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The great anomaly

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No author of a study such as mine could fail to be grateful, to editors and contributors alike, for a discussion as wide-ranging and pertinent as that which the *Review* has accorded my book on revolutions. The main purpose of *Revolution and World Politics* was to place the study of revolutions, as historical process and as theoretical challenge, at the centre of International Relations. The responses printed here seem, in large measure, to reinforce that endeavour.

To assess these contributions in a focused manner, it may be best to restate the core theses of my book, which were, in summary form, four. First, I argued that revolutions needed to be given a much more central place in the history of the international system, to realize the potential claimed in Hannah Arendt's remark that two most formative processes in modern history were war and revolution. I was, and remain, struck by how revolutions are seen as interruptions of the development of the international system rather than as, in considerable measure, formative of it. To take some issues much discussed in conventional IR where the influence of revolutions has been understated: the causes of war, the creation and breakup of alliances, intervention, the nuclear arms race. At the same time, such historical events as the Versailles Conference of 1919, or the Cuba missile crisis of 1962, can be viewed through a very different lens if revolutions are given proper due. Secondly, I argued against much literature in national histories and in the sociology of revolutions, that revolutions are themselves necessarily international events—in cause, ideology, consequence and outcome. The very recurrence of international dimension not just in the policies and beliefs of revolutionaries, but also as cause, is often understated in studies of particular revolutions: for example, a work such as Simon Schama's *Citizens*, which seems to make a break with structural explanations and emphasizes the role of ideas within national politics, fails to recognize the latter's internationally causative role. While ideas play an important part in his domestic narrative, Schama relies in his treatment of international context on unexamined realist assumptions, about interstate conflict and the fiscal consequences thereof, and fails to see the role of the transnational radical climate of the times.[1] Thirdly, I argue

[1] Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, Viking, 1988: see especially ch. 2, ii, 'Oceans of Debt', pp. 60–71, which makes easy use of the ideas of imperial overstretch. 'If the causes of the French Revolution are complex, the causes of the downfall of the monarch are not … the end of the old regime was the necessary condition of the beginning of the new, and that was brought about, in the first instance by a cash-flow crisis' (p. 62), i.e. the pursuit of rivalry with Britain. Schama is right to include this dimension in his explanation for the causes of the French revolution, but mistaken, first, in not seeing how other forms of international influence could play their role, and, secondly, in failing to note that the overstretch thesis did not, *pace* Paul Kennedy, apply to the USA of the late 1980s. Minerva's owl, as ever, is slow to take flight.

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that the implications of revolutions for the concepts and hence theory of IR are considerable, not only with regard to the concepts of the state, of security and of the domestic-international relationship, but also with regard to the relative impact of ideas in international politics. In regard to theories, I aim, in the course of examining the international course of revolutions, to identify some weaknesses not only of realism, but also of Marxism and of a purely ideas-based, constructivist, approach: Marxism was the most influential, and sympathetic, theory to address the issue of revolutions but it failed for two major reasons, its misunderstanding of the materialist dimension, that is, the development of capitalist society, and its misreading of historical direction. Of constructivism, more later. Finally, I outline an alternative history of modern revolutions themselves, these understood at two levels, idea and movement: I trace the development of idea, of 'Revolution' in its post-1789 form, and of revolutionary movements, within the context of the development of capitalist modernity. This latter provides a broad, but in IR often overlooked or oversimplified, historical context. It is one which, I would suggest, provides a new insight on revolutions and on international relations alike.

The critics assembled in this Forum take issue with me on three broad fronts: historical, theoretical, disciplinary. To deal with each in turn. Michael Mann and Stephen Walt question how far I can take the claim that the impact of revolution should be seen not only in regard to the spread of radical movements but also in the ways in which it forced *status quo* powers to reform their own societies. In regard to the developed Western world I would not want to overstate this connection, as with the fear of communism after 1917, and, earlier, of the French revolution, be it in regard to democratization, social welfare or the increasing role of the state in modern society: but nor should it be denied, as is often the case. The role of the French revolution of 1830 in the English Reform Act of 1832 is a good example. Roosevelt's concern to promote the New Deal in 1932 was based on his argument that the alternative was revolution.[2] The history of welfare reform in western Europe after 1945 had many causes, but fear of the working classes and the need to incorporate them into a modernized capitalist system was a significant one.[3]

