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Towards a Critical Concept of the Statesperson

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Abstract

This paper considers convergence between classical realism and critical theory in relation to pressing political problems. It argues that the spirit of both traditions can help develop critical reflection on the state as an *agent of change*. I suggest that too much recent critical theorization has avoided the state in its attention to social movements, but that a critical concept of state leadership is now required to address global threats and challenges. The paper rehearses this critical concept in three stages. It considers, first, how the concept of national interest drives statecraft in the authorship of Hans Morgenthau and how complex this concept is both in its own terms and with regard to the political effects of the nuclear revolution. It develops, second, a multi-layered concept of responsibility as the guiding concept of statecraft in a world of increasingly incompatible demands. It argues, third, that these concepts of national interest and responsibility need to be aligned with global imperatives so that a greater marriage between the global and the national is possible. I conclude that it is the task of contemporary critical thought to address this present through a reimagined political realism.

Key words

Critical theorizing, classical realism, state leadership

Introduction: the present of theory

One important meeting-place between classical realism and critical theory from the perspective of modernity, crisis, and humanity is an understanding of the present and of political responses to it. Both trivial and non-trivial, the point requires explanation in order that the guiding concept of this paper, a critical concept of the statesperson, is appropriately understood.¹

That classical realism and critical theory meet in an understanding of, and political response to, the present may seem perplexing, particularly to those studying international relations through the lens of critical theory or to those in classical realism that have recently emphasized its more meta-theoretical credentials.² Indeed one might precisely argue that where classical realism and critical theory meet is in a particular *distance* to the present. This distance affords a *critical* approach to dominant modes of

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thought and behaviour, one lost if ‘truth’ comes too close to ‘power’ and loses *extra-systemic leverage* on structures of domination. This judgment is intellectually pertinent, informing part of the critical gesture behind the recent retrieval of classical realism from the IR schools of structural realism and neorealism. That said, I consider it equally critical to re-emphasize the importance of *the present* in both classical realism and critical theory given contemporary need for political imagination.

For the classical realists of the 1940s and 1950s (in particular, E.H. Carr, John Herz, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Arnold Wolfers), theoretical reflection always stemmed from, and was rooted in, a practical context. Reflection on the tenets of political realism, on national interest and power dynamics and on the security dilemma and nuclear weaponry were made in the immediate context of what was interpreted to be contemporary international reality: the failure of liberal internationalism, a system of states, and an ideologically polarized world of nations. The ‘classical realism’ of this period constitutes a family set (in the Wittgensteinian sense) of theoretical responses to this international predicament. The political morality of prudent statecraft, with which this set is closely identified, constitutes, in turn, the practically oriented theoretical outcome of these responses (Brown, 2012; Lang, 2004; Molloy, 2009; Williams, 2005). In these two respects—without being either presentist or subservient to present political actors or power structures—classical realism is a theory of, and for, the present.

As for critical theory, the temporal modality of its disposition towards political reality is more complex, but also oriented towards the present. In “Traditional and Critical Theory’ Max Horkheimer makes four claims for critical theory (Horkheimer, 1937). First, in distinction to positivism, it is comprehensive in its understanding of social processes (hence the Frankfurt School’s debt to critical political economy on the determining contradictions of capitalism). Second, in distinction to both abstract theory and the theorizing of successive periods of history, it works ‘with time’ (233) in the sense that it is both aware of its historical conditions and aware of its temporal relation to the historical practices of contemporary society. Third, as practical theory, it considers itself ‘an element in action leading to new social forms’, as a ‘force stimulating social change’ (215-6). Fourth, in distinction to the policy dimension of positivist theory and science, this practical nature is geared to the normative end of emancipation: a society of peoples

free from domination (230-1). In sum, in comparison with previous conceptions of theory, Horkheimer defines ‘critical’ theory as *comprehensive, historical, practical and normative*. Critical theorizing entails, accordingly, addressing present societal problems in such a way as not to repeat the present, but open it up to the future, to seek, that is, the present’s normative ‘transformation’. While rightly refusing a political agent of historical transformation, critical theory’s theoretical and practical force regarding the present has, however, become increasingly dissipated for internal and external reasons. Externally, the functional speed and social complexity of modernizing processes has undermined the ‘comprehensive’ nature of critical theory and marginalized it in political debate. Internally, when this non-comprehensive and marginal fate of critical theorizing has been consciously assumed (as with poststructuralist theory from the 1980s onwards), critical theory has often abandoned the public sphere to other forces (Beardsworth, 2011: 199-226). The contemporary poverty of post-Cold War liberalism (including its present structural inability to deal with nationalism) has been one consequence of critiquing political debate from the social and cultural margins, rather than deepening it, comprehensively, at its political and economic center.³ As a form of historical theorizing, critical theory should, I believe, return to an understanding of itself as ‘transformative’ of the present. Given this understanding of critical theorizing I consider that it is in the temporal dimension of the present and in this present’s problems that these two different bodies of contemporary international theory meet.

What, then, is the present of international politics? What are the problems of international politics that organize its present and to which morally informed theory responds? There is always room for subjective arbitrariness in an answer to this question, one predicated on the prejudices or preferences of the observer. That said, there is a cluster of problems that insist at the international level because they prove resistant to solution and because they have thrown up many unanswered conceptual and practical questions. These problems are what are called ‘global threats and challenges’.⁴ To differing extents, they affect in fact or in principle all peoples of the world: nuclear armament, climate change and its effects (new migration patterns, food and water sustainability, etc.), terrorism, health pandemics, and poverty and increasing inequality. Of a global dimension or with global effect, these problems define the present less

because they are *of* the present than because, remaining intractable within the present international political order, they insist *as* the present. It is evident that solutions to these problems require effective cooperation between states. What is not evident is how to engineer that cooperation or how to present stepping-stones to a different political order that would mitigate the need for inter-state cooperation in the first place. In the so-called ‘gap’ between global problems and political solutions to them (what is presently called ‘global governance failure’ (Goldin, 2013), ‘deadlock’ (Victor, 2011), or ‘gridlock’ (Hale et al., 2013) two things are therefore clear. First, there is a lack of *political* solutions to global problems; second, there is a lack of critical theoretical reflection that would help foster these political solutions.⁵

