The Evolution of Security:
Revisiting the Human Nature Debate
in International Relations

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Introduction

Traditional understandings of security in international relations have tended to rely on the assumption that the referent object of security is the modern political state which needs to be secured against rival states and other external threats. This conception relies heavily on the so-called security dilemma, the ever-present threat that outside states might use their power to launch an attack. The driving force behind the security dilemma has alternately been described as the anarchical nature of the international system and the aggressive and competitive nature of human beings themselves. The classical realist scholars of international relations (IR) rooted their arguments about human nature in philosophical and religious claims. It is only recently that evolutionary science has been employed in an attempt to revitalize the realist project; it seems to have had very little influence in shaping early disciplinary IR. Charles Darwin's theories, however, have historically been used to justify social competition and the contempt of difference and otherness.

Always the subject of controversy, and a staple of elementary science education, Darwin's theories of evolution are widely known – though they are not always popular and not always fully understood. Especially in western popular culture, there is a common sentiment that in a 'dog eat dog world,' 'only the strong survive.' Since the laws of nature operate based on 'the survival of the fittest' and so we must 'kill or be killed,' 'eat or be eaten.' Popular understanding has envisioned natural selection as a reified force, choosing from the most aggressive competitors and eliminating the weak. This has led to the widespread assumption that surviving 'successful' individuals and cultures are fitter and therefore superior than their opponents. Under this paradigm of biological and evolutionary determinism, it is not only implied that 'might is right' but that 'whatever is, is right.' This serves to justify modern social and political realities, and declare them the only real options as determined through centuries of competitive selection. This encapsulates a view of linear 'progress' that sees alternative schemes as unnatural and counter to human nature, and therefore imprudent.

Despite being largely absent from formal arguments within IR, elements of evolutionary theory have such a strong presence in popular consciousness that they undoubtedly influence thinking about the political world. The first extensive use of evolutionary science to substantiate the classical realist view of human nature emerged only recently, with the invocation of the scientific branches of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology. As applied in IR, these arguments have sought to prove that violence, ethnocentrism, patriarchy and competition are natural features of the human experience, thus creating the need for finding effective responses to the 'realities' these truths impose. International relations as a scholarly field has been dominated by a paradigm which sees conflict and the disharmony of difference as an inevitable feature of human nature, and recent evolutionary arguments based on sociobiology have sought to reinforce this mode of thought. Accepting the 'scientific' argument that human nature is naturally violent, ethnocentric, and competitive, human nature promises to further entrench a conception of security which focuses on distinct, competitive groups defined by their differences and prone to war.

Yet those who see human nature as aggressive, egoistic, and competitive do not have a monopoly on scientific arguments. Competing interpretations of evolutionary evidence provide grounds for questioning traditional assumptions and understandings about humanity's potential to mediate difference, active competition, conflict, and hierarchy. These alternate readings of the story of human evolution can open up a space conceptualizing revolutionary ways of thinking about what security can mean between and within states.

Realism in International Relations and Human Nature

The mainstream of the contemporary discipline of international relations still relies on key principles first enunciated by scholars in the post-Second World War era. The arguments of the so-labelled classical realists remain some of the defining concepts in IR and still shape the general orientation of scholarly study in the field. Emerging victorious from the first of the discipline's 'great debates', the realists provided theoretical response to 'idealist' approaches such as those espoused by Woodrow Wilson in the interwar period. Two of the most influential formulations of realist thought were authored by Hans Morgenthau and E.H.Carr, both of whom objected to what they saw as idealism's failure to take into consideration the underlying natural laws that caused humankind to tend towards violence and aggression.

In *Politics Among Nations*, Hans Morgenthau argues that international politics is a natural struggle for power. "Political realism," Morgenthau famously suggests, "believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature."[1] Morgenthau's specific depiction of human nature, following Nietzsche, is described as fundamentally evil and driven by a lust for power.[2] Morgenthau's citation of Nietzschean philosophy evokes one of the most famous passages of *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and, at the least and mildest, exploitation…."[3] Morgenthau therefore suggests that the human lust for power inevitably translates into an *animus dominandi*, or a desire to dominate.[4] *Politics Among Nations*, long received as a founding text in international relations, encourages students of world politics to accept this as objective, observable truth, and thus to study power politics in the world 'as it actually is.'

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[1] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th edition. (New York: Knopf, 1978), p. 4.

[2] Ulrik Enemark Petersen, "Breathing Nietzsche's Air: New Reflections on Morgenthau's Concepts of Power and Human Nature" *Alternatives* 24.1 (1999), p. 83

[3] Nietsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil.* R.J Hollingdale, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 193.

[4] Petersen, *op cit*, p. 102.

For E.H. Carr in *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* the ubiquitous thirst for power is similarly driven by a deep facet of human nature. Despite his focus on human nature, Carr relies heavily on Darwin alone, commenting that "when the harmony of interests was already threatened by conflicts of increasing gravity, the rationality of the world was saved by a good stiff dose of Darwinism. The reality of conflict was admitted."[5] Carr explains: "The exercise of power always appears to beget the appetite for more power. There is, as Dr. Niebuhr says, no possibility of drawing a sharp line between the will to power and the will to live."[6] Arguing that states are power-hungry entities and cannot be seen as morally responsible to each other, Carr draws on Hobbes' conception of the Leviathan of the state as an Artificial Man, and also on thinkers like Machiavelli and Hegel.[7] The Hobbesian social contract, the argument goes, redirects and translates the anarchy of pre-Leviathan society from the individual level to the international level, so that people forming political communities accept global chaos in exchange for domestic peace. Classical realism thus sees states operating in an anarchic realm that reflects Hobbes' state of nature, which is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[8]

For both Carr and Rienhold Niebuhr, whom he cites, the nature of states reflects the inherent nature of human social groups. In *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* Niebuhr suggests that inter-group dynamics naturally result in winners and losers, and so "conflict between the national units remains as a permanent rather than a passing characteristic of their relation to each other."[9] Niebuhr's Christian Realism undoubtedly reinforced this conception of permanent conflict, firmly linking it to the doctrine of original sin. According to Annette Freyberg-Inan, another side of Niebuhr's argument is that "man's quintessential experience as a mortal being is a pervasive sense of insecurity. From this insecurity results over-defensiveness."[10] The drive for power is magnified at the group and state level because, for many reasons, groups do not have the moral capability of individuals. Niebuhr argues that the will to conquer death by amassing power informs an egoistic and individualistic human nature. Niebuhr mirrors Nietzsche in this claim, although he argues from a theological perspective that is quite separate from the will to power.

Most of the 'fathers' of international relations theory were men raised in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, and in many ways their work was explicitly and implicitly shaped by being situatied within that

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[5] Carr, E.H. *The Twenty Years' Crisis,* Revised Edition, Michael Cox, ed., (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 208.

[6] Ibid, pp. 104-5.

[7] Ibid. Pp. 136-40.

