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# The Concept of Security and International Relations Theory

by

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First Annual Conference on  
Discourse, Peace, Security and  
International Society

Ballyvaughn, Ireland

August 9-16, 1987





**The Concept of Security  
and International Relations Theory**

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The conference held at Ballyvaughn, Ireland, in August 1987 was the beginning of an on-going international intellectual interchange on topics related to the discourse of peace and security and international society. It will include annual meetings, the second to be held in summer 1988, again in Ballyvaughn. Sponsored by the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, the conferences are intended to foster general inquiry into these scholarly topics and to stimulate research and teaching that incorporates these perspectives at University of California campuses. This year's series of working papers comprises the writings which seventeen authors submitted to their colleague-participants in preparation for the 1987 conference. Some have been updated somewhat before publication here. Some have been published elsewhere and are reissued here by permission. The Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation hopes that these working papers will help to interest even more scholars in pursuing these lines of thought.

James M. Skelly  
Series Editor

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## The Concept of Security and International Relations Theory

For never are the ways of music moved without the greatest political laws being moved.  
(Plato, *The Republic*, 424 c.)

Then when Greeks fight with barbarians and barbarians with Greeks, we'll assert they are at war and are enemies by nature, and this hatred must be called war; while when Greeks do any such thing to Greeks, we'll say they are by nature friends, but in this case Greece is sick and fractious, and this kind of hatred must be called faction."  
(Plato, *The Republic*, 470 c.)

To explore the contemporary meaning of the concept of security is to encounter both noise and silence. Both are intellectually and politically intimidating.

The noise is apparent enough, both in volume and passion. Appeals to "security" can induce complicity with pornographic extremes of state power. They can drive millions of people onto the streets to protest. They can pry cash from tight-fisted treasuries. They can legitimize or resist the iron fist. From the outpouring of books on military strategy, arms control, and militarization to the more sinister reaches of state apparatus and technological fantasy, it is difficult to keep abreast of the resources and processes ostensibly devoted to enhancing security.

The noise is sufficient to require credentials distinguishing authoritative from non-authoritative speech. Credibility rests not only on a special technical expertise, but also on an implicit normative code, on a professional capacity to confront necessity without flinching, whether on grounds of truth, goodness, or beauty. This professional credibility demands a knowledge of what it means to speak of politics through other means. It requires fluency in acronyms, leaked documents, and the paradoxes of deterrence theory. Once deemed competent, it is possible for the professional analyst to retreat from the noise of public debate to the decorum of arcane equations and the inner sanctum. Or rather, such a retreat is possible if one seeks to speak only about the security of the state, the "national security" that almost monopolizes our capacity to think about what the security of human beings in the modern world must now involve.

The dominance of statist conceptions of security is obviously not quite complete. Public debates about security bring a constant chatter of other, dissonant voices. The pursuit of national security, some say, only magnifies collective insecurity. Even if the more reasonable proponents of arms control manage to square the logic of competing empires with the paradoxes of nuclear deterrence in a states-system, the modern "security dilemma" requires a more complex explanation than is suggested by Thomas Hobbes' structuralist account of the necessity of

insecurity in a world of competing individuals. The problem is not so much that nuclear weapons have finally brought states into the condition of equality necessary for Hobbes' state-of-nature argument to be plausible. Rather, the participation of states in a wide range of processes — economic, military, technological, cultural and political — produces ever more intense forms of insecurity on many dimensions. Some point to the wreckage of a vulnerable planetary ecology. Forests are disappearing; the ozone layer is perforated; there are poisons in the food chain; mercury in the rivers and lead in the air; soils have become lifeless and deserts have become larger. These processes kill. Yet they do not enter into the equations of national security. It is far from clear how they enter into the categories of contemporary political thought at all.

Others point to the present insecurity of an intolerably large proportion of the world's people who live and die at the margins of existence. To compare statistics on military spending with those on the fate of the world's children is to become acutely aware that something is seriously wrong with a concept of security predicated upon the security needs of states alone.

These are all familiar themes, and they can be framed in many ways. The noise arises from the way that, in this context, "security" becomes an "essentially contested" term. It has an overload of meanings. Yet considered less in terms of the quantity of books, institutions, and debates devoted to it than of the substantive content of the term itself, it seems to have almost no meaning at all. To enquire seriously about what "security" now means, to retreat to the decorum of those arcane equations and the inner sanctum, is to encounter a silence that is deeply disturbing. The concept of security remains on the margin of contemporary political discourse in a way that is at odds with the importance of security policies in contemporary political life.

The most obvious part of the problem here is simply that serious discourses about security are very difficult to hear with any clarity. They occur behind doors, at dignified gatherings of those with the security clearance to speak. On exposure to journalists and cameras, they seem to evaporate into hot air. They are couched in languages of technical rationality, particularly in the ideology-dripping metaphors of game and public choice theory, or in jargons that clothe ontological puzzles in epistemological certainties. In fact it is exceptionally difficult for even the relatively well-informed public to know where or how to engage in a serious debate about security. The categories always appear so oversimplified, so distorted by rhetoric, passion, or official secret. Security has become a matter even less susceptible to democratic participation than is already implied by long-standing distinctions between foreign policy and domestic politics or between state and civil society.<sup>1</sup>

Even when serious discussions about security can be heard — in some of the literature of "strategic studies," for example, or in debates arising from the increasingly sophisticated challenges to nuclear weapons policies over the past decade — it is usually dominated by a monotonous echo. This echo, this reminder of the way modern conceptions of security reflect

the political practices of another era, is often amplified to the point of distortion. When analyzed, it reveals less an essentially contested concept than one that is essentially empty. The monotony, even when distorted, has become so familiar, so taken for granted by those professionally concerned with security matters, that it is only necessary to hum in unison, to repeat the same old refrain verse after verse after verse.

This paper is concerned to explore the consequences of this silence, this monotonous hum masquerading both as a serious concept of political analysis and a serious pretext for some of the most dubious political practices of our time. There are obviously enough specific political practices occurring under the sign of "security" that are of pressing concern, but the silence of the concept of security itself exposes the horizons of contemporary political thought and practice in a particularly revealing way.

This silence has been open to a number of different interrogations within the contemporary literature. For my purposes here, three are of special interest.

There have been a few attempts within the specialist literature on national security analysis to clarify what is admitted to be a curiously neglected concept. The most helpful starting point here is a recent text by Barry Buzan. Buzan, I will suggest, takes us as far as it is possible to go in thinking about "security" while caught up in the conventional refrain. He even manages to make this refrain rather less monotonous than usual, mainly because he is able to make explicit so many of the assumptions that are generally passed over without comment. But his analysis is most helpful in showing just why it has become so difficult to do more than hum in unison, to think about security in anything other than conventional terms.

Other scholars have tried to broaden the reference of security analysis away from the familiar concerns with presumed "hard realities" — weapons, capabilities, states, and so on — to encompass seemingly peripheral processes of culture, language, discourse, and ideology. These processes are usually grouped together in a few paragraphs on "perceptions" or "political" factors in the formulation of security policy. But from a different perspective — one, I will suggest, that must be taken very seriously — seemingly hard realities themselves dissolve into all kinds of less tractable political practices. "Security" here becomes a matter of meanings and interpretations, a subject for critical hermeneutics rather than utilitarian micro-economics, for textual criticism rather than a positivist or realist capitulation to "the way things are."

From a third direction, others still have asked the simple, naive, but devastating question: "whose security?"

