

## International Relations in Search of an Antidote<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract


*This essay is based on the author's long-time observation of the International Relations discipline and the repeated crises it has experienced. The piece identifies 'event-drivenness' as the structural reason behind these crises, in other words, the course of the discipline naturally follows global IR events and, depending on how transformative these events are, when responding to them, is more likely to fall into an existential crisis—with the most recent one being potentially fatal. By discussing in detail the a) science-statecraft relationship; b) scholar-practitioner disconnect; c) distortion of theories by scholars and practitioners; d) paradoxical relationship between rationality and irrationality; and e) theory-practice disconnect, the essay seeks to operationalize these crisis-generated processes when responding to major events. In order to show these crisis generation processes in detail, it uses the theories of political realism and, to a lesser degree, classical liberalism, as case reflections. As a possible solution to the reciprocal condescension between scholarship (theory-making) and statecraft (practice), the essay proposes a "Clausewitzian" modus vivendi that aims at creating a culture of synthesis between the presumed producers and consumers of IR knowledge.*

**Keywords:** Antinomy, paradox, fusion, doctrine, dialectic, enlightenment, and counter-enlightenment

### 1. Introduction

Ontological and epistemological problems have been the major research topic of the discipline of international relations (IR) since its commencement in the United States after its victory in the Second World War. Despite abounding theories and publications in IR, however, the world has not become a safer place to live in. The supposedly revolutionary new concepts and approaches still tend to remain event-driven, and in fact follow things that happen in the field, rather than precede them. Since the end of the Second World War the United States has played a pioneering role for developing the discipline of International Relations (IR). However, in the absence of a common understanding, IR has remained divided into various paradigms such as realism, neo-realism, liberalism, neoliberalism, postmodernism, globalism, and critical

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<sup>1</sup> My academic conversations with my dear friend Ersel Aydınlı have motivated me to write this essay. Our discussion's contributions have been considerable and unforgettable. It is also impossible to forget my daughter Defne's skillful help in formatting the text. Furthermore, I am always grateful to Gizem Koçver for her valuable work in our research center, and to Julie Mathews and Onur Erpul.

theory.<sup>2</sup> In the first place, all these theoretical studies have evolved under the shadow of realism as interpreted in terms of power politics. The growing impact of radical realism has motivated an opposition group of academics and intellectuals to try refining realism. In the literature of IR, these controversial activities were called “Great Debates.”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, the American tradition of liberalism has also participated in the debate. The “great debates” have maintained their influence without even trying to achieve a shared understanding on theory-making. In Turkey, some of our inquisitive colleagues, with the leadership of Professor Ersel Aydınli, began to develop a context (as I understand, an ecological discipline) for the creation of “homegrown theorizing.”<sup>4</sup> Such theorizing is to be new and independent from American IR. Its purpose would be to transcend all limitations arising from the core of IR.<sup>5</sup> A limited group of scholars and intellectuals is now becoming fully aware of this need. Homegrown theorizing would reflect a strong regionalism and the growing revolutionary significance of the “periphery” by indicating political change against the weight of the core.<sup>6</sup>

The perspective shifts involving bitter disputes about ontology and epistemology have finally brought the discipline to a chaotic situation and decline. *Foreign Affairs* and its editor Prof. Gideon Rose, in the March/April 2021 issue, published a series of critical essays under the general title “Decline and Fall.”<sup>7</sup> These articles implied a two-fold meaning: one is about the continuation of the United States’ global leadership. The United States have emerged from the end of the Cold War as a unipolar and dominant state. The other meaning is the ongoing crisis of the discipline of IR, particularly the theory-making dimension of IR intellectuals and scholars in the United States. This irreconcilable association between the two has constituted a serious disadvantage to the development of IR.

It is quite interesting that some of the articles in the special issue of *Foreign Affairs* are written by business administration professors who complain about the habitual methodologies and the lack of serious security of historical data, real or imagined. This is another selective characteristic of the discipline of IR that has been based on harmful factors. Eclecticism has directed the IR discipline and theorization, giving special space to the methods of the natural sciences. On the other hand, it encouraged political scientists, social scientists and market researchers to advise IR scholars.

One of the key aims of this essay is to examine the fundamental mistakes which have been committed by the United States and the Western nations since their victory in the Second World War. Two more basic problems have followed the former one. A certain motivation and rivalry in IR’s theoretical studies is observable. At the same time, we are now embarrassingly challenged by the relationship between America’s persistence of world leadership and the possibility of IR’s revival as a strong and respectable world-wide scholarly discipline. At present, the reconciliation of these two claims seems impossible.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of paradigmatic research in the IR discipline, see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, Daniel H. Nexon, “Paradigmatic Faults in International-Relations Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (2009): 907–30; David A. Lake, “Why ‘isms’ are evil: Theory, epistemology, and academic sects as impediments to understanding and progress,” *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011): 465–480.

<sup>3</sup> Wæver, Ole. “The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations.” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 687–727, doi:10.1162/002081898550725. 715

<sup>4</sup> Ersel Aydınli and Gonca Biltekin, eds., *Widening the World of International Relations: Homegrown Theorizing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Turton, Helen Louise, “Locating a Multifaceted and Stratified Disciplinary ‘Core,’” *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace* 9, no. 2 (2020): 177–210.

<sup>6</sup> Aydınli and Biltekin, eds. *Widening the World*.

<sup>7</sup> See Gideon Rose, “What’s Inside: Can America Ever Lead Again?,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2021.

