Political Realism and Human Interests

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Although political realism is often understood as a more or less homogeneous tradition fixed on certain essential concepts, John Herz's provocative piece prompts an attempt to examine realist scholarship in a way that reveals some deep antinomies: some internal tensions that make realist scholarship, at least potentially, an evolving, open-ended "dialogue." Specifically, Jürgen Habermas's categories of knowledge-constitutive interests—practical, technical, and emancipatory—are employed to distinguish two opposed aspects of the realist dialogue: practical realism and technical realism. Practical realism is guided by a practical cognitive interest in sustaining intersubjective understanding within the context of tradition. Its corresponding approach to inquiry and grounding is hermeneutic. Technical realism is guided by a technical cognitive interest in coming to grips with objective laws so as to expand powers of technical control over an objectified reality. Its approach to inquiry and grounding is essentially positivistic. Against this background, Herz's contribution to the realist dialogue is that, unique among realists, he brings a strong commitment to an emancipatory cognitive interest—an interest in self-reflection as the basis for the autonomous expression of will and consciousness in the human species' "self-formative process." Interpreted in this light, Herz is seen to employ a two-sided discursive strategy, each side addressed to one of realism's two aspects, the practical and the technical. However, though brilliant in conception, Herz's argument is unlikely to be persuasive if realist scholars are at base positivist scientists oriented by a technical interest in control. In this sense, Herz's piece represents a critical "test" of realism, its essence, and its developmental potential.

I. Introduction

The word "realism," in the context of international relations, summons forth a whole host of images and concepts. "Power politics," "balance of power," "anarchy," "the national interest," "the security dilemma"—the concepts spring to mind, all with their visual images, and all rich with historical examples. The
pictures are far from idyllic. They are drawn, though, with stark clarity. The pictures portray a politically fragmented world of pervasive insecurity, recurring violence, generalized expectations of war, and self-animating strategic logic against strategic logic. So deeply ingrained is the associated Hobbesian imagery, in fact, that one need not ask how a realist will respond to recent writings that resurrect Kantian themes of emergent holistic imperatives in a world becoming "one." One knows the answer. Realists will decry as idealistic, dangerous, or dangerously idealistic those programs and practices, as advocated by "ecological holists" and others, that would transcend the fragmented world of power politics.

It is therefore something of a surprise to read the words of John Herz, who proclaims that he is a realist, on the one hand, and who warmly embraces themes more Kantian than Hobbesian, on the other. Yes, I am a realist, Herz says, but I am a global humanist, too. Yes, I am a realist, he repeats, but in the face of mounting global threats that cannot find answers in the fragmented political order of the past, it is the height of dangerous idealism to slavishly seek guidance in the timeworn concepts of yesteryear's realism. The "existing givens" of political reality have changed, no matter how much one might wish that they had not; and political realism is nothing if it does not base its arguments on the real facts, the "existing givens."

So arguing, Herz advances a position that departs radically from the imagery we usually associate with realism. He appeals for an "attitude of universalism." He urges the surpassing of "national interests" by "global interests" in world views. He urges that states yield "portions of their cherished sovereignty" to supranational agencies. In all of this and more, his argument bespeaks a holistic view that is almost the antithesis of the more atomistic world conception one associates with realism.

The initial sense of surprise manifests a deeper dissonance—a discomforting tension born of the fact that Herz's arguments strain one's preunderstandings of political realism as a tradition. It is a tension that can be resolved in either of two ways. One way is simply to deny Herz the status of a true realist. With Kenneth
Thompson (1979), we can wonder if Herz has “abandoned the essence of political realism.” We can call him a “planetary humanist” or an “anguished romanticist.” At the very least, we can point out that Herz’s realism is somehow blended with—or contaminated by—liberal and utopian ideals, thus making him a very strange kind of realist.

A second way to resolve the tension has more to commend it, however. It is to give Herz the benefit of the doubt, so to speak, and then, once done, find in Herz’s argument a basis for reflective examination of our own prior understandings of realism. This I intend to do.

Herz’s present argument, I submit, is properly understood only in the context of its making. The immediate context is a dialogue among realists, but the broader context, reflected and sometimes distorted in the dialogue, consists of society as a whole. Within this dialogue, Herz’s present argument is only one statement. Like all such statements, it contains gaps, and it no doubt expresses some misapprehensions about the nature of the dialogue and the social order in which it occurs. Unlike many such statements, however, Herz’s argument represents an attempt, not just to say something about the world “out there,” but to bring that world reflectively to bear “right here” on realism itself—its concepts, its knowledge claims, and even its modes of inquiry and grounding. In “revisiting” realism, Herz intends to call to consciousness a commitment to human interests underlying realists’ attempts to build knowledge; and, upon that basis, to urge upon realists a critical reexamination of cherished concepts in light of changed conditions. Accordingly, if one is to understand Herz’s argument, and especially what it implies for the development of the realist tradition, one must begin with an understanding of the realist dialogue to which it is addressed.

In responding to Herz, then, my point of departure is an assessment of the realist tradition itself. My assessment does not regard realism as a finished, homogeneous tradition describable solely in terms of the “essential” concepts and claims by which it “knows” the world. Rather, apropos of Herz’s argument, I try to look deeper. I am concerned with the deeper relation between
realist concepts, knowledge claims, and modes of inquiry and grounding, on the one hand, and the world of social action that realism would inform, on the other. Here, at this deeper level, I will contend, realist scholarship is very far from being an internally harmonious tradition. At this deeper level, realist scholarship in fact contains some genuine antinomies—some critical tensions that make realism, at least potentially, a vital, open-ended tradition.

More specifically, I will try to abstract out two opposed "aspects" of the realist dialogue: what I shall call practical realism and technical realism. Each implicitly assumes a distinct relation between realist knowledge and human interests. Each is also committed to a definite and corresponding mode of inquiry and grounding in its development and validation of concepts and arguments. These opposed aspects, I will argue, appear with varying degrees of emphasis among realist scholars, but they are present in all realist scholarship. I begin with a discussion of these aspects and the relationship between them.

II. Aspects of the Realist Dialogue

In order to present these two "aspects" of realist scholarship I will rely on a vocabulary which, although originating outside of realist scholarship, permits remarkably keen insight into some of the issues raised by Herz. This vocabulary was developed by Jürgen Habermas (1971, 1975; see also 1974) in his attempt to identify some competing general orientations to the relation between knowledge, on the one hand, and human interests, on the other. Habermas's attempt in this regard starts from a position with which some realists would agree. Knowledge is not constituted objectively. It is not constituted as a "universe of facts whose lawlike connection can be grasped descriptively" (Habermas, 1971: 304). The illusion of objectivism must be replaced with the recognition that knowledge is always constituted in reflection of interests. The problem for Habermas is how to progress
beyond this position without reducing the relation between knowledge and interests to Mannheimian simplisms (Mannheim, 1936).

