International Theory (2010), 2:3, 486–494 © Cambridge University Press, 2010
doi:10.1017/S1752971910000230

Motives, evidence, identity: engaging my critics

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My thanks to David Welch for organizing this symposium and to *International Theory* for publishing it. This is truly generous on the part of the editors as my theory aims to supplant one of theirs as the standard bearer for constructivism. Most of the reviewers provide succinct and accurate overviews of key parts of my theory and offer thoughtful criticisms.

Welch notes in his introductory essay that his task was not to provide a critique of *A Cultural Theory*, but he does raise the question: Why is a feminist perspective excluded from my theory? My reply would be that it is not. Women are central to my treatment of honor, and especially the Homeric understanding of honor. In traditional honor societies, women are described as lascivious and seductive and undue interest in them is thought to sap men's strength and make them unwilling to risk their lives for honor. As Homer became a foundational text of Western culture, and the Homeric understanding of honor and women was central to subsequent Western societies, my analysis lays bare the origins of misogyny and one of the key reasons why it has remained with us over the millennia. Of equal importance, it highlights how reframing the concept of honor – something now underway in Western societies – has the potential to overcome these negative stereotypes and provide a firmer social foundation for gender equality.

Nicholas Rengger questions my choice of motives. He agrees that interest, honor, and fear help to explain a lot of foreign policy. But why stop there? There are other important human motives, among them joy, love, and devotion. He answers his own question by acknowledging that these other motives may not be as relevant to international relations. His second concern is the diversity of Greek thought and my failure to represent it adequately. Hesiod, the Old Oligarch, and Protagoras differ with Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle on key points. Why do I choose the Greeks I do and how valid is my theory if they are unrepresentative or

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no more than one strand of Greek thought? He might have added that there are notable differences among the three classical thinkers I rely on and between them and Homer. I note some of these differences but do not discuss other Greeks because I am not writing an account of Greek philosophy. As it is, James Der Derian criticizes me for going into too much detail about Greek thought. My aim was to draw on certain thinkers for the foundations of an analytical framework. The test of the framework is not how representative it is of Greek thought but rather how effective it is in explaining Greek and non-Greek foreign policy. I try to represent the Greek thinkers I draw on as accurately as possible but cannot subject them to the same kind of detailed hermeneutic reading I do with Thucydides in *Tragic Vision of Politics* because if I did I would never get to elaborate my theory. This said, Greek thought, as Rengger acknowledges, represents a virtual storehouse of insights and ideas relevant to comparative politics and international relations.

Jacques Hymans is quick to appreciate the central role that psychology plays in my theory and how it goes beyond – indeed, actively rejects – the widespread understanding of psychology as only useful in explaining so-called non-rational behavior. In practice, all behavior is rooted in psychology as it reflects different human motives, and four of these motives – reason, appetite, spirit, and fear – generate distinct logics of cooperation, conflict, and risk-taking. Motives are cultural and personal. Culture defines and shapes the hierarchy of individual motives, channels them toward specific forms of expression and goals, and teaches people to respond when their goals are achieved or stymied. People nevertheless have choices and are never automatons in behavior or feelings. To understand foreign policy and international relations, we must understand the motives, goals, and emotions of relevant actors. There is simply no such thing as a universal strategic logic or hierarchy of motives that we can take for granted and use to model behavior.

Hymans foregrounds the importance of identity to my theory and queries the extent to which we need to define ourselves against others whom we describe negatively. Der Derian, by contrast, assumes that 'there is no identity without differences.' In *A Cultural Theory*, I go no further than posing the same question as Hymans. In a recent article, an expanded version of which will be a chapter in a book on identity, I take up this question (Lebow, 2008; see also Lebow, 2009). Following Kant and Hegel, political scientists generally assume that an identity cannot be created or sustained without a negative 'other'. Drawing on Homer's *Iliad* and recent psychological research, I contest this assumption. The Greco-Roman literary tradition and recent survey and experimental research indicate that identities generally form *prior* to construction of 'others',

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that negative stereotypes are neither necessary nor common, and even when they exist the boundaries between in- and outgroups are often quite elastic. Homer's *Iliad* and much of recent history suggest that identity construction and maintenance often involved positive, although not necessarily equal, interactions with 'others'.

While he finds my theory persuasive, Hymans is troubled by the centrality I give to the emotions of fear and anger. By building a bridge between my theory and terror management theory (TMT), with its emphasis on the fear of death as a motive, he contends that I move closer to the realist position than I need to do. There may be a misunderstanding here, and if so, I accept responsibility for it. I describe TMT and social identity theory (SIT) as theories that emphasize psychological motives and praise them for this move. I do not link my theory to them; in fact, I share Hymans' concern about TMT. I observe that TMT offers a possible explanation for the search for immortality through honor-based fame. Even if we accept this supposition – and I am agnostic in the absence of compelling evidence – it would use fear in a different way than realists do and prompt quite different behavior.

