Moral Enhancement and Political Realism

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Abstract

The possibility of morally enhancing the behavior of individuals by means of drugs and genetic engineering has been the object of intense philosophical discussion over the last few years. However, although moral enhancement may turn out to be useful to promote cooperation in some areas of human interaction, it will not promote cooperation in the domain of international relations in those areas that are critical to state security. Unlike some moral enhancement theorists, I argue that, because of the structure of the system of states, moral enhancement cannot be used to avert such major threats to humankind as terrorism and nuclear conflict. My analysis of the political implications of moral enhancement is pursued through a critical discussion of two different versions of political realism, namely human nature realism and structural realism. I conclude that, as far as major threats to the survival of humankind are concerned, moral enhancement can at most be used as a means to change the present structure of the system of states.

I.

In recent decades, empirical research in the fields of biomedical technology and neuroscience has paved the way for different forms of human enhancement, such as, for instance, cognitive enhancement, memory enhancement, mood enhancement, and attention enhancement. Unlike therapy or treatment, which aims at correcting someone's deficit in the exercise of a specific activity, *enhancement* aims at improving someone's already well-functioning capacity to perform an activity. An older person, for example, may seek a drug as a form of treatment for his or her failing memory. This is not enhancement, but therapy or treatment. On the other hand, a younger and healthy person might seek the same drug as a means to improve his or her already well-functioning memory. This is not therapy or treatment, but enhancement. By means of drugs or genetic engineering, human beings may become better at a wide range of activities. But could drugs or genetic engineering also make human beings *morally* better?

The supposition that in the future it will be possible to morally enhance human beings has been the subject of some philosophical debate over the last few years. The idea here is *not* that moral enhancement will enable individuals to make better moral judgments, or that individuals will be in a better position to provide the foundations of their moral convictions. The idea behind moral enhancement is that empirical research suggests that it is possible to use drugs or genetic engineering in order to influence and modify human *motivation* in ways that are relevant for morality. Moral enhancement, thus, might make individuals more willing to help people in need, more inclined to behave cooperatively, more disposed to be honest and truth-telling, or more sensitive to the suffering of other individuals in their surroundings. Although the feasibility and implementation of moral enhancement in the future are uncertain, its mere possibility raises a number of relevant questions for both moral and political philosophy.

Some moral enhancement theorists argue that a society of morally enhanced individuals would be in a better position to cope with important problems that humankind is likely to face in the future such as, for instance, the threats posed by climate change, grand scale terrorist attacks, or the risk of catastrophic wars. The assumption here is quite simple: our inability to cope successfully with these problems stems mainly from a sort of deficit in human beings' moral motivation. If human beings were morally better – if we had enhanced moral dispositions – there would be fewer wars, less terrorism, and more willingness to save our environment.

Although simple and attractive, this assumption is, as I intend to show, false. At the root of threats to the survival of humankind in the future is not a deficit in our moral dispositions, but the endurance of an old political arrangement that prevents the pursuit of shared goals on a collective basis. The political arrangement I have in mind here is the international system of states. In my analysis of the political implications of moral enhancement, I intend to concentrate my attention only on the supposition that we could avoid major wars in the future by making individuals morally better. I do not intend to discuss the threats posed by climate change, or by terrorism, although some human enhancement theorists also seek to cover these topics. I will explain, in the course of my analysis, a conceptual distinction between "human nature realism" and "structural realism," well-known in the field of international relations theory.

II.

Thomas Douglas seems to have been among the first to explore the idea of "moral enhancement" as a new form of human enhancement. He certainly helped to kick off the current phase of the debate. In a paper published in 2008, Douglas suggests that in the "future people might use biomedical technology to morally enhance themselves." Douglas characterizes moral enhancement in terms of the acquisition of "morally better motives" (Douglas 2008, 229). Mark Walker, in a paper published in 2009, suggests a similar idea. He characterizes moral enhancement in terms of improved moral dispositions or "genetic virtues":

> The Genetic Virtue Program (GVP) is a proposal for influencing our moral nature through biology, that is, it is an alternate yet complementary means by which ethics and ethicists might contribute to the task of making our lives and world a better place. The basic idea is simple enough: genes influence human behavior, so altering the genes of individuals may alter the influence genes exert on behavior. (Walker 2009, 27–28)

Walker does not argue in favor of any specific moral theory, such as, for instance, virtue ethics. Whether one endorses a deontological or a utilitarian approach to ethics, he argues, the concept of virtue is relevant to the extent that virtues motivate us either to do the right thing or to maximize the good (Walker 2009, 35).