In the following three sections of the paper, I propose to make a number of very brief remarks about each of these lines of interrogation in turn, referring to themes that I have explored more extensively elsewhere. There is an extensive overlap between them. Each line of interrogation leads to the next. And each leads to the contemporary theory of international relations as the



crucial ground on which to explore not a more coherent account of security, but why the silence of the concept has been tolerated for so long. It is in this context in particular that it is necessary to understand the tremendous power of all the jargon, clichés, metaphors and myths that thrive on the simultaneous noise and silence in which the concept of security has been enveloped.

This exploration of the relationship between the concept of security and the categories of modern international relations theory will then be the subject of the remainder of the paper. Particular attention will be placed on the relationship between twentieth-century traditions of political realism and the broader (liberal) discourse about political life that makes political realism possible. More specifically, I will suggest that the dominant theoretical tradition in the analysis of international politics is not, as has been almost universally claimed, political realism. It is idealism; or better, liberalism; or better still, the philosophy of identity through which the opposition between political idealism and political realism has been constituted historically. Political realism, in the theory of international politics at any rate, is merely the moon, or better, several moons, that depend on the sun of political idealism both for their light and their shadows.

All this inflated imagery of oppositions is intentional. Prevailing conceptions of security are unthinkable without them. They reflect the fundamental spatial oscillations — inside/outside, self/other, friend/enemy — on which not only the state and states-system, but also the dominant understanding of human community and human identity depend.

The three ways of interrogating the silence of security to be explored here all converge on a critique of such oppositions. They lead, I will suggest, to an insistence that the proper context in which to think about questions of security is not within the conventional categories of international relations theory, but in relation to the structural transformations and political practices through which patterns of human community and identity are being reconstructed. Security, in short, must be treated as a matter for serious *political* thought. The concept of national security, and the noise and silence which accompany it, depends on a sharp distinction between "politics" and "relations" between community and anarchy, between life inside and outside the state. Contemporary political thought has to come to terms with this deeply rooted refusal of politics, of which the noise and silence of security is only the most urgent symptom.

## II

Barry Buzan's important analysis of the concept of national security<sup>2</sup> begins by recognizing its "underdevelopment," for which he cites five groups of possible explanations. It involves complicated and ideologically laden ideas, though as he recognizes, no more so than, say, "freedom" or "state." It overlaps with the concept of "power," particularly in the conflation of means and ends typical of so much self-styled realist literature. It was largely ignored rather than analysed properly by those who rejected realism in favour of so-called "idealism," or who in the heat of the

behavioural era so readily confused social science with inductive logic and empirical method. It was also ignored as a consequence of the specific sociology that gave rise to strategic studies as a sub-discipline, tied as it has been to the short term military policies of hegemonic states. And, finally, conceptual ambiguity has been useful "as a justification for actions that would otherwise have to be explained." (p. 6-7) All five groups of explanation point to the "intensely political" character of the concept. From the perspective of this analysis, the silence, we might say, is precisely the consequence of the noise.

The core of Buzan's discussion depends on the familiar hierarchical schema of individual, state and international system. This schema is both the strength and the primary weakness of the analysis. Conventionally, Buzan argues, security has been conceived in relation to one or another of these three so-called "levels of analysis," particularly the second or the third. Theoretical dispute typically hinges on which is chosen for emphasis. Buzan argues, convincingly, that security cannot usefully be divided up in this way. It requires a reintegration, a holistic conception in which "national security" is understood in the context of "systemic security." In making this argument in detail, Buzan offers a perfectly adequate ground from which to criticize the fetishization of the military postures and capabilities of states in the formulation of security policies.

Yet Buzan's own analysis, while helpful, is founded on a number of theoretical choices of its own. In some ways, these choices are more interesting than the critique they make possible.

To begin with, for all its claimed holism, the analysis remains preoccupied with the security of states. It provides a broader context in which to understand what national security might involve. Part of the attraction of the analysis, for example, is the way it reflects the influence of a "society of states" perspective, rather than the apolitical conceptions of a supposed "anarchy problematic" rooted in analogies with Newtonian mechanics or an economics of possessive individualism. The tory sensitivities of David Hume or, more recently, Hedley Bull are at least more open to the significance of meaning, rules, and traditions in human affairs than the technocratic liberalism that guides the currently influential form of "structural realism" or theories about "international regimes". Moreover, Buzan correctly insists on the importance of thinking about national security in the context of the international economic system. Yet while relatively open in these senses, Buzan's analysis somehow manages to by-pass most of the harder questions about the possible meaning of security in the modern age. Proclaimed intentions to the contrary, it does not really address the concerns of these worried by, for example, ecological breakdown, unequal development within and between states, or the way the state itself has in many places become a major threat to the people's security.

The reasons for this are to be found in Buzan's second theoretical decision, namely his reliance on a conception of national security that is framed within a specific understanding of the

relationship between the state and civil society on the one hand, and between the states and the states-system on the other. This understanding is essentially liberal in inspiration. In the context of civil society it tends to reify a specific account of the relationship between individual and the state characteristic of conventional liberal political thought. The political or class character of civil society, or the class character of the state, or the relationship between classes within states and transnational economic processes - to take issues that would be significant from rather different political perspectives - are not matters of primary concern.

Similarly, despite an emphasis on the importance of international economic relations, there is little in the way of an analysis of the nature of the relationship between the state and the variety of international structures - from transnational corporations to international financial institutions - that dominate the security concerns of so many states. For some states, medium-range ballistic missiles may pose a serious problem. For others, IMF conditionality, declining terms of trade, and the debt burden are equally serious. For Buzan, however, the complex structures of global economic life are fairly easily re-encoded into the conventional categories of international relations theory. Unsurprisingly, problems of security in this context once again become a matter of management at the "top layer at the global level" (p. 254), of the possible contribution of international organizations and law in providing the logistical mechanisms for negotiations, inspections, settlement of disputes, and so on.

In effect, the three tier hierarchy which forms the basis of Buzan's analysis focuses attention away from a serious consideration of the category of the state. It separates out into "levels" aspects of political life that ought to be integrated into a proper theory of the state itself. Rather than being a useful heuristic model appropriate to the specific needs of the analysis of international relations, it is a way of putting the serious questions about the relationships *between* state and civil society and *between* state and international systems into permanent abeyance.

This particular form of theoretical amnesia, on which the "levels of analysis" schema depends, has deep roots in what I have elsewhere referred to as the "Theme of Gulliver."<sup>3</sup> It embodies a set of spatial metaphors, derived most immediately from the metaphysical assumptions of Gallileo, Newton, and Kant, that transform the possibilities of temporal change into the impossibilities of spatial transformation. These metaphors in turn depend on historically specific resolutions of the relationship between universal and plural, being and becoming, structure and history.<sup>4</sup> In the usual formulation, often packaged in languages of liberal contractarianism on the one hand and tragic resignation on the other, security becomes a matter of maintaining order within the states-system or moving to supranational institutions. Buzan correctly tries to resist this temptation. Instead, he suggests we give each "level" its due. It remains unclear, however, why it is these levels that should be taken seriously or what the precise relationship between them should be.

Similar difficulties arise with a subsequent paper in which Buzan examines the concept of security in relation to concepts of peace and power.<sup>5</sup> The paper serves as a useful extension and clarification of the argument of the book. Again, however, the conclusions reached are already predetermined by the assumptions from which the analysis proceeds. Both the concept of peace and that of power are said to provide partial and complementary insights. These partial insights are then synthesized into a reformulated conception of security keyed to the possibility of managing international conflict. But just as the levels of analysis hierarchy that informs the book rests ultimately on a static or spatial ontology, so also the concepts of peace and power are presumed to provide partial insights into what amounts to an unchanging essence of international politics. Neither the historical relationship between concepts of peace and power — that is, the conditions under which they have merged in response to specific historical transformations — nor the theoretical-philosophical problems that are at play in this relation — most significantly, in my view, the tension between universalist and pluralist ontologies — are of much concern to Buzan.