In this present how do the two international theories of classical realism and critical theory meet and help? *Since these global problems pose critical questions regarding the survival and/or welfare of humanity within modernizing processes*, answers to this question are more than important, necessarily resonating with the larger themes of this special issue on modernity and crisis. To kick-start my argument, I suggest among others, and somewhat straightforwardly, that, rather than looking to solutions to global problems in global terms and at a global level (as has been the habit of international liberalism since the end of the Cold War), theorists confront the crisis of global governance in national terms and from the national level upwards. As Ian Goldin succinctly puts it, solutions to global problems must begin with the nation-state and with the preferences of state leaders (Goldin, 2013: 54). In more theoretical terms, in a world order still structured by the independence of states—however interdependent this world has at the same time become—the state must be considered not the obstacle, but the very means to effective and legitimate global governance arrangements. One consequence of this hypothesis is that theories of the progressive state and of progressive state leadership are needed that both assume the limits of political action in a complex world and align global imperatives with national interests. Therefore, in the context of this global present, one effective meeting-place between classical realism and critical theory is *to develop a critical concept of the statesperson that promotes progressive state leadership*. Rather than back-tracking, stalling, deferring, or scapegoating others in order to make his or her choices, this statesperson would embody the multiple responsibilities of the state in a

globalized world where duties to one's own people, duties to foreigners, and duties to species life and the planet are assumed *as* conflicting and/or are aligned *as* compatible (both practices being part of political ethics).⁶

This paper follows one particular path towards the conception of this statesperson. I do not consider it a privileged path. Historical studies, intellectual history and a diverse set of leadership studies do the important graft on statecraft; indeed, ultimately, a trans-disciplinary research project on global state leadership is required to uncover this conception. It is a path however—and this is the particularity of my paper—that attempts to align critical reflection not only with contemporary needs, but also with a political agency, state conduct, that has most often been condemned or circumvented in self-consciously 'critical' literature as, precisely, 'uncritical' (whether this conception of the state be one of self-interest, power, imperialism, or particularism). In this vein, in order to give its critique of the contemporary global order, critical reflection of the last twenty-five years has turned theoretical attention away from the state and focused on global civil society, post-national politics, and/or cosmopolitan orders (Archibugi and Held, 1995; Habermas, 1996; Hayden, 2005; Scholte, 2011; Risse, Ropp & Sikkink, 1999). Here lies the interest of the meeting-place between *state-minded* classical realism and critical theory.⁷

My argument is made in five stages. Section one tracks the evolution of the concept of 'national interest' among classical realists like Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr, pinpoints how the concept is erased under conditions of modern technology and appraises the conceptions of prudence and self-restraint that emerge therefrom. The failure to align national interest with global imperatives restricts classical realist formulations of statecraft in a globalized world. Section two looks at three recent critically minded attempts to reconsider classical realism with regard to global reform to see if a deeper concept of state leadership is on offer. With mixed results, Part three then turns to recent work of the English School theorist, Robert Jackson, that explicitly founds the concept of prudence and statecraft on the *practice of responsibility* in order to see if the dilemmas of classical realism can be better rehearsed. I argue that they can as long as an historical sociology accompanies Jackson's work on state responsibility. However, as a result of this approach, *contra* Jackson's theoretical modesty, Part four seeks to align

global with national interests in order to secure a transformative notion of contemporary state leadership that works towards emancipation. Part five then rehearses the traits of the critical notion of statesperson that has emerged through the preceding course of arguments. The conclusion returns to my reformist understanding of the ‘critical’ and ‘critical theorization’ when seeking this notion in response to present global problems.

I: The statesperson and national interest in classical realism

For classical realists like E.H. Carr (2001), John Herz (1959), George Kennan (1984), Hans Morgenthau (1952a; 1952b; 1954; 1971) and Reinhold Niebuhr (2002; 2008), foreign policy and international diplomacy is made intelligible through reference to the concept of ‘national interest’. It is a commonplace of IR theory that, by defining foreign policy in these terms, the mid-twentieth century classical realists were attacking liberal internationalism and, at the same time, laying the conceptual groundwork for the emergent discipline of IR. Due to their re-interpretation over the last decade, it is also a commonplace that the notion of national interest is less a functional than a relational and moral concept (Bacevich, 2008; Bell, 2008; Cozette, 2008; Lebow, 2001; Scheuerman, 2009, 2011; Schou Tjalve, 2008; T. Smith, 2010; Williams, 2005). From this perspective, the emphasis of classical realist thought on political morality was lost with the rise of behaviorist and systemic thought during the 1950s and 1960s. The purpose of this section is not to enter this recent debate (which, after an effective decade, is basically won), but to deduce from classical realism’s rehearsal of national interest its understanding of the statesperson and to show how and where this understanding remains limited, but paradigmatically useful for reflection on state leadership in a globalized world. It is Hans Morgenthau’s work that is theoretically and institutionally most assertive regarding the link between foreign policy and national interest; I will keep, therefore, to his illustrative pronouncements.

During the ‘Great Debate’ of the first half of the 1950s, Morgenthau argues in an assertive relay of publications how American foreign policy can only be made intelligible through the concept of ‘national interest’ (Morgenthau, 1952a; 1952b; 1952c; 1954; 1971). His basic point is that the political action of state leaders must be guided by this concept rather than by normative frameworks of international law because, otherwise, the

state is left, in principle if not in fact, exposed to the military and economic forces of other states. National interest constitutes nevertheless a much more *layered* concept in Morgenthau's writings than in later realist work that focuses on the explanatory nature of material power. There are at least five dimensions of national interest that guide statecraft for Morgenthau; it is worth rehearsing them in ascending order of complexity (compare, in particular, Williams, 2005: 180-92).