Moral enhancement theory, however, does not reduce the ethical debate to the problem of moral dispositions. Morality also concerns, to a large extent, questions about reasons for action. And moral enhancement, most certainly, will not improve our moral beliefs; neither could it be used to settle moral disagreements. This seems to have led some authors to criticize the moral enhancement idea on the ground that it neglects the cognitive side of our moral behavior. Robert Sparrow, for instance, argues that, from a Kantian point of view, moral enhancement would have to provide us with better moral *beliefs* rather than enhanced moral motivation (Sparrow 2014, 25; see also Agar 2010, 74). Yet, it seems to me that this objection misses the point of the moral enhancement idea. Many people, across different countries, already share moral beliefs relating, for instance, to the wrongness of harming or killing other people arbitrarily, or to the moral requirement to help people in need. They may share moral beliefs while not sharing the same reasons for these beliefs, or perhaps even not being able to articulate the beliefs in the conceptual framework of a moral theory (Blackford 2010, 83). But although they share some moral beliefs, in some circumstances they may lack the appropriate motivation to act accordingly. Moral enhancement, thus, aims at improving moral motivation, and leaves open the question as to how to improve our moral judgments.

In a recent paper, published in *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, neuroscientist Molly Crockett reports the state of the art in the still very embryonic field of moral enhancement. She points out, for example, that the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) citalopram seems to increase harm aversion. There is, moreover, some evidence that this substance may be effective in the treatment of specific types of aggressive behavior. Like Douglas, Crockett emphasizes that moral enhancement should aim at individuals' moral motives (Crockett 2014; see also Spence 2008; Terbeck et al. 2013). Another substance that is frequently mentioned in the moral enhancement literature is oxytocin. Some studies suggest that willingness to cooperate with other people,and to trust unknown prospective cooperators, may be enhanced by an increase in the levels of oxytocin in the organism (Zak 2008, 2011; Zak and Kugler 2011; Persson and Savulescu 2012, 118–119). Oxytocin has also been reported to be "associated with the subjective experience of empathy" (Zak 2011, 55; Zak and Kugler 2011, 144).

The question I would like to examine now concerns the supposition that moral enhancement – comprehended in these terms and assuming for the sake of argument that, some day, it might become effective and safe – may also help us in coping with the threat of devastating wars in the future. The assumption that there is a relationship between, on the one hand, threats to the survival of humankind and, on the other, a sort of "deficit" in our moral dispositions is clearly made by some moral enhancements theorists. Douglas, for instance, argues that "according to many plausible theories, some of the world's most important problems — such as developing world poverty, climate change and war — can be attributed to these moral deficits" (2008, 230). Walker, in a similar vein, writes about the possibility of "using biotechnology to alter our biological natures in an effort to reduce evil in the world" (2009, 29). And Julian Savulescu and Ingmar Persson go as far as to defend the "the need for moral enhancement" of humankind in a series of articles, and in a book published in 2012.

III.

One of the reasons Savulescu and Persson advance for the moral enhancement of humankind is that our moral dispositions seem to have remained basically unchanged over the last millennia (Persson and Savulescu 2012, 2). These dispositions have proved thus far quite useful for the survival of human beings as a species. They have enabled us to cooperate with each other in the collective production of things such as food, shelter, tools, and farming. They have also played a crucial role in the creation and refinement of a variety of human institutions such as settlements, villages, and laws. Although the possibility of free-riding has never been fully eradicated, the benefits provided by cooperation have largely exceeded the disadvantages of our having to deal

with occasional uncooperative or untrustworthy individuals (Persson and Savulescu 2012, 39). The problem, however, is that the same dispositions that have enabled human beings in the past to engage in the collective production of so many artifacts and institutions now seem powerless in the face of the human capacity to destroy other human beings on a grand scale, or perhaps even to annihilate the entire human species. There is, according to Savulescu and Persson, a "mismatch" between our cognitive faculties and our evolved moral attitudes: "[…] as we have repeatedly stressed, owing to the progress of science, the range of our powers of action has widely outgrown the range of our spontaneous moral attitudes, and created a dangerous mismatch" (Persson and Savulescu 2012, 103; see also Persson and Savulescu 2010, 660; Persson and Savulescu 2011b; DeGrazie 2012, 2; Rakić 2014, 2).