Now we need to put forward three questions. Question one: Is it possible to put an end to the destructive aspects of IR's dynamism? Question two: Is it possible to create a completely new IR discipline with a new approach and new concepts? Question three: What is the most real and predictive role of politics, history, law, and philosophy? These formal hypothetical questions are now separated for the sake of better understanding and explanation. Their present position ought however, to change into integration. Otherwise, a complete separation of their premises would ultimately make vain the conceptualization and theorizing processes. This essay will be composed of the following layers: The chaotic situation and the "great debate;" realism and liberalism; the gaps between scholars, agents, and institutions; assertive and dialectical concepts; objectivity and subjectivity; rationality and irrationality; purpose and instrument; enlightenment and counter-enlightenment; and intellectual encounters on politics, history, philosophy and law in an integrated way from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The essay argues that contemporary IR theorists and foreign policy practitioners have much to learn from the insights of Kant, and more importantly, Carl von Clausewitz, whose ideal-type theorizing served as a framework for the practical ends of statecraft rather than engaging in abstraction with theory as an end in itself.

Since the end of the Cold War, these questions have remained at the forefront. American Presidents, as individuals, have certainly had their own views, but their orientations have remained within the fundamental framework of realism and liberalism. They are generally concerned with their quantitative aspects. Pragmatism, an American philosophical concept, is culturally valid within the framework of those two basic principles. Since the end of the Second World War, America has had the geopolitical privilege of moving from peripheral obscurity to global hegemony. Its most useful capability has been less about strategic insight than about decreasing losses. Its pragmatism has diminished the destruction effects of governmental or/and military shortcomings. The International Relations discipline is sometimes ironically called an "American social science."<sup>8</sup> One can argue that all these problems cannot be dealt with by putting the great turn of the world outside the United States. The two doctrines, realism (extended to power politics) and liberalism, were authenticated by politicians and bureaucrats as the fundamental principles of American political culture. But this is not everything. Power politics and liberalism came to be used as the instruments of world leadership and for the implementation of a hegemonic foreign policy. It is to be noted that this American national foreign policy doctrine was also accepted, refined, and propagated. Nevertheless, without much delay, a group of academics started to criticize this official "IR theory" and foreign policy, which are predicated on power politics and liberalism and their conduct toward war, peace and domination. These critical studies, however, did not have any considerable constructive doctrinal foreign policy, so traditional defense policy and economics continued to dominate crisis management and military operations.<sup>9</sup>

Many IR scholars pretentiously evaluated their discipline as akin to the natural sciences. They aimed at producing absolute knowledge, which they argued had to be useful not only to their colleagues and students, but to everybody, including statecraft practitioners. One of the consequences of the Enlightenment was that science and technology was able to claim a much better place than the political arena within international affairs. On the other hand, we

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 44–60.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Guilhott, *After The Enlightenment (Introduction)* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-26.

can all appreciate that the legacy of the Enlightenment and its critics have much broader and deeper resources. Humanity has also inherited a rich philosophical, and historical literature. We must not be too far to argue that we are able to benefit from that intellectual treasure in dealing with the problems of the present turn, including in IR, by neglecting politics and strategy.

Two short statements from Henry A. Kissinger may be apropos to the present discussion: “America doesn’t need an alibi, it needs a strategy.” Elsewhere he transcends military strategy, power politics, and neo-realism: “The deepest problems of equilibrium are not physical but psychological or moral. The shape of the future will depend ultimately on convictions which far transcend the physical balance of power.”<sup>10</sup> There is no doubt that Kissinger had extraordinary skill and depth in state affairs. He has always approached statecraft with regard, and he had the skill to put forward his critical arguments with dexterity, and utmost clarity.

## 2. The Great Debate

Stanley H. Hoffmann and Kenneth W. Thompson put forward three kinds of theory applications.<sup>11</sup> The first one is the normative and value theory, which is based on “the study of politics in terms of desiderata.” Originally, the political desiderata have been ethical or moral. Thompson reproduced this theory as the study of politics, however, it is a kind of theory produced by philosophy. Its theoretical origin can be traced back to Kant’s theory of perpetual peace. As a purely political practice this effort has always been exercised whenever required. Its theorization, however, was “alarming” to political scientists who, “allegedly confining themselves to the study of facts as contrasted with values, so often failed to take stock of this realm. The scientific approach blunts the fact that ethics and purpose relate to practical matters.” They assert that the problem is more than social customs. Nevertheless, the critical scholars do not seem to deny the sociological aspect of normative theory completely, because it is also related to national interest and its acceptance by the population. Moreover, moral pretension may arise from higher claims concerning civilization or justice. When the conduct of foreign policy is democratic, this tendency increases rather than diminishes.”<sup>12</sup>

The second theory is empirical or causal theory. This theory’s essential purpose is to analyze actual political behaviors and to identify the main variables, such as the balance of power, offered as the key to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries of international relations. The third theory is called political science theory or theory as a set of recipes for action as systematic advice on statecraft. This theory’s primary purpose is to provide the decision-makers with the intelligence needs of the time. At this point, the theory contributes to the success of diplomatic and military operations.<sup>13</sup>

A remarkable social democratic thesis of liberal and social values of individual freedoms and, if not equality, at least welfare, have developed. The cost of welfare has increased gradually, social programs have bred a stifling bureaucracy, and demand for rights and litigations have multiplied considerably. A generalization of the great movement for

<sup>10</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “In Afghanistan, America needs a Strategy, not an Alibi,” *International Herald Tribune*, June 25, 2010; and Henry A. Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company IHC, 1974), 78–9. Also see Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 230–34.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley H. Hoffmann, ed., “International Relations as a Discipline,” Part I in *Contemporary Theory in International Relations* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 1–12; and Kenneth W. Thompson, “Towards a Theory of International Relations,” in Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 17–28.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, “Towards a Theory,” 20–1.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 8–9.

emancipation from traditional customs, hierarchies and realism and all sorts of stratifications have become serious problems.

