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Kenneth Waltz's Kantian moral philosophy: 'the virtues of anarchy' reconsidered

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Abstract

Kenneth Waltz once stated, unequivocally, that, 'I consider myself to be a Kantian, not a positivist'. I explain what Waltz might have meant by this, and how deep this professed Kantianism ran. Such is the depth of the engagement, I argue, that it is no exaggeration to claim that Waltz's political philosophy, his philosophy of history, his philosophy of science, his methodology, and his normative theory of anarchy are all broadly Kantian. Crucially, what Waltz meant by the 'virtues of anarchy', is best understood as an attempt to develop a regulative ideal, or an 'organising principle' of 'practical reason' that would guide diplomats in the nuclear age. Indeed, in his most contentious intervention in global public policy, Waltz deploys Kant to argue that horizontal nuclear spread, rather than the spread of democracy, would ensure the peaceful development of states. This anarchic nuclear peace would, he thought, be the means to achieve 'perpetual pacification'. This revisionist reconstruction is the primary contribution of the paper. But through unsettling paradigmatic readings of 'Waltzian IR theory', the paper also presents an immanent critique of 'the virtues of anarchy' that contributes to a wider research project on the concept of anarchy and its emancipatory potential.

Keywords: anarchy; ethics; Kant; Waltz; history of international thought

Introduction

In an interview with Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg in 1998, Kenneth Waltz stated, unequivocally, that: 'I consider myself to be a Kantian, not a positivist'.[1] To date, no one has taken the time to show how deep this professed Kantianism ran. And why would they? Waltz was arguably one of the most important theorists of international affairs, and, as far as textbook accounts proceed, his 'neo-realist' approach to world politics was predicated on a rejection of Kant. As all budding IR theorists are taught, often using Waltz's own writings, Kant is apparently the progenitor of the liberal approach to IR, one which seeks to explain war via

[1]Halliday and Rosenberg 1998, 379.

the character of states, and hypothesises that war is inevitable unless non-democratic states can be democratised. Waltz himself characterised this 'second image' theory as flawed because it was 'reductionist', and rejected the argument that the spread of democracy would bring peace.[2] Waltz also rejected the more 'revolutionary' or cosmopolitan reading of Kant,[3] and paid no attention to neo-Kantian ideal international political theory. It has been almost universally assumed since that the 'neo-realist' approach to IR is predicated on a rejection of Kant, and Waltz's two seminal works, *Man the State and War* (1959) and *Theory of International Politics* (1979), books which defined, directed, and dominated IR theory for two generations, are considered the twin foundations of this critique.

So, what could Waltz possibly have meant by claiming he was a Kantian? Unfortunately, his interviewers did not follow up with this question, but Waltz did set out his thinking succinctly in a piece published in the *American Political Science Review* (*APSR*) in 1962 entitled, 'Kant, Liberalism and War'. This long ignored, but outstanding piece of scholarship, expands the analysis of Kant that appeared as an appendix to his doctoral dissertation,[4] but was removed from the monograph that followed (*Man, The State and War*). This engagement with Kant continued to fundamentally shape Waltz's thinking far beyond the publication of *Theory of International Politics*. Such is the depth of the engagement, I argue, that it is no exaggeration to claim that Waltz's political philosophy, his philosophy of history, his philosophy of science, his methodology, and his normative theory of anarchy, are all broadly Kantian. That, at least, is what this paper will attempt to demonstrate.

Waltz's Kantianism hasn't gone completely unnoticed. As William Scheuerman has shown, though only in brief outline, Waltz only rejected a specific form of Kantian*ism*, and did so on the basis of what he considered to be a better, more faithful anti-cosmopolitan reading of Kant.[5] Joseph McKay's excellent reconstruction supports this analysis, but only notes in passing that Waltz grappled with Kant's *Perpetual Peace* for 'decades', generally also reading 'Kant *against* democratic peace' theory.[6]

The primary contribution of this paper is the detailed reconstruction and exegesis of this Kantianism. I will show that Waltz uses Kant to develop a highly original theory of the 'virtues of anarchy', one that reformulates classical social contract theory as neo-Kantian American social science. But this scientific account, like the faux anthropology of the state of nature theory it supplants, is explicitly not a 'description' of world affairs. Rather, the theory of international anarchy is explicitly a regulative ideal that can guide moral and political agency.[7] Anarchy is an

[2]Waltz 1959, 1979.

[3]See Waltz 2000. Cf. Scheuerman 2012; Linklater 1998.

[4]Waltz 1954, 290–96.

[5]Scheuerman 2012.

[6]MacKay 2022, 345, n. 48 (emphasis added). In 'Structural Realism After the Cold War' (2000), Waltz reaffirms the value of neo-realism over neo-liberalism with reference to Kant: 'If the democratic peace thesis is right, structural realist theory is wrong […] The causes of war lie not simply in states or in the state system; they are found in both. Kant understood this. Devotees of the democratic peace thesis overlook it' Waltz 2000, 13. This paper is not a contribution to these debates, but echoes and develops arguments I have made elsewhere. See Prichard 2010b, 2013b; Baron et al. 2019.

[7]Waltz 1979, 111.

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'organising principle' of 'practical reason', in other words a normative political theory that can guide politicians in the thermonuclear age.[8] Waltz's most controversial intervention in global public policy, his defence of horizontal nuclear proliferation, is expressed broadly in these terms, as I will show.

In each part of this reconstruction, I show how the concept of anarchy is central to Waltz's Kantianism. Anarchy (or the international state of nature as Kant understood it) is the result and the cause of the establishment of states, and this is a moral good, from a Kantian point of view. For Waltz, anarchy has distinct normative 'virtues' because, understood more capaciously than simply the absence of world government, the idea of anarchy generates a regulative ideal, a form of neo-Kantian *phronesis*, that can guide policy making in conditions of epistemic, political, moral and material uncertainty.

My secondary aim with this paper is to use this reconstruction as a form of immanent critique of Waltz's theory of anarchy, and by extension of 'Waltzian IR theory'.[9] By redescribing the concept of anarchy from the perspective of Waltz's Kantianism, I am able to show that not only is Waltzian IR a quite distinct form of realism, but mainstream realist IR theory is also deeply normative. Realists, like Waltz, are deeply committed to the realisation of freedom and human emancipation, though primarily through a form of liberal republican statism.

I will show, *pace* Scheuerman (2012), that Waltz's Kantian defence of the 'virtues of anarchy' does not necessarily lead to statism, and rejecting statism does commit us to a cosmopolitan world state. As Waltz pointed out, but did not explore further, a maximalist Kantian theory of autonomy in anarchy also 'leads to anarchism'.[10] Indeed, we might read *Theory of International Politics* as an attempt to balance the 'anarchist ideal [of statelessness] applied to international relations'[11] with his Kantian statism. This is not to claim that Waltz was a critical theorist per se, and most certainly not an anarchist. But Waltz's theory of international politics can be extended to a defence of the emancipatory potential of anarchy more broadly.[12]

The paper is structured in the following way. The first part of the paper provides a working explanation of the relative oversight of Waltz's Kantianism. Part two of the paper sets out Waltz's Kantianism across five sub-sections. First, I reconstruct Waltz's Kantianism as it appears in his philosophy of science and epistemology; I then show how Waltz explains the relationship between epistemology and politics, before moving on to show how this idealist epistemology is developed into a Kantian moral philosophy visible and explicit in all his writings. I then set out Waltz's distinctly Kantian philosophy of history, which accounts for the role of war and the pursuit of peace in the development of republican states. To show how Waltz's Kantianism works in practice, I close the exegesis with a summary of the Kantian basis of Waltz's defence of horizontal nuclear proliferation. A nuclear peace is a normative good, for Waltz, because it brings about peace in

[8]Waltz's views compare well with Behnke 2008 Schmidt and Williams 2008.

[9]Donnelly 2015.

[10]Waltz 1959, 23. For the fullest account of this connection between Kant and anarchism, see Wolff 1998. Cf. Shell 2009, ch. 4.

[11]Waltz 1959, 115.

[12]See also, Alker 1996; Prichard 2010a; Kazmi 2012; Prichard 2013, 2016; Cerny and Prichard 2017; Salter 2023. See also, Rosenberg 2013 and Prichard 2018.