[8] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, A.P. Martinich, ed., (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002), p. xiii.

[9] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 3.

[10] Annette Freyberg-Inan, *What Moves Man: The Realist Theory of International Relations and Its Judgement of Human Nature,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 68.

cultural context.[11] Although the theological elements of classical realist theory are not usually cited or built upon by contemporary scholars of international relations, a culturally-specific concept of 'fallen man' has certainly continued to inform conventional international relations theory. However, as the formal study of international relations continued, an explicit reliance on such culturally-specific assumptions and theological claims began to pose problems for a discipline attempting to formulate principles that could be accepted as rational, objective, and universal. In response to this problem, structural realists like Kenneth Waltz moved the theoretical cause of the security dilemma up one level, framing it around the nature of the international system itself rather than on the nature of humankind.

"Because of the difficulty of knowing such a thing as a pure human nature," Waltz writes, "[and] because the human nature we do know reflects both man's nature and the influence of his environment, definitions of human nature such as those of Spinoza and Hobbes are arbitrary and can lead to no valid social or political conclusions."[12] However, this caveat does not prevent Waltz from stating at the outset of the same volume: "Our miseries are ineluctably the product of our natures. The root of all evil is man, and thus he himself is the root of the specific evil, war."[13] This suggests that Waltz does not disagree with the classical realist human nature; it is merely that he believes it is not scientifically knowable and therefore cannot provide a solid foundation for theory. Instead, he argues that it is more prudent to study the structural constraints that encourage modern states and humans to vie for power, no matter what human nature might or might not be. To a large extent, Waltz's assertion has encouraged scholars of world politics to move away from explicit claims about human nature.

Yet the legacy of the classical realist conception of an egoistic and aggressive humanity is still reflected in many ways in contemporary international relations.[14] A competitive and individualistic view of human nature still seems to underlie arguments about international politics, informing the key concept of the security dilemma. Since humans are seen to lust for power and individual gain, no individual or group is secure from the threat of 'others.' These others are different, alien, foreign, and are thus considered to be opposed. Business as usual in contemporary international politics in general, and the state system in particular, relies on the demonization of difference and the rejection and expulsion of the other in order to foster national

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[11] As feminist thinkers in international relations have argued, the fact that these 'fathers' were 'men' in the cultural context of the mid-twentieth century undoubtedly shaped their thinking as well.

[12] Kenneth N. Waltz,. *Man, the State and War*: *A Theoretical Analysis.* Eighth Printing, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 166.

[13] Waltz, *Man, the Stat and War*, p. 3.

[14] See among others, Beate Jahn, "IR and the State of Nature: The Cultural Origins of a Ruling Ideology" *Review of International* Studies 25.3 (July 1994); George, "Realist Ethics"; Freyberg-Inan, *op cit*., p. 73.

identity and reify borders.[15] In contemporary international relations the main problematic is the potential for violence caused by a never-ending struggle for power by competing states, and the main solution is the balance of power between those states. Difference is to be seen as a source of insecurity, to be excluded, defended against, or reconciled. All of this relies, whether tacitly or expressly, on a specific conception of humanity's natural social predispositions.

Evolution, Egotism, and Domination

The second so-called great debate in the discipline of international relations was sparked as so-called behaviouralist scholars argued that the realist theory needed to adopt greater methodological rigour in supporting its claims. The behaviouralists argued that instead of employing philosophical, normative, and qualitative methodologies, scholars of international relations should formulate precise definitions for observable phenomenon so that claims could be tested and proven in a fashion similar to experiments in the natural sciences. Given the desire to connect political science with the natural sciences, it should come as no surprise that some scholars seeking methodological credibility have pointed to evolutionary theory as providing the perfect intellectual and theoretical bridge between the two.

The invocation of evolutionary concepts to prove an egoistic and warlike human nature has been common since the first publication of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories. The themes of competition, survival, and victory that seemed to permeate Darwin's work seemed to provide a truly scientific grounds for theorizing an innate drive to battle. Yet Paul Crook argues that Darwin was no determinist, and that his work stresses the human capacity to transcend the pressures of natural selection. It is therefore problematic, Crook argues, for analysts "to read into Darwin's work a necessary belief in a system of ethics chained to the empirical contours of nature."[16] Over the decades, however, this seems to be precisely what has happened. Popular understanding of Darwin's core concepts is incomplete and imprecise to say the least, but the interpretation of basic evolutionary arguments is influential.

While many people associate Darwin with the phrase "the survival of the fittest," the phrase actually belongs to Herbert Spenser, who resisted Darwin's position that evolutionary theory provides no guidance for social policy or ethics. While his ideas were published a few years before the *Origin of the Species*, Spenser is generally seen as the originator of what is known as social Darwinism. Robert Bannister has suggested that early social Darwinism was one of those interesting categories of thought in that while many thinkers were given the label, it is almost never applied to oneself. The phrase quickly gained negative connotations. For Bannister, the term 'social Darwinist' best applies to those who use the phrases *natural selection*, *the survival*

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[15] For insight, see David Campbell, *Writing Security*, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1992).

[16] Paul Crook, *Darwinism, War and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 3.

of the fittest, *struggle for existence*, or who otherwise invoke Darwin's ideas when making claims in matters of social policy.[17] I will adopt this very loose definition.

George Kateb suggests that although early social Darwinism in its pure form did not justify outright exploitation, it asserted that inequality was natural, and that society was best served by letting individuals thrive or fail. In its extended form, social Darwinism envisioned life as an unavoidable and natural struggle between groups, leading to a justification of all manners of inter-group violence including, perhaps most significantly, imperialist exploitation.[18] As Patrick Brantlinger has recounted, extinction discourse rooted in the naturalness of evolutionary arguments was especially utilized in justifying violence, and even genocide, committed against aboriginal peoples during the imperialist era.[19] This violent evolutionary discourse affected the relations between states as well. Paul Crook suggests that Darwinian concepts were construed as naturalizing war and imperialism, drawing up an evolutionary hierarchy which placed economic and military powers in an entitled position at the top. Arguments that condoned violence as an inevitable part of the natural world relied on mischaracterizations, or caricatures of the work of Darwin and his contemporaries. However, Crook also contends that historians have underplayed the degree to which Darwinian thought also inspired 'peace biology,' based on arguments that favoured Darwin's holistic ecology.[20]

Darwin himself, under Bannister's definitions, was no social Darwinist. He denied that the process of evolution had a teleological drive towards a goal, or that it moved in a linear direction, which is a key element in the argument that what evolutionary selection chooses is right and justified.[21] Despite using combative language in his writing, such as "the struggle for existence," Darwin was unwilling to give priority to themes of militarism and dominance in nature. In *The Descent of Man* he writes: "Although man, as he now exists, has few special instincts… this is no reason why he should not have retained from an extremely remote period some degree of instinctive love and sympathy for his fellows."[22] In a chapter on the mental faculties of human beings, Darwin puts an emphasis on the unique role of memory, judgement, and feeling

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[17] Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), p. xii, 2-9.

