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Realism, ideology, and exile

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Abstract

What is the relationship between political ideology and realism in international relations? This article reconceptualizes the realist relationship with ideology in terms of a recurring experience of ideological *exile*. Exile was a crucial part of the biographical experience of early realists like Hans Morgenthau and John Herz. I argue that the idea of exile also marked an aspect of their relationship to ideology. Realists often allied themselves with ideological camps, through which they aimed to shape political practice. Yet realists mistrusted ideological utopianisms, and these liaisons often ended badly – in effect driving realists into ideological exile. The resulting exile persona has marked realism durably, recurring among later realists who do not have a biographical experience of exile in the conventional sense. Exile has thus become a persistent, constitutive feature of the intellectual project of realism itself. My argument has ongoing implications for how we understand realism as a political project.

Keywords: realism; ideology; exile; policy practice; history of international thought

> All that you held most dear you will put by
> and leave behind you; and this is the arrow
> the longbow of your exile first lets fly.
>
> You will come to know how bitter as salt and stone
> is the bread of others, how hard the way that goes
> up and down stairs that never are your own.
>
> —Dante Alighieri[1]

This article rethinks realism's relationship with political ideology. Realists often present themselves as centrally practical or pragmatic, opposed to ideological

[1]Alighieri 2003, 744.

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excess.[2] Yet, realists themselves have commonly been attached to ideological projects: liberal, socialist, conservative, nationalist, and otherwise. On some readings, realism is itself ideological.[3] However, the dynamics of these ideological engagements and relationships remain relatively opaque. I reframe these in terms of a recurring experience I term ideological exile.

Exile was a crucial part of the biographical experience of many early realists. Many of realism's founders had formative experiences as exiles or émigrés from occupied Europe. Hans Morgenthau, John Herz, Arnold Wolfers, and others besides, were among the large cohort of chiefly German–Jewish scholars who fled National Socialism, to America. However, with the exception of work by Felix Rösch, this experience often goes under-theorized as a historical condition for the school's emergence.[4] Exile often served the classical realists as an important rhetorical tool. They could claim to offer American audiences privileged knowledge of danger and survival in world politics, learned though hard experience. Like many other exiles, they prized safety above all else, adopting an anti-utopian focus on prudence and security. They also claimed descent from figures like Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes – all of them, in varying ways, exiles.

However, exile also separately describes a distinctive problem in realists' difficult relationships with ideology. To advance their cause in eras of mass politics, realists often allied themselves with popular ideological projects, through which they aimed to shape political practice. Yet, successive realist liaisons with liberal anticommunists, nationalists, antiwar leftists, and others often ended badly. Realists mistrusted their allies' often-utopian visions – and the realist message of prudence proved hard to sell. As a result, they repeatedly abandoned or were expelled from their ideological alliances for prioritizing security seeking over their allies' political ideals. Each time, the realists moved on, forming new ideological attachments, which broke down in turn. The realist impulse to speak truth to power, about how to convert power into safety, has thus pushed realists cyclically into the arms of mass ideological projects and then back out of them. This pattern has recurred across modern realist intellectual history.

I conceptualize this pattern in terms of ideological expulsion or exile. Drawing on the interdisciplinary field of 'exile studies,' and parallel work elsewhere, I theorize the exile as a character, role, or persona realists have recurrently inhabited. In their interwar flight from Germany, exile was a hard personal experience. Gradually, however, that positionality shaped the realist disposition. Exile marked not just realist biographies, but also the realist style of reasoning. Intentionally or otherwise, the classical realists passed this exile style or persona on to their U.S.-born successors.

I reconstruct twentieth-century realist history as follows. The émigré realists fled interwar Europe to America, as opponents of Hitler's reactionary, genocidal utopianism, and the radical Marxism that was its chief Continental rival. After 1945, realists made a fractious peace with American liberalism. However, they rejected

[2]Opposition to principled idealism is among realism's founding tenets; the classic statement is Carr 1946.

[3]Bell 2002; Bessner and Guilhot 2015.

[4]See recent histories of realism or individual realists, including Molloy 2006; Williams 2007; Guilhot 2017; McQueen 2018; Specter 2022. Work centering the realist exile experience is somewhat more limited. Exceptionally, Rösch centers it in his account of Morgenthau's lost 'lifeworlds' in Europe and of émigré intellectuals in IR more broadly (Rösch 2016, 40–41; Rösch 2014a; Rösch 2020). I build on his work here. Throughout, I emphasize realism in international relations. On its relationship with realism in political theory, see Bell 2017.

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liberal anticommunism's missionary zeal, and the alliance broke down over (chiefly) the Vietnam War. Later, American realists – most visibly Kenneth Waltz and his students – opposed liberal adventurism and made common cause with the mainstream American right. However, this too broke down, as the Republican Party foreign policy establishment turned to neoconservatism, beginning in the 1980s and culminating in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War. Realists then allied themselves with antiwar leftist politics and later, in at least one case, with the radical right. Most recently, these arrangements too have broken down, as realists and many leftists have been divided over the Russian war in Ukraine.

In making this argument, I offer not straight intellectual history, but rather a critical reconstruction, deploying the exile metaphor as a critical viewpoint. My aim is to intervene in how we understand realism as an ethical or normative project and in how we assess its limits.[5] My account has at least three implications. First, it contributes to current work on the history of realism. Second, it briefly unpacks the field of exile studies for IR scholars.[6] Exile, like all migration, is an unavoidably international phenomenon – this article helps put it more squarely in the field's view. Third, the account provides a new vantage on the fractious relationship between theory and practice in IR. The realist experience is largely one of trying but failing to bend policy practice to match their theories.[7] My argument sheds new light on how and why this has been so.

I proceed next in three sections. First, I theorize exile and its interface with realism. Second, I turn to the classical realists, showing how their lived experience of exile persisted into their encounters with political ideologies. Third, I show how it resurfaced implicitly, but repeatedly in the neorealist experience. A conclusion weighs implications.

