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The Honor Motive in International Relations>

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The Honor Motive in International Relations

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Abstract

The Honor Motive in International Relations

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This report aims to broaden the horizon of research questions in international relations by encouraging a greater appreciation for the complexity of individual and collective motivations. More specifically, the report focuses on why the honor motive is ignored in the discipline and why it deserves more attention.

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Introduction

The intellectual tendency of modern, enlightened, liberal individuals and societies is to regard honor as outmoded and archaic. Honor is associated with the relic of aristocracy, tribalism, stratified hierarchies, and ridiculous dueling. The notion of honor, however, has a long and important lineage in international relations. In Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, the Athenians famously claim that they are compelled to war by "fear, honor, and profit."¹ In fact, according to the Greek historian, honor was the very catalyst for the 27-year-long war between Athens and Sparta. Thucydides describes how the commercial Corinthians meddled in a strategically reckless quarrel "out of hatred" for their adversary, the Corcyraeans, who posed no threat to the Corinthians' economic or security interests. The reason for this hatred was that the Corcyraeans insulted the Corinthians and "treated them contemptuously."² In response, the Corinthians sought a long and bloody conflict to punish those they viewed as their disrespectful subordinates.

Today, by contrast, the field of international relations has lost sight of honor as a motivation. Conventional paradigms and research methods in IR typically bracket any examination of motivations. Instead, scholars focus on establishing predictive accuracy through parsimonious theories. These theories assume states are motivated not by honor but only by what Thucydides called fear and profit, or security interests and economic gain. These contemporary theories dismiss or altogether avoid the idea that foreign policy is shaped by a spirited moral defense or assertion of one's individual or national

¹ Victor Davis Hanson and Robert B Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War* (Free Press, 1998), 1.75-6.

² *Ibid.*, 1.25-1.35.

worthiness, a desire to escape shame and humiliation, or a prideful desire to avenge wrong and restore one's reputation and moral ideals. When scholars do acknowledge the presence of concern for esteem, they typically reduce the phenomenon to an underlying concern for greater power, security, and economic gain.

This report aims to broaden the horizon of research questions in international relations by encouraging a greater appreciation for the complexity of individual and collective motivations. More specifically, the report focuses on why the honor motive is ignored in the discipline and why it deserves more attention.

What Is Honor?

Honor is the assertion or defense of a principle or cause that transcends expedient, materialistic calculations.³ Honorable behavior speaks with the pretense of universal principles of justice or self-worth. But honor is always arbitrary in the sense that honorable behavior is attached to one's own concern—whether person, family, property, tribe, nation, or ideology. Honor connects one's private circumstance with a principle and its worthiness. Even though honor is the source of self-concern, it is different from the concern of self-preservation and wealth because such material considerations are subordinated or instrumental to attaining a more intangible desire, such as victory, autonomy, or respect. Honorable behavior is done out self-respect, rather than principally out of fear of punishment or a reward that goes beyond the personal gratification inherent in the action.⁴ Thus honor can restrain prudential calculation in order to look for the greater gratification that is attained by fulfilling moralistic and indignant desire.⁵ While codes of honors are conventional and conditioned by society, honor is a universal phenomenon of human nature.⁶

³ Harvey Claflin Mansfield, *Manliness* (Yale University Press, 2006). 65. Peter McNamara, *The Noblest Minds: Fame, Honor, and the American Founding* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999)., 214.

⁴ Sharon R Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁵ Thomas L Pangle, "Interpretive Essay," *Thomas L. Pangle The Laws of Plato*, New York: Basic Books (1980).

⁶ See Krause, *Liberalism with Honor*.

The Puzzle of Honor in IR

Contemporary theories of international relations tend to simply avoid or even dismiss “intangible,” moralistic motivations of individuals and nations. Many positivist IR theories regard moralistic language and beliefs as a kind of rhetorical or psychological shell that either reflects, conceals, or is reducible to underlying structural, material, and strategic variables and interests.⁷ While there is a small (and perhaps growing) recognition among IR scholars of the importance of status, prestige, and reputation, there have been no serious attempts to demonstrate the existence and importance of honor as an irreducible moralistic motivation.⁸ In one sense, the discipline of IR merely reflects the broader cultural and intellectual tendency in the West to regard honor as an antiquated and even patriarchal concept that is no longer a relevant or worthy goal.⁹

And yet, when considering concrete cases, it is difficult to deny the perennial and irrepressible intuition that honor is a central motive in conflict. One striking example of “everyday” honor is France’s national soccer team loss during 2006 World Cup final. In that match, France’s star player, Zinedine Zidane, was expelled in the 110th minute of the final game after head-butting an Italian opponent who insulted his sister and mother. Years later, Zidane said he “would rather die” than apologize to his victim. As he put it,

⁷ J. Goldsmith and E. Posner, “Moral and Legal Rhetoric in International Relations: A Rational Choice Perspective,” *U Chicago Law & Economics, Olin Working Paper*, no. 108 (2000).