[18] George Kateb, "Democratic Individualism and its Critics" *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003), p. 298.

[19] Patrick Brantlinger. *Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races 1800-1930*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 12, 190.

[20] Crook, *Darwinism, War and History, p.* 25.

[21] Ibid*,* p. 10.

[22] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Second Edition, (New York: Hurst and Company, 1874), 124; see also Crook, *Darwinism, War and History,* p. 16.

in constructing human social relations. He suggests, in one example, that a person saving a helpless victim from a fire would not in the moment of pressure feel a utilitarian "happiness or pleasure" from behaving altruistically, but might act almost thoughtlessly as if under the influence of a deeply planted social instinct.[23] Still, responding to Herbert Spenser's suggestion that moral intuition is inherited, Darwin suggests that while many virtues may *seem* to be passed down genetically,

> It appears probable… that they become first impressed on the mental organization through habit, instruction, and example, continued during several generations in the same family, and in a quite subordinate degree, or not at all, by the individuals possessing such virtues having succeeded best in the struggle for life.[24]

It is perhaps ironic that an argument for the importance of human 'nurture' versus 'nature' is found in one of the founding texts of evolutionary theory, but this is not a contradiction. It is merely a testament to the complexities of evolutionary theory, as well as the difficulties with drawing conclusion for human behaviour based on natural selection. According to Darwin, the forces of natural influences such as genetic predisposition, sensory encouragement of behaviours, *et cetera*, in the evolution and development of human beings by no means replace the importance of habit, intergenerational teaching, mimicry, and other social influences.

Yet the inclusion of these arguments and caveats in Darwin's own texts did not prevent his ideas from taking on a life of their own. Popular interpretation of Darwin's evolutionary theories has focused on themes of aggression, active competitiveness, and egoistic struggle, translating the 'survival of the fittest' into an active social and political directive. Joshua Goldstein points out that soon after the publication of Darwin's work, nineteenth-century social Darwinists used the misrepresentation and simplification of Darwinian thought to further conservative political agendas by making claims to "unalterable biological realities."[25] Evolutionary arguments have commonly been used in arguments expounding upon the 'naturalness' of war, social hierarchies and laissez-faire economic systems. Each of these arguments resides within a tradition that views competitiveness, particularism, and ethnocentrism as biologically-programmed human responses to foreignness and difference.

In *Primate Visions*, Donna Haraway suggests that in evolutionary discourse reproductive bio-politics serve as the paradigmatic condensation of a broad set of narratives about same and different, self and other, one and many.[26] Haraway points out that traditional evolutionary biology's bottom line conclusion regarding

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[23] Darwin, *Descent of Man,* p. 137.

[24] Ibid*,* p. 139.

[25] Goldstein, Joshua S. "The Emperor's New Genes: Sociobiology and War" *International Studies Quarterly* 31.1 (1987), p. 34.

[26] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions,* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 373.

difference is that non-identity is antagonistic; it poses a fundamental threat to the survival of cooperative relationships: "In the end, only the sign of the Same, of the replication of the one identical to itself, seems to promise peace."[27] *Primate Visions* presents an effort to

> facilitate revisionings of fundamental, persistent western narratives about difference, especially racial and sexual difference; about reproduction, especially in terms of the multiplicities of generators and offspring; and about survival, especially survival imagined in the boundary conditions of both the origins and ends of history, as told within western traditions of that complex genre.[28]

Haraway attempts to re-tell and re-explore stories about the intersections between primatology and anthropology, disturbing traditional common knowledges in an attempt to open up new interpretations that will allow an expansion of possibilities for understanding the complex meanings of these narrative elements.

Sociobiology and International Relations Theory

Although social Darwinism declined in popular favour following the experience of the World Wars, the twentieth century did not see the end of attempts to use evolutionary theory to explain social dynamics. In the 1970s, sociobiology emerged as an attempt to explain human behaviour in terms of evolved genetic predispositions. Edward O. Wilson, the 'founder' of sociobiology, defined it as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviour."[29] This branch of evolutionary theory has inspired some scholars of international relations to revisit classical realist arguments about human nature, setting aside Waltz's concerns and investing their confidence in evolutionary science. These scholars seek to combine elements of rational choice theory with evolutionary arguments in an attempt to 'prove' claims that were previously considered unknowable. This sentiment has been expressed in perhaps the boldest manner by Bradley Thayer in a 2000 article in *International Security*.[30]

In arguing that an interpretation of evolutionary theory can strengthen the realist theory of international relations, Thayer favours a revitalized form of classical realism, which steps away from theorizing structural determinations of global anarchy and returns to the impact of human nature on international politics. Following Edward O. Wilson, Thayer argues that advances in the field of sociobiology offer an opportunity for "consilience" between the natural and social sciences. Sociobiology, a sub-discipline of evolutionary theory, explores how the social behaviour of animals, including humans, is shaped by natural selection at the genetic level. In particular, Thayer suggests that evolutionary science can offer a solid scientific ground for

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[27] Haraway, *Primate Visions,* p. 369.

[28] Ibid, p. 377.

[29] Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 4.

[30] Bradley A. Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin: Evolutionary Theory, Realism, and International Politics," *International Security* 25.2 (Fall 2000), p. 124-51.

proving the validity of the two realist themes of natural human egoism and domination, leading to the confirmation of a warlike human nature. In this argument, Thayer is not alone. R. Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong have similarly contended that evolutionary biology and sociobiology can offer an explanatory theory of the human propensity for warfare.[31]

According to Thayer, the goal of evolutionary theory is to understand the ultimate causes of behaviour, and because these causes are testable they provide a solid foundation for a realist approach to the study of politics.[32] This description oversimplifies the goals of evolutionary science and conflates evolutionary theory writ large with the specific intentions and goals of sociobiology, a controversial field. Furthermore, Thayer exaggerates the scientific consensus about sociobiology within evolutionary studies, as Duncan Bell and Paul MacDonald have noted.[33] This is not a minor point, for while his argument seeks to unify the natural and social sciences, Thayer has selectively chosen his scientific sources (both social and natural), read them selectively, and turned a blind eye to alternative explanations and interpretations. His article rests on two major claims, both underpinned by arguable sociobiological evidence.

The first argument Thayer puts forward is that natural selection favours egoistic individuals over altruistic ones. Following evolutionary theory, he recalls that a member of a species is relatively 'fit' in biological terms if it is better able to survive and reproduce than other members of the same community or species. For Thayer, this underscores the important concept of the 'survival of the fittest.' He suggests that since what is most important is relative, not absolute fitness, it is only logical to emphasize a competitive aspect to evolution within groups. "In a hostile environment where resources are scarce and thus survival precarious, organisms typically satisfy their own physiological needs for food, shelter, and so on before assisting others."[34]

Thayer conveys a simple version of basic principles within evolutionary science, but delves into a scientific niche by incorporating Richard Dawkin's controversial 'selfish gene' theory. Thayer asserts that because selfishness in genes increased fitness, the same sort of selfishness has spread to behaviour patterns in modern

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[31] R. Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong. "Ethnic Mobilization and the Seeds of Warfare: An Evolutionary Perspective" *International Studies Quarterly* 31.1 (1987), pp. 5-31.

