

The Case for Hegel in International Relations Theory: Making War and Making States

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Abstract: Despite his significance for political theory, Hegel has often been overlooked by the International Relations (IR) canon. We investigate why, and mount an argument that Hegel should be read more closely by scholars and students alike. Reevaluating Hegel can offer a more nuanced account of some of the central problems in IR. Of these, we emphasize the causes of war. In contrast to the structural and rationalist theories still dominant in security studies, Hegel offers an account of war based on domestic politics and national identity. These are, in turn, tied to his account of state formation: state making and war making are closely linked. Further, Hegel's account can help to explain the importance of nationalism and nationalistic war, along with the causes of imperialism, in ideational terms. We conclude with an analysis of broader theoretical implications for IR, and an argument for the inclusion of Hegel in discussions of the field's founding texts. While no one would argue that any canonical body of theoretical work should be adopted wholly, many Hegelian methods and concepts can and should be added to IR's theoretical toolkit.

Keywords: Hegel, sovereignty, war, international relations, identity, state formation, logic of anarchy.

Introduction

This paper presents an International Relations-theoretic account of the causes of war drawn from the German philosopher and political theorist G. W. F. Hegel. The project has both theoretical and substantial motivations. Theoretically, we identify a middle ground between constructivist accounts and the rational-material accounts still dominant in the discipline. Substantively, we trace the causes of war to the processes of state formation, emphasizing both material and cultural factors.

Hegel has been read at the margins of IR for some time, but has only occasionally received detailed attention.¹ Thus, his account of international politics has rarely been assessed programmatically by the mainstream of the discipline. Indeed while many key concepts in IR are drawn from or claim roots in classical and modern political theorists, the

¹ A brief survey of existing IR-theoretic coverage would include Smith (1983), Knutsen (1992: 147-50), Boucher (1998: 330-53), Jaeger (2002), and Brooks (2004).

literature on Hegel in IR is thin. Moreover, Hegel defies easy classification, having variously been appropriated by realists (c.f. Brooks 2004, Carr 1946, Linklater 1996 footnote 6 on the “inevitability of international conflict”), liberals (c.f., Fukuyama’s popular work *The End of History and the Last Man* (1993), which parallels the triumph of post-Cold War liberal democracy, and cosmopolitans (c.f., Avineri 1972 on the emergence of a world culture and the end of conflict), a communitarian (Brown 1993), as well as being described as an anti-liberal (Knutsen 1992), a progenitor of fascism (Popper 1945), or even communist totalitarianism (Boucher 1992: 330). In IR, English School theorists, with stronger ties than others to history and political theory, offer at least some insight on his thought (Bull 1976, Vincent 1983). Constructivists also mention him both in explaining the social constitution of actors and attendant methodological issues (Wendt 1999: 214, Onuf and Klink 1989, Neumann, 1996)² and in explaining the long-term trajectory of world politics (Wendt 2003). Nonetheless, the gap here is striking: IR theorists appear to read Hegel with a fraction of the attention devoted to, for example, Kant or Marx.

Yet Hegel can offer IR scholars novel approaches to reliably thorny issues. In this essay, we emphasize perhaps the single most central issue in IR: the causes of war.³ The Hegelian account emphasizes the importance of national identity formation and maintenance alongside the international logic of self-help to jointly explain both why war is sometimes thought inevitable and also why it can appear desirable to states and their populations. In so doing, Hegel provides the basis for a substantial theory of the causes of armed conflict beyond mainstream rational-material frameworks. As such, Hegel can provide a bridge between mainline rational choice or structural theories and constructivist accounts. Nevertheless, Hegel’s corpus also has empirical shortcomings. We argue that these raise important concerns about Hegel’s thought.

The Hegelian argument suggests that the causes of war are closely tied to the formation and maintenance of the state. We begin, therefore, with IR’s extant accounts of the state, and move from there to prevailing accounts of the causes of war. Second, we discuss the role of political theory in IR, and consider Hegel’s potential place in it. Third, we present the Hegelian account of armed conflict. Fourth, we assess Hegel with reference to contemporary IR theories. Fifth, we review a few shortcomings of the Hegelian account. We conclude with a brief review and a discussion of why Hegel has largely vanished from the IR canon.

State Making and War Making in IR

IR theory has traditionally approached the state in one of two ways: either it is treated as an a priori fact and given little consideration (e.g., Waltz’s 1979 pioneering work on structural realism), or, borrowing from comparative politics, it is treated as an instrumental response to local conditions. A brief survey of the latter is in order.

Mancur Olson (1993) suggests that the state forms under conditions of anarchy as a solution to collective action problems. Under anarchy, he argues, theft by ‘roving bandits’ is

² Perhaps the most interesting recent case of this usage is Patrick Thaddeus Jackson’s (2004) argument that people should be understood as socially constructed actors as much as are states.

³ That social explanations of conflict in IR are wanting is well documented. Brian Schmidt (2002), Ole Waever (1998), and Steve Smith (2002) argue in varying ways that this distorted view of intellectual history is meant to confer legitimacy on particular research projects, chiefly the dominant rationalist paradigm within the field of International Relations. This perhaps helps to explain how Hegel has so long gone under-read.

a regular occurrence (because there is no authority to prevent it) that militates against investment and productivity by settled populations. According to Olson, both bandits and settled populations can improve their material condition if the bandit settles down and extracts theft in the form of taxes. In return, the bandit provides security, the rule of law, institutions, and the like, making complex societies and economies possible.

Similarly, Charles Tilly (1985) argues that European states originated as “racketeers”, charging for protection against threats of their own making. For Tilly, the state is the most effective structure for elite to consolidate their power and control internally (“eliminating or neutralizing their rivals inside those territories”) and project it externally (“eliminating or neutralizing their own rivals outside the territories in which they have clear and continuous priority as wielders of force”). In sum, wars make states and states make wars. Like Olson, the state is successful because it has the monopoly over violence within its territory and is thus best suited to extract resources (i.e., taxes).