Small wars, deterrence of a nuclear war, and stopping the escalation of armed conflicts, in other words “rules of the game,” gradually developed and dominated the international agenda in military interventions and proxy wars. Globalization, the revolutionary development marked by the successive improvements in communications, have shrunk the world. Globalization represents a single, worldwide international economic and political system in the context of liberalism. Globalization has undermined the system of sovereign states from below and from above. One aspect of this is the empirical revolution of globalization and interdependence.<sup>14</sup> It deprives states of much of their currencies and their budgetary policies. Globalization transfers power from the state to a private world economy of investors, businesspeople and firms, traders, bankers, speculators, and communications experts. That transfer is, to quite an extent, uncontrolled because of the lack of relevant and satisfactory global regulations and institutions.

The second revolution against sovereignty is normative: Human rights, international criminal justice, stopping air and water pollution, and the limited ability and intention of the states to fight against terrorist organizations. Some of the great powers, hiding behind human rights, are actively supporting terrorist actions. Various countries, for example, Turkey, have been victims of this kind of contradictory behavior of the United States. We live today in a world of novelties, complexity and uncertainty. It is still a world of states, but problem solving requires multi-polarity. It is a “world that moves in two opposite directions at the same time.”<sup>15</sup> One of the dimensions is “horizontal,” and signifies the competitive aspect of international politics. The other dimension is “vertical,” which signifies domination and dependence.<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Waltz’s neorealism has changed the form of the IR debate.<sup>17</sup> His neorealism is as hegemonic as Morgenthau’s mainstream theory.<sup>18</sup> It emphasizes not the state and its foreign policy but the entire international system and its structure. His theory is the distribution of power, particularly military power. The neoliberal scholars put forward their findings as scientific conclusions and veil their normative character as being values and norms. Indeed, they were only the old liberal values of common understanding of cooperation. However, they were not explained in these terms. In fact, they claimed falsely to have a new science as a whole. This is just one of the very good examples produced by a worldwide IR scholar group, one which cannot be construed as being anything more than a pretentious attempt to seem more scientific and more impressive. The above-mentioned IR scholars probably expected the statecraft to be influenced by their scientific approach. However, this was just wishful thinking. American politicians and bureaucracy have not cared much about what and how the scholars think.<sup>19</sup> We may even argue that American statecraft has treated IR theories with neglect and condescension. In decision-making and implementation they fundamentally depend on a combination of realism and liberalism, without taking an interest

<sup>14</sup> Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, “Domestic Institutions beyond the Nation-State: Charting the New Interdependence Approach,” *World Politics* 66, no. 2 (2014): 331–63.

<sup>15</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 54–69.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 51–3; Stanley H. Hoffmann, “International Relations: The Long Road to Theory,” *World Politics* 11, no. 3 (1959): 374–76; and Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington DC, Institute of Peace, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

<sup>18</sup> See Ole Wæver, “Waltz’s Theory of Theory,” *International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2009): 201–222.

<sup>19</sup> Paul C. Avey and Michael C. Desch, “What Do Policymakers Want From Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2014): 227–46.

in the theorization studies of the IR discipline. In the statecraft, the transformation of these fundamental concepts are accepted as values and norms of a doctrinal belief.

The scholars of the great debate do not complain only about the hubris of the politicians, they also complain about the “tension” between theorization and politicians, probably to avoid bias: “Among the materials to be used for such a research, none has been more neglected than the writing of philosophies, theorists, and statesmen... There have been some path-breaking efforts which study theories and writings of statesmen as distorted mirrors of the world around them. Much more could be done if we used such works not for new chapters in histories of political thought but as tools for the analysis of actual systems and situations.”<sup>20</sup>

The moral issue has always been persistent. It was raised both in theory and in the practical conduct in international affairs. It is not only because of the honesty and integrity of individuals and collective human beings. Another reason for obeying the social values and norms is the social pressure on the members of society. Nations and civilizations are more inclined than individuals to follow their own interests. This also brings about a critical situation is democracies, the statecraft’s choice between “good” and “bad” or “right” and “wrong” becomes more difficult.<sup>21</sup> The problems do not arise only from the combination of realism and liberalism, but also from two different kinds of liberalism. One of them is Kant’s liberalism, which is regulated through universal rules and a moral imperative doctrine which may turn into an ideology. But Kant is highly abstract and did not write much on international relations. The second kind of liberalism was philosophical, less rational, more suitable to a calculation of consequences, and may be affected by sentiments and passions. On this issue, Hoffman shared the position of his Harvard colleague Judith Shklar, particularly her essay published in her book titled “Liberalism of Fear”. Stanley H. Hoffmann says that he is “concerned with one particular aspect of liberal ethics: the ethics of political life.”<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The Cornerstone of Realism and Its Distortion

The theory that represented the center of IR in the years of its commencement was Professor Hans Morgenthau’s realist theory of power politics. The concept of national interest defined in terms of power was the central concept of the radical realism of Morgenthau.<sup>23</sup> Political sociology and political science have used as a model the image of integrated community. This kind of a system did not fit with the area of the critical scholars of the great debate. Whatever else, the nature of IR was considered as an integrated system. As an autonomous discipline it should again have to struggle for the invention of a new theory of IR. Morgenthau formulated theoretical questions according to the dependency and independency of the discipline. The political realist should maintain the autonomy of the political sphere; the economist should think in terms of interest defined as wealth, which is a form of power. The economist asks: how does the policy affect the wealth of society? The lawyer asks: is this policy in accord with the rules of law? The moralist asks: is this policy in accord with moral principles? And the political realist asks: how does the policy affect the power of the nation or the decision-making elite? Morgenthau underlines that political realists are not unaware of the existence

<sup>20</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 26–7 and 102–3.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 244 and 242–54.