[32] Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin," p. 127.

[33] Duncan A. Bell and Paul K. MacDonald, "Correspondence: Start the Evolution Without Us" *International Security* 26.1 (Summer 2001), 187. Bell and MacDonald's critique was of tremendous assistance in helping me to locate useful sources and to follow the broader debate over sociobiology.

[34] Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin," p. 131.

animals, including humans.[35] Shaw and Wong, for example, suggest that altruism and nepotism can be explained through the concept of 'inclusive fitness,' wherein natural selection favours specific genes that cause individuals to act on behalf of their gene pool. The authors use complex mathematical experiments to construct models of evolutionary humankind and explain its likely behaviours as individualistic rational choices.[36]

The second argument in Thayer's essay deals with domination and hierarchy. To prove classical realism's theory of a natural human tendency towards domination, Thayer points to the 'dominance hierarchies' observed in many social animals. The ubiquity of hierarchical, alpha-male-dominated social orders suggests to Thayer that such a pattern of organization contributes to fitness because the alternative is perpetual conflict over resources. Dominance hierarchies, he argues, avoid conflict because weaker members submit resources to dominant members instead of engaging in costly conflicts.[37] According to Edward O. Wilson, humans naturally evolve a mental framework for engaging in dominance hierarchies. "Human beings," Wilson suggests, "Are absurdly easy to indoctrinate – they *seek* it."[38] Thayer suggests that survival in a hostile world produces a fear of ostracism and a desire for the protection of a group, and argues that conformity to a dominance hierarchy lowers conflict and keeps groups together. This, in turn, results in the clash of opposing hierarchical societies.

The broad goal of Thayer's paper is to unite his two arguments to demonstrate that universal biological impulses drive human beings towards war. His argument revolves around the idea of an evolved human antipathy towards difference. Thayer suggests that xenophobia and ethnocentrism would have been helpful attributes to groups seeking to protect limited resources, and concludes that "given the contribution of xenophobia and ethnocentrism to fitness during human evolution, ethnic conflict is likely to be a recurring social phenomenon. Therefore ethnic conflict, like war and peace, is part of the fabric of international politics."[39] While Thayer acknowledges that culture and religion can dampen or exacerbate xenophobia and ethnocentrism, he still argues that these phenomena are an integral part of an evolved biological human nature. In this he follows Edward O. Wilson, who has argued that war as we know it is the evolutionary result of a phenomenon known as *kin selection*. This refers to the particular selective mechanism whereby genetic relatives affect each other's evolutionary fitness through interactions that make survival – of the relatives

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[35] Thayer, *op cit.*, p. 132.

[36] Shaw and Wong. "Ethnic Mobilization," p. 6.

[37] Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin," pp. 133-4

[38] Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 562.

[39] Ibid, p. 150.

as well of the gene or trait encouraging such interactions – more likely. According to Wilson, the continual processes of kin selection have encouraged warlike behaviours because of various competitive advantages to violent ethnocentrism.[40] With this starting point, Thayer, Shaw and Wong attempt to explain a human propensity for warfare in terms of "central tendencies in aggression and lethal conflict, which [they] maintain have been adapted to serve humans in hunter/gatherer groups for 99 percent of humanity's existence."[41] To prove this claim, Shaw and Wong attempt to formalize a cost-benefit analysis model supported by the concept of inclusive fitness. Theoretical decisions are mapped out in terms of mathematical probabilities to show how aggressive tendencies would lend individuals communities relative fitness and encourage such traits to be passed along.

Responding directly to Thayer, Duncan Bell and Paul MacDonald have expressed concern at the intellectual functionalism inherent in sociobiological explanations, suggesting that too often analysts choose a specific behaviour and read backwards into evolutionary epochs in an attempt to rationalize explanations for that behaviour. These arguments, Bell and MacDonald write, often fall into what Richard Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould have called 'adaptionism,' or "the attempt to understand all physiological and behavioural traits of an organism as evolutionary adaptations."[42] Arguments such as these are hand-crafted by their makers, and tend to carry forward their assumptions and biases. In an insightful article, Jason Edwards suggests that sociobiology and its successor, evolutionary psychology, are fundamentally political because they frame their major questions in terms of an assumed individualism. Edwards suggests that the main question in both sub-fields is: "given human nature, how is politics possible?"[43] The problem is that the 'givens' of human nature are drawn backward from common knowledges and truths about humans in society, and the game-theory experiments which seek to prove them are often created with such assumptions in mind. These arguments are seen by their critics as politicized from the very start. Sociobiology in particular has been widely interpreted as a conservative politico-scientific tool because of these basic assumptions, and because of the political writings of many sociobiologists.[44] Because sociobiology naturalizes certain behaviours like

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[40] Joshua Goldstein has offered a very helpful critique of sociobiology's application to broad political arguments. See Joshua S. Goldstein, "The Emperor's New Genes: Sociobiology and War" *International Studies Quarterly* 31.1 (1987), p. 35.

[41] Shaw and Wong. "Ethnic Mobilization," pp. 25-6.

[42] Ibid, p. 189

[43] Edwards, Jason. "Evolutionary Psychology and Politics" *Economy and Society* 12.2 (May 2003), pp. 280-98.

[44] Lewontin, R.C., Steven Rose, and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 8, 264; Goldstein , "The Emperor's New Genes," p. 39.

conflict, inequality and prejudice, Lewontin *et al.* suggest that it "sets the stage for legitimation of things as they are."[45]

The danger inherent in arguments that incorporate sociobiological arguments into examinations of modern political life, the authors say, is that such arguments naturalize variable behaviours and support discriminatory political structures. Even if certain behaviours are found to have a biological drives behind them, dismissing those behaviours as 'natural' precludes the possibility that human actors can make choices and can avoid anti-social, violent, or undesirable action.[46] While the attempt to discover a genetically-determined human nature has usually been justified under the argument that knowing humankind's basic genetic programming will help to solve the resulting social problems, discourse about human nature seems to generate self-fulfilling prophesies by putting limits on what is considered politically possible. While sociobiologists tend to distance themselves from the naturalistic fallacy that 'what is' is 'what should be,' there is still a problem with employing adaptionism to 'explain' how existing political structures because conclusions tend to be drawn in terms of conclusions that assert what 'must be' because of biologically-ingrained constraints.[47] Too firm a focus on sociobiological arguments about 'natural laws' draws attention away from humanity's potential for social and political solutions that can counteract and mediate any inherent biological impulses, whatever they may be.