Recognizing this problem, Habermas (1971: 314) has provided a useful set of concepts. He has tried to identify three “knowledge-constitutive interests” which, as general cognitive interests, delineate viewpoints from which the constitution of knowledge is guided. Briefly defined, these are:

1. **The practical cognitive interest.** This is an interest in knowledge as a basis for furthering mutual, intersubjective understanding. It guides knowledge toward the development of “interpretations that make possible the orientations of action within common traditions.” The practical cognitive interest is the knowledge-constitutive interest of the historical and cultural sciences.

2. **The technical cognitive interest.** This is an interest in knowledge as a basis for extending control over objects in the subject’s environment (possibly including strategic dominance over other human beings). It guides knowledge to obtain “information that expands . . . powers of technical control.” The technical cognitive interest is the knowledge-constitutive interest of the empirical-analytic sciences. It finds its foremost philosophical expression in positivism (e.g., the Vienna Circle, Carnap, and Nagel) and critical rationalism (e.g., Popper, Lakatos, and Albert).¹

3. **The emancipatory cognitive interest.** This is an interest in securing freedom from “hypostatized forces” and conditions of distorted communication (e.g., ideology). It is rooted in the human capacities for the communicative exercise of reflective reason in light of needs, knowledge, and rules; it guides knowledge to achieve human autonomy and self-understanding by bringing to consciousness previously unapprehended determinants of the human species’ “self-formative process.” The emancipatory interest is the knowledge-guiding interest of all critically oriented sciences.

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¹ Habermas (1971: 314). Habermas tends to regard critical rationalism (e.g., Popper) as part of the positivist tradition—something that Popper strenuously denies. While acknowledging the differences which Popper emphasizes, I will hereafter refer to critical rationalism as part of positivism. In this regard, it is useful to consult Adorno et al (1969) and the exchange between Hans Albert and Habermas.
For Habermas, these three cognitive interests are interests of the human species—they are a priori interests by which the human species organizes its experience. They find their a priori basis, as interests, in the fact that humans are both toolmaking and language-using animals. Humankind has a technical cognitive interest—an interest in the creation of knowledge enabling control of objectified processes—because humans must "produce from nature what is needed for material existence through the manipulation and control of objects" (Held 1980: 255; Habermas 1971, 1975). Humankind has a practical cognitive interest—an interest in maintaining communication—because humans must communicate with one another "through the use of intersubjectively understood symbols within the context of rule-governed institutions" (Held 1980: 255; Habermas 1971, 1975). And humankind has an emancipatory interest—an interest in the unrestrained, communicative exercise of reflective reason—because, amidst "the exigencies of man's struggle for self-preservation," only reflection on the self-formative process of the human species encourages consciousness of hitherto unacknowledged influences on humans and thereby makes possible the autonomous, self-conscious development of life (Habermas, 1971: 211).2

This vocabulary, together with the associated conceptualization, is essential to my attempt to identify the two main aspects of the realist dialogue. In particular, I will rely on the first two of Habermas's three categories to define two aspects: practical realism and technical realism.

On the one hand, there is the aspect I am calling *practical realism*. This is the realism of the Hans Morgenthau who writes of the "moral consensus" of balance of power; who says, "No study of politics . . . can be disinterested in the sense that it is able to divorce knowledge from action"; and who adopts the historian's

2. Habermas (1971: 211). For Habermas, it is important to note, these three cognitive interests, though apprehendable a priori, are accorded a rather problematic quasi-transcendental status. For they "arise from the actual structures of human life." In particular, the emancipatory interest has a "derivative status." Unlike the practical and technical interests, the emancipatory interest entails no immediate, necessary connection of knowledge to an "external" interest in its utilization (it is instead reflective reason grasping its interest in reason); the actual historical form in which an emancipatory interest finds expression, if it does, depends upon the stage of development in both technical activity and conditions of symbolic interaction. See Habermas (1975: 176).
pose in peering over the statesman's shoulder, listening in on his conversations, and anticipating his thoughts (Morgenthau, 1978: 224, 23, 5). This aspect of realism, practical realism, is oriented by a practical cognitive interest. It sees the aim of knowledge as principally "the attainment of possible consensus among actors in the framework of a self-understanding derived from tradition" (Habermas, 1971: 304). Its primary approach to inquiry and grounding corresponds to that of the historical and cultural sciences. As elaborated below, its approach is hermeneutical.

On the other hand, there is the aspect I am calling technical realism. This is the realism of the Hans Morgenthau who writes that "politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws"; who aspires to "scientific"; who invokes a prior theoretical framework of "interest defined as power"; and who values this framework because it "imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible" (Morgenthau 1978: 4-5). Technical realism is oriented by a technical cognitive interest. It sees the aim of knowledge as the development of information — regarding universal laws and their operation — that can expand powers of technical control over an objectified environment. Its approach to inquiry and grounding is reminiscent of positivistic reconstructions of natural science.

As I say, these two aspects, practical realism and technical realism, are abstractions. With rare exceptions, it cannot be said that a given realist scholar wholly expresses one aspect and wholly denies the other. Morgenthau, in fact, is exemplary in this regard, since both aspects appear in his work.

Nevertheless, the two aspects are opposed in many respects. To see how this is so, how realists reconcile the two aspects, and what this implies for possible developments in the realist dialogue, it is necessary to look somewhat more closely at these two aspects.

A. PRACTICAL REALISM

In general, practical realism stresses the "uniquely human" character of its subject matter. Human beings can converse,
remember, know, expect, and attach meaning to themselves and their circumstances. Human beings can also miscommunicate, forget, misunderstand, falsely expect, and summon forth forgotten experiences in ways that lend novel layers of meaning to seemingly similar circumstances. Human beings, in short, are subjectivities.

Thus, from the vantage point of practical realism, where there are regularities in life—and where social relations are ordered and predictable—this fact is not totally reducible to the operation of some eternal or natural law. On the contrary, a regularized social order derives from a usually protracted and arduous (although not necessarily intentional) struggle to establish and maintain a consensus of co-reflective self-understanding: a tradition.

For practical realism, the principal social role of realist scholarship derives from the fact that the tradition that binds participants within a common order is a fragile, often only implicit set of relations. Human beings are ever prone to forget or repress aspects of their pasts, to mistake the ephemeral for the eternal, to become caught up in and falsely universalize the experiences of the moment, and thus to lose sight of (or even do violence to) the co-reflectively shared norms, expectations, rights, and meanings built up under the weight of long-historical experience.

Given this tendency, the task of practical realism is clear. It is almost that of an agent acting on behalf of history—or, rather, on behalf of an historically established tradition. Practical realism strives to examine history, to distill an understanding of the practical consensus, to communicate this distilled understanding to each and every participant, and thereby to situate all in a transhistorical normative-practical order.

