

Anarchy and Identity

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Does the anarchy of international politics inevitably lead to relations between states based on self-help and relative gains? If it does, we can hope to do no more than ameliorate this conflict; if it does not, perhaps we can escape from the Hobbesian nightmare of state-eat-state competition. While neorealist pessimists assume international politics will always consist of self-regarding and relative-gain-seeking states, constructivist optimists assume that what is, need not always be.<sup>1</sup> By working with constructivist assumptions about state identity, this article provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for neorealist arguments about identity, self-help, and relative gains.

Critical theorists have turned their sights on the most important neorealist assumption: that state egoism in anarchy begets self-help. If they can gut this assumption by showing that anarchy does not necessarily generate self-regarding behavior, then they have done irreparable harm to neorealist theory. If anarchy can generate what I would call an “other-help” international system, this invalidates neorealist theory and shows it to be an artifact of a particular historical period.

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1. The clearest neorealist statement is that of Kenneth Waltz in *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). Also see Joseph Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988), pp. 485–507. The constructivist position is clearly presented by Alexander Wendt, in “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46 (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425; and Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).

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I argue that the more carefully one examines the question of state identity in anarchy, the stronger the assumption of egoism becomes. By treating identity as a dependent variable and using constructivist assumptions about the state of nature, Kenneth Waltz's arguments about self-help and relative gains acquire additional support.

This article addresses the constructivist argument, put forth most clearly and persuasively by Alexander Wendt, that the competitive self-help nature of international politics is not an inevitable feature of anarchy. Because we have neither interests nor identity prior to interaction with others, Wendt argues that it is sensible to imagine anarchy becoming an other-help rather than a self-help system. Unlike the competitive self-help system, other-help is a cooperative security system in which "the security of each is perceived as the responsibility of all."<sup>2</sup> By recognizing that practice determines states' identity, Wendt hopes to inject Waltz's theory with a dose of agency, thus paving the way for systemic change.

This article accepts the constructivist argument that identities are made, not given. This does not mean the absence of all constraints on how our identities form. Even if we assume away all material needs and historical or social processes, the constructivists must still account for cognitive biases that affect the way we interact and the probabilities for conflict. Put in terms of the agent–structure problem, the absence of structure does not give agents a free hand unless we devise a way to escape from cognitive biases.

By using demanding constructivist assumptions—such as the absence of rivalry, fear, or competition over scarce resources in the state of nature—I hope to shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the contending theoretical approaches. My conclusions support the substantive neorealist assumptions about state identity even in this easy case for the constructivists. My findings also complement neorealist theory by suggesting a social psychological, rather than a structural basis for self-help.

After contrasting the neorealist and constructivist views of state identity, self-help, and relative gains, I discuss in more detail the meaning of self-help and other-help and how we might construct an other-help system. I use social identity theory (SIT), which was developed to explain the experimental findings from the minimal-group paradigm, to make a social psychological explanation for state identity. After presenting the findings from the minimal-group tests and suggesting SIT as the best explanation for these findings, I review the possible effects of norms and culture on the argument. Having made my case that intergroup comparison and competition are rooted in our cognitions and social identities, I turn to address two issues. First, how would states in the state of nature relate to one another before identity, interests, and insecurity? Second, what does this tell us about international politics today? For example, what are the implications of SIT for self-help and the European Union?

2. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 400.

## Neorealism and constructivism

What happens in the state of nature and why? Neorealists answer that without an international sovereign, each state must fend for itself. Waltz assumes that at a minimum, states seek to survive. This desire for survival in the absence of a sovereign requires states to look out for their own interests. States must be self-interested. This inexorably leads to self-help: "International-political systems, like economic markets, are individualist in origin, spontaneously generated, and unintended. In both systems, structures are formed by the coercion of their units. Whether those units live, prosper, or die depends on their own efforts. Both systems are formed and maintained on a principle of self-help that applies to the units."<sup>3</sup> Waltz does not define the strategies that would characterize self-help: "Beyond the survival motive, the aims of states may be endlessly varied."<sup>4</sup> States can pursue absolute gains with friends because they think war unlikely, or they can pursue relative gains because they fear the possibility of war. They can pursue foreign aid to alleviate poverty, or they can seek to exploit the weak. They can do what they want.

Neorealists characterize international politics as a competitive arena where insecure states are more concerned with the relative distribution of power than with their individual gain. When a state feels insecure it asks not, "Will both of us gain?" but "Who will gain more?"<sup>5</sup> Since all states at a minimum want to maintain their place in the system, states at a minimum must become defensive positionalists.<sup>6</sup> As a result, insecure states in anarchy either become self-regarding and seek relative gains or risk being crushed.

The constructivists do not share this pessimistic characterization of international politics. Because process determines identities and interests, they believe we should focus on process as a way to transform state interests. While both neoliberal institutionalists and constructivists accept that international politics lacks a central enforcer of rules, constructivists believe that norms, laws, economic interdependence, technological development, learning, and institutions can fundamentally change state interests.<sup>7</sup> By emphasizing process,

3. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 91.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 105.

6. Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 36.

7. See, for example, Ernst Haas, *When Knowledge is Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Peter Haas, "Do Regimes Matter: Epistemic Community and Mediterranean Pollution Control," *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992), pp. 377–403; Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Joseph Nye, "Nuclear Learning and U.S.–Soviet Security Regimes," *International Organization* 41 (Summer 1987), pp. 371–402; Thomas Risse-Kappan, "Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Relations, Domestic Structures and the End of the Cold War," *International Organization* 48 (Spring 1994), pp. 185–214; and John Gerard Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 195–231.

these scholars argue that it is possible to effect a fundamental transformation of state interests. Because the world is not “given” but “made,” it can be “remade.”<sup>8</sup>

The neoliberal institutionalists stress the important role that institutions and regimes play in changing state policy or behavior.<sup>9</sup> Their emphasis tends to be on reducing transaction costs, uncertainty, and cheating. Because states often care more about absolute than relative gains, institutions can facilitate cooperation by reducing the opportunities for and increasing the costs of cheating.<sup>10</sup> For both constructivists and neoliberals, institutions can fundamentally change state policy.

However, there is a problem. Efforts to bring the agent back into structure by creating transformative institutions collide with Waltz’s powerful logic of self-help. If one accepts that the principle of action in anarchy is self-help, then the norms, laws, or institutions of international politics must remain subordinate to competition. Given self-help, competition governs international politics. For institutions to play their transformative role, they must somehow overcome the problem of self-help and its attendant consequences, such as the preference for relative gains. Only by showing that self-help and its consequences are not an unchanging and unchangeable result of anarchy can they go beyond the weak view that institutions can change state behavior within a self-help system to the strong view that institutions can fundamentally change international politics.<sup>11</sup>

In an influential essay, Wendt addresses the neorealist challenge and argues that self-help, far from being a natural corollary of anarchy, is but an institution. We created it, we can change it. Because the international arena is not inherently conflictual, it could be characterized more by other-help than by self-help. There is no reason, according to Wendt, to give self-help such an exalted position in our theories, but there are very good reasons to recognize the transformative potential of international politics.

Neorealists might be tempted to dismiss this critique as beside the point. Waltz and many others argue that assumptions are neither true nor false, but only more or less useful.<sup>12</sup> The constructivists would argue that the state-egoism assumption is problematic because we should not make a priori assumptions about state identity in anarchy. By assuming that states are self-interested, Waltz assumes an identity that requires the system to be one of self-help. Deriving a system from the selfish identity of the units eliminates the

8. Mark Neufeld, “Interpretation and the ‘Science’ of International Relations,” *Review of International Studies* 19 (January 1993), pp. 39–61. The quotations are from p. 60.

9. See Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

10. For a discussion of the relative–absolute gains debate, see David Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

11. This is how Wendt characterizes the issue. See his “Anarchy is What States Make of It.”

12. The debate over the “as if” assumption dates to Milton Friedman’s “The Methodology of Positive Economics,” in his *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). Waltz gives a good defense of the practice in *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 10 and 88–93.

opportunity for the units to do anything but live in a self-help world. This is one reason constructivists object to the lack of agency in Waltz's structural theory.<sup>13</sup> In other words, by understanding that identities are created through interaction, we open the door to systemic change. The constructivists argue that assuming a selfish identity (and thus a self-help world) is neither useful (because it blocks the opportunity for systemic change) nor necessarily accurate (because identities are made not given).

The constructivists have a point. Waltz's theory cannot explain systemic change and leaves little room for agency. So it is sensible to focus on state identity and on whether the system must be one of self-help. First, it is important to know what self-help and other-help mean.

### *Self-help and other-help*

Susan Oyama noted that a theory that assumes egoistic identities is "a kind of black hole explanation: it sucks everything into its maw."<sup>14</sup> So it is with self-help. Almost any behavior short of state suicide could be interpreted as self-help. Although critics of the concept focus on its Hobbesian imagery of "war of all against all," they should focus on its indeterminacy.<sup>15</sup> Self-help means that anarchy is a competitive realm, but sometimes the best way to compete is by cooperating. This "defensive cooperation" can even be prompted by concern over relative gains.<sup>16</sup> Waltz argued that we cannot predict how a state will respond to the pressures of self-help without first knowing its internal dispositions.<sup>17</sup> We can predict that all state behavior should be motivated by egoistic rather than collectivist or altruistic reasons: other states will be viewed as instrumental rather than as ends in themselves.

In contrast to self-help, other-help is rooted in a collective self that will "produce security practices that are in varying degrees altruistic or prosocial," in Wendt's words.<sup>18</sup> I prefer the term "other-help" to "prosocial" (or "altruistic") for two reasons. First, prosocial means helping others.<sup>19</sup> Second,

13. For example, Dessler objects to Waltz's ontology because it does not allow, even in principle, for the system to be anything other than self-help. See David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate," *International Organization* 43 (Summer 1989), pp. 441-73.

