

Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg Interview with Ken Waltz

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Interview with Ken Waltz*

CONDUCTED BY FRED HALLIDAY AND
JUSTIN ROSENBERG

1. Personal and academic background

F.H. It would be very interesting if you could say something about your own personal and academic background. What were the experiences that led you to write *Man, the State and War*?

K.W. I came from a relatively poor family. My father was a painter—of walls, not of pictures. Lower middle-class; we didn't suffer. I am the only person of my generation in the family who went to college. I am quite sure my father did not graduate from high school, though he'd never really admit that he didn't. My mother did get into high school. She didn't graduate. It was that kind of family: a German-speaking family in south-eastern Michigan.

F.H. Were they first generation?

K.W. No, but it was then so German in rural south-eastern Michigan that my cousin, who's almost exactly my age, could not speak English until she went to kindergarten. Sometimes when I went to Sunday school, my father would go to the German service: the same preacher, but from 9.30 till 11 was the German sermon and then 11 to 12.30 it was in English.

I, along with all of my male friends, expected to go to the University of Michigan and study engineering. And then in my junior year I said to myself, 'I don't want to be an engineer!' It was an early life crisis. I went to a psychological counselling service at the University of Michigan, which went on for hours, over a period of three days. And this lovely woman, who I realize now was either a graduate student or the wife of a graduate student, asked me: 'Your best field is music: what instrument do you play?' And I said, 'The banjo.' She said, 'Oh well, in that case, the next best would be law.' So I called the Dean of the Law School—this was 1941. The Dean, rather than a secretary, answered the phone. And I said 'What should I major in? I want to come back to the University of Michigan Law School.' And he said, 'We recently did a survey of our most successful graduates and the most successful ones majored in mathematics.' Well, I liked math. It was very easy. I didn't have to spend a lot of time doing homework. You either get it or you don't. So I majored in math, and then drifted into economics, while still doing some mathematics.

Even then, I didn't really expect to go on to graduate school. But I didn't want to teach and I didn't want to write. So I went to graduate school in economics intending to be an econometrician. But then I was bored stiff at Columbia where the teaching tradition was not rich. And after a semester or so I had to make a decision.

* London School of Economics, 2 pm, Friday 7 May 1993.

I'd started following some great courses in English literature, but I realized that if I got a PhD in English, I would be a critic: I was not going to write a poem; I was not going to write a novel. I think it's fine to be a critic but I didn't think of that as being satisfying. The other thing for which I had tremendous enthusiasm was political philosophy—which is called political theory in the US. There is very little theory in political philosophy, but it's great literature. You only had to have two fields for a PhD degree, and I decided that my second one would be IR since I'd already done international economics; that would be the easiest second field for me. It was a very minimal field. I did as little as possible. I had an agreement with a professor who was often on the oral exams for students who were minors that I would do certain things in IR and not others: no international law and no international organization, for example.

F.H. You were clear about that even then?

K.W. Oh, even then. And then Professor Peffer got sick and Bill Fox took over. Fox said, 'If you're going to do IR, you have to do IR, not just part of the field.' So I started reading, reading, reading like mad; and I couldn't make head or tail of it. So many people writing in IR were talking past each other, talking different languages really. I think I still have the faded piece of yellow paper on which I wrote down the three images: 'This is why the people I am reading are not able to communicate with each other: because some of them think the major causes lie at the level of individuals or states or the international system.' This was my final month as a graduate student before beginning to write the dissertation about a year and a half later.

F.H. So *Man, the State and War* arose out of your doctoral dissertation?

K.W. Yes. In fact the second chapter is practically intact, for which all the research was done by my wife. The first chapter is entirely new. The original first chapter wasn't much good. There was a lot of Spinoza in the original, which doesn't appeal much to students of international relations. But essentially the book and the dissertation were saying very much the same things.

F.H. Could you say something about your personal background. You were in World War II; you were in the Korean War.

K.W. I was in the Second World War beginning in 1944 and ending in 1946, and that was while I was at college. The Korean War intervened when I was at graduate school.

F.H. And so you served in the Second World War or just in the Korean War?

K.W. Both.

F.H. So where were you in the Second World War? Were you in the Pacific or in Europe?

K.W. I was in the Pacific. The war ended while we were on the boat. We heard about the atomic bomb on the boat on the way to Manila, but I took the first opportunity to transfer to Japan and spent a year in the occupying army.

F.H. Would you say that these experiences in the Second World War, and for that matter your German-American background, affected your view of international relations? Do you feel there is some connection between your overall theoretical interests and your early experiences. Or would you locate it more at the intellectual level?

K.W. I would locate it more at the intellectual level. I was in the quartermaster corps. I didn't do any fighting. The war was over. In the Korean War there was fighting but I was in Pusan.

F.H. What about intellectual influences on you? Up to *Man the State and War*, there was the growth of what we now see as Second World War and post-Second World War American realism, although many of the people had in fact migrated from Europe: Niebuhr, Kissinger and others. Were there people who had a formative influence on you?

K.W. In international politics? No. I was really emphasizing political philosophy, and doing International Relations because one had to have a second field. For years I expected to be a teacher of political theory in the traditional sense and was very sad when there weren't any jobs. Now, in retrospect, I'm very glad that there weren't, because political philosophy has very little theory. And I became very interested in theory.

F.H. How would you distinguish the two?