Practical realism thus serves a practical cognitive interest (Habermas: 1971). The aim is to undertake interpretations that make possible the orientation of action within a common tradition. In the practical realist aspect, valid knowledge entails, not so much an improved capacity to control one's object environment, but an improved capacity to be and behave as a worthy member of one's traditional community, with its intersubjective and consensually endorsed norms, rights, meanings,
purposes, and limitations on what the individual participants can be and might become. Drawing out the nature of such a consensus—including the language and concepts in which events find meaning and validation among the parties—is an essential task with practical import. It is essential to the integration of society, the maintenance of order, the mutuality of interaction, and the avoidance of severe, dislocating social conflict.

This understanding of the practical interest of knowledge is closely coupled with practical realism's approach to inquiry and grounding. This approach is hermeneutical. It is reminiscent, not of natural science, but of the cultural sciences. Equating knowledge with understanding, not causal explanation, its relevant metaphor is found in the interpretation of texts.3

As in the interpretation of texts, the task of the interpreter is to learn to speak, not just read, the language he would interpret. The interpreter must become part of the world of the text—the subject/object tradition being interpreted—and must learn to see and generate statements about the world as it does. The interpreter must become part of, and make his own, the same “stream of life,” including those indirectly communicated experiences that represent the empirical context of that which the text does express. He must strive for a deep, total consensus with the text—thereby to establish genuine understanding and shared expectations as well as common linguistic skills.

In so striving, though, the interpreter retains a certain humility in the face of the final authority of the text, the tradition he would understand. He knows that every interpretation has the status of an “hypothesis” to be tested. Every interpretation is tested, as it were, insofar as it generates expectations for practice, including language, that can be gauged against actual practices in the referent text. A disappointment of expectations signals the failure of interpretation and a need, therefore, to carry the dialogue forward in a way informing the interpreter's own world. An interpreter whose expectations are persistently disappointed evidently has not become part of the world he would interpret. He cannot speak its language and would not be regarded as a worthy

participant within it. Practically speaking, the interpreter would be a failure in the world of the text. Only when the interpreter's expectations close on actual practice can it be said—and then always provisionally—that the interpreter has succeeded, that the interpreter has become a successful, suitable inhabitant of the world of the subject/object text.

For practical realism, the predominant approach—the consciously invoked method, if you will—is found in just this hermeneutic attitude. Morgenthau refers to this approach when he says that we

retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversations with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts [Morgenthau, 1978: 5].

Being practical in intent and hermeneutic in approach, practical realism is not and cannot be phrased in terms of another language outside the realm of its text-analogue, the world of traditional statesmanship. Practical realism does not have the relation to its text—the world of statesmanship—that natural scientific theory has to its object nature. It cannot be to statesmanship as a metalanguage (an empirical content-free set of rules of constitution) is to ordinary language (itself intertwined with, and at once reflecting and expressing, the real stuff of experience). Rather, for practical realism, explicans and explicandum are of the same "language system," and practical realism must express its concepts, norms, and knowledge claims in terms of the very language it interprets.

It follows that the terms and knowledge claims of practical realism must be meaningful and warranted within the subjectivity of the object text itself, that is, within the traditional community of statesmen. If proposed terms, concepts, and knowledge claims are not warranted and meaningful within just this frame—if they are not meaningful to statesmen—then they have no place in practical realism. Obviously, they would express no aspect of an existing or possible consensus among statesmen themselves.
Indeed, attempts to impose such alien terms from one or another flank would threaten to overload or disrupt whatever consensus is possible within the existing language of traditional experience. In order to be admitted as terms or statements of practical realism, such alien terms must first be shown to be meaningful and warranted within the text, within the classical diplomatic language of traditional statesmanship.

If this helps to explain why *Politics Among Nations* is still "must reading" among foreign service officers, it also helps to account for realists’ attitudes toward the operationalization of concepts, including their insistence upon "the autonomy of the political sphere." Regarding concepts of power and national interest, for example, realists would remind us that no fixed, once-and-for-all operational definition is possible. The specific recognized contents of these terms at any moment depend upon the "political and cultural environments," the "political and cultural context within which foreign policy is formulated" (Morgenthau 1978: 9). The traditional community of statesmen is responsible for supplying the specific empirical contents to these terms. It will do so in a way reflecting the internal history of the community and its internalized context, not some set of laws and operations external to and unrecognized by this community. Within the hermeneutic circle of practical realism, the intersubjectivity of the traditional community of statesmen is the only possible standard of itself. Read onto this world, the language and norms of other traditions—say, economics, religion, law, or positivistic social science—are meaningless or worse unless they can be rewritten, justified within, and hence subordinated to the language of the traditional community of statesmen.

All of this suggests that practical realism does obey a systematically describable, internally consistent logic of development—a hermeneutic logic articulated with a practical cognitive interest. None of this suggests, however, that the practical aspect of realism stands alone. Undiscussed in my description of the practical aspect are many of the issues that one would expect to see raised in any reasonably complete description of political realism. How, in the first place, do realists identify the true
tradition of statesmanship, as opposed to external practices, that merit their hermeneutic approach to understanding? How is the "political sphere" set off from other spheres? And how do realists reconcile a practical interest in intersubjective understanding, on the one hand, with the mutually objectifying instrumentalism of power politics, on the other? These questions begin to find answers in technical realism.

B. TECHNICAL REALISM

All realists are technical realists, at least in part, but it is in the so-called "modern realism" of Kenneth Waltz that technical realism finds its starkest approval. Waltz's position in realist scholarship is extreme. He is first, foremost, and only a technical realist. He is a "scientific" realist stripped of all practical pretensions. As such, his work, especially his *Theory of International Politics* (1979), performs a valuable service for my purposes. His work lays bare the cognitive interest and the associated approach to inquiry and grounding that are the hallmarks of the technical aspect of all realist scholarship.  

Specifically, Waltz speaks for the technical aspect of all realist scholarship when he says that the understanding of theory "does not accord with usage in much of traditional political theory, which is concerned more with philosophical interpretation than with theoretical explanation" (1979: 6). Theory is given a definition corresponding to positivistic understandings of theory in the natural sciences. A theory is understood to be a set of statements embodying assumptions and explaining laws, where laws are repeatedly observed relations between variables of an objectified reality. As Waltz (1979: 9-10) puts it:

By a theory the significance of the observed is made manifest. A theory arranges phenomena so that they are seen as mutually dependent; it connects otherwise disparate facts: it shows how changes in some phenomena necessarily entail changes in others.

4. In drawing upon Waltz, I almost totally ignore his "theory" per se, concentrating instead on his understanding of what theory is, how it is constructed, and its redeeming social utility. On Waltz's theory, see Ashley (1980b).
The words recall Morgenthau's (1978: 3) claim that a theory brings "order and meaning to a mass of phenomena which without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible."

