

## **On the limits of new foundations: a commentary on R. Harrison Wagner, *War and the State*<sup>1</sup>**

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R. Harrison Wagner has produced a comprehensive and elegant statement critiquing and re-launching the theory of international politics as it has developed after Kenneth Waltz's seminal interventions (1959, 1979). Abandoning Waltz's categorical distinction between domestic and international politics, and in so doing opening out to prior and broader questions regarding the organization of violence and the sources and character of political order, Wagner's work is a major advance over what has come to be known as 'Waltzian theory'. Especially impressive are his use of canonical texts, among them Hobbes, Kant, and Clausewitz to think through contemporary problems of political and scientific interest. Moving on from Waltz to Wagner offers a far more enriched, if also tangled, set of questions for game-theoretic and rationalist traditions of inquiry in international politics. That one can credibly suggest Waltz has been superseded gives some sense of the range and quality of Wagner's book, evident even to those of us who work outside these traditions.

For Wagner, questions of force, war, and international order, which concern scholars of International Relations (IR), are not distinct from those of the foundation of political order and the rise of the modern state. The theory of international politics has occluded what these matters have in common by conceiving of domestic and international politics as belonging to separate realms, marked respectively by hierarchy and anarchy, and entailing a series of categorical inside/outside distinctions based on the sovereign state, such as that between civil and international

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war. On Wagner's account, the problems of creating out of rival armed groups that enduring order known as the Leviathan are of piece with those regarding war and peace among sovereign states. At the core of these problems are the relations between organized violence and politics, and the threat of force as an instrument of power and rule.

For the division of labor in a forum such as this, I am not best placed to provide an 'internal' critique from the perspective of 'structural realism' or formal theory. Nor am I a representative of any of the competing 'isms' in the debate among paradigms Wagner rightly sees as an obstacle to theoretic and empirical inquiry. Rather, I want to take seriously Wagner's text as a foundational statement for IR, as providing an answer to the question of what the discipline should be about and how and with what questions it should proceed. Foundational texts, as with Waltz's, have a way of shaping much that comes after, even the work of critics and those bearing alternative approaches, and so must be considered carefully (cf. Waltz, 1979; Wendt, 1999). I certainly wish I had been given Wagner (2007) rather than Waltz (1979) when I started out. At the same time, as creatively and incisively as Wagner refigures and opens up the questions we should be asking, he also shuts them down again, and unduly limits the intellectual resources and traditions we should bring to bear on them. I want to explore some of these limits and some of what might be missed by taking his book as new starting point for core disciplinary debates.

Like Waltz, Wagner takes as the discipline's central question that of war in a system of independent states (2007: 51). Unlike Waltz, he does not think this question can be answered by dividing the social sciences between the study of domestic and international politics (2007: 35). The reason is that the modern European state represents one of the chief institutional solutions to the problem of violence among competing armed groups. How and why European sovereigns were able to acquire a monopoly on organized violence and establish internal peace is akin to the problem of war in international politics, inquiry into which should be conceived as 'part of the more general study of the relation between political order and organized violence' (2007: 235). Hobbes' problem was not that of violence among individuals existing outside society, but that of violence among small lords and other armed groupings in the absence of any overarching institutional arrangement guaranteeing contracts. How Hobbes proposed to solve this problem, the tradition of inquiry that preceded and followed his interventions, and histories and analyses of the rise of the European state represent core intellectual resources for the study of international politics. These should be supplemented with greater attention to how groups organize themselves for violence and what they hope to achieve with it, prompting Wagner's turn to Clausewitz.

Since relations between such groups are best conceived as a ‘complex multiactor bargaining process’ (2007: 193), even if force and violence are a primary medium for such negotiation, game theory provides the essential mode of analysis, one capable of unifying the many disparate discussions of violence and order in the social sciences.

Some general presuppositions for inquiry are implied by Wagner’s approach. First, war and politics lie at the center of the discipline. Notably, and broadly speaking, IR is the only social science to take war as a core object of inquiry. Second, there is no *a priori* distinction between ‘international’ social relations and any other sorts of social relations. Analysis of the ‘international’ should be grounded in more general traditions of social and political inquiry. This move, however, raises the question of just how the study of the international should define and distinguish itself. Wagner’s answer is the interplay between political order and organized violence, conceived as always potentially ‘violent bargaining’ between groups capable of using force. As such, and third, game-theoretic inquiry and ideas regarding social equilibrium, offer the way forward on questions of war and peace.