As with the complex ontologies reified within the levels of analysis schema, concepts like peace, war, power, or security are not simply given in the nature of things. It is fairly reasonable to expect that such concepts embody a number of theoretical, philosophical, and ideological ghosts. As Buzan himself clearly recognizes, this is why "security" has to be understood as an "essentially contested concept." Yet this recognition is fundamentally at odds with the task Buzan then sets for himself. What is required is less a synthesis of patently inadequate concepts than a serious analysis of how those inadequate concepts have come to be as they are.

Thus, the third interesting choice made by Buzan is the decision not to pursue the theoretical, philosophical, and ideological ghosts that haunt concepts like security. He does not explore the historical-philosophical trajectories embodied in the concept of national security, or in the categories — whether about levels of analysis or the oppositions between peace and power or peace and war — through which the concept of national security has been constituted historically. Consequently, in my view, while Buzan's five groups of explanations for the underdevelopment of the concept of security are all significant, they do not begin to get at the way the concept has become so silent, so empty simply because it has been taken for granted for so long. Its silence is a mark of its political power. This is precisely what makes it interesting. Despite all its insights, Buzan's analysis remains a symptom of the problem he seeks to overcome.

### III

"Security" seems to be a "hard" term. It invokes hardware and necessity. It justifies secrecy and violence. Claims about security policy are resolved through the special judgement of statesmen able to calculate and articulate some irreducible "national interest." Public discussion of security policy gives way to the special expertise of technicians able to assess circular error probabilities

and throw weights. Security demands special sacrifices: schools for missiles, civilization for (temporary) barbarism, freedom for necessity. Those who speak of security often sound like the old-style Marxists of caricature who reduces all political life to automatic material forces.

It is quite obvious, however, that "security" is not "hard" at all. Security policies may be expressed in very concrete artifacts, but any understanding of how these policies come to be has to engage with social and political processes that have so often been characterized as "soft" or "superstructural." Conceptions of political life that assume some easy distinction between matter and consciousness, determining base and determined ideology, are just as misleading in this context as in any other.

Here it is only necessary to think of the rhetorical and fictional nature of the concept of "national interest"; or the paradox of credibility and capability within theories of nuclear deterrence; or what conception of human action is implied by the term strategy; or the consequences of the ambiguous meaning of "balance" as it is played out in contemporary debates about the "threat" posed by the "enemy"; or the metaphors of liberal micro-economics that dominate conceptions of strategic rationality; or the invocation of textual "authorities" like Clausewitz or Thucydides; or the psychologistic premises that are embedded in a term like "security"; or the Augustinian theologies of good and evil that inform not only the rhetoric of the Reagan administration but a large proportion of the writings of those who have called themselves "realists" ever since Lutheranism and nationalism converged in the power politics of Max Weber. From all these directions, it becomes necessary to understand security policies less in terms of any coherent technical definition of national security than of the way the concept of security enters into all kinds of other codes, symbols, rhetorics, propagandas, ideologies, discourses, and other terms usually subsumed under the generic concept of culture.

Elsewhere, I have suggested that the most pressing problem involved in coming to terms with security from this direction is that it is difficult to speak about security at all without becoming aware of the way in which the term is caught up in complex and historically specific politics of discourse.<sup>6</sup> Three primary groups of problem are involved here. Each of them is the subject of important analytical literatures that seek to raise questions about security going beyond those raised by traditions represented by Barry Buzan.

First, concepts of security play an important role in processes of cultural production. Hollywood is important in creating and reproducing particular conceptions of security, and not only in North America. So are the mass media, notions of instrumental rationality that inform defense intellectuals, the science-military-technology nexus, literature, and so on.<sup>7</sup>

Second, concepts of security enter into the dense fabric of particular cultural, philosophical, ethical, and theological traditions. This involves more than the conventional concerns about the relationship between power and ethics of nuclear deterrence and the just war, or the role of

"norms" in the society of states. In Western modernity, security is caught up in the dialectic between Enlightenment and Despair, between philosophies of progress that emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and which have been so important in the contemporary United States (the "Applied Enlightenment" as Raymond Aron once called it), and the philosophies of Despair that took such firm root in the so-called crisis of historicism at the turn of this century.<sup>8</sup> This dialectic has informed much of the tension between political realism and political idealism that has been so important for the way the analysis of international politics has been structured in this century. In my view this is also what makes Max Weber the crucial figure for understanding the contemporary character of that analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Third, concepts of security enter into complicated questions about the relationship between political communities, and especially the way in which these relationships are so easily reified into a mutually exclusive choice between universalism and pluralism. It is in this context in particular that it is necessary to see how the concept of national security has pre-empted the possible range of meanings that security could have. From this point of view, the state itself appears as an historically specific resolution of the claims of universalism and pluralism, of identity and difference, of men and citizens in the terms used in Andrew Linklater's important analysis;<sup>10</sup> a resolution that involves both spatial and temporal reifications.

Contemporary theories of international relations enter into these processes of cultural production. They express contradictions central to the culture of Western modernity. And they embody the temporal and spatial reifications of the relationship between identity and difference on which the sovereign claims of the state depend.

#### IV

The question of "whose security?" is potentially quite devastating to prevailing conceptions of security precisely because it puts into suspension all the old certainties about the state having a monopoly on legitimate political community — not to mention legitimate violence — within a specific territory. There are four major themes at work here, each of which has attracted reams of well known analysis and commentary.

First, there has been a broadening of the sources of insecurity. National security is understood primarily in the context of war and peace in the states-system, and, to an increasing extent, in the context of the competitive position of states within a world economy. Yet it has become relatively obvious to a wide range of commentators that questions of war and peace or the struggle for a better niche in the world economy cannot be separated from insecurities arising from processes of development, ecological degradation, abuse of human rights, or the translation of political and economic processes into cultural and ethnic conflicts.

Differing perspectives on how to analyse a so-called arms race are perhaps symbolic here. While some scholars concern themselves with the technicalities of first-strike missiles and contracting response times, others focus on what they see as an all-pervasive militarization of human affairs. They point to the increasing integration of military matters into all aspects of life within modern societies. Most obviously, the production of armaments has to be understood more than ever not only in terms of technical military requirements but also in terms of economic forces. Indeed, the term "military-industrial complex" does not begin to grasp the interplay between economies and military deployments, and particularly of the role of the state in fostering this interplay. Nor is it possible to stop at a political economy of arms production. Processes of militarization enter into cultural forms and symbolic codes, into what is considered appropriate as children's play or as a metaphor of human interaction.

Perhaps the most worrying voices here are raised by those who stress the importance of understanding the global scale of these processes. They delineate the complex patterns of integration between: arms production; arms deployments between superpowers and in different regional settings; international trade; foreign aid in the form of weapons, military assistance, or arms-related technologies; and the use of increasingly sophisticated weapons as instruments of repression within states.

It may be much easier to see how it might be possible to stop processes understood through the metaphor of race — by persuading the contestants to stop competing. It is much more difficult to see how to respond to processes that seem to converge in the inexorable dynamics of global structures beyond the control of existing authorities. Conventional conceptions of security reflect a concern with the competitive logic of the states-system. But that logic can no longer be treated in isolation from the competitive logic of industrialization, capitalism, and modernity. In a world in which the state was both the primary political unit and the primary economic unit, these two logics could perhaps be assumed to converge fairly closely. In an era of transnationalizing capital, things get much more complicated.

Second and consequently, there has been a broadening of the subject of security to include people in general, indeed life on earth, rather than just citizens of states. The concept of national security depends on a highly specific resolution of the competing claims of people as people and people as citizens of states. It is this resolution — not some imaginary state of nature through which so many theorists of international politics have constructed a myth of origin around the name of Hobbes — that is the primary precondition for the rise of international political theory as we know it.