As Waltz also makes clear, theory in this sense does not arise through a one-sided process of induction from facts or everyday practice. There is no expectation that theoretical knowledge will necessarily find expression in reality—in some already existing tradition, for example. Rather, theory is seen to exist (in Popperian language) in another "world" (Popper, 1972), a world "distinct from the reality it explains." Theory is detached from practice and cannot be made identical to it. Nor can theory be reduced to the language of practice, for, as Waltz (1979: 7, 11) stresses, theoretical notions "have no meaning outside of the theory in which they appear." Morgenthau (1978: 8) would have agreed. "It is no argument against the theory presented here," he wrote, "that actual foreign policy cannot live up to it."

How, then, is theory generated? On this question most realists are vague. Waltz shows us why: Within the technical aspect of realism, as in positivist reconstructions of science, the background intersubjective understandings that go into the making of theory are not to be systematically interpreted or criticized. The position is reminiscent of Karl Popper's (1935) fascination with "bold conjectures." "How are [theories] made?" Waltz asks. "Creatively," he answers. The construction of a theory comes only when "a brilliant intuition flashes, a creative idea emerges." It is all very mysterious. "One cannot say how the intuition comes and how the idea is born" (Waltz, 1979: 9).

Indeed, one is not even allowed to ask. The subjective process of theory construction, rendered mysterious, is bracketed and set beyond the scope of rational inquiry and criticism. There is no allowance for questioning the background intersubjective understandings that permit the theorist to arrive at just this "brilliant intuition," the background language of experience through which his "creative idea" is communicable to others, or the background intersubjective understandings that permit the theorist and others to agree on the facts in need of explaining. Nor is there allowance for questioning the dependence of these background under-
standings on evolving historical conditions that might be beyond the frame of consciousness. The theory, if it is to be regarded as anything more than the personally meaningful nonsense of a lunatic, depends upon such intersubjective preunderstandings. Yet as Waltz's work so clearly illustrates, realists disallow critical interpretations of these intersubjective processes even as they depend upon them.

This bracketing, which secures the technical-theoretical basis of realist scholarship against systematic interpretive criticism, is affected in several ways. Perhaps the foremost way, most pronounced in Morgenthau's work but absent from Waltz's, is to invoke a metaphysical system as an unassailable defense of theory. Thus, the Niebuhrian metaphysics of fallen man—man with a "will-to-power"—enters realism, not as the necessary kernel of theory, but as an hypothesized defense for the assertion that "the struggle for power is universal in time and space and is an undeniable fact of experience," (Niebuhr, 1940, 1953; Morgenthau, 1978: 36). As Morgenthau well recognized, however, this metaphysical defense is not a rational defense of theory. It is antirationalistic.

The rational justification of technical realism's theory, as Waltz stresses, is found in terms of its usefulness. Here, though, usefulness does not refer to a theory's capacity to sustain a practical consensus of mutual understanding. Instead, the usefulness of theoretical explanation resides in its capacities to orient purposive-rational attempts to exert control over an objectified reality. Waltz (1979: 6) is very straightforward on the point. "The urge to explain," he says, "is not born of idle curiosity alone. It is produced also by the desire to control, or at least to know if control is possible."

A theory, Waltz indicates, goes beyond "knowledge of the regularity of associations embodied in laws." A theory tells us "why a particular association holds" so that we might be informed as to "whether we can exercise control and how we might go about doing so." Put differently, a theory provides an explanation of relations between means and ends and thereby fulfills the purposive-rational interest in behaving efficiently—in working
“with [objective] forces, not against them,” to use Morgenthau’s (1978: 3) words. Herein is technical realism’s rational justification of theory: a purposive-rational justification. Herein, also, is its knowledge-constitutive interest: a technical cognitive interest.

As long as theory demonstrably serves this technical cognitive interest, it is considered valid from the vantage point of technical realism. The question then becomes: How can a theory’s utility as an instrument for apprehending reality be tested? “The test by which a theory may be judged,” according to Morgenthau (1978: 3), “is not a priori and abstract but empirical and pragmatic.” A theory “must meet a dual test, an empirical and logical one”:

Do the facts as they actually are lend themselves to the interpretation the theory has put upon them, and do conclusions at which the theory arrives follow with logical necessity from its premises? In short, is the theory consistent with the facts and within itself?

Waltz accords with this view, sharpens it, and draws out its distinctively positivistic character. As Waltz (1979: 13-16) understands the testing of theory, it involves the logical deduction of testable hypotheses and the subjecting of these hypotheses to a variety of distinct and demanding experimental and observational tests under conditions where perturbing variables can be controlled or eliminated. For Waltz, as for Morgenthau, the testing of theory is a matter of imitating control operations and observing results: The theory should be a logical system that can generate reliable expectations as to the results of certain control operations; accordingly, to the extent that the theory’s expectations correspond with actual historical results where the control conditions contemplated by the theory obtain, the theory is said to find corroboration. To the extent that expectations generated by theory do not correspond with actual historical results, the theory’s worth as an hypostatized basis for the exercise of control over an objectified reality is called into question. If it flunks the “quality control” tests, then it is an inadequate and unreliable...

5. Waltz (1979: 13-16). Waltz later considers other possible tests; “confirmatory tests” and comparisons across similarly and differently structured domains.
instrument, and it is said to be falsified—*presuming of course that a more reliable instrument is available.*

The theory itself is expressed in different ways by different realists. But at base, I think, there is a common "kernel" to all realist formulations. Crudely summarized, the kernel may be said to start from an *impossibility theorem,* which all realists take to be axiomatic and therefore in need of no defense: *There exists no actual or immanent universal consensus that will or can for a long time satisfy the real and emerging wants and needs of all states and peoples.* In more Morgenthauian (1978: 179) language, the world is seen to be made up of a multiplicity of units whose interests are antagonistically poised, with the result that universal moral principles can never be fully realized in practice. From this "impossibility theorem" all else follows:

From it follows the expectation that policies, practices, and movements aiming or tending toward the universal realization of some particular norms or interests must at some point reach a threshold beyond which the satisfaction of some participants' wants and needs comes only at the expense of others.

From this, in turn, follows the expectation that when programs and practices reach beyond this threshold, participants can no longer communicatively interact to serve their mutual needs and wants, but can only act on and use one another as mere things to be manipulated, controlled, deflected, or balanced.

From this follows the expectation that international relations is inherently a competitive realm, with competition centering, not on absolute ends, but on relative means—on the instruments and agencies of mutual control. Competition over means is, so to speak, the main animating force of international political development. Although some states and statesmen might fail to enter the "race," they are destined to sooner or later "fall by the wayside" of history.