K.W. Political philosophy is more interpretative. There are some exceptions. There's some theory in Rousseau. There's some theory in Kant. There's some theory in Hobbes. But by and large it's interpreting the political world and beyond.

2. Realism and foreign policy

J.R. Readers often form very stereotyped impressions of the political judgments of well-known writers. I was surprised when I first learned that Morgenthau had opposed the Vietnam War. Many people think that there is an easy correspondence between a realist *theoretical* position and the *political* legitimization of existing foreign policy. But that actually doesn't hold, does it?

K.W. It doesn't hold at all. He opposed the Vietnam War for the same reasons I did. From a realist point of view there was no reason under the sun for us to expend large amounts of treasure and blood fighting in that hopeless cause where there was no interest, no important interest, at stake. There are really two reasons why people think that I am a hardline conservative. The first is that they think realists *are*. And that is so ingrained that when Morgenthau very actively opposed the war in Vietnam, there were a lot of people who were saying, 'Oh, he's tired of being unpopular. He wants to be popular, especially among the youth. So he's renounced all his beliefs, and now he's opposing the war in Vietnam.' That was absolutely false. He was opposing the war in Vietnam *because* he was a realist. The other reason that I think that people think of me as a hardline conservative is that the people who read the theory tend not to read what I write that isn't theory. I've written quite a bit of stuff on the military. And I've been a fierce critic of American military policy and spending and strategy, at least since the 1970s. The fact is that there's no way to read directly from a theory to policy conclusions. People who say realists are hardline conservatives are doing that. They're saying, 'That's his theoretical stance; therefore that must be his policy preference.'

J.R. Morgenthau also opposed the Truman Doctrine.

K.W. Because it was universalistic. And I think that's a legitimate criticism. He did not oppose the Kennan version of containment. But the Truman Doctrine was phrased in universalistic terms: anywhere, any place where Communism is, etc. And that was unsound. Many realist and other people would agree. But it's not surprising

that President Truman should use rather grandiose, general terms. I have great respect for President Truman.

J.R. Kissinger is often spoken of as a great realist figure, modelling himself on Metternich. Do you hold that Kissinger was a realist?

K.W. In the general sense of that term, I think, yes, he was a realist. He did not easily admit any indebtedness to anybody who was alive, such as Morgenthau. But Metternich was safely dead for a good long while. There were two things that surprised and dismayed me about Henry. One is that he didn't understand American domestic politics. Just a matter of weeks before he was appointed to be National Security Advisor, I had a private conversation with him, and we talked about the war in Vietnam. We agreed completely: hopeless, pointless, no American interest at stake. But he believed—this was 1968—as he said: If we get out of Vietnam, just withdraw, the McCarthy period in American politics will pale into insignificance. American society will just *blow up*. There will be such recriminations, because we will be seen as having sold out. I said that was completely wrong then, and in retrospect I'm sure it was completely wrong.

F.H. He would see it as another 'Who lost China?' but on a bigger scale?

K.W. Yes. Because it would have been more immediate. We 'lost' China, but we were never really in there very much. But we were in Vietnam for a good long time.

J.R. Returning to the question of realism and conservatism: during the early 1980s, you published, among other things, two articles called 'Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better', and 'The Myth of National Interdependence'. In the first of those you argued that a general proliferation of nuclear weapons would create a unit-veto system which would be logically more stable than an uneven distribution . . .

K.W. More peaceful.

J.R. . . . And in the second, you argued that it was illusory to hope that the international system would become more peaceful as a result of greater interdependence, because greater interdependence only gives states more to fight over.

K.W. Yes, more conflict.

J.R. I remember reading these pieces and thinking, 'This writer believes that the world would be a safer place if everybody had nuclear weapons and nobody traded with each other.'

K.W. Well, I think I make it clear in the Adelphi paper ('Nuclear Weapons') that a *rapid* proliferation would be destabilizing. That's why I said 'the spread', not the proliferation, of nuclear weapons, gradually from one country to another does not make for more war but for greater chances for peace to prevail. I would venture to say that we probably would have had a better time in Iraq if Iraq had had nuclear weapons. We couldn't have done what we did. We could have embargoed, which I was in favour of. And we could have kept the embargo up for a long time, as we have done. We would not be in a much different situation if we still had the embargo in place and hadn't bothered to smash up a good part of Iraq.

F.H. He'd still be in Kuwait.

K.W. I'm not sure, because if you have nuclear weapons you make yourself a target. You have to be careful what you do. We also know that if other countries—like Iraq—get nuclear weapons, we cannot then simply bomb the hell out of them. We don't like other countries to get nuclear weapons, because we have them and they don't. Nuclear weapons deter. We like to deter other countries but we don't want

other countries to deter us. There's an awful lot of double standard going on. When China got nuclear weapons, and then there was the 1962 India–China war, it was obvious that India was going to become a nuclear military power if it could. It's not that difficult. I once said to an Indian who is an expert in the subject, 'You Indians must have known when you exploded your peaceful bomb in 1974 that the Pakistanis would do everything they could . . . in order to build a nuclear weapon.' He said, 'We should have known that, but we didn't. We thought we were doing it so carefully, and making it so clear that we were only doing it for peaceful purposes, not for military purposes.' But it was *inevitable* Pakistan was going to do it if it could—and it has done. One has to open one's eyes and say, 'If this happens, what's likely to happen next?' To say to Pakistan, 'Don't get nuclear weapons, but we're not going to guarantee your security against India or anybody else' is entirely unreasonable.