In this sense, a myth of origins is more appropriately constructed around the name of Machiavelli, and his rejection of Christian universalism as a foundation for political life within the enclosed space of the city. Machiavelli participates in the renaissance of a classical conception of

political space that depends on a sharp distinction between inside and outside, between citizen and barbarian. The great irony of the classical tradition, of course, and of the theory of the state ever since, is that the pursuit of universalism has been pursued within particular states, and depends on the usually unspoken assumption that universalism can be pursued within an island surrounded by barbarians and Others. Much of the energy of political theorists working within statist assumptions, and of Hobbes, Kant, and Hegel in particular, has been taken up with the attempt to reconcile the universalist claims of the state as a particular entity with the universalist claims of Reason and *Geist*.

Third, the state itself, far from being the provider of security as in the conventional view, has in many ways also been a primary source of insecurity. There is in principle nothing new in this. Hobbes, as Locke observed, simply made the wager that lions were safer than pole-cats and foxes. The twentieth century has tended to confirm Locke's suspicion of lions (though not his trust in the public benefits of private property). On the one hand, the pursuit of national security generates processes that threaten everyone. On the other, it is difficult to see how any useful concept of security can ignore the participation of states in "disappearances" and the abuse of human rights in so many societies.

The fourth theme underlies the other three, and again involves the historical character of both the state and the states-system. So much analysis of national security simply presumes an ahistorical structuralist account of the logic of the state-system. The state becomes a mere atom subject to the determining forces of a mechanical system. Theories of international politics can then take on all the nostalgic charm of theories that pretend modern economic life can be explained through the immutable laws of a magical market. In fact, theories of international politics have had considerable trouble coming to terms with questions about history. The ahistorical hierarchy of the levels of analysis schema that underlies Buzan's analysis is symptomatic in this respect. On the one hand, they have been caught in a number of very fundamental contradictions between meta-theoretical assumptions grounded in historicist and temporal categories, and those grounded in structuralist and spatial categories. On the other, and as a consequence of this, the reading of historical possibilities has depended on a prior decision about whether the state is becoming obstinate or obsolete.

The particular resolution of the claims of universalist human identity and individualist particularity at the level of the state is an achievement of historically specifiable practices. Its effect on contemporary thinking about political life, and thus on what is meant by security, is overwhelming. It suggests that political community is either a matter of nationalism, expressed through the state, or cosmopolitanism, expressed through some kind of nascent institutional framework at the global level, usually pictured in the image of the state writ large. And given that there is little sign of the withering away of the state, conventional wisdom continues to believe that states must remain the



primary focus of human solidarity and political identity, the primary source of human security, and tragically, it will usually be admitted, the primary source of human insecurity.

## V

Even without elaborating on any of these three themes at length, it is clear enough that they may all be framed within the major categories of contemporary international relations theory. Buzan's analysis of the concept of security tries to work within those categories, giving them new emphases and priorities rather than putting the categories themselves into question. Research into the discursive politics of contemporary debate about security leads to a concern with the way the categories of international relations theory enter into the characteristic rhetorics within which security policies are framed, legitimized, and reproduced. A concern with the question of "whose security?" calls into question our capacity to think coherently about security in the modern world at all. It threatens to undermine the discipline's most basic presumptions about the relationship between the possibility of security and the possibility of political community.

Each of these three themes also gives some indication of what is at stake in contemporary debates about the adequacy of the major categories of international relations theory. They provide some insight into the reasons why so many critics have urged the need to abandon the conceptual categories and methodological strategies that have guided research on international politics for so long. Buzan indicates what it is like to struggle to breathe new life into conceptual categories that are past saving. Contemporary discourse about security draws attention to the intensely political character of concepts that have been naturalized and rendered relatively apolitical within the discipline. The question of "whose security" opens up the possibility that the primary ground on which the study of international relations has been constituted as a discipline — namely that there is a fundamental ontological difference between relations between states and political life within states — is untenable.

While it is easy enough to agree with the critics that the categories of contemporary international relations theory require more than renovation, it is more difficult to see with much clarity what alternatives ought to be recommended. However, the three ways of interrogating the silence of 'security' sketched above, I want to suggest, give some indication of why the terrain on which debate about the future of international relations theory is conducted is now shifting in significant and, in my view, positive ways. It is not so much that international relations theory provides any guide as to how we now ought to study matters of security or recommend more appropriate policy alternatives. Rather, as a subject *for* analysis rather than as a guide *to* analysis, international relations theory provides the crucial link between the noise and silence of contemporary discourse about security understood as the security of states, and broader concerns about the possibility of political life at all in the modern world.

It is instructive in this context that epistemology is no longer the primary source of dispute about the appropriate character of international relations theory, as it was — or seemed to be — when the analysis of international relations became almost entirely an "American social science." Much of the discipline remains a product of the epistemological (or more properly, perhaps, methodological) pretensions of the 1950s and 1960s. These pretensions have become increasingly vulnerable to the triple attack on them that has characterized meta-theoretical controversies in the social sciences in general over the past two decades. From one direction, the rules about what constitutes legitimate empirical research have been tightened up considerably. From another direction, the positivist search for explanation has been challenged once again by a hermeneutical search for understanding. From another direction still, the priority of epistemology in the development of research strategies has been challenged by those who argue, correctly, that epistemology is dependent on a prior ontology. The declining influence of the "philosophy of science" and the increasing interest in European debates about historicism, structuralism, and post-structuralism are symptomatic of the significance of the second and third challenges in particular.<sup>11</sup>

Under these influences, the concern with epistemology as a prelude to the search for appropriate research methods has begun to give way to the aspiration for a properly *critical* theory of international relations.<sup>12</sup> It may still be easy enough to find the usual dogmatisms: that positivism is social science (as opposed to a caricature of one of many possible modes of enquiry); that 'theory' is irrelevant to the "real world" (as opposed to the recognition that such claims are only the most uncritical — and dangerously naive — forms of theory); that "realism" is a "tradition" going back to some founding father (as opposed to the recognition that all supposed traditions reconstruct the past from the perspective of the present); that the state, or "power" or "national interest" remain the irreducible essence of international relations (as opposed to the recognition that the state is a highly variable, complex, and historically constituted political category, and that terms like "power" or "national interest" are not exactly uncontested givens of political discourse). Each of these dogmatisms undoubtedly remain influential, to a greater or lesser degree in different research communities, but they have attracted a healthy scepticism everywhere.

To some extent, the demand for a critical theory of international relations has been articulated against the continuing influence of such dogmatisms. Yet more significantly, the demand for a critical theory of international relations seems to involve a return to the primary terrain on which so many of these dogmatisms have been grounded: the opposition between political realism and political idealism. Thus, anyone who attempts to develop a critique of the dominant traditions of realism in international relations theory is conventionally tarred with the labels of "utopian" and "idealist." This has been an enormously powerful rhetorical ploy, akin to the way positivists have charged their critics with having normative or even metaphysical tendencies. Positivists have

fostered the myth of the white coat, the ostentatious demarcation between scientist and object of science. Realists have managed to create a myth of the white flag, the demarcation between those willing to face up to necessity and the enemy, and those who would capitulate.