From this, finally, follows the belief that power is an interest, at once basic, universal, and historically unsurpassable. Inescapably, whether they acknowledge it or not, all states and statesmen—indeed, all people—are potentially the objects of power. As they are, they have an objectively necessary interest in power. Interest, necessity, and power are soldered into one: *raison d'état.*
This, I think, is a fair rendition of the technical realist "theory kernel." Upon it, all other facets of theory are built. Attempts to assay the "elements of national power," attempts to identify the "inevitable" laws of balance of power, and attempts to deduce the expected consequences of various control operations, such as "divide and rule"—all build upon the "theory kernel."

Theory formulated in technical realism thus concerns itself with the category of objective necessity, not the more subjective categories of contingency and choice, norms, and values. Technical realism does not assert, however, that international politics can be fully accounted for in terms of objective laws. As Morgenthau (1978: xi) wrote, "Nothing I have read or learned in recent years has dissuaded me from my conviction that the theoretical understanding of international politics is possible only within relatively narrow limits." Waltz (1979: 68) puts it in more prosaic terms: "The behavior of states and statesmen . . . is indeterminate." Technical realist theory thus does not try to predict, nor to explain, the policies and behaviors of individual states and statesmen. It concerns itself, instead, with general tendencies and potentialities and the likelihoods of different systemic outcomes under various conditions. That is why, as Waltz indicates, technical realist theory is hard to test. But that is also why technical realism leaves room for practical realism.

The point to be stressed, though, is that technical realism's cognitive interest, its associated methodology of inquiry and grounding, and the theory it produces and validates are all in complete accord. As to its technical cognitive interest, technical realism:

—would constitute knowledge in order to expand powers of technical control over an objectified reality.
—would conceive of international politics in terms of some fixed structure of being which channels objective forces and constrains outcomes attending alternative programs, policies, and designs.
—would gauge knowledge in terms of a purposive-rational criterion: the enhancement of the efficiency of means.
As to its approach to inquiry and grounding, technical realism:

—would bracket and set aside questions of ascertaining truth and falsity of knowledge claims and concepts, emphasizing instead the gauging of a theory’s adequacy as an hypostatized basis for control operations. (As Waltz (1979: 117) phrases the matter: “One . . . cannot legitimately ask if [theoretical] assumptions are true or false, but only if they are useful.”)

—would treat as mysterious—and suspend beyond the reach of critical interpretation—the (historically dependent) intersubjective understandings that allow the theorist to conceive of the world “just so.”

—would test and validate theory through the imitation of control operations on historical experience.

As to its theory, technical realism produces a theory wherein:

—participants’ interests are best defined in terms of the category of objective necessity.

—participants do not reflect on ultimate or universal values or norms—or on the historical contingency of their wants and needs—but instead concentrate on the efficiency of means of control.

—participants measure success by the success of control operations over an objectified reality.

Nowhere more clearly than in technical realism is the underlying identity or raison d’état and raison de science positive displayed.

C. THE RELATION BETWEEN TECHNICAL REALISM AND PRACTICAL REALISM

By now it should be clear that the two abstracted aspects are sharply opposed. Practical realism’s approach is interpretive. A practical tradition of statesmen is the real subject whose language of experience the interpreter tries to make his own. Technical
realism, by contrast, is positivistic. Theory "captures" objective forces that exist beyond history, and statesmen within history are among the objects of those forces. Clearly, neither of the two aspects can fully dominate realist scholarship without denying a place to the other. Yet each is a part of realism. How is this opposition reconciled?

Some hints as to the answer to this question have already been provided. For one thing, technical realism assumes that international political behavior is indeterminate. Although the objective forces and tendencies disclosed in technical-realist theory narrow the latitude of effective action and limit the consequences attending policies and practices, they are not understood to exactly determine behavior or the immediate motives and subjective understandings behind behavior. As a result, one may say that there is room for practical action: Practical realism has partial autonomy.

For another thing, technical realism, with its positivistic inclinations, puts itself outside of the hermeneutic circle of practical realism. As I have indicated, technical realism disallows interpretation of the intersubjective preunderstandings and language of experience by which technical realism (1) recognizes intersubjectively accessible facts and lawful regularities, (2) "intuits" concepts capable of organizing this intersubjectively accessible experience, and then (3) communicates its concepts, explanations, and associated meanings. In so doing, it establishes technical realism's total autonomy of practical hermeneutics.

Still, a more definite statement on the relationship between the two aspects is required. Ideally such a statement would be buttressed by a substantial review of realist literatures to corroborate and illustrate the relationship proposed. Here, though, I can only propose a relationship and assert that a careful reading of realist writings⁶ would substantiate my propositions. The relationship I propose has two parts.

⁶. See, for example, Aron (1966), Carr (1946), Kennan (1966), Kissinger (1964), Morgenthau (1978), Schuman (1969), Wight (1946), and Wolfers (1962).
First, the theory produced by technical realism constrains practical realism by identifying the “true tradition” worthy of interpretation and understanding. In particular:

Technical realism’s theory orients practical realism to regard as part of the ‘true tradition’ those states, statesmen, and policies that recognize the limits of any universal consensus, that are consequently conscious of their own and others’ interests in power, and that therefore seek to establish mutual understanding respecting the limits beyond which man becomes the mere object of man. So oriented, practical realism regards participants in this true tradition—for example, Metternich for Kissinger (1964) and Hay for Kennan (1957)—as the real subjects whose actions are to be interpreted, with whom the realist can ‘converse,’ and from whom the realist can learn.

Among participants in this “true tradition”—that is, as participants in this “true tradition” relate to one another—power can be regarded as a practical matter:

Among participants in the ‘true tradition’ power is not reducible to a matter of mutually directed instrumental action. It is instead an essential part of the practical language of experience by which participants sustain consciousness of their mutual dependence on a common order (such as Morgenthau’s notion of the ‘moral consensus’ of balance of power). Among participants, power becomes a matter of instrumental action (such as threats of force and use of force) only insofar as its limited exercise is sometimes necessary to clarify empirically strengths of commitment, interests, and relative capabilities that cannot be consensually ascertained through verbal interaction alone; but even here, the instrumental use of power, one participant against another, is essentially a communicative enterprise intended to adjust or clarify, not overturn, the intersubjective consensual understanding by which the ‘true tradition’ sustains its common order.

However, it must be stressed that power is a practical matter among participants in the “true tradition” only because they commonly recognize their shared interest in using power to instrumentally restrain or repress programs, practices, and
movements that betray, are outside of, but in any case threaten the "true tradition." That is to say, technical realism's theory not only identifies the "true tradition" of practical realism but also distinguishes it from its opposite:

Statesmen, policies, movements, and developments which strive or tend toward some universal consensus surpassing power politics are understood to be outside of and in opposition to the 'true tradition.' As such, they are regarded as objectified 'forces' or 'tendencies' which (like nineteenth century German nationalism for both Metternich and Kissinger) cannot be understood or interpreted but which nonetheless threaten the one true order of the 'true tradition.' They are regarded as objective forces or tendencies that can only be checked, deflected, or pitted one against the other through the coordinated instrumental actions of the 'true tradition.'