At a stroke, more or less, Wagner liberates IR from some of its most distorting starting points and preoccupations, among them 1648, sovereignty, and the systemic level analysis (as understood after Waltz). His thematic of order and violence places the rise of the state in Europe in the same analytic domain as that of the absence of effective states in parts of the global South. He offers analytic leverage on the multiple and profound confusions involved in using the sovereign state as a basic unit of analysis: the problem of war and order cannot be neatly divided into sovereign categories or carved up in terms of sovereign borders, as in nearly the entirety of the contemporary quantitative study of conflict. For Wagner, it is the armed group that lies at the core of his schema, irrespective of its relations with the ultimately juridical notion of sovereignty.

Thinking about international politics as relations between and among armed localities, and as both the order they comprise and the problems for order they pose, offers much greater clarity than beginning from the idea of a system of sovereign states, with all the baggage that has entailed. There is a danger, however, of the sovereign ‘unit’ re-entering by the back door, in the form of the armed and bargaining actor, especially given Wagner’s limiting focus on ‘territorial satisfaction’ in distinguishing between status quo and revisionist powers (e.g. 2007: 206–208). Unfortunately, Wagner’s positive contributions reproduce a set of Eurocentric assumptions characteristic of IR, clawing back some of the initial promise of his more thoroughgoing realism. Moreover, in turning war into ‘violent bargaining’, he reduces war to a species of peacetime politics – bargaining

and contracts – and in so doing misses the distinctive character of war as a social and political force (and does some violence to Clausewitz along the way, mistaking him as an ally in this move). In all of these ways, Wagner fails to break sufficiently with the theory of international politics he so vigorously and effectively critiques, making the second reconstructive half of his book less a re-founding of the discipline and more a modified restatement of existing themes.

A route into these criticisms is to situate historically and geographically most of the intellectual resources that Wagner brings to bear on his subject. It is as if an American intellectual traveled to Europe in 1802, imbibed the political philosophic learning in the salons of London and Paris before traveling to Königsberg for discussions with students of the ailing Kant. Along the way, our American developed some appreciation of the potentialities of France's new armies and its First Consul, but definitely had not heard of a young *privatdozent* just appointed at the University of Jena by the name of Hegel. Neither was much notice taken of an ex-slave general from San Domingo recently imprisoned in France, or of the successive defeats he had inflicted upon French, English, and Spanish expeditions, and what all this eventually might portend for relations between Europe and the world. Upon return to the states, the American fell into a deep slumber, awakening only in 1958 at one of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetters' parties in Santa Monica, California. There, he listened carefully as RAND researchers dissected a recent paper by Daniel Ellsberg on the strategic utility of insanity (or at least appearing so), marking up their cocktail napkins with  $2 \times 2$  diagrams modeling bank heists conducted by (suicidal?) grenade wielding robbers. Over perfect Manhattans, the party goers speculated on the implications for US nuclear posture and for responses to communist challenges. Our American decided that game theory offered the key to the basic problems of political philosophy as well as the analysis of relations between political entities, and set out to master it.

Wagner is far from alone in North American IR and political science in having a theoretic and philosophic background of the kind unkindly parodied in this sketch. My main point is that the great debates begun by Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant *continued*, with Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber (as the great counter-enlightenment critic of modernity he in fact was), up through the Frankfurt School and onwards to Habermas and Foucault. All of these thinkers and others made fundamental contributions to social and political inquiry; understood themselves to be participating in and building upon the Western conversation, yet are more or less invisible in the theory of international politics Wagner critiques and in his own approach. Social and political inquiry is a moving feast, and it is

incumbent upon us to stay until all the main courses have been served. In terms of political philosophy, most IR realists never make it out of the 18th century (Rousseau dies in 1778), the liberals just creep into the 19th with Kant (who expired in 1804), where even Wendt's constructivism mostly stops. To be sure the methods and philosophy of science are of later origin, but this obsession with early modern European thinkers to the near exclusion of what came after must come with extraordinary intellectual penalties. Especially so, as the thinkers I have listed not only spent a great deal of time effectively critiquing the early moderns, but also made major contributions to understanding capitalism, modernity, and rationality, subjects that should be of interest to an IR embedded within general traditions of social and political inquiry. To debate liberalism without Marx's devastating critique, or to imagine one can be a realist without taking on board what Nietzsche and Foucault have to say about reason and power, is to further the myopia, which increasingly has cut North American political science off from nearly every tradition of inquiry in the Western academy except that of neoclassical economics – a discipline so profoundly implicated in the contemporary order of power as to reflect its reigning ideology.

