

## COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL STATE

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**T**he neorealist–neoliberal debate about the possibilities for collective action in international relations has been based on a shared commitment to Mancur Olson’s rationalist definition of the problem as one of getting exogenously given egoists to cooperate. Treating this assumption as a *de facto* hypothesis about world politics, I articulate the rival claim that interaction at the systemic level changes state identities and interests. The causes of state egoism do not justify always treating it as given. Insights from critical international relations and integration theories suggest how collective identity among states could emerge endogenously at the systemic level. Such a process would generate cooperation that neither neorealists nor neoliberals expect and help transform systemic anarchy into an “international state”—a transnational structure of political authority that might undermine territorial democracy. I show how broadening systemic theory beyond rationalist concerns can help it to explain structural change in world politics.

**T**he collective action problem dominates world politics. The state is often thought to solve it in domestic society by forcing or socializing people to identify with the common good, but the problem seems endemic to the anarchic world of international relations, where each state reserves the right and the force to do as it pleases. Realists and idealists have long debated the conditions under which states can overcome this problem, the former taking a materialist line that power and human nature preclude significant cooperation, the latter arguing that knowledge and institutions make it possible. The discussion has become very sophisticated, with neorealists and neoliberals today dissecting the effects of pursuing relative versus absolute gains, the shadow of the future, transaction costs, and so on (Baldwin 1993).

An important but neglected feature of the recent debate is the shared belief that collective action should be analyzed in terms of Mancur Olson’s (1965) definition of the problem, which takes self-interested actors as constant and exogenously given and focuses on the selective incentives that might induce them to cooperate. This reflects the rationalist strategy of explaining behavior in terms of changing prices or constraints, rather than tastes (Stigler and Becker 1977). While some neoliberals have questioned the assumption of state egoism (Keohane 1984, 120–32; see also Lumsdaine 1993), few treat state interests as *endogenous* to interaction.<sup>1</sup> They either bracket the formation of interests, treating them *as if* they were exogenous, or explain interests by reference to domestic politics, on the assumption that they are exogenous, although not necessarily constant (e.g., Moravcsik 1992). In both cases, the effect on systemic theory is captured by what Jeffrey Legro (1993) calls the rationalist “two-step”: first interests are formed outside the interaction context, and then the latter is treated as though it only affected behavior. This can be merely a methodological presumption, but given its pervasiveness in the current debate it may also be seen as an implicit hypothesis about world

politics: systemic interaction does not transform state interests.

Neoliberals make things hard for themselves by accepting this constraint, and their efforts to explain cooperation under it are admirable. But it also brackets an important line of argument against realists, namely, that through interaction, states might form collective identities and interests, redefining the terms of Olson’s problem altogether (Calhoun 1991). We cannot know, *a priori*, which argument is more appropriate. A rationalist approach makes sense when state interests really are exogenous to interaction, which is sometimes the case. When they are not, however, it may ignore important possibilities and/or strategies for cooperation, as well as misrepresent the latter’s dynamics.

It would be useful to discuss potential anomalies for the rationalist hypothesis, but ultimately it can only be assessed against its rival, which has not been adequately articulated in the literature. With a view toward theoretical pluralism, my goal herein is to formulate such a rival by reframing the collective action problem among states in terms that make interests endogenous to (or part of the problem in) interaction. In so doing, I hope to put in sharper relief the underappreciated implications of a rationalist assumption (exogeneity).

I draw on two literatures for this purpose. The first is integration theory, which focuses on the formation of community at the international level. Moribund since the early 1970s, it is undergoing a revival today, thanks in part to neoliberals (Keohane and Hoffmann 1991). Collective identification is an essential variable in this theory, however, since without changes in identity the most we can expect is behavioral cooperation, not community (Deutsch et al. 1957; Lasswell 1972; Russett 1963). A rejuvenated “sociology of international community” will therefore ultimately have to go beyond a rationalist vocabulary (Linklater 1990). This exists in what is variously called critical, reflectivist, or *constructivist* international relations scholarship (see Keohane 1988; Wendt 1992). Con-

structivists are interested in the construction of identities and interests and, as such, take a more sociological than economic approach to systemic theory. On this basis, they have argued that states are not structurally or exogenously given but constructed by historically contingent interactions.<sup>2</sup>

In building a bridge between these two literatures I take a state-centric approach, which integration theorists have often avoided in the past because of its emphasis on anarchy. I do so for two reasons. First, notwithstanding the growing importance of nonstate actors in world politics, states remain jealous of their sovereignty and so may resist collective identification more than other actors, which poses a harder case for theory. Second, I argue that collective identification is an important condition for the emergence of "international states," which would constitute a structural transformation of the Westphalian states system. In effect, constructivism shows how the concern of integrationist theorists with the formation of community can be addressed from a state-centric perspective and the latter thereby made into a critical theory of world politics.

I shall define my dependent variable—forms of identity and interest—then briefly discuss some causes of state egoism at various levels of analysis, arguing that none justifies treating it as given. I shall then sketch a "pretheory" of collective identity formation among states and, finally, suggest how this points to an internationalization of the state, with implications for the states system and democratic theory.

## IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective, rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics. The second claim opposes realism. The third opposes systemic theories that are rationalist in form, whether they are "as if" theories that bracket interest formation, or unit-level, "reductionist" ones (Waltz 1979) that say interests "really are" exogenous. The result is one form of structural idealism or "idea-ism".<sup>3</sup>

The claim that states are socially constructed can take various forms. In an effort to avoid an oversocialized approach, I distinguish between the corporate and social constitution of state actors, which parallels the distinction between the "I" and the "me" in symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934). In both cases, I argue that interests are dependent on identities and so are not competing causal mechanisms but distinct phenomena—in the one case, motivational, in the other, cognitive and structural—and, as such, play different roles in explaining action.