Mann notes that the Second World War was fought against fascism, not communism, but this does not mean that the rulers of these states did not see communism, before and after World War II, as the greater threat to their domestic orders: recent scholarship on Churchill, for example, argues that for him, from 1917 to the 1950s, Bolshevism always remained the greater concern.[4] As for the argument raised by Michael Mann on fascism, I would not exclude fascism from certain definitions of revolution that focus on consequences—E.H. Carr had no problems about this in his *International Relations Between the Two World Wars*: but it fails on ideological grounds. Fascism is not to be included in what I discuss in Chapter 2 of my book, a history of the ways in which modern history has, from 1789 to 1989, thrown up a historic myth of 'Revolution' as a socially emancipatory force. In

[2] According to one historian, for Roosevelt 'A shrewd recognition of the dangers to democracy in the modern world enabled him to identify the key elements of a positive democratic government … The first duty was that of creating within the country the conditions at home that would make communism in America impossible'. Mario Einaudi, *The Roosevelt Revolution* (London: Constable, 1959) p. 62.

[3] Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), especially ch. 6, 'Building Social Capitalism 1945–1950'.

[4] David Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 2000.

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addition, I would repeat that Nazism was, to a degree which post-1945 history has only recently come to recognize, driven by a hatred of Bolshevism itself (this is not just an aberration of Arno Mayer's—note the emphasis of recent biographers of Hitler on his experiences during the 1919 socialist republic in Munich). At the same time, as students of anti-semitism have argued, fascism was less than revolutionary in its failure to challenge the social and economic conditions of the gentile majority.

In regard to East Asian development after 1945 the argument on the role of revolution is much stronger and the denial, to which David Armstrong rather surprisingly contributes, all the greater. For example, in a recent overview of the East Asian boom, Benedict Anderson gives four major causes of the success of the East Asian miracle, the first of which is the impact of the Cold War on the region and the American desire to protect its allies.[5] In Japan, the initial emphasis on uprooting the sources of fascism and militarism, through land reform and the break-up of the *zaibatsu* conglomerates, was abandoned towards the end of 1947 in what was termed the 'Reverse Course'. To quote one standard textbook: 'The general policy of the occupation in reforming Japan came into sharp conflict in 1947 with the new emphasis on recovery of Japan's economy as the Cold War led to new perceptions of Russian power, the Chinese revolution and insurgency movements in Asia'.[6] The massive input of US aid starting in 1948, the crushing of the labour unions in 1948–9, and the restoration of the *zaibatsu* after an initial anti-fascist attempt to break them up, were all a result of the fear of communism within Japan and in the region. The subsequent boom was, of course, greatly assisted by the most dramatic attempt to contain communism of all, the Korean War. In South Korea, the promotion of land reform in 1951 was a direct response to the communist support for this policy, while the coup by Park Jung-Hee in 1960 was animated by the desire to mobilize society and economy to meet the apparent economic success of the DPRK.[7] In Singapore, the rise of the PAP led by Lee Kuan Yew is inextricably linked to its rivalry with the communist-led trades unions and the socialist movement within, and the concern about communist strength in Malaya and Indonesia without. Far from this being some aberration of mine this connection between East Asian development and the fear of communism, domestically and regionally, is widely recognized: indeed the text that served as the ideological canon for this whole endeavour, Rostow's *Stages of Growth*, had as its sub-title 'A Non-Communist Manifesto'.

Roberto Gonzalez is most pertinent in his criticisms and he is right to question my analysis of the internal politics of Cuba in terms of a conventional bureaucratization of the revolutionary regime: it is, in large measure, the very lack of a bureaucratic order at the top that characterizes, and both strengthens and weakens, the Cuban state. But I would enter some defence on both the main issues he raises, where I try to link domestic political dispute to international relations. The two main occasions for attack on the PSP, the orthodox communist left in Cuba, in

[5] Benedict Anderson, 'From Miracle to Crash', *London Review of Books*, 16 April 1998.

[6] Jon Livingston, Joe Moore and Felicia Oldfather, *Postwar Japan: 1945 to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 106.

[7] On the 1951 land reform, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1951), ch. 21. On the general strategy of agrarian reform as pre-emption, see Al McCoy, 'Land Reform as Counter-Revolution', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 3:1 (Winter/Spring 1971).

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March 1962 and February 1968, were both periods of general tension between Castro and the USSR, and in both the bill of indictment against the orthodox PSP leaders included one of opposing Cuba's independent foreign policy.[8] In regard to the trial of the popular General Ochoa, I would not claim to attribute to him a broader and distinct political ideology, beyond what we know was his broad dissatisfaction with Cuban policy: but the dissatisfaction he articulated had much to do with his experiences in the Angolan war, and his show trial and execution in 1989 had a disciplinary character in a climate where Cuba was increasingly, and rightly, concerned about the shift in Soviet strategy under Gorbachev. The treatment of Ochoa did produce widespread criticism within Cuba and amongst Cuba's supporters abroad:[9] its longer-term impact on what is a central feature of the Cuban state, relations between the political leadership and the armed forces, has yet to be assessed.

