is no assimilation of moral norms with legal norms. Legal skepticism is a common feature of the realities, or, more precisely, the skepticism relative to the possibility of the international law expressed by the Versailles institutions to regulate international relations. This is not identical with moral skepticism. On the contrary, the criticism of morality, which the Versailles system tends to introduce, is widespread.

We can identify two different kinds of criticisms of the moral normativity entailed by the juridical normativity of the Versailles system. The first, represented by Morgenthau, is founded in a historicist and aristocratic moral skepticism. The second, with Schmittean roots, is a demystification of international morals, which, in fact, conceals the winners' immorality. The label of moral skepticism attached to international relations is arguable as far as Raymond Aron is concerned.

In Aron's approach, there is an important distinction between the idealism and realism of power politics. Crossing the Atlantic and becoming "power politics," Treitschke's *machtpolitik* changed, first of all, from the spiritual point of view. It became a fact and not a value. Authors who, according to a common opinion in the United States, belong to the realist school note that states animated by the will of power are in a perpetual rivalry. These authors do not express sympathy and do not consider it as part of a divine plan. The refusal of states to submit to a common law or arbitration is considered by these authors as incontestable, intelligible, but definitely not sublime, for war is not at all sublime to them.³⁹

Aron's statements comprise, in their turn, multiple nuances. This is the difference between German idealism, which normativizes the will of power, and American realism which considers it not to be very important. To accept the difference between friend and foe as a criterion of politics in international relations, to recognize the irrational and permanent nature of strains among states, is to implicitly admit that their disappearance might lead to the disappearance of politics too. The international institutions are utopian, precisely because they propose such a transformation.

The most important reflection which seems to be comprised in *Paix et guerre entre les nations* is whether moral skepticism actually exists in the works of writers

³⁹ Aron (1983: 579).

belonging to political realism. Another assumption to be made here would be that the realists' antijuridism was taken for a moral skepticism.

For Raymond Aron, the political realism is not only pragmatic, but also ethical. The standard political person described by realists has to take into account his state's interests, but cannot ignore altogether the interests of the other communities. If realism is ethical, irrespective of the content of values it represents, then it is obvious that it cannot be skeptical.

Aron attaches juridical idealism to the ideological idealism of the will of power, although from the intellectual point of view, the latter is placed next to realism. In Aron's antinomical sketches, prudence is the one opposing these idealisms, not realism.

What is prudence? If prudence does not express skepticism, as Aron states, what then is its moral content? Prudence, in fact, expresses a refusal to determine rationally which are the moral norms. The morals of wisdom, optimal at the level of both facts and values, does not solve the antinomies of diplomatic and strategic conduct, but tries to find in each case the most acceptable compromise. This phrase belongs to Aron, but its Humeian source is obvious.

David Hume refers to prudence as being made up of good sense and obvious judgements. Prudence is the one that has to rule the relations between states. For Hume, the best way to determine the moral norms is not that of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, namely inferring from experience what the behavior is that best suits all the needs, but *The Balance of Power*, which best expresses this way of acting cautiously.

As regards the classical realism of the American authors who are also active in politics, it is much more simple and dogmatic. The opposition between national interest and ethics becomes obvious and entails little nuance for George Kennan. Morgenthau's Spenglerian conception disappears together with the portrait of the statesman, as opposed to the indefinite mass of people involved in decision-making in foreign policy. Kennan⁴⁰ is not interested why or since when there are no ethics in international relations, but merely takes note of their absence. Thus, for Kennan, ethics cease to exist beyond the state's borders.

⁴⁰ Kennan (1953).

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