⁸ R. Wolf, “Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition,” *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (2011): 92; B. O’Neill, “Mediating National Honour: Lessons from the Era of Dueling,” *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics (JITE)/Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft* (2003); R.N. Lebow, “Fear, Interest and Honour: Outlines of a Theory of International Relations,” *International Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2006); S. Joshi, “Honor in International Relations,” (Working Paper, 2008); E. Abrams and D. Kagan, *Honor among Nations: Intangible Interests and Foreign Policy* (Ethics & Public Policy Center, 1998).

⁹ James Bowman, *Honor: A History* (Encounter Books, 2007).

he “could never have lived with himself” had he remained in the game instead of punishing a man who insulted the honor of his family.¹⁰

Even, or especially, in cases of war—when necessities of material power and security concentrate the mind—concern for one’s honor appear in the opinions and justifications of statesmen. For example, Thomas Jefferson justified rejection of the Barbary Pirates’ demand for tribute in part on the humiliation it would bring the United States. Indeed, his war against them was justified as an effort to “chastise their insolence.”¹¹ During the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, nearly all of the major delegates revealed a desire to subject Germany to a punitive peace. Despite the fact that the terms and enforcement mechanisms did not significantly weaken Germany (and arguably, in some respects, strengthened the regime), Germany recognized the punitive tone of the treaty and perpetually sought to overturn the humiliation.¹² During the Vietnam War, Lyndon Johnson escalated U.S. involvement on the grounds that “Our national honor is at stake in Southeast Asia, and we are going to protect it.” When the war turned into a

¹⁰ Zinedine Zidane: I'd "rather die" than say sorry - ESPN Soccernet
Espnfc.com (2010) Zinedine Zidane: I'd "rather die" than say sorry - ESPN Soccernet. [online] Available at: http://espnfc.com/world-cup/story/_/id/749212/ce/uk/?cc=5901 [Accessed: 30 Apr 2013].
Zidane is glad he was sent off in 2006 World Cup final | M24 Digital
M24digital.com (2010) Zidane is glad he was sent off in 2006 World Cup final | M24 Digital. [online] Available at: <http://m24digital.com/en/2009/12/22/zidane-is-glad-he-was-sent-off-in-the-2006-world-cup-final/comment-page-1/> [Accessed: 30 Apr 2013].

¹¹ Allan Dafoe and Devin M Caughey, "Honor and War: Using Southern Presidents to Identify Reputational Effects in International Conflict," *Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley* (2011).

¹² Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1995). M. Trachtenberg, "Reparation at the Paris Peace Conference," *The Journal of Modern History* (1979). Sally Marks, "The Myths of Reparations," *Central European History* 11, no. 3 (1978). Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

stalemate, he rejected withdrawal because, he explained, it would dishonor America's commitment.¹³

Appeal to honor, it seems, is not merely rhetorical or instrumental. In fact, it is not uncommon for commentators and policymakers of all ideological stripes to turn to explanations of honor, pride, shame, and humiliation to make sense of global events. For example, a recent *New York Times* op-ed by a former spokesman for Iran's nuclear negotiators explained the importance of honor and prestige in influencing Iranian incentives.¹⁴ Similarly, a recent *Wall Street Journal* article considered the seemingly "bizarre" British aggression over the Falklands that can be explained only by recourse to appreciation for pride and honor.¹⁵ As columnist Thomas Friedman put it: "If I've learned one thing covering world affairs, it's this: The single most underappreciate force in international relations is humiliation."¹⁶ Friedman was merely echoing something that Henry Kissinger wrote decades before: "no serious policymaker could allow himself to succumb to the fictional debunking of prestige or honor or credibility."¹⁷

The evidence that honor matters goes beyond anecdotes and intuition. It is also supported by a broad range of disciplines, especially philosophy, theology, literature,

¹³ Quoted in Dafoe and Caughey, "Honor and War: Using Southern Presidents to Identify Reputational Effects in International Conflict."