Even so, the return to this terrain has begun to occur on less conventional terms. To begin with, debate is no longer framed simply as a straightforward opposition between "power" and "ethics," between "is" and "ought" or between "present" and "future." It is clearly not enough to return to E.H. Carr's indiscriminate rendition in which the distinction between utopia and reality is identified with just about every dichotomy available to modern thought: free will and determinism, theory and practice, intellectual and bureaucrat, left and right, ethics and politics, purpose and analysis.<sup>13</sup> The myth of the white flag, and the categorical structures of international relations theory, do depend on philosophical dualisms of one kind or another. But these dualisms are not simply given. They arise out of historically specific circumstances. And though they may be traced to philosophers like Plato, Augustine, Kant, or Weber who have articulated such dualisms in general terms, they enter into thinking about international relations in a rather special, not so say peculiar way.

One indication of what is at stake here can be found in recent attempts to distinguish between two quite different forms of political realism. As a result of the work of Richard Ashley in particular, it has become necessary to distinguish clearly between classical or historicist and utilitarian or structuralist forms of political realism. The timeless structuralisms characteristic of recent work conducted under the labels of neo-realism, regime theory, and so on, loses sight of the ontologies of temporal contingency that are expressed so powerfully in the writings of Machiavelli in particular and the traditions of historicism more generally. In effect, the conventional claims of political idealism have been turned into claims about the structural form of the present international system. These claims have been subject to criticism on the grounds of history. Machiavelli and Hobbes have begun to appear, properly, as representatives of two different political ontologies rather than as the identical cardboard cutouts that populate the opening chapters of so many textbooks. Far from being a single tradition to which it is possible to appeal for authority, political realism appears as, among other things, the site of a rather old philosophical problem — the nature of the relationship between structure and history, being and becoming.

Opening up realism as a site of serious philosophical debate rather than as a body of received wisdom necessarily leads on to questions about whether those philosophical problems have been resolved any differently in international relations theory than in political theory more generally. It is no accident, in fact, that the concern by Ashley and others to distinguish historicist and structuralist forms of political realism is closely connected with a critique of the conventional formulation of the relationship between theories of international relations and theories about political life within states.<sup>14</sup> Here the opposition between political idealism and political realism has

appeared as a spatial division, as an account of the state and the boundary between inside and outside, between politics on the one hand and mere relations or even anarchy on the other. From the opposition between being and becoming we move to the opposition between Greek and barbarian, between community and the threatening Other.

## VI

It is often necessary to emphasize that the modern states-system is precisely that: modern. It is an historical creation. Analogies with other historical states-systems can sometimes be enlightening. They can also be misleading. Abstract models of multi-unit structures can also be illuminating. But they are also easily reified into claims about historical and structural necessity. This slide from model and method to ontology and politics is all too easy.

The modern states-system emerged in the context of very complex transitions in early modern Europe, and it has itself been transformed in the context of the rise of industrial capitalism and a global economy. The crucial political move, of course, has involved the long, slow emergence of the state as the primary locus of political life. The political consequences of this transition were already apparent by the late sixteenth century, and formed the basis of Machiavelli's attack on the universalist political language of the time. In an era in which the effective authority of Pope and Emperor were becoming increasingly nominal, Machiavelli refused to accept universalist categories as a basis for the political life of particular principalities. For the most part, Machiavelli has been treated as the outcast of the Western political tradition, the supposed champion of immorality and power politics. But even leaving aside the misreading of Machiavelli that this implies, it is clear that he articulates a fundamental cleavage without which most of the subsequent tradition of Western political theory is unthinkable. Although it is necessary to insist that the states-system is modern, and thus to beware of the dangers of anachronism, the theory of the state as it has developed since Machiavelli has drawn upon a conception of spatial community familiar from classical discussions of the *polis*. *Virtu* may involve a sexual-temporal metaphor in which the bitch goddess *Fortuna* is the object of seduction by the hero-prince. But this metaphor is played out in a spatially distinct realm, separate from and at war with other spatial entities.

By the time of Hobbes, the spatial exclusion of the territorial state is firmly re-enforced by the geometrical image of reason through which Hobbes arrived at the principle of absolute state sovereignty. Hobbes' name is usually invoked by theorists of international relations to appropriate the model of the state of nature as an early articulation of the security dilemma; or worse, to confirm an Augustinian conception of human nature after the fall from grace. In fact, the emphasis on the state of nature argument can be seriously misleading. It is perhaps more appropriate to understand the significance of Hobbes in this context in terms of his confirmation of an account of political life that assumes an absolute exclusion between life inside and life outside the state. For

Hobbes himself, this is not a distinction between community and anarchy, but between sovereignty and what seems not too far removed from Hedley Bull's "society of states."<sup>15</sup>

While the distinction between community and anarchy in the context of international politics cannot be blamed on Hobbes, it has certainly come to be the primary way in which an account of the state as an intersection has been reproduced both in theories of international relations and in theories of political life within states. The Treaty of Westphalia can be read as a codification of this in the context of a distinction between conflict over universalist religious claims and conflict arising from statist self-interest. Martin Wight's classic essay on "why there is no international theory"<sup>16</sup> gives an elegant and economic rendition in terms of the contrast between the "progress" possible in community and the recurrences and repetition inevitable in relations among states. In the methodological literature, concerns are raised about the dangers of using the "domestic analogy" as a way of explaining international relations. For some, in fact, the very use of such an analogy constitutes the surest sign of professional incompetence.

It is unfortunate, however, that this contrast has simply become naturalized, framed as an account of the way things are, and therefore must be. Neither the historically specific conception of political life that is thereby reified, nor the peculiar discursive practices through which that reification has informed the conceptual structures of a discipline, have been of much concern. Like E.H. Carr's rendition of the tragic oscillation between realism and idealism, the contrast between community and anarchy, between inside and outside hides much more than it reveals. Above all, it has led to a dogged refusal to take the category of the state seriously. Instead of placing the question of what is meant by "the state" under different historical circumstances at the centre of attention, either the state is asserted to be the central and unchanging political category, or the only relevant issue is said to be whether or not we remain in a state-centric political universe. The contrast between state and nation is obscured; as is the contrast between the state as territory and state as an ensemble of institutional apparatuses; as in the relation between state and civil society.<sup>17</sup>

This constant affirmation of the state as mere spatial boundary has sometimes been put into question by those working within international political economy on the one hand and within foreign policy analysis on the other. It has also become a major theme in the debate over the currently influential forms of structural realism. This debate was already prefigured at the beginning of the behavioural era when the classical ontological dualism (which, as in Bull's articulation of the "classical" position against the "scientists," was said to require different epistemological stances in each realm) gave way to epistemological universalism. The methods of social science were presumed to apply to all social phenomena. It mattered little that the ontological assumptions grounded on a distinction between community and anarchy remained implicit in the research conducted under the sign of such epistemological universalism.<sup>18</sup> Now

the modernists, as Ashley appropriately calls them, resolutely champion an ontological universalism, a conception of the essential nature of political life that can be switched from an analysis of life within states — and one, hegemonic and culturally intolerant state at that — to the international arena. The recent literature on co-operation under conditions of presumed "anarchy," for example, relies heavily on the transfer of a liberal version of the domestic metaphor into the international arena.<sup>19</sup>

For those suspicious of the "domestic analogy," this may be a cardinal sin, a transgression of professional etiquette. For those suspicious of the way in which historicist insights are constantly transformed into atemporal structuralisms, this may be yet another example of mystifying naturalizations and reifications. For others, it may just be arrogance or hubris. But the underlying dynamic is important. It has two elements. First, the statist community becomes the ground from which to judge all things. Specifically, the supposed anarchy of the international system depends on the prior image of the other state as the model of community. Inside and outside confirm each other. Second, conceptions of political life drawn from the inside are used to "solve" the "problems" of the outside — to find co-operation within anarchy. The fundamental question of what is meant by political community is thereby thrust aside in favour of yet another attempt to universalize instrumental reason, utilitarian ethics, the economics of possessive individualism or the politics of American liberalism. The logic of the states-system meets a form of universalist reasoning that the uncharitable might interpret as characteristic of empires.