<sup>22</sup> Hoffmann, *Contemporary Theory*, 244.

<sup>23</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*.



and relevance of standards of thought other than political ones. As a political realist, one cannot treat equally with other standards, but subordinate other standards to those of politics. This subordination, however, is not absolute.<sup>24</sup> The realist analysis of power is highly debatable. The tendency to equate politics and the effects of the “lust for power” narrows the premise of realism and mutilates it. In fact, evil and violence are not basic instincts of human beings. Much of the international or domestic evil of power is produced by the changing conditions of a context. Even a good person can be forced to act immorally. Unfortunately, this issue has been largely neglected by the radical realist theory, with the exception of Hans Morgenthau.

The usefulness of strategic planning is another important aspect of theory-making. Sometimes these two words are employed interchangeably. It is almost a common belief that the criterion of a good foreign policy is its rationality. However, there is here another limitation. The success and its degree of rationality can only be evaluated and understood at the end of the operation, in other words after the implementation of the plan. The lack of a fruitful discussion of ends has brought the interpretation of power politics to the static quality of the theory. The permanence of power politics itself has become a goal. The importance of the transitory characteristics of diplomatic strategic plans are completely ignored. I would like to finish this paragraph with a philosophical limitation. The problem arises from rational principles. It is of a dialectical nature where the rationality desired contains its opposite, irrationality. The harder we struggle for rationality, the closer we get to irrationality.<sup>25</sup> Morgenthau inspires the reader that he is also inclined to recognize this paradox.

#### 4. Science: Servant or Master?

After positing his radical interpretation of realism, Morgenthau apparently felt the necessity of asking and trying to answer a subtle question. He introduces his remarkable book, *Servant or Master*, with his yearning of the ancient days: “The Aristotelian concept of science as a self-sufficient human activity was indeed appropriate.”<sup>26</sup> Then he complains about the growing role of scientists in bureaucracy and politics. After all, they claim to be the guardians and augmenters of the truth, but “the result is not only corruption but also hypocrisy.”<sup>27</sup> The utilitarian orientation of science and technology toward statecraft constituted a radical break with the traditional habits and constructed artificial walls of monopolizing military and diplomatic knowledge. So, modern scientific knowledge became esoteric. It seems that Morgenthau believed that this shift of power within the government meant the usurpation of the fundamental democratic right of control of the layman. Another great risk was that the scientific elites, through their involvement in the political and military decision-making process, would become “both the supporters and ideologues” of diplomatic and strategic policies. Morgenthau dealt with the above-mentioned questions. In one of his monographs in 1972 he reminded quite clearly that politics is concerned not only with power, but normally with resources and instruments of power as well. This implies that through power, science and technology enter the area of high politics. As a result of this, a paradox comes to the

<sup>24</sup> Hoffmann, “International Relations,” 349–50. Particularly, see Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1968), part IV- part VI; and James Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations* (New York: Lippincott, 1971), 75–80.

<sup>25</sup> Justin E. H. Smith, *Irrationality: A History of the Dark Side of Reason* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 4–11.

<sup>27</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Science: Servant or Master* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1972), 1–19 and 73–104.

fore, as science serves as an instrument for acquiring arms, fighting, national security, and for demonstration of power. When science and technology are used for such aims, they become transformed into a political implication. Their service to the government is expected to distinguish between what is true and false. However, if this original purpose is replaced by a political doctrine or an ideological value system, science and technology elites open themselves up to “corruption and hypocrisy.” Such professional and moral disintegration leads to the degeneration of science itself, as a system of theoretical knowledge about what is true and what is false. The loss objective standard incapacitates the state.

Morgenthau’s approach to IR is within the general framework of realism. He exposed his basic understanding of IR with a critical style in the first ten pages of his monograph. He revealed that the most important challenges to the discipline derived from interactions between scientific objectivity and political subjectivity. It is the distinctive characteristic and ambition of a human being to become conscious himself or herself through their experiences. The development of natural and humanistic sciences and the speed of technological achievements have provided occasions for humanity to be able to live in awareness. Nevertheless, there are also other ways of becoming conscious of oneself, such as religion, art, love, nationalism and ethical considerations, which also have always been within politics. According to classical realism, domestic national politics and international politics are not completely separated from each other politically. Their interaction is particularly important in the ethical and ideological arenas. Morgenthau argues that politics is managed by objective laws which lay in the nature of humanity. In all realist theories, power is accepted as a key concept and defined in terms of interest. All statesmen think and act on the basis of interest, which is an objective and universal concept. Despite this assumption, Morgenthau does not attribute fixed meanings to the fundamental concepts of power and interest. We know by historical experience that interactions between objectivity and subjectivity in politics cannot be avoided. In other words, rationality and irrationality, neither of them can be eliminated from the decision-making process. The process should then require a solution to this paradox.