This worry about the mismatch between, on the one hand, the modern technological capacity to destroy and, on the other, our limited moral commitments is not new. The political philosopher Hans Morgenthau, best known for his defense of political realism, called attention to the same problem nearly fifty years ago. In the wake of the first successful tests with thermonuclear bombs, conducted by the USA and the former Soviet Union, Morgenthau referred to the "contrast" between the technological progress of our age and our feeble moral attitudes as one of the most disturbing dilemmas of our time:

> The first dilemma consists in the contrast between the technological unification of the world and the parochial moral commitments and political institutions of the age. Moral commitments and political institutions, dating from an age which modern technology has left behind, have not kept pace with technological achievements and, hence, are incapable of controlling their destructive potentialities. (Morgenthau 1962, 174)

Moral enhancement theorists and political realists like Morgenthau, therefore, share the thesis that our natural moral dispositions are not strong enough to prevent human beings from endangering their own existence as a species. But they differ as to the best way out of this quandary: moral enhancement theorists argue for the re-engineering of our moral dispositions, whereas Morgenthau accepted the immutability of human nature and argued, instead, for the re-engineering of world politics. Both positions, as I intend to show, are wrong in assuming that the "dilemma" results from the weakness of our spontaneous moral dispositions in the face of the unprecedented technological achievements of our time. On the other hand, both positions are correct in recognizing the real possibility of global catastrophes resulting from the malevolent use of, for instance, biotechnology or nuclear capabilities.

IV.

The supposition that individuals' unwillingness to cooperate with each other, even when they would be better-off by choosing to cooperate, results from a sort of deficit of dispositions such as altruism, empathy, and benevolence has been at the core of some important political theories. This idea is an important assumption in the works of early modern political realists such as Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. It was also later endorsed by some well-known authors writing about the origins of war in the first half of the twentieth century. It was then believed, as Sigmund Freud suggested in a text from 1932, that the main cause of wars is a human tendency to "hatred and destruction" (in German: *ein Trieb zum Hassen und Vernichtung*).

Freud went as far as to suggest that human beings have an ingrained "inclination" to "aggression" and "destruction" (*Aggressionstrieb*, *Aggressionsneigung*, and *Destruktionstrieb*), and that this inclination has a "good biological basis" (*biologisch wohl begründet*) (Freud 1999, 20–24; see also Freud 1950; Forbes 1984; Pick 1993, 211–227; Medoff 2009). The attempt to employ Freud's conception of human nature in understanding international relations has

recently been resumed, for instance by Kurt Jacobsen in a paper entitled "Why Freud Matters: Psychoanalysis and International Relations Revisited," published in 2013.

Morgenthau himself was deeply influenced by Freud's speculations on the origins of war.[1] Early in the 1930s, Morgenthau wrote an essay called "On the Origin of the Political from the Nature of Human Beings" (*Über die Herkunft des Politischen aus dem Wesen des Menschen*), which contains several references to Freud's theory about the human propensity to aggression.[2] Morgenthau's most influential book, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, first published in 1948 and then successively revised and edited, is still considered a landmark work in the tradition of political realism.

According to Morgenthau, politics is governed by laws that have their origin in human nature: "Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature" (Morgenthau 2006, 4). Just like human enhancement theorists, Morgenthau also takes for granted that human nature has not changed over recent millennia: "Human nature, in which the laws of politics have their roots, has not changed since the classical philosophies of China, India, and Greece endeavored to discover these laws" (Morgenthau 2006, 4). And since, for Morgenthau, human nature prompts human beings to act selfishly, rather than cooperatively, political leaders will sometimes favor conflict over cooperation, unless some superior power compels them to act otherwise. Now, this is exactly what happens in the domain of international relations. For in the international sphere there is not a supranational institution with the real power to prevent states from pursuing means of self-defense. The acquisition of means of self-defense, however, is frequently perceived by other states as a threat to their own security. This leads to the security dilemma and the possibility of war. As Morgenthau put the problem in an article published in 1967: "The actions of states are determined not by moral principles and legal commitments but by considerations of interest and power" (1967, 3).