Realism in (ideological) exile

Following Alison McQueen, I understand realism as a political 'tradition that is focused on power and interest, suspicious of moralizing, and attentive to the limits of political action.'[8] Morgenthau defined realism in terms of politics governed by 'objective laws…. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.' He finds the content of those laws in 'interest defined in terms of power.'[9] Realists commonly understood this view as opposed to idealism or utopian ideology. E. H. Carr defined realism in dialectical opposition to utopianism.[10] As many scholars argue, in varying ways, 'the midcentury modern version of classical realism was a response to a profoundly felt, but historically specific, crisis of liberal institutions and values.'[11] The result was, among other things, a distinctive form of ideological critique. Ideological projects, as realists

[5]Contra some accounts (e.g., Walzer 2006, chapter 1), realists have long been seen, and have seen themselves, as having sustained ethical commitments (Gilpin 1984, 1996; Morkevičius 2018).

[6]Unlike IR, political theory treats exile at length (e.g., Shklar 1993; Simons 1995; Vasanthakumar 2021).

[7]See, for example, Oren 2009. The realist failure to shape debates around the 2003 Iraq invasion is indicative.

[8]McQueen 2018, 6; see also 10–12.

[9]Morgenthau 1967, 4, 5.

[10]Carr 1946, 11–21.

[11]Specter 2022 citing, inter alia, Koskenniemi 2001; Bessner 2018; Rösch 2014a; Guilhot 2013.

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understand them, are geared toward securing some best outcome or idealized transformation of politics. Realism has substantially defined itself by its skepticism of those transformational undertakings.

Refusing utopian visions, realism can thus appear oddly incomplete next to the twentieth century's mass ideological projects. Realists have sometimes made common cause with these ideologies. In aiming to speak truth to power, in pursuit of their goals of safety and prudence, realists have had to engage with political practice. In modern mass societies like the United States, this has meant engagement with the parties and movements through which politics is organized – liberal anticommunist, mainstream conservative, antiwar leftist, and others besides.[12] Yet, when the two encounter one another, tensions surface. Unlike realism, those ideologies have tended to have utopian aims of their own. Once in power, these movements eventually wield it, in some part, to their preferred idealistic ends. Realists, committed instead to managing power's vicissitudes, often end up in conflict with their more ideological allies, who tend to exclude or expel them in response.

I argue the resulting pattern of ideological allegiance and expulsion can be read as a cyclical pattern of exile – one that has recurred across realism's twentieth century history and into the twenty-first. Realism's need to attach itself to power and then speak unwelcome truths to it propelled this recurring cycle of ideological attachment and rejection. The early realists were thus exiles in two senses: first personal or biographical and later, second, metaphorical or ideological.[13] Their intellectual descendants are inheritors of this distinctive legacy of attachment and exclusion. While hardly exiles in the first sense, later American realists shared the experience of expulsion from practical politics.

To make this argument, I turn to exile as a theoretical category. Exile is among the oldest ideas in human literature – central to multiple biblical stories, Old and New Testament alike, beginning with the Fall and expulsion from Eden. Among the urtexts of Western exile literature are the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, though exile ends differently in each – in one with a homecoming and in the other with a political founding.[14] Aspects of exile surface further back still in the *Gilgamesh* poem, Tablet 11 of which details a flood myth recounted by a Noah figure living in exile.[15] Later, Dante, in Canto 17 of the *Paradiso*, has the ghost of his ancestor recount to him his own future expulsion from Florence, the central event of his later life.[16] Exile then is a widely resonant idea. So long as we consider somewhere home, we can imagine its loss. Nor is the idea a pleasant one: Socrates preferred death to it.

Modern research on exile intellectual life is bound up with WWII and the scattering of intellectuals from Nazi Germany and occupied Europe. The modern field of exile studies emerged to investigate the vast displacement of substantially Jewish philosophers, physicists, artists, novelists, poets, and others forcibly exiled,

[12]Popular politics and public opinion are recurring concerns for realists and fellow travelers; see, e.g., Lippmann 1922. Realism has an ambivalent relationship with democratic mass politics; see, e.g., Drezner 2008; Oren 2009.

[13]See similarly Edward Said, who notes exile can both an '*actual* condition… [and] a *metaphorical* condition…. Exile for the intellectual in this metaphorical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others' (Said 1994, 39).

[14]Homer 1998; Virgil 1983.

[15]Helle 2021; Schmidt 2019, 88–94.

[16]Alighieri 2003. See this article's epigraph.

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first to other parts of Europe, then later to America and elsewhere. The field 'defined exile as an imposed flight or expulsion from one's own home country by a tyrannical ruler or government.'[17] I broadly follow this definition here, though my own use is sometimes metaphorical. The European exiles themselves ranged in ideological affiliation, from Frankfurt School Marxists like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Franz Neumann, to heterodox conservatives like Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin.[18] Early realists like Morgenthau, Herz, and Wolfers were part of this broader exodus. Exile is distinguished from other cross-border mobility by being forced on its subject. Expatriates relocate voluntarily, perhaps with considerable privilege. Émigré, another common term, is silent on whether or not exit is voluntary.[19] Exiles leave under duress. Exile is not only an event but also a structure, becoming a durable biographical feature, so long as one is deprived of home.[20] If one returns, or fully adopts a new home, exile ends.[21]

I theorize the intellectual exile as a distinct type or persona, marked by distinctive views. Exile serves as a persona-defining and orienting experience, one that predisposes the exiled individual to some preferences, priors, and judgments over others. The exile position is necessarily both critical and ecumenical. Edward Said, possibly the ideal late-modern exile intellectual, noted that 'While it perhaps seems peculiar to speak of the pleasures of exile, there are some positive things to be said for a few of its conditions. Seeing "the entire world as a foreign land" makes possible originality of vision.'[22] Felix Rösch finds a similar liminal experience, balanced between worlds, in the lives of the exile realists.[23] Morgenthau, for example, aimed for a distinctively clear-eyed view of the politics of his new home. Exiles could claim to see things more clearly than most – the scales having already fallen from their eyes. The exile stance need not shape all of one's views, some of which inevitably precede exile or even contribute to it. One can, like Socrates, face exile for one's beliefs. The European exiles who became the classical realists were often some combination of Jewish, leftist, anti-fascist, or otherwise in positions of political alterity after 1933. Either way, exile reshapes both one's views and one's dispositions toward the views of others. One's political priors, whatever they may be, will tend to be cast in new light by the exile experience.