*Corporate* identity refers to the intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality. For human beings, this means the body and experience of consciousness (Schwalbe 1991); for organizations, it means their constituent individuals, physical resources, and the shared beliefs and institutions in virtue of which individuals function as a "we" (Douglas 1986). Corporate identities have histories, but these do not concern me here; a theory of the states system need no more explain the existence of states than one of society need explain that of people. The result is a weak or essentialist social constructionism, but one that still leaves the *terms* of state individuality open to negotiation. (There is no space to defend it here, but for a start, see Leplin 1988 and Wendt n.d.)

The corporate identity of the state generates four basic interests or appetites:

1. physical security, including its differentiation from other actors
2. ontological security or predictability in relationships to the world, which creates a desire for stable social identities
3. recognition as an actor by others, above and beyond survival through brute force
4. development, in the sense of meeting the human aspiration for a better life, for which states are repositories at the collective level.<sup>4</sup>

These corporate interests provide motivational energy for engaging in action at all and, to that extent, are prior to interaction, but they do not entail self-interest in my sense, which is an inherently social phenomenon. How a state satisfies its corporate interests depends on how it defines the self in relation to the other, which is a function of social identities at both domestic and systemic levels of analysis.

*Social* identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object (McCall and Simmons 1978, 61–100). In contrast to the singular quality of corporate identity, actors normally have multiple social identities that vary in salience. Also in contrast, social identities have both individual and social structural properties, being at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine "who I am/we are" in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations. In this respect, they are a key link in the mutual constitution of agent and structure (Wendt 1987), embodying the terms of individuality through which agents relate to each other. These terms lead actors to see situations as calling for taking certain actions and thus for defining their interests in certain ways.

Some state identities and interests stem primarily from relations to domestic society ("liberal," "democratic"), others from international society ("hegemon," "balancer"). Foreign-policy role theorists (e.g. S. Walker 1987), as well as more recently a number of neoliberals, have emphasized the domestic (and thus systemically exogenous) roots of state identities. I am interested in showing how state identities may be endogenous to the system but (as we shall see) this is

ultimately an empirical question that depends on the depth of structures at each level of analysis. It is also important to note that the intersubjective basis of social identities can be cooperative or conflictual. What matters is how deeply the social structures they instantiate penetrate conceptions of self, not whether self and other are normatively integrated. The Cold War was a social structure in virtue of which the United States and the USSR had certain identities. These were embodied in "national security world-views" (in terms of which each defined self and other) and in role positions in a social structure (see Weldes 1993). The content of national interests was in part a function of these structurally constituted identities (as well as of domestic ones). The United States had an interest in resisting Soviet influence in Angola because the Soviets were an enemy and enmity is a *social* relation.

Social identities and interests are always in process during interaction. They may be relatively stable in certain contexts, in which case it can be useful to treat them as given. However, this stability is an ongoing accomplishment of practices that represent self and other in certain ways (Ashley 1988), not a given fact about the world. Rationalism depends on practices having stabilized identities, which we cannot know a priori.

### Collective Identity and Action

The ability to overcome collective action problems depends in part on whether actors' social identities generate self-interests or collective interests. Self-interest is sometimes defined so as to subsume altruism, which makes explanations of behavior in such terms tautological. Instead, I shall define self-interest and collective interest as effects of the extent to which and manner in which social identities involve an *identification* with the fate of the other (whether singular or plural). Identification is a continuum from negative to positive—from conceiving the other as anathema to the self to conceiving it as an extension of the self. It also varies by issue and other: I may identify with the United States on military defense but with the planet on the environment. In any given situation, however, it is the nature of identification that determines how the boundaries of the self are drawn.

In the absence of positive identification, interests will be defined without regard to the other—who will instead be viewed as an object to be manipulated for the gratification of the self. (Note that this does not preclude action that benefits others, as long as it is done for instrumental reasons.) This can take more or less virulent forms. The neorealist claim that states define their interests in terms of relative gains assumes that states tend toward the negative end of the identification continuum, whereas the neoliberal claim that absolute gains predominate assumes that states tend toward the center (neither positive nor negative identification). In both cases, however, self-interest stems from a particular representation of the

relationship of self to other—from social, not corporate identity. Self-interest presupposes an other.

Though little discussed in recent international relations scholarship, an extensive literature exists on collective identity in sociology, social psychology, philosophy, and even economics (see, e.g., Calhoun 1991; Chase 1992; Jencks 1990; Melucci 1989; Morris and Mueller 1992; Oldenquist 1982; Sen 1985; Taylor and Singleton 1993; Wartenberg 1991).<sup>5</sup> It refers to positive identification with the welfare of another, such that the other is seen as a cognitive extension of the self, rather than independent. Because of corporate needs for differentiation, this identification will rarely be complete (although some people do sacrifice their lives for others), but to the extent that it exists, there will be an empathetic rather than instrumental or situational interdependence between self and other (Keohane 1984, 122–123; see also Russett and Sullivan 1971, 851–52). This is a basis for feelings of solidarity, community, and loyalty and thus for collective definitions of interest. Having such interests does not mean that actors are irrational or no longer calculate costs and benefits but, rather, that they do so on a higher level of social aggregation. This discourages free-riding by increasing diffuse reciprocity and the willingness to bear costs without selective incentives, an effect supported by empirical research in various fields (e.g., Caporael et al. 1989; Dawes, Kragt and Orbell 1990). This is hardly surprising: if collective action depended solely on coercion or selective incentives, it would be a miracle that society existed at all. The state itself is testimony to the role of collective identity in human affairs.<sup>6</sup>

The distinction between alliances and collective security arrangements provides an instructive illustration. Alliances are temporary coalitions of self-interested states who come together for instrumental reasons in response to a specific threat. Once the threat is gone, the coalition loses its rationale and should disband. In contrast, in collective security systems, states make commitments to multilateral action against nonspecific threats. Collective identity is neither essential nor equivalent to such a multilateral institution but provides an important foundation for it by increasing the willingness to act on "generalized principles of conduct" and diffuse reciprocity (Ruggie 1993a). (*Less* identification would be necessary in pluralistic security communities, in which the commitment is merely not to settle disputes by war, and *more*, in amalgamated security communities, in which states join formal unions [Deutsch et al. 1957].) Is NATO merely an alliance or a collective security system? There are good reasons for thinking the latter (Chafetz 1993), but data on collective identification would help us answer this question.