F.H. What is your evaluation of the foreign policies of the postwar US presidents?

K.W. I thought Carter was an especially good president on foreign policy, for which he got no credit. I understand why: he didn't come across well. But think of what he did. The Panama Treaty—he expended an awful lot of political blood to get that through the Senate. And if he hadn't done it, we would have had even more trouble in Central America than we did. Carter on Camp David: the wrong guys got the Nobel Peace Prize; Carter should have got it. Angola: Henry Kissinger made a spectacle of himself on the Angola question. 'If we don't stand up and go into Angola and defeat Communism, we will prove that we are not a great power,' etc. He made it a real test case, and Carter did nothing. And nothing was the right thing to do. You don't get credit for the things you don't do: for example, if Lyndon Johnson didn't go into Vietnam, he would deserve a lot of credit for that, but he wouldn't get it, because nothing would have happened.

I think Carter was one of our really good foreign policy presidents, but not on military policy. The arms build-up of the late seventies and early eighties was first a Carter military build-up. Carter lost control of military policy. This is, I think, one of the amazing episodes in recent American politics. Paul Nitze, a private citizen, and the Committee on the Present Danger, with Rostow and others, made the running. They persuaded influential people in the US that the Russians were coming, that we were in danger of becoming vulnerable to a first strike with nuclear weapons, all of which was crazy. But Carter and Brown lost control of military policy: politically defensively gearing up for the campaign, they greatly increased military spending, which Reagan continued. And there wasn't any reason. I was among the minority who began saying at that time, partly because of this ridiculous military build-up, 'Look, the Soviet Union is weak economically—we all know *that*. But don't overlook the fact that it's weak *militarily*.' Most Americans and many Europeans tremendously exaggerated the vulnerability of Western Europe. Speaking at the invitation of the IISS, Helmut Schmidt made the foolish proposal that missiles capable, with easily added boost, of reaching Russia be placed on German soil. When I read the text of the talk, I thought that he must have become prematurely senile. Why would Germans want those missiles on their soil? What were they for? Nobody needed more missiles, and the mumbo-jumbo about linkage was wholly unconvincing. But many people worldwide thought the Russians were becoming as strong as, or stronger than, the US militarily. I well know because I gave many talks

in Europe, South-east Asia, North-east Asia, and at home. I was very unpopular because I just said: Look, the Soviet Union is not so strong. It has four strategic nuclear weapons systems pointed at it. How would the US feel in that situation? The Soviets have a hostile China to the East and a hostile East Europe to the West. They're outgunned, outmanned, outproduced; and we treat them as though they were a military threat to the US? Preposterous.

As for Reagan, there's no question but that he was a tremendously popular president. There are still a lot of people in the US, even including some of my students, who say 'At least he won the Cold War. He forced the Soviet Union to almost bankrupt itself, by increasing American military spending.' But my simple response to that is, 'You people have a higher opinion of Communism than I do.' That system collapsed of its own weight. Furthermore, the causes of military spending are rooted as much in one's domestic politics as they are in international politics.

In any case, I think the real culprits in the arms race were Kennedy and MacNamara. I recall Khrushchev's speech in 1960, when he announced a major cut in Soviet manpower, from 3.6 million down to 2.4 million, and effectively proclaimed a policy of minimum deterrence. What did we do? We undertook the greatest peacetime military build-up that had ever occurred in world history, both strategic nuclear and conventional. We knew the missile gap was indeed a big gap, but it was in our favour! But we kept right on going. And MacNamara at one point even said, 'They're so far behind, they won't even try to catch up.' No great power in the history of the world has ever behaved that way: 'OK: they've got us. They've got more missiles than we have. We'll give up.' Pah!

Now, America and the world today. We're in this frightfully dangerous position of being the one world superpower, albeit with qualifications. Nobody can hold the United States in check, and that's dangerous for us and for the world. It gives us a disposition to intervene militarily. And that's a reflection of international political theory. America's situation in the world changed almost overnight in historical terms during World War II. We used to say, 'Whatever happens in the world is not our business, unless it happens in Central America.' Now we say, 'Hey, whatever happens in the world anywhere, we're the world superpower. We've got to do something.' But military power meets its limits. England ought to be able to pacify Northern Ireland if it were just a question of military power. But it's not. Furthermore, our interventions are going to be disturbing to more and more countries. And then the mechanism of balancing. Other countries will feel more and more uncomfortable, because those who are powerful do not *determine* what happens but they have more influence over other countries and they have more to say about what goes on in the world than others do.

J.R. You recently suggested that what America must attempt to do now is to emulate Britain's achievement in *not* generating an overwhelming coalition against it.

K.W. Yes, and I went on to say that in both instances you can explain it. England, for demographic and imperial reasons, could not impose itself on other great powers. It was busy in far-flung parts of the world. And we, of course, were held in check by the Soviet Union. Now, we're not held in check by anybody, and that's what worries me.

F.H. I think you're pretty well held in check by the American people and the Congress actually . . .

K.W. Oh boy! In the period between the invasion of Kuwait and our invasion of Iraq in January the next year, Senator Patrick Moynihan and his staff enquired about what had been done by the relevant government offices to learn about how embargoes work, how long they take, what effects they have. They didn't do anything. They didn't care. In fact there was what was called the nightmare scenario: that the thing would be settled before we got our troops in there. We wanted to go to war. It was a narrow vote, but the Senate approved.