Hymans is more concerned about anger, which he thinks I should do without as it weakens my case for the autonomy of the spirit. 'For if not merely the expression but even the very *feeling* of anger is indeed so highly dependent on relative power considerations, then we are back in Melos, where the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must'. Aristotelian anger, the kind to which I refer, is provoked by slights, and especially from those who lack the standing to act this way. My theory explains the circumstances in which political actors are most likely to feel acute anger, and I offer numerous examples of how it has caused or contributed to the outbreak of wars. Anger may explain aggressive behavior but does not justify it, and the Athenian invasion of Melos was not provoked by anger. Anger does arouse desires for revenge and in *Why Nations Fight* I show how since 1648 it has been responsible for more wars than have material interests (Lebow, 2010).

William Wohlforth is persuaded by the importance of the spirit in foreign policy. For a self-identified realist, this is a major concession. He flags four problems, all of which demand thoughtful responses. Wohlforth notes that I analyze discourses to determine the presence and priority of motives in a society or policymaking elite. But when I discuss the Cold War and its aftermath, I refuse to take some discourses at face value, arguing that a discourse of security often masks a concern for standing. I argue that this practice was a response to the broader consensus in the United States and the USSR that superpowers should not spend vast sums of money or risk war for something seemingly as frivolous as prestige.

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I nevertheless contend that this is just what policymakers in both countries did, and with the tacit support of their respective publics. For evidence in the American case, I point to public shock at the news of a Soviet nuclear explosion in 1949, the 'loss' of China in the same year, and the launching of Sputnik in 1957. All three events could be interpreted as security threats, and some analysts and journalists read them this way, but the dominant response by far was worry about the loss of prestige and diminished national stature. Wohlforth is nevertheless correct in pointing out that I need to develop general rules about when discourses are to be taken at face value and when we must read between the lines.

Wohlforth also takes me to task for not making more use of modern research, especially psychological and neuroscientific. I draw heavily on social science, most notably on Weber, Durkheim, and contemporary social psychology. I agree that readers would respond more positively to a framework built entirely on contemporary literature, especially if they could claim some scientific status. I would have gone this route if compelling theories existed. Neither TMT nor SIT qualifies, as the causes for the behavior they describe remain speculative. They are unappealing for other reasons too; the former puts too much emphasis on fear and the latter on the need for negative others. More importantly, neither offers a comprehensive theory of human motives as the Greeks do. Contemporary understandings of human motives are culturally specific, as is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, or err by treating emotions as universals. Nor do any of these frameworks recognize, let alone emphasize, the spirit, which I find so central to politics. For all these reasons I go back to the Greeks.

Wohlforth correctly observes that my efforts to explain major twentieth century wars join an already 'overcrowded explanatory competition' and will not persuade readers committed to other theories or explanations. Works in social and physical science rarely do. Rather, they appeal to like-minded people and the uncommitted, many of them younger scholars. Over time, they have the potential to shift a field. It would have been a better strategy, Wohlforth suggests, to show how my theory helps to explain peace, and thereby the variation that we observe in international relations. By directing my attention more to war rather than peace, I encourage readers to conclude that war is the norm and thereby end up emphasizing the continuity of international relations, not the possibility of change. My theory does speak to the problem of peace and describes the different patterns of cooperation we should observe depending on the hierarchy of motives. In the case of the Cold War, I use my theory to explain superpower avoidance of war and the evolution and resolution of the Cold War.

My theory is fundamentally one of change. Although war has been a constant feature of the international environment, its causes and character

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have evolved and *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* offers explanations why this is so. The frequency of interstate war has declined over the last four hundred years and *Why Nations Fight* offers reasons for believing that the principal motives responsible for war in the past – standing, security, revenge, and material interests – are no longer effectively advanced by war in most circumstances. To the extent that this political reality becomes better understood, it will function as a source of restraint.[1] Wohlforth insists that leaders start wars to gain esteem because it is a successful strategy. Since 1945, leaders have overwhelmingly lost the wars they started or provoked. In the 31 post-1945 wars, only eight initiators achieved their political goals. If we relax the criteria and look only at military victory over opposing forces, the number rises only to 12.[2] In almost all these cases, the political standing of initiating leaders and nations suffered a decline. The Bush administration's interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are cases in point. Russia's recent intervention in Georgia was militarily successful, and while damaging to Russia's international standing, seems to have enhanced President Putin's standing at home. Such outcomes are infrequent in comparison to those in which intervention fails.