## 5. Political Realism and Modus Vivendi

John J. Mearsheimer, in one of his book chapters on liberalism, used a legal concept: *modus vivendi*. He asserted that political liberalism had two variants: “Modus vivendi liberalism and progressive liberalism.”<sup>28</sup> This division between two kinds of political liberalism, especially that associated with the well established legal concept of *modus vivendi*, moved Mearsheimer toward norms and legal studies despite his staying within the framework of realism in general. The application of this concept could possibly produce a juridical effect in liberalism and realism, or the fusion of the two. There are two differences between *modus vivendi* liberals and progressive liberals: They think differently about the content of individual rights, and about the role of the state. In *modus vivendi* liberalism, rights depend on individual freedom, and acting without government interference. Progressive liberals also benefit from individual freedoms. They can call on the government to help its citizens. They believe all individuals have a right to equal opportunity, for social engineering by the state. The *modus vivendi* liberals on the other hand, have always looked at social engineering with suspicion. They have always considered social engineering as an instrument for the strongly connected within

<sup>28</sup> See the discussion on “Modus Vivendi Liberalism and Progressive Liberalism,” in *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, ed. John J. Mearsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 55–90 and Chap.5.



a particular political and economic system. It would be a useful practice of making changes to laws in order to establish a new society according to unfamiliar political ideas and culture in order to tie the target country or the region firmly to the hegemon.

Progressives tend to emphasize that reason facilitates extreme tolerance in liberal societies and can help move them toward universal consensus on moral matters. *Modus vivendi* liberals usually reject those claims and instead focus on the limits of reason. They are entitled to argue that it is too early for the conclusion of the expected essential treaty. In the meantime, with consent or tolerance, both political liberals should keep the gates ajar for consensus. The classical purpose of *modus vivendi* is to allow the parties to learn the virtue of restraint, including the proper way of claiming forbearance and patience. In legal terms, *modus vivendi* is a temporary agreement or arrangement until a final settlement is arrived at. Mearsheimer did not focus on this aspect of political liberalism. In order to explain clearly American foreign policy doctrine he emphasized that liberalism only works if there is a higher authority like the state, which can maintain order. If there is no such an international system, liberalism degenerates into realism. To work effectively, liberalism requires a hierarchy of two or more great powers. Mearsheimer employs the word “anarchic” instead of “chaotic” for the present international system because according to him, there is a certain order in anarchic societies, but in chaos there is no order at all.<sup>29</sup> Although there is today a certain international order, survival still is every state’s primary goal. They want to maintain their territorial integrity, personality, sovereignty, and economic and technological development. On the other hand, there is today no substitute for interventionist states for the fulfilment of these goals. This is the reason why liberalism depends on hierarchy and why it effectively becomes realism with two or more great powers. Mearsheimer, in his remarkable critical analysis of political liberalism, does not seem to be very happy about “the Triumph of Liberal Progressivism.” He begins the relevant paragraph not with progressivism, but by reminding readers of the classical meaning of *modus vivendi*:

...in its original form, political liberalism was synonymous with *modus vivendi* liberalism. But variant gradually fell out of favor, partly because a *laissez-faire* approach to governing led to extreme economic inequality and widespread poverty... Utilitarianism and liberal idealism emerged in good part as responses to *modus vivendi* liberalism’s shortcomings... Yet progressive liberalism has not won such a decisive victory as to render *modus vivendi* liberalism irrelevant. *Modus vivendi* liberalism has a substantial following in every liberal society, and its advocates sometimes have a significant influence on public discourse. But in practice, the best its proponents can do is to curb the excesses of the interventionist state. There is virtually no hope of replacing it with a state that keeps away from social engineering and positive rights.<sup>30</sup>

## 6. The Gap between Theory and Practice

We have so far worked to understand and explain theory-making disputes and restraints upon the discipline of international relations. Some of these problems have arisen from groups of scholars and intellectuals, while others have originated from the official policy makers. American practitioners’ foreign policy making, as we have already dealt with, depends considerably on the fusion of realism and liberalism. The combination is far from a synthesis

<sup>29</sup> Hoffmann, “International Relations,” 353–54; Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion*, chap.5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, “The Triumph of Liberal Progressivism”.

of two theories; rather, it is nothing more than a doctrinal principle, i.e. a way of utilizing liberalism to strengthen realism according to the national interest. However, the expected result was not achieved. The practitioners' disregard has been completely limited, and has distorted the government's knowledge about the non-Western world. The lack of correct variables has badly affected Washington's diplomatic and military operations. American political decision makers and military commanders have often lacked a clear idea about their strategy as well as that of the invaded area, and thus failed to conduct their efforts successfully. Scholars and practitioners in the conduct of diplomatic-strategic policies are usually handicapped by their different cultures. Members of two combatting communities have often been socialized in different professional and intellectual arenas. Usually they have different interests, sometimes even highly opposed interests. They may even claim them as national interests. Actually, this has been the case in America's great debates on IR. Government agencies are usually too reserved and distrustful of academics. Although they often object to the scientific assumptions of foreign policy analysis, it is true that they from time to time happen to confess their appreciation of scholars' criticisms. However, this has not been a usual behavior. A rather worrying thought often strikes academic scholars and intellectuals, which is that the eyes of policy specialists reflect a bored and sour face whenever they hear the mention of the word "theory" or the phrase "scientific study of IR" from academic scholars. The slightly hidden and unsympathetic reaction of the foreign policy practitioners is naturally embarrassing to academic scholars.<sup>31</sup>