Hendrik Spruyt (1994) argues that the Westphalian state ultimately prevailed over competing forms of sociopolitical organization because of its ability to better reduce transaction costs, prevent defection, and make credible commitments. Unlike city-leagues and city-states, which were characterized by overlapping jurisdictions and diffuse authority, the sovereign state was able to standardize legal codes, define property rights, weights and measures, currency, and others. As such, the state gradually edged out other forms of social organization over time.

These accounts provide a combined picture of rationally self-interested actors creating the state as a maximally efficient extractive mechanism. The state is made to maximize the outcomes of elites, and in turn is built to provide the most efficient mechanism for survival vis a vis competing actor types. The state is an ideal mechanism for making war. Wars, then, generate economic and territorial growth for the state, and the cycle repeats. After Hegel, we will argue that is a promising account, but tells only half the story.

IR research is comparatively extensive on the causes of war. However, analyses of conflict and cooperation again tend toward rationalist accounts, presenting the state as a maximizer of its own material interests. That is, these accounts provide explanations of why conflict might occur between rational actors in a system of anarchy. War is the consequence of states rationally seeking either to outdo one another or simply to survive in brute material terms—it is a zero sum game—while cooperation is the product of reciprocal bargains and leads to absolute gains. However, this approach is generally said to originate in political theory and Greek history, dating to Hobbes (1994), Machiavelli (1989) and Thucydides (1978). While these earlier accounts did not always overtly emphasize rationality, they can and have often been read as presenting accounts of war as a tragic consequence of selfishness rationally acted out.

A rational account of conflict is found most programmatically and parsimoniously in Waltz’s seminal *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Under conditions of international anarchy states, Waltz argues, must seek security as their first priority in order to ensure their own survival. Powers within the international system will inherently increase their material capacities in order to balance against each other. Though not inherently pacific, such balancing, for Waltz, produces a system in which war is sublimated to a tenuous stability between equally powerful states. To disturb this balance would risk war. Following Waltz, structural realists have either modified or rejected the balance of power thesis. Walt (1985) argues that states balance against threat rather than power. He later (1987) argues that weak states will often attempt to bandwagon with stronger states rather than attempt to balance against them. Organski and Kugler (1980) argue that the threat of war between states does not occur so much when the system is out of balance as when there is a change in who the

powers are: conflict arises not with unequal distributions of power, but with redistributions of it.

Other literatures expand on the rational causes of war in varying directions. Fearon (1995) argues that war might be rational for several reasons. First, states and their leaders may act rationally, but not properly or fully perceive the costs of conflict. Second, state elites often do not bear the burden of their decisions. Finally, because of the high cost of war, states' first preference is a negotiated settlement. However, states may be unable to achieve these for three possible reasons. First, incentives for states to misrepresent private information may prevent settlement. State actors may find it in their interest to lie (particularly about sensitive military capabilities), and indeed may thus not trust one another (392). Second, new agreements to prevent war produce new rational equilibria, and new reasons to break them. States' best attempts to prevent war may create new and unanticipated causes of armed conflict. Third, states have nothing to bind the terms of an agreement. Commitment problems may cause them to renege in the future and this knowledge may make a negotiated settlement impossible to achieve (381). Finally, issue 'indivisibility' may make it impossible to prevent war. States may prove unable to divide, for example, the issue of land from the natural resources it contains, making fine-grained bargaining impossible.

Elsewhere, Fearon (1994) suggests that conflicts can escalate to war because of domestic audience costs. He notes that "troop deployments' and public threats make crises public events in which domestic audience observe and assess the performance of the leadership." (577) States that back down, therefore, suffer domestic audience costs (in the form of lost "credibility, face or honor" (581). In other words, facing domestic audiences, leaders may become locked into their positions during a crisis.

Fearon and Laitin (2000) argue that elites construct and manipulate ethnic identity (or attempt to do so) and provoke ethnic conflict in order to "gain, maintain, or increase" their power (846). Rather than being primordial (i.e., fixed by nature), they suggests that elites fix these social categories through 'social convention and practice.' By constructing 'antagonistic identities,' often at the price of violence, elites entrench themselves politically and enrich themselves economically. (Here, Fearon and Laitin's account much resembles Tilly's, and indeed, Hegel's.)

All of these theorists are rightly viewed, in contrast to constructivists, as having economic or utilitarian worldviews: that is, they adopt a view of human rationality as the maximization of material self-interest. Much of contemporary IR research has been framed around a belief that, as social science, the field should be free of normative bias. E. H. Carr (2001) identifies this as one of the key theoretical assumptions of realism, and it is perhaps the single most important tenet of the near-universal rejection after WWII of inter-war liberal idealism. Thus, the study of war as materially rational has been central to the study of armed combat—both among those who view war as inevitable and those that claim it can be avoided.⁴ Hegel's account, we hope to demonstrate, differs sharply from mainline IR. It also differs in important ways from much mainline constructivism, as we shall see. Those who provide a 'thicker' constructivist account will generally allow that the anarchy itself is

⁴ Indeed, the lack of serious prescriptive or normative thought in IR is itself the object of research. Steve Smith (1992) has termed the positivist turn in IR research a "forty year detour". Chris Brown and others have attempted to produce a "new normativity" based on a cosmopolitan-communitarian distinction (Brown, ed, 1993). Nancy Kokaz (2005) has framed an argument against neoliberal institutionalism around an opposition not to its conclusions, but to its lack of normative prescription.

mutable, but certainly *can* result in realist logic (Wendt 1992). In all cases war is caused by the anarchic structure of the international system, even if cooperation is a possibility, as some neoliberals and constructivists suggest.

