

**man
the state
and war**

Kenneth N. Waltz

**a
theoretical
analysis**

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FOREWORD

MAN, THE STATE, AND WAR is the second of the Topical Studies in International Relations to be published. The series was planned to demonstrate some of the contributions which existing bodies of knowledge are capable of making to the understanding of modern international relations. Even in a relatively new field of academic specialization, it is not necessary for the scholar to make an absolutely fresh start. Indeed, it is incumbent upon him not to fail to draw on existing storehouses of knowledge. One of those storehouses least systematically inventoried for its usefulness for international relations is classical Western political thought. Each volume in the Topical Studies series was meant to be such an inventory. It is particularly appropriate that *Man, the State, and War* be included in the series.

Professor Waltz has chosen to investigate the particular contribution which classical political theory makes to understanding the causes of war and to defining the conditions under which war can be controlled or eliminated as the final arbiter of disputes between groups of men in the absence of central authority. There are other fundamental questions of interest to the student of international relations to which classical political theorists have sought to provide answers, but none is so central as the question with which Professor Waltz is concerned.

His method has been to describe the answers which certain representative theorists have given and then in alternate chapters to discuss some of the implications and applications of classical insights to contemporary social science research and choices in the field of public policy. Thus, his work is far more than a work of exegesis. He is

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concerned not only with what certain towering figures in the history of Western political thought have really meant, but even more with what difference it makes that they thought and wrote as they did. His concern is not an antiquarian one, and his is not purely an "art for art's sake" point of view.

The Topical Studies series, in major part, was organized in 1947 by Dr. Grayson Kirk, now president of Columbia University, but then professor of international relations in that university. His administrative burdens made it necessary for someone else to assume direct editorial responsibility for the series; and he requested me to assume such responsibilities in 1951. The studies in the series have been made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to Columbia University. Neither the foundation nor the university thereby assumed responsibility for the findings of the various contributors to the Topical Studies series. As I observed in the foreword to the earlier volume in the series, Alfred Vagts's *Defense and Diplomacy* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1956), the opinions expressed are those of the authors alone and to them properly belongs the credit as well as the responsibility.

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April 6, 1959

PREFACE

THE pages that follow reflect a direct concern with international relations and a long-standing interest in political theory. The latter dates from my years at Oberlin College where John and Ewart Lewis led me to feel the fascination of theory and to understand its importance in the study of politics. Later, at Columbia University, I was fortunate enough to be one of the students of the late Franz Neumann, whose brilliance and excellence as a teacher can never be forgotten by those who knew him.

My most immediate and my deepest debts are to William T. R. Fox. From the first vague outline of the manuscript to the final version here presented, he willingly gave his advice and perceptive criticisms. Moreover, as Director of Columbia University's Institute of War and Peace Studies, he made it possible for me to devote summers and parts of the academic year as well to research and writing. It is insufficient to say that because of him this is a better book, for without his encouragement and counsel it is difficult to see how there would be any book at all.

I have been unusually fortunate in my other critics as well: Herbert A. Deane and John B. Stewart, both of Columbia University, and Kenneth W. Thompson of the Rockefeller Foundation. Each was kind enough to read the entire manuscript at some stage of its preparation, and Professor Stewart patient enough to read it at two different stages. Each made suggestions that saved me from many errors and, more important, that caused me to reconsider and often to recast substantial parts of the manuscript, though I did not always come to conclusions they would accept.

My wife has done more than keep the children quiet

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and move commas around, more than criticize and read proof; she did most of the research for one chapter and contributed ideas and information to all of them. I should also like to thank the Columbia University Press for its understanding of the problems an inexperienced author must face and its generous assistance to him in overcoming them.

Excerpts from the works of others often conveyed the ideas I had in mind with more felicity than I could hope to achieve. I have therefore quoted freely and wish to thank the following publishers for their kind permission to quote from copyrighted works: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., for John Hobson's *Imperialism*; Constable and Company, Ltd., for Jean Jacques Rousseau's *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe*, translated by C. E. Vaughan; E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., for Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, translated by G. D. H. Cole (Everyman's Library edition); William Morrow and Company, Inc., for Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (copyright 1928 by William Morrow and Company) and *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (copyright 1942 by Margaret Mead); the Philosophical Library for *Psychological Factors of Peace and War*, edited by T. H. Pear; and the Social Science Research Council for Otto Klineberg's *Tensions Affecting International Understanding*.

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April, 1959

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

ASKING who won a given war, someone has said, is like asking who won the San Francisco earthquake. That in wars there is no victory but only varying degrees of defeat is a proposition that has gained increasing acceptance in the twentieth century. But are wars also akin to earthquakes in being natural occurrences whose control or elimination is beyond the wit of man? Few would admit that they are, yet attempts to eliminate war, however nobly inspired and assiduously pursued, have brought little more than fleeting moments of peace among states. There is an apparent disproportion between effort and product, between desire and result. The peace wish, we are told, runs strong and deep among the Russian people; and we are convinced that the same can be said of Americans. From these statements there is some comfort to be derived, but in the light of history and of current events as well it is difficult to believe that the wish will father the condition desired.