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anarchy, a 'perpetual pacification' that rests on the right of war in anarchy. Without this nuclear peace, Waltz suggests, pursuing the good within states or between them would be impossible. In other words: 'peace is considered as a means not as an end'.[13]

This account of the 'virtues of anarchy' contributes to and invites further research on the concept of anarchy in IR and political science more broadly, research I connect to in the conclusion of the paper.[14] And finally, if my account of Waltz's Kantianism is accurate, it has significant implications for the way in which we understand the 'self-images of the discipline', and how we teach IR theories to our students.[15]

Recovering and reconnecting Waltz and Kant

One of the likely reasons that the connection between Waltz and Kant has not yet been made is because Waltz explicitly disparages Kant as a 'second image' theorist in his first book, *Man, the State and War* (1959). Liberal theorists like Kant, Waltz argued here, reduce the causes of war to the character of states, and believe that as soon as states are perfected, war will vanish as a problem for humanity.[16] In his 1962 article, Waltz argues forcefully against this reading of Kant, and offers us a completely different reading of his own. But this piece seems to have vanished from our disciplinary memory. All other references to Kant are disconnected and fragmented, like a puzzle scattered across a table, and there is no reference to Kant in any of his responses to his critics or well-wishers.[17] This is surprising, since Waltz's theory generated huge controversy, and some of the criticisms of his work were quite robust. One can only guess at the likely reasons Kant was never marshalled in his self-defence. Perhaps assuming people would continue to read 'Kant, Liberalism and War', Waltz felt no need to lean on Kant for extended intellectual support in any subsequent English language publication.[18]

This lack of interpretive nuance has resulted in the entrenched and paradigmatic readings and interpretations of Waltz's neo-realism. Waltz's contribution to the discipline has in some instances been reduced to a series of hypotheses about the motivations of states, anarchy, the balance of power, and rationality.[19] Jack

[13]Waltz 1997b, 105. My translation.

[14]A note on method. I employ a broadly contextualist approach to the history of ideas drawing on established methods of historicised critical reading. Rather than provide a 'Kantian' reading of Waltz, or a 'Waltzian' reading of Kant, I will set out as faithfully as possible, the reading of Kant that Waltz elaborates. The result, I hope, destabilises the categories of both 'Waltzian' and 'Kantian', while it presents Waltz's intentions on this score for the first time. On contexualist methods, see for example, Lamb 2009. On the history of political thought as critical theory, see Vigneswaran and Quirk 2010.

[15]Smith 1995.

[16]These 'images' are synoptic reconstructions of the causes of war in modern political theory. 'First image' theorists reduce the causes of war to human nature, 'second image' to the character of states, and 'third image' explanations for the causes of war refer to the relatively autonomous international anarchy.

[17]Waltz 1986, 2009.

[18]Though he did return to Kant in a French publication. See Waltz 1997b. The English original is Waltz 1996. I am grateful to Joseph MacKay for sharing his copy with me.

[19]This literature is ubiquitous and paradigmatic. See for example, Legro and Moravcsik 1999. Cf. Feaver *et al.* 2000.

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Donnelly's rejection of anarchy in IR inadvertently exposes the problems with this way of reducing Waltz to 'Waltzian IR'.[20]

Donnelly objects to what Buzan and Little have called IR's 'anarchophilia'.[21] Donnelly argues that the concept of anarchy does not appear in the disciplinary lexicon in any meaningful way prior to the publication of Waltz's seminal work in 1979, and that there is no obvious link between state of nature theories and the theory of anarchy that followed. Anarchy in 'Waltzian IR' is a much narrower concept, a 'demarcation criteria', a descriptive, not a normative concept, that describes a 'formless void' that results from the absence of government in the international order.[22] Anarchy has no causal properties, and no *sui generis* cultural characteristics. Following Alex Wendt Donnelly argues that anarchy should be understood as merely a context for action, and as such cannot explain anything, let alone the balance of power.[23] The explanations for the features of world politics that we take for granted today must come from elsewhere, not anarchy, he argues. Given the empirical and theoretical failure of 'anarchy' on these terms, it would be preferable for IR to return to the 'ordinary language concept [of anarchy] indicating disorder and lawlessness'. 'Waltzian IR' is 'at best, a dead end'.[24]

Others have offered more sympathetic and complementary accounts of the purpose of Waltz's IR theory. For example, Bressner and Guilhot have argued that Waltz's neo-realist liberalism was an attempt to rescue conservative liberal statism from Morgenthau's left republican internationalism.[25] LaRoche and Pratt distinguish Waltz from neorealism because of his grand-theoretic vision, and other such acts of intellectual rescue *from* 'neo-realism' exist across in the literature.[26] But none of these accounts link Waltz to Kant. Even Seán Molloy, who made two separate, highly sophisticated studies of modern realism and Kant, overlooked this connection.[27]

Far more common is for IR theorists to debate Kant's 'Waltzian' credentials, rather than Waltz's Kantianism. Waltz was guilty of this too, claiming that Kant was a 'thoroughgoing realist'.[28] Wade Huntley followed suit, explaining the more 'structural' elements in Kant's theory in 'Waltzian' terms.[29] Ewan Harrison went further to claim that Kant developed a 'Waltzian' scientific approach to world politics as well.[30] Martin Weber rightly objected to Harrison's claims on methodological grounds: reading a structural IR theory into history undermines both the historicity of the past and the present.[31]

[20]Donnelly 2015.

[21]Buzan and Little 2009, 207.

[22]Donnelly 2015, 25.

[23]Wendt 1992. See also Wohlforth *et al.* 2007.

[24]Donnelly 2015, 26.

[25]Bessner and Guilhot 2015. See also Shilliam 2007; Scheuerman 2012.

[26]LaRoche and Pratt 2018. See also Humphreys 2013; Blagden 2016; Wæver 2009; Jackson 2011, 112–114, 149–152; Joseph 2010; Brostrom 2016; Lechner 2017; Desch 2007; Shimko 1992.

[27]See Molloy 2006 and 2017, respectively.

[28]Cited in Scheuerman 2012, 468. This association of Kantian thought with 'realism' is a little cryptic, given Waltz's preference for 'neo-realist theory'.

[29]Huntley 1996.

[30]Harrison 2002, 2004.

[31]Weber 2003.

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Others have asked whether Waltz's writings were more akin to Kant's than he realised. For example, Nicholas Onuf has pointed out that Waltz's work mirrors Kant's in three ways: first, Waltz, like Kant, is a philosophical idealist; secondly, Waltz's use of '*as if*' models of human behaviour is distinctly Kantian (as I will discuss further below); and third, Waltz's conception of structure is, like Kant's 'radically constructivist', perhaps even more consistently so 'than Wendt is'. Onuf continues: 'If Waltz had ever considered fully the philosophical implications of his Kantian affinities, he might indeed have acknowledged how close he is to an updated constructivism.'[32] But Waltz *did* set out his Kantianism, and at length.

'Kantian' IR theory doesn't particularly help matters, and general understandings of it no doubt dissuade readers from seeing parallels in less paradigmatic readings of Kant. For example, most read Kant's works to defend what has come to be called the 'liberal peace thesis' and, more problematically, liberal imperialism. This interpretation is well known, has animated the discipline of IR for over 40 years, and was the object of Waltz's criticisms on many occasions.[33] Secondly, the analytical approach to international political theory is generally considered to have derived from Rawls's reading of Kant, and the conjoining of the two has resulted in the analytical strictures of ideal political theory. This tradition is largely a-historical, and certainly does not rely on any more or less authentic reading of Kant to proceed. This of course results in the ever-narrower reading of key texts in the history of political thought. For example, Thomas Doyle II has argued, on 'Kantian' normative and analytical grounds, that nuclear proliferation is defensible. But Waltz's nuclear spread argument, which I argue is Kantian, is presented by Doyle as Hobbesian, without any justification at all.[34] In Doyle's defence, such is the hold of these paradigmatic readings that no one requires any justification of them.

A smaller group caution that the liberal, analytical, even imperialist Kant, is not at all obvious in his published writings, and that Kant's international thought is far more conservative, and indebted to Rousseau and Hobbes. This results in a defensive, and far more cautious, sanguine, understanding of the possibility of *Zum Ewigen Freiden*, or 'perpetual peace'.[35] For example, As Susan Shell has argued at length, Kant was neither an 'idealist' nor a 'realist' in the way they are understood conventionally today, and his defence of a loose federation of autonomous free states was a riposte to the French Napoleonic and Jacobin universalism of the time.[36] This is but one recent intervention. But such is the extent of the revisionist literature on Kant, that Filkschuh and Ypi have recently argued that 'the least "Kantian" among current political philosophers and global theorists are often those working on Kant'.[37]

[32]Onuf, 2009, 195.