Some constructivists have begun to provide serious explanations of the ideational causes of war. Jennifer Mitzen (2006) argues that identity construction is as necessary as rational-material self-interest to explaining violent international interactions. Contra structural realists, Mitzen suggests that “physical security is not the only type of security that states seek” (342). Mitzen contends that states seek ‘ontological security’, or stable identities and environments in which decisions can more effectively be made. Mitzen suggests that in order to be “whole” and experience a sense of “agency” “individuals need to feel secure in who they are, as identities or selves” (342). She expands:

Some deep forms of uncertainty threaten this identity security. The reason is that agency requires a stable cognitive environment. Where an actor has no idea what to expect, she cannot systematically relate ends to means, and it becomes unclear how to pursue her ends. Since ends are constitutive of identity, in turn, deep uncertainty renders the actor’s identity insecure. Individuals are therefore motivated to create cognitive and behavioral certainty, which they do by establishing routines. (342)

Most straightforwardly, then, actors look to “minimize uncertainty” and impose “cognitive order on their environments” (346). More broadly, Mitzen suggests that actors fear uncertainty and are, therefore, motivated to seek stability even at the expense of their physical security (342).

Ontological security offers an explanation, according to Mitzen, into often-observed ‘irrational’ behavior of actors (i.e., irrational in the sense that it might conflict with security seeking or economic benefit). Particularly those behaviors found in ‘intractable conflicts’ or ‘enduring rivalries’ (343). Ontological security seeking often generates routine behavior to which actors become attached (347). This routine-based identity can be predicated on conflictual behavior. This, in turn, has close parallels in Hegel’s account of armed conflict, specifically in terms of national identity formation and maintenance.

Mitzen’s work has roots in psychology. It is perhaps not surprising that Hegel also has parallels in psychological, cognitive, and sociological research in IR. By going to war, rather than utilizing the mechanisms of international law, states often cause much material harm to themselves and others—a profoundly irrational act—in an effort to consolidate their identities. War can help foster or cement state identity. Here Hegel presages the work of social identity theorists who claim that conflict between groups is not necessarily about material interests (as it is for realists in IR). Social identity theorists demonstrate empirically that the mere perception of ‘others’ leads to “in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination” (Mercer 240). They further suggest that “categorization is a cognitive necessity” helping us make sense of our world (Mercer 241). Categorization “accentuate[s] similarities within our group and differences between groups” (Mercer 242). In other words, activities that create in-groups by definition create out-groups as well (and vice-versa). The more one is sharpened, the greater the contrast between the two becomes (Mercer 251). Further, the more the in-group bias is sharpened the greater the self-esteem of the in-group. IR literature is filled with examples of elites manipulating this tendency to gain or maintain power (c.f., Fearon and Laitin, 2000 on ethnic conflict).

This review suggests two modes of explanation for armed conflict: rational-material and social-ideational. The two need not be mutually exclusive—presumably both could be

true. What is needed, then, is a framework that grants both explanatory power. We contend that Hegel does this.

Hegel in the IR Canon

It may be useful at this point to frame Hegel's place in the IR literature. We propose a simple analytical device for organizing major political theoretic contributions to IR. We organize major key theorists and their major IR theoretic descendants along two dimensions, set out in a two-by-two table. First, we divide these theorists into those noted chiefly for theories of conflict and those noted for theories of cooperation. We then divide them according to those whose theories emphasize rational or material explanations and those whose theories emphasize ideational or ideological causes. The resulting table is as follows:

[Insert Fig. 1]

The table organizes IR theorists into those with realist and liberal proclivities. It also distinguishes those with strictly positivist methodological commitments from those with more heterodox or critical approaches.⁵ It then maps these onto their canonical influences. Hobbes and Thucydides are classically associated with early formulations of the security dilemma. Locke and Grotius are associated with early accounts of cooperation through material self-interest, and of international law. Kant is a forefather of more radical ideational sources of 'perpetual peace'⁶ through the formulation of his proposed pacific federation, as informed by the deontological ethics of the categorical imperative.⁷

What is starkly missing, then, is any canonical political theoretic account of conflict caused by ideas or ideology. In the prevailing accounts, wars are caused chiefly by conflicting material interests between states. This is noteworthy not only because IR has extant accounts of ideas and ideologies driving conflict (Mitzen 2006), but also because canonical political theoretic sources on the subject are readily available. Chief among these, we argue, is Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1967). Indeed, many important IR concepts have underappreciated roots in Hegelian thought. For example, constructivist ideas about conflict have, as we will see, strong parallels in Hegel's political theory. In what follows, we argue for closer attention to Hegel's account of the causes of war.⁸

⁵ Classical liberals and realists occasionally admit some ideational as well as material causes—certainly, the liberal idealist commitment to peace might well itself be described as ideological (Angell 2007). Also, some approaches, such as the tripartite formulation of the English School, defy categorization here (Bull 1977). Constructivists such as Wendt (1992) claim ideas cause both conflict and cooperation. Nonetheless, the table captures the essentials of the field's understanding of its intellectual roots.

⁶ Readings of the Kantian peace in IR often emphasize the material rationality of his formula. However, Kant himself traces it to the categorical imperative, which offers a non-consequentialist, and thus principled, ideational, account of how a perpetual peace can be achieved (Kant 2008).

⁷ Those who radically deemphasize the state (Rousseau, Marx) are not easily accounted for here. Augustine is not easily accounted for perhaps because of the religious roots of his account, and because of his partial commitment to armed conflict, now taught under the rubric of Just War Theory.

⁸ One might argue that Hegel has been ignored for political reasons—certainly his promotion of empire is at odds with modern liberal-democratic politics. We would argue that much the same can be said of conventional

States Make War (and War Makes the State)

Because Hegel's account of international politics is intrinsically tied up with his account of the state itself, it may be instructive to briefly discuss this first. We then assess, at greater length, the state's role in war and peace. For Hegel, political integration cannot rise above the level of the state, as it does for Kant, because of unresolved dialectical contingencies. Dialectical completion of the state requires precisely that political integration at the international level remain incomplete.⁹

The state is the culmination of the political-dialectical process elaborated in *The Philosophy of Right*. As such, its purpose—its *telos*—is to provide the largest and most rationally integrated form of social organization available. So understood, it has three elements: it is “a self dependent organism”—that is, much like a living being, it comes into existence and survives over time by keeping internal elements in balance. It exists in relations to other states, and it arises and changes over time in response to the passage of world history—the process elaborated at the end of *The Philosophy of Right* (341-360) and in depth in *The Philosophy of History*.¹⁰ As a self-dependent organism, the state exists independently of other actors around it. In IR terms then, Hegel's state resembles Waltz's, insofar as it exists in anarchy. However, we are offered a complimentary account of domestic politics to match: a state shaped internally through bargains and interdependencies¹¹ as much as by its external relations in the international system, and across space and time.

realism, which endorses hegemonic realpolitik and nuclear proliferation over peace-building. Indeed, realists often take illiberal positions quite publicly and self-consciously. See, for example, Mearsheimer's (1990) public work on the end of the Cold War.