First, the concept of national interest refers to the 'vital interests' of the country: what maintains the country's territorial existence, secures the biological survival of its population, but also guarantees its immediate self-understanding. These interests are military and economic, but they also involve what is worth 'defending with one's life' (Morgenthau, 1952a: 970). The statesperson is the one who protects the nation in these terms, and it is this concept of statecraft that citizens of nation-states are still most familiar with when the concepts of 'national interest' and 'national security' are wielded in the public realm. Second, as the above notion of national sacrifice already presupposes, national interest concerns political and cultural identity. It is a duty of state leadership to defend the moral and political values of the nation (whatever national history, sectional interests or basic consensus have decided the tenor of these values). Third, to defend these interests must be done in such a way that this defense is compatible with, indeed *includes*, the interests of other nations, and vice versa (Morgenthau, 1952a: 978, 985-7).⁸ This third conception of national interest foregrounds the *political morality* of statecraft. Balancing one's own national interests with others constitutes an act of tolerance in the international environment. This tolerance maintains international order: that is, the promotion of the national interest *of* a group of nations. This third sense of national interest leads to its fourth definition as 'international responsibility'. If, for Morgenthau, 'statesmen think and act in terms of interests defined as power', (Morgenthau, 1960a: 5), national interest *as* tolerance entails the *responsibility of power* towards world order. National interest is not, in other words, geared to the sovereign right of power except in conditions of immediate national survival (layer one). Rather, as a relational practice of power/interest with regard to other powers and interests, the idea and practice of the national interest connote responsibilities towards others' interests and towards world order. Hence why, for Morgenthau, the more power a nation holds, the more related it is

to other political entities than itself, and therefore, *the more responsibilities it bears*. For classical realism, ‘great power’ entails ‘great responsibility’ in this sense (Claude, 1986; compare Bukovansky et al., 2012). Just as rights and responsibilities are inseparable in the liberal polity, so power and responsibility are inextricable in the international system of states. Despite its critique of liberal rationalism the classical realist notion of interest as responsibility is, accordingly, profoundly liberal (see Williams, 2005).

Now, this complex of understandings of national interest come together in the political morality and morally informed political choices of the statesperson, the driver of a nation’s foreign policy. Assertion of one’s national interests should not override the interests of other nations unless the integrity of any one national interest constitutes *irresponsibility* towards the least violent conduct of world politics. International tolerance is constitutively limited, for instance, by intolerance towards nationalist aggression. For Morgenthau, appeasement towards Hitler was bad statecraft (Morgenthau, 1954); but so, inversely, was the American conflation of Russian imperialism with Asian communism and the consequent US intervention in the Korean War. The intervention constituted, as with the succeeding Vietnam War, intolerance towards what was judged a national movement of self-determination (Morgenthau 1954, 1960b). In a pluralist world of nation-states, the exercise of national self-restraint and the negotiation of interests towards the *common good* of international order constitute the major political virtues of the statesperson.

In sum, if the concept of national interest is, for Morgenthau, to guide foreign policy, all foreign policy converges on a political morality of prudence in three senses. The statesperson acts prudently first, by protecting his or her peoples from existential threats; second, by limiting violence between international political entities—in Burkean terms, ‘the law of neighborhood’ and ‘the rules of prudence’ (Burke, 2011); third, by leading responsibly in the international environment through the example of national interest and its conduct, not by a universalist conception of this interest’s general applicability (Morgenthau, 1960b: 34). These three points are well known to contemporary students of IR due both to the recent revival of classical realism and to the fact that effective criticism of neoconservative American foreign policy from 2001 to 2006 was often conducted in the classical realist terms of self-restraint (Bacevich, 2008;

Smith, 2010; Williams, 2005, 2007). Indeed, the revival of classical realism and criticisms of G.W. Bush's state leadership in the world are not unrelated. Bush's piloting of international crusades, in the name of freedom, smacked of political moralism, not political morality; it was therefore an important intellectual exercise to resurrect classical realism for theoretical and practical purposes (Beardsworth, 2011: 75-110).

However, the contemporary interest of classical realism lies not only in the above conceptions of prudent statecraft, but also in the telling failure of the mid-twentieth century realists to deal conceptually with the relation between national interest and modern technology. Morgenthau is again most illustrative here because his writings from the late 1950s argue that modern technology (the fact of nuclear weaponry) puts in question the very concept of national interest that he seeks at the same time to defend *contra* liberal rationalism. Tracing this dilemma of national interest leaves an unthought in classical realist considerations of statecraft that has only recently begun to be developed *in critical terms*. Regarding the meeting-place of classical realism and critical theory in the present, this technopolitical 'unthought' needs rehearsal and response.

National and supranational interests are, for Morgenthau, incompatible. 'The nations of the world must overcome the dilemma that the pursuit of their interests, conceived in national terms, is incompatible with modern technology, which requires supranational political organization' (Morgenthau, 1971 [1958]: 219). National interest must yield to the supranational 'in the national interest of all nations' (219). If the dilemma of technological modernity gives rise to the paradox that national interest must be ceded in the name of national interest, then the third and fourth layers of national interest above—interest among several interests and interest as responsibility towards world order—leads to a fifth definition and layer. *National interest entails pooling or delegating sovereign authority when it is judged necessary to do so*. This judgment redounds to state leadership. It would seem, therefore, both necessary and possible, from the perspective of classical realism, to square national interest with supranational interest and square statecraft with cession of sovereignty to supranational organization. Both alignments entail facing and overcoming present dilemmas with arguments for paradox-formation (it is in the national interest to yield sovereignty) and political judgment

(sovereignty must be yielded for the sake of national security). And yet, no classical realist engages on this path because of the historical limits set by the Cold War.

In his *The Purpose of American Politics*, published in 1960, Morgenthau notes, for example, that repeated American interest in international self-restraint regarding nuclear weaponry between 1946 and 1958 (graduated disarmament, ban on nuclear tests) failed because of a mutually reinforcing circle between American and Russian nationalisms. He comments: 'Supranational control of atomic power is incompatible with national sovereignty ... and [its] authority would exercise for all practical purposes the function of a limited world government' (Morgenthau, 1960b, 172). The Soviet Union refused the idea of such cession and the US, while wishing to remove an existential threat, sought to maintain national advantage in the struggle for power with the Soviet Union. The failure to transcend national interest redounds therefore to the historical limitations of the Cold War. In consequence, Morgenthau does not follow the paradox of national interest through; nor does he develop further the terms of state prudence in a world of global common national interests.⁹

I maintain that it is this dilemma and paradox that classical realism bequeaths to critical reflection on state leadership in international theory. Within the revival of classical realism, there have been three critical attempts to address this dilemma of national interest in a nuclear age: the work of Campbell Craig (2003), of Daniel Deudney (2007), and of William Scheuerman (2011). I consider them briefly in the next section to see what they critically bring to the techno-political un-thought of mid-twentieth century realism.

