

THE FUTURE OF STRATEGY

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To speak of the "future" of strategy is to reveal a deep tension within the way in which we commonly think about the subject. On the one hand we are confronted by apparently revolutionary changes in the geo-political landscape. The transformation of Europe, the perhaps imminent fragmentation of what is still derisively known as the Soviet "Union,"¹ and the devolution of the Warsaw Pact, to name only a few, are all factors which conspire to force upon us the belief that the Cold War - a term which has in varying degrees been almost synonymous with strategy for almost half a century now - and perhaps all that goes with it, is rapidly becoming a historical artifact. The course of events, and the words of many political leaders, commentators, and even national publics, all seem to force us to think very seriously about the future of strategy in such a world.

On the obverse side of this coin, however, things are not nearly so clear. For in the tradition of thinking about strategy which has grown up within the period of the Cold War it is difficult even to think about the "future" of strategy in any meaningful sense. In this conception, deeply indebted to (perhaps quintessentially representative of) the neo-realist tradition of international relations theory, it makes no real sense to speak of the "future" of strategy at all. Strategy, like international relations in general, is a realm of timeless precepts and principles. Specific institutions, distributions of power, and especially technology may change, but the essence of strategic reality is eternal.² The strategic realities of Thucydides and Sun Tzu, of Clausewitz and Frederick the Great, as well as the more tangible reality of the Cold War, remain essentially unchanged.

These principles of statecraft are not themselves open to transformation. They represent the eternal nature or essence of international relations, and thus of strategy itself. In this sense, therefore, it makes no sense to speak of the future of strategy; the future, like the past and present, are reduced to an eternal moment.³

It is this tension between the fundamental transformations which appear to be concretely occurring and the theoretical framework through which we seek to comprehend them which seems to me to constitute the most fundamental challenge, both theoretically and practically, to thinking about strategy today. Yet the meeting of such a challenge does not require a complete rejection of all existing conceptions of strategy. One does not have to begin de novo, as it were, to construct a theory of strategy which can move beyond this tension. That reconstruction is needed is beyond doubt; but it is my conviction that the seeds for such a potential transformation already exist - albeit largely unacknowledged - within contemporary strategy. A recognition of this potential, however, requires the adoption of a manner of thinking about contemporary strategy quite different from that currently dominant. It requires a broad reconsideration of the relationship between strategic studies and the neo-realist theory of international relations upon which it is founded.

An understanding of the issues at stake in considering the future of strategy must go beyond the relatively narrow field of strategic studies. It draws upon themes current within, and possess implications for, many of the most

¹ I owe this turn of phrase to John Dunn who uses it in reference to the "United" Kingdom; see his *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.5.

² A particularly clear formulation of this position is provided by Robert Gilpin in "Has Modern Technology Changed International Politics?" in J. Rosenau, et. al. eds., *The Analysis of International Relations* (New York; Free Press, 1972).

³ The best treatments of these issues are R.B.J. Walker, "Realism, Change and International Relations Theory" *International Studies Quarterly* (March, 1987) and "History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Summer, 1989). See also Robert W. Cox, "On Thinking About Future World Order" *World Politics* (January, 1976).

fundamental debates currently under way within the discipline of International Relations as a whole. Most importantly, it involves the entire question of the challenge to neo-realism by "interpretivist" conceptions. In particular, what Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie have convincingly demonstrated in their analysis of the relationship between regime theory and neo-realism must be recognized as holding equally true in contemporary strategic debate: the epistemological stance of neo-realism stands in direct contradiction to the framework of analysis and ontological conception of states adopted by the so-called Third Wave which dominates much of contemporary thinking about strategy.⁴ The ontological claims which provide the very content of Third Wave strategic thinking, and its self-defining opposition to the forms of analysis which dominated the preceding Second Wave, bring it into contradiction with the epistemological stance underlying the neo-realist theory which it claims to represent.

The recognition of this fundamental contradiction at the heart of contemporary strategic thinking has important theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical standpoint it leads to a re-engagement between strategic studies and current debates in International Relations theory, and to the startlingly ironic realisation that contemporary strategic thinking may find its natural evolution in the direction of recent attempts to develop a "critical" theory of international politics. At the level of practice, it is vitally important in determining the ways in which we understand, and thus react to, the transformations currently at work in the realm of international security in this apparently pivotal era.

In both cases the question of the "future" of strategy is amongst the most important and interesting issues confronting the contemporary study of international politics. But to more fully understand the way in which the strategic thinking of the Third Wave leads contemporary strategy beyond itself, and into a real sense of the future, it is necessary to return to the past. In this case that past is the relationship between strategic studies and the neo-realist theory of international relations.

Rationality and Neo-Realism

Neo-realism provides the very foundation of the contemporary discipline of strategic studies. But the foundations of neo-realist theory itself rarely receive a sufficient treatment in discussions of strategy. The neo-realist invocation of the "condition of anarchy" and the resultant "security dilemma" in which states find themselves, has become virtually ritualistic as an introduction to discussions of strategy.⁵ Yet it is rare that the theoretical foundations of neo-realism itself are exposed to serious discussion.

Now obviously to expect a full analysis of the neo-realist framework as an introduction to any and every strategic analysis would be unreasonable. But it is this silence, the virtual non-existence of any such analysis within the discipline, which is striking. More to the point, many of the confusions and controversies in recent strategic debate are a direct consequence of this lack of theoretical clarity. It is not my intention to provide a full discussion of neo-realism and its relation to strategic studies in this context. It is possible, however, to open up the issue through

⁴ Friedrich Kratochwil and John G. Ruggie, "International organization: a state of the art on the art of the state" *International Organization* (Autumn, 1986). See also Kratochwil, "Regimes, Interpretation and the 'Science' of Politics: A Reappraisal" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Summer, 1988).