⁹ The dense style and vocabulary of Hegelian prose presents unique challenges, which have often served to drive readers away (and occasionally to discredit Hegel's work). In addressing texts such as the *Philosophy of Right* for the first time, the incredulous social scientist finds herself faced with a complex and obscure logic of politics that appears to begin from pure ideational abstractions. She is asked to make sense of terms like ‘subsumption’ and ‘Absolute Idea.’ Latin is used liberally, and, everyday terms like ‘civil society,’ ‘police’ and ‘corporation’ acquire new and complex meanings. We have found that these issues account for a good deal of anti-Hegelian bias among our colleagues. With a mind to overcoming this, we have tried to limit use of Hegel's terminology and logical abstractions below, emphasizing the political consequences of his philosophy. While an argument can perhaps be made for more overt and rigorous use of pure Hegelian dialectical logic in IR, we do not attempt it here.

¹⁰ For Hegel, this means that the development of states occurs through a teleological historical progression. Thus, although ancient Greece is long dead, it is not forgotten. Modern states far from the Mediterranean basin have assimilated its ideas, structures and institutions as their own (e.g., elements of deliberation, rhetoric, and democracy):

In the course of this work of the world mind, states, nations and individuals arise animated by their particular determinate principles which has its interpretation and actuality in the constitutions and in the whole range of their life and condition. While their consciousness is limited to these and they are absorbed in their mundane interests, they are all the time the unconscious tools and organs of the world mind at work within them. *The shapes which they take pass away, while the absolute mind prepares and works about its transitions to its next higher stage.* (emphasis added, 344)

“World-historical nations”, according to Hegel, rise to greatness and, in so doing, develop new forms of ethical life. They contribute these ideas to the rest of humanity and then “decline and fall.” Hegel traces this “world historical process” across four stages: “(1) the Oriental, (2) the Greek, (3) the Roman, (4) the Germanic.” (354).

¹¹ Social organization, then, originates when individuals come to recognize each other through the ownership and exchange of property. Out of a formless mass, individuals, families, classes, corporations, estates, and others unite around shared interest(s) ultimately to form a state.

The state exercises authority over its constituent components (such as the family and civil society) but attains this authority through the unity of interests of these very constituent components. In non-Hegelian terms, the participants in the social order grant legitimacy to the state, which in return provides security, order, and a welfare state. The administration of this balance demands considerable attention: Hegel calls for a “division of powers” to “guarantee public freedom” (273). In other words, the different responsibilities of statehood are balanced among different groups. This emphasis on responsible government, social welfare, and so on, represented a novel contribution on Hegel’s day. He is concerned not only with balancing power and authority within the state but also economic resources. For example, the component parts (“estates”) are:

regarded as a mediating organ, the Estates stand between the government in general on the one hand and the nation broken up into particulars (people and associations on the other) . . . [they] prevent both the extreme isolation of the power of the crown, which otherwise might seem a mere arbitrary tyranny, and also the isolation of the particular interests of persons, societies, and Corporations. Further, and more important, they prevent individuals from having the appearance of a mass or an aggregate and so from acquiring an unorganized opinion and volition and from crystallizing into a powerful *bloc* in opposition to the organized state. (302)

In short, these interdependent parts not only divide political labor and separate powers, but attain a balance that he would describe as dialectical.¹²

Hegel’s state works domestically on what we would term mechanisms of legitimacy. Hegel suggests that education and religion both play a role in building state cohesion (270). Education, for example, holds similarities to Gramscian hegemony; through education the principles and laws that undergird the state may become almost second nature or common sense (270). Religion has the capacity to explain, justify, and legitimate almost any state activity (270).

These mechanisms form the organizing principle of the state, which will survive if the needs of diverse groups are effectively met. In other words, actors willingly come together ceding certain things for the benefit of others. In this way, Hegel’s state has echoes of a social contract. But Hegel’s state is not only bottom up; it is also a top-down project. Echoing other models of state formation, Hegel suggests that a powerful and potentially forceful actor can create a state by coercing others into a subordinate position. The monarch takes a “formless mass” and unites the people together under one idea or personality of statehood. The monarch is a vessel in which all can see their individuality come together in the form of the state; to be sure, the monarch is more than a unifying symbol which mitigates

¹² On this account, a society with great class imbalance and no mechanism for redress is prone to self-destruction. In such a society there is a risk of creating what Hegel terms “a rabble of paupers.” This rabble is not merely a deprived underclass, but a faction of the poor inclined to class resentment. After Smith and Ricardo, Hegel invests a great deal of faith in a market economy as a self-regulating social mechanism. However, market economic forces and the bureaucratic imperfections and pathologies of the state apparatus will produce contingencies in the form of persistent poverty. Hegel is clear that poverty cannot be addressed purely through private charity, (242) and civil society lacks the resources to offer sufficient relief (245). He thus provides for the police to oversee a welfare state on their behalf, which “takes the place of the family” in providing for its members where corporations cannot (214).

against particularity and conflict, it *is* the state. In this way the state moves beyond a mere balance of interests to become “the actuality of the ethical Idea” (257).

The tension between expansion, with attendant interstate violence through war and colonialism, and mutual recognition between states is echoed in the individual level of analysis found at the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right*. Following the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1967), the *Philosophy* begins with an individual subject, who maintains absolute free will; they are not yet constrained by the social or material world outside of, and apart from, them (35). However, in exerting their will on the world, the subject finds themselves constrained by material and social reality. Initially, those around threaten the unlimited pursuit of free will (for they also have an unlimited desire to pursue their absolute free will). Thus, they attempt to dominate and negate the other. However, these attempts ultimately fail on two counts. First, to dominate or negate the other by necessity, rules out recognition by the other. Second, without mutual recognition they find themselves locked in violent Hobbesian anarchy.