[33]For example, Doyle 1983a, 1983b, 1986; Williams 1992, 1996; Williams and Booth 1996. Waltz's criticisms are fleshed out below.

[34]Doyle II 2010, 88, n.3.

[35]Tuck 2001; Behnke 2008; Molloy 2017.

[36]Shell 2009, 214.

[37]Filkschuh and Ypi 2014, 8. See also Scruton 1982; Williams 1983; Flikschuh 2000; Tuck 2001; Muthu 2009; Shell 2009.

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If we acknowledge the secondary literature on Kant that Waltz cited, we can better account for what looks like a change of mind. Waltz attended the lectures of Franz Neumann, a prominent Frankfurt School Critical Theorist, while reading for his doctorate during the McCarthy era at Columbia,[38] and was a close reader of Hans Kelsen, a neo-Kantian jurist, as William Scheuermann has shown.[39] Waltz's sophisticated account of Kant's international theory runs throughout his dissertation. His objections are not to Kant per se, but the way in which his thinking has been interpreted and deployed. Waltz's references to Kant's key writings on international politics all come from the same source too: the Reverend William Hastie's 1891 translations, introduced by Edwin Mead.[40] Mead's introduction bore all the hallmarks of the brand of liberalism rejected by the discipline by 1945. It was also the text Martin Wight referred to when setting out his interpretation of Kant as a philosopher of the 'revolutionary' tradition of international theory.[41]

But, as is so often the case with doctoral research, a seminal text is published by a world-renowned expert, and through a popular press, immediately after final submission: in this case Stephen Körner's 'superb little book', *Kant*, published by Penguin 1955.[42] Körner's critical interpretation of Kant as a sceptic within limits redirected subsequent Anglo-American studies of Kant, and is central to Waltz's reappraisal of Kant in his 1962 *APSR* piece. However, Körner's book has almost nothing to say about the problems of international politics,[43] which makes Waltz's piece so original for that time.

Reconstructing Waltz's Kantianism

What if we ask a less anachronistic question: how and in what ways did Kant's thought shape Waltz's theory of international politics? In the following four sections I set out Kant's influence on Waltz's philosophy of science and epistemology, Waltz's account of the relation between epistemology and politics, between politics and morality, and then war and the philosophy of history. I close with an illustration of how each shaped his theory of horizontal nuclear proliferation.

Theory and epistemology

Before we get to the emancipatory politics of Waltz's theory, we must of course traverse his theory of theory, since this is arguably Waltz's most famous and contentious intervention in the development of IR. If Kant cannot be found here, there is little reason to suspect he can be found anywhere else. But he can, and the depth of engagement is striking.

[38]MacKay 2022, 346–47.

[39]Scheuermann 2012.

[40]Kant 1891; Mead 1914.

[41]Wight 1966, 44, n. 1. Carl Friedrich's 1948 book *Inevitable Peace* also comes in for some sardonic criticism: 'Let me acknowledge Kant's wisdom', writes Carl Friedrich, 'only the triumph of constitutional government will bring us peace in permanency. This is Kant's conclusion, if not his wisdom'. Waltz 1954, 273.

[42]Waltz 1962, 339, n. 49.

[43]Körner 1955.

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Waltz was a visiting fellow in the department of philosophy at the LSE in the early 1970s, a time when Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend, and Thomas Kuhn were having a very public set of disagreements about epistemology and the philosophy of science. Waltz was caught up in the intellectual ferment of this time. He too, he said, was driven by their concerns, but *not* by their solutions. As he put it: 'One might think that philosophers of science would begin by asking what theories are and how one makes them. Instead, they skip quickly to figuring out how theories can be tested. I decided to start at the beginning.'[44]

For Waltz, this began, as with Kant, with assumptions about the nature of reality itself. In his 1962 essay on Kant, Waltz sets out his sceptical anti-empiricism. Like Kant, Waltz made a categorical distinction between the real, phenomenal world, and the ideal, or what kant called the 'noumenal' realm. The former can only be interpreted by the latter, its meaning is not given to us. Meaning cannot be expressed directly by a thing, nothing's reality is self-contained within it, Kant argued. Likewise, and against empiricists like Hume, the 'constant conjunction of events' cannot in and of themselves tell us anything. We must interpret them using more or less plausible theoretical explanation. As Waltz put it: 'If we look at the world and see discrete events, we are overwhelmed by the chaos: each event without cause and all events without meaning. But if we look at the aggregate of events with a proper organizing principle in our minds, we may see in the chaos, order; in the welter of events, a plan of nature.'[45] The question Waltz then asked at the outset of *Theory of International Politics* was also Kant's: how do we derive knowledge about this chaotic world; how do we infuse it with meaning? Can our senses give us direct knowledge, or do we need to deploy reason to give the empirical world meaning?

Körner, who, as we have seen, was one of Waltz's key influences, argued that for Kant, 'Judging and perceiving are irreducibly different. In this he is opposed both to his rationalist predecessors, for whom perceiving was a kind of low-grade judging, and to his empiricist teachers [e.g., Hume], who were inclined to assimilate judging to perceiving. Kant expresses the sharp distinction between judging and perceiving as between two distinct faculties of the mind: understanding and sense.'[46] Waltz follows the same path and dismisses what he calls the 'inductivist illusion', that the facts can speak for themselves.[47] To make sense of the world it is necessary to develop theories, which are only a collection of statements that are logically coherent and help explain complex patterns in the empirical world around us. Theories can and should be amended as new evidence comes to light. Kant called these sorts of statements about the world, statements informed by empirical data, synthetic *aprioris*, but they are not theories, only claims. This position, as Waltz put it, is 'less sceptical than the British empiricists, but deeply sceptical nonetheless'.[48]

[44]Waltz 2009, 501. In his response to John Vasquez's reading of Lakatos and Kuhn, Waltz reaffirmed his Kantian idealism, through the claim that theories merely provide a set of ideas that can guide scholarship, they do not necessarily have to predict or explain anything in the real world. See Waltz 1997a.

[45]Waltz 1962, 335.

[46]Körner 1955, 30.

[47]Waltz 1979, 4.

[48]Waltz, 1954, 292.

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This broad distinction between the empirical and the ideal, or the phenomenal and the noumenal realm in Kant's formulation, is what drives Waltz's famous philosophy of science in the opening pages of *Theory of International Politics*. As he puts it on page five '[n]othing is ever both empirical and absolutely true, a proposition established by Immanuel Kant and now widely accepted at least by natural scientists […] If we could directly apprehend the world that interests us, we would have no need for theory.'[49] In fact, theories, Waltz argues, are 'creative', born of 'intuition' conveying a 'sense' of things: theory building is art and/as science.

Waltz argues that theories have four roles: 'isolation', 'abstraction', 'aggregation', and 'idealisation'.[50] It is this latter role that is quintessentially Kantian, and central to Waltz's theory of international politics. It is because we do not act 'automatically', 'like bees and beavers', producing 'predicable' 'patterns of behaviour', Waltz argues, and because the world does not present itself to us unmediated by our senses or our consciousness, that we must *idealise*.[51] Idealisation is unavoidable. Idealisation is the rational, that is, noumenal, production of meaning about the world, and for Kant and Waltz is a fact of life, of consciousness, and wholly internal and individual.

Moreover, Waltz is adamant that the reality or existence of a thing is immaterial to theory. Following Kant, Waltz argued that existence is not a necessary predicate of reason, which means that whether something exists or not adds nothing to our understanding of the meaning of a thing, Kant argues. This aversion to ontology, central to Kant's transcendental and critical idealism, can also be attributed to the historic complicity of ontology in debates around the existence or otherwise of God, which Kant avoided for that reason (more on this below). De-ontology, the basis of Kantian ethics, denies the moral salience of the real world. Only reason can give us firm ideas of right and wrong.