## VII

Unless this distinction between life inside and outside the state is taken into account, the lack of any substantial critical tradition in the analysis of international relations can seem extraordinary. After all, it is difficult to maintain that the political processes that now matter most can be grasped as if they all occurred within the territorial confines of the autonomous state. The uncritical nature of international relations theory sits very awkwardly with the urgency of its subject matter. Critical lines of enquiry are obviously not completely absent, but they tend either to be structured in the form of a confrontation between realism and idealism, or when beginning from an analysis of global political economy, to stand outside the disciplinary categories of international relations theory almost entirely.

In other ways, however, the lack of a critical edge is a necessary consequence of just these disciplinary categories. Quite simply, if international relations, being the negation of civil society, is merely an anarchy, then there is by definition no community in which critique can be grounded. Again, it is significant that Ashley begins his demolition of the pretensions of the neo-realists by insisting that the regularized practices, techniques, and rituals of realist power politics constitute not evidence of an anarchy but precisely of a political community; one rooted in difference and

diversity to be sure, but one that nevertheless does provide ground for critical analysis.<sup>20</sup> It is significant also that Ashley is drawn towards a positive assessment of the contributions of Hedley Bull, whose own neo-human attempt to develop an account of the "anarchical society" grew out of a clear recognition of the unfortunate consequences of taking statist community as the essence of political life.

But the real force of recent attempts to insist on the possibility of a properly critical discourse about international politics does not come from Humean scepticism. Nor from yet another attack on "realists" by "idealists." Nor even just from those who insist on examining the states-system in the context of the world economy. It has come most recently instead from various forms of "post-structuralism." Cynics may complain that post-structuralism is just the latest passing French fashion, or another fancy ivory tower trimmed in inaccessible jargon. Yet in its broadest sense it is not all that novel. And whatever its deeper subtleties, and to whatever literary indulgences it has undoubtedly been susceptible, post-structuralism has grown out of a number of relatively simple insights. Without wishing to engage here with a detailed assessment of the long-term significance of the post-structuralist turn in the human sciences generally, it is easy to see how these insights prove attractive to those concerned with a critical analysis of the categorical structures of international relations theory.

To begin with, post-structuralism draws upon a wholesale critique of the philosophy of identity as it has dominated Western thought for so long. It involves both a critique of the fetishization of the moment of unity and of the way in which the moment of difference — whether in space or in time — becomes subordinate to unity. In the great dualistic schemas of the philosophy text books (though not always in the writings of those whose names appear in those text books), truth, beauty, and goodness reside in the moment of identity, their opposites with the inferior moment of difference. The categorical schemes of international relations theory easily appear as yet one more rendition of this durable but now quite tedious reading of available alternatives.

Moreover, the moment of difference is seen to be *defined* by the moment of identity. The identity of community in the sovereign state defines the anarchy of the space between states. The universalist identity of truth, beauty, and goodness within states defines the necessity of relativism, violence, and deceit between states. The possibility of justice within states defines the impossibility of justice — or peace or co-operation — between states. It is certainly not necessary to be a post-structuralist or "deconstructionist" in order to reveal the rhetorical ploys built into the classic texts of Carr, Morgenthau, Niebuhr, Wolfers, and so on. Some awareness of the history of political theory, philosophy, and theology, or a sharp eye for false dichotomies can go a long way in this context. But as a critical method, post-structuralism does have the desirable advantage of parsimony.

Apart from its relevance for the analysis of specific texts and its sensitivity to the rhetorical character of all discourse (particularly that which claims to transcend rhetoric through science, epistemology, or method) post-structuralism brings a (renewed) emphasis on a number of themes that are necessarily crucial for a properly critical analysis of international politics.

There is, first, the need for a proper genealogy of the construction of received traditions. The categories of international relations theory did not appear out of thin air. They were not carved in stone by Thucydides. They are not given in the text of supposed founding fathers like Hobbes or even Machiavelli. They did not appear full blown with the academic institutionalization of the discipline in this century. These are all elements in a much more complex story, one that is of surprisingly little interest to most participants in the discipline.

Second, there is a pressing need for a more critical assessment of the way the theme of the Other is so deeply embedded in the categories of international relations theory. This theme is usually encompassed within psychological categories, in terms of the "perception" of the enemy in foreign-policy decision-making. Yet as Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and many others have argued at great length, the politics through which Others are constructed depend precisely on a categorical frame of identity and difference.<sup>21</sup> The construction of radical otherness — of the enemy, the "evil empire," the "oriental" — is itself part of the statist resolution of inside/outside, community/anarchy, national/international that is reproduced with such crystalline clarity in the categories of international relations theory. The familiar ideological slide from classical realism to the demonic rhetoric of Cold War is no accident. Nor is the slide from structural realism to a universalist ideology of the Same: to the claim that we are all learning to co-operate in the same (i.e., hegemonic) utilitarian modernity.

Consequently, there is, third, a need to explore very carefully the precise relationship between theories of relations between states and theories of politics within states. This relationship appears to be one of mutual indifference. In fact, it is more plausible to suggest that they are mutually constitutive. It is not only that so much international relations theory is constituted as a negation of the theory of statist community. From a post-structuralist perspective, concerned as it is with the relationship between identity as centre and difference as margin, between text and footnote, international relations theory in general, and realism in particular, appear as a margin that simultaneously undermines and maintains the conventions of liberal political discourse. It participates in a politics of displacement.

This is perhaps clearest in the case of liberalism, which, as an embodiment of a specifically modernist rationality, depends on a capacity to distinguish between knowledge and power, between reason and violence. The distinction is maintained in a variety of ways, some directly philosophical, some through the translation of universalist rationality, into the economic categories that maintain a charade of universalism while legitimizing inequality, the violence of



private property. In the liberal theory of international relations, the distinction is simply abandoned. Violence is openly condoned. Realism in particular can then be understood as the space in which knowledge and power, reason and violence are allowed, indeed encouraged, to converge. It is the footnote that undermines all the pretensions of the text. It is the point at which "humanity" ends. It is the point of transgression, the special dispensation granted to those prepared to confront necessity without flinching, the expression of limits that allows the centre to hold. The silence of "security" is precisely the condition under which claims to universalism within states can be uttered.

Fourth, and most crucially, post-structuralism leads to questions about political practice and political community. It does not, it cannot participate in the reification of the state. Nor can it participate in the fetishization of the state as the ambition for political change. A Hobbesian contract for a global Leviathan is not on the agenda. Rather it takes the state as exactly what it is; an historically specific resolution of identity and difference, of universalism and pluralism.

This resolution occurred as a consequence of specifiable concrete processes. It was a resolution through territorial exclusion: universalism inside, pluralism outside. As a result, the state has achieved a formal monopoly on political community and power. The very object of political practice everywhere has become the capture of state power. Only the means have been in dispute. Security too has been the prerogative of the state. Security is a problem of the outside. It arises from difference. Thus either the state as the embodiment of identity must protect the inside from the outside, or everyone must be brought inside, into a realm of identity.

Consequently, within the categories of international relations theory, the analysis of political change, of political practices, of future possibilities, has undergone a major realignment: from historically specifiable resolutions of identity *and* difference to the philosophically and politically impossible choice of identity *or* difference. Theorists of international relations speak of the state as obstinate or obsolete, and frame their accounts of change as either the same old game played over and over again or as the centralization of authority, whether in governmental institutions, economic integrations, or the invisible hand of "international regimes."