3. The nature of international theory

F.H. It could be argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union poses an anomaly for balance-of-power theory. We have moved into a unipolar world. And although there are economic challenges, it's very hard to see major military or strategic challenges emerging to American dominance.

K.W. States try to maintain their position in the system. For me that's an axiom. It's derived from balance-of-power theory. Now, there's nothing in anybody's theory, of *anything*, that says you'll succeed. It indicates what you are likely to try to do, and what will happen to you if you don't manage to do it. Take Mussolini as an example. You could quote Machiavelli: a weak country must never ally itself with a stronger neighbour if it can avoid doing so. Mussolini did it. You could look at history. He didn't think that the British and French would ever stand up to Hitler and would ever manage to make an arrangement with the Soviet Union. So he did what international political theory says you shouldn't do, and he paid the price. The theory doesn't predict success.

F.H. Where is the evidence of a coalition forming against the US?

K.W. Well, my goodness. Following the Dual Alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany in late 1879, it took the French and Russians till 1894 (although they began to do it in 1889) to make a formal alliance. It's interesting to read the communications between the Chiefs of Staff in the two different countries. How many divisions, how many artillery pieces, how long will it take to mobilize and so on. And the French Chief of Staff said, 'If we ally, we will be in approximate balance. If we don't, Germany and Austria-Hungary will be the dominant powers.' It still took fifteen years.

Do you think Japan is a nuclear power yet? It certainly is importing enough plutonium. I would say there is a fifty-fifty chance that it has a nuclear military capability reachable at least within months. They may be doing the Indian thing, saying we're not a nuclear power, meaning we've got all the parts but we'd have to assemble them. Or they could adopt the Israeli policy and lie about it. But I can't believe that the Japanese are not working on a nuclear capability. Look at where they live: There's North Korea, South Korea. There's the Kurile Islands dispute, there's China, there's six different countries that lay claim to all or part of the Spratly Islands. And there's always the Taiwan/China problem. It's a terribly insecure part of the world. There's a fascinating parallel between Japan now and the United States in the nineteenth century. Presidents and Secretaries of State wanted to get going. It was assumed that Canada would become part of the United States. Some presidents wanted to annex *all* of the Caribbean and assumed that Cuba

would be part of the US. The resistance was in the Senate, which is very easy to explain politically. Japan is now in a comparable situation. If you try to explain international politics by domestic politics, you would say that Japan and Germany are not going to become great powers. Because the people don't want it. I accept that as being true. But I would also predict unequivocally that Japan and Germany, failing European unity, will become great powers within ten to twenty years.

F.H. And in a rival strategic position to the United States?

K.W. That's right. Fénelon said he had never known a country to wield overwhelming power with moderation for more than a very short time. That's historically and theoretically understandable. In Iraq, for example, we did not behave with moderation. We decided everything. We decided when the war would begin. Most of the allies except England wanted us to wait longer, for the embargo to work. We decided when it would begin, how it would be fought, how much bombing would be done, and when it would end.

Following that conflict, a French general said, 'We did not have our independent means of satellite observation. In Iraq we didn't have any alternative to American intelligence resources. (This was in the *New York Times*.) For the same reasons that we had to have our own nuclear deterrent, we have to have our own observation capability.' Japan, exactly the same thing. Rumours began about the nuclear capability of North Korea. Japan did not have observation satellites. Do you think they are not going to get observation satellites? They sure as hell will! If you don't have what the other country has, then you're vulnerable and/or dependent. If you don't want to be vulnerable or dependent, you've got to help yourself.

F.H. Surely balance-of-power theory also predicts that a balance will emerge, a balance based upon countervailing rival strategic blocs?

K.W. Well, the twenty-first century will not be the nineteenth century, but there will be a lot of similarities. It's a self-help system. The system has not been transformed. What kind of predictions can you make in international politics? As I wrote—and I'm practically quoting myself—'The Cold War, like hot wars, is rooted in the structure of international politics and will endure so long as that structure lasts.' That's exactly right. That's the kind of prediction theory can make. Theory can't say *when* that will happen. But *if* it happens, here's the result: no more Cold War. Hedley Bull once said that if Britain had been the other pole emerging from World War II, rather than the Soviet Union, the Cold War would have been entirely different. That it would have been different is undoubted. That it would have been England and the US that would have formed the major relationship of tension in the world is also by me undoubted. Remember, it would have been England with its empire, drawing strength from it. Hard to imagine; but toward the end of the war there was more and more tension between Roosevelt and Churchill, because Roosevelt was an anti-imperialist. After all, who were among the most hostile countries in the world in the nineteenth century? Britain and the United States. The 'democracies don't fight' theme is *suggestive* but unsound.

F.H. You have a theoretical problem with Michael Doyle's thesis because it would be reductionist in your theory.

K.W. Absolutely. Also, you cannot make much of a generalization, because there aren't many cases in point and you do have exceptions. Take the war of 1812. Now, I know what people are going to say: England wasn't really a democracy until 1832, etc. But the two most democratic countries in the world—there *were* only

two—*fought a war*. Or take the American Civil War; people say that doesn't count because it was a civil war. But Britain almost recognized the South. This was one reason for the perpetuation of bitterness between America and Britain. The South was organized as a separate, democratic country. The North was a separate, democratic country, and both were recognized as belligerents by various foreign countries. We had the biggest army in the later nineteenth century. Grant's army was the biggest army in the world. That was a tough war! Equally, Germany was a democracy before World War I, and the German democracy could not control its interest groups: the navy and the steel interests, the Junkers and the grain tariff. It was a democracy. That was a major part of the problem.