Waltz's Kantian deontologising of politics was a similar attempt to divorce theory from the mechanical, Newtonian, or 'phenomenal' world. If the real world was mechanical, it left no room for free will. While Waltz may have appreciated Durkheim's *theory* of state development, he nevertheless makes a categorical distinction between Durkheimian 'social facts' and the necessary 'reification' of concepts like 'anarchy' on precisely these terms. In a private communication with Justin Rosenberg, Waltz suggests that the reification of concepts is a necessary part of theory building. Claiming anarchy is real, in the Durkheimian or philosophical sense, is an ontological and inductive step too far.[52] In other words, whether there is a real world or not makes no difference to the development of theories about it.[53]

[49]Waltz 1979, 5. A recent special issue of *Kantian Review* (28(3), 2003), surveys developments in Kantian philosophy of science.

[50]Waltz 1979, 9.

[51]Waltz 1962, 335. Kant also uses the example of 'bees and beavers' in his *Idea of a Universal History With Cosmopolitan Intent*. See Kant 1991, 42.

[52]Waltz 2005. Rosenberg of course disagrees with Waltz's aversion to ontology, and his theory of 'multiplicity' is an attempt to ontologise anarchy along Trotskyist lines. I am grateful to Professor Rosenberg for sharing this correspondence with me. Cf. Prichard 2018.

[53]Compare this idealism with Bhaskar's (1989) 'transcendental critical realism'. The latter provides a realist and ontological corrective to Kant. See also Agar 2005; Joseph 2010.

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Theories may not be true or false, but we have to work 'as if' the theories are true. In Körner's reading of Kant, this 'as if' principle is 'the supreme maxim of method'.[54] For Waltz and Kant, theories have to be useful, and put into practice, and even though they cannot be true, we must treat them as if they're true just to get out of bed in the morning.[55] The critical reflection it takes to revise pure reason through our activities in the world is what stops theory becoming whimsical, abstract, or solipsistic reflection. As Waltz says, it is difficult to envisage scientific practice that does take proceed 'as if' its hypotheses were true. But that doesn't mean they are.[56]

Waltz, like Kant, also warns against the 'deductivist fallacy': the idea that reason can tell us anything independent of facts. The critical use of reason emerges after a 'creative idea has emerged', and then from using both deduction and induction 'in combination': a 'synthetic *apriori*'.[57] The point of theory is not to more closely approximate reality. As Waltz put it in 'Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory': 'To achieve "closeness of fit" would negate theory'.[58] 1:1 scale maps are useless. If we cannot rely on materiality for meaning, we cannot shy from the hermeneutic problem of the complexity of meaning. Trying to 'turn the problem of meaning into the technical one of making terms operational […] won't help', Waltz says.[59] As the distinguished comparativist, Giovanni Sartori put it a decade previously, 'operational definitions generally entail a drastic curtailment of meaning for they can only maintain those meanings that comply with the operationist requirement'.[60] Reducing meaning to what you need to make sense of the world is counterproductive, because the reductionism takes you away from your goal. Waltz was fully aware therefore, that words, concepts, and theories convey meaning, that meaning is hermeneutic, and defined by the syntactical structure of the sentences of which they are a part. They are also part of the world and are developed in communication with observation. But at root, '[t]heories not only define terms; they also specify the operations they can rightly perform'.[61] As Popper conceded, language, conceptual or otherwise, fundamentally shapes the scientific endeavour.[62] In other words, prevailing theories (or ideologies) shape our understanding of the world by constraining the normal language we might use to describe it. Even though Popper is only discussed in *Theory of International Politics* with reference to the errors of falsification, his later-Wittgenstein approach to language is also

[54]Körner 1955, 124.

[55]Waltz 1979, 6.

[56]Waltz, like Kant, seemingly tries to have his cake and eat it too. It is not because Waltz does not want to consider difficult countervailing evidence that he rejects 'falsification', but because all theories will ultimately be proved wrong. The point is not 'can it be falsified', but how 'fruitful' it is in particular time and place. Waltz 1997a, 914. For more on Waltz's theory of theory, see Wæver 2009, Jackson 2011.

[57]Waltz 1979, 11.

[58]Waltz 1990, 31.

[59]Sartori 1970, Waltz 1979, 11.

[60]Sartori 1970, 1045. Recent years has seen a return to concept analysis in IR and political theory, though this has had little impact on more empirical approaches to political science. See, for example, Freeden 1996; Berenskötter 2016, 2017.

[61]Waltz 1979, 12.

[62]Naraniecki 2010, 518–20.

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central to his neo-Kantian objection to logical positivism.[63] In sum, Waltz seems to be arguing, like Paul Feyerabend,[64] that epistemology has no Archimedean point of authority, because meaning is anarchic. From this point of view, Waltz shared an epistemology and broad philosophy of science with the poststructuralists and constructivists, but he didn't acknowledge it.[65]

Moving on, for Waltz, theory is a synthetic idealisation, a profoundly creative generalisation,[66] and 'variables' are simply a synonym for 'terms' of the theory, rather than the formal way in which the term is used in neo-positivist theory.[67] As he says, 'The trick, obviously, is to link theoretical concepts with a few variables in order to contrive explanations from which hypotheses can be inferred and tested.'[68] But bear in mind that this is literally a 'trick'. The truth of a theory, or the meaning of empirical regularities, remains beyond objective science. The theory of gravity had to be invented and refined, and reinvented too, and in the case of quantum theory, long before anyone could 'see' anything.

But how does all this relate to anarchy? Kant argued that 'If we review our knowledge in its entire extent, we shall find that the peculiar business of reason is to arrange it into a system, that is to say, to give it connection according to a principle.'[69] In Waltz's work, as is well known, and as I will elaborate below, anarchy is this regulative ideal, principle, or creative intuition. For example, the 'idea' of the state of nature was simply that. Likewise the idea of God was crucial for Kant, even if he objected to debates about whether God existed or not: 'The idea of a Supreme Being' he argues, 'is in many respects a highly useful idea; but for the very reason that it is an idea, it is incapable of enlarging our knowledge with regard to the existence of things'.[70] Ideas like God perform important regulative roles in society 'although only from the practical point of view' (a point I will develop soon).[71] Reflecting on what Kant is doing with this theory, Waltz observes that, 'The unknowability of noumena, the limitations placed on pure reason, do not, from this point of view, lead Kant to scepticism. He simply gives to man in the form of practical reason, or will, what he has denied to him in the form of pure reason. We are forced to assume progress, an immortal soul, a God.'[72] Put slightly differently, Kant argues that questioning whether God exists generates rational insight, enlightenment even, but it cannot finally disprove God's existence. This doesn't make the idea of God any less significant. For Kant, and Waltz who follows him here, ideas are regulative ideals and through their interrogation and influence on individual and collective practice, shape history.

Waltz's antinomic approach to concepts is also quintessentially Kantian. Rather than the truth or falsity of concepts being *sui generis*, their meaning is derived in

[63]Waltz 1979, 123.
[64]Feyerabend 1975.
[65]See Lundborg 2019.
[66]Waltz 1962, 332. Cf. Kant 1993, on the vanities of speculative metaphysics.
[67]Ibid., 13, 14.
[68]Ibid., 17.
[69]Kant 1993, 435.
[70]Ibid., 429.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Waltz 1954, 291.

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opposition to their antinomy, or opposite. For example, good and evil are not things which we can determine from the evidence, since the evidence is highly contextual, but rather needs to be compared in the ideal. Good and evil must be counterposed to one another, theories about their necessary or sufficient conditions posited, and then used to assess the real (and vice versa). As Roger Scruton put it in a memorable turn of phrase, 'these antinomies are not to be lightly dismissed as errors no sooner perceived than forgone. The assumption of totality which generates them is both the cause and effect of all that is most serious in science.'[73]

Anarchy's antinomy in Waltz's theory is, of course, hierarchy. These two political ideals have a singular 'principle' of their organisation,[74] he argues, and that is the presence or absence of 'legitimate and competent government'.[75] The functions and capabilities of actors in these two systems can be posited without a statement about ordering principles, but it would simply be a descriptive enterprise not a theoretical one, he says. Waltz elaborates that anarchic orders are necessarily 'self-help' orders, and in international relations the primary units are states (Waltz later includes gangs, criminal organisations and so forth).[76] These must rely on their own means and wits for the realisation of their freedom, their security and any common good. He contrasts this with a Durkheimian view of functionally organised orders, namely hierarchical ones, in which organisations and bureaucracies develop roles that facilitate the smooth operation and continuity of the specialist skills of others.[77] Then, in classically Weberian style, Waltz observes that hierarchic orders are hugely problematic: the struggle for 'control of the controllers'[78] precipitates the endless struggles for political power that is the hallmark of politics. But this is just a theory.