The realists took to the exile experience in multiple ways. In some respects, they made of it a rhetorical advantage. The realists situated themselves historically by building a theoretical canon that centered fellow exiles. Thucydides' exile from Athens is among the few biographical facts we have for him.[24] Thomas Hobbes,

[17]Stern 2020, 187.

[18]On the Frankfurt School theorists as exiles, see classically Jay 1985.

[19]Burke 2017, 3–4. Said articulates the same distinction, further associating refugees with sheer numbers and twentieth century mass violence (Said 2000, 181).

[20]See a similar distinction, in a quite different context, in Wolfe 2006.

[21]Franz Neumann put his wartime European peers in America in three categories. Some refused the intellectual culture and practices of their host country. Others integrated more or less completely. Voegelin refused the exile label for this reason, having come to see the United States as home (Voegelin 2007, 708). A third group fell between the two, appealing to both cultures and drawing comparative lessons for each. In this sense at least, exiles have some agency: they choose an intellectual response to the conditions forced on them (Neumann 1953).

[22]Said credits the quotation to 'Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony[.]' Said 2000, 185, 186.

[23]Rösch 2014b, 9.

[24]Thucydides 2013, 339.

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who gave the realists a conception of the state of nature and a fixation on avoiding violence, did his most important and influential political thinking and writing during his French expatriation from the English Civil War. Even Niccolò Machiavelli did his canonical political writing during an enforced retirement in internal exile, at the margins of the Florentine republic. The experience of political expulsion, along with proximity to power, seems among the few biographical points these men had in common.

Realism shares several features with exile generally. Realists think first of survival, as exiles often must. Realists theorize statecraft as comprising alliances of convenience or expedience. As I argue here, realists have themselves formed such alliances with their various ideological peers. Exiles, too, must take what friends they can, under the circumstances given to them. Finally, both are marked by direct and unmediated experience of potential or actual international systemic violence. Realists define world politics in terms of the actors that directly contend with one another, absent any superior government. Similarly, the experience of exile is first one of statelessness: of individual exposure, unmediated by institutions, to the vicissitudes of world political contention. In these important senses, exile is not merely background for realists, it is parallel to and perhaps constitutive of realism itself.[25] In this respect, realism is not just a doctrine of power, but also an experiential account of privation and weakness.

Consciously or otherwise, the realists adopted the exile critical stance as a rhetorical style. They positioned themselves as bearers of privileged knowledge, drawn from hard experience of the world. The exile gaze justified an attitude of world-weary knowing. The realists could present themselves to American audiences as having seen all of this – for any given 'this' – before.[26] Thus, Morgenthau could claim that:

> what one can say in an original way about foreign policy is extremely limited. You can apply the basic principles to new situations, but essentially one says the same thing all over again in a different geographic, political, and military context. The intellectual excitement in doing this diminishes with the number of times one has done it.[27]

There was, for these authors, very little new under the sun. This was a powerful rhetorical device with which to confront policymakers and publics, many of whom took these lessons to heart. Brent Scowcroft, George H. W. Bush's realist National Security Advisor, later recalled that 'Morgenthau was brand-new when I went to graduate school, and I just devoured it.'[28] Exile thus served as a kind of tacit method or analytical stance, marked by the positional advantages Said described: those of an experienced and ecumenical outsider. Personal experience of weakness also drove the realists to prudentially valorize strength. The resulting realist gaze focused on

[25]Perhaps tellingly, one of the first theoretical accounts of statelessness is in Morgenthau's longtime associate Hannah Arendt (1973, 275, 277, 282; see a recent discussion in Banerjee 2016).

[26]This form of argument recurs in standard secondary accounts of realism, including textbooks. For example, Chris Brown notes the influence of 'his own experiences of the 1930s' on Morgenthau (Brown 1997, 32). See similar gestures in Dunne and Schmidt 2020, 131. Lebow as well as Kauppi and Viotti emphasize Morgenthau's exile status (Lebow 2013, 75; Kauppi and Viotti 2019, 30).

[27]Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 381–2.

[28]Quoted in Goldberg 2005, 62.

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constraints of the possible, and by extension what not to do or seek. Given this focus on limits, the figure of the intellectual exile more or less inevitably came into conflict with another opposed figure: the ideologue.

Realism and ideology have a complex and ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, realism had and has ideological qualities.[29] On the other, it commonly refuses a key feature of modern ideological projects: a utopian vision of the good life or of human flourishing. While realism has ideological qualities of its own, as Nicolas Guilhot notes, it arose in response to 'conceptions of science, history, and politics that emerged in the late eighteenth century and informed the great movements of democratization of the nineteenth century.' That response, hardened by war and exile, 'stifles the capacity to elaborate any political project beyond the maintenance of order[.]'[30] All put differently, though Guilhot does not quite say so, realism was an ideological project couched as critique of modern emancipatory ideology. Its ideological priors were constructed as rejections of ideological utopias. Thus, when realists encountered and allied with fully fledged ideologies, they tended to fall out with them, because they could not endorse the pursuit of their ideological ideals.

The émigré classical realists tended to derive accounts of ideology from a somewhat simplified reading of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia*.[31] In *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau called it 'The fundamental work on political ideologies[.]'[32] In *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Carr called it one of 'two books which … seem to me to have illuminated some of the fundamental problems of politics[.]'[33] Mannheim's project was one of ideological critique, in response to Marx and Engels. On the Marxian account, ideology is a source of false consciousness: an ideational framework that justifies politics and economics as currently structured, thereby foreclosing revolutionary change. Mannheim had no such revolutionary motives and argued instead that any given ideological framework is prone to such distortions.[34] The early realists saw themselves, in part, as engaged in a critical project of ideological debunking. It was their failures to successfully convey those lessons in practice that led to their second and recurring experiences of ideological expulsion.

To illustrate this reading of realism, I briefly reconstruct some realist intellectual history, in light of these ideas. Methodologically, my approach is Weberian. I present the exile persona as an ideal type: an idealized representation of a figure I find recurring in the history of realism as a school of thought. Such analysis aims for 'a useful ordering of experience' not a testable hypothesis or law-like regularity.[35] On

[29]Bell 2002. For Nicolas Guilhot, modern political realism 'is an "-ism," an ideology' (Guilhot 2017, 4).