⁵ Two examples among an almost infinite number of possibilities are: Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to Strategic Studies: Military Technology and International Relations* (London: MacMillan/IISS, 1987) and John Garnett, "Strategic Studies and Its Assumptions" in J. Baylis, et. al. *Contemporary Strategy* Vol. I, 2nd ed., (New York: Holmes & Meirer, 1987) Ch.1.

an examination one of the central postulates of neo-realist theory: the concept of rationality, the positing of states as rational actors, and the relationship of these concepts to the theoretical - most especially epistemological - foundations of neo-realism.

At the most fundamental level it is important to recognise, as both its proponents and its critics have pointed out, that neo-realism does not claim simply to represent a body of opinion regarding international relations. On the contrary it claims to ground and justify its analyses in strict opposition to the vicissitudes of opinion and subjective interpretation, holding rather that it is founded upon the more secure tenets of science, of the objective representation of reality - the way the world is.

I do not wish to enter here into the complex, often interesting but occasionally obfuscating, debates over the status of the neo-realist theory of international relations as a "positivist-inspired" endeavour. At any rate the issue is too large to be adequately dealt with in this context. What I do want to emphasise, however, is the way in which neo-realism is not simply a claim about the nature of international relations, but a claim to *know*: specifically a "scientific" claim to know, objectively, the reality of international relations.

The importance of this theme in neo-realist thinking cannot be underestimated. In what remains in many ways the classic treatment, Hans Morgenthau included it in the first of six principles of political realism, arguing that: "Realism believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects, however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws. It believes also, then, in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion - between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgement, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking."⁶

It is this belief in appropriateness of the physical sciences as the model for all knowledge, and the desire to separate objective truth from subjective opinion which continues - despite considerable diversity in its embodiments - to unite the neo-realist study of international politics. More recently, for example, Robert Gilpin has provided an explicit restatement and recognition of neo-realism's link to the objective, scientific, conception of knowledge emerging from the Enlightenment: "An offspring of modern science and the Enlightenment" he writes, ". . . Realism is based on the practice of states, and it seeks to understand how states have always behaved and presumably always will behave."⁷

There are important differences in the analytic foundations of each of these thinkers.⁸ What each shares, however, and what is central to the neo-realist tradition, is a fundamental desire to place the study of international

⁶ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th edition (New York; Knopf, 1973) p.4.

⁷ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.226.

⁸ One need only read the first four chapters of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (Reading Mass.; Addison-Wesley, 1979) to get a sense of this diversity. On this theme see also Alexander Wendt, "The agent structure problem in international relations theory" *International Organization* (Summer, 1987).

It is a failing of some recent "critical" theory that despite its avowed concern with the 'reifying' consequences of neo-realism it has itself tended to reify the complex and often contesting themes which constitute the Realist tradition into a single abstraction called 'Realism'.

relations on "objective" foundations. If the discipline of International Relations is ever to be placed on secure foundations, and proceed toward the knowledge we so desperately need, it must conform to the tenets of objective knowledge as they have developed in other sciences.

In epistemological terms this means that the discipline must adopt the approach of science itself.⁹ It must, in short, treat the phenomena under consideration as objects. In this sense the epistemological approach underlying the neo-realist theory of international relations is essentially positivistic. Robert Cox's summary of this epistemological position is particularly clear, he writes: "Positivism denies the relevancy, for an understanding of the social world, of the inward and outward duality of human institutions and events. Scientific method for the study of society is conceived as analogous to that evolved for the study of the world of nature. *Human agents and actions are reduced to their outward phenomenal aspects, and science is thought of as a rationality to be discovered in the form of regularities in the relationships among externally observed phenomena.* The progress of science is equated to the cumulative discovery of laws in the form of consequences that are predictable under prescribed conditions."¹⁰

Now the nature of human action, subjectivity, provides a consistent difficulty for such an epistemological stance. In the tradition of thought from which the neo-realist theory of international relations emerges, this problem is overcome through an appeal to the universality of rational self-interest.¹¹ It is the positing of a unitary state-as-actor as the bearer of this rationality which provides the solution to this fundamental problem. The concept of rational self-interest provides the theoretical bridge in neo-realism's conversion of subjectively grounded state actions into the externally observable "objective phenomena" required by a positivist epistemology. In the Weberian appraisal of Hans Morgenthau,¹² or in the more overtly socio-scientific idiom of micro-economics and rational-choice theories

⁹ That this presupposes a particular conception of science, and that what science is is a highly contested question in itself, should be self-evident. Unfortunately this too is an issue beyond the scope of the present essay. For some reflections on the question see: R. Keat and J. Urry, *Social Theory as Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2nd ed., 1982); and Peter T. Manicas, *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

¹⁰ Cox, "On Thinking About Future World Order" p.178; emphasis added. The paradigmatic treatment in this vein remains Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

Two excellent recent treatments of the entire question of neo-realism, epistemology and social theory are: David Campbell, "Recent Changes in Social Theory: Implications for International Relations" and Jim George, "The Study of International Relations and the Positivist/Empiricist Theory of Knowledge: Implications for the Australian Discipline"; both may be found in R. Higgot, ed., *New Directions in International Relations?*, Australian Perspectives (Canberra: Department of International Relations, 1988).

¹¹ This is too large a theme to be dealt with here; however two sources in the history of ideas are in this context invaluable. For a succinct treatment see: Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1977). More extensive is J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

¹² An analysis of Morgenthau as a Weberian is well traced in R. Turner and S. Factor, *Max Weber and the Dispute Over Reason and Value* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,

favoured by many contemporary analysts, the conception of state action as the instrumentally-rational pursuit of self-interest is the foundation of theoretical analysis.