II. The dilemma of classical realism: three arguments in response

In his intellectual history of the founders of American Realism, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan*, Campbell Craig rehearses how Niebuhr and Morgenthau came to understand that the threat of nuclear war undermined the long-term survival of the human species. Niebuhr considered more quickly than Morgenthau a nuclear war unwinnable, but offered no solution to the nuclear dilemma bar peaceful coexistence between the USA and Soviet Union. As we saw above, Morgenthau came to see by the end of the 1950s that nuclear war undermined the foundation of Realism (the first layer of national interest: biological

survival in international politics) and that, therefore, national interest and sovereignty had to cede to a supranational monopoly of nuclear force. Craig argues that, for Morgenthau, a world state is only possible if there is a global community underpinning the will to institute it, and that this community might emerge specifically through collective fear of human self-destruction. For Craig, however, Morgenthau never pursued this line of thinking, distracted by the more immediate concerns of the Vietnam War and by the very difficulty of the intellectual project he envisaged. He sees no answer in the Waltzian solution of managed nuclear proliferation, concluding that, based on statistical probability, ‘the continuation of anarchy will sooner or later lead to nuclear war’ (Craig, 2003: 172). While Craig pinpoints, therefore, the importance of Morgenthau’s *normative* and *analytical* argument for world government (in specific regard to the monopoly of nuclear violence), there is no new theoretical framework in his otherwise excellent intellectual history that suggests what states and state leaders might do to transcend the nuclear dilemma.

In *Bounding Power*, Daniel Deudney inscribes the nuclear dilemma of classical realism into republican security theory. Given the evolutionary materialist logic of violent interdependence, nuclear weapons, with both their global range and global destructive capabilities, no longer fit the modern political order of the nation-state. Morgenthau’s world-statism (what Deudney calls ‘a nuclear one-worldism’ particular to the 1940s-60s) is, however, neither desired nor feasible (Deudney, 2007: 244-64). The contemporary nuclear condition is highly complex, interstate conflict is decreasing, and no animate extraterritorial threat exists. The control of nuclear arms can, therefore, be separated from the statist monopoly over violence and placed in institutional arrangements that effectively paralyze military nuclear capability. A key-sharing system that aborts unilateral nuclear ignition would provide one illustration of such an institutional arrangement of mutual self-restraint by states (262). This ‘republican-type’ nuclear union, in distinction to Morgenthau’s supranational monopoly of violence, could be governance-light and kept separate from other types of inter-state conflict. Deudney’s reconsideration of the nuclear dilemma in Morgenthau is grounded in a technological and planetary materialism that does not require supranational political arrangements. The implications for statecraft and statesmanship are clear. Whereas statecraft in world-

statism requires upward *cession* of sovereignty over the military use of nuclear technology towards a world monopoly on nuclear force, the statesperson here *pools* the state's nuclear sovereignty among other nuclear states, non-nuclear states and an international nuclear authority (a revamped IAEA) *in order to paralyze its own force*. Whereas the first required world community to be possible in the first place (at present unfeasible), *Bounding Power* suggests that the pooling of nuclear sovereignty among states and institutional actors can redound to republican-minded state responsibility alone.¹⁰

In *The Realist Case for Global Reform* William Scheuerman argues specifically for a progressive realism according to which mid-twentieth century classical realist authors like John Herz, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, Frederick Schuman and Arnold Wolfers all recognized the demise of the nation-state and worked beyond it for 'global reform'. Classical realism's nuclear dilemma becomes one dilemma among several, predicated on the malfunction of the nation-state within an increasingly interdependent world order requiring new governance structures. While Deudney's solution to Morgenthau's nuclear dilemma is a loose republican and federal one, Scheuerman castigates global anti-statism for radically underestimating the necessity of organized coercion *for* world integration. If the contemporary state is 'decreasingly well suited to basic functions of contemporary governance' (Scheuerman, 2011: 41), the *monopoly* functions of the state must nevertheless be reinstated at the global level for a *democratic* political and legal global order to be possible in the first place (138). In sum, both security from arbitrary power and redistribution of resources for social justice require, at whatever level of human organization, organized coercion. Morgenthau is therefore right to argue for world-statism and correctly identified the need for greater global social integration to underpin it. Scheuerman's concern is essentially with political economy. It would nevertheless appear that, for him, there will be no solution to the nuclear dilemma until, either through catastrophe or coercion, nuclear-armed states give up their own monopoly on nuclear force. The world state (not global governance) provides, consequently, the right *horizon* for practically minded reformers, however distant its concretization. The nuclear dilemma is not resolved by *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, but rather rehearsed to such intensity and social and economic generality

that the normative and analytical argument for world government appears persuasive to ‘critically minded students of global politics’ (173).¹¹

Of these three responses to the classical realist dilemma—that the pursuit of national interest is *incompatible* with modern technology, which requires supranational organization—two (Craig and Scheuerman) constitute normative analyses of what is necessary to overcome the incompatibility between global imperative and national interest. Their work does not offer, however, a concrete notion of progressive statecraft in a globalized, but fragmented world. One (Deudney) seeks more feasible solutions in global institutional arrangements of a loose republican federal nature. Dividing state sovereignty among a plurality of actors and institutions, the argument entails the pooling of sovereignty for the very possibility of national security in a nuclear age. It is this last argument among contemporary revivals of classical realism that I consider resourceful for critically thinking *present* state leadership. Before reinforcing and deepening this critical reasoning in response to Morgenthau’s dilemma, I turn to a recent reconceptualization of state responsibility that comes from the English School.

III: Prudence in a globalized, but fragmented world

I emphasized earlier that Morgenthau’s layered, relational conception of national interest led necessarily to understanding the concept of national interest through the prism of international responsibility. Since it is in the national interest to share national interests, part of the statesperson’s duty, ensuing from a policy of national interest, is to exercise responsibility towards other nations and towards the world order within which a world of nations operates. Given Deudney’s own productive rehearsal of republican state responsibility regarding the nuclear dilemma, it is appropriate at this juncture to further the classical realist concept of statecraft and state prudence, ensuing from the concept of national interest, by addressing directly the question of state responsibility in a world of global threats and challenges. The English School’s thin ‘social’ approach to international relations takes the consequences of classical realist logic on power and interest further.