Practitioners and policy specialists have rarely welcomed the high level of abstraction which is often employed in scholarly writings. However, we know that they have also adopted a questionable opposite approach concerning the relevance and utility of theoretical generalizations and models involved by academic researchers. For instance, it was the case in the association between the Air Force and RAND Corporation, and Robert McNamara's system analyses. The first one was successful, while the second one failed. The time has thus come to ask the following question: what is the state of contemporary IR theory and what has it contributed so far to the knowledge base for conducting foreign policy? In this essay, I have so far emphasized the mistakes committed and their negative effects on the following struggles. More than failures, scholars and intellectuals have arguably not developed satisfactory predictive IR theories. For various reasons, they did not expect too much from general theories of IR. A few of them did not attempt to provide all the knowledge needed for the diplomatic-strategic conduct. In other words, they refrained from starting with theoretical assumptions. Instead, catching up with changing realities, they proposed to foreign policy decision makers and practitioners to involve certain philosophical and legal concepts to soften further moralistic political decisions and implementations. Two very good examples of this are Raymond Aron's "praxeology" and John Mearsheimer's "modus vivendi."

One of the most important critical arguments came from a distinguished historian, Professor John Lewis Gaddis, at Yale University. The fundamental aspect of his argument is the independency and dependency of variables in IR theories. In short, the core idea is underlined as followed: If history is essentially required in IR theory making and teaching, we must understand and acknowledge that separation between dependent and independent variables is invalid. All kinds of variables are interdependent. IR theorists, like historians,

<sup>31</sup> George, *Bridging the Gap*; and Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2005).

should assume the interdependency of variables as they trace their interconnections through time. In order to moderate a little, the devastating logic of his argument, Gaddis dedicated some thoughts to reductionism and the ecological approach. Reductionism approves that there are independent variables and it will be possible to decrease the number of dependent ones. Reductionism could also occasion to fulfil the principle of parsimony. The ecological approach also appreciates the specification of simple constitutive elements: “It is worth asking, therefore, where the pressure for reductionism within the social sciences actually comes from. The answer, I think, is that these disciplines prefer reductionist over ecological methods of inquiry because they see in reductionism the only feasible way to generalize about the past in such a way as to be able to forecast the future.” Gaddis finished his remarkable explanation about the interdependency of variables with “a palpable hit:” “The ecological viewpoint is inclusive, even as the reductionist perspective is exclusive; but would anyone claim that inclusion is any less ‘scientific’ a procedure than exclusion?”<sup>32</sup>

Before passing to the analysis of our *modus vivendi*, I would like to share with you one more of our common troubles. It has always been one of the most complex issues of theory making that it is much less knowable than the past. It is about the future. It lies on the other side of singularity that is the present. It has been the most attractive, but the hardest singularity to reach rightfully. With modernization and primacy of instrumental technology, the goals of the diplomatic-strategic activities have vanished. In fact, we should know where we want to go and for what. We should avoid unexpected itineraries. We should know about the relationship between the region, its population and potential instruments. To have a correct knowledge about the equilibrium between goals and instruments is of utmost importance for both parties. Aspirations and imagining may be limited, but instruments are always limited. Many IR scholars and strategists have dealt with this paradox by offering oversimplifications like rational choice assumptions, structural functionalism, modernization theories, and neorealist theory.

The crux of historical and philosophical problems has not been taken on in detail. We are today almost completely convinced that, in the United States, no bridge will soon be constructed between statecraft and scholarly-theory construction. Both parties view askance the possibility of meaningful engagement. Reciprocal condescension, even if it is as soft as glazed looks, are not encouraging at all.<sup>33</sup>

## 7. The Clausewitzian *Modus Vivendi*

The Clausewitzian *modus vivendi* has two major perspectives to develop. The first one is the paradox between the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment. How can we stop the clash of ideals between these two rival worlds? This mutual struggle has not been solved. This is still the most important philosophical subject-matter and it continues to involve any scientific or humanistic problem. The second perspective of Clausewitz was about historical studies. Clausewitz gained a remarkable historical and political experience. He played a leading role together with his teacher and friend General Scharnhorst in the military reform of Prussia after his active participation in the Napoleonic Wars. I will come back to the story

<sup>32</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 55; John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (USA: Penguin Random House, 2018). In this book, Gaddis explains Clausewitz’s “softened realism.”

<sup>33</sup> George, *Bridging the Gap*, 6.

of Clausewitz after a brief introductory reminder.

Following his explanation of the core assumptions of realism, Mearsheimer asserts that “none of these assumptions by itself portrays the competitive and dangerous world usually associated with realism.”<sup>34</sup> But states are rational actors. Yes! But, they are usually instrumentally rational. The theory makes no dependable judgements on the rationality of goals, with the only exception of survival. When we continue an attentive reading of Mearsheimer, we observe that he is gradually and partly inclined to criticize realism. He asserts that realists do not show much respect to inalienable rights. Moreover, according to him, liberalism does not deceive realism. This may be true. But we know that both liberals and realists exaggerate liberals’ influence in politics by spreading democratization.

Finally, we witness in Mearsheimer that *modus vivendi* liberalism has become competitive with progressive liberalism. As Mearsheimer argues, the United States public is inclined toward a more restrained foreign policy based on *modus vivendi* liberalism, which differs from the liberal-realist hegemony. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine War may in some way accelerate the *modus vivendi* variant. We have already seen the difference between the two variants of political liberalisms: *modus vivendi* liberalism and progressive liberalism. For the first one, rights are all about individual freedom to act without government interference; for the second one, rights are also imperative, but they favor a much more activist government which can even help the society move toward universal consensus on moral and economic matters. *Modus vivendi* liberals reject those claims and emphasize rationality’s limits in order to maintain security and national sovereignty.