This, then, is the first part of the relationship between the two aspects. Technical realist theory constrains practical realism by (1) identifying a "true tradition" for which power is a practical matter and (2) distinguishing it from opposing universalistic designs, movements, or tendencies which are taken to represent objectified and threatening externalities.

The second part of the relationship is this. As circumscribed by the hypostatized prior theory of technical realism, the hermeneutic circle of practical realism can only confirm, but never call into question, the practical justification of the theory itself: a theory that identifies interest and power. Specifically:

The theory constrains practical realist hermeneutics such that programs, practices, conditions, and movements that aim toward or imply a possible universal consensus cannot call into question the theory that presupposes the impossibility of such a consensus. It does so by constraining practical realism to regard such practices and developments (1) as beyond the pale of hermeneutic understanding, (2) as objectified and irrational forces and tendencies that threaten to shatter or overwhelm the one true order of the 'true tradition,' and hence, (3) as forces and tendencies which participants in the 'true tradition' have an urgent, common, and practical interest in collectively recognizing and restraining through the coordinated use of power.
In short, thanks to the constraint imposed by prior technical theory, the very empirical developments that might seem to invalidate the theory’s essential impossibility theorem are recorded in practical realism as threatening developments that justify the immediate practical relevance of the theory built upon that theorem.

Taken together, these two parts come to one point: technical realism provides the autonomous scientific-technological base of realism’s partially autonomous practical superstructure. The technical base, oriented by a technical cognitive interest in control, remains autonomous and immune to criticism in light of practical developments as long as those who would and can exert control find guidance in the theory that the base provides. As long as at least some powers find guidance in the theory, grasp objective forces identified in it, and, wielding these forces, bend others to the system within which their own success is assured, the technical theoretical base of realism proves itself in its own terms. And it is made all the more secure in that practical realism, constrained by the theory, works toward the universalization of a superstructural “true tradition” in which (1) the questioning of the base is disallowed, and (2) opposing programs, developments, and normative systems—those that imply the possibility of a universal consensus surpassing power politics—are themselves regarded as irrational objects of power.

This, in very stylized form, is the realist dialogue, a kind of dialogue that is echoed in many a male-dominant marriage. The working male, the “technical side,” is ever dominant and operates in the realm of necessity. The dependent female, the “practical side,” is asked to maintain and adjust the intersubjective understandings, values, and ethics of the whole family in accord with the demands and opportunities emerging from the “man’s world.” So adjusted, she and the whole family are likely to join with the male in regarding the world in a manner consistent with the male’s “necessities” of finding employment, pleasing his boss, competing with other employees, advancing a career, and so on. Seldom, if ever, does she dare to criticize or advise the man on his conduct in the outside world. And on those rare occasions when the female becomes conscious of and complains about the limits of her and
the family's existence imposed by the dominant male—when she becomes aware of and complains about opportunities forgone, a career unfulfilled, friends left behind, and children ignored—she knows what answer she will hear. "Be rational, woman! Don't be so idealistic. Mine is the world of necessity. Should I change my ways, our whole world would tumble down."

III. John Herz's Contribution

Enter John Herz, who brings something novel to the dialogue just described. In reading Herz's substantial writings produced over nearly four decades—from his splendid *Political Realism and Political Idealism* through his better known *International Politics in the Atomic Age* to his most recent writings—one discovers a strong thread of continuity. It is not, to be sure, a thread reflecting a sublime certainty about some anchoring kernel of realist truth. Instead, the thread is found in Herz's commendable determination to anchor realism, above all, in *reflective reason* (Herz, 1951, 1959, 1976).

The essence of Herz's unique approach to realism is found in a critical tension that he associates with the essence of man as a social being. It is an antinomy (somewhat reminiscent of an "idealized" Freud) between ego and community, power and pity. It is an antinomy between the socially situated urge to control and subordinate one's environment, possibly including other people, on the one hand, and the urge to submerge and find the larger meaning of oneself in one's environment and one's community, on the other. It is an antinomy between "parts" and "wholes"—between the particular subject who would make the whole world the object of his interests and the individual whose interests, beliefs, and self-understandings are inescapably the objects of the world in which he acts (see especially Herz, 1951).

Exactly this antinomy animates Herz's writings. In his view, the contradiction is to be found "out there" in the reality that realists would study. The tensions he envisions between the citizen and the "rational" state or between "national interests" and "global interests" are cases in point. Importantly, though,
Herz also sees the contradiction "right here," as the organon of reason in realist scholarship. Even as realists would seek to "capture" an object reality in their concepts and knowledge claims to aid in controlling an environment or sustaining a practical consensus, realists have an interest in reflective reason for its own sake. Realism must ever see itself, its concepts, and its claims as at least potentially the "captive" objects of some real and evolving conditions yet to be understood.

The distinguishing feature of Herz's realism, then, is the depth of his commitment to an *emancipatory cognitive interest* as defined above: An interest in securing freedom from unacknowledged constraints, relations of domination, and conditions of distorted communication and understanding that deny humans the capacity to make their future through full will and consciousness. Herz's, in short, is an interest in reason as such. It is an interest in exercising reflective reason to dissolve limits on the self-conscious development of life and thereby restore to men and women a true awareness of their place in history and their capacities to make the future.

Accordingly, while Herz can recognize that knowledge has a basis in interests, he cannot accord final, uncontestable validity to norms, concepts, and knowledge claims solely because they serve (or are consistent with) the practical and technical interests in understanding and control that society consciously recognizes and endorses. For Herz, neither the technical-strategic interest in mastering an objectified environment nor the practical interest in sustaining consensual order is a sufficient interest basis for the justification of knowledge. Neither is sufficient because neither responds to the human interest in autonomy, and neither makes use of the essential human capacity by which autonomy may be achieved: self-reflection. Both leave unquestioned—and beyond the force of reason—those yet to be apprehended historical processes that shape participants' self-understandings, including their understandings of the immediate interests they call upon knowledge to serve.

This position on Herz's part is what dictates his habit "of questioning . . . assumptions, of reexamining periodically ideas and concepts." So habituated, Herz understands that being a
committed realist means being a critical nonrealist at the same time. In advancing realist norms, concepts, and arguments, Herz senses, one must also step "outside of" realism to examine critically the possibly changing conditions—the politicomilitary, technological, social, environmental conditions—amidst which realist norms are worthy (or not), realist concepts are valid (or not), and realist arguments are warranted (or not).