James Morrow comes away from my book convinced that appetite-driven worlds are less war prone than their spirit-based counterparts. This is not a generic truth but rather depends on the understandings people have of wealth and honor. Modern understandings of wealth, unlike traditional forms of honor, see it as expandable, making competition for honor more acute because of its more limited and relational nature. One important feature of modernity, I argue, is to introduce multiple honor hierarchies into societies and to make entry into them available to more people. If international relations comes to resemble domestic societies, the competition for honor will more closely resemble that for wealth. Morrow makes a different argument, contending that international relations has become more peaceful when 'interests supplanted personal ambition and grand moral designs'. He cites Henry Kissinger as a source, indicating an unreasonable conflation of material with national interests. Kissinger, of all people, thinks about the national interest in broader terms, which include considerations of prestige and national standing. They are embedded in grand designs, as is the concern for material wealth for that matter.

Morrow insists that peoples' attachments to their political units must be documented, not merely asserted, noting that Roman slaves would

[1] For documentation, see Lebow (2010: ch. 5).
[2] Ibid., ch. 7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971910000230 Published online by Cambridge University Press

hardly have had positive feelings for Rome or derived much satisfaction from its conquests. This is an unfair argument and example. In all my cases, I do my best to document attachments to the political units by relevant publics, which, of course, excludes slaves or others with no or little political voice. Also unfair is his assertion that I ignore domestic politics. It is absolutely critical in the nineteenth and twentieth cases, where I document its effect at some length. My explanation for World Wars I and II rests largely on domestic politics.

Finally, we come to reason, which Morrow reduces to wise or foolish choices. This is indeed the relevant binary for rational choice, to which Morrow appears so wedded that he ignores my use of ancient Greek distinctions among instrumental reason (central to strategic action models), practical wisdom (*phrōnesis*), and wisdom (*sophia*). These distinctions encourage us to examine not only how actors use reason to achieve goals, but how they reassess their goals and how they consider their position within the broader system and its consequences for the kinds of goals it is reasonable to seek. The more sophisticated Greek understanding of reason and its uses leads to a more sophisticated analysis of political behavior than rational choice can possibly deliver.

Perhaps my most important substantive conclusion is that wars of standing can also be expected to decline as war initiation, even when successful, no longer enhances external standing. I believe there have been three important historical shifts in thinking that have profound consequences for war and international relations more generally. The first of these concerns the nature of wealth. Until Adam Smith and modern economics, the world's wealth was thought to be finite, making interstate relations resemble a zero-sum game in which an increase in wealth for any state was believed to diminish that of others. Once political elites learned that total wealth could be augmented by the division of labor, use of mechanical sources of energy, and economies of scale, international economic cooperation became feasible, and ultimately came to be seen as another means of generating wealth. Trade and investment, and the economic interdependence to which this led, did not prevent war, as many nineteenth and early twentieth century liberals hoped, but in the long term have all but put an end to wars of material aggrandizement.

The second shift in thinking began in the nineteenth century and accelerated during the twentieth. It concerns the relative value of collective vs. individual security. Alliances have always been part of the practice of foreign policy but assumed new meaning at the Congress of Vienna. The victorious powers sought to act collectively to maintain the postwar status quo and thereby prevent the resurgence of revolution and interstate war. This was a short-lived and unsuccessful experiment, due in large part

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to the unrealistic goals of Austria, Prussia, and Russia, not only of restraining France, but of holding back democratization and the unwillingness of Britain to support this project. Periodic congresses later in the nineteenth century were to a large degree effective in reducing great power and regional tensions by means of agreements and suasion. Following World War I, the League of Nations was given the more ambitious task of preventing war by means of collective security. The League failed for many reasons, but the principle of collective security endured and strengthened its hold in English speaking countries. The United Nations, established in 1945, made it the principal mission of the Security Council. Its record has been mixed, as was that of the numerous regional alliances that came into being during the Cold War. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is by far the most successful, although there is no evidence that it ever prevented a Soviet attack on Western Europe. NATO and other international groupings have played a prominent and arguably successful role in keeping the peace or helping to terminate wars in the post-Cold War era. Collective security has become the norm and an important source of regional and international stability.