A revived classical realism based on biological arguments casts biology as destiny in a manner that parallels the neo-realist sentiment that the international sphere is doomed to everlasting anarchy. Jim George quotes the English School scholar Martin Wight as writing that "hope is not a political virtue: it is a theological virtue."[48] George questions the practical result of traditional realsist claims, arguing that the suggestion that fallen man's sinful state can only be redeemed by a higher power puts limitations on what is considered

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[45] R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes: Biology, Ideology and Human Nature*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 264.

[46] Bell and MacDonald, "Correspondence," p. 188.

[47] Despite criticisms to the contrary about his work, Edward O. Wilson has written against this type of thinking:
> The moment has come to stress that there is a dangerous trap in sociobiology, one which can be avoided only by constant vigilance. The trap is the naturalistic fallacy of ethics which uncritically concludes that what is, should be. The 'what is' in human nature is to a large extent the heritage of a Pleistocene hunter-gatherer existence. When any genetic bias is demonstrated, it cannot be used to justify a continuing practice in present and future societies.

See Edward O. Wilson, "Human Decency is Animal," *New York Times*, 12 October 1975, p. 272. Retrieved via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[48] Hedley Bull, "Introduction: Martin Wight and the Study of International Relations," in Marin Wight, *Systems of States,* (Leicester: Leicester University Press), cited in Jim George, "Realist Ethics, International Relations, and Post-modernism: Thinking Beyond the Egoism-Anarchy Thematic," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 24.2 (1995), p. 206.

politically possible. Thayer's argument rejects the religious version of the fallen man for a scientific version, but similar problems remain with his 'scientific' conclusions.

Examining Sociobiological Realism

The political and philosophical debates that surround sociobiology in general are the least of the problems with Bradley Thayer's article. In fact, Thayer's argument is exactly the sort of reading of sociobiology about which its critics like Lewontin and Gould have been uncomfortably anticipating. Worse, Thayer's exercise demonstrates a misreading of many evolutionary arguments drawing conclusions with which the theorists he cites would likely distance themselves. His argument about an egoistic human nature relies on a tiresomely common oversimplification of "a classic Darwinist argument," crudely linking natural selection to the assumption that selfishness encourages evolutionary fitness; Even Thayer feels the need to qualify this argument in a footnote.[49] Thayer's citation of Richard Dawkins' selfish gene theory to provide "the second sufficient explanation for egoism" is also incredibly problematic.[50] In *The Selfish Gene,* Dawkins suggests that at the beginning of micro-organic life genes that promoted survival were key to making basic life-forms into simple 'survival machines.' Rather than viewing genes as an organism's tool for generating, Dawkins suggests that it is wiser to look at the development of complex organisms as genes' method of replicating themselves. The word *selfish* is used as a shorthand to describe a more complex phenomenon: genes that give their organic vessel advantages in survival and reproduction are successfully transmitted into future generations.[51]

However, an important part of Dawkins' work is that the 'selfishness' of genes translates into decidedly *unselfish* behaviours. Dawkins himself has had to distance himself from groups who interpreted his focus on kin selection as a reification of ethnocentrism:

> The National Front was saying something like this, "kin selection provides the basis for favoring your own race as distinct from other races, as a kind of generalization of favoring your own close family as opposed to other individuals." Kin selection doesn't do that! Kin selection favors nepotism towards your own immediate close family. It does not favor a generalization of nepotism towards millions of other people who happen to be the same color as you.[52]

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[49] Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin," p. 132.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene,* 3rd edition, (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2006). Note that a focus on genes was not a part of Darwin's theory, or those of other early evolutionists, because genetic theory was not amply developed until the 20th century.

[52] Frank Miele, "Darwin's Dangerous Disciple: An Interview with Richard Dawkins," *Skeptic* Vol 3: Issue 4, 1995, pp. 80-5.

In light of a careful consideration of the intricacies of Dawkin's thinking, Thayer's treatment of his theories seems remarkably crude and shallow. Broad conclusions seem to materialize as if from thin air: "In general," Thayer writes, "the selfishness of the gene increases its fitness, and so the behaviour spreads."[53] This line, crucial to Thayer's point, is such a brazen oversimplification and misinterpretation of Dawkin's work that Thayer's arguments about a provable natural human egoism are rendered essentially baseless in terms of scientific evidence.

Thayer's argument about the ubiquity of hierarchical structures of power rely on a dichotomous hypothetical choice between eternal conflict and structures of dominance. The suggestion that the ubiquity of male-dominated hierarchies 'contributes to fitness' in the present tense comes dangerously close to naturalizing and reifying patriarchal structures of human social organization.[54] As presented, the argument reads very much like Hobbes' *Leviathan,* in which pre-social actors sought the refuge and protection of a larger social order. In many ways, Thayer seems to be reconstructing the Leviathan using sociobiology rather clumsily to justify broad generalizations. It is certain that some mix of biology and culture have led to male-dominated cultures in the past, and there is a strong basis for the argument that humans have developed a need to belong to social groups. It is also clear that humans have the mental capacity to understand and technologies for operating within dominance hierarchies. Yet these possibilities together do not suggest, contrary to Thayer's argument, that "humans readily give allegiance to the state, or embrace religion or ideologies such as liberalism or communism, because evolution has produced a need to belong to a dominance hierarchy."[55] If humans do depend on social connectedness, must this necessarily come in the form of hierarchical, patriarchal structures? The case is not made convincingly. As I shall discuss below, alternate understandings of the connection between basic human needs, human culture, and environmental stresses can provide an understanding of dominance hierarchies that does not naturalize their ubiquity.

Beyond the problems with the scientific evidence behind Thayer's ontological claims, there are also problems with his proposed epistemological project of consilience. Using sociobiology to unite the social and natural sciences (and to give bases to a revitalized classical realism) would depend on achieving a near omnipotence, where known genetic programs could be weighed against known environmental influence, using science to predict the results. At the outset of his essay, Thayer implies that science is progressing at a rapid pace towards making this a reality. Yet evolutionary explanations for specific behaviours become incredibly problematic given all of the possible factors and externalities which might have affected evolutionary outcomes, all of which are impossible to map into even the most complex mathematical theoretical games.

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[53] Thayer, "Bringing in Darwin," p. 132.

[54] Ibid. pp. 133-4.

[55] Ibid. p. 136.