That said, none of the thinkers mentioned in the preceding paragraph systematically addressed war, nor were they particularly concerned with the world outside Europe, with the partial exception of Weber on both counts. In fact, the great black hole for *all* of these thinkers is their inherent Eurocentricity and the limitations of perspective and politics this entails in addressing something as global in scope as the *international*. It would appear the Western conversation has a great deal of unfinished business, which an IR that reads past 1800 might help with, concerning, for example, the interrelations between modernity and war, and how world politics might be thought from the perspective of histories other than that of power politics in Europe, from the point of view of those who live in places the West has competed over and dominated for much of the last several centuries. With these broad stakes in mind, it is time to turn to more specific criticisms of Wagner's book they help highlight, beginning with his approach to science.

Wagner has some fun with his *American Heritage Dictionary*, looking up words like 'ontology' and 'materialism', suggesting that philosophy of science is not something actual social scientists should be overly concerned with or deeply informed about (2007: 44–45). He goes on to rely throughout his book on a classic deductive-nomological model of explanation, thought up by philosophers of science and based on a naturalist ontology (2007: 2–12). He uses this model to more or less devastating effect on the theory of international politics from Waltz on,

identifying arguments from all the major contributors as incomplete and invalid. In all of this assessment of the theory of power politics, and assisted by his willful ignorance in respect of the philosophy of inquiry, Wagner manages to maintain a naive view of science in which ‘knowledge progresses by trial and error’ and scientists correct one another’s mistakes (2007: ix, 5). On Wagner’s reading there has been a great deal more error than trial, but while he shows that power in the form of the modern state can shape the equilibrium expectations of ordinary people, he never discusses the ways power also shapes scientific and other systematic knowledge. This is a basic proposition of the counter-enlightenment, finding its full realization in Foucault’s discussions of power/knowledge and in work on the profound influence of the Cold War on the development of the social sciences, including of course IR (Cumings, 1999; Gilman, 2003; Oren, 2003). Even in Kuhnian terms, where any credible paradigm can ‘explain’ observed phenomena, science progresses less by trial and error than by the older generation dying off and releasing its death grip on journals and university appointments (Kuhn, 1962).

Scientific and other types of knowledge are formed within and reflect definite social and political contexts. Wagner is proposing to take approaches fostered in the heart of the national security state, based on a philosophy of science that constructs the social world in ways that can be intervened upon and manipulated effectively by power, as the core of his theory of international politics. He does so without any of the reflexivity that comes from the post-Kantian critique of rationality, a reflexivity that cannot be acquired from dictionary definitions of core philosophic terms. Game theory, and instrumental rationality of which it is an expression, are wrapped up in, are part of, the very formations of modern power that need to be subjected to critical analysis (Amadae, 2003; Barkawi, 1998).

In IR, realism has typically and explicitly reflected the point of view of the powerful. International politics is taken to be about the great powers and their struggles and relations with one another. Since in modern history these great powers are overwhelmingly located in Europe and the West, Eurocentrism is intrinsic to realism. Indeed, and again thinking in geographic terms, the overwhelming majority of the historical episodes discussed and analyzed by realists are located in Europe, as in Wagner’s text. This observation is also true to somewhat lesser extent of constructivist and liberal IR. As compared with other social sciences, a curious feature of IR is that it fails to analytically integrate relations between the strong *and* the weak, the powerful and those they dominate, as together responsible for, as *co-constitutive* of outcomes. Rather, in realist IR, it is about relations among the strong, seen from the point of view of statespersons competing with one another over a world they dominate.

As Stanley Hoffman remarks, IR takes an ‘Athenian’ perspective on the world (1977: 58).<sup>2</sup>

A great promise of Wagner’s book theoretically is that he should be able to break out of this, as his broader problematic of order and violence is not a specifically European one. Moreover, his careful dissection of social equilibriums, the expectations and common knowledge they are based on, offers a way of accounting for the order created by the modern state that analytically integrates ordinary people and the powerful in explanations. Unfortunately, none of his substantive discussions in the second half of the book follow through on this theoretic opening to placing the strong and the weak in the same analytic frame. Instead, we get the whole panoply of Eurocentric IR: it is all about the rise of the European state as a solution of the problem of order; the histories of European power politics; and latterly territorially satisfied, non-predatory democratic states (or commonwealths in Wagner’s early modern vocabulary) living in a ‘mixed world’ among predatory commonwealths and ungoverned spaces populated with armed groups. We escape Waltz’s systemic level of analysis only to be cast back into the world of the democratic peace, with its zones of peace and war and categorical distinctions between democratic and non-democratic ‘units’.