¹⁴ Seyed Hossein Mousavian and Mohammad Ali Shabani, "How to Talk to Iran," *The New York Times*, January 4, 2013.

¹⁵ Bret Stephens, "Why the Falklands Matter: Pride and principle are no small matters in affairs of state," *Wall Street Journal*, April 9, 2012

¹⁶ *The Humiliation Factor - New York Times*

New York Times (2003). *The Humiliation Factor - New York Times*. [online] Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/09/opinion/the-humiliation-factor.html> [Accessed: 3 May 2013].

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), 228

history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, evolutionary biology, and ethnography.¹⁸

Remarkably, however, international relations scholars have made few attempts to examine it.

¹⁸ For examples, see Tor Aase, *Tournaments of Power: Honor and Revenge in the Contemporary World* (Ashgate Pub Limited, 2002); Richard E Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (Westview Press, 1996); Blema S Steinberg, *Shame and Humiliation: Presidential Decision Making on Vietnam* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1996).

Honor in Theoretical Context

What explains the massive gap between, on the one hand, what is widely recognized as an important phenomenon in understanding conflict and, on the other hand, the analytical tendency of international relations to ignore or dismiss it? The answer is rooted in the theoretical and methodological origin of the modern conception of honor, represented by the thought of Thomas Hobbes. The theoretical approaches of modern political science, especially rational choice theory, can be understood as an embrace or continuation of the normative goals of Hobbes' political science. These normative goals effectively conceal any serious understanding of the moral dimensions of honor, and have contributed to the foundational assumptions across modern IR approaches and paradigms that favor the primacy of security and materialistic motivations.

I. The Roots of Modern Honor

International relations theorists draw on Hobbes as a philosophical authority on the primacy of security and self-preservation. Yet they usually ignore the great emphasis on what he saw to be the universal and powerful drive for honor. Without being fully aware of it, modern political scientists have embraced Hobbes' normative intentions that sought to orient political science (and political society) around the goals of material self-interest. But while modern scholars assume that these goals encompass the core truth about human needs, Hobbes had no basis for making such assumptions. He lived at a time when concerns of honor were so obvious that their existence and worthiness could be taken for granted. In fact, the three principal causes of quarrel for Hobbes are security, economic gain, and concern for glory or reputation.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, then, one of the most prominent themes of Hobbes' mature works is the troublesome and destructive nature of honor-oriented behavior. His project was based on the belief that it was possible to educate or enlighten men sufficiently so that political society security and material self-interest as the most important goods that no rational being should ever sacrifice. As one scholar explains, Thomas Hobbes "represents a clear turning point in Western society's conception of honor."²⁰ Returning to Hobbes reveals the way in which the modern dismissal of honor stems from an intellectually conditioned, *normative* view that peace and security are worthier and more rational than seeking and maintaining honor.

¹⁹“So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.” Thomas Hobbes and Ian Shapiro, *Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (Yale University Press, 2010), Chapter 13.

²⁰ Laurie M Johnson Bagby, *Thomas Hobbes: Turning Point for Honor* (Lexington Books, 2009).5

The pre-modern or pre-Hobbesian understanding of honor nearly equated the notion with moral behavior. Honor was a motivation, reward, or symbol of behaving admirably, and that meant behaving in accordance with moral and religious virtue. Both in ancient, biblical, and medieval thought, behaving honorably was associated with courage or sacrificing one's private interests for a transcendent good. Honor therefore included an underlying belief in a God or cosmic order that exhorts noble self-sacrifice.²¹ Hobbes' mature works can be understood as a campaign against this ancient and medieval view that the purpose of politics is moral fulfillment and the salvation of the soul.

For Hobbes, an exalted conception of self-fulfillment encourages behavior that leads to civil strife, including the horrific religious wars of his own day. His famously brutal picture of the state of nature in the *Leviathan* seeks to show how dangerous life is when what vanity and honor inebriates an individual. Honor leads to an exaggerated sense of self-importance, and to blindness to the most essential good, security.²² Hobbes therefore sought to show the misguidedness and destructiveness of heroism and religious martyrdom.