Bell and MacDonald point out that many biologists dispute whether sociobiology can offer useful commentary on humans "because of the central role of culture, language, and self-reflexivity in determining human behaviour."[56] Similarly, in response to Shaw and Wong, Joshua Goldstein cites evidence that human beings do not demonstrate an inherent tendency towards aggression, instead displaying cooperation more often. Goldstein offers the possibility that human behavioural traits like aggression, altruism, and sacrifice are shaped more by cultural transmission than by genes. This possibility enormously complicates the attempt at consilience intended by Thayer and his contemporaries, by adding in incalculable variables that come with social and cultural interactions.[57]

Because of these complications, Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin have asserted that sociobiology's grand argument is discredited since no aspect of human social behaviour has ever been linked to a specific gene or set of genes.[58] As Mary Clark observes, one of the major results of the human genome project was the falsification of the supposition that each protein produced in a human cell was coded by a separate gene. In fact, genes often work interdependently, with the same gene recurring along the chromosome and causing different outcomes depending on its position and neighbouring genes. Clark describes the complex signals and activations which occur at the genetic level, concluding that rather than a linear unidirectional blueprint, the human genome is more like an ecosystem, and can be responsive to its microscopic – and perhaps even the macroscopic – environment.[59]

Just how important are the influences culture, social behaviour, and environment to the human condition, as distinct from biological programming? In many caveats and footnotes within Thayer's own argument, he includes statements that acknowledge the importance of cultural factors in the shaping of modern human societies. If all behaviour cannot be explained by sociobiology and other evolutionary arguments because behaviours are contingent on cultural and environmental factors, how strong is the scientific support for Thayer's revived realist project? As Bell and MacDonald have suggested, many of the scientific foundations Thayer employs to support his epistemological program are indeterminate because they cannot explain when cultural or environmental factors will play a role.[60] On the ontological side, Thayer certainly comes a long way from proving that human nature is defined by and limited to egoism and dominance, as he had intended to do. If knowledge borrowed from evolutionary biology and other natural sciences suggests that culture and

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[56] Bell and MacDonald, "Correspondence," p. 189.

[57] Goldstein, "The Emperor's New Genes," p. 37.

[58] R.C. Lewontin, et al, *Not in Our Genes*, p. 251.

[59] Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, pp. 73-4.

[60] Bell and MacDonald, "Correspondence," p. 194.

environment play a significant role in shaping human behaviours, then it may not be the realist project that is best supported by a deep and sustained interdisciplinary exploration.

Human Needs and Social Potential

Citing evolutionary Science does not truly support 'realist' narratives and explanations of egoistic competition in human society, despite the fact that over the years it has often been cited by those wishing to make such cases. There is plenty of evidence in evolutionary science for explaining why biology is not destiny, and in fact, for unsettling any claim about an evolutionarily-derived 'human nature' that underlies political life. In her book *In Search of Human Nature*, Mary E. Clark has suggested that instead of a human nature defined by genetically programmed instincts, predispositions and drives, it is more useful to discuss a human nature in terms of universal needs. These needs, she argues, are as close to a 'human nature' as we humans have, since their fulfilment is necessary as a result of complex development. Clark suggests that human beings have basic biological and psychological needs for *bonding*, for *autonomy*, and for *meaning*.

Bonding with a social group, Clark says, is an evolved human propensity that was necessary for survival during our evolution, and which also became indispensable *because* of other biologically evolved traits. Situating her evolutionary arguments in the context of the Pleistocene era, she suggests that biological changes in the evolving human body demanded social changes as well. For example, as the primate brain grew in size, the birth canal could not enlarge to accommodate it. This meant that as primate intelligence evolved and increased, selective pressures encouraged primate children to be born increasingly premature, thus experiencing more and more of early childhood development outside of the womb. This, Clark argues, meant that natural selection favoured mutually supportive group behaviour.[61] A large brain therefore co-evolved with an interdependent social lifestyle. However, this is not a repeat of the sociobiological emphasis on inclusive fitness. Clark argues that not only individuals, but also *groups* were selected for traits during the most crucial phases of primate evolution. Culture became the most critical adaptation for survival in the Pleistocene as group living became vital not only to the survival of individual members, but also to the survival of the group as a whole. Communication skills and their social use became critical to survival. "Shared group intelligence," Clark suggests, "independent of genetically determined behaviours, promotes the survival of groups, and hence of all their members."[62]

While social bonding is a fundamental need, human beings also need the autonomous freedom to act individually to establish an identity. Clark suggests that this need was established during human evolution, when children would need a degree of freedom in order to experience the environment and independently

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[61] Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, 82; Goldstein, "The Emperor's New Genes," 37.

[62] Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, 83.

learn how to survive.[63] The need for autonomy, Clark insists, does not translate into a genetic predisposition towards egoistic individualism. She criticizes Machiavellian interpretations of evolutionary science, arguing that ultra-Darwinians overemphasize the ubiquity of dominance hierarchies.[64] Much of the science that supports the Hobbesian view of human nature, Clark argues, is based on studies of primates conducted under obtrusive conditions and in artificial environments. When scientific observers have developed less invasive methods for observing primates in their natural habitat, far different results were recorded where primates were seen as more peaceful, cooperative, and conciliatory. Much of the conflict, aggression, tendencies towards dominance and violence observed in primate societies, Clark writes, is the result of irregular stresses upon the individuals and the group as a whole, often posed by scientists conducting their studies.[65] Neither neo-Hobbesian sociobiologists nor the rational game theorists have correctly envisioned primate nature in its complexities, Clark asserts.

The intersection between the basic human needs for bonding and autonomy offers a space for understanding complex behaviours and social arrangements. Citing extensive ethnographic evidence, she suggests that primates have the potential for both dominance hierarchies and for egalitarian co-existence, and that the determining factor is the level of stress experienced by a group. When individuals are allowed autonomy within the context of meaningful group bonding, she argues, hierarchies are less likely to emerge. [66] The implication is that the conflict-driven hierarchies that observers like Thayer believe to be an unavoidable part of human and primate nature are instead contingent upon environmental and social circumstances, being merely the result of a failure to fulfil basic needs.

The third basic human propensity, Clark suggests, is for the creation of meaning. The evolved human ability to conceive of meaning in the world, according to Clark, has been of prime importance to the survival of groups. Communication has been critical to group survival in many ways. Shared cultural stories are key to the coherence of groups, and individual growth depends on them. The specific stories within cultures structure the existence of societies and provide standards of humanity by which members evaluate their actions. Because they are important, human beings actively defend their meaning systems from threats, and result in conflict between groups over meaning systems.[67] Furthermore, Clark argues, the particular meaning system embraced by a society can help to shape survival strategies and responses to potential stresses:

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[63] Ibid, pp. 234-5.

[64] Ibid, p. 83.

[65] Ibid, p. 84.

[66] Ibid, p. 97.

[67] Ibid, p. 237, 59.

"Whether a given culture becomes extinct or successfully adapts depends less on what *causes* the stresses it experiences than on how those stresses are interpreted and responded to. In other words, its *beliefs* are more significant than its *circumstances*."[68]

Freedom and Security

Perhaps Clark's most significant arguments for political scientists is her argument that within social groups, conflict and aggression can be mitigated by finding a way to allow members the freedom to fulfil the basic needs of bonding, autonomy, and meaning. "A healthy society," Clark writes, "meets basic human needs in a balanced way, and therefore coercive controls are unnecessary."[69] Human beings, having rapidly evolved relatively recently, are far from cohesive and consistent machines. Clark suggests that modern humans contain a large degree of internal genomic conflict, having unfinished evolutionary patterns and processes built into us which natural selection has not removed. This explains many conflicting tendencies, Clark says, including the opposite desires for bonding and autonomy.[70] Finding a way to balance these human needs has been, and remains, the most effective way to avoid conflict and encourage survival. Rather than genetic dispositions towards egoism or even quasi-egoistic altruism, it was the traits of flexibility, quick learning, problem solving, and the sharing of knowledge that were the most important adaptive qualities in the Pleistocene.[71] If there is a human nature, Clark argues, it is characterized not by genetic programming but by a natural flexibility and an ability to be adaptive.