Up to this point, the legal concept of *modus vivendi* has been employed within the framework of IR theory making and policy implementation. However, its original and essential meaning has been somewhat forgotten. The crux of the philosophical problems were not taken on through *modus vivendi* as applied in its original meaning. Its primary task was to provide the mutually disagreeing parties with a preparatory transitional period before the conclusion of a permanent treaty or any other permanent legal arrangement. The European philosophers and intellectuals had to deal with a similar problem, on a greater scale, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. We cannot say that the problem has now been concluded. Indeed, the problem is still far from that point. The fundamental problem is much deeper and older than the decline of IR. The core paradox arises from the lack of consent between the radical supporters of the Enlightenment and those of the Counter-Enlightenment, and their mutual arrogance and hubris. The radical Enlightenment people believe that they are the key to making the world a much better place. The *modus vivendi* liberals expect to be treated with tolerance, but they do not want tolerance meaning consent. On the contrary, it allows for lack of consent. During the provisional period, “the aim should not be to guarantee equal outcomes, just equal opportunity.” The Enlightenment, with its optimistic and rational doctrine and its rich history from the Renaissance to the French Revolution and even beyond it, has continued until our days. Indeed, the great success of Newtonian (1643-1727) physics increased the confidence of scholars and intellectuals, with the exception of legends, astrology and alchemy.<sup>35</sup> As far as politics is concerned, since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), nation states have not submitted their will to another state or organization. Even then, political

<sup>34</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Please see Heuser’s book for more detail. Also see Kerem Karaosmanoğlu, *Komple teorileri: disiplinlerarası bir giriş* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2019).

tolerance has dominated implementation, and conspiracy theories too have benefited from populist statecraft.

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) made it clear and relatively easy to understand the ideas of the key figures in the development of Counter-Enlightenment, such as Vico (1668-1744) and Herder (1744-1803). I must note that Berlin preferred to use the more general word “romanticism” instead of “counter-Enlightenment.” I do not want to take much of your time with a very detailed explanation so I will limit myself to one of the arguments that is related to our previous analyses:

The Romantics did more than draw attention to the irrational springs of human behavior. By insisting on the diversity of human ideals they showed the need - however much they might deny it - for tolerance, for the necessity of preserving an imperfect equilibrium in human affairs... The result of Romanticism, then, is liberalism, toleration, decency and the appreciation of the imperfections of life...some degree of increased rational self understanding. In a reversal of a kind common in the history of thought, the Romantics gave a new lease on life to ideas and values they despised.

Existentialism owes its success story to the Romanticism that critically penetrated the modern philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Immanuel Kant had two diametrically opposed positions. He disliked Romanticism, and at the same time, he was rightfully regarded as one of the defenders of Romanticism. He was brought up in a religious family and he detested any form of exaggeration, mysticism, ambiguity and confusion. Perversely, Kant was very much interested in sciences. Kant exerted this duality and played well his decisive role in the development of a new philosophical and intellectual climate. Berlin underlines: “We are children of both worlds.” Despite the Kantian dualist philosophy and his book *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), the German *Aufklärung* advocates were appalled by the Counter-Enlightenment philosophy.<sup>36</sup>

Kant and Clausewitz, the two great theorists of peace and war, lived, thought, and wrote in a turbulent period when political and intellectual life in Europe (including the Ottoman Empire) was undergoing a radical transformation caused by the French Revolution and the philosophical debate between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment. The arguments of these two formidable thinkers continue to inspire contemporary international affairs and are regarded as the classical actors of the two opposing schools of thought. In the first view, Kant is a source of inspiration for the liberalism-oriented intellectuals, and Carl von Clausewitz for realists. However, they have often been subject to superficial or distorted interpretations. The major argument of this essay is that these two thinkers were influenced by political and intellectual movements of their time in similar ways. They had a significant shared area of reasoning and conceptualization. They both developed their ideas on a similar epistemological ground. Kant’s “perpetual peace” and Clausewitz’s “absolute War” are unattainable ideals. They are abstractions which make theorizing possible. Like Hobbes, Kant defines “the state of nature” as a “state of war.” Nations are in conflictual and cooperative relations with each other in the state of nature (or the state of war). Clausewitz’s concept of “real war” represents the wars that take place in life (that is to say in the state of nature). They are the wars that occur in specific historical situations. Perpetual peace and absolute war

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 2013), ix-xi; 26-307; and *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 26-170. And Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

belong to the world of “noumena” whereas the state of nature (or war), in contemporary IR terminology, belong to “the anarchic society.” Clausewitz’s “real war” belong to the world of phenomena. Although Kant’s perpetual peace is an unachievable target, nations have a moral obligation to make every effort to achieve it as if it is attainable. According to Clausewitz, every war tends to escalate to absolute violence. “Absolute War,” albeit philosophically valid, is an abstraction. In the real world, politics and many other factors that Clausewitz calls “friction” introduce themselves in the act of war and reduce the absolute violence to the modified forms it assumes in history. In both scholars we observe a philosophical attempt to reconcile the ideal (or the image) with the real. In the final analysis, both thinkers meet in this effort of mutual consent through the possibility of reasonable politics suggesting, *inter alia*, a moral obligation to limit violence; in Kant, through an imaginable perpetual progress to eternal peace; in Clausewitz and in the contemporary strategic terminology, the management of the “security dilemma” in its extensive form.<sup>37</sup>