The starting-place for English School IR thought are the international values, norms, and rules formed through the emergence and interaction of states (Bull, 1977;

Bull and Watson, 1984). These common values, norms and rules form ‘international society’ of which states are the primary members. Responsibility towards world order translates therefore a set of state rights and duties that conform to the basic principles and rules of this society. For the generation of Hedley Bull, this set of rights and duties is robust (with the global ‘expansion’ of European society), but thin. Interstate rules are specific: state sovereignty, rules of war and international law, diplomacy, and trade. In his *Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* Robert Jackson argues that these responsibilities have increased over the last forty years and can be analytically distinguished into four categories: national responsibility, international responsibility, humanitarian responsibility and responsibility for the global commons (Jackson, 2000: 170-4). National and international responsibilities cover the same ground as classical realism’s layered understanding of national interest and of power/responsibility towards a world of nations (the more powerful the state is, the more responsible it becomes internationally). Without engaging with the classical realist dilemma above, Jackson adds, however, two further responsibilities of statecraft that are readily discernible in the world politics of the global present. The statesperson is now also responsible to the peoples of other states beyond the immediate formulation of national interests and, to one side of the question of historical and causal responsibilities (liability), carries increasingly custodial responsibility for the stewardship of both species life and the planet. The state has become in this sense the site of a ‘normative pluralist reality’ (179). Couched in English School terms, Jackson’s important reflection on responsible statecraft permits four major observations regarding my concern with critical reflection on the statesperson and prudential conduct.

First, those who hold offices of state are no longer only responsible to their people and to the international order in which they can maintain their interests with other state interests. Confronted increasingly with explicitly human and planetary concerns beyond the protection and welfare of state citizenship, they must make normative decisions between different sets of values that impinge upon the state. For Jackson, contemporary international society is far from being a global, cosmopolitan *universitas*. The rules between states are however *changing enough* for statecraft to be increasingly about hard choices not between interest and value, but *between different sets of values*. The four

responsibilities Jackson lists do not carry equal weight; there is incompatibility between them given state-led hierarchy. ‘Neither human rights nor environmental ethics can trump the responsibilities of national leaders to their own citizens’ (177). That said, as he puts it, ‘if any one of the norms were acknowledged and followed in a dogmatic way it would invite justified criticism nowadays’ (178). State prudence concerns, therefore, increasingly weighing which norm has priority in which circumstance and accepting the consequences of the decision made. For my purposes, Jackson offers here a critical framework for understanding and rehearsing practical judgment (prudence) in a globalized, but fragmented world.

Second, Jackson’s set of distinctions is analytically pitched, but requires a sociological framework.¹² To move, that is, towards a critical concept of the statesperson, it is important to situate the increasing number of responsibilities of the state within a historical sociological analysis. We can then understand these responsibilities as the political consequence of the state being the densest institutional *site* of a set of social, economic and cultural processes triggered by globalization.¹³ The pluralization of state responsibilities can, in turn, be considered as one effect of material and social interdependence. The point is far from trivial. It means that to transcend the system of states towards supranational organization undermines political responsibility towards the cultural identities of states and sub-states. Inversely, it means that to reduce contemporary life to the requirements of various forms of localism ignores political responsibility towards the effective and legitimate management of global problems. From this historical, sociological perspective it is impossible to provide a critical political theory of progressive state practice that brings together all dimensions of responsibility. Hard choices between these different responsibilities make up the *underbelly* of contemporary statecraft because of the very nature of what a political community entails (borders). Critical reflection on this new historical situation can, however, serve both to understand the processes that bring about this situation and bring to bear upon it an appropriate, publicly rehearsed sense of political responsibility and judgment.¹⁴

Third, at the same time, this last point has to be addressed more ambitiously. As the introduction argued, the present can be defined by the tension between an increasing set of global problems and a robust system of developed, developing and failing states.

This system is not giving way to a post-sovereign order (Cooper, 2003), as re-emerging pluralism confirms. On specific global issues, however, the powers of national sovereignty must be negotiated for global action to be effective. Within this set of tensions, *the state remains the most important site of power, responsibility, and transformation*. To frame an increasing number of (often incompatible) state responsibilities within global processes must be supplemented, therefore, by a critical historical analysis of why the state remains the most important political agent to shape these processes and, why, therefore, those who assume the duties of state bear the most important responsibility for change among all social actors. To renounce this analysis is simply *un-critical* at this historical juncture, in this present.

Fourth, Jackson's reflection on state responsibility and prudential statecraft nevertheless has its limits, and it is here that we bring back, within the now foregrounded context of state responsibility, the classical realist dilemma. For Morgenthau, this dilemma redounded to the 'incompatibility' between global imperatives and national interest. The concept of state responsibility for world order, for humanity and for the planet can go some way to resolving this incompatibility: either by explicitly placing the state, its functions and its legitimacy in a non-domestic set of global responsibilities and/or by showing the tensions that state leaders have increasingly to rehearse and negotiate to make responsible decisions in the first place. I have stressed that both moves are equally important. What neither move does, however, is align global imperatives with national interest and/or national responsibility to one's people as such. Jackson's English School approach emphasizes the changing set of values, norms and rules that define the changing regime of state sovereignty and state responsibility in a globalizing world. His approach does not argue however that, on specific issues, national and global interests and responsibilities *must be squared*.

Jackson remarks that his own approach is 'conservative' (Jackson, 2000: 179) in that it stands with the state and international society, expands the state's responsibilities towards humanity and the world, but emphasizes hard choices between different norms. I would disagree with this conservative label given the broad strokes of a historical sociological analysis above: to assume the pluralization of state responsibilities as the contemporary underbelly of statecraft is already a progressive notion. However, I would

crucially add that if, in particular circumstances and on specific problems, global and national interests can be squared, then *transformative political leadership from out of the state is possible*. In this sense, state prudence is not only about tolerance, reciprocity, consequential analysis, responsibility, and hard choices. It is also about taking *risks* to redefine the national interest globally. To cut through the diremption between globalism and nationalisms, one critical task is for statepersons to affirm and embody how global and national interests/responsibilities converge.