It is this very assumption which provides the foundation for neo-realism. Although his approach is critical, Richard Ashley's characterisation of this foundation is in this regard completely accurate. "For the neo-realist," he writes, "the state is *ontologically prior* to the international system. The system's structure is produced by defining states as individual unities and *then* by noting the properties that emerge when several such unities are brought into mutual reference. For the neo-realist, it is impossible to describe international structures without first fashioning a concept of the state-as-actor."¹³

Despite its consistent invocations of the concept of "structure," the neo-realist theory of international relations is fundamentally grounded in a particular conception of states and state action. In neo-realist theory the sovereign nation-state is declared to be the "subject" within international relations. The particular state, as the rational individual, looks to its own interests first. Despite the fact that in the long term this interest might be better served through cooperation, each state cannot rationally assume that all states would act in a cooperative fashion, therefore it acts solely in its own interest, and all others do the same.¹⁴

The essence of the neo-realist conception of international relations is thus not simply the postulate of anarchy, but the assumption of a particular form of rationality in state action as both the source and outcome of that anarchy. In the neo-realist theory of international relations the key to understanding the rational nature of reality is, paradoxically, rationality itself.¹⁵

It is this adoption of a specific conception of states as rational actors which provides the foundation of neo-realist theory. Since all states are held to be equally rational, or are forced by the "security dilemma" to become so in order to survive, it becomes possible for both the statesman and the scholar to calculate the actions and reactions of the actors on such a basis.¹⁶ This form of action, once understood, is applicable to all times and in all places, and thus allows international relations to be subsumed under, and comprehended within, the framework of a positivistic science.

Through the theoretical mediation of rational self-interest and a unitary state-as-actor the "subjective" actions of states are rendered "objective." Neo-realism thus constructs a "science" of international politics which claims to have discovered the eternal nature and objective operation of the world system.

1984).

¹³ Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism" *International Organization* (Spring, 1984). See also Wendt, "The agent-structure problem" on this issue.

¹⁴ The classic analogy here, of course, is Kenneth Waltz's use of Rousseau's parable of the stag hunt in *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). Although the idiom differs in his *Theory of International Politics* the essential position remains unaltered.

¹⁵ This could scarcely be more clearly stated than it is by Morgenthau in his first two "Principles of Political Realism". See *op. cit.* pp.4-8.

¹⁶ A nice treatment of this theme, though specifically limited to questions of foreign policy analysis is Miriam Seiner, "The search for order in a disorderly world: worldviews and prescriptive decision paradigms" *International Organization* (Summer, 1983), pp. 373-413.

This system operates, as it were, in a self-perpetuating feedback controlled manner. Not only is it claimed that international politics itself is based upon instrumental reason, but its analysis also follows its dictates. In practice this allows Reason to become synonymous with calculation and a universally applicable strategic/instrumental rationality. In terms of theory it allows for the same exclusion of value and universality of instrumental calculation which makes possible a positivistic analysis of international relations and which allows neo-realism to lay claim to the title of "objective science."

It is only through this transformation of states into objects that neo-realism can adopt and maintain the positivist epistemology on which it bases its claim to scientific knowledge. They become epistemological objects, "units," whose actions are subject to the predictive and explanatory requirements of a positivistic conception of science and knowledge. The link between the ontological claim of neo-realism concerning the nature of states and their action and the epistemological stance through which it claims to know are inextricably bound together.

Neo-realism in The Second Wave

In nuclear strategy the instrumentalist foundation of neo-realism found its clearest and most vociferous application in the analyses of the so-called Second Wave of strategic thinking. In its most extreme cases it took on the highly formalised structure of game theory.¹⁷ In whatever form, however, it adopted the concept of the universal rational actor and applied it to question of nuclear strategy. The characteristic analyses of the relationship between "deterrence and defence," the "requirements of deterrence" and the "strategy of conflict," all bear the distinctive mark of this theoretical heritage.¹⁸

But the adoptions of "strategic man" (or perhaps "American" strategic man)¹⁹ which is the centre of this form of analysis was not simply the result of an unconsciously ethnocentric projection. This is only part of the puzzle. It is absolutely essential to grasp its theoretical significance, that is, to emphasise the essential role which this concept

¹⁷ While game theory represents an extreme example of the application of the rational actor model it is important not to completely identify Second Wave strategic thinking with game theory itself or overstate the impact which explicitly game-theoretic approaches had on strategic analysis. Useful correctives are Hedley Bull, "Strategic Studies and its Critics" *World Politics* (July, 1968) and, more expansively, Barry O'Neill, "A Survey of Game Theory Models on Peace and War" in R. Aumann and S. Hart, eds, *Handbook of Game Theory* (forthcoming). It is not so much pure game theory as it is the adoption of the universal, instrumentally-rational actor as the foundation of analysis - in whatever broader theoretical context it may be embedded - which defines Second Wave thinking.

¹⁸ The terms in quotations refer, of course, to three representative works within the tradition: Glenn Snyder's *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); William Kaufmann, "The Requirements of Deterrence" in Kaufmann ed., *Military Policy and National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); and Thomas Schelling *The Strategy of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

¹⁹ On "strategic man" or, as Bull referred to the concept "homo strategicus", see Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) and his searching analysis "American Strategy: The Myths Revisited" in K. Booth and M. Wright, *American Thinking About Peace and War* (Sussex; Harvester Press, 1978).

or assumption plays in allowing strategic studies to meet the positivist epistemological criteria which it inherits from the neo-realist theory of international relations.

"Strategic man" is not simply an afterthought or an idiosyncratic a priori upon which a theory of strategy could be constructed. Quite the contrary. It also emerges, as we have seen, from a long - though again quite culturally specific - evolution in the understanding of the social sciences themselves. "Strategic man" is in fact the necessary foundation for the entire conception of theory and knowledge which this conception of understanding social life sought to fulfil.

"Strategic man," to put it another way, was a means of turning actors into objects and allowing them to be subsumed under a positivistic theory of knowledge. The abstract and deductive structure of the theory is founded upon a set of assumptions about the nature of the actors themselves. But these assumptions are themselves grounded in the epistemological requirements of a positivist theory of knowledge. "Strategic man" is not simply an unselfconscious a priori: it is a means, a necessary means, through which the study of the human phenomena of strategy may meet the requirements of a positivist conception of knowledge. It is thus an indispensable element not only of the Second Wave of strategic thinking, but of the neo-realist theory of international relations itself.