Ultimately, for Hegel, property becomes the vehicle through which individuals assert themselves both in material and social terms. In material terms individuals can place their mark on the world by creating or possessing objects. In social terms when we recognize ownership and exchange through contract we establish a system of mutual recognition, which allow us to transcend Hobbesian anarchy. These rules provide a shared benchmark by which individuals can moderate their behavior and a metric against which wrongs can be righted. Individuals first confront each other in a world without rules to govern their behaviour, but they quickly develop these rules. They do so for instrumental reasons (to make industry, commerce and trade possible) and for social reasons (mutual recognition).

However, political integration cannot rise above the level of the state, according to Hegel, because of unresolved contingencies—that is, unaddressed imbalances, imperfections, and so on, within the political structure of the state itself. Because these cannot be addressed in absolute terms internally, the state requires that political integration at the international level remain incomplete. Chief among these contingencies are economic iniquity and political disunity. Through devices such as nationalism and imperial expansionism, the state externalizes these internal conflicts, projecting them onto the international stage. Thus, international politics are typified by state interest, uncertainty, and conflict.

Certainly, this does not apply all the time. Much like individuals in the domestic arena, law governs state-to-state interaction. Such behavior comports with the upper right hand quadrant of our table. However, unlike the domestic arena, there is no overarching authority to govern international relationships, an assumption shared by most IR scholars. According to Hegel,

International law, or the law which is universal, and is meant to hold absolutely good between states, is to be distinguished from the special content of positive treaties, and has at its basis the proposition that treaties, as they involve the mutual obligations of states, must be kept . . . (emphasis added, 333)

International law is not merely the mesh of treaties and alliances that bind states together, then, but also the substrate of legal practice and belief that makes these allegiances possible: it is founded on the international recognition of sovereignty:

[A] state shall not meddle with the internal affairs of another state. Yet, on the other side, it is essential for its completeness that it be recognized by others. But this recognition demands as a guarantee that it shall recognize those who recognize it, and will have respect for their independence. (331)

International law is real, but it is governed by tit-for-tat behavior: that is, obedience and disobedience are governed by reciprocity. Reciprocity is the mechanism that governs the relations between states, something that neo-liberals in International Relations have long argued. However, as neo-realists will argue, this relationship can break down, in which case states must resort to the use of force to resolve their differences. In fact, the knowledge that reciprocity requires trust and is subject to failure makes war more likely.

When international regulatory mechanisms fail, states are apt to resolve their differences through war. Yet war has an extraordinary cost both in the lives of individual citizens and to the state in general. So why, with international regulatory mechanisms in place, would a state opt for war? In other words, why would states allow these mechanisms to fail? A visceral reaction might be to suggest “absolute evil”, “external accident” or “the passions of powerful individuals or nations” (324). In the main, Hegel rejects these simplistic explanations. He also goes beyond conventional realist mechanisms. War, for Hegel, is not an accident of history, nor is it primarily about settling material differences between states, nor about security. War is not an unfortunate accident for Hegel but a necessity of the state-making and state-sustaining process itself.

Nationalism, Hegel notes, requires the existence of more than one nation state—it requires a range of actors for comparison. On this basis, warfare becomes the expression and intensification of state identity through violence. This in turn often gives rise to empire—the expansion of the political-economic structures of the state into dependent colonies, with many consequent political advantages.

Thus, over and above the material defense of the state, war serves a dual purpose for Hegel. First, it facilitates the formation of a unified national consciousness, limiting the negative effects of socio-economic contingencies (such as poverty) on the social structure of the state. Second, it permits imperial expansionism, which mitigates many of these socio-economic contingencies directly.

According to Avineri, Hegel’s conception of war is not a matter of ethics, or right and wrong, as it is for classical liberals in IR, but is instead a matter of right and right—that is, of states asserting their rights in the international arena (Avineri 1972: 202). War is about states seeking recognition from other states much as individuals seek recognition from other individuals in the Hegel’s domestic account (Boucher 1998: 343, Jaeger, 2002: 508). Moreover, the realist risk of war through anarchy and distrust is compounded by psychological causes and, more broadly, the putative benefits for organized domestic society that war brings. War is *good* for the state.

In IR terms, Hegel is perhaps a realist insofar as he argues that the lack of legitimate authority above the level of the state makes warfare chronic, corresponding to the top left quadrant of our table.¹³ However, he is something more insofar as his account of state formation and maintenance makes this violence indispensable to the internal politics of the state itself. Anarchy makes war possible, but war becomes a recurring feature of international relations because states actively seek it out. It is driven not strictly by anarchy, as conventional IR theory would have it, but by the exigencies of intra-state politics itself. Hegel goes further, applying this idea as part of a normative or ethical program. Here we argue that Hegel conforms to the lower left quadrant of our table: that is, to ideational causes of war.

War has the ability to divert attention from domestic problems. War is a powerful motivator, both on the individual and state levels. More importantly, under threat or duress, wars act to mobilize people in defense of life and property, and, more often than not, wars require central coordination (both helping to create and to legitimate the state apparatus). War creates the motivation for state formation and the institutions necessary for its success. In Hegel's words:

[S]uccessful wars have checked domestic unrest and consolidates the power of the state a home... peoples unwilling or afraid to tolerate sovereignty at home have been subjugated from abroad, and they have struggled for their independence with the less glory and success the less they have been able previously to organize the powers of the state in home affairs... [Conversely,] as a result of war, nations are strengthened, but peoples involved in civil strife also acquire peace at home through making wars abroad. (325)