In fact, even a cursory examination of contemporary trajectories reveals a much more complicated picture. The state is neither its old self, whatever that was, nor is it disappearing. It is changing in response to all kinds of economic, technological, cultural, and political processes. There is no simple transfer of authority to centralized institutions. There are all kinds of transnational structures, or processes that occur somehow "above" the state, but they are not usually conceived or centralized state-like institutions. In the case of the structures of international capital, it is the simultaneous pattern of decentralization and concentration that is most striking, the ability to move rapidly from location to location, the capacity to create linkages between cities rather than states. Whatever is going on with these things, images of structural

change towards greater and greater unity are quite misleading. Some of the most important political transformations of the modern age involve local political spaces and decentralized processes. This is partly what makes certain kinds of social movements, for example, so interesting as emerging forms of political practice.<sup>22</sup>

None of these things are easy to capture in existing conceptual categories, not least because of the huge vacuum in the theoretical literature where there ought to be a serious attempt to treat the state as always participating in the logics of both the states-system and the world economy. Nevertheless, they do not suggest a move up the hierarchy, a move from difference to identity. They do suggest yet another historically specific relationship between identity and difference. It is fairly certain, for example, that the state no longer has the capacity to make a sharp resolution between inside and outside. Legal sovereignty may still justify Cartesian cartography, but mapping the important patterns of power in the modern world requires a very different account of political spaces, an account of networks and flows, of shifting boundaries and interpretations rather than the continuing reification of Euclidean geometry.

It is not even clear that an alternative resolution has to give priority to the principle of identity at all. There is no logical reason why political community cannot arise from practices that give priority to difference, to pluralism, to "conversation," to openness. It is just that the dominant political categories, of all ideological persuasions, have begun the other way around. But as Machiavelli himself advised, the art of politics involves preparing for the unexpected. To take the advice of the supposed arch-realist himself, it would seem to be less than prudent to treat such deeply entrenched conventions as the way things must be.

### VIII

The broad outlines of the connection between seemingly arcane debates about international relations theory and the struggle to rethink the possibilities of security in the modern world should now be apparent. They involve an understanding of the categorial structures of international relations theory as discourse, as a specific, and very interesting form of power/knowledge. This is not simply a matter of "ideology" as conventionally understood. Where the classic analyses of ideology, from Plato to *some* of the formulations in Marx, depend on uncovering the way particularistic forms of consciousness masquerade as universals, we see here the effects of an historically specific reification of the relation between universality and difference. Where classic analyses of ideology depend on the Platonist counterposition of "knowledge" and "opinion," we see here the effects of a discourse in which truth and opinion are presumed to guarantee each other, thereby generating a seemingly endless echo of same and other, of idealism and realism, the hum of academic analysis and the noise of the public debate. Where classic accounts of ideology grow out of Platonist, or at least Cartesian separation of matter and consciousness, we

see here theoretical categories embodied as the concrete material practices of academic disciplines and state policy.

Barry Buzan makes a brave attempt to bring a modicum of rigour to the concept of security. Yet this attempt continues to presume the very categories that have rendered the concept so incoherent, so silent, in the first place. Thus its search for "integration" and "holism" remains fixated on the sovereign identity of the state, and on the reification of the two ends of a polarity — peace and power — within which some middle ground must be sought. "Instead of alternating between state and system in an endless cycle of frustration, a more appealing logic," Buzan suggests, "is to combine and expand the two approaches by operating security policy on all three levels [that is, individual, state, and international system — R.W.] simultaneously. In this way, an expanded and clarified concept of security can fill the ground between the power position of the Realists and the peace position of the Idealists."

Unfortunately, it is precisely this middle ground that is excluded by the play of power that is constitutive of the discourse of same and other, identity and difference, inside and outside, idealism and realism. Buzan's dependence on the "level of analysis" model, in which the discourse of identity and difference is reified into an ahistorical conception of change, literally makes a reading of security in anything other than statist terms unthinkable. Far from being a simple and convenient analytical device, the "levels of analysis" model embodies a very powerful metaphysics, a way of resolving historically specific understandings of the relationship between space and time, finity and infinity, being and becoming, into a frozen essence, the way things are, the reality to which we are supposed to submit, the tragic and inevitable need to submit before the demands of "security."

It is within this discursive framework that the category of security enters into contemporary political practice, setting the conditions and horizons of possible debate. To speak of security on terms other than those of "realism" and "idealism," of the necessity of state and the illegitimacy of cosmopolitan aspiration (unless, of course, cosmopolitan aspiration is clothed in the hegemonic pretensions of liberal-utilitarian economics through which we are all turned into the different yet identical actors in the same play scripted by, alternatively, the dominant power, capitalism, or modernity itself), is to confront a brick wall, the palpable limits of permitted discourse. These limits enter into, and are in turn reproduced by the processes of cultural production, the contradictions of culture/modernity and the forms in which struggles for political community are presumed to occur.

The question of "whose security?" remains. And it is because it remains that it is impossible to provide an alternative definition of security from within the existing categories of international relations theory. No longer can the claims of security guarantee the discursive strategies upon which international relations theory has been distinguished from political theory in general. The

most important characteristic of the concept of security is neither that it is "essentially contested" nor that it is "silent," but that it is derivative from and dependent upon an historically specific conception of political community.

The concept of national security is a consequence of the theory of the state as the Sovereign locus of political identity. The fact that international relations theory has depended on only the sketchiest outlines of a theory of the state has mattered surprisingly little to a discipline that has been so self-conscious about the primacy of the state. It has only been necessary to be sure that the distinction between inside and outside, between politics and relation, between community and anarchy, could be maintained as an absolute exclusion. However appropriate this formulation may have been in the past — it has, arguably, always been misleading — it is difficult to sustain in a world in which states are both growing "stronger" in some senses but are also increasingly embedded in complex global structures whose contours do not conform to the expectation of a global Leviathan.

The issue is not whether the state is obstinate or obsolete; or whether "realism" expresses a recognition of tragic necessity and idealism is merely a dangerous naivety; or whether drawing on the "domestic analogy" is a sign of professional incompetence; or any other version of the false choice between the community of identity within and the difference — the barbarian, the other, the anarchy — without. In this sense, the problem with the claims of realism on which the concept of national security depends is its simultaneous rejection yet deeper acceptance of idealism, of the priority of the moment of identity against which the tragedy of the "security dilemma" can be measured: The priority *produces* the problem of national security. Concepts of peace that build upon this same priority cannot provide a way out. The silence of prevailing concepts of security — and peace — can only be broken by refusing the equation of security with identity, and thus with the obliteration of difference: a refusal that necessarily constitutes a struggle for new forms for political community.<sup>23</sup>

This conclusion may be usefully contrasted with the one suggested by Steve Smith after canvassing much of the same general terrain. Smith also draws attention to the highly problematic nature of the relationship between political life within states and international relations, particularly in the context of the undemocratic way in which foreign and defence policies are typically formulated.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere, he also makes an explicit connection between this distinction and contemporary debates about international relations theory.<sup>25</sup> In making this connection, Smith refers in passing to the difficulties faced by scholars concerned with the possibilities of critical theory in international relations because of the way they draw upon the work of people like Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. The main problem, he suggests, is that the esoteric and specialized language in which this literature is written is unlikely to be very attractive to scholars trained in more conventional forms of international relations theory.

It should be clear from the above analysis, however, that there is more at stake here than just the use of obscure language. First, no intellectual tradition holds a monopoly on the use of needless jargon. Conventional theorists of international relations, whether traditional or behavioural in orientation, are hardly angelic in this regard.