In regard to my theoretical argument, Stephen Walt and David Armstrong charge me with not producing a theory. Walt offers his own, neorealist, alternative. To the charge of not producing a new theory of international relations I plead partially guilty: this book does not claim to produce *a* theory of either IR in general, or revolutions in particular. It is, rather, a contribution to the interaction of IR and historical sociology, aiming both to examine revolutions in this analytic context and to use revolutions to address some issues, historical and conceptual, within IR. In line with the third of my four broad aims mentioned at the start of this comment, it is intended to take revolutions as a challenge to a range of theories, both orthodox IR and Marxist. My problems with the former concern the limits of an approach that denies change, and focuses on the interstate dimension; my difficulties with the latter relate to its historical vision, and its denial of the role of states.

Underlying the disagreement with Walt and Armstrong is, however, something else, a divergence on what theory itself is. Walt offers a parsimonious account, and calls for the clarification of cause: but both of these are delusive. As for Waltz, as a model of theory, please no: I am happier with the broad and suggestive, theoretical framework of IR and historical sociology, which does allow for historical explanation and for a sense of historical change, than with the abstract, but also banal, framework of neorealism.[10] The latter can neither explain international relations in general, nor can it provide the basis for specific histories. It is hard to see what a Waltzian history of *anything* would be, other than a restatement of neorealist verities. Neorealism is less a simplification of history, more an evacuation of its content. What would an account of, say, the French or Iranian revolutions look like? The blindness to history, and change, is also evident, submerged but clearly visible, in the first of Walt's charges: for if, as he says, the international impact of revolutions has been studied 'for centuries' one may wonder what is the relevance of history, of events, ideas, movements or states, in addressing this question. My argu-

[8] Andres Suárez, *Cuba: Castroism and Communism, 1959–1966* (London: The MIT Press, 1967), pp. 143–53; K.S. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power: The Course of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1970), pp. 467–71.

[9] Julia Preston, 'The Trail that Shook Cuba', *New York Review of Books*, 7 December 1989; Juliette Habel, *Cuba in Crisis* (London: Verso, 1997), ch. 7.

[10] For more general reflections on the work of Kenneth Waltz see my *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1994), ch. 2, and Fred Halliday and Justin Rosenberg, 'Interview with Kenneth Waltz', *Review of International Studies*, 24:3 (1998).

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ment is precisely that revolutions, as idea and as event, *have* changed over time: Chapter 2 of *Revolution and World Politics* addresses the changing idea, Chapter 12 the history of revolution as movement and event. Every revolution brings something new, in practice and theory. Such developments of modern times as the revolution in Iran and the collapse of communism, which postdate Walt's historic literature, enhance our understanding of these issues.

On one further issue, however, I would query Walt's argument. To my knowledge no-one has hitherto provided as widespread an analysis as I have in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book. The emphasis I lay on the ideological internationalism of revolutionaries is not as theoretically obvious as he implies, *if* the theory is one that stresses either state interest (realism) or the role of perception. Walt's own work, in my view, falls into this trap, since it devotes far too much intention to what is a circular theory, based on balance of power, and dilutes the impact of ideology, a set of beliefs, into something much more diffuse, 'misperception'. Revolutionary internationalism is only obvious, or intuitive, to those who take the ideologies of revolutionaries seriously. Walt seems to believe that incorporating social factors, the broad development of modern society, the specific crises that enable regime breakdown and ideological influence, involves spreading the net too far: but it is precisely the absence of a sense of international social context that has weakened much work in IR on revolutions to date, including Walt's own. In the latter this occurs where the incidence of revolutions, and their international impact, is divorced from the social and transnational context in which they erupt in the first place. In terms of the analysis of specific revolutions, it has been remarkably unnoticed to what degree different revolutionaries espouse similar international visions, and illusions.