The difficulties of achieving pure collective identity make it unlikely that the motivational force of egoistic identities among states can be eliminated, as the recent debate over the Maastricht Treaty made clear. The tension between particularism and universalism is not specific to international relations, however, being inherent in the relationship of individuals to

groups (Brewer 1991; Chase 1992; Wartenberg, 1991). Group membership can be costly to the individual and even lead to his being killed, all the while that it is highly valued. Identification is a continuum along which actors normally fall between the extremes, motivated by both egoistic and solidaristic loyalties. The existence of multiple loyalties is at the heart of the debate over "European identity" and may generate substantial role conflict (Smith 1992). Resolutions of such conflicts are never permanent or fixed, however, and their evolution cannot be studied if we take interests as given. Thus, I am *not* suggesting that collective interests replace egoistic ones as exogenously given constants in a rationalist model but, rather, that identities and interests be treated as dependent variables endogenous to interaction. This would allow us to treat collective action not merely as a problem of changing the price of cooperation for self-interested actors but as a process of creating new definitions of self.

## EXPLAINING SELF-INTEREST IN WORLD POLITICS

States, of course, often do define their interests in egoistic terms. Constructivists would emphasize that these are always in process, sustained by practice, but to the extent that practice is stable, the rationalist assumption that interests are given may be useful. To claim this, however, we need to justify that assumption. I shall briefly examine five explanations for state egoism (three domestic and two systemic), arguing that their strength varies historically and often leaves room for collective identity formation.

### Domestic Determinants

Perhaps the most fundamental explanation is that self-interest, even if not presocial, stems from the essential nature of states. One might make this argument with reference to human nature, but more relevant here is corporate nature. In a recent critique of constructivism, for example, Jonathon Mercer (1993) draws on the social psychology of intergroup relations to argue that the mere perception of being in a group is sufficient to generate in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, suggesting that states are cognitively predisposed to be self-interested when they come into contact. This is an important reminder of the importance of corporate identity and interests in constructing social ones. It does not entail permanent group egoism, however, since the boundaries of the self are not inherently limited to corporate identity and scholars in this same tradition have done important work on the conditions under which groups develop common identities (Gaertner et al. 1993).

Second, states typically depend heavily on their societies for political survival, which may induce them to place societal interests before those of other

states and treat the latter as instruments for realizing the former. This is undoubtedly pervasive and reflects a general relationship between dependency and identity formation that I shall discuss. Nevertheless, much depends on the nature of state-society relations. Some states depend more on international than domestic society (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Wendt and Barnett 1993), while others are embedded in societies in which domestic welfare commitments are projected onto altruistic foreign policies (Lumsdaine 1993) and still others are part of democratic societies that identify through shared norms and political culture. To the extent that the boundaries of society are porous, in other words, states might be propelled toward collective identification by "domestic" factors.

These two arguments come together in a third, which focuses on nationalism, that is, a sense of societal collective identity based on cultural, linguistic, or ethnic ties. Nationalism may be in part "primordial" and thus inherent to societies' self-conceptions as distinct groups. In addition, the dependence of states on their societies may be such that they cultivate nationalist sentiments in order to solidify their corporate identities vis-à-vis each other (Anderson 1983). Nevertheless, the depth and exclusivity of national identities varies greatly. German national identity in 1939 was chauvinist and exclusivist, while today it coexists with a significant European component; Serbian identity has moved in the opposite direction, from coexistence with a Yugoslavian identity to chauvinism. This suggests that how nationalism affects state interests should be treated as an open, empirical issue, not assumed a priori to produce egoism inevitably.

None of this is to deny that these (and other) domestic factors often dispose states to be self-interested. The point is that this is socially constructed and historically contingent, not inherent to stateness. Much the same conclusion follows from a consideration of two systemic determinants of state identity.

### Systemic Determinants

Neorealists and institutional idealists might each make systemic arguments for treating self-interest as given. Waltz (1979), for example, argues that anarchies are self-help systems in which states that do not think egoistically will be selected out by those that do. This allows him to assume that surviving states will be self-interested, justifying its treatment for subsequent theoretical purposes as exogenously given. In effect, in Waltz's view anarchy so tightly constrains identity formation that the latter becomes uninteresting, which is how his would-be structuralism begets rationalist individualism (Wendt 1987).

The key to this story is the assumption that anarchies are inherently self-help systems, in which actors do not identify positively with each other's security. I have argued elsewhere that there is no necessary connection between the two (Wendt 1992). An anarchy *may* be a self-help system, but it may also

be a collective security system, which is not self-help in any interesting sense. Which logic obtains depends on conceptions of self and other; an anarchy of friends is different from one of enemies. If, because of unit-level factors, states threaten each other's security in their first encounter, then competitive dynamics may ensue, generating egoistic conceptions of self. New anarchies may even be particularly susceptible to such outcomes. But if states bring a friendly or respectful attitude to that encounter, then different dynamics of identity formation may ensue. Anarchic structure explains little by itself; what matters is the identities and interests that states bring to their interactions and the subsequent impact of the latter on the former. Self-help presupposes self-interest; it does not explain it. Anarchy is what states make of it.