Hobbes disparaged honor by showing that the phenomenon is reducible to perceptions of power. Honor "is nothing else but the estimation of another's power; and therefore he that hath least power, hath always least honour."²³ Power is a kind of currency that buys human needs and desires. Thus, honor contains no inherent rational

²¹ "For Hobbes, someone who believes in the reality of honor instead of understanding it as foolish vanity does not really understand the world and thus plays the part of the fool." Ibid., 17.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), Chapter 14.

dignity; it is intelligent only insofar as it contributes to attaining security and material goods.²⁴ Reason, Hobbes says, is the calculation involved in attaining these basic needs, a “scout and spy” of the passions that helps individuals fulfill their basest desires and interests.²⁵

Honor not only has no inherent rational dignity, but also no inherent moral dignity. As one scholar puts it, for Hobbes, “honor was almost entirely rhetorical, devoid of moral content.”²⁶ In that spirit, the English philosopher ridiculed the lofty rhetoric and decorative insignias of the aristocrats on his day as the bogus façade that aggrandizes power. Honor is ornamental and frivolous because human beings are fundamentally equal. This equality is evident in the basic fact that every individual is hypothetically capable of killing another. Once this basic equality is recognized, man can lose the delusions about seeking fulfillment through virtue and recognize that rational self-interest is survival. The social contract is the acknowledgment that the government’s foremost duty is to protect every individual’s basic goods from others.²⁷

In sum, Hobbes argued against the pre-modern notion that honor is duty that transcends self-interest. He promoted a new conception of honor whose only rational basis lies in its purchase of attaining the earthly goods of power, security, and economic

²⁴ Laurence Berns, “Thomas Hobbes,” in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, *History of Political Philosophy*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²⁵ T. Hobbes and A.R. Waller, *Leviathan: Or, the Matter, Forme & Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (University Press, 1904), 45.

²⁶ Bagby, *Thomas Hobbes: Turning Point for Honor*, 25.

²⁷ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis* (University of Chicago Press, 1963), 23-9; Devin Stauffer, “Reopening the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns: Leo Strauss’s Critique of Hobbes’s “New Political Science”,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 02 (2007).

gain. Hobbes' civic mission was to "enlighten" societies by lowering moral goals, making them more achievable and realistic, and therefore societies more stable and peaceful.²⁸

Precisely because Hobbes has been so successful, and his key claims so internalized in Westerners' habits of mind, it is difficult to see that the prevailing belief that security and material goods are the overriding concern of human beings is based on a normative and polemical project. The idea that basic appetitive goods encompass individual and collective motivation is a relatively recent phenomenon—and one that is certainly not accepted universally. As Donald Kagan puts it, "The notion that the only thing rational or real in the conduct of nations is the search for economic benefits or physical security is itself a prejudice of our time."²⁹ It is paradoxical (though, given Hobbes' success, not surprising) that Hobbes, who emphasized the irrationality of man, contributed, through his normative goals, to the massive tendency of political science toward rationalistic conceptions of human behavior. As a founder of modern political science, Hobbes' thought reveals the origin of the scientific disposition to reduce moral motivations to materialistic motivations.

II. The Limits of Rational Choice Theory in International Relations

The massive appeal of rational choice theory in international relations suggests that Hobbes' science continues to be immensely influential. While the theory originated recently (in the 1950s), rational choice represents "the continuation of the tendency of

²⁸ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Charles R Walgreen Foundation Lectures (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1953). Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God : Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

²⁹ Donald Kagan, "Honor, Interest, and the Nation-State," *Honor Among Nations* (1998).

modern social science following modern natural science to understand complex wholes in light of their simple elements.”³⁰ By importing economics’ premise that human beings are rational beings who aim to maximize their utility, rational choice theory explicitly avoids investigation of the psychological basis of motivations. For rational choice theorists, evidence against human rationality is irrelevant because, as Anthony Downs explains, “theoretical models should be tested primarily by the accuracy of their predictions rather than by the reality of their assumptions.”³¹ Instead of investigating the beliefs actors hold at the start of the interaction, the theory focuses on behavior, or preferences over actions, and seeks to show the conditions under which pattern of actions emerge.³² Rational choice theory’s focus on predictive accuracy and verifiable relations rather than examination of human motivations and goals has contributed to its powerful analytical purchase and embrace in international relations.³³

There is nothing inherent in rational choice theory that prevents analysis of non-rational goals; rational choice theory is agnostic to the origin of preferences. Any conceivable goal (including a moral, non-material one such as honor) can be entered into a utility function.³⁴ In practice, however, theorists rarely stray from preconceived Hobbesian understandings of human goals. Because the origins of preferences are exogenous, the theory uncritically relies on preconceived modern, economic

³⁰ Nasser Behnegar, *Leo Strauss, Max Weber, and the Scientific Study of Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 24.