IV: Lining up the global and the national: the contemporary risk of state leadership

Lining up global and national interests and responsibilities is not a new challenge for the state and state leadership. The risks involved have been entertained before and understood within great power and hegemonic accounts of statecraft. Indeed great statecraft is often understood in terms of this alignment. Great Britain's leadership on the abolition of the slave trade, the US's Marshall Plan for Europe and the US's exit from the Breton Woods arrangement in 1972 constitute three examples of where hegemonic powers have either assumed or refused the risk of aligning national interest with global concerns, and where the state leaders concerned were judged accordingly. The risk is one of modernity in the sense that it is a risk of leadership (to line up the global and the national) that enters the historical stage only once the earth and its human populations are materially and morally integrated into bounded territory. What is new today is that this alignment has become immanent to national policy-making. Transborder problems interfere with national integrity, national identity, and national ambition. This phenomenon has been accepted, at the level of national interest and national security, with new security problematics like 'climate change security' and 'cybersecurity'. Despite this recent alignment, it remains nevertheless difficult to narrate the convergence between the national and global and to theorize it in explicitly *political* terms. The Stern review on climate change is an instructive example of this difficulty.

In 2006, UK Prime Minister Blair's climate change adviser, Nicholas Stern, argued that climate change mitigation and adaptation required preventive action now to

lessen the economic costs later (Stern, 2010). The argument resonated with policy-makers, both nationally and internationally, because the argument for action against climate change was made in terms of economic rationalism. The costs of reorganizing the present economy towards sustainable modes of production and consumption were less than the future economic costs of not doing so. Although there has been important disagreement concerning Stern's chosen discount rate for future generations (Helm 2012; Northcott, 2014), there has been much less disagreement with the political effectiveness of an economic argument on climate change mitigation and adaptation as such. Since the material dimension of national interest is calculated in cost/benefit terms, economic utilitarian language seemed the most appropriate political language to marry national and global concerns. This is partially true. The UK has a cross-party agreement to seek an 80% reduction on CO₂ emissions by 2050 (on a 1990 baseline) in order to help the world as a whole achieve a temperature increase of less than 2°C by 2100. The UK seeks through nationally determined commitments global political leadership on climate change (peer competition to foster international cooperation). To one side of whether these arguments actually add up (Hoffmann, 2013), there remains a major problem of political narrative. Climate change cannot be made an economic problem alone if the marriage between the national and the global is to capture *political imagination*. A specifically *political* approach is needed in order to animate the risk of state leadership on a global action issue. To line up the national and the global, at least four sets of argument are, I suggest, needed.¹⁵

First, regarding the negative effects of a trans-border event, a *general, public* argument needs to be made that it is the responsibility of the office-holders of the state to manage these effects in the name of the welfare of its citizens. For the moment this argument is publicly rehearsed regarding terrorism, migration flows, and health pandemics. Very little is, however, rehearsed publicly within a *general* problematic of trans-border threats as such. This problematic should include global finance, climate change and nuclear proliferation. The point is that state leaders should hold themselves responsible—and, therefore, be held accountable by their citizenry—for the effects of these phenomena *because* they affect the welfare of their citizens. Jackson's distinctions consider neither this notion of responsibility nor the risk of leadership that accompanies

it. An argument concerning needs is not however enough to stimulate political imagination, except in the case of immediate existential threat.

Second, events of a global nature that affect national citizenry and that necessitate national leadership and international collective action require a political language that goes to the roots of political identity: citizenship. The key concept here is that of freedom (or, actively put, emancipation). As republican thinkers have recently begun to articulate, a marriage between the national and the global (in my terms) can be forged politically through an expansion of a *more republican than liberal* understanding of freedom. Returning to the Roman idea of *liber*, the freeman, Philip Pettit argues for example, that either an individual and/or a collective is free as long as its ability to choose what it wishes is not only not hindered by another agent (the liberal idea of freedom) but is independent of the volition of another agent *tout court* (Pettit, 2007, 2014). Freedom requires, therefore, independence from both existent and structural domination: what he calls ‘freedom as non-domination’. Since domestic freedom requires laws and institutions to restrain internal domination threats, the state constitutes, for the civic republican, the condition of freedom. *If*, accordingly, events or agents external to the state prevent the state from fulfilling its modern duties, office-holders of the state are, in principle, bound to try and satisfy its citizens by ridding them of this domination. If this requires, as in the case of all global trans-border problems, interstate cooperation and/or supranational authority, the state leader is the one who pools national sovereignty and/or cedes it where necessary (as in the case of a monopoly of nuclear force) to guarantee the freedom of his or her citizens. At this stage of the argument, the critical point is not whether this risk of statehood is empirically feasible (it happens presently at the functionalist level of ‘low political’ issues alone). Rather, the critical point is *whether an effective normative argument for progressive national state leadership is possible that can foster appropriate kinds of political imagination and risk*.

Third, the first two arguments concern global problems, the state and its own citizens. The question of responsibility towards non-citizens comes up, however, in their very exposition. In terms of the first argument, *meeting the needs of non-citizens helps meet the needs of one’s own*. Here, in comparison with Robert Jackson’s approach, there is no ‘incompatibility’, no ‘hard choice’ between national and humanitarian

responsibility. One hears this argument regarding present migration flows to the European continent. Development of sub-Saharan Africa is not only a moral imperative in the name of basic human interests; it is a political imperative of national security. The securitization of development concerns should be handled prudently by the state since the argument can quickly revert into isolationism and exclusionism when national wealth is spent. That said, the argument is not false and provides, more importantly, a baseline for a more reflective, republican-type argument. As Pettit has argued, if events or agents are preventing citizens of *other* states from enjoying their freedom, the republican obligation is to assist them if this is their expressed wish or to assist the foreign state in such a way that it can assume its own duty to its citizens (Pettit, 2014: 177).¹⁶

Fourth, if this kind of assistance requires mediating institutions at international and supranational levels, then, the supranational organization no longer has to be considered as ‘incompatible’ with national interest. The supranational and national work, in principle, together in order to secure and sustain more local freedoms. The supranational authority (for example, a coordinating agency of technological transfers that has nevertheless sovereign decision over aid-destination) serves as a *supplement* to national freedom, not a new form of domination over it. It is important to show how this supplemental logic might reorganize—in terms of political imagination—Morgenthau’s nuclear dilemma and paradox. For Morgenthau, the pursuit of national interest is incompatible with modern nuclear technology, which requires supranational organization. The paradox for modern state leadership is to yield national interest to supranational authority in the name of global national interests. Within my framework of republican supplementary logic, the pursuit of national interest is made compatible with modern technology through supranational authority. There is little difference between the two logics, except that the first retains the paradox while the second assumes it within a republican (federal) logic of mutual self-restraint. It is here that my own analysis would rejoin Deudney’s critique of Morgenthau’s world-statism.