Because Morgenthau and early modern political philosophers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes defended political realism on the grounds provided by a specific conception human nature, their version of political realism has been frequently called "human nature realism." The literature on human nature realism has become quite extensive (Speer 1968; Booth 1991; Freyberg-Inan 2003; Kaufman 2006; Molloy 2006, 82–85; Craig 2007; Scheuerman 2007, 2010, 2012; Schuett 2007; Neascu 2009; Behr 2010, 210–225; Brown 2011; Jütersonke 2012). It is not my intention here to present a fully-fledged account of the tradition of human nature realism, but rather to emphasize the extent to which some moral enhancement theorists, in their description of some of the gloomy scenarios humankind is likely to face in the future, implicitly endorse this kind of political realism. Indeed, like human nature realists, moral enhancement theorists assume that human nature has not changed over the last millennia, and that violence and lack of cooperation in the international sphere result chiefly from human nature's limited inclination to pursue morally desirable goals.

One may, of course, criticize the human enhancement project by rejecting the assumption that conflict and violence in the international domain should be explained by means of a theory about human nature. In a reply to Savulescu and Persson, Sparrow correctly argues that "structural issues," rather than human nature, constitute the main factor underlying political conflicts (Sparrow 2014, 29). But he does not explain what exactly these "structural issues" are, as I intend to do later. Sparrow is right in rejecting the human nature theory underlying the human enhancement project. But this underlying assumption, in my view, is not trivially false or simply "ludicrous," as he suggests. Human nature realism has been implicitly or explicitly endorsed by leading political philosophers ever since Thucydides speculated on the origins of war in antiquity (Freyberg-Inan 2003, 23–36).

True, it might be objected that "human nature realism," as it was defended by Morgenthau and earlier political philosophers, relied upon a metaphysical or psychoanalytical conception of human nature, a conception that, actually, did not have the support of any serious scientific investigation (Smith 1983, 167). Yet, over the last few years there has been much empirical research in fields such as developmental psychology and evolutionary biology that apparently gives some support to the realist claim. Some of these studies suggest that an inclination to aggression and conflict has its origins in our evolutionary history. This idea, then, has recently led some authors to resume "human nature realism" on new foundations, devoid of the metaphysical assumptions of the early realists, and entirely grounded in empirical research. Indeed, some recent works in the field of international relations theory already seek to call attention to evolutionary biology as a possible new start for political realism. This point is clearly made, for instance, by Bradley Thayer, who published in 2004 a book called *Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict*. And in a paper published in 2000, he affirms the following:

> Evolutionary theory provides a stronger foundation for realism because it is based on science, not on theology or metaphysics. I use the theory to explain two human traits: egoism and domination. I submit that the egoistic and dominating behavior of individuals, which is commonly described as "realist," is a product of the evolutionary process. I focus on these two traits because they are critical components of any realist argument in explaining international politics. (Thayer 2000, 125; see also Thayer 2004)

Thayer basically argues that a tendency to egoism and domination stems from human evolutionary history. The predominance of conflict and competition in the domain of international politics, he argues, is a reflex of dispositions that can now be proved to be part of our evolved human nature in a way that Morgenthau and other earlier political philosophers could not have established in their own time. Now, what some moral enhancement theorists propose is a direct intervention in our "evolved limited moral psychology" as a means to make us "fit" to cope with some possible devastating consequences from the predominance of conflict and competition in the domain of international politics (Persson and Savulescu 2010, 664).

Moral enhancement theorists comprehend the nature of war and conflicts, especially those conflicts that humankind is likely to face in the future, as the result of human beings' limited moral motivations. Compared to supporters of human nature realism, however, moral enhancement theorists are less skeptical about the prospect of our taming human beings' proclivity to do evil. For our knowledge in fields such as neurology and pharmacology does already enable us to enhance people's performance in a variety of activities, and there seems to be no reason to assume it will not enable us to enhance people morally in the future. But the question, of course, is whether moral enhancement will also improve the prospect of our coping successfully with some major threats to the survival of humankind, as Savulescu and Persson propose, or to reduce evil in the world, as proposed by Walker.

V.