[30]Ibid. See similarly Bell 2002, 2017; and Alison McQueen's account of realism as response to apocalypticism, often linked to ideological accounts of eschatological political transformation (McQueen 2018). See also Samuel Moyn's account of Cold War liberals, who also refused utopianisms (Moyn 2023).

[31]Mannheim 1936.

[32]Morgenthau 1967, 581.

[33]Carr 1946, ix–x. The other was Reinholdt Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Niebuhr 2013).

[34]Mannheim distinguished between two senses of ideology: particular and total. The former points to specific distortions of view amenable to critique, the latter to more complete views that, by their very totalizing structure, resist critical assessment (Mannheim 1936, 49–53). Morgenthau claimed to distinguish the two; it is less clear what Carr had in mind when invoking him (Morgenthau 1967, 82 n1).

[35]Jackson 2016, 56, 154–8.

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this account, both the recurrence of the exile figure and its transformation over time are of analytical interest. I look briefly at two broad periods in American realism's history: that of the émigré classical realists and that of neorealism. I emphasize two classical realists, Hans Morgenthau and John Herz, whose exile experiences seem central and for whom we have autobiographical writings and comments. The classical realist émigrés experienced both literal and metaphorical exile, first from occupied Europe and second from American policy circles. Their neorealist successors lacked the experience of literal political exile – they were and are chiefly Americans born in America. Yet, they nonetheless replicated the experience of ideological exile from policy circles. I briefly trace it across the several decades of Kenneth Waltz's career and those of his students.

The figure of the exile that persists through this account is thus one marked not by simple repetition, but by a transformed echo. It occurs first in wartime biographical experience, then later in a recurrence (self-conscious or otherwise) in the lives of others who lacked that original experience. One sets the form, tone, and tempo of realist exile. The other unexpectedly replicates aspects of it.

Classical realist exile

The realist exiles arrived on American shores in the mid to late 1930s, fleeing the Nazis.[36] Detached from European academic circles, they felt their loss of status and standing acutely. As their fellow traveler Hannah Arendt put it early on, 'we do not like to be called "refugees".'[37] Yet, the realists did not resort to liberal cosmopolitanism – they endorsed a politics of security and practicality, not of ideals. Whether embracing their new home wholly or ambivalently, they understood power as central to their survival. They sought out relationships of influence, often fractious ones, with American political actors and institutions.

Having come in search of refuge, the exile realists faced exile problems. On arrival, John Herz briefly considered work cleaning houses.[38] Arendt worked as a housekeeper, with a family near Boston, while she sharpened her English.[39] An employment 'agency suggested to the newly arrived Hans Morgenthau that he get a job as an elevator operator' (he declined).[40] He had already had trouble securing a visa and would face further difficulties finding stable academic work.[41] Gradually, they found temporary then permanent places in American universities and emerging think tanks: Morgenthau at Brooklyn College, then the University of Kansas, then finally the University of Chicago; Wolfers at Yale; Herz at Howard University, then City College; the realist fellow traveler Hans Speier at the New School and the RAND

[36]While they became the founders of a canonical American realism, they were not the first in America to call themselves realists. The category was introduced by the white supremacist and eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard (Vitalis 2015, 83). My concern here is with the effects of ideas about and experiences of exile on downstream realism. I thus begin with the moment exile entered the field's history as an influence.

[37]Arendt 2009, 264.

[38]Herz 1988, 133.

[39]Hill 2021, 90.

[40]Heilbut 1983, 73; Frei 2001, 64.

[41]Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 362, 364.

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Corporation. America became, in Peter Burke's term, their 'hostland' – their place of long-term refuge, after their homeland expelled them.[42]

Morgenthau was perhaps the ideal exile realist. He arrived in America in July 1937, after months spent trying to secure a visa in multiple countries, and with difficult months searching for work still ahead of him.[43] His professional journey to and across America – from Brooklyn, to Kansas City, to Chicago, by way of the Missouri Bar exam (he passed, with difficulty) – is the story of a sustained effort to repurpose himself in his adoptive country. Yet, Morgenthau's sense of alterity in America was not simply an experience of estrangement from Europe.[44] His 'amazement at the main characteristics of the American mind' made him formatively and persistently an intellectual outsider.[45] Even once he had academic work, America seemed to him not less strange, but more. His first English book was a response to American technocratic optimism – the 'scientific man' to whom he opposed power politics.[46] The point was not to reject Americanness. He felt, he wrote to a friend at the end of 1941, 'the duty to put whatever faculties I may have at the disposal of the community.'[47] He wanted, that is, to improve the quality of American political debate and foreign policy, by speaking truth to power.

Morgenthau was received as a distinctly émigré or exile intellectual. At least one reviewer of *Politics Among Nations* noted Morgenthau's exile background as an analytical advantage: 'The author is a German by birth and an American by nationality; and he taught for a number of years in Switzerland. He has succeeded in obtaining, from this background, an unusually detached, almost Olympian, view both of history and modern politics.'[48] Barrington Moore similarly termed him 'intellectually cosmopolitan[.]'[49] A reviewer of Morgenthau's *In Defense of the National Interest* noted that '[h]is training, his teaching, his practice of the law and his residence in many countries in Western Europe and many states in the Union have given him a point of view that no one could call provincial.'[50] At least in judgment of his work, his exile status worked to his credit.

However, if Morgenthau wanted to help, his advice ultimately met with disapproval or even condemnation from the broader elite political culture. He eventually became a critic of American Cold War liberalism – specifically of the war in Vietnam – and was expelled from political and policy circles for his troubles.[51] He later described this as an experience of forced political movement, from one group of allies to another: 'While my opposition to the war in Vietnam made me popular in

[42]Burke 2017, 4. Their experiences were always somewhat privileged. They usually arrived documented and had access to émigré networks. In contrast, Said tells us that to truly grasp exile we must think beyond elites, to 'the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created…. The hopelessly large numbers, the compounded misery of 'undocumented' people suddenly lost, without a tellable history' (Said 2000, 175–6). This more expansive and experience of abjection and erasure was never quite what the realists personally faced.

[43]Frei 2001, 59–64.

[44]Ibid., 181–5.

[45]Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 379.

[46]Morgenthau 1947.

[47]Quoted in Frei 2001, 183.

[48]Ensor 1949, 192.

[49]Moore 1949, 326.