F.H. But there *wasn't* one person, one vote in Germany in 1914, let alone in Britain or the US in the early nineteenth century. One can really talk about the generalization of democracies among the developed countries only since the Second World War. Would you simply deny the relevance of such a response?

K.W. Well, ever since Kant—and I consider myself to be a Kantian, not a positivist—the serious people who write about this make it very clear that it's got to be the *right kind of democracy*. Kant is very strict about this and even specifies how the question has to be put, and answered, about going to war and not going to war. Just as in the Socialist world, the *right kind* of socialist government would never fight another socialist government if it were *also* the right kind. You get this in the Chinese and Soviet discussions. In fact, however, there is a very good historical and theoretical basis for saying that international politics is a system in which there is *not* a direct correspondence between the attributes of the actors—I take the main actors to be states, but whatever the actors are—and the outcomes that their interactions produce. I think that's unchallengeable.

J.R. Well, if you look only at one historical period, that discontinuity between domestic and international can certainly appear very sharp. But as soon as you compare whole geopolitical systems from different historical epochs and look at the different kinds of society that were involved, you find that the differences between these 'international systems' correspond to the differences between the kinds of societies on which they are based. For example, in order to explain the prevalence of dynastic diplomacy in medieval Europe, you would have to have some understanding of the domestic character of European feudalism.

K.W. I don't know how you could explain anything in international politics without understanding something about the domestic character. I am tired of people who say, 'You've got a theory of international politics; you need to include domestic politics.' Well, don't these people understand anything about what a theory is? A theory has to be *about* something. It can't be about everything. So you have to figure out what it is you're trying to explain, what is this domain you're trying to deal with. I don't think that anybody under the sun would deny the statement that if you *could* have a single theory that would comprehend both international and domestic, both political and economic matters, all in one theory, hey, that would be a lot better than a simple theory of international politics. However, *nobody's thought of how to do it*. I've thought about that a lot. I can't figure out how. Neither can anybody else so far. So you take the theory you have—again, I make the comparison with economics—which is comparable to an oligopolistic market theory (not a purely competitive market theory) and then of course you have to hook it up with reality: you have to know a lot of history and a lot about domestic politics. I said in *Man, the State and*

War, it would be much nicer if there had been fewer countries like Hitler's Germany and more countries like England. Sure, that would have made a difference. Of course. I went to *such* lengths to emphasize in *Theory of International Politics* that you have to bring national politics and international politics together to understand or explain anything. But theories are very sparse. What theories do mainly is omit things. They make bold simplifications. If they don't, they're not theories. It's the same thing in the natural sciences.

F.H. But they have to be able to make some broad explanation of the phenomenon.

K.W. The explanation always involves both the theory and knowledge that lies outside of the theory. The theory itself leads to certain expectations. But to explain anything that goes on in the real world, you've got to know something about the real world.

F.H. Can you justify the polarization which you establish between what you call reductionist and systemic theories? 'Reductionist theory' is used in two senses in *Theory of International Politics*: first, to describe a theory that explains everything by reference to the domestic, but, secondly, to include any theory which brings in the domestic at all. Surely, between systemic and reductionist there must be a space for a third type of theory which, difficult as it is, combines statements about the domestic and the international, and in particular about the interaction between the two. Why can't it be possible to produce a theory that is not reductionist in the narrow sense of explaining everything by the domestic, but which focuses on the interaction? Why does one have to make this choice?

K.W. Do you know of any theory that does that? I'd be delighted to avoid that choice.

F.H. Immanuel Kant, Niccolò Machiavelli, Karl Marx; even your friend Rousseau combines them in that sense.

K.W. But not in a theory. You take the theory and then you have to hook it up to the real world. There are theories of oligopolistic competition. There are theories of the firm, which are really organizational theories. Now, if somebody could come up with a theory that would comprehend both national and international—and I don't see any *logical* reason why this can't be done—but nobody's done it. So what *good* is it to say of a structural theory of international politics: it's a theory of international politics, and unfortunately it's not also a theory about domestic politics, economics, society, culture, ideology, whatever. What good is that? We know that theories are about something, not about everything.

F.H. But even in your reading of these people, you do put them sometimes too easily into boxes. Take the 'second image'. Now, you have on the one hand your liberal second-image people, Woodrow Wilson, and you have on the other Hobson and Lenin (about whom you are extremely flattering in both books). But it could be argued that Lenin's theory isn't in fact a second-image theory at all. Lenin's *Imperialism* is not about what goes on inside a country. It's about the way in which what goes on inside a country is shaped by international economic and strategic competition which then has its own further consequences for the country's foreign policy. In other words, it isn't a second image. Lenin's theory of imperialism, right or wrong, is a combination of what you'd call a second and a third image. And the same probably goes for Woodrow Wilson.

K.W. No. Lenin's theory is only in very minor ways different from Hobson's. It's Hobson's theory, not Lenin's.

F.H. Lenin's is a theory of war, which is very pertinent to our subject. Hobson doesn't have a theory of war.