In contrast to the realist's Darwinian view of world politics as an asocial "system," institutionalists emphasize the norms and shared understandings that constitute international "society" (Bull 1977). The foundation of this society is the principle of sovereignty. Sovereignty is a social identity, and as such, both a property of states and of international society. Its core is a notion of political authority as lying exclusively in the hands of spatially differentiated states, in which sense it is an attribute of the state implying territorial property rights (Ruggie 1983a). Territorial control is only a "right," however, if it is recognized by other states, in which sense sovereignty is an institution. This institution mitigates the dangers of anarchy, helping states to survive that otherwise might not (Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Strang 1991).

Sovereignty has an ambiguous relationship to self-interest. On the one hand, it is a highly open-ended institution compatible with a diversity of interests, by virtue of empowering states juridically to determine their own interests and creating a measure of de facto security in which they have the luxury of doing so. This indeterminateness of sovereignty is important to the argument I shall make about the internationalization of the state. On the other hand, an important rationale for sovereignty is to meet corporate needs for security and recognition. Moreover, it does so in a particular way, namely, by defining rigid spatial boundaries between the rights of self and other. Because of the intimate connection between these rights and corporate needs, states may perceive threats to their ability to exercise such rights as threats to their corporate individuality—in effect, conflating social with corporate identity. One might expect this especially in the early days of a sovereignty regime, when states are still unsure whether their rights will be acknowledged by others. This, along with the fact that by accepting sovereignty, states give up the right to protection by others, will tend to promote egoistic over collective conceptions of interest, or "possessive" over "social" individualism (Shotter 1990).

If and when a society of egoistic sovereigns has been created, it will resist redefinition in more collective terms for at least two additional reasons. First,

the need for ontological security motivates actors to hang onto existing self-conceptions because this helps stabilize their social relationships. Second, once Waltz's self-help world is in place, it will reward egoism and punish altruism. Thus, even though a states system is self-help only in virtue of intersubjective knowledge, the latter confronts states as a social fact that resists easy change. Nevertheless, sovereignty may also *promote* collective identity formation in the long run. Like individuals, states do not want to be engulfed by a collective. This concern may be mitigated, however, by being recognized as sovereign, which increases the confidence that others will respect corporate individuality and leaves the decision to join the collective up to each state. In this way, sovereignty may make it "psychologically" possible for states to develop collective attachments (see Wartenberg 1991), paving the way for an internationalization of the state.

To sum up the argument so far, (1) egoistic interests are based on representations of the relationship between self and other and as such are not an essential feature of individuality; (2) these representations are always in process, even if their relative stability in certain contexts makes it possible to treat them as if they were sometimes given; and (3) many factors dispose states toward egoism, but these do not always preclude collective identities. Still, given that international history has produced mostly egoistic states, collective identity formation must start with and overcome that social fact. I turn now to how such an endogenous transformation of Olson's problem might occur.

## COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG STATES

The forces disposing states toward particularism sometimes confront others disposing them toward collectivism. Collective identities vary by issue, time, and place and by whether they are bilateral, regional, or global. I cannot examine such variations here, nor can I assess the weight of their determinants relative to those of state egoism. Thus, I specifically do *not* impute any directionality or teleology to the historical process. I shall merely identify some causal mechanisms that, to the extent they are present, promote collective state identities, although their impact may be more lumpy than linear. In view of my concern with endogenizing identity change to systemic theory, I shall limit my focus to factors at the systemic level, even though domestic factors may matter, as well. Some of my arguments will repeat claims made by integration theorists (though here applied to a state-centric framework), while others will reflect general principles of identity formation in "structurationist" and symbolic interactionist social theory. I shall differentiate three types of mechanisms by the causal roles they play (structural contexts, systemic processes, and strategic practice) and address two

factors under each. The discussion will again be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

### Structural Contexts

The structures of regional or global international systems constitute interaction contexts that either inhibit or facilitate the emergence of dynamics of collective identity formation, and as such they play an indirect causal role. Whereas neorealists define structure in material terms, constructivists emphasize intersubjective structure, while leaving room for the emergent effects of material capabilities.

Intersubjective systemic structures consist of the shared understandings, expectations, and social knowledge embedded in international institutions and threat complexes, in terms of which states define (some of) their identities and interests. They vary in thickness or depth, depending on the density and/or salience of interactions for state actors. Many international relations scholars acknowledge a role for such structures only in cooperative settings, implicitly equating intersubjectivity with normative integration and leaving conflict to be treated in materialist terms. In contrast, I would argue that conflicts are also intersubjective phenomena, partly in virtue of *rules* shared by the parties (Bull 1977) but especially in virtue of shared *perceptions* of issues and threat (see Ashley 1987; Walt 1987). The Cold War was fundamentally a discursive, not a material, structure. Whether cooperative or conflictual, intersubjective structures constitute what kind of anarchy states are in: Hobbes's anarchy is constituted by one such structure, Locke's by another, and Kant's by a third. To say that worlds are defined intersubjectively is not to say they are malleable, however, since intersubjective constructions confront actors as obdurate social facts. Sometimes structures cannot be changed in a given historical context. My idealism is that of Durkheim and Mead, not Pollyanna and Peter Pan.

Intersubjective structures help determine how much "slack" exists in a states system for dynamics of collective identity formation to develop. The greater the degree of conflict in a system, the more the states will fear each other and defend egoistic identities by engaging in relative gains thinking and resisting the factors that might undermine it. In a Hobbesian war of all against all, mutual fear is so great that factors promoting anything but negative identification with the other will find little room to emerge. In the Lockean world of mutually recognized sovereignty, however, states should have more confidence that their existence is not threatened, creating room for processes of positive identification to take hold. The ability of states to create new worlds in the future depends on the old ones they created in the past.

Intersubjective structures give meaning to material ones, and it is in terms of meanings that actors act. British nuclear capabilities were a very different social fact for the United States from Soviet nuclear capabilities. Nevertheless, material structures can have sui generis effects on collective identity formation.