To miss this element is to miss a fundamental dynamic in the relationship between the theory of knowledge underlying the Second Wave and the concrete analyses which it presents. There are, no doubt, a number of other factors which go to make up the story. But for the relatively limited purpose we are pursuing here it is this element which is crucial not only in understanding the Second Wave, but in grasping the significance of that which constituted - and continues to constitute - a reaction against it: the so-called Third Wave of strategic thinking.

Neo-realism and the Third Wave

The Third Wave of strategic thinking, emerging in the mid-1960s, centred primarily around opposition to the abstract rationalism which dominated the strategic theorising of the Second Wave. Initially, Third Wave theorising stressed the need to apply inductive methodologies and called upon the evidence of concrete historical experience to counter and correct the misconception emerging from the abstract rationalism and deductive structure of Second Wave analyses of strategy. It stressed unacknowledged complications and questions in the actual historical practice of deterrence, and suggested theoretical refinements such as the notion of bounded rationality.²⁰ Despite such concerns, these "early" Third Wave analyses tended to remain largely within the identifiable, rationalistic, framework of neo-realism. In the more recent development of Third Wave analyses, however, fundamental issues implicit in these early arguments have emerged with greater force.

For the most part, the development of strategic thinking in the Third Wave has evolved in two clearly discernable directions, each of which is representative of the broader schism between theories of "deterrence as

²⁰ The most important single work in this vein is probably Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence and American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). See also Robert Jervis' extensive review "Deterrence Theory Revisited" *World Politics* (January, 1979) pp.289-324. Note, however, that George and Smoke seem largely to concede the assumptions and conclusions of the Second Wave concerning "strategic" deterrence, and differ primarily as it concerns lower levels of application. In this they differ, in varying degrees, from subsequent Third Wave theorists.

denial" and "deterrence as retaliation" which predates the Third Wave and continues to dominate strategic thinking.²¹ Categorizing strategists is, of course, a notoriously risky business; but though the terms may be somewhat misleading I have found it simplest to refer to those strategists who continue to make the case for a conception of nuclear strategy centred around Assured Destruction as strategic "liberals." Conversely their opponents, whose thinking tends to revolve around concepts of nuclear utilisation and theories of denial, I shall label strategic "conservatives."²²

In their own self-images, and in most conventional readings of the field as a whole, these two positions are defined largely in opposition to each other. While I do not wish to minimise their differences, I will argue here that they are in fact characterised by a fundamental commonality. This commonality ironically lies in their shared, though almost wholly unacknowledged, opposition to the neo-realist theory of international relations.

Strategic Liberalism and the Appeal to Subjectivity

The theoretical move of the liberal Third Wave is driven largely by a desire to rescue MAD from the apparently damning paradoxes to which it is subject in "rational deterrence theory". For John Steinbrunner, for example, it is the paradoxical nature of Assured Destruction which provides the most troubling challenge to thinking about nuclear strategy. The theory's central postulate, the instrumentally-calculating rational actor, results in the long-standing paradox that in the event deterrence should fail it would be irrational to carry out the threat of retaliation upon which deterrence is based.²³ Such a possibility, rationally considered, would appear to yield only one logical outcome: the need for a first-strike counterforce capability. As he puts it: "If simple, direct and perfect rationality existed on both sides of the strategic confrontation, this paradox of the retaliatory threat would presumably lead to a pre-emptive counterforce attack by the first side truly understanding the conundrum."²⁴ This very logic, he acknowledges, appears to undermine MAD and has provided the impetus behind the emergence of counterforce and "deterrence as denial" strategies.

In similar terms, Robert Jervis places the problem of the "stability-instability paradox" at the heart of his analysis. In purely rational deterrence theory, stability at the strategic level of Assured Destruction would lead logically to a greater incentive for limited aggression, thus undermining the very deterrence it sought to achieve. The mutual ability to carry out assured destruction renders the threat to respond to limited aggression in such a fashion senseless and, as a result, is inherently lacking in credibility. The strategies of denial: counterforce, limited nuclear options and the like, again seem the logical conclusion.

Unlike their opponents, however, the liberal strategists are unwilling to follow this paradox down the logical road to a counterforce doctrine and a theory of denial or victory. Conceding its apparent logic, they nonetheless deny

²¹ For an analysis of the history of strategic theory as a continuing conflict between these two conceptions see: Gregg Herken, *Counsels of War* (New York; Knopf, 1985).

²² I should note that I am far from satisfied with these labels. They seem, however, as adequate as (or at least no more inadequate than) other possible distinctions such as those between "assured deterrers" and "warfighters" or theorists of "retaliation" versus those of "denial".

²³ John Steinbrunner, "Beyond Rational Deterrence: The Struggle for New Conceptions" *World Politics* (January, 1976) p.231.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p.231.

its validity. Rather they seek to defend a conception of Assured Destruction as the essence of nuclear strategy from such a conclusion. This defence has two components. The first is a technical-strategic attack upon the very possibility and plausibility of a strategy of denial, utilisation or victory. This is the level at which most strategic debate is conducted. It is the second aspect of the argument, however, which is more fundamental and more interesting. Though they may differ in detail, this element of the attempts to defend MAD are fundamentally similar in essence: in each case they involve an appeal to the nature of the actors themselves, that is, to human subjectivity and its crucial place in the constitution and comprehension of "reality".

Strategic reality, it is held, is fundamentally different than it appears in the arid portrayals of rational deterrence theory. And the source of this difference lies in the impact of the subjective nature of the actors who comprise and create that reality. Only through such an understanding, and the theoretical transformation which it entails, can we avoid the apparently damning paradoxes and misleading conclusions yielded by "rational" deterrence theory.

In Steinbrunner's case the appeal is to a "cybernetic" conception of decision-making. He stresses the need to understand that actors act within limited and limiting preconceptions, conceptual frameworks and institutional routines. The implication, and the empirical judgement, is that rational deterrence theory simply does not represent the "reality" of the nuclear age.