Epistemology and politics

Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* has been interpreted as both a paradigmatic case of value-free social scientific analysis of world politics, and an *implicitly* normative account of the way the world ought to be. The reality is that Waltz, like Kant, saw no necessary distinction between epistemology and politics: good science ought to lead to better politics, and vice versa. What I want to show in this section is how Waltz accepts and deploys the deeply political nature of epistemology. Morality is discussed in more depth in the section to follow.

First, let's go back to Kant. As Körner shows, there are two types of 'Ideas' for Kant, theoretical and practical ones. Practical ideas unconnected to a theory cannot be said to be generalisable: they are just unthinking actions. But if your maxim of

[73]Scruton 1982, 50.

[74]Waltz 1979, 82.

[75]Ibid., 114.

[76]See Waltz 1990.

[77]Typically, Waltz's state theory has been defined as Durkheimian and this too has generated considerable debate. See Barkdull 1995; Donnelly 2012; Albert and Buzan 2013. But Waltz was not an ontological realist and would have rejected Durkheim's conception of 'social facts'. Nevertheless, his theory of social development, and the complex division of labour, clearly shaped Waltz's state theory. There is some crossover between Kant and Durkheim, though explaining this is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for example, Garlitz 2020.

[78]Waltz 1979, 111.

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behaviour can be universalised, then it can be said that there is a unity between theory and practice.[79] The most famous iteration of this is of course Kant's categorical imperative, the claim that maxims of moral behaviour must be determined 'according to a possible and general law'.[80]

Policy options cannot be derived from the evidence alone. For the idealist, regularities in the evidence can only be identified theoretically, which is to say in the ideal, which makes policy fundamentally ideological (from this point of view). Laws 'identify invariant or probable associations', but, he continues, '[t]heories show why those associations obtain'. In other words, '[t]heories explain laws'.[81]

The state of nature theory is a paradigm example of an ideal theory that explains the so-called laws of the jungle, and is a paradigm case of the relationship between epistemology, and politics. It has also guided politicians for centuries. Waltz's theory of anarchy is his own modern iteration. For Hobbes, who Kant and Waltz both follow, material insecurity in the state of nature is secondary, even caused by a prior and more philosophically significant epistemic uncertainty. Which religion is true? Which form of society is right? Hobbes argued, in Maloney's words, that '[s]avages lived as they did because they suffered from the effects of intellectual anarchy', which caused them to be regularly at war.[82] For Hobbes, without a sovereign power to determine the meanings of words, to legislate for right and wrong, anarchy prevails. Likewise for Kant: the Scottish Enlightenment, in particular Hume's radical scepticism, and the Old World-shattering exploits of Napoleon Bonaparte, demanded the affirmation of reason.[83] Kant pinned his hopes on 'moral politicians', individuals guided by an aspiration to reason and the moral law.[84] Outside the state of nature (an 'as if' of civilizational proportions), in well governed republics, the dictates of the sovereign, being in line with the moral law and demonstrably rational, demand absolute fealty.[85] In other words, the theory of the state of nature, or anarchy, operates as epistemology and politics at the same time. As Waltz puts it in his discussion of Kant in *Man, the State and War*, the state releases us from 'uncertainty' as well as 'violence'.[86]

While Waltz discusses the state of nature theory at length, unfortunately the snippet on Rousseau's stag hunt 'allegory' has dominated the subsequent secondary literature, and is a further distraction from Waltz's fundamentally Kantian politics.[87] Rousseau's stag hunt 'allegory' is extremely 'useful', Waltz argues because it gives an idea of the problem of politics, not because it offers any account of the truth or reality of the world in which we live.[88] So the allegory goes, the material

[79]Körner 1955, 136.

[80]Kant, cited in Waltz 1962, 332. See Kant 1964.

[81]Waltz 1979, 5, 6.

[82]Moloney 2011, 196. See also Williams 1996.

[83]But Kant's sexism led him to believe that women were unable to be free since they were the slaves of their passions. For example, Mendus 1992.

[84]Kant 2006, 96, 101.

[85]Nicholson 1976.

[86]Waltz 1959, 163 (emphasis added).

[87]Tuck 2001 remains arguably one of the best syntheses of the ideas of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, and the influence of the former two on the latter.

[88]Waltz 1959, 192.

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impulse to satisfy immediate need trumps the long-term collaboration needed to hunt a stag. In the absence of the state, defection is inevitable, self-help a necessity, and anarchy a structural product of human social interaction (but not of nature, for Rousseau at least). What Kant fails to recognise in this, according to Waltz's materialist reading of Rousseau here, is that 'conflict is a by-product of competition and […] cooperation',[89] and that this renders the categorical imperative fundamentally flawed. As he puts it later, 'the absence of an effective decision making authority' at the global level is a key problem for those, like Kant, committed to universal conceptions of justice: tendencies towards protectionism by states were a case in point.[90] In *Man, The state and War*, Waltz disparages Kant, arguing that the hope that 'republics […] will act in accordance with the categorical imperative', is naïve:[91] 'war occurs because there is nothing to prevent it'.[92]

But in the appendix to his PhD thesis, Waltz argued something quite different. Here, and in his 1962 *APSR* piece, Waltz argues that the categorical imperative is an *aspiration* of the moral law, not an objective reality, and it is the striving for it that develops good politics, not its realisation: even a band of 'devils' will see the logic of forming a state to mutually regulate their interactions, but this doesn't mean their state will ever be fully realised, or objectively good. Moral politicians, on the other hand, can at least aspire to perpetual peace and the categorial imperative, because neither are in principle 'an impossibility'.[93] In *Man, The State and War*, Waltz claims that Kant repeats Spinoza's error, which was to suggest that if we all reasoned alike, harmony would prevail in anarchy – an argument that 'leads to anarchism', he thought.[94] But three years later, he had changed his mind. There he writes, '[Kant] has, as many liberals do not, an appreciation of politics as struggle, an idea of possible equilibrium not as simple and automatic harmony but always as something perilously achieved out of conflict'.[95] In adopting this agonistic account of politics, Waltz accepts that the republic will always be '*dissoluble*',[96] at least in principle, for two important political reasons. First, for reason, law, and right to be realised, they must be struggled for. If they were automatic or natural 'as for bees and beavers', they could not be rational in the Kantian sense. Secondly, it is because we struggle for what is right, and that ideas about right change, that politics is a never ending struggle guided by contingent and routinely universalised ideals.

Politics and morality

Waltz's political ethics are fully in keeping with a wider tradition that Michael Williams calls 'wilful realism'. While Waltz does not feature in Williams' discussion of realist ethics, we can already see synergies between Waltz and the wider realist tradition, in so far as he too believed that there 'are no obvious foundations – no

[89]Ibid., 171.
[90]Ibid., 190.
[91]Ibid., 164, n8; 171.
[92]Ibid., 159.
[93]Waltz 1954, 295.
[94]Waltz 1959, 23, 115.
[95]Waltz 1962, 339. Ironically, this summary is in fact closer to anarchism than the stereotype he supported three years earlier. See, for example, Proudhon 2022 [1861].
[96]Kant, cited in Waltz 1962, 337.

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"natural" or essential structures of either the self or the political order' which begs the question of 'how is one to achieve a politics of responsibility?'[97] For Waltz, statism and anarchy mutually generate this ethic, but unlike his forebears, Waltz sees the priority in defending anarchy rather than necessarily the state.

The first substantive discussion of the concept of anarchy in any of Waltz's writings begins on page 111 of *Theory of International Politics*. His opening claim here is that anarchy is a 'virtue'.[98] It certainly isn't a virtue in the sense that it is a character trait, like honesty or bravery. As Körner shows, Kant objected to this model of ethics. For Kant, our actions should be 'for the sake of duty' to a generalisable law. In other words, it is not moral to blindly follow rules, or to copy the law-abiding behaviour of others, but it is moral to act because that is the rationally correct way to act. It must, therefore, be in line with 'the subjective principle of action'.[99] As Waltz puts it in relation to the balance of power: 'The further distortion of the theory [of the balance of power] arises when rules are derived from the results of states' actions and then *illogically* prescribed to the actors as duties.'[100] Do not 'mistake a theory of international politics for a theory of foreign policy', he continues (Waltz 1979, 120). This statement is usually interpreted as a statement of analytical levels, which it may well be, but it is also fundamentally normative in a Kantian sense: balance of power theory generates the virtue of responsibility.