³¹ Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Democracy," (1957), 27.

³² J. Fearon and A. Wendt, "Rationalism V. Constructivism: A Skeptical View," *Handbook of international relations* (2002).

³³ Duncan Snidal, "Rational Choice and International Relations," 73.

³⁴ J. Fearon and A. Wendt, "Rationalism V. Constructivism: A Skeptical View."

understandings of human goals. One reason for this is that these economistic assumptions are not arbitrary; they are plausible, substantive, and contribute to an understanding of individual and collective behavior. Another reason is more subconscious and normative: IR scholars believe in the worthiness of Hobbesian goals. After all, international relations scholars pick their cases and questions not randomly but in order to understand the causes of conflict and destruction and to understand what might contribute to peace, cooperation, and prosperity.³⁵ Indeed, some postmodernists argue that rational choice theory promotes a certain normative view by uncritically assuming it.³⁶

When rational choice does consider intangible goals, another major limitation of the theory emerges. Rational choice theorists follow Hobbes in artificially separating reason and desire. This relies on the assumption that a goal can be separated from the strategic calculation aimed to achieve it and remain empirically relevant. The problem with this is that separating means and ends has the consequences of treating all behavior and speech that is inconsistent with the goal as strategic means or a kind of currency that is purely instrumental. Rational choice is not concerned with the question of how desires and reasoning interact and mix in ways that, for example, leads to the actors' own confusions and ambiguities about their goals.³⁷

³⁵ Catherine H Zuckert, "On The 'rationality' of Rational Choice," *Political Psychology* (1995).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

III. The Limits of Conventional IR Paradigms

There is nothing necessarily “unscientific” about ontological simplifications and normative assumptions. Still, a lack of self-awareness about smuggling normative ontology, combined with a commitment to predictive accuracy, can easily distort the rich complexities of human behavior. As the predominant paradigm of contemporary IR, realism reflects the costs of sacrificing empirical richness for parsimonious elegance. As one scholar puts it, “by embracing the notion of *homo economicus*,” realists have sought “to ‘operationalize’ a prescriptive political philosophy according to the categories of contemporary social science and to endow it with predictive power.”³⁸ The ontological and methodological commitments by realists contributed to the widespread view among all IR paradigms that beliefs, opinions, and ideologies are merely a smokescreen that conceal or merely reflect material structures and materialistic motivations.³⁹ Indeed, from a non-Hobbesian perspective, the divisions among IR paradigms is merely a family quarrel. Liberalism and Marxism, after all, follow realism’s scientific and ontological assumptions and reduce motivations (including honor) to the maximization of materialistic goals.⁴⁰ According to these paradigms, much of state behavior can be accounted for by the postulate that security and economic gain drives human behavior.

Realists acknowledge that states are concerned with how they are estimated by others. However, consistent with their interpretation that power is not only a material but

³⁸ Michael Loriaux, "The Realists and Saint Augustine: Skepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought," *International Studies Quarterly* (1992).

³⁹ Morgenthau Hans, "Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace," *New York* 51973(1948), 10, 86-7, 95-6.

⁴⁰ Michael Tomz, *Reputation and International Cooperation: Sovereign Debt across Three Centuries* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

also a psychological phenomenon, realists view honor as an instrumental rather than a moral phenomenon.⁴¹ These scholars typically talk not so much of honor as of prestige, status, or standing—that is, perceptions of power that are ultimately grounded in security concerns.⁴² Hans Morgenthau defines prestige as the “reputation for power,” and even that, he says, is “rarely the primary objective of foreign policy.”⁴³ A similar view is echoed by John Herz, who writes that “Striving for prestige means striving for security.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Robert Gilpin equates prestige with the perception of state’s power.⁴⁵ With Kenneth N. Waltz, realism departed even further from the psychological dimensions of honor. Waltz explicitly abstracts “from every attribute of states except their capabilities” in order to explain state behavior according to the universal constraints on states imposed on them by the anarchical structure of the international system.⁴⁶ When Waltz does discuss state motivations, he collapses all of them to a desire for wealth and security.⁴⁷

More recently, John Mearsheimer has argued that great powers are in an “unrelenting pursuit of power,” defined largely by material capability, with the goal of hegemony and for the ultimate sake of survival.⁴⁸ For Mearsheimer, power is a

⁴¹ One exception is Raymond Aron, who takes a more open view to human goals. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (Cambridge Univ Press, 1966).