Thus, in contrast to sociobiologists who seek to explain politics in terms of human nature, Clark argues in favour of the reverse. Thus the challenge that emerges from Clark's analysis is similar to that called for by Jason Edwards, who suggested that rather than using an assumed human nature to explain the political, it is more important to ask how social, cultural, and political forces have shaped not only human, but primate evolution.[72] An exploration along these lines is of vital importance because, as Clark writes, "How a culture perceives human nature determines the way its people behave."[73] If organized war, she suggests, first erupted

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[68] Ibid, p. 281.

[69] Ibid, p. 405.

[70] Ibid, p. 77.

[71] Ibid, p. 99.

[72] Edwards, "Evolutionary Psychology and Politics," p. 292.

[73] Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, p. 235.

from clashes over competing meaning systems, then one of the surest ways to avoid conflict is to find ways to allow such differences to coexist.[74] Not only is this possible, Clark argues, but it happens.

> It is extremely important to realize that many, many societies have existed (and still do) that have managed to provide fully satisfying and meaningful cultural narratives *without becoming exclusive*! The "Other" is *not* ubiquitously present as a threat. When strangers from unknown cultures are encountered, they are tolerated, treated as any traveler is, with hospitality and respect.[75]

Clark cites Kenneth Boulding, who has identified three major avenues, or facets of power, through which human societies have utilized in order to establish social control over the chaotic and varied impulses of human nature. These three avenues are legalized organized violence, economic power and control, and love. While perhaps a loaded word, *love* in this instance stands for the power that mutual trust, understanding, shared meaning, and compassion exert over a person's behaviour in a social group. The ratio of how these are employed, Clark argues, depends on a society's cultural narrative and assumptions about human nature.[76]

Clark describes the African concept of *ubuntu* or *botho*, which carries a range of virtuous meanings. Clark relays Archbishop Desmond Tutu's explanation of the concept's essence: "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours… A person is a person through other persons… I am human because I belong. I participate. I share."[77] For differences to coexist peacefully, Clark suggests, it is necessary to build societies that foster recognition of the connectedness of the human experience and the value of difference. "The only compromise (if we must call it that) is to accept the possibility of – and then give respect to – beliefs different than one's own."[78] The focus on human propensities and needs put forward here lays out a framework for thinking about social and political problems by paying attention to the underlying stresses which result from people's lack of freedom. When human beings are freely able to negotiate their social bonds, their autonomous movements, and to invest in meaning systems, they have the potential for peaceful and harmonious living. Key to this argument is a political ethic of difference, where Otherness is not only tolerated, but embraced and respected. Clark may not necessarily see this as an ethical assertion. Her book is constructed upon scientific evidence (however contested) and the concluding remarks are framed in terms of a practical argument. Human beings have evolved the psychological, biological, and intellectual tools for social interaction, which provide the potential for peace and for conflict. Alternate outcomes depend on which meaning systems are adopted in a culture. Some particular meaning systems add stress, disrupting the

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[74] Ibid, p. 63.

[75] Ibid, p. 273 (emphasis in original).

[76] Kenneth Boulding, cited in Mary E. Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, p. 340.

[77] Clark, *In Search of Human Nature*, p. 343.

[78] Ibid.

basic human needs as discussed above, and leading to conflict. The most valuable and lasting way to ensure peace and stability, Clark asserts, is to adopt social frameworks wherein different systems of meaning can co-exist without hierarchy.

Clark's message resonates quite closely with recent theoretical writing in the international relations subfield of critical security studies. Recent postmodernist-poststructuralist scholars like Jim George and David Campbell have advanced an approach to international ethics which mirrors many of the same intellectual impulses that seek to find ways to favour approaches and outlooks that embrace difference rather than expelling and confronting it.[79] In fact, by developing this argument from a scientific point of view, Clark offers a complementary piece to the puzzle, albeit from what is perhaps an unlikely direction. Her argument connects with these writings in two ways. First, it offers support for a concept of radical interdependence, and second, it does so in a way that does not seek a totalizing discourse or a 'meta-narrative.'

Jim George has challenged the '*egoism-anarchy thematic*' he sees as dominating the conceptualization of ethics in international relations theory. Targeting classical realists like Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and Waltz, George suggests that this thematic has been reinforced by the realist presentation of pessimistic views of human nature, as described earlier.[80] Bradley Thayer injects this egoism-anarchy thematic heavily into his sociobiological arguments. In *National Deconstruction,* Campbell, writing in the aftermath of the Balkan conflicts and international interventions, has argued that this egoistic conception of ethics contributes to an international political atmosphere where state-centric political communities are seen as the only legitimate form of political organization. The received view suggests that struggles involving issues of identity and culture can only be solved by creating territorial barriers and encapsulating differences in bordered spaces. Multiculturalism, when it is employed, is presented as a social mechanism for homogenizing differences and encouraging 'tolerance' as opposed to 'respect.'[81]

In traditional approaches to security, the authors argue, differences are something to be reconciled, translated, and erased. Tolerance is held up as a virtue, but tolerance only demands one to turn a blind eye to differences and to avoid conflict. According to observers like Thayer the tendency to detest difference is rooted in human genetics, the result of evolutionary selection. For Niebuhr, it was sinfulness and for Morgenthau it was the *animus dominandi*. Even where the 'natural' repulsion of difference does not result in violence, difference

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[79] See George, "Realist Ethics"; David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); David Campbell and Jim George, "Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations" *International Studies Quarterly* 34.3 (1990), pp. 269-93.

[80] George, "Realist Ethics," p. 199.

[81] Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, p. 169, 205-6.

must be managed. The theoretical other, under this ethical paradigm, is understood by projecting one's own identity onto her or him and turning differences into similarities. "Consequently," George writes, "the purpose of knowing the other in ethical terms becomes a process of *control*."[82] This seems to be an automatic response stemming from the ubiquity of a dominant paradigm that focuses on egoistic unitary rational actors, as implied by realist interpretations.