Jervis' analysis is even more sweeping. He readily grants the apparent logic of the counterforce or warfighting conception of strategy and deterrence. The problem with such a way of thinking lies, he avers, not in its detailed logic, but in its failure to appreciate that such logic no longer applies in the situation within which we find ourselves. This is a situation which the abstract rationalism of strategic thinking has by and large failed to comprehend. Yet it has not escaped the attention of the decision-makers who actually confront and create that reality. They have long recognised the fundamentally transformative nature of the "nuclear revolution" and have acted accordingly. They have consistently understood, according to Jervis, that "MAD is a fact, not a policy."²⁵

In order to comprehend this fundamental shift we must also transform our categories of analysis. Jervis emphasises the psychological and stresses the "symbolic" nature of nuclear politics.²⁶ In each case the focus of attack is upon the rationalistic calculation which is held to dominate and mislead strategic thinking. Again the foundation of his critique is the subjective nature of the actors involved, and the claim that this reality is fundamentally different than its misleading portrayal in rationalist deterrence theory.

Nor are these isolated examples. In similar terms Patrick Morgan argues that "we should step away from overly simplistic conceptions of deterrence in favour of a model that is rooted in the real behaviour of governments".²⁷ He calls upon the idea of "sensible" decision-making as the key to understanding deterrence in the nuclear age. Again it is abstract rationalism which is held to be the enemy of understanding. Finally, consider McGeorge Bundy's invocation of the concept of "existential" deterrence as a means to precisely the same end.

It is not my purpose to evaluate these proposed alternatives. The crucial point is that all of these are interpretations of the nature of subjectivity and assessments of the implications of that subjectivity for the

²⁵ Words which form the title of Chapter Three in *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, Chapters 5 and 6 especially.

²⁷ Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977) p.207.

understanding of reality. In each case there is an appeal to the subjective constitution of reality by the actors who comprise it. The very categories they invoke: psychological and cybernetic images, the politics of symbolic representation, the existential condition of humanity confronting nuclear apocalypse, are all claims about the very nature of subjectivity itself.

These "liberal" analyses are, in fact, interpretations of interpretations. And it is through reference to this interpreted "reality" - which they contrast to the unreality of rationalist strategy - that they seek to defend MAD. The precise analyses that each pursues may be different - what, after all, does it mean to understand the nature of the "sensible," not to mention the "existential"? - but all clearly stand outside the purview of the rationalistic, objective science of neo-realism. At the most fundamental level they constitute an interpretively-based challenge to the foundations of that theory itself.

The positing of the universal instrumentally-rational subject which provides the epistemological foundation of neo-realism, and the basis of its claim to the status of "objective science," is the very focus of the "liberal" critique. The appeal is to interpretive modes of understanding itself represents a direct assault on the theoretical foundations of neo-realism. Yet these more fundamental implications have rarely been recognised or taken up within the field.²⁸ Ontological and epistemological claims continue to coexist in a contradictory and often confusing tension.

Strategic Conservatism and the Appeal to Culture

At first glance the conservative Third Wave appears, and claims to be, a classic exemplar of neo-realist theorising. In the view of one of its most well-known proponents, Colin Gray, this is true not only of the Third Wave but of strategists in general. "Strategists," he says, "may be termed and should acknowledge that they are, without apologies, neo-realists." While they must appreciate and take into account the criticisms of classical Realism which have engendered the prefix "neo", he continues, the fundamentals of strategists' assumptions "are those which form

²⁸ Robert Jervis' recent analyses may mark something of a shift in this regard. It is necessary, he argues, to start to understand "the liability of our general social science tradition that analyzes reality apart from the beliefs that both we as scholars and the actors themselves hold." *Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution*, p.176. The implications of such an understanding may be far more fundamental for theories of international relations than he seems imply.

the conceptual bedrock (or sand, in the appreciation of many theorists of international relations) of the writings of E.H. Carr, Nicholas Spykman and Hans Morgenthau."²⁹

Nor are these foundations limited to the appropriation of the foundational concepts of power and interest in a condition of self-help and anarchy. Gray's epistemological position is distinctly positivist.³⁰

When probed more deeply, however, this claim to neo-realist foundations proves to be illusory. The conservative Third Wave's adoption of the neo-realist analysis is limited almost entirely to an off-hand appropriation of the supposed verities of anarchy and power. Indeed the very existence of conservative Third Wave theorising is based upon an attack on the foundations of neo-realism. To fully understand the way in which this reversal comes about it is again necessary to grasp the relationship between this conception and that against which it defines itself: the "Second Wave" theories of the so-called Golden Age of strategy, and the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction.

The attack of the conservatives upon Golden Age theorising in general, and upon MAD in particular, again consists of two related themes. The first, as we have already seen in our discussion of the liberal response, emerges from a series of arguments concerning the logical inconsistency - and corresponding lack of credibility - of MAD. Again, however, it is the second element which is more interesting. The essence of the critique is that the strategic theorising of the Golden Age was (and its descendants remain) dominated by a series of ahistorical and ethnocentric assumptions. These assumptions, derived from peculiarly American ways of thinking, have been extended by strategists into universal categories of analysis regarding strategic thinking and action. Golden Age strategy, it is claimed, erroneously assumed that everyone thought about strategy in the way in which a particular school of American theorists thought about it.³¹

The abstract rationalism of strategic theory which these ahistorical and ethnocentric analyses have made possible is held responsible for a diminution of the political element of strategy. Rather than understanding that

²⁹ Colin Gray, *Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982) p.188. The all too easy conflation of these thinkers into a unified "Realist tradition is itself highly problematic and misleading. In this regard Robert Cox's distinctions between the positions of Carr and Morgenthau are especially important; see his "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (10:2, 1981). Morgenthau's own sense of the distinction is clearly apparent in his review of Carr's *Twenty Years Crisis*; see H. Morgenthau, "Surrender to the Immanence of Power: E.H. Carr", reprinted in Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century Vol.3: The Restoration of American Politics* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1962) pp.36-43. The entire theme of the creation of the "Realist tradition" has been effectively dealt with in R.B.J. Walker, "The Prince and 'The Pauper': Tradition, Modernity and Practice in the Theory of International Relations" in J. DerDerian and M. Shapiro, eds., *International/Intertextual Relations: Boundaries of Knowledge and Practice in World Politics* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1989).