A defining feature of Eurocentrism is conceiving Europe and the West as self-contained and self-generating. A basic difficulty is that you cannot explain even European outcomes in Eurocentric terms, which is precisely what Wagner attempts to do. On his account, by the second half of the nineteenth century Europeans had solved the problem of order and violence by designing institutional arrangements that ‘channel people’s interests in peaceful directions’ (2007: 100–101). Other places may learn, ‘as eventually happened in Europe’, how to create ‘institutional arrangements that substitute for the use of force’ (2007: 103). In most of this discussion, the problem of order and violence in Europe and that outside it are implicitly treated as separate and distinct matters; Europeans solved the problem of armed groups struggling for gain through the development of arrangements to guarantee contracts. In a reprise of the classic liberal association of free trade with peace, commerce is seen as having the potential to detach the attainment of greater wealth from territorial predation (2007: 89–94, 103).

The problem here is the failure sufficiently to appreciate the inter-connections between developments inside and those outside Europe, as well as between the political–economic and the political–military.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of these points, see Barkawi and Laffey (2006).

As Richard Drayton comments, ‘what we now call Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia were constructed together in the midst of a relationship, at once economic and cultural, military, and political’ (2002: 103). The finances for the industrial revolution in England (another of Wagner’s supposed forces for peace (2007: 202; cf. McNeil, 1982)) came in significant measure from Caribbean sugar plantations, where the first modern factories were found, worked by slaves from Africa on land seized from Amerindians. This trade was embedded in circuits that encompassed Eastern Europe, India, and China, circuits established and maintained through repeated uses of force, in the many wars fought to establish the Raj, for example, as well as in the wars for free trade fought to open up, and then prop up, Qing Dynasty, China. There, as elsewhere in the non-European world, the introduction of commerce had a far different result than imagined by Adam Smith (quoted in Wagner, 2007: 90), leading to some of the largest and most violent conflicts of the nineteenth century world.

These interconnections between capitalism, imperialism, and violent conflict are in many respects constitutive of modern global history, and for many people and places on the planet central to their experience of the ‘international’ and of modernity. They are largely invisible in IR in part because of the intellectually embarrassing reception of Marx (see e.g. Alker and Biersteker, 1984: 132–135) and the neglect of the traditions he influenced elsewhere in the social sciences and humanities, in no small measure a result of the Cold War context in which the discipline developed. Consequently, and broadly speaking, there was a failure to marry the Marxian tradition’s analyses of capitalism with due appreciation of the political–military in historical outcomes, realist IR’s speciality.<sup>3</sup> Capitalism may be associated with peace and wealth for some in the West, but capitalism is not a ‘unit level’ or regional phenomenon, and cannot be adequately considered as such. It is rather a world system, the past and present history of which is deeply marked by war and violent repression, especially but not only in the non-European world. Yet, due to the profound influence of liberalism and neoclassical economics on IR, not to mention its largely Anglo-American setting, capitalism generally is conceived in the discipline in terms of the putative benefits of free trade for peace. As a world system, it involved histories and relations of uneven and combined development, made and maintained by political and military means, or ‘imperialism’. Unfortunately, the literatures in historical sociology, imperial historiography, and elsewhere, which explore this world system rarely foreground political–military relations, predominantly conceiving their

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion, see Barkawi (2010).



subject in economic, social, or cultural terms (e.g. Said, 1979; Cooper and Stoler, 1997; Wolf, 1997 [1982]; Cain and Hopkins, 2002). The upshot is the failure on all sides to analytically integrate the political–economic and the political–military in the making of modern global history, something that in my view should be of serious concern for a social science of international relations.