Social scientists, realizing from their studies how firmly the present is tied to the past and how intimately the parts of a system depend upon each other, are inclined to be conservative in estimating the possibilities of achieving a radically better world. If one asks whether we can now have peace where in the past there has been war, the answers are most often pessimistic. Perhaps this is the wrong question. And indeed the answers will be somewhat less discouraging if instead the following questions are put: Are there ways of decreasing the incidence of war, of increasing the chances of peace? Can we have peace more often in the future than in the past?

Peace is one among a number of ends simultaneously entertained. The means by which peace can be sought are many. The end is pursued and the means are applied under varying conditions. Even though one may find it hard to believe that there are ways to peace not yet tried by statesmen or advocated by publicists, the very complexity of the problem suggests the possibility of combining activities in different ways in the hope that some combination will lead us closer to the goal. Is one then led to conclude that the wisdom of the statesman lies in trying first one policy and then another, in doing what the moment seems to require? An affirmative reply would suggest that the hope for improvement lies in policy divorced from analysis, in action removed from thought. Yet each attempt to alleviate a condition implies some idea of its causes: to explain how peace can be more readily achieved requires an understanding of the causes of war. It is such an understanding that we shall seek in the following pages. To borrow the title of a book by Mortimer Adler, our subject is "How to Think about War and Peace." The chapters that follow are, in a sense, essays in political theory. This description is justified partly by the mode of inquiry—we proceed by examining assumptions and asking repeatedly what differences they make—and partly by the fact that we consider a number of political philosophers directly, sometimes in circumscribed fashion, as with St. Augustine, Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Kant, and sometimes at length, as with Rousseau. In other places we shall concentrate on a type of thought, as in the chapters on behavioral scientists, liberals, and socialists. But what is the relevance of the thoughts of others, many of them living far in the past, to the pressing and awful problems of the present? The rest of the book is an answer to this question, but it is well at the outset to indicate the lines along which we shall proceed.

Why does God, if he is all-knowing and all-powerful, permit the existence of evil? So asks the simple Huron in Voltaire's tale, and thereby confounds the learned men of the church. The theodicy problem in its secular version—man's explanation to himself of the existence of evil—is as intriguing and as perplexing. Disease and pestilence, bigotry and rape, theft and murder, pillage and war, appear as constants in world history. Why is this so? Can one explain war and malevolence in the same way? Is war simply mass malevolence, and thus an explanation of malevolence an explanation of the evils to which men in society are prey? Many have thought so.

For though it were granted us by divine indulgence to be exempt from all that can be harmful to us from without [writes John Milton], yet the perverseness of our folly is so bent, that we should never cease hammering out of our own hearts, as it were out of a flint, the seeds and sparkles of new misery to ourselves, till all were in a blaze again.¹

Our miseries are ineluctably the product of our natures. The root of all evil is man, and thus he is himself the root of the specific evil, war. This estimate of cause, widespread and firmly held by many as an article of faith, has been immensely influential. It is the conviction of St. Augustine and Luther, of Malthus and Jonathan Swift, of Dean Inge and Reinhold Niebuhr. In secular terms, with men defined as beings of intermixed reason and passion in whom passion repeatedly triumphs, the belief has informed the philosophy, including the political philosophy, of Spinoza. One might argue that it was as influential in the activities of Bismarck, with his low opinion of his fellow man, as it was in the rigorous and austere writings of Spinoza. If one's beliefs condition his expectations and his expectations condition his acts, acceptance or rejection of Milton's statement becomes important in

¹ Milton, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce," in *Works*, III, 180.

the affairs of men. And, of course, Milton might be right even if no one believed him. If so, attempts to explain the recurrence of war in terms of, let us say, economic factors, might still be interesting games, but they would be games of little consequence. If it is true, as Dean Swift once said, that "the very same principle that influences a bully to break the windows of a whore who has jilted him, naturally stirs up a great prince to raise mighty armies, and dream of nothing but sieges, battles, and victories,"² then the reasons given by princes for the wars they have waged are mere rationalizations covering a motivation they may not themselves have perceived and could not afford to state openly if they had. It would follow as well that the schemes of the statesman Sully, if seriously intended to produce a greater peace in the world, were as idle as the dreams of the French monk Crucé—idle, that is, unless one can strike at the roots, the pride and petulance that have produced the wars as they have the other ills that plague mankind.