³⁰ His clearest statement on this issue is *Strategic Studies and Public Policy: The American Experience* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982) pp.3-6

³¹ See, quintessentially, Colin Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, Ch.2. and Carnes Lord, "American Strategic Culture" *Comparative Strategy* (Vol. 5, No.3, 1985).

strategy is a paramountly *political* endeavour, this recent strain of conservative strategy has argued, the thinking of the Golden Age reduced it to a set of abstract calculations which obscured its political nature.³²

The primary practical concern of these theoretical assaults, of course, has been the way in which the theorists of the Golden Age have understood the Soviet Union and its approach to strategy.³³ The failure to comprehend the particular nature of the Soviet state - its historical, cultural, political and ideological distinctiveness - has led, in the eyes of the Third Wave to a consistent misapprehension of Soviet strategy. This misapprehension, in turn, has resulted in fundamental flaws in American strategy and a concomitant failure in its ability to deal successfully with the Soviet Union.³⁴

It is not my purpose here to deal with the specific analysis of the "Soviet threat" provided by conservative strategists of the Third Wave, or with its analysis of the shortcomings of American strategic thinking. What is important to recognise is that this claim about the *nature* of the Soviet state does not simply indicate a difference of opinion within the framework provided by neo-realist theory. It invokes a completely different - indeed contradictory - methodological approach from that adopted by neo-realism.

The theoretical position of the Conservatives is based upon a critique of the assumptions about states and state actions which are incorporated in Second Wave thinking. It represents, in essence, a challenge to the very model of the universal actor in international relations which provides the foundation for that thinking. In arguing for a renewed stress on history and politics - even an incorporation of the insights of cultural anthropology³⁵ - the Third Wave poses a fundamental challenge to the concept of the universal instrumentally-rational actor which underlies "rational deterrence theory". It represents a call for an understanding of historical and cultural difference and relativity, and an appreciation of these factors for the political endeavour known as strategy.³⁶

If we take this claim seriously, however, it is apparent that this critique need not, indeed cannot, consistently be limited solely to an assault upon Second Wave strategy. A stress on questions of culture, broadly conceived, yields a set of concerns very different from those embodied in neo-realist theory. It also inevitably entails a shift in epistemological orientation. Taken seriously it marks a turn to interpretive or hermeneutic modes of inquiry as opposed to the positivistic stance adopted by neo-realism. It is in fact an assault upon the very essence of neo-

³² There exists an obvious tension here between the rationalist-logical approach which underlies the first element of the critique of MAD and the political-cultural argument which constitutes the second. In this context, however, this is an issue cannot be explored further.

³³ The paradigmatic example here is Richard Pipes, "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Can Win a Nuclear War" *Commentary* (July, 1977).

³⁴ See Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, Ch.3.

³⁵ See Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style*, p.xiv.

³⁶ This is not to say, by any means, that the 'conservative' Third Wave takes these admonitions at all seriously enough or carries them out in an adequate or sophisticated way. What is important is the underlying challenge. An excellent exploration of the importance of questions of culture and ideology in international relations, and a critique of the ways in which they are most often handled in the discipline, is R.B.J. Walker, ed. *Culture, Ideology and World Order*, (Boulder; Westview, 1984).

realism itself. The Conservative Third Wave represents a critique not only of the strategy of the Golden Age, but also upon the theoretical framework which it claims as its own foundation.

In its critique of strategic studies the Conservative Third Wave inadvertently opens up the possibility (indeed declares that it is the *reality*) that states do not necessarily act, or have to act, in the instrumentally-rational fashion which results in the fatalistic world of neo-realism. Now, obviously, this element the Third Wave has applied its theoretical critique in a strategically conservative way. Moreover, it has remained unaware of the fundamental contradiction within its own position. It has continued to see itself as securely grounded within the neo-realist theory of international relations and to premise - and justify - its analyses within its parameters. This lack of awareness is a source of theoretical confusion, but also provides the Conservative analysis with considerable rhetorical power through the ability to claim both the validity of its critique of the strategic rationalism of MAD *and* its grounding in the necessities of power politics in a condition of anarchy derived from its supposed foundation in neo-realist theory.

But this confusion should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the attack of the Conservatives upon the theories of Mutual Assured Destruction and the Golden Age is in fact a fundamental critique of the neo-realist theory which it claims as its very foundation. What is more, this critique can lead strategy in directions quite different - indeed opposite - from those in which it has been taken by this school of Third Wave strategists.

The very premise which allows neo-realism to declare anarchy, insecurity and conflict to be the eternal nature of international politics, and the foundation of its scientific understanding, is explicitly denied by the critique of the Third Wave. Moreover, the claim of the conservative Third Wave to being rooted in the supposedly secure foundations of neo-realism is subverted by the very content of its own existence. This tension remains largely unexamined within the Third Wave itself, however it is a tension which cannot be ignored or wished away.

But the foundational critique of the Third Wave need not fall into this contradictory position nor be developed in the conservative vein in which it has hitherto been proposed. For the critique provided by the Third Wave opens up the possibility of a renewed *political* sense of strategy in which the future again becomes one of contingency and possibility. The issues at stake here are, once again, not simply epistemological or methodological; they are also ontological and thus practical. Questions of interpretation become contestable and, because they explicitly involve judgements on present or potential strategies, they also become political. They relate not simply to the theory of strategy but also to the relationship between that theory and the practice of strategy in the nuclear age. The study and analysis of strategy itself thus becomes political in a sense far beyond that implied by the challenge of the Third Wave.