On the one hand, within a conflictual intersubjective context actors will tend to infer intentions from capabilities, such that the latter may become emergent sources of insecurity (Jervis 1978). The deployment of SS-18s by the USSR was a new threat to the West, even though its meaning was a function of the Cold War. To this extent, material capabilities may be part of the problem in a conflict, inhibiting the emergence of positive identifications. On the other hand, material structure can facilitate the latter when it provides incentives for collective problem solving (as Dan Deudney [1993] argues with respect to nuclear weapons) or is sufficiently asymmetric that powerful states can coerce weaker ones to identify with them (Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Wendt and Barnett 1993). Such coercion may produce hegemony in the Gramscian sense, but hegemony is a form of collective identity, one less easily created when material power is equally distributed.

### Systemic Processes

Structures are always being reproduced or transformed by practice and thus are not static background conditions for collective identity formation. To the extent that practice does reproduce them, however, they merely inhibit or facilitate collective identity formation. The remaining factors have more direct causal impacts. By *systemic processes* I mean dynamics in the external context of state action. Both of these arguments are long-standing liberal ones. My point is that they relate to identity, not just behavior—a point lost in neoliberalism's rationalist "two-step."

The first process is rising interdependence. This can take at least two forms. One is an increase in the "dynamic density" of interactions due to, for example, trade and capital flows (Buzan 1993; Ruggie 1983a). A second is the emergence of a "common Other," whether personified in an external aggressor or more abstract threat like nuclear war or ecological collapse (see Lasswell 1972, 24). While the one generates "dilemmas of common interests" and the other "dilemmas of common aversions" (Stein 1983), both increase the objective vulnerability and sensitivity of actors to each other (Keohane and Nye 1987) and, with these, the thickness of systemic structures. This reduces the ability to meet corporate needs unilaterally and increases the extent to which actors share a common fate. These changes in the context of interaction will sometimes affect only the price of behavior (as rationalism assumes), but they may also change identities and interests. Indeed, dependency, whether intersubjective or material, is a key determinant of the extent to which an actor's identity is shaped by interaction, which is why a child's development is normally far more influenced by its parents than by others actors. As the ability to meet corporate needs unilaterally declines, so does the incentive to hang onto the egoistic identities that generate such policies, and as the degree of common fate increases, so does the incentive to identify with others. As interdependence rises, in other words, so will the

potential for endogenous transformations of identity, with consequences that go beyond those analyzed by rationalists.

A second systemic process that may encourage collective identity formation is the transnational convergence of domestic values. This can take place in various issue areas, but two of the most salient are cultural (the rise of global consumerism) and political (the spread of democratic institutions, welfare statism, concern with human rights, etc.). Societal convergence can result from rising interdependence, in which case, its effects will be hard to separate from the latter. But it may also stem from demonstration effects, diffusion, and "lesson drawing" (in which one society learns from another that one form of social organization is "better" than another). The effect is to reduce the heterogeneity (or increase the similarity) among actors. As with interdependence, this change in the interaction context may sometimes affect only behavior, but it may also change identities and interests. As heterogeneity decreases, so does the rationale for identities that assume that *they* are fundamentally different from *us*, and the potential for positive identification increases on the grounds that "they're no different from us, and if it could happen to them . . ."

Despite the incentives that rising interdependence and societal convergence may create to adopt more collective forms of identity, however, neither is a sufficient condition for such a result. The vulnerabilities that accompany interdependence may generate perceived threats to self-control, and rising similarity may generate fears that the state has no *raison d'être* if it is not different from others. States may respond to these systemic processes, in other words, by redoubling their efforts to defend egoistic identities. (This may be one reason why students of intergroup relations have found that increased contact alone does not ensure cooperation.) The key to how states deal with the tension between corporate fears of engulfment and the growing incentives for collective identification, therefore, lies in how they treat each other in their changing interaction context.

### Strategic Practice

In the last analysis, agents and structures are produced or reproduced by what actors *do*. Systemic structures and processes may affect the context of interaction, but specific actions are rarely dictated by them. Actors sometimes act as though they were in a "game against nature", but more interesting here is strategic practice, in which others are assumed to be purposive agents with whom one is interdependent. This is, of course, the traditional province of game theory, which normally does the rationalist "two-step" of treating identities and interests as exogenous to interaction.<sup>7</sup> Without minimizing the usefulness of game-theoretic models when identities and interests are stable, I want to suggest that more is always "going on" in strategic interaction than such models convey, namely, the production or reproduction of

identities and interests. When these change as a result of interaction, game-theoretic models will misrepresent the possibilities for, and mechanisms of, cooperation. In what follows, I shall focus on two forms of interaction differing in their form of communication: behavioral and rhetorical.

The first argument involves a constructivist rereading of Robert Axelrod's (1984) "evolution of cooperation." Taking an iterated, two-person prisoner's dilemma as his model, Axelrod shows how a strategy of reciprocity, or "Tit for Tat," can generate behavioral cooperation. This process becomes attenuated in the *n*-person case of interest here, where it is harder to target specific others and so may only work in small or "k-groups" within a larger context (Olson 1965). But the general logic is transportable: through repeated acts of reciprocal cooperation, actors form mutual expectations that enable them to continue cooperating. Like Olson, however, Axelrod's basic model assumes that actors remain egoistic,<sup>8</sup> and as such that interaction only affects expectations about others' behavior, not identities and interests. This gives the argument greater generality, applying to pigeons as much as to people, but it brackets the possibility that interaction may transform the interests constituting a game.