Wagner’s overall perspective reflects what we might term these ‘political–intellectual’ developments and limitations, and consequently fails to open up new directions in thinking economy, violence, and politics together. Empire, a concept that should entail force *and* economy, makes its appearance in Wagner’s text in a bifurcated manner that deprives it of critical punch. Introduced in a section entitled ‘Taming Predators’ (2007: 202), it is worth noting in passing the politics of the title, which take a distinctly European perspective on just who was tamed where. Here the idea is that overseas expansion along with industrialization provided alternative means of acquiring wealth than territorial predation in Europe. An historical implication of such an argument is something like Drayton’s multidimensional relationship in which modern states in Europe, and imperialism outside it, *arose together*. Analytically, constitutive connections between a pacific order in the West and violence and empire abroad lead to a socially ‘thick’ conception of the international, as comprised of a rich set of cultural, economic, political, and military relations, opening out to some of the literatures mentioned above.

With Wagner, such a turn is difficult even to envisage much less take, despite the historical implications of much that he says. His framework is constrained not only by the socially ‘thin’ world imagined by game theory and consisting mainly of strategic interaction but also by a version of the territorial trap through which the world of atomistic units is reintroduced (cf. Agnew, 1994). For Wagner, this comes in the form of an assumption regarding the bounded character of political units, defined by the monopoly on organized violence within a given territorial area. In this way, his positive statements lapse back into a sovereign and systemic perspectives on international politics, evoking the spare world of Waltzian realism, wherein at best sovereign states ally and trade with one another when they are not in a posture of war. A book that began by declaring that domestic and international politics are not separate realms should not have ended up here.

A fuller discussion of empire comes later in Wagner’s text, amid his critique of liberal failed state and global governance literatures (2007: 217–225). The previous sections map out the world in terms of distinct and separate territories and the forms of rule that appertain to them. There are regions composed of commonwealths which have resolved the

problem of order through territorial monopolies on organized violence, and areas where armed groups hold local sway and settled rule is unknown. Among the commonwealths, Wagner draws a further distinction between predatory and non-predatory ones, and here offers his discussion of democracy and trade. The image on the whole is not dissimilar from the liberal peace literature, which imagine the zones of peace and war as *separate places* defined by their internal forms of rule rather than as co-constitutive. Whereas in the ‘taming predators’ argument, Wagner implies interconnected histories between peace in Europe and imperial violence outside it, in his discussion of empire he presumes a world already divided into areas where states exercise firm control over a well-defined (in effect sovereign) territory and those areas where there is no such state. This division, he now argues, is a *cause* of imperialism (2007: 224–225). The absence of modern states in the non-European world meant that ‘there was no equivalent state in those territories with which one could make an agreement with any confidence it would be kept’ (2007: 225). He goes on to elaborate in a note that the ‘barbarians’ on the frontier posed a similar problem for the Roman Empire (2007: 225). It is unclear how these statements relate to actual histories of European expansion. Western powers were in the business of destroying the civilizations and political entities they encountered, or transforming them into clients, and in the course of doing so broke numerous agreements they struck with indigenous powers.

In bifurcating his discussion of empire, Wagner misses an opportunity to integrate political–economic and political–military relations with respect to their very different but *combined* effects in core and periphery. His essentially territorial conception of the state (e.g. 2007: 221) overlooks the networked and external character of imperial states (cf. Nexon and Wright, 2007). When this focus on territory and rule is turned toward empire, it misconceives what is at stake not only in imperialism generally, but in its specifically strategic dimensions. The political–military problem of modern empire was not primarily about unsettled hinterlands or weak native powers that invited great power predation, although of course these factors played their role. It was about forging global networks and maintaining circuits through which people, goods, and finance flowed, while at the same time policing various boundaries that allowed some flows through while containing others. War and organized violence were essential to these processes, but took diverse territorial and political expression, in part because formal colonial rule was costly, as Wagner points out. Crucial were the control of nodal points, resource-rich areas, sources and movements of labor, and the regulation of markets and trade.

Here, we come up against the limitations of an international politics conceived in primarily political–military and sovereign territorial terms. International politics are not only about the territorial order of armed units, commonwealths or otherwise, but also about their *interconnection* and the control of flows through them. Through these connections, international relations exercise constitutive effects on society, politics, culture, and economy in widely divergent places. An example is the dependence of the industrial revolution in Europe on the coerced transportation of twelve million Africans to the Americas, or the way in which control of cheap and plentiful Indian labor – eventually used throughout the empire – made possible Britain’s break with the slave trade and its historic turn to ‘free trade’ policies (see e.g. Blackburn, 1988, 1997). For me, it is these ‘thick’ co-constitutive relations and their histories that are the proper object of inquiry for a social science of the ‘international’.