The Future of Strategy

In opposition to the objectivist epistemological stance which dominates neo-realism, a stress on subjectivity, culture and agency as categories of analysis requires the adoption of a *interpretive* stance. The shift, in the language of G. H. von Wright is from *explanation* to *understanding*.³⁷ The actions of states - here the specifically "strategic"

³⁷ Many of these issues are highly contentious and reflect some of the deepest and most difficult issues in social theory. What follows, therefore, is intended to be suggestive rather than rigorous.

Suggestively, one need only consider the long standing (and still vibrant) debates in cultural anthropology - to which Gray appeals - which were set off by Peter Winch's early analysis to see that the complexity of the questions raised by an appeal to cultural understandings go far beyond the relatively superficial attempts advanced by Third Wave

actions, cannot be studied as objective data, but must be understood through an analysis of the practices and structures which they make and through which they are in turn made.

Specifically, then, the study and practice of strategy is not to be viewed solely as the process of instrumental calculation in an objective condition of anarchy. Both this attitude toward strategy, and its part in constructing strategic reality, themselves become a focus of study as "subjective" practices rather than objective givens. What is more, other forms of interpretive understandings and practices may be advanced. Culture, ideology, history all become essential elements in subtle, nuanced and particular understandings of how strategy has come to be seen, constructed and practised in different times and in different places.

The epistemological shift involved in a move to interpretive understanding also entails a transformation in the ontological foundations of enquiry. A stress on history, relativity and subjectivity - in short, on practices - implies an ontological position very different from that of neo-realism. As social constructions, practices become susceptible to critical self-reflection and thus to potential change. In place of the eternal determinations of the nature of states and the structures they create, history becomes a realm of contingency.

Strategy and strategic relations, in this view, also emerge as contingent historical constructions. In theoretical terms, the analysis of strategy becomes a process of critical self-reflection upon the practices adopted and their interrelationship at particular historical, and especially political, conjunctures. Timeless determinations of structure and "objective" declarations about the eternal nature of strategy give way before *concrete political practices and possibilities*.

The discourse of strategy is to be seen as a political clash of interpretations. Moreover, the *practice* of strategy is to be seen as one of competing or conflicting interpretations of strategic relations, politics, themselves. The very strategic practices and analyses pursued reflects political judgements. There is, then, no such thing as the appeal to "objective" analysis. There exist only better or worse interpretations.³⁸ The grounds of judgement concerning these interpretations are not purely empirical, they are also practical. The question of whether the conclusions they advance, and the prescriptions which flow from them, advance the cause of peace and security - and even the very definitions of peace and security from which these theoretical conceptions emerge - become matters of debate and judgement. Strategy ceases to be a realm of purely instrumental calculation in an objective realm of analysis, and becomes broadly political its potentials and possibilities.

theorists.

In an expansive literature see, as examples, Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958); Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978); P. Rabinow and W. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); M. Hollis and S. Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1984); G.H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

³⁸ A classic treatment of this entire issue is: Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" *Review of Metaphysics* (Fall, 1971).

It is important to note that it was precisely the desire to avoid the theoretical and practical political difficulties and dilemmas which such a stance yields which, in part, provided the impetus for the tradition of thought from which contemporary Realism emerges. The universality of rational self-interest was to provide not only an analytic foundation, a claim about what *is*, but also a prescriptive or ethical admonition how these relations should be ordered.

This more general theoretical reflection is clearly represented in the concrete analyses of Third Wave analysts themselves. They are far from the "objective" analyses sought by neo-realism. On the contrary, they are particular, contestable and highly political *interpretations*.³⁹ It is not possible, to reiterate, for this political nature to be hidden behind the purportedly objective and scientific analysis of neo-realist theory, for it is precisely its unrecognised opposition to this theory which defines the Third Wave.

This realisation has numerous implications. At the practical level it forces us - like some recent work in international political economy and in theories of international regimes - to take much more seriously the role of norms and values and their part in the creation and maintenance of security relations. The recent transformations in Europe, especially the process surrounding CSCE provide a prime illustration.⁴⁰ The shift from a process of purely instrumental calculation and a stress on the technical solution of an (ever elusive) "military balance" to one of a common understanding and structure of security based upon a shared set of norms and values represents a situation in which conventional rationalist analysis is either unhelpful or misleading.

CSCE may in fact represent a transformation from the attempt to manipulate technical factors affecting the "logic of deterrence" to a process concentrating on the development of common foundations of a relationship built on trust, on rules, norms and values which provide the foundation for an architecture of mutual security. This does not mean that instrumental considerations become irrelevant, but the structure of possibilities which such an understanding yields is considerably broader and potentially more transformative than one limited solely to traditional rational calculation and the structural determinations of a "security dilemma" beyond the reach of those political practices.

In theoretical terms the implications are equally far-reaching. The first bears on the relationship between the debates in strategic theory and the broader debates currently under way in International Relations theory. Robert Keohane's recent analysis, for example, is generally open and sympathetic to "interpretive" - or he calls them "reflective" - approaches, but charges them with a failure to generate concrete research strategies.⁴¹

The issues raised here are complex, but the debates in strategy reflect a direct concern with precisely these issues. Contrary to Keohane's claims, the debates in strategy over the past fifteen or so years have been precisely about the research agenda - and the concrete political consequences, yielded by an interpretivist stance. It has been a confused debate, due largely to its lack of theoretical self-consciousness and corresponding conflation of contradictory epistemological and ontological stances; but though this demonstrates its inadequacy, it also points to its importance.

³⁹ A clear example of this conflict is evident in Gray's admiring comments regarding the methodological approach advanced in Ken Booth's *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979) and yet his disagreement with the concrete conclusions which Booth puts forward. Conversely, Booth's own appraisal of the school of strategic thinking represented by Gray is, to say the least, highly critical. See his: "Nuclear Deterrence and World War Three: How Will History Judge?" in R. Kolcovicz, *The Logic of Nuclear Terror* (Boston; Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Keith Krause for an illuminating discussion of this issue.