There are many who have agreed with Milton that men must look to man in order to understand social and political events, but who differ on what man's nature is, or can become. There are many others who, in effect, quarrel with the major premise. Does man make society in his image or does his society make him? It was to be expected, in a time when philosophy was little more than a branch of theology, that the theologian-philosophers would attribute to human agency what many philosophers before and since have described as the effects of the polity itself. Rousseau, among many who could be mentioned, makes a clean break with the view that, man being a social animal, one can explain his behavior in society by pointing to his animal passion and/or his human reason. Man is born and in his natural condition remains neither good nor

² Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*.

bad. It is society that is the degrading force in men's lives, but it is the moralizing agency as well. And this latter effect Rousseau was unwilling to surrender even had he thought it possible for men to retreat to the state of nature. This is his position, consistently reflected in his various works, though the myth persists that he believed the savage noble and lamented the advent of society.³ Man's behavior, his very nature, which some have taken as cause, is, according to Rousseau, in great part a product of the society in which he lives. And society, he avers, is inseparable from political organization. In the absence of an organized power, which as a minimum must serve as the adjudicating authority, it is impossible for men to live together with even a modicum of peace. The study of society cannot be separated from the study of government, or the study of man from either. Rousseau, like Plato, believes that a bad polity makes men bad, and a good polity makes them good. This is not to say that the state is the potter and man a lump of clay posing no resistance to the shape the artist would impart. There are, as Rousseau recognized, similarities among men wherever they may live. There are also differences, and the search for causes is an attempt to explain these differences. The explanation of consequence—whether one is worried about the recurrence of theft or of war—is to be found in studying the varying social relations of men, and this in turn requires the study of politics.

Can man in society best be understood by studying man or by studying society? The most satisfactory reply would seem to be given by striking the word "or" and answering "both." But where one begins his explanation of events makes a difference. The Reverend Thomas Malthus once wrote that, "though human institutions appear to be the obvious and obtrusive causes of much mischief

³ For further discussion of Rousseau, see ch. vi, below.

to mankind; yet, in reality, they are light and superficial, they are mere feathers that float on the surface, in comparison with those deeper seated causes of impurity that corrupt the springs, and render turbid the whole stream of human life.”⁴ Rousseau looked at the same world, the same range of events, but found the locus of major causes in a different ambit.

Following Rousseau’s lead in turn raises questions. As men live in states, so states exist in a world of states. If we now confine our attention to the question of why wars occur, shall we emphasize the role of the state, with its social and economic content as well as its political form, or shall we concentrate primarily on what is sometimes called the society of states? Again one may say strike the word “or” and worry about both, but many have emphasized either the first or the second, which helps to explain the discrepant conclusions reached. Those who emphasize the first in a sense run parallel to Milton. He explains the ills of the world by the evil in man; they explain the great ill of war by the evil qualities of some or of all states. The statement is then often reversed: If bad states make wars, good states would live at peace with one another. With varying degrees of justification this view can be attributed to Plato and Kant, to nineteenth-century liberals and revisionist socialists. They agree on the principle involved, though they differ in their descriptions of good states as well as on the problem of bringing about their existence.

Where Marxists throw the liberals’ picture of the world into partial eclipse, others blot it out entirely. Rousseau himself finds the major causes of war neither in men nor in states but in the state system itself. Of men in a state of nature, he had pointed out that one man cannot begin

⁴ Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, pp. 47–48 (ch. x of the 1798 ed.).

to behave decently unless he has some assurance that others will not be able to ruin him. This thought Rousseau develops and applies to states existing in a condition of anarchy in his fragmentary essay on "The State of War" and in his commentaries on the works of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre. Though a state may want to remain at peace, it may have to consider undertaking a preventive war; for if it does not strike when the moment is favorable it may be struck later when the advantage has shifted to the other side. This view forms the analytic basis for many balance-of-power approaches to international relations and for the world-federalist program as well. Implicit in Thucydides and Alexander Hamilton, made explicit by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau, it is at once a generalized explanation of states' behavior and a critical *point d'appui* against those who look to the internal structure of states to explain their external behavior. While some believe that peace will follow from the improvement of states, others assert that what the state will be like depends on its relation to others. The latter thesis Leopold Ranke derived from, or applied to, the history of the states of modern Europe. It has been used to explain the internal ordering of other states as well.⁵

Statesmen, as well as philosophers and historians, have attempted to account for the behavior of states in peace and in war. Woodrow Wilson, in the draft of a note written in November of 1916, remarked that the causes of the war then being fought were obscure, that neutral nations did not know why it had begun and, if drawn in, would not know for what ends they would be fighting.⁶ But often to act we must convince ourselves that we do know

⁵ Ranke, "The Great Powers," tr. H. H. Von Laue, in Theodore H. Von Laue, *Leopold Ranke*. And see, e.g., Homo, *Roman Political Institutions*, tr. Dobie, especially pp. 146, 364-69.