Even in political–military terms alone, there are further difficulties involved in sovereign territorial conceptions of imperial relations. Presumably because there are no longer formal colonies, and despite the often informal character of imperial rule historically, Wagner conceives of imperialism as a thing of the past. Contemporary liberal interventionism, on his account, is an effort to find a substitute for the settled rule provided by European imperial power. He leaves no space for imperial relations within a formally sovereign state system. Yet consider one of the key political–military dimensions of imperialism: the raising of armed forces from among the populations being brought under control, as in the case of colonial military and police forces. A variation was the support of the armed forces of client powers, as, for example, in the provision of Western-led mercenary forces to the Qings or, latterly, the enormous resources devoted to the ‘advice and support’ of the military and security forces of subordinate states by the superpowers during the Cold War, or in Iraq and Afghanistan today. Imperial power creates and shapes political entities abroad. Imagining relations between great powers and clients as strategic interaction or bargaining between armed actors overlooks this *constitutive* dimension of the international organization of violence. Western power in the Third World in the post-1945 world was exercised in large measure by intervening in subordinate states, changing their leaderships through covert and other means, providing political and economic assistance, and, most of all, by developing their coercive power and orienting it toward internal security. This enabled the maintenance of the networks and flows that comprised the ‘Free World’. The organization of violence has significant international elements highlighted by histories of imperialism that exceed Wagner’s focus on the question of the local, territorial monopoly on force.

I have been exploring some of the analytic limitations of Wagner's core object of analysis, relations between armed and bargaining groups. I have argued there is a tendency to drain the international of its social content, and that a Eurocentric perspective obscures the constitutive relations between the strong the weak, which require different terms of analysis than Wagner offers. I want now to take up one last consequence of this core object of analysis before concluding, and this is the reduction of war to bargaining. Across the social sciences, inspired as they were by the pacific visions of modernity characteristic of enlightenment thought, there has been a failure to conceive of war as a profoundly generative force (see e.g. Keane, 1996). Rather, war is understood as an interruption in the normal peacetime social processes that make history, not as the 'father and king of all' as Heraclitus would have it (2003: 29). Thus, for example, none of the major sociological traditions center war as a core object of analysis, but rather focus on economy, politics, or culture. A consequence is the tendency when dealing with war to reduce it to terms of analysis derived from peacetime society. A classic case is the Marxian reduction of war to an effect of capitalism. It is within these terms that I would approach Wagner's conception of war as a form of bargaining and offer a few remarks regarding his discussion of Clausewitz.

Clausewitz's writings seek to evoke rather than resolve the tension between war as a general phenomenon and as historically specific (see e.g. Strachan, 2007). He was deeply cognizant of the extraordinary social and political changes wrought throughout Europe by Napoleon's way of war. Neither war, nor politics or society, would ever be the same again. War is conceived by Clausewitz in socially 'thick' terms, as involving, and reverberating throughout, society, culture, and polity, working its historical effects. At the same time, he was attentive to certain generic tendencies of war, for example, the tendency of war to escalate, to involve ever more extreme violence, drawing in ever greater resources. Opposed to this tendency, among other things, were efforts by political leadership to control war, and make it serve political ends. Inherent tendencies of the war could be limited by politics (or not). It is in this context that his most oft-quoted dictum is offered, that war is the continuation of political intercourse by additional means.

As should be clear, and without mentioning his 'trinities', Clausewitz's conception of war far exceeded the notion that it was 'simply' the continuation of politics, despite the fact that he can be quoted as saying so. Wagner, by contrast, seizes on this political dimension in order to argue that at the 'heart' of Clausewitz' analysis is a 'bargaining problem' because war is shaped by states' political choices (2007: 133–135). In this way, Wagner severs the causal circuits Clausewitz sets up in which war and

society, politics and culture shape *one another*, instead conceiving war as controlled by politics. War loses its own historical and generative powers, and now can be conceived as essentially a peacetime bargaining problem, only conducted with additional means. The notion of war as historical and always changing is gone, a fundamental theme for Clausewitz for whom war was more than a ‘true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to a given case’ (1976: 89), replaced with the idea that it is always essentially bargaining. This move complete, Wagner can conflate Clausewitz with Schelling (2007: 135). Here again, rich, interconnected international histories are drained of social content in order to fit within game-theoretic terms of analysis.