The third and most recent shift in thinking concerns the nature of standing in international affairs. Since the emergence of the modern international system, great powers have always sought to maintain control over standing, the means by which it is determined, and who is allowed to compete for it. Throughout this period, military power and success in using it was the principal means of gaining standing and recognition as a great power. In the modern world there are many ways of gaining status within domestic societies, and the more robust regional and international orders become the more multiple hierarchies will also emerge at these levels. A number of states are already seeking standing in diverse ways and directing resources toward this end that might otherwise have gone to the military. Such behavior is rewarded. A BBC World Service poll conducted in early 2007 indicates a significant increase in standing of countries associated with alternate visions of the international system. When asked which countries exerted a positive influence in the world, Canada and Japan topped the list at 54%, followed by France (50%), Britain (45%), China (42%), and India (37%).[3]

Positive responses at home and abroad create a positive reinforcement cycle in which praise and respect from third parties build national esteem, play well politically, and strengthen the link between such policies and national identity. Such a process has been underway for some time in

[3] *The Age* (Melbourne), 6 March 2007, p. 7.

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Germany and Canada and to a lesser extent in Japan. If an international orientation remains dominant in Japan, if China plays a responsible role in Asia, if India and Pakistan avoid another military conflict, if the Middle East remains troubled but its problems do not contaminate other regions, and if the European Union prospers and strengthens its economic and political links with both Russia and China, fear is likely to decline as a foreign policy motive and those of appetite and spirit to become correspondingly more prominent. States will have stronger incentives to seek standing on the basis of criteria associated with these motives and to spend less on their military forces. Claims for standing on the basis of military power will become even less persuasive. As standing confers influence, states will have additional incentives to shift their foreign policies to bring them in line with the dominant incentive structure. In such a world, states would view even more negatively the use of force in the absence of what they deemed appropriate international support. From the vantage point of, say, the year 2030, we may look back on the Iraq war as one of the defining moments of the twenty-first century because of the way it delegitimized the unilateral use of force and foregrounded and encouraged alternative, peaceful means of claiming standing.

James Der Derian is the most difficult reviewer to engage. He praises my book but reads me as a 'wild-card constructivist' and 'card carrying member of the reconstructed English school' whose 'pessimistic realism' nevertheless shows through. My theory is 'essentialist' in its treatment of culture, full of smuggled-in norms and insufficiently sensitive to 'phallocentrism, androcentrism, and orientalism'. Der Derian believes my book will be a success at war colleges and serve as 'a high-end' supplement to the new culture-centric form of warfare now being promoted in Afghanistan and Iraq by the US Army. As I cannot imagine what a 'wild-card constructivist' might be, I will pass on that one. I admire the English school, but note in chapter one that its founders never went beyond thin notions of international society in contrast to my interest in more robust understandings of regional societies, and ultimately, an international one. I do not smuggle in norms but introduce them openly and explicitly. I fully agree with Der Derian that international relations theory should be transformative in its goals, not merely provide justifications for the existing power structure by portraying current practices as rational and even inevitable.

Der Derian faults me for paying too much attention to psychology and culture, on the ground that they are not really tangible, but thinks I could go further into the darker recesses of the collective unconscious to explore why the 'healthy' psyche degenerates into and is so often overpowered by systemic pathologies; or as Nietzsche so pithily puts it: 'madness is rare

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among individuals; in entire nations it is common.' The relationship between culture and personality is indeed a fascinating and important question, and one I explore without invoking the admittedly murky subconscious. Rather, I attempt to show how culture shapes the hierarchy of values and how political culture shapes their expression. My theory functions at the social in addition to the individual level, which is more amenable to analysis and more capable of answering the question that Nietzsche poses. Indeed, I make a stab at doing this in the case of Nietzsche's own society, Wilhelminian Germany. I try to show how late cultural and political development aggravated class tensions – in a psychological, not economic sense – and led to aggressive foreign policies that were an underlying cause of World War I.

A Cultural Theory of International Relations is a complex book as it roots my theory of International Relations in a proto-theory of political orders and situates that in an even sketchier theory of history. It is also lengthy because of the need to demonstrate the theory's utility across cases, epochs, and cultures. I believe the frameworks I have created are useful in important ways. As several of the reviewers note, they liberate International Relations from a crushingly claustrophobic and misleading focus on the system level, from the narrow horizon of power and material capabilities, and from an equally unproductive belief that reason is independent of culture and motive and can be used in a parsimonious way to understand political behavior. My focus is on what actors want, why they want it, and how they think it can be obtained. By embedding a theory of Iinternational Relations in a theory of society, I can explain who becomes an actor and how they are so empowered. By rooting a theory of society in a theory of history, I can identify the principles that govern change in this process over time. These theories give rise to propositions that can be tested, or at least evaluated. Of equal importance, they generate important and interesting questions – recognized by some of the reviewers – about the future evolution of regional and international orders. These questions and the propositions they can generate are in turn amenable to empirical analysis.

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