Moreover, war demands sacrifice on the part of the individual for the sake of the whole, thus bonding the two together through the 'virtue of bravery' (325, 328). "In times of war", Smith argues, "common values and commitments are not only preserved but enhanced" (1983: 628). War "transcends attachment to things by uniting men for the purpose of a common ideal" (Smith 1983: 628). In so doing, it creates a common lived experience that has the potential to unify those who experience it (Avineri 1972: 196). The experience can be told and retold allowing some to relive the experience and others to share in it. In this way, war holds the potential not only to bond people together across space in opposition to a common external enemy, but also across time. War draws people together, tearing down the "walls created by ossified self-interest" (Avineri 1972: 198). War helps to consolidate a formless mass into a cohesive group with a shared identity and shared virtues. Similarly, Boucher suggests that a perpetual peace leads an environment permissive of the pursuit of private interests at the expense of the public good (1992: 348). War "reasserts[s] the primacy of the

¹³ Certainly, Hegel offers proto-realist conceptions of international politics:

The immediate actuality which any state possesses from the point of view of other states is particularized into a multiplicity of relations which are determined by the arbitrary will of both autonomous parties... in civil society individuals are reciprocally interdependent in the most numerous respects, while autonomous states are principally wholes, while needs are met within their own borders... There is no judge over states, at most only a referee or mediator, and even the mediatorial function is only an accidental thing, being due to particular wills. (332)

state over and above the aggregate of private interests that constitutes civil society” (Smith 1983: 625).

Nationalism is both a cause of and a response to the internal coherence of the state. The state, on Hegel’s account, is “the actuality of the ethical Idea”—a realization of an objectively ideal ethical context (257). It is the mechanism through which an ideal ethical order is manifested in politics. This objectively ideal polity, however, must also find expression in the subjective realm of the individual. It does so through “political sentiment”—through patriotism or nationalism (267). One feels national pride precisely out of a knowledge that one lives in the best of all possible social orders.

The state does the individual subject good and that subject is consequently grateful (268). Nonetheless, patriotic sentiment requires, or at any rate benefits from, cultivation. In the first place, this requires that one’s state be contrasted against others. Without other actors to contrast itself against, the state cannot be presented as an individual—a unified ethical whole—nor can it be the object of pride. There can be no unified whole without reference to something else—a unified ‘other’ or ‘others’. Just as the individual can only come to self-consciousness through contact with others, so the state can only realize its identity and unity through a broader international political structure—what we now call anarchy (279, 322). Patriotism serves to bring the individual to consciousness of his or her own role in the state and of the fellow feeling necessary for the social bond. This self-conscious bonding of the state together as a self-realized whole requires interaction and competition with other like entities (259 addition, 323). While one might imagine this occurring through a range of means—international trade, perhaps, or other forms of symbolic competition between states, Hegel attributes this chiefly to armed combat.

The effect of warfare, Hegel argues, is to promote nationalism: “As a result of war, nations are strengthened” (324, addition). The material damages of war are insignificant next to the gains in national unity facilitated through armed conflict. This trades material losses—damages to the state and to society—for ethical gains. The sublimation of the individual into the objective whole of the state is the true, mature form of human courage.

Courage to be sure is multiform. The mettle of an animal or a brigand, courage for the sake of honour, the courage of a knight, these are not true forms of courage. The true courage of civilized nations is readiness for sacrifice in the service of the state, so that the individual counts as only one among many. The important thing here is not personal mettle but aligning oneself with the universal. (327, addition)

Mere bravery, so to speak, is not a politically sophisticated human experience. Willingness to engage in sacrifice for the state, for the whole of society, constitutes the bond between the individual and the state itself: as such, it is a “universal duty” (325).

The expression of this ethical duty through institutionalized armed violence is, then, a means of perpetuating the realization of ethical ideals through the state. Additionally, being constituted as a state is itself an advantage in warfare. States perform better in armed combat than do other forms of social organization (tribes or clans, for example), and as such are better able to self actualize individually and as a whole through victory in armed combat—precisely perpetuating their identity as a state (327 addition).

The dual needs to promote nationalistic fervor and to engage in warfare make imperial expansionism by the developed European states of Hegel's time at the very least likely. This has, however, philosophical foundations above and beyond contingent necessity for Hegel: "The state's tendency to look abroad lies in the fact that it is an individual subject" (329). Because the state has realized itself as a unified polity it is naturally inclined to look outside itself at its others: at other states, in armed combat, and also at other actors that Hegel would identify as being in earlier stages of political development.

This is, in part, a market-seeking activity on the part of civil society. Because "civil society is not rich enough . . . to check excessive poverty," (245) an outward movement toward other societies as export markets is, Hegel argues, inevitable (246). The combined effect of excess population and over production is expansionism: "Civil society is thus driven to form colonies." This colonization can be either sporadic, that is incidental, or systematic. The former includes German emigration outside of Central Europe, typified by ad hoc resettlement and little contact with the home country. The latter typifies English or Spanish settlement in the new world, and was, we are told, also typical of the ancient Greeks. This more radical form of colonialism, of which Hegel seems to most approve, involves the wholesale settlement and occupation of a territory, which is converted to the ends of the settlers (248 addition).

The result is the formation of a new society, and often a struggle for independence from the founding state. Perhaps surprisingly, this is to be viewed as a good thing. It produces a new self-realized state, which is of clear benefit to the settlers. However, it is also an advantage for the colonial power, "just as the emancipation of slaves turns out to the greatest advantage of the owners." The country that founded the colony is, thus, relieved of the burden of caring for it, and can go about creating further colonies, such that the pattern repeats (248 addition).

Thus, the expansionist needs of civil society dovetail with the need of the state to engage in warfare in order to maximize the unity and shared consciousness of the population. As such, the synthetic unity of state and civil society is best realized through expansionist warfare. This is, in turn, an extension of the process of state formation itself. It is violent struggles for recognition, at each stage of social development¹⁴ that permits the birth of larger, more systematically integrated, more fully self-conscious social orders, culminating in the state:

A nation does not begin by being a state. The transition from a family, a horde, a clan, a multitude, &c., to political conditions is the realization of the Idea in the form of that nation . . . So long as it lacks objective law and an explicitly established rational constitution, its autonomy is formal only and is not sovereignty. (349)

Put differently, states are states only insofar as they have the rationally efficient and ethical institutions that make states superior to other forms of social organization. That this should cause more developed societies to look down on those less so is, on Hegel's account, only natural:

¹⁴ A similar developmental logic is at work in purely theoretical terms, and in much greater detail, in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (1979), paragraphs 178-96.