⁴¹ Robert Keohane, "International Organizations: Two Approaches" *International Studies Quarterly* (December, 1988).

The purportedly neo-realist Third Wave unconsciously marks a fundamental, if incomplete, move away from the traditional neo-realist framework. The development of the future of strategic studies thus comes to be reunited, and bound up with the broader debates currently under way in international relations theory. Each possesses fundamental implications for the other.

Broadly conceived, there are thus at least three directions in which the future of strategic thinking may develop. Although each possesses different methodological and practical implications, this is not the venue in which to undertake such an analysis. Rather, I want simply to outline the directions in which the future of strategy - in a theoretical sense, but always remembering that theory possesses powerful practical implications - may develop.

The first option involves a move in the direction of contemporary regime theory. This may involve, on the one hand, an engagement with recent attempts to add greater sophistication to neo-realism while still remaining largely within its theoretical parameters.⁴² Conversely, those who regard the recent theoretical, especially epistemological, criticisms of regime theory as more fundamental may find themselves drawn to the exploration of theories of international regimes which move considerably beyond neo-realism. Again the work of John Ruggie and especially Friedrich Kratochwil is exemplary in this regard.⁴³

A second possibility lies in a return to some form of "classical" Realism in the tradition of E.H. Carr or - in some readings - Hans Morgenthau. But Realism, in this appreciation, is defined in clear opposition to the timeless determinations of objective structure which define neo-realism. The transition marked by the addition of the prefix "neo" to Realist theory is seen as more than simply a "taking account of criticisms". It is viewed as a fundamental shift in the grounds of Realist thinking itself, a shift which is to be rejected. Abstract structures are replaced by sensitive and nuanced readings of complex historical developments and contemporary political problems and possibilities.⁴⁴

This leads to a final, and certainly most ironic possibility. Though it would probably be an anathema to many who identify themselves with contemporary Third Wave analysis, their theoretical foundations, fully understood, share fundamentally the same theoretical stance as what is now commonly referred to as the "critical" movement in International Relations theory.

This Critical Movement, whatever its variants, has consistently had at its centre a desire to recover the historical, the particular and the contingent in the study of world politics. Its own assault upon neo-realism has been largely to these ends. It has sought to place the study of concrete practices of self-regarding agents back at the centre of the analysis of world politics. This is not to say that there are not significant differences of approach within this critical movement, but a rejection of the positivistic and rationalistic foundations of neo-realism tend to provide a unifying theme. In this desire it is at one with the critical impulse submerged within the Third Wave's own position.

⁴² As well as those mentioned above, Joseph S. Nye's "Nuclear learning and U.S.-Soviet security regimes" *International Organization* (Summer, 1987) stands as an exemplar of this form of analysis.

⁴³ In addition to the works already cited see Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ The most well-known attempt to reclaim Carr in this sense is probably Robert Cox's "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory". The recovery of Morgenthau in this sense sometimes appears to be a goal in the work of Richard Ashley.

The fundamental difference lies in the willingness of Critical Theorists to take these questions in a theoretically self-conscious fashion and take its categories of analysis much more seriously in relation to neo-realism itself than the Third Wave has done. If the Third Wave is to take seriously its own theoretical stance it may find as its natural outcome a move in the direction of Critical Theory.⁴⁵

Critical Theorists have also sought to take seriously not only the epistemological or methodological implications of such considerations. The renewed emphasis on subjectivity and practices brings with it a concomitant need to reexamine fundamental questions regarding those actions. Questions of morality, ethics and justice - among others - are no longer defined as beyond the bounds of scientific understanding. They reemerge at the very centre of analysis, as an integral part of the realm of judgement and decision concerning those actions.

These alternative futures for strategy place it squarely within the debates now occurring within International Relations theory. Strategic studies should not, indeed cannot, see itself as securely isolated from these "theoretical" debates. It is not distinct from them, it is - when adequately understood - right in the heart of them. The consideration of these issues is thus not to be seen as the imposition of some alien theoretical controversy on the analysis of strategy. It emerges from the inadequacy of contemporary strategic thinking itself. In terms of both its theoretical and its practical implications it is a debate which must be engaged.

A final consideration: the recognition of the latent sense of possibility within contemporary strategy, and its opposition to the timeless structures of neo-realism, presents once again the possibility that strategy does have a future. In a period of apparently revolutionary political change and opportunity, the ways in which those changes are viewed and opportunities acted upon will be perhaps the fundamental determinants of the future of strategy and security. In a practical sense the nature of our theoretical reflections will be in no small part responsible for the approaches we adopt to questions of strategy and security in a "post-Cold War" world. Whether that thinking remains trapped within the static categories bequeathed by neo-realism or moves forward into new and imaginative conceptions of the nature and structure of security in the nuclear age represents the challenge of contemporary strategic thinking.

Whether the "future" of strategy, in both a theoretical and a practical sense, may be constructed out of a contemporary recovery of the "classical" tradition of Realism, from a more theoretically self-conscious form of neo-realism, or whether it could emerge from one of many other possibilities latent within a renewed sense of possibility made possible by critical or reflective approaches is itself, of course, a political and contingent question. What such conceptions may allow however, and what humanity desperately requires, is that strategy have a future in a sense which is truly meaningful.

⁴⁵ Any attempt to define so-called Critical theory as a unified school would be erroneous. Robert Cox, for example, could (and probably should) be as easily placed in this category as in the previous one. This said, from among many possible examples of the approach - as well as of its diversity - one might include not only the work of Ken Booth already mentioned, but also that of Bradley S. Klein and G.M. Dillon. See, for example, Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics" *Review of International Studies* (14:2) and "How the West Was One: Representational Politics of NATO" *International Studies Quarterly* (September, 1990); and Dillon, "Strategy, Discourse and Modernity" *Current Research on Peace and Violence* (Vol. 2, 1989).