In order for war to be bargaining, it has to be about the exchange of information, and here Wagner does further violence to Clausewitz. Clausewitz was not only the theorist of war as historically contingent but also of war as uncertainty (see e.g. Herbig, 1989). Throughout *On War*, Clausewitz discusses war in terms of uncertainty, of fog, of ‘the general unreliability of all information’, for in war ‘the light of reason is refracted in a manner quite different from that which is normal in academic speculation’ (1976: 113, 140). In Wagner’s hands, however, war becomes an exercise in revealing information between bargaining actors, in which ‘Battlefield outcomes cannot be faked’ and preferences, will and capabilities become clear over time (2007: 153). Contrast this with *On War*’s emphasis that the only certainty in war is uncertainty. As Clausewitz reminds both soldiers and theorists ‘who aim at fixed values’, in war ‘everything is uncertain, and calculations have to be made with variable quantities’ (1976: 136).

As a generative force in history, war consumes and reworks cultural and political orders, including their taken for granted truths, and its effects are not straightforward. The fight at Rorke’s Drift eternally stands for the small band of white men fighting off aggressive, fanatic Africans, when in fact it was Britain that had invaded the Zulu Kingdom. The Tet Offensive was a battlefield disaster for the Vietnamese communists but sealed their victory. Popular narratives of the meaning of the Vietnam War circulate and exercise great effects in American politics and society, yet have almost no connection to the actual events of the war. These effects of war on identity and truth, on remaking the ‘fiber of our lives’ as Paul Fussell has it (1975: ix), takes the level of ‘uncertainty’ war generates to new orders of magnitude – it reconstitutes the entity interpreting information, and in so doing alters essentially the meaning and significance of that information. In all these ways, war is part of the rich set of specifically international social relations that constitute the states, societies, and cultures that populate the world, and which should be objects of analysis for a social science concerned with the international.

In lieu of summing up, I want to return to the imperial. This is less because of my own commitment that a social science of the international must be able to speak to the histories and experiences of the dominated, that is, most of the people who have ever lived on the planet, and more because it offers a window on the international as a ‘thick’ set of social relations with constitutive effects. Many of IR’s key foundational episodes have inherent and fundamental imperial dimensions that have been overlooked. The World Wars were not only struggles between great powers but also *inter-imperial* contests. The Melian dialogue arose in the context of Athenian empire and involved the control of clients, as well as the sometimes curiously costly character of war between the strong and the weak, a theme which should have resonated in twentieth century IR. Yet in its realist reading, the tough Melians, who caused Athens so much trouble, are somehow rendered as a symbol of those who must do as the strong will. This is precisely what the Melians, and later the Vietnamese, the Algerians, and others, chose not to do, with internationally constitutive effects, such as the remaking of French and American society and politics.

The imperial moment I want to close on involves Hobbes, Wagner’s European states, and their monopoly on violence. It is often forgotten that a key problem facing Hobbes in *Leviathan* was that of legitimating a monarchy established by foreign conquest, which is why he includes ‘commonwealth by acquisition’ as one of his paths to sovereignty, for it is an England shaped by Norman rule and colonization that he is dealing with. Hobbes desired that the English should forget this history of conquest and defeat, get on with the business of thinking in terms of ‘interests’, and obey the king (Foucault, 2003: 89–111). When the Normans defeated the Anglo-Saxons, they had faced a hostile population and this fact shaped the entire subsequent development of the English state (Delbrück, 1990: 163–174). The Norman kings, posing as the legitimate heirs of the Anglo-Saxon kings, created and developed a far more centralized state, with administrative and coercive means that exceeded their contemporaries on the continent. No continental vassal of any eminence would have allowed the kings’ men into his domains to count his sheep, yet William the Conqueror already could have the Domesday Book drawn up by 1086. Part of this centralization involved a money economy used to pay mercenary knights, rather than relying on vassalage for military service. Therefore, the precocious character of the English state in terms of economy, military organization, and administration is due to its colonial past, a past which endowed it with the capabilities to go on to play its own leading role in the world history.

A properly founded social science of the international needs a far broader purview than the narrow, spare world of Wagner’s armed and bargaining

actors allows. He consistently invokes the importance of the organization of violence in shaping the international, but rather than offer inquires into the complex international politics and histories of this organization, he leaves us with a binary: either there is or there is not a monopoly on organized violence in any given territory. How these monopolies came about, how they are embedded within larger imperial and international orders, and the historically key role of powerful states in sustaining disorder in the non-European world, ultimately fall outside the terms of analysis Wagner offers for his far too limited theory of international politics.

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