K.W. Well, that's using theory to mean interpretation. And I'm using theory—I must say much influenced by the LSE philosophy department in which I spent the academic year 1976–7. Hobson's theory is very impressive as a theory of the domestic economy. And in fact it is so impressive that Keynes gives Hobson almost complete credit for Keynes's General Theory. He has a theory of why equilibrium can endure at a level of less than full employment of the factors of production. But then he makes the jump: if you've got underemployment of factors, *then* the outlet is imperialism. And that doesn't follow logically. Schumpeter might say: an outlet was also available through the rapid development of railways. It doesn't follow that it has to be external. And in fact, Hobson himself said this is a matter of policy. If you could get a government that would redistribute the wealth—the problem is that the wealth falls into the hands of people who have so much that they can't spend it. And then you get a downward spiral. So if you had a New Deal policy, you wouldn't need imperialism. It is Lenin who said that governments of capitalist states could never redistribute wealth, and so imperialism was inevitable. But that's a matter of policy, not a conclusion of theory.

F.H. The Doyle thesis is also neither second nor third image; because if you ask why are the major countries democratic, it has a lot to do with international factors, whether imitation or competition or straight conquest.

K.W. People have sometimes asked me whether Doyle's propositions constitute a theory, and I think that's an interesting question. In fact, he has not come up with a theory. It is a correlation. He says: it holds historically that democracies do not fight democracies. Now, a theory has to have something more in it than that. Theory is an instrument for understanding and explaining, and, if you get your fondest wish, predicting. But Doyle has discovered a suggestive correlation. It is indeed true that you can't find many cases where democracy fights democracy. It's very suggestive. It poses a puzzle. But then there are a lot of authoritarian countries—Franco's Spain? Mussolini and Hitler could not budge him: he wasn't going to do anything that might drag Spain into any war.

F.H. Doyle doesn't claim that non-democratic countries *always* go to war.

K.W. But, as Doyle says, democracies fight more than enough wars. They just don't fight one another. And as for the American democracy, my God, we are fierce.

F.H. You're the least fierce developed capitalist country on the record of the nineteenth century.

K.W. But in the twentieth century—ask anybody that lives in Central America.

F.H. Compare what the Japanese or the French or the British did or the Dutch.

K.W. Oh, I don't think you can call Japan a democratic capitalist country. It was not. England was fiercer, all right, in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, but certainly not beyond World War I. Nor was France. When we invaded Panama, we not only broke international law, we even broke the international laws that we wrote, the Charter of the Organization of American States. It was a flagrant violation of international law. Grenada, too, was ridiculous. As Reagan said, 'We got there just in the nick of time.' And my answer to that was 'Yes, because I think

the Grenadians were just about to release the American students. And then Reagan couldn't have stood tall in the saddle.'

J.R. A few moments ago, you made a distinction between theory and interpretation. The implication seemed to be that the task of theory is to make causal predictions about the behaviour of actors which are taken as given, rather than to explain (or 'interpret') what these actors are as particular historical forms of human social relations. But can this distinction be justified? If such key actors as sovereign states and capitalist markets are historically peculiar to the modern period, then surely a major part of any social theory of international relations must be to explain why that is so in terms of their sociological foundation. What significance or value do you attribute to that other aspect of theory, particularly since what it is trying to explain is precisely the agents which your own theory takes as given?

K.W. There are all kinds of attempts to understand and explain. And they are very interesting. But I think of theory as having to meet certain standards, and fulfil certain requirements. Otherwise it would fall into some other category, a perfectly fine category such as philosophy or historical interpretation.

J.R. In your own theory, you derive the behaviour of the units deductively from the anarchical character of the geopolitical system. The image of the system is abstracted from in order to make its causal operation logically clear. At the same time, you also make occasional historical references, for example to Thucydides, and say that the Greek city-state system illustrates the same principle. But it was a point of some frustration for the English School of International Relations, Martin Wight and Herbert Butterfield, that when they consulted the classical literature, they actually couldn't find explicit discussions of the balance of power in that earlier epoch. Similarly, David Hume's essay 'On the Balance of Power' is actually a quite spurious attempt to give an ancient pedigree to an institution that just seemed to be emerging and consolidating itself in the eighteenth century.

K.W. Well, balance of power is an 'institution' in a special sense of that word. Herbert Butterfield says that Fénelon, who died in 1715, was the first person to have any sense of the balance of power as a continuing practice, rather than just as an *ad hoc* response to a situation. Some people say that Polybius had this sense, but that's minor. But Machiavelli does not have a sense of the balance of power as a continuing recurring phenomenon. Herbert Butterfield is one of the most interesting historians from an international political point of view because what he illustrates in that essay, though I'm not sure he intends to, is that statesmen don't need to have any sense of the balance of power. They react situationally. They're in a situation, and they either react appropriately or they suffer the consequences. That's what theory is about. The theory says 'Wherever the conditions are such—that is, where you have units in a self-help system—or, to put it even more carefully, *insofar* as a system is one of self-help, this will apply also in the Middle Ages.' Read Markus Fischer's piece in the *International Studies Quarterly*. He considers a French medieval case, and finds . . . balance-of-power politics. What was Innocent III, when he was Pope, doing? Balance-of-power politics. Theory applies, given certain conditions. If those conditions are not there, well, then of course the theory doesn't apply.