The point to which I would next like to call attention is that "human nature realism" – which is implicitly presupposed by some moral enhancement theorists – has been much criticized over the last decades within the tradition of political realism itself. "Structural realism," unlike "human nature realism," does not seek to derive a theory about conflicts and violence in the context of international relations from a theory of the moral shortcomings of human nature. Structural realism was originally proposed by Kenneth Waltz in *Man, the State and War*, published in 1959, and then later in another book called *Theory of International Politics*, published in 1979. In both works, Waltz seeks to avoid committing himself to any specific conception of human nature (Waltz 2001, x–xi).

Waltz's thesis is that the thrust of the political realism doctrine can be retained without our having to commit ourselves to any theory about the shortcomings of human nature. What is relevant for our understanding of international politics is, instead, our understanding of the "structure" of the international system of states (Waltz 1986). John Mearsheimer, too, is an important contemporary advocate of political realism. Although he seeks to distance himself from some ideas defended by Waltz, he also rejects human nature realism and, like Waltz, refers to himself as a supporter of "structural realism" (Mearsheimer 2001, 20).

One of the basic tenets of political realism (whether "human nature realism" or "structural realism") is, first, that the states are the main, if not the only, relevant actors in the context of international relations; and second, that states compete for power in the international arena. Moral considerations in international affairs, according to realists, are secondary when set against the state's primary goal, namely its own security and survival. But while human nature realists such as Morgenthau explain the struggle for power as a result of human beings' natural inclinations, structural realists like Waltz and Mearsheimer argue that conflicts in the international arena do not stem from human nature, but from the very "structure" of the international system of states (Mearsheimer 2001, 18). According to Waltz and Mearsheimer, it is this structure that compels individuals to act as they do in the domain of international affairs. And one distinguishing feature of the international system of states is its "anarchical structure," i.e. the lack of a central government analogous to the central governments that exist in the context of domestic politics. It means that each individual state is responsible for its own integrity and survival. In the absence of a superior authority, over and above the power of each sovereign state, political leaders often feel compelled to favor security over morality, even if, all other things being considered, they would *naturally* be more inclined to trust and to cooperate with political leaders of other states. On the other hand, when political leaders do trust and cooperate with other states, it is not necessarily their benevolent nature that motivates them to be cooperative and trustworthy, but, again, it is the structure of the system of states that compels them. The concept of human nature, as we can see, does not play a decisive role here. Because Waltz and Mearsheimer depart from "human nature realism," their version of political realism has also sometimes been called "neo-realism" (Booth 1991, 533).

Thus, even if human beings turn out to become morally enhanced in the future, humankind may still have to face the same scary scenarios described by some moral enhancement theorists. This is likely to happen if, indeed, human beings remain compelled to cooperate within the present structure of the system of states. Consider, for instance, the incident with a Norwegian weather rocket in January 1995. Russian radars detected a missile that was initially suspected of being on its way to reach Moscow in five minutes. All levels of Russian military defense were immediately put on alert for a possible imminent attack and massive retaliation. It is reported that for the first time in history a Russian president had before him, ready to be used, the "nuclear briefcase" from which the permission to launch nuclear weapons is issued. And that happened when the Cold War was already supposed to be over! In the event, it was realized that the rocket was leaving Russian territory and Boris Yeltsin did not have to enter the history books as the man who started the third world war by mistake (Cirincione 2008, 382).[3] But under the crushing pressure of having to decide in such a short time, and on the basis of unreliable information, whether or not to retaliate, even a morally enhanced Yeltsin might have given orders to launch a devastating nuclear response – and that in spite of strong moral dispositions to the contrary.

Writing for *The Guardian* on the basis of recently declassified documents, Rupert Myers reports further incidents similar to the one of 1995. He suggests that as more states strive to acquire nuclear capability, the danger of a major nuclear accident is likely to increase (Myers 2014). What has to be changed, therefore, is not human moral dispositions, but the very structure of the

political international system of states within which we currently live. As far as major threats to the survival of humankind are concerned, moral enhancement might play an important role in the future only to the extent that it will help humankind to change the structure of the system of states.

While moral enhancement may possibly have desirable results in some areas of human cooperation that do not badly threaten our security – such as donating food, medicine, and money to poorer countries – it will not motivate political leaders to dismantle their nuclear weapons. Neither will it deter other political leaders from pursuing nuclear capability, at any rate not as long as the structure of international politics compels them to see prospective cooperators in the present as possible enemies in the future.