[50]Kayser 1951, 91; Morgenthau 1951.

[51]Morgenthau and Chomsky 1972; Molloy 2020.

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some quarters where I did not expect to be popular, it also created enmities among people who had formerly supported me.'[52] When one ideological door closed, another opened. Yet there was little choice in this political migration. He was, in effect, compelled to step back from the political establishment, having failed to bow to their anticommunist ideological preferences.[53]

Herz had a similarly ambivalent experience. His autobiography addresses exile questions directly.[54] He left Europe for America in August 1938. Unlike Morgenthau, he mentions no trouble securing a visa. His immediate family, and that of his later wife, made it to America too, many of them settling in Kentucky.[55] In Princeton, NJ, he briefly lived a few doors down from Einstein and met Thomas Mann, who was helping European escapees.[56] His American professional network centered on Edward Mead Earle, whose *Makers of Modern Strategy* appeared in 1943, but extended to émigrés like the renaissance historian Felix Gilbert, from whom Herz learned American foreign policy, and the military historian Alfred Vagts.[57] After a few uncertain years, including contract teaching and 3 years at the Institute for Advanced Study, he found steady work at Howard University, in Washington, then City College, in New York, where he spent his remaining career, bar a period with the OSS.[58] His émigré experience of the U.S. was chiefly positive. After working on the Nuremburg trials, he returned to America with relief. His experience was 'less "exile" than "emigration"': he and his wife started a family and felt at home in the United States.[59] Yet he wrote ambivalently of that emigrant experience: '[M]ost of us [exiles] … have never been able to abandon completely a sense of connectedness with the country of our origin, despite all we had to go through.'[60] If he was at home in America, he remained attached to his birthplace.

Herz was a somewhat heterodox realist, whose realism was also never simply conservatism. Having been a progressive in Germany, on arrival he 'became a liberal in the American sense,' which 'meant social welfare policy' and a progressive, interventionist state.[61] His politics were ecumenical, perhaps tacitly cosmopolitan.[62] Yet, true to his exile roots, he remained deeply committed to avoiding the worst, before seeking the best. He opened his memoir with an epigraph from Rilke: 'Who

[52]Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 384.

[53]Morgenthau's experience may have been specific to his exile being not just from Germany, but also to the United States. See a comparison and contrast with another exile realist, Georg Schwarzenberger, who ended up instead in the UK, in Chas 2024.

[54]Herz self-published an autobiography in German. I cite the archival typescript of an unpublished English translation he prepared for family and friends (Herz 1988).

[55]Ibid., 133. Not, however, his whole extended family. He describes his grandmother's funeral, in 1929, with 'for the last time her entire, wide-spread family gathered together – soon to be dispersed (as far as they survived the holocaust) over the continents of the world.' Ibid., 97.

[56]Herz 1988, 141.

[57]Ibid., 135.

[58]Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's wartime precursor.

[59]Herz 1988, 162–3, 165, 166.

[60]Ibid., 78.

[61]Ibid., 139–40.

[62]Herz found scant solace in community or nationalism. The rise of Nazism and cognate movements 'failed to make me a Zionist, who would find "community" in Jewry as a group…. I always revolted against this kind of overly close "togetherness"[.]' Ibid., 103. He appears to have seen Zionism as dispossessing Palestinians and gestured at what might now be called a one-state solution. Ibid., 77–8.

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talks of victory? Survival is everything[.]'[63] Herz never deeply embedded himself in the Washington policy community in the way Morgenthau did and thus could not be intellectually exiled from it. Still, any efforts he made at disruptive policy influence clearly when nowhere. His late-career attempts to found a (tacitly realist) field of 'survival research' seem to have gone unheeded.[64]

Morgenthau and Herz exhibit several points of overlap here. Both men credited exile with their survival, as German Jews who fled Europe in advance of the Holocaust.[65] Their preference for prudence seems difficult to separate from their experience of flight. Both were distinctly realist in prioritizing survival over political ideals. Like Herz, Morgenthau implied that survival was a condition of possibility for intellectual life: 'What good was it to speculate on philosophic topics if in a couple of years or decades the world would be reduced to radioactive rubble?'[66] Their exile fellow traveler Hans Speier had already written that:

> the very existence of the intellectual as a social type presupposes a certain degree of social differentiation and a modicum of human control over nature. If the intellectual enters a social structure in which these conditions are absent he cannot satisfy any demand and there is no one from whom he might derive recognition.[67]

Speier's point was not much different from Morgenthau's or obliquely Herz's: if realism aimed to set conditions of possibility for political safety, then part of what it aimed to protect was the possibility of an autonomous intellectual vocation.[68]

Both Morgenthau and Herz experienced exile as something that happened not just in their lives, but to their beliefs. It made them foreigners in terms both of national identity and political ideas, which proved comparatively alien in their new political context. Prudence impelled realists both to speak truth to power and to center truths alien to American elites. This sometimes got them into trouble. When Morgenthau tried to explain why the Vietnam War was a needless mistake, he faced not just objection but condemnation. Strikingly, the negative reception surprised him. He saw what he said as obvious: 'I did not say anything original[.]'[69] He nonetheless found himself experiencing exile of a new kind, cast out of Washington policy circles.

While Herz lacked Morgenthau's political access, his views became increasingly marginal and transformational. His late advocacy was bound up with existential matters. In his memoir, he insisted that:

> My radicalism does not involve utopian demands for unattainable goals…. I admit to pessimism. But my pessimism should not be confused with a fatalism that holds

[63]Herz 1988.

[64]Herz 2003, 135.

[65]Both men had faced American antisemitism. Morgenthau was told his trouble getting a U.S. visa arose from antisemitism (Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 362). Herz was replaced in a temporary teaching role for his 'non-Aryan' background (Herz 1988, 144). All this presumably sharpened their sense of exile alterity.

[66]Quoted in Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 381.

[67]Speier 1937, 318. The underlying point is a Hobbesian one, in which survival and even comfort are preconditions for an autonomous intellectual life (Hobbes 1994, 455).

[68]Speier seems to have seen the exile experience as a kind of bare life, whereby 'the individual finds himself in a state of suspension' between societies, in which the intellectual vocation is threatened (Speier 1937, 325). On Speier's life, see Bessner 2018.

[69]Johnson and Morgenthau 1984, 382.