There's another point here. People generally assume that for realists, it's always and only military power that counts. But it follows from structural realist theory that in a self-help system, how you help yourself depends on the resources you can dispose of and the situation you're in. The distinction between high politics and low

politics—with high politics being military and diplomacy, and low politics being economic—is entirely misplaced. In the near term, and probably for quite some time, economic competition will often be more prominent than military competition.

F.H. Does the economic system operate in roughly similar ways to the military system? Does balance-of-power theory in particular operate in the economic sphere or not?

K.W. Some economists have pointed out that there is a high correlation between size and survivability among oligopolistic firms. If you don't go for market share, then you risk becoming small and thus the chances of survival become less. There are many parallels.

F.H. Is there much evidence in history that the international economic system does operate according to balance of power?

K.W. What do you mean by the international economic system? Japan is a marvellous example. All these writers on interdependence are saying that nations are going to lose control of their economies, because of all the transnational stuff that's going on. But Japan is not losing control of its national economy. I think what's happening is the opposite, that Japan is so much of a success story in the latter part of the twentieth century that other countries are going to try to imitate Japan's successful processes. States don't *want* to lose control. Maybe they can't help it. But they'll try not to. I think we're becoming a world of blocs: Japan and South-east Asia especially, the NAFTA which will be the biggest trading area in the world if it comes off, the European Community which is not much of a common market but which is still trying to become a common market. When the Mondeo, the Ford world car, was introduced, the price differential across the EC was 22%. Some common market!

J.R. My problem with your theory is not that it is internally inconsistent, but that there are such large aspects of international relations which simply can't be grasped with the theory that you offer.

K.W. Absolutely.

J.R. Take for example the question of the historical emergence of the modern international system, and the way that this is bound up with the enormous set of social transformations which we call the modern world: capitalism, rationalization, and so on. If you accept that we cannot explain these things using your theory, doesn't that mean that there are other kinds of explanatory theories in International Relations which are legitimate branches of knowledge?

K.W. I wish there were. I just don't know of any other theories. History is not part of any theory. Take Newton's law of gravity. He's not saying, 'Hey, I'm explaining how apples fall from 1666 onwards. Don't ask me how they fell in the year 1500. That's not part of the theory.' The theory applies wherever the conditions the theory contemplates are in effect. So the theory *does* explain how apples fell in the year 1500. But that's not part of the theory. Wherever the conditions of the theory . . .

J.R. But that's just the point: how to explain the historical emergence of the conditions of the theory. When we look at the history of the modern international system, what we see is an enormous social and political upheaval which brought it into being, which drives its development, and we need to understand *that*.

K.W. Sure. But even Stephen Hawking, if his fondest wish comes true and physicists come up with a theory of everything, that theory won't have explained

everything. It will explain most of what goes on in daily life. It will provide what the physicists say is a full explanation, but only of certain phenomena.

F.H. But all theory must contain some specification of what is significant or important. You wouldn't defend a theory that was parsimonious and elegant but which explained only marginal phenomena. So within your theory, there has to be some implicit specification—which I don't think we'd disagree on—concerning what are the important things to explain. And J.R. is simply saying that there are a lot of other important things, and that it doesn't explain enough.

K.W. That's fair enough, and I've said that myself. It explains certain big and important things. There's an awful lot that it does not explain. Now, what's wrong with that? That's true of economic theory. It's true of the type I'm most indebted to in anthropology and economics, especially to Durkheim in anthropology. I think that his distinction between solidary and mechanical societies is a real insight and it explains a lot of important things, and it's generalizable. But it doesn't explain *everything*. Most of what you want to know it doesn't explain. And that's true of international political theory, of economic theory and its true of physical theory. Physicists have a different attitude. They say, 'OK, we've explained *that*, by God'. Take relativity. As a matter of fact, the space programme doesn't use Einstein's theory. They use Newton's. It's not as accurate, but it's accurate enough.

J.R. Another book that came out in the same year as *Man, the State and War*, also a classic but in a different discipline, was C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination*. That elaborated a very different conception of theory. Mills says that the purpose of theory is to illuminate people's understanding of 'the present as history'. Now, that's very different.

K.W. Very different. There are all kinds of theory. There's the theory of literary criticism. And that obviously has to be a very different thing; I would not use the term theory for it. There's international political theory, there's feminist theory. Indeed there was a recent conference at USC held under the rubric 'Woman, the State, and War'. One can't legislate. People use 'theory' in all sorts of different ways. All I claim is that I do make clear how I use that term. And my usage has a good pedigree in the natural sciences, economics and much of the philosophy-of-science literature.

F.H. The sympathy of the English School for what we call the Grotian approach, the concept of international society, does not seem to be replicated on the other side of the Atlantic. I doubt if the concept of international society figures in much North American writing at all.

K.W. I don't even know that it figures much in English writing. There's a certain identity made by English writers between 'society' and 'peacefulness'. If you think of Hedley Bull's *Anarchical Society*—well, my goodness, there was almost a 100 per cent chance that war would not occur between the Soviet Union and the United States. Hedley Bull's concept, I gather, would call that a society. Very, very peaceful! It had nothing to do with society. Think of Israel and the Arabs. These people are so similar. They form a society, and the hostility is deep and constant. Phil Habib, who engaged in the great shuttle diplomacy with Henry Kissinger—you couldn't tell whether he was a Jew or an Arab if you didn't know. They look the same, they sound the same, they *think* in very similar ways. It's a real society. Northern Ireland: it's a real society. They're so much like one another. Now, we know this. Most murders occur within the family or among friends. Society? I've always thought:

open one's eyes and look around, and say, well, is there anything in this concept of international society. I really don't think there is.