The idea of a "structure" should not be understood here in metaphysical terms, as though it mysteriously existed in a transcendent world and had the magical power of determining leaders' decisions in this world. The word "structure" denotes merely a political arrangement in which there are no powerful law-enforcing institutions. And in the absence of the kind of security that law-enforcing institutions have the force to create, political leaders will often fail to cooperate, and occasionally engage in conflicts and wars, in those areas that are critical to their security and survival. Given the structure of international politics and the basic goal of survival, this is likely to continue to happen, even if, in the future, political leaders become less egoistic and power-seeking through moral enhancement. On the other hand, since the structure of the international system of states is itself another human institution, there is no reason to suppose that it cannot ever be changed. If people become morally enhanced in the future they may possibly feel more strongly motivated to change the structure of the system of states, or perhaps even feel inclined to abolish it altogether. In my view, however, addressing major threats to the survival of humankind in the future by means of bioengineering is unlikely to yield the expected results, so long as moral enhancement is pursued within the present framework of the international system of states.

It might be objected now that if this account of political realism is correct, then we would have to admit that structural realists, too, have to take for granted a specific conception of human nature, namely that human beings naturally strive for security and survival. Waltz himself admits that there is a basic "wish for survival" common to all states (Waltz 2001, 203). Yet, if there is a conception of human nature at issue here, it is a very modest one. This is, actually, the assumption that makes intelligible a wide range of human activities. We strive to make safer cars, better medicines, and earthquake-resistant buildings on the assumption that people will generally prefer security and survival rather than danger and death. Human institutions, just like cars, medicines and buildings, can also be designed to promote the basic goals of security and survival. Both positive law, in the context of domestic politics, and the system of states as a whole, are institutions that clearly reflect the human quest for security and survival. Positive laws can certainly make our lives more secure in the context of states, where a powerful institution is in a position to enforce them. But in the context of interaction among states, the absence of such an institution means that states will have to rely upon themselves in order to promote the basic goals of security and survival.

Once we have understood how the structure of international relations often constrains actors operating within the structure to prefer war over peace, as well as conflict over cooperation and mistrust over trust, in situations in which everyone would be better-off by acting otherwise, we can ask more pertinent questions. In particular, we can ask ourselves whether, given the goals of security and survival in a world in which weapons of mass destructions are becoming so readily available, we would not have reasons to radically change this structure or even get rid of it. My intention here is not to propose a blueprint for the implementation of radical change in world politics. I simply intend to explain why this option is not incompatible with the realist approach,

nor with the project of the moral enhancement of human beings. Quite the opposite: the idea of a "world state," devoid of state borders and ruled by "supra-national institutions," was perfectly in line with the original project of some human nature realists, although it eventually disappeared in the works of the so-called "neo-realists," such as Waltz and Mearsheimer.

VI.

The suggestion that the system of states could one day be abolished might perhaps be dismissed as a far-fetched idea and, indeed, as wholly incompatible with political realism itself. For political realism presupposes the very existence of the system of states. Should the system of states ever disappear, political realism would fail to make any sense. It is not entirely clear, however, whether political realism must be understood as both a *descriptive* and a *prescriptive* theory. If political realism is both descriptive and prescriptive as a theory of the structure of the international relations, then the objection is justified. For one could not endorse political realism and, at the same time, prescribe the dissolution of the system of states as part of a solution to a range of problems to which some moral enhancements theorists rightly draw attention. But although some realists do advocate political realism on both descriptive and prescriptive grounds, it seems to me that we can coherently retain only the descriptive aspect of the theory. Consider, for instance, the following passage from Mearsheimer's book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*:

> It should be apparent from this discussion that offensive realism is mainly a descriptive theory. It explains how great powers have behaved in the past and how they are likely to behave in the future. But it is also a prescriptive theory. States should behave according to the dictates of offensive realism, because it outlines the best way to survive in a dangerous world. (Mearsheimer 2001, 11)

Political realism, in my view, correctly describes the structure of the international relations in a world devoid of central government. The absence of an institution with the real power to enforce laws for mutual benefit on a global scale means that the states can only count on self-help in their attempts to guarantee their own security and survival. But if the survival of humankind in the future becomes threatened for some of the reasons to which moral enhancement theorists plausibly call attention, then abolishing the system of states, rather than following the "dictates of offensive realism," may very well be the best prescription to follow.