The assumptions, or what Jackson calls the 'wagers' of epistemology,[101] and the ideological explanations of empirical laws, are the chassis of a Kantian ethics. Only action that is in accordance with the duty imposed on you by reason is moral. The injunction 'thou shalt not kill' is rational because you cannot generalise its opposite as a moral law without obliterating reason itself (and people of course). The maxims of morality are in 'accordance' with duty when they can plausibly guide action ('the subjective principle of action').[102] In short, science is vital to good, moral practice. Get the first wrong and the second follows suit (and vice versa).

Leaning on Kant, Waltz counsels prudence and restraint, or 'balancing' and 'bandwagoning', not outright conflict, or what Mearsheimer calls 'offensive realism'.[103] The former is a principle that can be rationally universalised, the latter is not. These arguments are most clearly set out in 'Kant, Liberalism and War', published in the same year that the US tripled its ground forces in Indochina, and 'The Politics of Peace' published five years later.[104] Read together with Waltz's critical reflections on the neo-Wilsonianism of Michael Doyle (2000), these pieces are explicitly anti-War, and anti-imperialist, on Kantian grounds.[105]

Let's unpack this in a little more detail. In the first three pages of *Kant, Liberalism and War*, Waltz sets out what he sees as the three fundamental princi-

[97]Williams 2005, 171.
[98]Waltz 1979,111.
[99]Körner 1955, 131, 132.
[100]Waltz 1979, 120, emphasis added.
[101]Jackson 2011.
[102]Körner 1955, 132.
[103]Mearsheimer 2001.
[104]Waltz 1967.
[105]See Waltz 1997b, 2000.

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ples of Kant's ethics.[106] He argues, first, that freedom is relative to consciously established political orders, and not an absolute universal value, he then argues that the maxims of moral law have no necessary content, and that they can be pursued in different ways in different political contexts (but not without some form of political context); and finally, that individuals are ends in themselves. Whether the first is a correct interpretation of Kant's universalism need not detain us here. More importantly, if there can be no objective grounding to morality, but by virtue of our universal dignity, all humans are ends not means, then freedom must be grounded on socially agreed rules that recognise and presuppose the equal dignity of all. Waltz's reading of Kant is fundamentally communitarian in this respect, and a defence of practical ethics, one which is less common in the wider analytical Kantian literature, but nevertheless has highly regarded modern Kantian defenders.

Onora O'Neill, one of the foremost Kantian scholars of her generation, is a defender of this neo-Aristotelian interpretation of Kant's theory of ethics. She argued that Kant's practical reason is elaborated most clearly in broadly the same five texts that animated Waltz: *Religion within the limits of reason alone*; *Contest of the Faculties*; *Perpetual Peace*; *On the popular saying 'This may be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice'*; and *Groundwork to the Metaphysics of Morals*. O'Neill argues that therein one finds an account of Kant that is decidedly un-Kantian by more modern standards, if by Kantianism we assume an aversion to the virtues and to Aristotle. 'However', she says, 'it is less obvious whether or how far […these anti-Aristotelian forms of Kantianism] apply to Kant's ethics'.[107] Waltz would have agreed wholeheartedly.

Waltz's account of the virtues follows O'Neill's very closely indeed, surprising as that may seem. Waltz, like O'Neill, observes that Kant understood the maxims of ethics, such as the categorical imperative, as a subjective theory of ethics that could guide political action, and an ideal standard against which to measure it: the injunction to do the right thing is not dictated by pragmatism, or circumstance, but by reason.[108] In the face of empirical uncertainty and the inability of the human mind to fathom the complexity of nature directly, the maxims of ethics are supremely useful, but can only ever be contingent. The categorical imperative, for example, is an idea towards which we must aspire, but are fated never to realise. The upshot of this reliance on ideology is that good moral counsel demands prudence, virtue, and the development of 'practical reason', or *phronesis*.

In Waltz's writings, anarchy operates in the same sort of way as the categorical imperative works for Kant's. Recall that for Waltz anarchy is not *real*, but it can be universalised since the ethical principle is a non-interference principle that rests on, presupposes, and reinforces, the sovereign equality of all actors. While the international domain may be free of law, for Waltz, and international law little more than the will of the powerful, nevertheless, the condition of anarchy presses actors to mutually recognise one another in this way to avoid perpetual war. For Waltz, anarchy, like a state of nature in Kant's thought, is a mutual condition of insecurity, that, if understood correctly, can and should breed trust and cooperation between

[106]Waltz 1962, 331–33.
[107]O'Neill 1998, 77.
[108]Waltz 1954, 294–5; Waltz 1962, 332.

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groups, trust that their mutual vulnerability, and assured destruction in the case of nuclear war, will lead them to see that reason lies in mutual restraint (see below for more on this). Waltz's defensive realism is Kantian in this respect, in so far as it is predicated on a principle of deterrence in defence of the republic.

But beyond this principle of self-defence, war is in and of itself materially and psychologically efficacious for both Kant and Waltz. As the *First Supplement* of *Perpetual Peace* makes clear, war is the principle means by which humans came to understand the moral law, first by escaping violence and thereby becoming 'scattered', then by forcing them into political relations with one another as communities once more.[109] War *produces* republican constitutions by compelling people to work together to find the ideal form of political community through which to defend themselves from others. As Kant famously put it: 'Establishing a state, as difficult as it may sound, is a problem that can be solved even for a nation of devils (if only they possess understanding).'[110] Differences, which might lead to 'mutual hatred', are natural and necessary for human psychological, moral, and political development. Nature, in this case war, 'does this with a certainty that is not sufficient to foretell the future of this peace (theoretically), but which is adequate from a practical perspective and makes it a duty to work toward this (not simply chimerical) goal'.[111] For Kant, 'peace among human beings can be brought forth from the warlike state of nature',[112] but only if everyone understands the rationality of this theory in similar ways.

Unfortunately, because we don't all reason identically, or 'automatically', what is required for the pursuance of justice and order in anarchy, as Kant elaborates in the first appendix to *Perpetual Peace*, is 'moral politicians' who understand 'political prudence' in accordance with a wider moral law.[113] These individuals are guided by better theory, in Waltz's terms. But to argue that these individuals are the harbingers of war or peace would be a reductionist argument Waltz disavows. The causal logic works the other way: the international anarchy causes statesmen to act in particular ways. As he put it in a lecture in 1999, 'In the state of nature, as Kant put it, there is no "mine and thine". States turn possession into property and thus make saving, production and prosperity possible.'[114] Contrary to liberal ideology, Waltz notes that this process of economic development does not bring peace, nor does it usher in any inevitable equality. In fact, it breeds the conditions for all sorts of future conflicts. But it is the management of this conflict, and the pursuit of peace, that generates enlightenment. As Waltz puts it: 'The most important causes of peace, as of war, are found in international-political conditions, including the weaponry available to states.'[115] And this weaponry has to be paid for, managed, sustained, and updated.

In a nuclear stalemate, however, anarchy becomes the norm of international affairs, and states are compelled to find other ways of managing their affairs than

[109]Kant 2006, 88–9.
[110]Ibid., 90.
[111]Ibid., 92.
[112]Ibid., 100.
[113]Ibid., 96.
[114]Waltz 1999, 697.
[115]Ibid., 698.

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through open warfare.[116] The balance of power becomes a series of socialisation processes that are 'induced by the system'. If external stimuli are understood in the same way, 'we should find widespread imitation among competing states', he posits.[117] His example is 'Chicherin, who personified the carefully tailored traditional diplomat rather than the simply uniformed revolutionary, […] refrain[ed] from inflammatory rhetoric for the sake of working deals'.[118] By reforming the Soviet identity, Chicherin was able to become pragmatic, responsible, and engage with the Soviet Union's 'ideological enemy, Germany'.[119] Anarchy breeds peace, Waltz says.