F.H. Does that pertain to a broader view of the significance of Grotius in the history of international theory? Grotius is *the* figure from whom the British realists—not Carr but the others—derive much of their pedigree. I notice again there is a silence on this on the other side of the Atlantic, including in your own work.

K.W. I read Grotius. I was prepared to take him seriously, and I didn't find him useful.

F.H. The English realist school itself is quite a diverse one. There is the core of Bull, Wight and other people—Donelan and Mayall. Then there is quite separately E. H. Carr.

K.W. I think E. H. Carr is rather distinct. When my wife and I were here in 1959, I remember coming across an essay by Hedley Bull in the LSE library. I called her up and I read her a few sentences and I said to her 'Who do you think wrote this?' And she said 'You did!' I said, 'No: Hedley Bull.' We really were thinking in very much the same way in those days. Hedley's latter development was in a different direction; not wholly incompatible. I respect Hedley Bull very much, and Martin Wight very much. But they did theory in a sense that is not recognized as theory by philosophers of science.

F.H. If you were drawing up a programme, or just a set of injunctions to younger scholars or funding agencies, saying 'this is the work you should be doing, the work that can be done and that now needs to be done', what would you say?

K.W. In theoretical terms, I think the big problem is that people don't distinguish between a theory and its application. I'd invoke Keohane as an example. In his liberal institutionalism he says that the core of the theory is structural realism. That's the only theory that there is in liberal institutionalism: the rest is application. I think application is extremely important and very tricky; it's very difficult to move from theory to practice. But in political science generally, and certainly in international politics, people who in effect are trying to *apply* a theory think they are *elaborating a new theory*, or *enlarging* a theory.

When I was a graduate student around 1950, it became very boring because people kept saying, 'The reason we're so far behind in sociology, political science or whatever, is that our disciplines are very young.' So, I asked myself, 'How young are we?' And that's why I went back to the Physiocrats. If you read pre-Physiocratic economics, which I don't recommend, you'll find that it's entirely atheoretical. There's a lot of enumeration and descriptions, and it amounts to nothing. The Physiocrats, who very much influenced Adam Smith, asked the right question: 'What is it that we can have a theory about?' They drew a picture of an economy. It all begins in the ground, with agriculture, minerals and metals. And then it goes through the process of refining and manufacturing, distributing the agricultural products, and so on. And it's a complete, self-contained circle. They invented the idea of an economy as a thing in itself. It consists of repetitive actions and occurrences. It has a beginning, an ending and a repetition. It's very simple; but that's the marvel of it. Nobody else, I'm reasonably sure, had thought of that—of thinking of an economy in and of itself. Auguste Comte reacted to Adam Smith by asking: how could he make the colossal error of thinking that you could think of economy in itself? Well, of course we all know that it's embedded in society and politics and all that, but if you can't think of it in itself, then you can't have a theory of it.

J.R. So ‘theory’ for you has a very definite, distinctively positivist sense?

K.W. A theory’s a theory. It has to meet certain standards whether it’s a natural science theory or a social science theory. Beyond that, I would call it interpretation, philosophy, history: all good things, I don’t put those things down, can’t live without them.

J.R. How far then do you think that International Relations has progressed as a discipline over the postwar period?

K.W. I think that structural theory has at least helped focus people’s minds on the theoretical problem, but I don’t think there’s much increase in understanding. I have often said that what Morgenthau did was translate Meinecke from German to English, and if you look at the index, you won’t see Meinecke mentioned. I would translate some of Meinecke into the same words that Morgenthau used in *Politics among Nations*. And then Morton Kaplan translated Morgenthau from English into whatever language it was that Kaplan was writing in. I guess I think there’s been very little progress. An awful lot of people became interested in IPE, a lot of work was churned out, but I haven’t seen much progress.

Postscript

The Editors pose two questions additional to those directly discussed in the interview.

First: What is the feminist contribution to IR theory?

K.W. Feminists offer not a new or revised theory of international-political theory but a sometimes interesting interpretation of what goes on internationally.

Second: What is the post-positivist contribution to IR theory?

K.W. I have trouble understanding the meaning of the term ‘positivist theory’. In this usage, positive, I suppose, means trying to understand the world as it is. We all try to do that, though in different ways. At the extreme, positivists believe that reality can be apprehended directly, without benefit of theory. Reality is whatever we directly observe. In a more moderate version of positivism, theory is but one step removed from reality, is arrived at largely by induction, is rather easy to construct, and is fairly easy to test. Keohane and Nye in their book on interdependence provide a clear example when they ‘argue that complex interdependence sometimes comes closer to reality than does realism’.¹ Yet if we knew what reality was, theory would serve no purpose.

Having misunderstood the meaning of the word ‘theory’ in the term ‘structural theory of international politics’, post-positivists concentrate on the world as it might be, the world they wish we could have. Many students of international politics seem to believe that all interpretations and explanations of historical developments should be called theories. Theories do explain, but not all explanations are theories; and interpretations surely are not. Interpretations and explanations are plentiful; theories are scarce. I, and apparently post-positivists as well, have trouble stating a post-positivist explanation of international relations in a way that would look at all like a theory.

¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston, MA, 1989), p. 23.