David Armstrong taxes me for my engagement with Marxist categories, 'combined and uneven development' and 'capitalist modernity': he fails to see that I use both of these to counter the conventional Marxist account. If it is the uneven spread of capitalism, and the tensions it produces, that provide the occasion for revolution, it is that same unevenness which traps revolutionary regimes in a competition they cannot win. Through preserving the combination, that is, the single global system in which they operate, the international in the longer run undermines them. 'Capitalist modernity' is not, for its part, such a vague context: it helps to explain something that contemporary analysis downplays, namely how the modern world itself produces revolutions—they are not accidents, or aberrations; on the other hand, as I argue in my concluding chapter, it is the very development and shifting focus of that modernity which explains why revolution has moved from the more developed to the less developed world. As for the change of imprecision, an IR which has long been content to deal in such generic concepts as 'balance of power' and 'international society' should have little problem in accommodating to capitalist modernity.

Armstrong makes a case for a fusion of the international society and constructivism approaches and suggests that this ideational analysis could provide a better take on the impact of revolutions. My problem with constructivism is not that it stresses the importance of ideas, be these formal political ideologies, broader historical assumptions or perceptions, but rather that, as with all forms of intersubjective analysis, be they in IR or in sociology, they both avoid the question of causation, what material or situational factors lead people to think, imagine, say what they do in the first place and, secondly, they ignore the limits of other, external and

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structural factors on how far these ideas take effect. International politics involves ideas, but is not simply ideational, any more than puberty, or employment, or inter-gender relations. This is indeed one of the central arguments of my book—that while ideas, in this case of revolutionary internationalism, are necessarily produced by the condition of revolutions, they are also limited and thwarted by the same objective conditions. The most pithy criticism of constructivism remains that of Marx: people make their own history but not in the circumstances of their choosing.

This brings me to the third area of debate, the implications of a study of revolutions for IR. I am happy to recognize the support for my critique given by Mann and Gonzalez, and confess to be unmoved by the disciplinary defences of Walt and Armstrong: neither the historical importance, nor the theoretical implications, of revolutions are as yet given their minimal due within academic IR. The briefest study of mainstream textbooks and works of reference, or of standard courses in major universities, would bear this out. Of equal importance is the fact that where new theoretical or empirical issues are addressed in IR, the very import of revolutions for a study of these is downplayed: constructivism on the one hand, and the postmodern interest in 'non-hegemonic' voices on the other, both historically shallow, could fruitfully take on board the record of twentieth century revolutions, as could the study of 'non-state actors' and social movements. Amidst the diffuse invocation of 'emancipatory' movements in IR scant attention is paid to the communist case and the lessons, negative and positive, of this. Yet if communism was not a social movement, it is hard to see what it was.

The same goes for the history of the Cold War. Much of IR focuses, like the film *Thirteen Days*, on strategic issues, thereby ignoring the context of revolution and counter-revolution; in the case of October 1962 the Cuban desire to be protected from invasion that led to the stationing of Soviet missiles in the first place. Walt argues that revolution was not such an important component of US foreign policy during the Cold War: this would have been news to those who fought the war in Vietnam as it would have been to every US president, from Truman to Reagan, who propounded an international security doctrine based on the need to confront the communist threat. Similarly, a historically and theoretically informed analysis of the end of the Cold War would be pertinent to discussion of social values in IR, something Walt avoids in his own analysis of this process in his *Revolution and War*. Orthodoxy and post-1989 fashion alike have tended to obscure this. Armstrong illustrates the relevance of constructivism by reference to the end of *apartheid* in South Africa and ascribes this to ideational factors: ideas did matter, but so did such more 'material' factors as twenty or more years of black revolt, the defeat of Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique, the investment boycott organized by the USA, and the end of the Cold War itself. What led the Pretoria elite to change their minds was not, regrettably, only ideas, but also pressure, material or whatever you want to call it, from within and without.

The challenge to IR as a discipline therefore remains, as Michael Mann indicates. Mann concludes his comment by discussing the need for a more integrated approach to international and internal change, and one that gives due weight to the different dimensions of power. The greatest test of any work is not the issues it resolves, but the issues where it indicates further research is possible and needed, in other words a research agenda. I would much prefer this openness, and creative dissatisfaction, to the rather complacent finality, very much the hallmark of orthodox IR on both sides

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of the Atlantic, in both its 'international society' and 'realist' variants, as I would prefer it to a reassertion of banal revolutionary verities, evident in much contemporary Marxism and post-Seattle anti-globalization rhetoric. Mann chides me for an inconclusive conclusion, but I am more than happy to stick with this as I see history as equally so: in the contemporary world, radical social and political change is possible, but not necessarily desirable or inevitable. For that reason alone the historical importance of revolutions, and the theoretical issues they raise, merit inclusion in the core syllabus of IR, something very far from being the case.

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