Both George and Campbell frame an alternative ethical basis for interaction in terms of inter-subjectivity and interdependence. They see the tendency to reject and detest difference as far more socially contingent than it is natural or unavoidable. For inspiration, they turn to the writing of Emmanuel Lévinas, whose ethical ideas portray being human as an inherently interdependent experience. Lévinas' concept of radical interdependence suggests that human beings are endlessly responsible to their others because it is only by relation to another that an individual can define herself or himself.[83] While traditional ethics always takes place in a self/Other opposition, Campbell and George use Lévinas' ideas to suggest that other approaches are possible. George quotes Foucault, who suggests that the best alternative scheme is to "disavow one's modernist God-like status and seek not to speak from universalist certitude, *for* others, but to utilize one's particular capacities to help others speak *for themselves*."[84]

Using this approach, it may be possible to conceive of political solutions and conceptual frameworks that escape the egoism-anarchy thematic. George envisions "an engaged post-modern politico-ethical perspective concerned to open up closed discursive practices to the creativity and critical capabilities of peoples seeking to understand and change their worlds in their own ways and through their own struggles."[85] Similarly, Campbell suggests that pursuing this type of thinking will assist in "Developing political modes and strategies through which our responsibility to the other can be democratically if imperfectly realized, and articulating conceptions of community that refuse the violent exclusions and limitations of identity politics."[86] These ideas reflect in many direct ways the values expressed in Mary Clark's concluding chapters. The concept of *ubuntu* she describes, for example, corresponds very closely with Lévinas' concept of radical interdependence, grounding individual subjectivity firmly in connection with social relationships.

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[82] George, "Realist Ethics," p. 209 (emphasis in original).

[83] For an excellent study of Lévinas' work, see Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Lévinas,* second edition, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

[84] Ibid, p. 222 (emphasis in original).

[85] Ibid.

[86] Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, p. 208.

For Lévinas, this is a metaphysical prerequisite of being; for Clark it is a part of our biological and psychological needs as humans.

An examination of Clark's arguments about human needs and their importance in healthy social structures can provide a 'scientific' counterpart to Lévinas' assertions of radical interdependence as a universal phenomenon. On a certain level, Lévinas' philosophy must be accepted or denied: he presents a series of claims about the nature of subjectivity and the implications for social life which the reader must evaluate. While philosophically rich, Lévinas' statements may leave some thoughtful readers, even sympathetic ones, questioning on what basis to accept his assertions as true. Read together, Clark's science complements Lévinas' metaphysical and philosophical ideas with very similar concepts, rooted instead in the basic human need for bonding and meaning as explored through psychology and evolutionary theory. She offers what might be, to some students of international relations theory, a more grounded explanation for why the ideas of Lévinas (and then perhaps Campbell and George) can and should be accepted. The later chapters of Clark's book describe in everyday terms how 'egalitarian' societies can function without excluding, reconciling, or ranking differences.

Of course, the suggestion that Clark 'backs Lévinas with science' may be uncomfortable and problematic for some readers, especially those who favour post-modern and poststructuralist approaches to the study of security. Such approaches differ from traditional approaches because they question the ontological and epistemological bases for the knowledge claims that are prevalent in traditional work. Poststructuralist thinkers in international relations are especially critical of 'meta-narratives' or overarching intellectual stories that presume to give an orderly, linear, and positivist account of complex phenomena.[87] Campbell and George have advocated an approach to political thinking that "involves a rejection of all attempts to secure an independent foundation, or Archimedean point, from which to orient and judge social action. It stresses instead the need to ground all knowledge of social life in human history, culture, and power relations."[88] While academic interdisciplinarity or non-disciplinarity is often understood as a virtue, advocates of postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches critique the imperial pretenses of positivist science especially those that seek to universalize. Bradley Thayer's invocation of Edward O. Wilson's theory of *consilience* attempts to create exactly the sort of positivist meta-theory to which poststructuralist and postmodernist writers object. By relying on purportedly objective scientific approaches to establish a master narrative that can unite the social and natural sciences, Wilson's consilience theory represents an example of the

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[87] Steve Smith, "The Contested Concept of Security" in Ken Booth, ed., *Critical Security Studies and World Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), p. 49.

[88] Campbell and George, "Patterns of Dissent," p. 270.

overzealous rationalism that typifies the modernist paradigm.[89] Sociobiology in general carries forward what post-positivist theorists see as the problematic attempt to create a unified science by drawing on knowable universals.

It is trickier to make these same criticisms of Clark because she does not make similar claims to objective truths. Her use of scientific arguments, rather than providing an ultimate theory of human behaviours, demonstrates that universal claims are unhelpful and cause intellectual distortions. By focusing on human needs but emphasizing that these needs are filled in endlessly different ways across cultures, Clark's conceptual prioritization of human needs rather than human nature opens up a space for exploring meaningful political solutions that allow for possibility of social arrangements that do not require the erasure and reconciliation of difference or the sacrifice of autonomous freedoms.

Conclusions

Unfortunately for Bradley Thayer, evolutionary arguments do not provide a simple and incontestable ontological and epistemological foundations for revitalized realism. Since arguments like Thayer's draw on controversial scientific branches of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, which arguably assume the basic features of human nature they seek to prove, the conclusions for political theory remain almost as scientifically arbitrary as Morgenthau's assumption of an *animus dominandi*. In framing the problematic of their exploration, many of these arguments assume an individualistic and egoistic human nature and question how political relations might arise out of the mechanical dynamics of self-interest. As Mary Clark's work demonstrates, this ignores important factors in the evolutionary development of the human being. Since interpersonal, cultural, political ,and social influences have had a large role in shaping the evolution of humans and our primate relatives, it is not such a simple task to explain human nature based on rational actor models and mathematical calculations.

In contrast to the sociobiology and evolutionary psychology's depiction of human nature as biologically determined, Clark argues that it is a society's construction of a 'story' of human nature that affects how people will imagine ways to live together, fulfilling basic human needs or not. Biology is not destiny, she seems to argue, but what we *believe* about our biology threatens to become our destiny if we allow it. This highlights the possibility that seemingly universal traits like competition, aggression and egoism might be contingent on the weight we lend them and not biologically determined. If we have a choice in the matter, it is possible to begin conceiving of political possibilities for global social orders that do not depend on a combative and competitive engagement with Others.

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[89] See Jung, Hwa Yol. "Edward O. Wilson's Theory of Consilience: A Hermeneutical Critique," *International Journal of Public Administration* 25.9 & 10 (2002), pp. 1171-97.

In turn, this allows a reconsideration of the conceptual lens through which to view security. If it is not programmed into our genes to be intolerant, ethnocentric, and aggressive, then we can find ways to abandon the traditions that have normalized such behaviours. Following Jim George and David Campbell, perhaps a new conception of international relationships would serve better than the current paradigm, which is based on traditional views of an aggressive and competitive human nature. It may be that, as Clark suggests, conflict can only be mitigated when basic human needs are met. Doing so, it seems, would require a rethinking of how differences are engaged with, interpreted and reconciled in both international and local societies. If we humans are not biologically destined to draw lines between ourselves and others, then it is possible for us to escape conceptions of security that necessitate aggression against, or protection from, outsiders. Perhaps the security long sought after in international relations will come not from making societies secure from difference, but making difference secure within and between states.

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