⁶ Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era*, p. 257n.

the answers to such questions. Wilson, to his own satisfaction, soon did. He appears in history as one of the many who, drawing a sharp distinction between peaceful and aggressive states, have assigned to democracies all the attributes of the first, to authoritarian states all the attributes of the second. To an extent that varies with the author considered, the incidence of war is then thought to depend upon the type of national government. Thus Cobden in a speech at Leeds in December of 1849:

Where do we look for the black gathering cloud of war? Where do we see it rising? Why, from the despotism of the north, where one man wields the destinies of 40,000,000 of serfs. If we want to know where is the second danger of war and disturbance, it is in that province of Russia—that miserable and degraded country, Austria—next in the stage of despotism and barbarism, and there you see again the greatest danger of war; but in proportion as you find the population governing themselves—as in England, in France, or in America—there you will find that war is not the disposition of the people, and that if Government desire it, the people would put a check upon it.⁷

The constant interest of the people is in peace; no government controlled by the people will fight unless set upon. But only a few years later, England, though not set upon, did fight against Russia; and Cobden lost his seat in 1857 as a result of his opposition to the war. The experience is shattering, but not fatal to the belief; for it relives in the words of Wilson, for example, and again in those of the late Senator Robert Taft. In the manner of Cobden but in the year 1951, Taft writes: "History shows that when the people have the opportunity to speak they as a rule decide for peace if possible. It shows that arbitrary rulers are more inclined to favor war than are the people at any time."⁸ Is it true, one wonders, that there is a uniquely peaceful form of the state? If it were true,

⁷ Cobden, *Speeches*, ed. Bright and Rogers, I, 432-33.

⁸ Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans*, p. 23.

how much would it matter? Would it enable some states to know which other states they could trust? Should the states that are already good seek ways of making other states better, and thus make it possible for all men to enjoy the pleasures of peace? Wilson believed it morally imperative to aid in the political regeneration of others; Cobden thought it not even justifiable. Agreeing on where the causes are to be found, they differ in their policy conclusions.

But what of those who incline to a different estimate of major causes? "Now people," President Dwight Eisenhower has said, "don't want conflict—people in general. It is only, I think, mistaken leaders that grow too belligerent and believe that people really want to fight."⁹ Though apparently not all people want peace badly enough, for, on a different occasion, he had this to say: "If the mothers in every land could teach their children to understand the homes and hopes of children in every other land—in America, in Europe, in the Near East, in Asia—the cause of peace in the world would indeed be nobly served."¹⁰ Here the President seems to agree with Milton on where cause is to be found, but without Milton's pessimism—or realism, depending on one's preconceptions. Aggressive tendencies may be inherent, but is their misdirection inevitable? War begins in the minds and emotions of men, as all acts do; but can minds and emotions be changed? And, if one agrees that they can be, how much and how fast can whose minds and feelings be changed? And, if other factors are relevant as well, how much difference would the changes make? The answers to these questions and to those of the preceding paragraph

⁹ Quoted by Robert J. Donovan, "Eisenhower Will Cable Secret Geneva Reports," in *New York Herald Tribune*, July 13, 1955, p. 1.

¹⁰ Eisenhower, address to a meeting of the National Council of Catholic Women. Text in *New York Times*, November 9, 1954, p. 14.

are not obvious, but they are important. How can they best be sought?

Some would suggest taking possible answers as hypotheses to be investigated and tested empirically. This is difficult. Most English liberals at the time of the First World War argued, as did Wilson, that the militarist and authoritarian character of the German state prompted Germany to seek the war that soon spread to most of the world. At the same time some liberals, most notably G. Lowes Dickinson, argued that no single state could be held guilty. Only by understanding the international system, or lack of system, by which the leaders of states were often forced to act with slight regard for conventional morality, could one understand and justly assess the processes by which the war was produced.¹¹ Dickinson was blasted by liberals and socialists alike for reversing the dominant inside-out explanation. Acceptance or rejection of explanatory theses in matters such as this most often depends on the skill of the pleaders and the mood of the audience. These are obviously not fit criteria, yet it would be foolish to argue that simply by taking a more intensive look at the data a compelling case could be built for one or the other explanatory theory. Staring at the same set of data, the parties to the debate came to sharply different conclusions, for the images they entertained led them to select and interpret the data in different ways. In order to make sense of the liberals' hypothesis we need somehow to acquire an idea of the interrelation of many possibly relevant factors, and these interrelations are not given in the data we study. We establish or, rather, assert them ourselves. To say "establish" would be dangerous; for, whether or not we label them as such, we cannot escape from philosophic assumptions. The idea we entertain becomes a filter through which we pass our data. If the

¹¹ Dickinson, *The European Anarchy*, *passim*.