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> doomsday inevitable. Just the opposite: While a facile optimism in times of peril may render us blind to its scope and seriousness, pessimism may open our eyes to the deadly threats and enable us to master them.[70]

Herz was prone to calls for action. Realist pessimism, as he saw it, was not nihilism – indeed, it was roughly its opposite. If nihilism invites inaction or desperation, then realist pessimism is grounded in cool-headed calculation.[71] Yet his late-life calls for a new field of 'survival research,' aimed 'to investigate how the survival of the human species and its civilizations can be assured' do not seem to have enjoyed much influence.[72] He moved away from the policy mainstream, not toward it.

Both men thus took on a distinctive exile persona: a way of being in the world that marked them as different. The exile persona was cautious and world weary. When those values ran up against opposition from policy elites or mainstream political culture, exile captured their ensuing, second experience of estrangement – this time for ideological reasons, from the heights of political life.

As with any ideal type, the fit here is far from universal and is often inexact: not all the early realists were exiles and not all of them shared these experiences. Arnold Wolfers was an exile but seems not to have given the experience extended thought. Beyond a passing (and not terribly empathetic) reference to immigration policy in *Discord and Collaboration*, Wolfers exhibited scant professional interest in the matter.[73] He was unambivalently an advocate of the American security state and faced nothing like Morgenthau's experience. Reinhold Niebuhr was born in the United States to German immigrant parents. His comments on exile are scattered, appear to have no particular basis in his biography beyond his Americanness, and often concern theological matters.[74] He did not experience any sort of expulsion from elite American political circles.

Perhaps the most striking exception, because he partially fits the biographical pattern, is Henry Kissinger. Kissinger's engagements with American policy practice went from strength to strength across decades, in the face of regular condemnations from his critics. Yet his life fits the exile model somewhat oddly. Born in 1923, he arrived in America aged 15, in 1938, fleeing National Socialism. However, his education and much of his cultural socialization were American, as was his wartime military service – he returned to Germany in uniform, with the invading U.S. Army.[75] Kissinger's status as a realist is also somewhat complicated. His contemporary Kenneth Waltz seems to have regarded him as a realist, but an imperfect or unusual one.[76] During the American war in Vietnam, a group of Harvard security scholars personally foreswore

[70]Herz 1988, 8.

[71]Realist pessimism thus differs from the 'German nihilism' described by Morgenthau's Chicago colleague and fellow émigré Leo Strauss. Strauss defined 'nihilism as the desire to destroy the present world and its potentialities, a desire not accompanied by any clear conception of what one wants to put in its place' (Strauss 1999, 359). Strauss credited it with the rise of national socialism. Realist prudence could not readily be more different.

[72]Herz 2003, 135. Exceptionally, see discussion in Stevens 2020. Herz drifted from the mainstream in other ways as well. His late works involve a fixation on population control that by this time had ceased to be common political currency (Herz 1988, 7, 189; Herz 2003).

[73]Wolfers 1962, 78.

[74]For example, Niebuhr 2015, 710–1.

[75]Grandin 2015, 6–8.

[76]Halliday and Rosenberg 1998, 374.

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him for his involvement with bombing Cambodia.[77] His official biographer termed him an 'idealist.'[78] Others view him chiefly as a self-promoter, suggesting limited ideological commitment of any kind.[79] On these accounts, the interests he advanced were chiefly his own. His professional trajectory was also peripatetic in its way, but always at or near sites of American power – moving from Harvard to Washington and being welcome in the elite of both major parties, even as he faced protest and the threat of arrest abroad. If he experienced exile biographically, he certainly did not politically or ideologically, except perhaps from the academy itself.

Inversely, others well outside the biographical ambit I describe still had glancing encounters with exile, at least in its metaphorical forms. E. H. Carr was a British subject who spent his whole professional life in England and Wales yet had multiple thematic and professional encounters with aspects of or analogies to the exile experience. Carr wrote a study of Russian exile intellectuals, which Said invoked in his 'Reflections on Exile.'[80] Carr's career was itself peripatetic, blending academia, government, and journalism, often marked by considerable controversy. After he was pushed out of the Wilson chair at Aberystwyth in 1947, he spent years 'in an academic exile' before taking up a term position at Balliol College, Oxford in 1952.[81] His work as a Russia specialist also involved frequent contact with émigrés.[82] Yet the record here is ultimately ambivalent, not least because Carr himself was protean figure, complicated in his politics and personal life alike.[83]

Neorealist exile

The classical realists' affinity for exile finds partial but surprising echoes in their successors, the neorealists. Unlike their predecessors, the neorealists were and are mostly Americans of American birth – they had no biographical experience of exile. Indeed, they were among those said to have made an 'American social science' out of a European, humanistic mode of inquiry.[84] I argue, however, that the realist exile persona recurred in neorealism, in a relatively deep way. Neorealists became the persistent intellectual others of the American foreign policy establishment. Despite their Americanness, their relationship with American ideologies and practices was and is marked by an exile spirit.

The crucial figure is the school's founder, Kenneth Waltz. Waltz's realism arose in dialogue with and response to classical realists. At times, he distanced himself from them. He was critical of Morgenthau, thought he cited Herz more positively.[85] He encountered them while serving as a graduate student rapporteur for the 1954 Rockefeller-funded conference on international theory, where Morgenthau and

[77]MacKay 2024, 5.
[78]Ferguson 2015.
[79]For example, Thomas 2015.
[80]Carr is an exceptional realist, as much a Marxist and a historian as an IR theorist (Carr 1933; Said 2000, 174).
[81]Haslam 1999, 136–7, 165, 166–7.
[82]Ibid., 41, 174, 182, 213, 245.
[83]Attacks on Carr are a kind of genre unto themselves – for example, Stone 1983; Pryce-Jones 1999.
[84]Hoffmann 1977. On IR's European roots, see alternately Rösch 2014a.
[85]Waltz 1979, 62–5, 184, 186. See also his remarks in Halliday and Rosenberg 1998, 373. On Waltz generally, see a recent intellectual biography (Viotti 2024).

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several others were participants.[86] Waltz's disagreements with them aside, he likely knew the broad outlines of their biographies. In short, he was broadly their intellectual descendent, albeit a somewhat revisionist one.