In contrast, if we treat identities and interests as always in process during interaction, then we can see how an evolution of cooperation might lead to an evolution of community. This can occur as an unintended consequence of actions carried out merely to realize self-interests or as a result of a conscious strategy of collective self-transformation (Gamson 1992, 60). Repeated acts of cooperation will tend to have two effects on identities and interests. First, the symbolic interactionist concept of "reflected appraisals" suggests that actors form identities by learning, through interaction, to see themselves as others do (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Mead 1934; Rosenberg 1981). The more significant these others are, as measured by the material and/or intersubjective dependency of the self upon them, the faster and deeper this process works. By showing others through cooperative acts that one expects them to be cooperators too, one changes the intersubjective knowledge in terms of which their identities are defined. Second, through interaction actors are also trying to project and sustain presentations of self (Goffman 1959). Thus, by engaging in cooperative behavior, an actor will gradually change its own beliefs about who it is, helping to internalize that new identity for itself. By teaching others and themselves to cooperate, in other words, actors are simultaneously learning to *identify* with each other—to see themselves as a "we" bound by certain norms. As with Axelrod's argument, this process may be attenuated in an *n*-person context, but the fact that humans do associate in communities suggests that repeated interaction can transform an interdependence of outcomes into one of utility.

Many examples of such transformations might be cited, but a particularly apposite one here is John

Ruggie's (1983b) analysis of the postwar free-trade regime as "embedded liberalism."<sup>9</sup> In keeping with its rationalist basis, conventional regime theory treats the rules, norms, and principles defining regimes as external constraints affecting merely the price of behavior. Ruggie shows that the free-trade regime does more than this, having institutionalized in state-society relations new state identities and interests that conform to the regime, in effect creating new subjects of international relations. Insofar as these define a transnational community of interest, states have incentives for compliance that go beyond the transaction costs of defection. The evolution of such a community can only be explained, however, if we examine the effect of practice on identities and interests.

The discussion so far has focused only on the potential effects of strategic behavior on identities and interests, and as such it is consistent with the concept of a noncooperative game in game theory. This may be realistic in situations where actors do not have available more direct forms of communication (as in the prison of the prisoner's dilemma), but this is not typically the case. What might be called rhetorical practice may have effects similar to those of behavioral practice but it does so through a different mode of communication, variously enacted as consciousness raising, dialogue (Offe and Wiesenthal 1980), discussion and persuasion (Caporaso 1992, 614-6), education, ideological labor (Hall 1986), political argument (Plotke 1992), symbolic action (Johnson 1988), and so on. Despite differences, all of these processes presuppose that the social world is constituted by shared meanings and significations, which are manipulable by rhetorical practices. These practices may involve power, but of the "third-dimensional," rather than the "first-dimensional" kind (Lukes 1974); that is, they are efforts to change others' conceptions of their interests. The goal of rhetorical practices in collective action is to create solidarity; thus they may have an important expressive function independent of their instrumental value in realizing collective goals.

A good part of the "action" in real-world collective action lies in such symbolic work. When leaders of the G-7 hold annual but substantively trivial meetings to discuss economic policy, when European statesmen talk about a "European identity," when Gorbachev tries to end the Cold War with rhetoric of "New Thinking" and a "common European home," when Third World states develop an ideology of "nonalignment," or when the United States demonizes Saddam Hussein as "another Hitler," states are engaging in discursive practices designed to express and/or to change ideas about who "the self" of self-interested collective action is. These practices may ultimately serve an instrumental or strategic function, but they cannot be understood from a strictly rationalist standpoint, since they are at base about redefining identity and interest.

## Rival Hypotheses

There is nothing inevitable about collective identity formation in the international system. It faces powerful countervailing forces, and I do not mean to suggest that the logic of history is progressive; there are too many examples of failed collective identities for that. My point is only that *to the extent that* mechanisms are at work that promote collective identities, models that ignore them will understate the chances for international cooperation and misrepresent why it occurs. In that sense, my argument is a rival to the rationalist hypothesis about collective action. The precise nature of the rivalry depends on how the latter is formulated—whether as the claim that egoistic state interests are, in fact, given and constant (which instructs us to ignore the formation of interests) or as the claim that states might develop collective interests but only as a result of domestic factors (which leads to reductionism about state interests). Despite the differences between these claims, both treat interaction as affecting only the price of behavior and thus assume that a rationalist research agenda exhausts the scope of systemic theory. My rival hypothesis is not merely that states might acquire collective interests (which dissents from realism) but that they might do so through processes at the systemic level—which dissents from rationalist versions of systemic theory, realist or liberal. Indeed, by focusing on the systemic origins of collective identity, I have made systemic rationalism rather than realism my primary target.

Which hypothesis is more appropriate in a given context is an empirical question that may change over time. Two strategies for comparison suggest themselves. One would avoid the direct measurement of identities and interests and focus instead on testing the different behavioral predictions of the two models about how much collective action should occur, and, taking into account problems of revealed preference, on that basis infer whether interests are collective or egoistic. A problem with this strategy is that it is difficult to specify exactly how much collective action even a well-worn theory like Olson's would predict (Green and Shapiro 1994). This strategy also tells us little about the process and causes of collective identity formation. Thus a second strategy would be to focus more directly on identities and interests as the dependent variable and see whether, how, and why they change. The challenge here, of course, is to construct measures of state identity and interest capable of sustaining inferences about change, which I cannot take up here (see Wendt, n.d.).

## THE INTERNATIONAL STATE

This essay so far has been a creature of the "anarchy problematique" (Ashley 1988), which theorizes about states in anthropomorphic terms as purposive actors interacting under anarchy. Despite my "sociological"



departure from the dominant "economic" vocabulary, like rationalists I treat states as agents having identities, interests, rationality, and so on. There are important objections to this analogy (Ferguson and Mansbach 1991, 370), but I believe it is legitimate for many purposes (Geser 1992; Wendt n.d.). It becomes problematic, however, if it so dominates our thinking that we automatically treat whatever is external to territorial state actors as "not-state" and therefore anarchic. This may obscure the emergence of state powers at the *international* level that are not concentrated in a single actor but distributed across transnational structures of political authority and constitute a structural transformation of the Westphalian states system. Collective identity formation is an essential aspect of such a process.