The proof of these largely theoretical arguments is, of course, in the pudding: the concrete forms of statecraft that they help to encourage. Since statecraft is not a science, and since prudence is a practical skill, these arguments serve only to frame political imagination at a moment when the gap between the national and the global has to be

bridged from the nation upwards. Morgenthau stood back from the nuclear dilemma given American and Soviet nationalism. The Vietnam War then distracted his intellectual attention. He saw little way to bridge the national and the supranational given their incompatibility of interests and despaired of his generation's lack of political imagination. Both using a responsibilities argument and seeking to marry the global and the national through republican-type arguments, I am suggesting: 1) that the abyss Morgenthau despaired of can be framed more positively, even regarding military power; and 2) that the national/global framework of state leadership can help to provide, at this historical moment, something like a republican, federal agenda for future *political* solutions to global threats and challenges. So what critical concept of the statesperson emerges from this work? I will use the simple methodology of hypothetical profile-traits to answer.¹⁷

Part V: Towards a critical concept of the statesperson

The statesperson upholds first the 'common good' of the state by not allowing any one particular interest to dominate it internally. Political philosophy and political theory have always been clear, from Plato and Aristotle onwards, that statecraft requires such balancing of interests within the state so that it remains a polity for all its citizens. Good statespersons are those who achieve that balance.

Classical realism's understanding of the national interest as a guide to a state's foreign policy within a world of states extends this craft to the international realm. A statesperson upholds, second, the national interest of the state in relation to the national interests of other states: this requires prudential judgment, particularly in order to safeguard the national interest in the plural environment of world politics. Good statespersons are those who satisfy, in one, the national interest and uphold world order.

The prudence of statecraft has become all the more complex as world politics has turned, on an array of existential and moral issues, into global politics. With the material and ideological pressures of globalization, the statesperson has, third, to guide state action through a series of conflicting if not incompatible normative demands. These demands can imply divergent state responsibilities (Jackson suggested six) between the needs of domestic employment and the needs of the international trade regime and/or

between the physical and/or social welfare of one's own people and assistance to those in need beyond the state. *Assuming the responsibility* of these responsibilities and of the choices between them defines the statesperson and the quality of their state leadership. A good statesperson in a globalized but fragmented world both holds the state together as a free state and fulfills humanitarian and global responsibilities beyond its borders.

In a world of interdependence among states and their peoples, some of these state responsibilities are therefore not incompatible when correctly conceived and aligned. It is in the overall national interest to protect the planet upon which states are housed and therefore a responsibility of statecraft to construct political responses to planetary degradation at the appropriate level. The contemporary statesperson is, fourth, one who shows and rehearses the marriages between the national common good and the global common good. He or she takes, accordingly, the risk to lead the state into poorly known territory of pooling and/or ceding sovereignty to international and supranational political arrangements *in the very name of national sovereignty*. The good statesperson is the leader who transforms global interest into national interest and national interest into global interest *without* incurring new forms of domination.

These four traits make up a critical concept of the statesperson: they provide a portfolio of state responsibilities that make sense of the contemporary state condition and provide normative and progressive guidance for it. Is this concept *uncritically* calling for a messiah? No. It is what a critical concept of the statesperson requires because it is addressing the nature of domestic, foreign and global policy in a long-term present: a globalized world of states. Progressive political leadership will embody these traits in one form or another in the coming years, just as regressive leadership refuses them.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that a fruitful meeting-place between classical realism and critical theory—under the general rubric of modernity, crisis and humanity—is to be found in our global present and in political responses to it. Given the gap between global problems and solutions to them, which characterizes this present, the latter requires progressive state action to forge international cooperation between states and the pooling and cession of national sovereignty where governance imperatives require. Without state leadership,

both the *global efficacy* and *national legitimacy* of these imperatives are in doubt. State leadership redounds to the office-holders of the state. They, among all international actors, have the power to assume the responsibility of leadership and help effect global political transformation. The paper has argued, accordingly, for a new critical conception of the statesperson: one able to embody often-conflicting duties in a globalized world; one able to assume in the very name of national sovereignty what regularly appear as duties conflicting with the national interest. I conclude this paper with the most obvious retort to my intellectual move in order to deepen the introduction's rehearsal of my understanding of the 'critical'.

Everything that this article has argued, the critical theorist might say, explores a set of priorities and range of possibilities *within the state system*. It is within this system that the nuclear dilemma insists as our present in the first place, and it is only within this system that the language and the problematic of 'state prudence' and 'state responsibility' have pertinence to begin with. As a result, these languages of prudence and responsibility *perpetuate* a system that needs to be transformed as such for *critical* thought and action to be possible. Perpetuating the system, whatever their intentions (that is, to one side of power-drives), state leaders cannot be critical. The paper's perspective throughout this argument therefore loses critical thought in the very gesture with which it attempts to regain it for the present. In doing so, it returns the present to the repetition of existing power structures and betrays the final purpose of critical theory: *emancipation*. It is responsible, rather, *not* to engage with state power and responsibility.

This retort is elegant but flawed: answering it clarifies my rehearsal of the term 'critical' in the introduction and my use of it throughout this article.

First, if critical thought entails historical theorizing, then it cannot itself stand outside of time. The object of critique does not only change through history; the notion of critique must change as well. I said in the introduction that the family traits of critique converge in its transformative relation to the present. As for the early Frankfurt School, this relation has deep roots in an amalgamation of Kantian critique and Marxian critical political economy. As has been well researched over the last half-century, these modalities of critique no longer stand up in the same way that they could in earlier modernity. Kant's critique of the limits of reason presupposes the fact of reason in the

first place: an assumption that allows him to short-circuit history and posit liberal teleology. Marx, in contrast, can only posit the object of capital and its immanent contradictions based on a 'supply-side' understanding of value (labour value). Without this assumption, the 'contradictions' of capitalism revert to tensions, and alternatives to it—as the 2007/8 financial crisis showed again—can be quickly marginalized. This is not to say that the critical gestures delimiting illusions of thought or de-reifying what appears natural or social givens do not remain important critical enterprises (see Linklater, 1998). My point is, rather, that to stand outside the system is not presently possible and that one still needs to think through the *political consequences* of this historical and theoretical point.