Yet Waltz's own biography supplies little basis for an exile disposition. His background may have lent him some more general sense of cultural alterity. Born in 1924 in Michigan, into a sprawling, working class German-American family, he noted that 'it was then so German in rural south-eastern Michigan that my cousin, who is almost exactly my age, could not speak English until she went to kindergarten. Sometimes when I went to Sunday school, my father would go to the German service [.]'[87] However, he had no actual experience of migration: 'All of my parents and my grandparents and probably their parents were born in the United States.'[88] Other sources of alterity suggest themselves. Neither of his parents finished high school and no relatives in his generation went to college.[89] He may thus have arrived at his undergraduate and graduate institutions, Oberlin and Columbia, with a sense of class difference from his peers. Yet, none of this amounts to political exile. He seems, in short, to have been uncomplicatedly American.

Instead, Waltz seems to have inherited an exile intellectual identity from his realist forerunners, including a mistrust of political idealisms and a desire to speak truth to power. On the first, Waltz broadly followed them in rejecting idealism and embracing prudence. While he did so more explicitly in the language of the social sciences, the effect was largely the same.[90] On the second, contra standard readings, Waltz did make efforts at policy influence – writing to senators, briefly attaching himself to at least one think tank, and testifying before Congress. His experience of policy engagement was not one of avoidance so much as frustration: his attempts to oppose Vietnam, for example, accomplished little, but he did make them.[91] Politically speaking, Waltz was some form of conservative or classical liberal.[92] However, he fell out with the institutional American conservative movement in the late 1970s, from the rise of early neoconservatism on.[93] Given that he was almost certainly the most prominent American IR theorist of the postwar period, it is striking then how little he was able to shape practice.

Waltz was not alone in this: his neorealist students and peers had little more direct influence than he did. Faced with major U.S. foreign and security policy decisions, like for example the 2003 decision to invade Iraq, they found themselves largely ignored.[94] They were, in effect, pushed into an intellectual form of internal exile. Over the postwar period, Waltz and his descendants faced repeated ideological expulsion from the American foreign policy establishment, such that their widespread, arguably

[86]A chapter by him – a sort of prospectus for his first book, *Man, the State and War* – appeared in an eventual edited volume five years later (Waltz 1959b; Guilhot 2013). Beyond the classical realists, he encountered other European exiles as well. At Columbia, he took a course with the Frankfurt School theorist Franz Neumann and edited a book manuscript for Vagts (MacKay 2022, 346–7; Waltz 2009, 500).

[87]Waltz in Halliday and Rosenberg 1998, 371. Later, 'When my wife and I went back to my high school reunions, even when she knew that Ann Arbor was German, German, German, she was still surprised: all the kids had German names.' Waltz in Beyer 2015, 1.

[88]Waltz in Beyer 2015, 4.

[89]Halliday and Rosenberg 1998, 371.

[90]See variously Waltz 1959a, 11–5; Waltz 1979, Chapter 1.

[91]MacKay 2024.

[92]Beyer 2015, 32, 37.

[93]MacKay 2024.

[94]See the prewar (26 September 2002) *New York Times* advertisement that many of them signed and paid for.

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hegemonic academic standing rarely if ever translated to political practice. To the extent they were conservatives, the source of their dissent was the right's increasing political idealism and willingness to take up arms to advance it.

Expulsion from the American right over interventionism pushed some realists toward the antiwar left. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer both became regular purveyors of antiwar ideas, sometimes in leftist venues.[95] Yet this may always have been an alliance of convenience. Realists were pushed toward left antiwar circles by their rejection from policy channels and repudiation of elective wars. The depth of their affinity for leftist politics is less clear. While Mearsheimer and Walt also found leftist support for their critique of U.S. policy on Israel–Palestine, realist assessments of U.S. Middle East policy are grounded more in prudence than in justice.[96] These are realist arguments made on realist terms, not in themselves arguments for emancipation.[97]

Variations on these patterns have persisted. Most recently, antiwar realists have found themselves in public conflict with leftists over the Russian war in Ukraine. Some on the left, liberal and otherwise, see Ukrainian independence as a matter of national liberation or even decolonization.[98] In contrast, many realists have cast the matter in terms of power politics and spheres of influence, leading them to oppose U.S. military support for Ukraine.[99] In consequence, the antiwar left-realist linkage that surfaced circa the Iraq war now seems to be fragmenting. Nor have realists ceased to attach themselves to ideological projects. At least one academic realist endorsed the first Trump Administration's nativist–isolationist foreign policy.[100] Realists may yet find themselves unwelcome on the American far right as well. The school's recurring marginalization from larger political projects appears strikingly durable.

The neorealist experience thus repeated the realist pattern of ideological exile. It may have done so in part because the neorealist worldview echoed or encoded aspects of the classical realist exile spirit. Waltzian states in anarchy are functionally undifferentiated, with no purpose other than survival.[101] They thus mimic, albeit unintentionally, the biographical conditions his forerunners had worked to escape and prevent from recurring. As exiled, potentially stateless intellectuals, they were exposed directly to the power dynamics of the international system, without mediation by the institutional vessel of the state. This perhaps explains why Speier insisted not just on survival but on intellectual autonomy and thus functional differentiation as a precondition for engaged intellectual life. 'One may generally question whether

[95]Both, for example, have made occasional appearances on Democracy Now!: https://www.democracynow.org/appearances/john_mearsheimer; https://www.democracynow.org/appearances/stephen_walt.

[96]Mearsheimer and Walt 2007.

[97]Earlier neorealists had a fractious, oblique relationship both with the left and with mass politics. An episode from the late 1960s illustrates. Robert Jervis recalls Waltz using an office near his, while visiting at Harvard. The building also housed an army reserve recruitment office, which antiwar activists firebombed (Jervis 2018, 7). A neorealist and fellow traveler were thus inside the American establishment looking out at the moment it was attacked for policies they rejected. While opposed to elective wars, Waltz seems never to have been an anti-war protestor. Participating in Berkeley antiwar demonstrations taught Jervis that 'I really did not like tear gas' and that his capacities might best be used in other ways. Ibid., 5. He went on to substantial engagements with the CIA (Jervis 2010, 7–14).

[98]Barkawi 2022.

[99]See, for example, Mearsheimer in Chotiner 2022.