Thus, Herz has contributed what have become some of the most central concepts of realist scholarship: the concepts of the "security dilemma" and "impenetrability," to name two. But thus also, Herz insists that these and other realist concepts cannot be viewed as both parent and child of themselves. They cannot finally validate themselves. Instead, one must persistently and systematically examine the implications of technological, social, and economic change, not just for state-to-state relations per se, but also for the validity of the very concepts framing realists' views of the world. Herz's whole career—especially in its emphasis on the implications of the evolving "means of destruction"—attests to the seriousness he attaches to this imperative (Herz 1959, 1976).

As Herz's emancipatory interest in reason leads him ever toward a reflective pose, however, he is exposed to the charge that he moves on a path toward a kind of idealism. It is not, to be sure, the idealism of Anglo-American "legalists" and "moralists." It is a kind of idealism having a deeper lineage traceable to German Idealism, perhaps Hegel more than Kant. It is a kind of idealism that strains always for the ultimate, the absolute, the universally good and true. As a result (to assemble and apply some familiar criticisms against this form of idealism), Herz can be charged with leaping to an abstract plane of argument that (1) is "no longer integrated into history" (Horkheimer, 1974); (2) is deprived of the critical, falsifying force of conventionally endorsed sense-based evidence (Popper, 1961); (3) is detached from "sensuous human activity" (Marx, 1970); (4) denies itself all practical relevance, becoming "method as impotence" (Perry Anderson, 1976); and (5) becomes a dangerous, uncorrectable force when, upon finally closing upon the "absolute," it reasserts itself on the plane of practical activity (Popper, 1961; Morgenthau, 1978; Carr, 1946; Marx, 1970).
To examine closely Herz's present piece is to see that he is not unaware of such possible criticisms. He is conscious of the dangers associated with the position he is taking. Rather than retreat in the face of these dangers, though, Herz tries to dialectically transcend them. Far from ascending to a world of pure reason, leaving the practical and technical interests of realism behind, Herz tries to dialectically recombine these interests and the associated approaches to inquiry and grounding in a way that would carry the realist dialogue forward in response to historical change.

His discursive strategy in this regard is, I think, nothing short of brilliant. It is a two-sided strategy, each side directed against one of realism's two aspects. First, Herz tries to shift the plane of grounding for practical realist hermeneutics away from a traditional consensus of statesmanship—a "true tradition" with its associated concepts embodied in the now globalized facticity of "state," "nation," and "national interest"—and toward an anticipated universal consensus that is realizable in principle—a consensus that finds its justification, above all, through unrestrained reason. Although his intent in this respect may not be immediately apparent, this side of Herz's strategy is implicit in his attempt to demonstrate that realist concepts find different meanings as viewed from different historical, political, and economic vantage points. Much of the world, he is saying, stands outside of and actively questions the "true tradition" of practical realist hermeneutics. How can this be so? How, he asks, can we realists rationally defend and justify our traditional concepts and claims to a world that daily attests to their lack of universal meaning?

Such a justification, Herz knows, cannot be presented in terms of the traditional language of experience of the "true tradition," for the language itself is in question. To justify rationally their traditional concepts and claims, realists must appeal to experi-

7. In my opinion, Herz's two-part strategy, though brilliant in conception, is not as well executed as it might be. In part this is because Herz's present argument is quasi-autobiographical, not a systematic critique of realism, its limitations, and its potentialities. My own arguments in Section II have been meant to provide this kind of systematic treatment against which the significance of Herz's statements should become clear. In larger part, though, the problem is that the thorough execution of Herz's strategy is something that no single article can be expected to accomplish. See especially footnote 8, below.
ences beyond those that are personally meaningful in terms of the "true tradition's" personal prehistory. Realists must regard participants outside of the "true tradition," not as mere objects beyond intersubjective understanding, but as suitable partners for a dialogue. Realists must regard these "outsiders" as other subjectivities whose own prehistories and languages of experience can be interpreted, understood, and integrated within a mutual understanding embracing the "true tradition" as well. In short, the intended effect of this gesture, the first part of Herz's strategy, is to widen the hermeneutic circle of practical realism to embrace the whole of international society and its history, not just a "true tradition" of statesmanship.

The second part of Herz's two-part strategy is directed at technical realism. In effect, he argues that (1) a "triad" of threats has projected the once remote but always universal interest in the survival of the human species onto the immediate plane of real, urgent problems requiring technical solutions; hence (2) the once seemingly idealistic emancipatory interest in the human species' reason, autonomy, and conscious self-creation has come to coincide with the technical cognitive interest at the base of realism. The unrestrained exercise of reason, he is saying, has become a technical matter—a superordinate matter of human survival that transcends all particular interests.

This part of Herz's strategy is crucial, for its goes to the very base of realism and its technical cognitive interest. In the first part of his strategy, Herz would expand the hermeneutic circle of practical realism, but as I tried to show earlier, this "superstructural" shift cannot occur so long as the base of technical realism is left unchallenged. Somehow Herz must succeed in demonstrating something to those for whom a theory founded upon the impossibility theorem serves a technical cognitive interest in control over others. He must demonstrate that they have a superordinate interest that would lead them to want to question the theory and the impossibility theorem itself.

Here the second part of his strategy enters. To say that the survival of the human species is at stake is to say that everyone's survival is at stake, including those people and societies that
benefit in every other way from the protracted political fragmentation of the world. When the survival of the human species is seen to be at stake, even those whose first concern is to maintain control over others might be willing to admit a need to get control of themselves. Even they would want to widen the hermeneutic circle of practical realism to embrace the whole of international society. And even they might hope that in the expanded dialogue, technical realism and its impossibility theorem would be proven wrong.8

Taken together, the two sides of this discursive strategy are, as I say, brilliant in conception. Herz's argument amounts to a transformational critique intended, not to deny or replace realism, but to find in the realist dialogue the basis for a new synthesis apropos of historical change and emergent conditions. The new synthesis he envisions is one in which immediate technical interests in control no longer subordinate practical understanding, and both no longer join in excluding as mere idealism the universalistic orientation of reflective reason. In the new synthesis, technical, practical, and emancipatory interests are coextensive. They are joined as one.

8. This part of Herz's strategy is crucial, and thanks to his introduction of this argument in the realist dialogue, we can see at once how much the classic realist conception of power politics depends upon: (1) the ability of "technological optimists" to beat down holistic "limits to growth" arguments, (2) the ability of nuclear strategists to convincingly assert that a nuclear war can be survived and "won" by at least some participants, and (3) the faintly Darwinian sentiment that, to paraphrase Churchill, when people starve they won't have the good grace to starve equally but will be at war with one another over the last morsels.