Where there is exaltation of reason (rationality), and an intention to eradicate its opposite, irrationality, the latter will not surrender easily. On the contrary, it will defend itself by spreading into the social order. At the social level it is expressed as religion, ethics, culture, myths, legends, rioting, mass demonstrations, renouncing vaccination. The harder we struggle for rationality, the more we move toward irrationality. Therefore it is irrational to seek to eliminate irrationality, both in society and in our mental capabilities. Justin Smith, referring to the French historian Paul Hazard, calls this result “la raison aggressive.”<sup>38</sup> As Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer pointed out, freedom depends on the satisfaction of passion; we ought to rebel against the dominance of rationality.<sup>39</sup>

Some people and some political regimes may have evil intentions. They abuse modernization and technological development to increase their power in order to dominate or eradicate other states. The national socialism of Hitler is a prototype example of that kind of political regime. Any victory of rationalism or any ideational effort to permanently set up a social order which condemns extremism will be a good beginning. If the purpose of this effort is to secure a quiet and peaceful society on the basis of rationality, the problem will be again of a dialectical nature, where the social and political order to be constructed will evidently contain its opposite. The endurance of the construction of will then depends on the political involvement through the process of *praxis*. Politics can either play a constructive role by fusing the Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment or can play a dividing role between the two. “It is a great paradox of the present age that, even though the totality of all human learning is more accessible than ever before in history—indeed a billion of us on earth can now easily access it with a special device we carry in our pockets—nonetheless false beliefs are as epidemic as ever.”<sup>40</sup> The interaction between objectivity and subjectivity in the political cannot be avoided. Of course, the subjective is not always irrational. But we can say that irrationality is ineliminable if we want to develop a theory. This presents another case of opposites. Like in the story of Kant and Clausewitz, they sought to reconcile opposites by first posing them; gradations, qualifications, and mitigations could then come after. Clausewitz himself explained the result as follows:

<sup>37</sup> Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, “Muhteşem ortaklık: Kant ve Clausewitz,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler-International Relations* 4, no. 14 (2007): 161–84.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Irrationality*, 5–27.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Irrationality*; and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Aydınlanmanın diyalektiği*, trans. Nihat Ülner ve Öztarhan Karadoğan (İstanbul: Kabcı, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Aydınlanmanın diyalektiği*, 288.



When two ideas form a true logical antithesis, each complementary to the other, then fundamentally each is implied in the other. The limitations of our mind may not allow us to comprehend both simultaneously, and to discover by antithesis the whole of one in the whole of the other. Nevertheless each will shed enough reciprocal light to clarify many of the details... A shift in our viewpoint will bring us nearer the subject, so that we can examine more closely what we previously surveyed from a distance.<sup>41</sup>

Clausewitz made clear that “war is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means... The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.”<sup>42</sup> Gaddis tries to make the relationship even clearer: “if war, in this sense, reflects politics, it must be “subordinate” to politics and therefore to policy, the product of politics.”<sup>43</sup> Ends can be infinite. They depend on passion, love, identity, morality, and honor, and are almost impossible to scale rightfully. Means can never be like that. If you want to be reasonable you should try to scale your aspirations according to your instruments. “Whatever balance you strike, there will be a link between what is real and what is imagined: between your current location and your intended destination. You won’t have a strategy until you have connected these dots, dissimilar though they are, within the situation in which you are operating.”<sup>44</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers underlined the significance of systematic approaches while the Counter-Enlightenment and Clausewitz emphasized great generals and political leaders and their genius for war and peace. But Clausewitz never forgot about the dialectical nature of paradoxes. In general, he argued, “the more physical the activity the less difficulties there will be” in establishing precise rules. “The more the activity becomes intellectual and turns into motives which exercise a determining influence on the commander’s will, the more the difficulties will increase. Thus it is easier to use the theory to organize, plan, and conduct an engagement than it is to use it in determining the engagement’s purpose,”<sup>45</sup> which is the final task of politics.

A theory can produce many choices on the settlement of an issue. Clausewitz is also liable to promise too many choices. But Clausewitz repeatedly states what his own strategic theory cannot do: 1) Construct a model for the art of war that can be applied in any war; 2) Put forward a positive doctrine, a manual for action; 3) Serve as a guide which at the moment of action lays down precisely the path one must take; 4) Cover every abstract truth; or 5) Mark the narrow path on which the sole solutions supposed to have liability of planting a hedge of principles on either side.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Clausewitz would certainly not support oversimplifications for the purpose of parsimony, stability, and universality. For example, he did not think of separating independent from dependent variables; he did not like to use “rationalism” on every occasion such as “rational choice models.” He disliked arguments in organizational studies and to provide politics with a single choice. He believed that a theory must never lose sight of the human dimension of life. However, this was not enough for him. Ultimately, his fundamental approach was to keep in mind the theoretical and empirical significance of the Enlightenment, and the dialectical relationship between both perspectives.

<sup>41</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press, 1976), 523. See also Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, 196.

<sup>42</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, 197.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 140–41. Also look at, Hugh Smith, *On Clausewitz: A Study of Military and Political Ideas* (London: Palgrave, 2004), 171–73. Clausewitz called this procedure “method” or “mode of procedure”, but it is not routine, it is not based on definite individual premises, rather on the “average probability” *On War*, 151–55.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *On Clausewitz*, 173.

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