It is interesting to note that, unlike Waltz or Mearsheimer, Morgenthau and other realists writing in the aftermath of World War II did not always defend their theories on normative grounds.[4] As I stressed earlier, Morgenthau understood that the greatest threat to the survival of humankind consisted in a "contrast" between our technological capability for mutual destruction, on the one hand, and the poor "moral commitments" and "political institutions" of the present age, on the other (Morgenthau 1962, 174). However, Morgenthau's proposed solution to the "survival of mankind" consisted, not in enhancing our moral dispositions, but in subverting the system of states. Morgenthau realized that, if the primary function of the state is to ensure the security and survival of its own citizens, then the state, conceived as a means to an end, had become "obsolete" by the time the United States and the former Soviet Union had both concluded their first thermonuclear tests. As he put the problem in 1966, there is really no point in trying to protect oneself in the event of a major nuclear war, for all one can hope is to avoid such a war in the first place. And this goal could only be achieved, he assumed, by creating a "world state" operating within the framework of a "supra-national political order" (Morgenthau 1962a, 175; Morgenthau 1962b, 284; Morgenthau 1966, 10).

> Modern technology has rendered the nation state obsolete as a principle of political organization, for the nation state is no longer able to perform what is the elementary

function of any political organization: to protect the lives of its members and their way of life. [...] Under the technological conditions of the pre-atomic age, the stronger nation states could, as it were, erect walls behind which their citizens could live in safety while the weaker states were protected by the operation of the balance of power, which added the resources of the strong to those of the weak.

The modern technologies of transportation, communications, and warfare, and the resultant feasibility of all-out atomic war, have completely destroyed this protective function of the nation state. No nation state is capable of protecting its citizens and their way of life against an all-out atomic attack. Its safety rests solely in preventing such an attack from taking place. (Morgenthau 1966, 9).[5]

Although a world state might not eliminate every form of violent conflict among competing groups, it would certainly end competition among states, which would be at the root of any possible grand scale nuclear war. True, violent conflicts among competing groups within states have often escalated to ethnic cleansing and genocide. And these internal conflicts have also frequently claimed far more human lives than wars *among* states. Yet, it is the system of states itself that makes international intervention in these cases sometimes nearly impossible, or at least slow and ineffective.

The idea of a "world state" has recently been revived in books such as *Global Democracy: The Case for a World Government*, by Torbjörn Tännsjö, published in 2008, and *The Realist Case for Global Reform*, by William Scheuerman, published in 2011. Scheuerman calls Morgenthau's theory "progressive realism." Ken Booth, on the other hand, refers to Morgenthau's project for a "world state" as "utopian realism." There is, indeed, no reason to assume that the prospect for the emergence of a "world state" is less "utopian" today than it was fifty years ago. Yet, the urge to think of strategies in order to cope with possible threats to the future of humankind may be even stronger now than it was during the Cold War.

At the end of the day, moral enhancement, conceived as a tool to avert major catastrophes in the future, may be no less "utopian" an idea than the project for a world state. Even if moral enhancement turns out to prove effective and safe in the future, it will not yield the expected results in the domain of international politics, as I have attempted to show, unless the structure of the system of states is also radically changed, or perhaps even abolished.

Notes

1. On the influence of Freud on the work of some early realist thinkers, see Schuett 2007, 2010.

2. The original MS is available at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC, in the collection *Hans J. Morgenthau Papers*, ID No. MSS61675, Box 151. The online catalog record for this collection is available from: http://lccn.loc.gov/mm84061675. For a detailed analysis of Morgenthau's unpublished MS, see Schuett 2007.

3. See also Hoffman 1998; Pry 1999. For other cases similar to the incident with the Norwegian weather rocket, see Schlosser 2013; Forsyth and Davis 2007.

4. For accounts of early realists who also supported the idea of a "world state," see Booth 1991, 2008; Scheuerman 2007, 2010, 2012.

5. See also Morgenthau 1948, 419: "If the world state is unattainable in our world, yet indispensable for the survival of that world, it is necessary to create the conditions under which it will not be impossible from the outset to establish a world state."

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