Second, despite all that can be said about the need to minimize jargon, challenges to theoretical traditions, as well as to existing forms of political practice, involve a complex politics of language. I have tried to suggest, for example, that to take certain terms for granted — "security" especially, but by extension also "peace," "war," and "enemy" — is to set very clear limits within which it is possible to speak with any authority. Indeed it is hardly possible to engage with contemporary social and political theory and all without becoming aware of the centrality of the relation between language and political practice. Where, say, Machiavelli can appear within "the tradition" of international relations theory as an inert icon miraculously in touch with the unchanging essence of power politics, he appears within the more specialized literature as someone struggling to articulate a conception of political life more appropriate to rapidly changing material circumstances — the historical emergence of the state — and in doing so in a discursive universe dominated by the universalistic categories of the old order.<sup>26</sup> To seek to develop a critical theory of international relations is to be especially sensitive about the hegemonic claims of established discourses, about the demand that critique be articulated within the categories and conventions that are themselves being put into question.

More specifically, and third, the most important problems now being raised by the critical theorists are in principle fairly straightforward. I have tried to suggest here that, even though many very difficult issues are being posed by writers like Habermas and Foucault, the concern about the philosophy of identity that has been so important in contemporary social and political theory should be of particular concern to all theorists of international relations precisely because it is central to the constitutive principles on which the main categories of international relations theory depend. That there is a distinction between international relations and political life within states is commonplace. It is less common to insist that there is both an historical and a theoretical connection between these supposedly different forms of human activity.

Smith argues that it is necessary to reject this dualism, especially as it has been formulated by realist writers, and to treat international relations theory as similar in kind to the other social sciences. The move is familiar: from ontological dualism to epistemological monism, from the difference between community and anarchy to the same science of modernity. It is precisely the possibility of this move that must be put into question. It should not be a matter of continuing to affirm historically specific conceptions of community (or modernity, or scientific method) or conceptions of anarchy understood as the negation of such community. This is to repeat, in the specific context of the state understood as a boundary between self and other, the same logic

that has contrasted tradition with modernity, barbarism with civilization, the alien with the familiar. Smith's important and legitimate complaint about the way democratic principles quickly run afoul of the claims of national security cannot be separated from the reification of self and other that informs the categories of international relations theory. These categories embody, legitimize, and help to reproduce an understanding of political community in which the claims of democracy *must* be limited.

A critical theory of international relations cannot avoid putting these categories into question. In this sense, the concept of security runs into much the same difficulty as the concept of development once one abandons the ethnocentric hubris enshrined in a view of history as a direct line from "undeveloped" to "advanced"; or the concept of democracy once one recognizes the incongruity between claims to state authority and a world in which so many of the processes that affect people's lives arise from global processes over which states have limited control. Like these highly problematic concepts, "security" points to a serious political project.

## Notes

- 1 For a useful brief discussion, see Steve Smith, "Reasons of State," in David Held and Christopher Pollitt, eds., *New Forms of Democracy* (London: Sage, in association with the Open University, 1986), 192-217. I will return to Smith's account in the conclusion.
- 2 Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983).
- 3 R.B.J. Walker, "The Territorial State and the Theme of Gulliver," *International Journal* 39:3, 1984, 529-552.
- 4 R.B.J. Walker, "Realism, Change and International Political Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 31:1, 1987, 65-86.
- 5 Barry Buzan, "Peace, Power and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research*, 21:2, 1984, 109-125.
- 6 R.B.J. Walker, "Contemporary Militarism and the Discourse of Dissent," *Alternatives* IX:3, 1983, 303-322; and "Culture, Discourse, Insecurity," *Alternatives* XI:4, 1986, 485-504, reprinted in Saul H. Mendlovitz and R.B.J Walker, eds., *Towards a Just World Peace: Perspectives for Social Movements* (London: Butterworths, 1987), 171-190.
- 7 For three perspectives on this theme, each representative of distinct and growing literatures, see Robin Luckham, "Armament Culture," *Alternatives* X, 1984, 1-44; Paul Chilton, ed., *Language and the Nuclear Arms Debate: Nukespeak Today* (London: Francis Pinter, 1985); Bradley S. Klein, *Strategic Discourse*, Centre on Violence and Human Survival Occasional Paper No. 3 (New York: CUNY, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1987).
- 8 For a helpful introduction to this theme in the context of sociological theory, see Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Enlightenment and Despair: A History of Social Theory*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- 9 The crucial importance of Weber both in contemporary debates about the contradictions of modernity and for the way the debate between political realism and political idealism has been constituted is increasingly apparent in the recent literature; see especially Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Max Weber and German Politics, 1890-1920*, trans. M.S. Steinberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); W.J. Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel, eds., *Max Weber and His Contemporaries* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); Stephen P. Turner and Regis A. Factor, *Max Weber and the Dispute over Reason and Value* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984); Sam Whimster and Scott Lash, eds., *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and David Beetham, *Max Weber and the Theory of Modern Politics*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985).
- 10 Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
- 11 This paragraph, like a number of others, simply points at complex and ongoing debates that are impossible to discuss in any detail in a paper of this length. For quite different ways of

engaging with these debates see, e.g., Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Brian Fay, *Critical Social Science* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987); John G. Gunnell, *Between Philosophy and Politics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986); Len Doyal and Roger Harris, *Empiricism, Explanation and Rationality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); and Nancy S. Love, *Marx, Nietzsche and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neo-realism," *International Organization* 38:2, 1984, 225-286; R.W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 10:2, 1981; F. Kratochwil and J.G. Ruggie, "International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State," *International Organization* 40:4, 1986, 753-775; Andrew Linklater, "Realism, Marxism and Critical International Theory," *Review of International Studies*, 12, 1986, 301-312; David Campbell, "Recent Changes in Social Theory: Questions for International Relations," and J. George, "The Study of International Relations and a Positivist/Empiricist Theory of Knowledge: Implications for the Australian Discipline," both forthcoming in R.A. Higgott, ed., *New Directions in International Relations: Australian Essays* (Canberra: Canberra Studies in World Affairs, 1987); Mark Hoffman, "Critical Theory and the Inter-Paradigm Debate," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 16:2, Summer 1987, 231-249.

<sup>13</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty-Years Crisis, 1919-1939*, 2nd edition (London: Macmillan, 1946), especially pp. 11 ff.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Richard Ashley, "The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space," *Alternatives*, forthcoming. Some of the following comments elaborate on my response to Ashley's analysis; see Walker, "Genealogy, Geopolitics and Political Community: Richard K. Ashley and the Critical Theory of International Politics," *Alternatives*, forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory," in H. Butterfield and M. Wight, eds., *Diplomatic Investigations* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1966), 17-34.

<sup>17</sup> For helpful comments on this latter distinction, see Fred Halliday, "State and Society in International Relations: A Second Agenda," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 16:2, Summer 1987, 215-229.

<sup>18</sup> John Vasquez, "Colouring It Morgenthau: New Evidence for an Old Thesis on Quantitative International Politics," *British Journal of International Studies*, 5:3, 1979, 210-228.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Oye, "Explaining Cooperation under Anarchy: Hypotheses and Strategies," *World Politics* 43:1, 1985, 1-24.

<sup>20</sup> Ashley, "The Geopolitics of Geopolitical Space;" "The Poverty of Neo-realism;" "Political Realism and Human Interests," *International Studies Quarterly* 25:2, 1981, 204-236.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970) especially chapter 9; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> See R.B.J. Walker, *One World, Many Worlds* (London: Zed Books and Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988).



23 This argument is pursued in Walker, *One World, Many Worlds*.

24 Smith, "Reasons of State."

25 Steve Smith, "The Development of International Relations as Social Science," *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* 16:2, Summer 1987, 189-206.

26 See, among others, J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). For two useful collections of essays on the more general theme of the politics of language, see Michael Shapiro, ed., *Language and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); and Richard Rorty, J.B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner, eds., *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).



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