⁴² William C Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (2009).

⁴³ Hans, "Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace," 10, 94.

⁴⁴ John H Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism, a Study in Theories and Realities* (University of Chicago Press, 1951), 4-5.

⁴⁵ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 31.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, vol. 5 (McGraw-Hill New York, 1979), 99.

⁴⁷ Kenneth N Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International security* 25, no. 1 (2000).

⁴⁸ J.J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W. W. Norton, 2003), 2.

“currency,” or a “means” to other ends, foremost of which is security.⁴⁹ Mearsheimer does not deny that states seek far more than merely security. “In fact,” he says in a buried footnote, “it is uncertainty about whether those non-security causes of war are at play, or might come into play, that pushes great power to worry about their survival and thus act offensively.”⁵⁰ This raises the question of whether security is sought for its own sake, or whether it is itself a “currency,” for example, for the maintenance and promotion of a certain regime or conception of justice. If so, this would help explain why Mearsheimer himself does not hesitate to make harsh normative judgments about illiberal regimes.⁵¹ Unfortunately, Mearsheimer, like most of his intellectual kindred, leaves utterly unexamined what motivates states. For realists, it is enough for a theory to arrive at accurate predictions through plausible assumptions.

The inadequacies of conventional paradigms has fueled fresh doubts about the usefulness of thinking in terms of paradigms.⁵² It has also contributed to the growing movement of constructivism that seeks to underline the pitfalls of materialism.⁵³ However, despite their fruitful criticisms, constructivists tend to focus on interaction and do not attempt to understand the intellectual and psychological character of phenomena they typically refer to as socialization, ideas, or identity.⁵⁴ Indeed, some constructivist

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12, 60.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 414, n.8.

⁵¹ Ibid., 217, 401.

⁵² David A Lake, "Why “Isms” Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress," *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011).

⁵³ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ For example, Martha Finnemore argues shows how the Genovese-Swiss banker Henry Dunant had a major impact on establishing humanitarian norms and the International Committee of the Red Cross. She does not, however, attempt to understand the intellectual origin of Dunant’s own understanding. Martha

and rationalist scholars argue, with some justification, that the difference between constructivism and rational choice is largely overblown.⁵⁵

What lessons can be taken from the limits of mainstream methodologies and paradigms in studying motivations in international relations? At least in the conventional positivist sense, there is no way to “prove” the existence of any motivation. There is therefore little point in ruling out any methodologies or paradigms because they fail to confirm specific motivations. Every approach must make “methodological bets” that confront certain tradeoffs, for example, between messy but rich detail and abstract but elegant theories.⁵⁶ However, a good case can be made that examining the importance of honor as an irreducible moral phenomenon is best achieved through a method that embraces the complicated messiness of human behavior, and tries to observe the multiple psychological dimensions of its apparent manifestation. The method of process tracing, whereby cases are broken into a series of observations, is perhaps a particularly promising way to undertake such a study.⁵⁷ There are, of course, significant downsides to such an approach.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, process tracing could help adjudicate among alternative hypotheses about motivations that so far go largely unexamined in the field.⁵⁹ One potential path is to devise artificial, paradigmatic models that assume the primacy of

Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁵⁵ Fearon and Wendt, "Rationalism V. Constructivism: A Skeptical View."

⁵⁶ David A Lake, "The State and International Relations," *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, pbk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) (2007).

⁵⁷ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 77

⁵⁸ These include the problem of infinite regress. Gary King, Robert O Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 86.

⁵⁹ Andrew Bennett, "Process Tracing and Causal Inference," (2010), 208.

security interests and economic gain. Doing so in specific historical cases could help illuminate the inadequacy of these motivations and the importance of building a more coherent understanding of honor.

Conclusion

The premise of this report is the gap between, on the one hand, the apparent omnipresence of honor, and, on the other hand, its relative absence in the field of international relations. The paper summarized the conceptual transition from pre-modern to modern honor in order to show the roots of the prevailing ontological and methodological beliefs about honor and honor's significance (and non-significance) in international relations. The limits of conventional methodologies and paradigms conveys that the study of honor in international relations must begin from a fresh examination of the phenomenon. The first task must be to establish that honor actually matters, and to cast doubt that existing theories for their failure to notice or appreciate the phenomenon. This report attempted to take the first step by problematizing common assumptions in IR and encouraging a renewed openness to studying motivations. The hope is that the arguments here could raise new research questions, while encouraging a more flexible and creative approach to studying motives in international relations.

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