[100]Schweller 2018.

[101]Waltz 1979, 97.

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the world has ever been profoundly moved by one who was unable to withdraw from it.'[102] By securing the state, the exile realists were preserving the conditions of possibility for their own vocation. Waltz recoded the problem of securing one's vocation as a general problem of security in politics, stripping away the biographical source, which he himself lacked. Yet on this reading, the problem of exclusion or exile tacitly persisted, close to the heart of neorealist theory.

Conclusion

What follows from this reading of realism and exile? I have argued that, beyond a biographical fact, realists experienced exile as a form of recurring expulsion from the political projects of their more ideologically minded allies. Exile came to function as a core aspect of realists' persona or style: an engrained feature of their encounter with world politics. It shaped their priorities and disposed realists against ideological visions of the good life. The classical realists' personal experience of exile was itself hardly replicable for their neorealist and other American descendants. Those descendants have nonetheless found an echo of sorts in a recurring pattern of ideological expulsion. Here then is a central irony: the circumstances that made the classical realist view-from-exile possible also made ideological exile a persistent feature of realism's history. That pattern appears to persist today.

Realism was an unusually direct theoretical attempt to confront and accept the challenge of exile. Liberal or radical cosmopolitanisms might have tried to transcend or overcome exile, transforming the world in response to it. The realists tried to do something quite different: they attempted to convert the problem of exile itself into a political doctrine. By taking up the exile's challenges and watchwords of safety, prudence, the minimization of harms, and the probability (perhaps inevitability) of violence, they aimed to theorize world politics as such through the exile's gaze. Their recurring failure to convey that message served in part to reinforce and continue aspects of the exile experience.

The realist problem was in part one of translation: of making their ideas palatable to new audiences. Yet the realists were not alone in this respect – other wartime exiles had to adapt their agendas in other ways.[103] In any case, loss in translation does not alone explain the problem. The realist mistrust of utopianism and the recurring rejection of it were not just matters of form, but of substance. Realism continued to face these challenges, translational or otherwise, long after it had settled in the American academic community. In this sense, translation, like exile itself, speaks not just to nationality but to realism's distinctive ethos. My account thus suggests potentially persistent limits on how realist intellectual life can engage with practice.

[102]Speier 1937, 328; see also 318.

[103]Both the Vienna Circle logical positivists and Frankfurt School theorists had, by degrees, left their socialism at the border (Reisch 2005; Laudani 2013). Émigré nuclear physicists found themselves repurposed as weapons scientists. Even artists were drafted into the Cold War (Saunders 2000; Von Eschen 2006; Lee 2020). Herz notes the German émigrés did not fit well with American social science, which was turning to quantification, systems theories, and other technical tools. 'They were too "sociological," derived as they were from tradition, from history, from philosophy, while those of the "modernizers" were adapted from engineering, mathematics, economics, and cybernetics' (Herz 1972, 285). See similarly Guilhot 2017. See also another account of émigré scholars and the problem of translation in Behr and Kirke 2014.

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One way to clarify the exile persona itself may be in contrast with its opposite. Martin Jay points to contrasting types of intellectuals, among them foxes and hedgehogs, priests and jesters, husbands and lovers.[104] We might similarly contrast host and guest, citizen and denizen, patriot and émigré, rooted and exiled. Realists-as-exiles can thus be contrasted with rival theorists and practitioners as opposing personas or dispositions.[105] If their opposite figures are marked by loyalty, particularity, and bonds to place, then the exile disposition may become one of imposed ecumenism or pluralism. In the U.S. case, this may include the liberal patriots constituting much of the foreign policy establishment.

If indeed the exile stance reflects and perhaps helps drive a recurring experience of ideological expulsion, realists have gained something from it as well: a distinctive style of ideological critique. Aiming to produce stability and safety for their host state, exile realists attempted to preserve, along with much else, the conditions of possibility for intellectual life. In so doing, they implied or sketched a practical and imminent critique of political–intellectual utopianism. To have a free intellectual vocation, you must first secure that vocation's participants against external harms.[106] Safety must thus always come before idealism. This attitude marked a concern, beyond all-purpose pragmatism, with how the intellectual vocation itself confronts threats to its survival. This aspect of realism recurs in the work of the exile's American descendants, who remain today critics of utopianisms of all kinds.[107]

The classical realists were, of course, not alone in being shaped by their wartime exile. It shaped others in other ways. I close with one example. Walter Benjamin, in his last writing, was impelled in another direction by something like the exile experience, away from prudence, and toward an embrace of crisis. 'The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule' he wrote. Only by taking this seriously 'shall [we] clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism.'[108] Yet, he went on, this alternative to realist prudence was not simply faith in historical progress – a papering over of the ongoing dominations and vicissitudes of history and a concealing of how power rewrites the past to its own ends. If progressive visions of history proclaim a coherent 'chain of events,' then Benjamin joined the realists in seeing instead 'one single catastrophe' – or at least a single pattern of ongoing potential for disaster.[109] For his part, Benjamin died fleeing occupied France – his American exile never began. The realists, whatever else they did, survived, to diverge from him in accepting that pessimism as the price of an ordered vision of politics.[110] Exile was the clear-eyed

[104]Jay 2021, 65–70. The first distinction is usually linked with Berlin (1953). Jay credits the last to Susan Sontag (1966). His examples of it are Isaiah Berlin and Walter Benjamin.

[105]My thanks to Toni Erskine for a discussion of some of these categorical terms and their opposites.

[106]This attitude echoes one of the realists' claimed forefathers, Thomas Hobbes, who insisted that 'Leisure is the mother of philosophy': that is, that only the conditions of political stability produced by the Leviathan, and with them such things as autonomous free time, make intellectual life possible (Hobbes 1994, 455).

[107]Radicals and others on the left, Said among them, have also embraced the idea of exile, including in IR. Robert Cox, for example, suggestively titled his memoir *Universal Foreigner* (Cox 2013).

[108]Benjamin 1968, 257. The target of Benjamin's 'state of emergency' critique is perhaps Carl Schmitt.

[109]Ibid., 258.

[110]In Benjamin's terms, realism aims to see only 'the pile of debris… [that] grows skyward.' Ibid.

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vantage from which, in the name of prudence, realism kept its politics safely unredeemed.

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