Pragmatism and an ethic of responsibility is the most sensible political and moral strategy in anarchy, and will lead to pacification, Waltz argues. 'The fate of each state depends on its responses to what other states do. The possibility that conflict will be conducted by force produces a tendency towards the sameness of the competitors […] And so the weapons of the major contenders, and even their strategies, begin to look much the same all over the world.' This pragmatism is the effect of '[s]ocialisation' in international anarchy, and those who resist will be compelled to balance that power or bandwagon.[120] A rational moral law is useful, he says, 'and […] to follow it is not necessarily impossible', it's just improbable.[121] All of this is prefigured in the final line of Waltz's PhD thesis: 'Both moral behavior and perpetual peace are logical necessities to man. Our reward, however, is not in the attainment of either, but in the struggle for both.'[122]

War and the philosophy of history

One of the standard criticisms of Waltz's work, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, was that it lacked a theory of change.[123] But read from this Kantian point of view, a different, highly determinist philosophy of history emerges. This philosophy of history becomes more visible if we reconstruct it on Kantian, theological grounds. It is also a vital piece in the reconstruction of Waltz's nuclear spread argument, which we will turn to in the next, final section.

Waltz's pays close attention to Kant's theodicy.[124] What interests him is the rationally providential account of how good can come of evil, or how republics emerge from war. Bear in mind that *Perpetual Peace* was first published in 1796, the year Prussia ceded the left bank of the Rhine to Napoleon's forces, before he then went on to annex Poland. Had God abandoned his rational progeny, Kant

[116]Biao Zhang has characterised this as 'axiological reason'. Developing Waever's insight that Waltz was distinctly constructivist, Zhang argues that for Waltz states are not cultural dopes, responding unthinkingly to external material stimuli. Rather, states respond to and are guided by a plethora of ideals. The presumption of anarchy helps orient statesmen: 'anarchy is itself a rule of the game', Zhang argues. Zhang 2014, 292. See also, Onuf and Klink 1989.

[117]Waltz, 1979, 126; see also Waltz, 1979, 124.

[118]Ibid., 128.

[119]Ibid.

[120]Ibid., 127.

[121]Waltz, 1962, 339.

[122]Waltz 1954, 296.

[123]For example, Ruggie 1986.

[124]Waltz 1954, 1962, 1997b.

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asked? God commanded that 'There shall be no war. Yet', as Waltz continues, 'without war in the past, men now would be feeble types sheltering in caves and feeding on nuts and berries'.[125] Central to Kant's philosophy of history and his political anthropology is the claim that it is *in* states that man is made and bettered, not *by* them: 'The civil state made changes in man's behavior possible; it was not the other way around',[126] and the primary motor of this improvement is war and international relations, which necessitated the emergence of reason. Against the Marxist theories of imperialism, Waltz argues that 'the reasons for the material well-being of rich states are found within their own borders – in their use of technology and in their ability to organise their economies on a national scale'.[127]

The philosophy of history is clear, however: wars, if they are to be won, must be justified, with people rallied to the cause, and they must be paid for. If any of these fails, so too does the republic. Hence, internal development, good organisation, restraint, and caution are the eternal counsel, even while war with your neighbour is the likely consequence of the founding of a successful republic. But, Waltz observes, 'Kant, in contrast to Mazzini and Woodrow Wilson, is a non-interventionist liberal', and rejected the idea of an imperialism for the sake of peace. 'He [Kant] fears that such a state, once achieved, would be a greater evil than the wars it is designed to eliminate. It could so easily become a terrible despotism, stifle liberty, kill initiative, and in the end lapse into anarchy'[128] (the bad sort).

Seventeen years later, in *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz restates Kant's theory of *Perpetual Peace*, but in terms of international anarchy. 'If freedom is wanted', Waltz claims, 'insecurity must be accepted'.[129] Since, by this schema, freedom is only possible within states, not without them, and a world state would be an invitation to global civil war, then the bipolar balance of power, which is a product of nuclear insecurity, is the only way to enable development within states, and their freedom vis-a-vis one another. 'If might decides', he continues at the foot of the same paragraph, 'then bloody conflicts over right can be more easily avoided'.[130] This might be understood as pacification necessitated by anarchy. It does not matter whether anarchy is real; we must 'act on the supposition of its being real' by 'adopting the maxim of action that will guide us in working incessantly for it; for it is a duty to do this'.[131] For Kant, the minimalist confederalism of perpetual peace is important to hope for, even if it 'may always remain but a pious wish'. In the meantime, pacification will have to do.[132]

Anarchy, practical reason, and the spread of nuclear weapons

In this final section, I want to pull together the threads of the exegesis to illustrate how Waltz's Kantian moral philosophy works in practice. Central to this is the way

[125]Waltz 1962, 336.
[126]Ibid., 337.
[127]Waltz 1979, 33.
[128]Ibid.
[129]Ibid., 112.
[130]Ibid.
[131]Waltz 1962, 339.
[132]Ibid. Cf. Baron et al 2019.

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in which anarchy, as a regulative ideal, shapes the world around us and guides politics in ways that are more in accord with the universal moral law than they would otherwise be. I also want to show (but not overemphasise) the coherence of Waltz's Kantian theory over the course of his output, and its presence in arguably the most contentious of all Waltz's highly contentious interventions in IR theory and global public policy: his defence of horizontal nuclear spread.

Waltz's belief that nuclear weapons could be a pacifying force in world politics has caused huge debate and consternation. It goes without saying that if Waltz had characterised his position on nuclear weapons as explicitly Kantian and providentialist, at least in principle, he would have received a quite different reception to the one he did, and doubtless even more fraught. Nevertheless, that is his implied strategy.

In his (in)famous *Adelphi Paper*,[133] which was originally a report for the CIA, Waltz theorises the reasons why nuclear states would be less likely to be martial and/or belligerent. First, the struggle to develop nuclear weapons is a lengthy, time-consuming business and will slow down arms races, making war less likely over the long term. Secondly, developing a nuclear capability requires a stable state, *not* one in which planners, technicians, and engineers are continually compelled to defend themselves from competing military factions, or where politicians must continually defend the polity's fragile political gains. Third, unstable states with nuclear capabilities will not see the use of nuclear weapons as a rational, proportional, responsible solution to their declining status or internal conflicts. And fourth, Waltz argues that retaliation in the event of deliberate targeting or misfiring would be unlikely: nuclear warheads are a lose-lose weapon that stabilises the bipolar balance of power.[134]

These arguments are well known and have been vociferously debated in the literature,[135] but for our purposes it is the second reason that needs most attention. Waltz argues on broadly Kantian lines that the internal development of states, and then what Wendt, following Hedley Bull, characterised as 'the culture of anarchy',[136] is driven by the demands on states to effectively signal to others to avoid using nuclear weapons.

Waltz argues that nuclear weapons impose restraint and responsibility internally and externally, *and* demand state development. Considered rationally, the possession of nuclear weapons, he argues, ought to remove the need to acquire territory to feed and sustain conventional forces, and would encourage others to protect similar absolute gains rather than risk them for relative ones, which recede in importance in the face of nuclear spread.[137] Whether neighbouring countries are ruled by bloodthirsty zealots or not, the threat of mutually assured destruction makes states risk-calculators, and risk is calculated by the possibility or otherwise of the loss of domestic political power. This is not a feature of anyone's race or culture (as he puts it, '[a]s is usual with ethnocentric views, speculation takes the place

[133]Waltz 1981.
[134]Ibid., 2–3.
[135]Sagan and Waltz 1995.
[136]Wendt 1999, 246–312.
[137]Waltz 1981, 6.