To argue that a gesture is only politically critical if it is made outside the system is, for the same reason, untenable. French critical thought from the 1980s onwards—Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, following in part the negative dialectics of Theodor Adorno—punctured effectively the illusion of thinking in extra-systemic and/or holistic terms. They lost, however, in so doing, comprehensive normative vision and, correlatively, a sense of political specificity: the absolute need to draw a line in the sand to counter-effect other forces in the political field (Beardsworth, 2011: 224-6). It is critical today—in both senses of the term: urgent and reflective—to think and implement differently the sense of what is critical and not to oppose it to those who hold power.¹⁸ Unable today to stand outside the system, critique must also work within it and transform its own terms of self-understanding.

Second, this means, in the context of political transformation in a changing system of states, looking not only to global civil society, but also to the state to be an agent of change.

Third, looking directly to the state to address effective change redounds also to the fact that the state constitutes the most intense and conflicting site of transformation at this historical juncture. Too much critical thought has circumvented the state although it is within the changing parameters of the state that effective leverage on trans-border problems is possible. Such circumvention vacates the force field of politics to contemporary nationalisms.

Fourth, and finally, my critical theorist might still retort that critical theory seeks deeper terms of transformation when addressing the present; and that, to use the language of Thomas Kuhn and Robert Cox, forsaking new paradigms of thought returns one to ‘problem-solving’ reflection within the present paradigm (Cox, 1996: 207-8). I have effectively questioned this distinction in point one above. It is, however, worth noting further that the problem with this critical standpoint is less that it does not offer feasible alternatives to the present all the while critiquing it (see Brown, 2012) than *it does not critically negotiate with the agencies of power that presently determine the direction of the future*. As a result, it always runs the risk of standing powerless before this future (as was the case after 9/11, after 2007/8 and with regard to the domestic, European and global consequences of ‘Brexit’). With regard to the present’s transformation, *this position is neither morally nor politically responsible*. Re-drawing lines of reflection in international theory between mid-twentieth century classical realism and critical theory not only fosters critical change in our understanding of political agency with regard to the present and its transformation. It invites us to reconsider what a *progressive state* and a *progressive statesperson* mean in a globalized, fragmented world. As a result more effective alliances between states, global civil society, and international organizations can be built regarding this present, and concrete stepping-stones can be forged towards the idea of a just, differentiated global order.

Notes

¹ The term ‘statesman’ is often replaced by the term ‘statesperson’ and/or ‘state leader’ in order that gender neutrality is guaranteed. I follow this usage, also replacing the generic concept of ‘statesmanship’ by either ‘statecraft’ or ‘state leadership’. Throughout this paper the discipline of International Relations is abbreviated IR.

² For strong statements on critical theory and IR, see Ashley (1984); Ashley and Walker (1990); Beardsworth (2007); Booth (2007); Habermas (2006); Held (1995); Der Derian (1994); Linklater (1990, 1998, 2007); Price and Reus-Smit (1998); Walker (1992, 2010); Wyn-Jones (2001, 2005). For meta-theoretical considerations of mid-twentieth century classical realism, see Bain (2000); Behr and Roesch (2012); Guilhot (2011); Lebow

(2001); Molloy (2006); Scheuerman (2009, 2011); Schou Tjalve (2008); Williams (2005).

³ To be clear: these ‘margins’ have been important in re-organizing the ‘center’ of politics on ethnic and gender fronts. They have been unable, however, to offer an effective alternative to domestic and international liberalism.

⁴ Following then UN General Secretary Kofi Annan’s call in 2003 for a report on contemporary challenges to the international community and on UN policy responses to them.

⁵ Much global governance procedure in terms of international cooperation is now framed by game theory (see particularly Barrett 2003; Sandler, 1997, 2004). Despite the insights it brings to international agreement, the rationalist framework of game theory is politically thin.

⁶ This approach could be aligned with Michael Williams’ concept of ‘willful realism’ and his constructivist, reflective reformulation of Weber’s ethics of responsibility (Williams, 2005: 169-210). Compare also Robert Jackson’s conception of the ‘situational ethics of statecraft’ (Jackson, 2000, 2004), to which I turn later.

⁷ Classical realism is state-minded, not state-focused. When the major site of executive decision-making in world affairs changes, classical realist understandings of political morality will change.

⁸ Nationalism, for Morgenthau, is an *exclusive* principle of political order: see ‘Nationalism’ (Morgenthau, 1962).

⁹ One of Morgenthau’s final words on this matter is found in the essay on ‘Nationalism’. With reference to nuclear nationalism, he wrote: ‘Political imagination is the key word. If the West cannot think of something better than nationalism, it may well lose the opportunity to think at all’ (Morgenthau, 1962, p. 194).

¹⁰ The point is first formulated by James Speer (Speer, 1968).

¹¹ Compare here the work of Luis Cabrera (2004, 2005, 2010).

¹² Despite Jackson’s engagement with history, the genealogy of state responsibility is only addressed within the terms of the evolution of interstate action.

¹³ In comparison, IGOs and NGOs are relatively thin sites of global social processes: hence why their responsibilities are less. This may make them more functional, but, by the same token, it makes them less politically agential.

¹⁴ The seminal work of Andrew Linklater has been addressing the first of these issues for the last decade (Linklater 2007, 2010, 2011, forthcoming). This paper constitutes one attempt to address the second.

¹⁵ For a more detailed republican argument on this alignment, see Beardsworth 2015.

¹⁶ Pettit places this logic under the heading of ‘globalized sovereignty’ (185-6).

¹⁷ See Foley (2014) for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary methodologies in political leadership studies.

¹⁸ The referendum for ‘Brexit’ is testimony to this point.

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Author's biography

Richard Beardsworth is Professor of International Politics in the department of International Politics and University Director of Ethics at the University of Aberystwyth. Trained as a political philosopher (*Derrida and the Political* (1996), *Nietzsche* (1998)), he is concerned to bring feasible normative vision to the field and practice of world politics (*Cosmopolitanism and International Relations Theory* (2011)). His work on the possibilities and dilemmas of cosmopolitan vision in a conflict-ridden world have appeared in *Ethics and International Affairs*, *Global Policy*, *International Political Theory*, *International Relations*, *Millennium*, etc. His current interests lie in formulating a public philosophy of political responsibility and political leadership attuned to the national/global complex. He is presently preparing a manuscript *Political Responsibility in a Globalized, Fragmented World*.