All but the most hard-core neorealists would probably say that the international system is characterized by "particles" of governance and that as such it is not a pure anarchy (compare Waltz 1979, 114–6). With the deepening and proliferation of international institutions, these particles are rapidly becoming "sediment." There is widespread agreement that this does not represent a move anytime soon toward centralized authority on a "domestic analogy" (Bull 1977), but neither does it represent a persistence of anarchy, since it does involve authority and "governance" (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992). This suggests that the anarchy–hierarchy dichotomy that has organized the field for so long is problematic (Milner 1991) and opens the door to new thinking about the foundations of international politics.

In response to this challenge, some scholars advocate non-state-centric thinking on the assumption that the concept of the state is inherently tied to centralized authority (Ferguson and Mansbach 1991). In contrast, other emphasize the mutability of state forms, differentiating the state from sovereignty and even territoriality (Ruggie 1993b; R. Walker 1990). One way to develop this latter suggestion would be to define the state as, at base, a *structure of political authority* that performs governance functions over a people or space (Benjamin and Duvall 1985; Katzenstein 1990). The enactment and reproduction of this authority structure may or may not be centralized in a single actor. In the Westphalian system, state agents and authority structures did coincide spatially, which leads to the familiar billiard ball imagery of "states" (actors, under which authority structures are subsumed) interacting under anarchy. But the two concepts need not correspond in this way: political authority could in principle be international *and* decentralized (Ruggie 1983b; Pasic 1993). Following Robert Cox, we might call such transnational structures of political authority that lack a single head "international states" (1987, 253–65).<sup>10</sup>

The concept of authority has a dual aspect: legitimacy (or shared purpose) and coercion (or enforcement) (Ruggie 1983b, 198). This suggests that the internationalization of the state requires the development of two qualities: identification with respect to some state function, be it military security, economic

growth, or whatever and a collective capacity to sanction actors who disrupt the performance of that function. The result of such developments would be an *institutionalization* of collective action, such that state actors would regard it as normal or routine that certain problems will be handled on an international basis (Nau 1993). This expectation is likely to be expressed and met in various ways: norms, rules, and principles that define expectations for behavior; routine discussions of collective policy; and interorganizational networks among bureaucratic agencies (Geser 1992; Hopkins 1978). By themselves, these forms are not international states, but to the extent that they manifest and contribute to collective identity and enforcement, they will be part of an internationalization of political authority.

This is present today in various degrees among advanced capitalist countries in both security and economic issues. The provision of security (and more specifically the maintenance of a territorial monopoly on organized violence) is a key function of the state. "Monopoly" normally refers to control by a single actor, but it can also denote control by multiple actors if they are not rivals and engage in institutionalized collective action. A collective security system is just that—*joint* control of organized violence potential in a transnational space. Such control with respect to external security has long characterized NATO, and recently European Community states have begun to internationalize internal security as well (Den Boer and Walker 1993). This system has a high degree of legitimacy among its members, as well as some capacity for enforcing its policies on them. It is based on multilateral norms that give even its weakest members a say in decisions (Risse-Kappen 1991), its leaders routinely formulate policies together, and its militaries are linked organizationally for both operations and procurement. Its capacity for institutionalized collective action is certainly also lacking in many respects, as the recent difficulties of defining a European defense policy attest, but the internationalization of political authority is a continuum, and NATO is far from anarchy along it.

The provision of an institutional framework for capitalist production is another function of the state that is today being internationalized. Historically, capitalism was largely a territorial phenomenon, in which capitalists could direct their political efforts toward corresponding domestic authorities. As competition drove them to expand overseas through trade and investment, however, they created a demand for international rules and regulations. State actors responded with a network of regimes: a trade regime to govern the flow of goods and services; a monetary regime to govern the value of transactions; and, increasingly, a "capital regime" to govern property rights and capital flows (Duvall and Wendt 1987). Today these regimes do more than merely affect the prices of certain behaviors; they embody a degree of collective identity ("embedded liberalism"), routinized discussions of collective policy, and networks of interorganizational linkages. Their principal

weakness remains enforcement, but even here there are emerging sanctioning systems that enable us to speak of an internationalization of political authority with respect to global capital (Cox 1987).

Let me emphasize that I am *not* saying that international state formation has gone very far, any more than has the formation of collective identities that is one of its prerequisites. It is a process, and even if it continues we are only in its early stages. It is issue-specific (though it may "spill over" into new issue areas), mostly regional in nature, and a matter of degree. Moreover, there are strong arguments for thinking that it will not continue, since it creates fundamental tensions between the national and transnational responsibilities of state actors (Taylor 1991). My point is merely to suggest some ways of thinking about certain dynamics in the contemporary world system that do not privilege the dichotomy between anarchy and hierarchy in statist theory (or its counterpart of intergovernmentalism versus supranationalism in integration theory). The key to such thinking is recognizing that political authority need not be centralized, a point recognized implicitly long ago by the integrationists and, since the neorealist interregnum, it is being rediscovered by a variety of scholars today (Pasic 1993). To be sure, centralization or supranationality *may* facilitate an internationalization of political authority, and the latter may even create some incentives for it. But one might also argue that *decentralized* governance arrangements will facilitate the process, since by preserving the forms if not substance of sovereignty, they may pose less tangible political threats to state actors against which resistance might coalesce.

The internationalization of political authority has at least two broad implications for international relations theory. First, it points toward a gradual but structural transformation of the Westphalian states system from anarchy to authority. The basis of that system is the institution of sovereignty, which constitutes an anarchy of mutual recognition. Even when international state formation does not involve the formal cession of sovereignty to supranational institutions, it does relocate individual state actors' *de facto* sovereignty to transnational authorities. The result in practice might be a "disarticulated" sovereignty in which different state functions are performed at different levels of aggregation (Pogge 1992), and/or a "neo-Medievalism" in which political authority is shared by both state and nonstate actors (Bull 1977, 254–94). Either way, the result is neither anarchy nor hierarchy but the emergence of a new form of state—and thus states system—which breaks down the spatial coincidence between state-as-actor and state-as-structure. Thus the erosion of individual state sovereignty does not imply the erosion of the state. Sovereignty is not an intrinsic feature of state agency but one social identity a state may have. By transferring it upward to a collective, states may actually strengthen their capacity to solve problems. Internationalization is a way of reorganizing and

redeploying state power, not a withering away of the state.