To fully execute his strategy, Herz must somehow surmount all of these positions. Here he merely asserts that a "triad of threats" puts the survival of the species in jeopardy so long as the world is politically ordered according to classic realist concepts. Going beyond this bald assertion would require a major project. Specifically, I think that the full making of his argument requires his attempt to analyze the insecurity-perpetuating states system as a now deeply institutionalized but still problematic social relation: one whose emergence, reproduction, and possible passing can be explained in terms of its real historical connections with social, economic, and natural environmental aspects of the human life process, including asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination. Only in this way would it become possible to systematically corroborate his assertions to the effect that now emergent conditions threaten the structure of human life in ways that overwhelm the states system's capacities to adapt. However, doing this requires the development of a framework in which interconnections between insecurity politics, on the one hand, and relations of production, reproduction, and exchange amidst environmental limits, on the other, are set forth. See Ashley (1980a, 1980b).
IV. Implications for the Realist Dialogue

To say that Herz's contribution to the realist dialogue is an important one is a gross understatement. To say that his strategy, brilliant in conception, succeeds in what it tries to do is another matter. Herz's aim is to tug realism toward a new synthesis centering on his universalized realist concepts. Whether or not his tugging succeeds in budging other realists depends, not entirely on his argument, but also on the realists who hear it. In making his argument, Herz necessarily assumes that my characterization of the two aspects of realism in Section II is wrong, at least in part. He necessarily assumes that for other realists, as for himself, reason is not reducible to technical realism's purposive rationality. He must assume this, for if my characterization is correct, then the realists to whom he addresses his argument are incapable of responding with any degree of self-reflectivity to arguments such as Herz's. They will not budge at all.

The realism presented in my characterization is robust against criticisms such as Herz's. Perhaps the most obvious reason, from what I have said so far, is that the technical base of realism is autonomous of the practical superstructure, with the result that criticisms lodged solely at the superstructural level of practical experience will generally be regarded as unwarranted by realists. They will miss the point. For example, consider an argument to the effect that realism falters because its concepts are out of kilter with a world full of Islamic movements, multinational corporations, stateless terrorists, and other transnational forces. Or consider the argument that realism is inadequate because the classic language of power politics fails to be responsive to imperatives for collaboration emerging with mounting economic interdependence, increasing prospects of "global tragedies of the commons," and so on. Such arguments are unwarranted, even silly, in realist eyes. They are unwarranted because, from a vantage point framed by the technical realist base, such arguments merely point out objective technical problems, external to the "true tradition," which that tradition, and it alone, can wrestle with and try to manage.

If my characterization is accurate, then for realism, the only admissible criticisms are those lodged at the level of the technical
base, and here realism’s robustness against criticism is all the more plain. Three points—all dealing with technical realism’s cognitive interest and positivistic outlook—need to be made.

First, given technical realism’s technical cognitive interest, the only admissible standard of criticism is means-ends rationality. At this level, the reflective examination of intersubjective pre-understandings is disallowed, and the onus is thrown back on the critic to show both of two things: (1) that the theory developed at the technical level does not enhance the efficiency of control operations, and (2) that there exists a “better” theory which would enhance the efficiency of control operations. In other words, the critic must beat technical realism at its own game.

Second, technical realism, like positivist science in general, is prepared to pass judgment on only one kind of end: Again, the enhancement of the efficiency of means. Like positivist science, technical realism conceives of itself as value neutral and tries not at all to establish an objective basis for values, ethics, and ends. In so doing, though, it implicitly sanctions a particular kind of ethics: a decisionistic ethics based only on the individual actor’s personal commitment, belief, or faith. As a result, technical realism is totally immune to criticisms that would point out that a world ordered according to realist concepts is incapable of realizing global ends or humanistic values. As far as technical realism is concerned, none exist; and although individual realists might have their own personal commitment to some ethical system, such a commitment is only a personal one. It introduces no tension whatsoever into their understanding of objective laws.9

9. To be clear, realism does admit consideration of norms, ethics, and mores, but these enter realism solely at the superstructural practical level, and their entry is not accounted for by the technical theoretical base. Instead, for Morgenthau as for most realists, these norms, ethics, and mores enter realism as exogenous, ad hoc terms which are of concern, not so much because of their contents, per se, but because of their functions: as “limitations on power.” Still, precisely because these norms, ethics, and mores originate outside of the theoretical base, realism provides no objective basis for assessing their historical dependence, ideological distortions, and/or truth content. Whether or not one agrees or disagrees with these norms, ethics, and mores remains purely a matter of personal choice.
Third, technical realism is robust against criticism because of the mutual reinforcement of its positivist outlook, on the one hand, and the theory of power politics, on the other. In technical realism's positivistic outlook, knowledge is redeemed in terms of its enhancement of some subject's power of technical control over an object reality, where that object reality happens to be made up of other subjectivities. The problem, though, is that if everyone is subject and everyone is object, with no hierarchy of control relations among them, then positivist science makes no sense at all. Under such circumstances, the technically useful information given to one would be equally accessible and useful to all, and the moment it is applied by all, the whole system would be transformed in a way making the original information useless at best. Here the theory of power politics comes to the rescue. For realist theory simply submits that while all states are objects of the power of at least one other—therefore having their interests at least partially shaped in terms of objective necessities—some are more powerful than others. And being powerful means being situated amidst hierarchical relationships such that, relative to others, one has greater autonomy and is therefore able to relate to others more as subject than as object. While the strong "do what they can," moreover, they are also positioned to disproportionately use and value a science of international politics that at once (1) orients their efficient exercise of control to reproduce the hierarchy and sustain their positions within it, (2) denies the possibility of a world ordered in any other way, and (3) disallows any objective basis for values or ethics from which one might criticize things as they are.

The implication should be clear: So long as the world is an hierarchical order of domination, the dominant will always retain an interest in realist concepts and claims; and being dominant, they will try, with varying degrees of success, to make the world in reflection of those concepts and claims. In the end, the only kind of criticism that would possibly do away with realism is a global revolutionary change that would put an end to the current order of domination without establishing a new one in its place. In the end, this, and only this, is the kind of falsifying evidence that realism will recognize.
Again, to say that realism is robust against criticism in these ways is to say that my presentation of the base-superstructure relation between technical and practical aspects is an accurate characterization. It is also, in an important sense, to insult realists by suggesting that, at the base of it all, there is no opposition between “scientific man” and “power politics.” Reducing reason to purposive rationality, gauging action solely in terms of the efficiency of means, and one-sidedly concentrating on the “is,” realists are “scientific men.” For the late Hans Morgenthau, such an assertion would have to be denied (1965).

Its denial, though, is a matter of actual scholarly practice, not declaratory policy, and a way of measuring that practice is provided by Herz’s present piece. As I have said, Herz wants to believe and must believe that there is more to realism than my characterization suggests. His argument appeals to realists to break out of the confines of purposive rationality, exercise their essentially human reflective capacities, and transcend the technical interest in control. He believes that realism is capable of doing so. Whether or not realism is in fact capable of living up to Herz’s understanding of its potential is an empirical question. It is a question that only realists, in the quality of their responses to Herz’s contribution, can answer.

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