The same consideration justifies civilized nations in regarding and treating as barbarians those who lag behind them in institutions which are the essential moments of the state. Thus a pastoral people may treat hunters as barbarians, and both of these are barbarians from the point of view of agriculturalists, &c. The civilized nation is conscious that the rights of barbarians are unequal to its own and treats their autonomy as only a formality” (351).

Civilized states, for Hegel, are both right to expand at the expense of less self-realized peoples, and much in need of doing so. Expansionist warfare both permits the resolution of the state’s internal economic difficulties, relieving pressures on civil society, and permitting the state to create the highest degree it can attain of idealized self-consciousness.

In sum, far from being a destroyer of states, war is indispensable to the perpetuation of the state as social institution. Without occasional recourse to war, the ethical rightness and unity of society would break down and the internal mechanism of the state would concomitantly stagnate. We are provided with a range of generalized examples from history. Restive populations often become less so after their states win wars. Equally, people not given to statehood often become so through revolutionary struggles against foreign subjugation (324). Contra Kantian cosmopolitanism, which fills the lower right quadrant of our table, peace, for all its material benefits, turns out to be socio-politically destructive—or at least a cause of stagnation: it fails to cleanse civil society of its ills and the state of its weaknesses and idiosyncrasies.

Hegel’s state, his “actuality of the ethical Idea” (257), has troubling implications for the IR scholar. Patriotism, for example, is not a benign domestic force reflecting love of one’s land and compatriots, nor strictly the product of rational calculation by utility maximizing individuals. Instead, patriotism is both a cause and a product of war. To be sure, war may result, in the realist fashion, from disputes between states, in which case patriotism is a side effect. However, psychologically and socially entrenched nationalism may be causes of war as well. We can envision nationalism leading to war in one of two ways. First, weak states (and their leaders) may seek war in the desire to consolidate their national project. Second, citizens, perhaps because of patriotic chauvinism, might also demand war out of contempt for their neighbors. In both cases the external costs of state formation have the potential to lead to great instability in the international system.

The new reader of Hegel can be forgiven at this point for concern or outright alarm at these ethical-political conclusions. Hegel arrives, finally, at a rather stark position: the state can best realize itself through the violent subjugation of its others, and the seizure of their territory. Indeed, Hegel is easily attacked on anti-Eurocentric or postcolonial grounds. However, there are important theoretical concepts to be drawn from this account, not least for those who want to understand war in more-than-structural terms. We elaborate these below.

Hegel and IR

Hegel's account—however violent—provides important insights into the relationship between socio-cultural and rational causes of war, closely paralleling recent constructivist work in IR without discounting material causes. We are offered an account of war in which conflict is often over determined—encouraged domestically both by the material gains of wartime economics (increased employment, conquered resources, and so on) and the social unifying effects of the war effort. The two causes are not rightly understood as being at odds.

Like Hegel, Wendt (1999) suggests that interactions between states, and between agents and structures, help color the character of the international system: anarchy really is “what states make of it.” (1992)¹⁵ The constructivist argument here is now well known: states identify who they are and what their interests are in relation to other states in the international system. Over time, states develop expectations and identities based on these interactions. Depending on the character of these interactions, states can “constitute a Hobbesian war of all against all or a Kantian perpetual peace” (Wendt 1999: 160). Moreover, depending on the interaction among states these expectations can change over time (i.e., from a Hobbesian war to a Kantian peace and vice-versa). The prevailing conditions of international anarchy, therefore, tell us little about the possibility of conflict or cooperation.

Mitzen's account of the ideational causes of war most closely matches Hegel's among IR constructivists discussed here. Her program does not provide anything like a normative argument in favour of these processes, as Hegel's does, but her social scientific explanation of conflict makes strikingly Hegelian assertions to the effect that the protection and stabilization of national identities can serve as explanations of organized violence in the absence of self interest based explanations.

However, in Hegel, as we have seen, this comes with a caveat: there are clear structural advantages (both social and material) to armed conflict. Anarchy is certainly “what states make of it,” but states have incentives to make a certain international structure: one in which they retain the option to reap the advantages of war.¹⁶ Internally coherent, unified, nationalistic states are thus more inclined to international violence. There is a fixed trade-off here, between internal integration and external conflict for which constructivists do not generally argue. This suggests a distinctive deterministic (and perhaps structural) constraint resulting precisely from the co-constitutive account of state formation Hegel offers.

This argument also suggests an interesting disagreement with the assumptions of Fearon's (1995) rational explanations of war. Fearon sets out to explain why states might go to war despite manifest costs. Hegel offers reasons why these costs might be overstated, or at least balanced by gains. Commonly acknowledged human costs in life, limb, welfare, and so on, may be countervailed, at least for elites, by a range of advantages, documented above. Put differently, a Hobbesian world politics is one of endemic violence, but also socially cohesive states that reap real economic gains from war.

¹⁵ States might follow laws either under duress or because of calculations of rational self-interest. In either case, there are two possible effects: laws might do nothing to alter the identity and interests of states, or laws might become legitimate in the eyes of the state (“external norms have become a voice in our heads telling us that we want to follow them” Wendt, 1999: 288) thereby changing the behavior and identity of states.

¹⁶ Wendt's (2003) argument that “a world state is inevitable” makes use of a Hegelian logic to draw the non-Hegelian conclusion that global politics will trend in the long term toward unity. In this, we (and Hegel) disagree with him. However, with Wendt, we argue that anarchy is both “what states make of it” and given to trend in a certain direction—in our case, toward chronic armed conflict. The two tendencies are not incompatible, insofar as states can opt out of the arrangement (witness the EU), but have reasons not to do so.