A second implication is how this calls into question the premises of contemporary democratic governance. The Westphalian approach to sovereignty allowed democratic and international relations theorists to ignore each other. The former were concerned with making state power democratically accountable, which Westphalia constituted as strictly territorial and thus outside the domain of international relations theory; the latter were concerned with interstate relations, which were anarchic and thus outside the domain of political theory. Under this worldview, democrats could celebrate the "end of history" with hardly a peep about democracy at the *international* level.

The internationalization of the state makes this silence problematic.<sup>11</sup> As state actors pool their *de facto* authority over transnational space, they remove it from direct democratic control. Territorial electorates may still retain the formal right to "unelect" their leaders, but the ability to translate this right into tangible policy change (versus merely changing the faces in power) is constrained by the commitments that state elites have made to each other. New elites could in principle break those commitments, but often only at the cost of external sanctions and reductions in their own effectiveness (Dahl 1993). Various interpretations of the threat this poses to territorial democracy can be imagined. The current debate in the European Community over the "democratic deficit" (Williams 1991) treats it in largely liberal terms as one of controlling an emerging centralized power, but radical democratic theory might be more relevant for the more decentralized authority structures cropping up all over the international system. In either case, the attempt to solve international collective action problems by creating collective identities among states creates an entirely new problem of making those identities democratically accountable, a problem ultimately of transforming the boundaries of political community (Linklater 1990; Wolfe 1992). Solutions might take transterritorial or functional-corporatist forms but will somehow have to expand "the people." In contrast to their splendid isolation in the sovereignty regime, democratic and international relations theorists might want to work on this one together.

## CONCLUSION

It is widely thought that state-centric systemic international relations theory cannot explain structural change and so ought to be abandoned. In my view, the problem lies not with statism but with two other commitments that inform contemporary understandings of structural theory: realism and rationalism. The essence of the former is materialism, *not* a willingness to confront the ugliness of world politics as its proponents would have it. If system structure is reduced to a distribution of material power, structural change can mean nothing more than shifts in polarity that

will not end the dreary history of conflict and despair over the millennia (but see Deudney 1993). Since authority is an intersubjective concept, the nature and implications of its internationalization will elude a materialist theory. The essence of rationalism, in contrast, is that the identities and interests that constitute games are exogenous and constant. Rationalism has many uses and virtues, but its conceptual tool kit is not designed to explain identities and interests, the reproduction and/or transformation of which is a key determinant of structural change. We should not let our admiration for rationalist methodology dictate the substantive scope of systemic international relations theory (Shapiro and Wendt 1992).

Scholars should not ignore the state as they grapple with explaining structural change in the late twentieth century, but for their part, statisticians should recognize that when states interact, much more is going on than realism and rationalism admit. Yes, international politics is in part about acting on material incentives in given anarchic worlds. However, it is also about the reproduction and transformation—by intersubjective dynamics at both the domestic and systemic levels—of the identities and interests through which those incentives and worlds are created. Integration theorists appreciated this suggestion long ago, but their nascent *sociology* of international *community* has been lost in the *economics* of international *cooperation* developed by realists and rationalists. The latter has contributed important insights into the dynamics of interaction under anarchy, but is ill-suited as a comprehensive basis for systemic theory precisely because it brackets some of the most important questions such a theory should address. Constructivists bring renewed interest and sharpened analytic tools to those questions.

## Notes

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1. For important exceptions, see Nye 1987 and Jervis 1988.

2. For varying expressions of this argument, upon which I draw freely, see Adler 1991; Alker n.d.; Ashley 1987; Katzenstein 1990; Kratochwil 1989; Ruggie 1993b; R. Walker 1990; and Wendt 1992.

3. Other traditions of international relations theory that might fall under this heading include poststructuralism, world society theory, neo-Gramscianism, Deutschian integration theory, and perhaps the society of states school. For elaboration of this and other issues discussed in this section, see Wendt n.d.

4. For a useful discussion of the importance and nature of basic needs at the individual level see Turner 1988, 23–69.

5. As noted, collective identity was a centerpiece of classical integration theory, but the latter's insights have been pushed aside by the realist and rationalist approaches that

dominate contemporary international relations theory. For recent international relations scholarship that begins to revive the concept, see Alker n.d. 1986; Caporaso 1992, 617–20; Keohane 1984, 120–34.

6. Although collective identification operates at the level of social identity, by enhancing the capacity for collective action it can help create corporate identity, which in one sense is simply a (temporarily) "solved" collective action problem. The distinction between the corporate and social identity of groups is therefore itself a construction, signifying the higher self-organization of the former rather than timeless and essential.

7. An interesting exception is the rationalist literature on "endogenous preference formation"; see Cohen and Axelrod 1984.

8. Later in his book, Axelrod discusses the possibility of actors internalizing new interests, but this important point has not been picked up by mainstream regime theorists in international relations.

9. Another is Schroeder's (1993) splendid discussion of how the European great powers learned to think in "systemic" (in my terms, essentially "collective") terms in the early 1800s.

10. This concept has been used primarily by neo-Marxists (Cox 1987; see also Picciotto 1991) though see the interesting discussion of Kant's usage in Hurrell (1990). My own thinking on this score, as on many others, owes much to conversations and work with Bud Duvall (see esp. Duvall and Wendt 1987).

11. For an early appreciation, see Kaiser 1971; the recent literature includes Connolly 1991; Held 1990; and R. Walker 1991.

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