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of evidence'[138]) but rather that material conditions, and the desire to protect gains and resources (or anarchy), imposes constraints regardless of who you are. Waltz claimed, wrongly as it turned out, that development aid for Israeli nuclear projects would strengthen Israel's 'legitimate borders' *and* breed 'independence' from US aid, with the effect that regional security becomes stabilised.[139] Thirty years later, Waltz doubles down. Iran should 'get the bomb', he argues, because the 'decades-long Middle East nuclear crisis […] will end only when a balance of military power is restored'.[140]

Reality to one side, Waltz continues that '[u]ncertainty about the course a nuclear war might follow, along with the certainty that destruction can be immense, strongly inhibits the first use of nuclear weapons'.[141] In other words, overwhelming force pacifies, not unilaterally, but through a rational calculation of the risks involved with initiating a first nuclear strike with an inevitably incomplete understanding of one's adversary's second strike capability: crucially, it is not the quantity of weapons, nor necessarily their power that determines their use, but whether the first strike can be guaranteed to knock out your opponents' ability to retaliate. If this cannot be assured, which it cannot, of course, then the risk of mutually assured destruction is more or less guaranteed, and the opponent's deterrence threat practically insurmountable. This deterrence threat needs only to be well hidden, or, say, housed on practically invisible but very expensive submarines. The uncertainty this generates 'make strategy obsolete'.[142] As Kant might well have foreseen, the production of the ultimate weapon results in the rational reluctance to use it.[143]

While much of the subsequent debate on horizontal spread has focused on accidents, the failure of deterrence and so on, the underlying sociology of state development has gained less attention, despite being more significant from Waltz's Kantian point of view. Absent developed states, nuclear proliferation can't take place at all, and nuclear war is less likely between developed states who can muster the deterrence capability. Waltz theorises that the budget, expertise, command and control systems, and public buy-in for such vast endeavours are what makes developed states cohesive and hierarchical. But once nuclear states have been established, the costs of war are exponentially higher, and the permanence of the international anarchy is baked in.

Kant might have objected that these are all claims that are an ontological step too far: perhaps there is too much here that is determined by the material conditions of military production, and not enough derived from reason. Indeed, drawing on the then unpublished work of Steven Van Evera, Waltz's Kantian philosophy of history becomes decidedly materialist, even technologically deterministic.[144] But perhaps this was the only way to convince policy makers of what he believed to be the rational coherence and moral superiority of his nuclear spread argument?

[138]Ibid., 11.
[139]Waltz 1981, 26.
[140]Waltz 2012, 3.
[141]Ibid., 12.
[142]Waltz 1990, 738.
[143]Ibid., 740.
[144]See Waltz 1981, 31, n. 10, and Van Evera 1999.

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In 'Nuclear Myths and Political Realities', published in *APSR* in 1990, Waltz concludes in a quintessentially Kantian way: 'How can we *perpetuate peace* without solving the problem of war? […] Never since the Treaty of Westphalia […] have great powers enjoyed a longer period of peace than we have known since the second world war. One can scarcely believe that the presence of nuclear weapons does not greatly help to explain this happy condition.'[145] A nuclear peace in anarchy is a form of necessary 'pacification', a means to an end, not the end in itself. We might rightly be concerned by the type of peace it prefigures. But wider conversations about more substantive, positive ends, goals, or values are only possible or realistic once the mutual fear of annihilation has abated. Waltz did not believe that a world state would help in this regard. Others disagreed.[146]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that Waltz was a Kantian. His philosophy of science, the way he understood the relationship between politics and epistemology, his normative political theory, and his philosophy of history are all broadly Kantian. His advocacy of nuclear spread was also defended on broadly Kantian terms. Waltz's key aim for international political theory was, arguably, to de-anthropologise and de-ontologise the state of nature, science, and ethics, by developing a novel theory of the causal effects of anarchy. This is most strikingly articulated in the highly controversial defence of normative virtues of the twentieth century thermonuclear balance of power. The faux anthropology and the hyperinflated ethnocentric claims about human nature that pervaded much of the 'realist' and 'liberal' theories of international relations at that time, and the implicit and explicit racism and sexism of much that preceded it, were imperfectly sidestepped by developing a neo-Kantian theory of 'the virtues of anarchy'.[147]

So what? The answer to this question very much depends on who's asking it. When dealing with such pivotal thinkers in the history of political thought, trying to reduce a reinterpretation like mine into a neat disciplinary contribution, does epistemic violence to their thought. On the other hand, given the extent to which Waltz and Kant have shaped modern political thought, we ought all to be able to hear whispers, or catch glimpses of the significance of this re-association. For example, linking Kant and Waltz further erodes the largely implausible distinction between twentieth and twenty-first century 'realism', 'liberalism', and 'neorealism'; this reconstruction also helps us erode the distinction between the 'utopia' and 'reality' that has shaped so much historical debate about realist politics; Waltz also shines a harsh light on the sublimated, deeply normative nature of all science, not only in IR;[148] and we ought to be able to learn from some of both Waltz and Kant's mistakes.

Answering the 'so what?' question with reference to any one of these speculative hypotheses would be important if not be particularly original. But that arguments

[145]Waltz 1990, 743–44. Emphasis added.
[146]See, for example, Sheuerman 2012 and Deudney 2007.
[147]Cf. Sabaratnam 2020; Sjoberg 2012.
[148]For an equivalent critique of neoliberalism, see Jahn 2009.

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like these could be made should give us pause to reflect on the ways in which we narrate the 'self-images' of the discipline,[149] and especially how we teach IR theory to our students.

Buzan and Little once argued that the centrality of 'anarchy' to the discipline of IR explains its ostracism from the rest of the social sciences: simply no one else sees any virtue in the concept.[150] Perhaps it is not the concept itself that is at fault, but the way it has been understood and used. The foregoing discussion should give us pause to reflect on the ways in which an uncritical, ahistorical, and decontextualised concept of anarchy pervades IR and political science, and how this paradigmatic reading of key texts and concepts has shaped these disciplines. Too often mainstream accounts of anarchy continue with no critical scrutiny of arguably the pivotal concept in the field, while critical theorists accept mainstream definitions of the concept and throw the baby out with the bathwater. As I have argued elsewhere, for a concept so central to the development of IR over the past 50 years, the meaning of anarchy is remarkably un-contested.[151]

Continuing Waltz's work might lead us to further historicise and contextualise the theory and concept of anarchy, to relink IR theory back to the history of political thought, and rediscover more expansive, emancipatory meanings and uses of the concept, for example, those found in the anarchist tradition.[152] But this demands a move away from the statism that has characterised political science.

My immanent critique of Waltz's theory of anarchy takes his theory on its own terms, and intimates that re-theorising the concept of anarchy in political science and IR, from an anarchist point of view, can point away from statism. For the anarchists, many of whom leant heavily on Kant,[153] anarchy is the prerequisite of freedom, not only of states, but for all groups.[154] This is not to laud the freedoms of the most heavily armed in society (practically everyone but the anarcho-pacifists do that).[155] Rather, the aim of foregrounding anarchy as a regulative ideal, as a principle of practical reason, is to push us to think more clearly about the question of freedom and justice in world politics, and to continue the unending quest for 'the kingdom of ends'.[156]

Ken Booth was not exaggerating when he said that, '[i]ntellectually speaking, we are all Waltz's subjects, whether we be loyal disciples, friendly critics, or rebellious opponents: the discipline defines itself in relation to the authority of his work'.[157] The problem is that, with the exception of Wendt's structural constructivism, this disciplinary development has proceeded almost entirely from the rejection of the concept of anarchy, and a general scepticism surrounding claims, like Alex Wendt's, that anarchy 'can be historically progressive'.[158] Some have seen this

[149]Smith 1995.
[150]Buzan and Little 2001.
[151]Havercroft and Prichard 2017.
[152]For example, Proudhon 2022; Weiss 1975; Falk 1978; Rossdale 2010; Newman 2012; Kazmi 2012.
[153]Wolff 1998; Prichard 2013a
[154]Prichard 2017; Cerny and Prichard 2017.
[155]See Christoyannopoulos 2022.
[156]Wolff 1998.
[157]Booth 2009, 179.
[158]Wendt 1992, 425.

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opening. Ken Booth put it like this in one of his earliest and most striking interventions in IR theory:

> To achieve security in anarchy, it is necessary to go beyond Bull's 'anarchical society' of states to an anarchical global 'community of communities'. Anarchy thus becomes the framework for thinking about the solutions to global problems, not the essence of the problem to be overcome. This would be a much messier political world than the states system, but it should offer better prospects for the emancipation of individuals and groups, and it should therefore be more secure.[159]

The recontextualising of Hedley Bull's theory of anarchy would demand another paper, but the point applies equally to Waltz's theory, if we understand Waltz in the way I have suggested. We have ample tools and materials to restart the work Booth ultimately abandoned,[160] we need to only move beyond the idea that anarchy is the antithesis of justice, peace, and order. It might well be, as Waltz suggests, its precondition.

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[159]Booth 1991, 540. Cf. Prichard 2017.

[160]Booth 2007.

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