Shortcomings:

The Hegelian account falls short in certain areas. First, as exponents of the democratic peace have long observed, the second half of the twentieth century has seen a substantial reduction in the occurrence and intensity of inter-state warfare. This cuts sharply against the Hegelian assertion that states must violently assert their political and cultural independence in order to fully self-actualize as idea social institutions.¹⁷

Second, the decline in inter-state war has been accompanied by an increase in intra-state warfare, and more recently non-state violence of various kinds, such as insurgent warfare and terrorism. Hegel makes little reference to these forms of violent interaction, acknowledging violence by actors other than states only to assess their comparative disadvantages in armed conflict (327, addition).

Third, the rise of substantial international institutions undermines the Hegelian argument for the irreducible sovereignty of the state. While IR theorists can and do argue about the efficacy of the UN, the EU presents a substantial case of agglomeration above the level of the sovereign state. It also presents a case of persistent regional peace, in precisely the region—Europe—in which Hegel claims war has had a substantially creative effect. While Hegel does “refer to the European peoples as a ‘family’” (Jaeger 2002: 503) he does not permit integration beyond the level of the state.

Lastly, Hegel makes little allowance for the extreme destructive power of modern warfare. Hegel wrote before the mechanization of European wars, and long before nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, accounts of war as a destroyer rather than creator of states are as old as Thucydides. Hegel was no doubt familiar with these. Given this—and given the wars of the twentieth century—the gap is especially stark. Much as there may be gains for states in war, the losses have expanded vastly over the two centuries since Hegel wrote.¹⁸

Hegelian responses to these might include an argument that the reduction in inter-state war has prevented the self-actualization of states, especially newly formed post-colonial states, giving rise to intra-state and non-state violence where these might otherwise not have occurred. This decline in inter-state violence might in turn be explained by the rise of institutions that curtail the violent settlement of disputes: were weak postcolonial states not protected by the institutional framework of international law, these states might simply be reabsorbed into larger imperial projects, as Hegel predicts.¹⁹

The destructive powers of mechanized and nuclear war are, however, less easily explained on the Hegelian account (Boucher 1998: 347). One might note only that, given the capacity of these to destroy nations nearly or completely, Hegel provides us with an account not of the costs of nuclear war, but the costs of nuclear peace. Where great powers can no longer make war against one another, they lose an important vehicle for their own advancement and self-actualization.

¹⁷ The democratic peace literature is too large to review here. For major contributions see: Doyle (1983), Owen (1994), Oneal and Russett (1999), Williams (2001), and Hayes (2009) for an extensive review of the literature. For general accounts of the downward trend in inter-state violence, especially concerning nuclear weapons, see: Mueller (1998).

¹⁸ For an assessment of how improvements in the technologies of war affect the scale of social unity, see Deudney (2007).

¹⁹ For an IR-theoretic version of this argument, see Jackson (1990).

In any event, this analysis should serve to demonstrate not only the deeply illiberal character of Hegel's international thought, but also the complexity, flexibility, and explanatory power of it. Scholars given to less belligerent modes of political thought, ourselves included, would do well to take them into account.

Conclusion

Whatever the gaps in his work, Hegel's account of international political is complex, providing a nuanced and detailed account of identity formation and interaction. This may help, finally, to answer our first question—the issue of why IR scholars pay so little attention to this body of work. Hegel's reliance on psychological and cultural factors stands a long way from behaviorist and positivist IR—including the long-dominant neorealist school.

However, as IR research has begun to move away from these accounts, lacunae do with identity and cultural issues have become more and more evident. Constructivist accounts address these, but often at the expense of explaining persistent political structures.²⁰ Hegel provides an alternative and analytically powerful account of how and why international violence has so often appeared chronic. This can be understood precisely as a necessary consequence of complete integration within the state itself. In order to have a unified and ethically just political unit domestically, states must have a free hand to engage in competitive and belligerent behavior abroad. Anarchy is not—or rather is not only—the result of the absence of government at the international level, but of the presence of government within the state.

A second answer, then, is that Hegelian accounts are already present in IR to a substantial degree—most emblematically the social and psychological accounts we discuss above—but have largely been shorn of their roots by longstanding bias against social, psychological, or otherwise 'thick' explanation in the study of international politics. Tilly's (170) account of the "interdependence of war making and state making," and Mitzen's account of how identity drives violence, are deeply Hegelian. A reintroduction of Hegelian thought promises to help both expand existing research and recover the roots of what has already been done. The present moment in the discipline's history provides especially strong reasons for doing so, as social or cultural accounts how entered the discipline's mainstream and entered into substantial dialogue with heretofore dominant rationalist paradigms.

Hegel's contribution, finally, is a complex causal account of how state making and war making are mutually constitutive processes. Nationalistic states can encourage warfare and in turn harvest increased political unity from it. Moreover, the social forces that make the state cohere are precisely those that discourage such coherence at the international level. This provides new insight into how anarchy works. The more states organize themselves internally around a common project—that of the nation-state itself—the more unstable and violent relations between states can and likely will persist.

²⁰ Broadly, we have reason to view Hegel as a point of reference to an ongoing dialogue between structuralist and constructivist theories of international politics. New structuralist theories, such as that of Jack Donnelly (2009), provide space for social construction within structural constraints. Constructivist research has demonstrated a recent tendency toward accounts of structures and structural constraint (Barkin 2003, Jackson and Nexon 2004, Nexon and Wright 2007). Because Hegelian thought presents a point of reference for both processes of social construction and structural constraint, it presents a theoretical toolkit of potential importance in this emerging dialogue (see also: Jackson 2004).

Figures

Fig 1:

	<i>Conflict</i>	<i>Cooperation</i>
<i>Material-rational</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political Theorists:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hobbes○ Thucydides• Contemporary IR:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Neorealism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political Theorists:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Locke○ Grotius• Contemporary IR:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Neoliberalism
<i>Ideational-ideological</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political Theorists:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ None• Contemporary IR:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Some constructivism○ Some critical theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Political Theorists:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Kant• Contemporary IR:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Some constructivism○ Some critical theory

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