14. Susan Oyama, "Innate Selfishness, Innate Sociality," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 12 (December 1989), pp. 717-18. The quotation is from p. 717.

15. Snyder's useful distinction between "defensive" and "aggressive" realism illustrates different realist strategies available in a self-help system. See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991). For further discussion, see William Wohlforth, "The End of the Cold War and Five Problems of International Theory," in William Wohlforth, ed. *Witness to the End of the Cold War* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming).

16. Duncan Snidal, "International Cooperation Among Relative Gains Maximizers," *International Studies Quarterly* 35 (December 1991), pp. 387-402 and pp. 400-401 in particular.

17. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 71.

18. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 401.

19. See John Darley, "Altruism and Prosocial Behavior Research: Reflections and Prospects," in Margaret Clark, ed., *Prosocial Behavior* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 326 n.1; Ervin Staub, *Positive Social Behavior and Morality* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); and David Schroeder, Louis

because we think of prosocial as good, it is easy to think of self-help (antisocial?) as bad. Just as self-help does not preclude the helping of others (for instrumental reasons), other-help does not preclude the helping of self (because the self includes the other). Self- and other-help capture in plain language the ends of a security continuum.

This distinction is important only if other-help means transcending egoistic incentives. To say that we can do well by doing good (competing by cooperating) represents a change of strategy, not a change of heart. For example, European fears of Japanese economic competition may have caused the resurgence of economic and political cooperation in Europe in the late 1980s.<sup>20</sup> This illustrates how cooperation can be prompted by competition with a third. Sometimes states cooperate directly with states they either fear or view as competitors. For example, one explanation for French support of the Maastricht treaty was the fear that German reunification caused in Paris.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, interaction strategies premised on egoistic assumptions—such as tit for tat, diffuse reciprocity, or reciprocal altruism—may lead to a more collective definition of self but are not in themselves evidence of nonegoistic behavior.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the issue is not whether groups can learn to cooperate—we know that they can and we know that “cooperation can be an intensely competitive strategy”—but whether intergroup relations can be free of egoistic incentives.<sup>23</sup>

At a minimum, an other-help system means a state looks out for others as well as for itself. It means one's own interests are not defined independent of the other's interests. In the alternate anarchy of other-help, it is also possible for states to pursue altruistic policies. In a self-help system, a state views the other in instrumental terms; in an other-help system, states identify with one another.

### *Constructing other-help*

To recognize the possibility of other-help means self-help is not a fixed component of anarchy. This allows us to focus on state identity and interests as

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Penner, John Dovidio, and Jane Pilliavan, *The Psychology of Helping and Altruism*, McGraw-Hill Series in Social Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, forthcoming).

20. Wayne Sandholtz and John Zysman, “1992: Recasting the European Bargain,” *World Politics* 42 (October 1989), pp. 95–128.

21. Ann-Marie Le Gloannec, “The Implications of German Unification for Western Europe,” in Paul Stares, ed. *The New Germany and the New Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), pp. 251–78.

22. For tit-for-tat strategies, see Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Robert Keohane discusses diffuse reciprocity in “Reciprocity in International Relations,” *International Organization* 40 (Winter 1986), pp. 1–27. For an introduction and review of Robert Trivers's idea of reciprocal altruism, see Charles Taylor and Michael McGuire, “Reciprocal Altruism: Fifteen Years Later,” *Ethology and Sociobiology* 9 (July 1988), pp. 67–72.

23. The quotation is Bobbi Low's. See p. 14 of Bobbi Low, “An Evolutionary Perspective on War,” in William Zimmerman and Harold Jacobson, eds. *Behavior, Culture, and Conflict in World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 13–55.

endogenous rather than exogenous to the state. Wendt's rhetorical strategy of assuming that states have no intrinsic qualities allows him to challenge Waltz's assumption that anarchy produces a self-help system. It is in this spirit that Wendt makes his argument for an alternate anarchy.

Wendt begins by assuming that two states, alter and ego, have no identity and so, no security interests. Before interaction there can be no expectations. Because they have no expectations, they do not assume the other is aggressive; there is no reason to assume a self-help world. In this state of nature, and before interaction, no selfish identity is possible because identity results from interaction. "To assume otherwise," says Wendt, "is to attribute to states in the state-of-nature qualities that they can only possess in society. Self-help is an institution, not a constitutive feature of anarchy."<sup>24</sup> In other words, neorealists have put the rabbit in the hat by assuming that states are self-interested and sometimes predatory in the state of nature. Neorealists, says Wendt, assume that what is must be: "If states find themselves in a self-help system, this is because their practices made it that way. Changing the practice will change the intersubjective knowledge that constitutes the system."<sup>25</sup>

Because states before interaction have no identity, no interests, and no expectations, Wendt sees no reason to accept the realist assumption that self-interested defensive states characterize the state of nature. Wendt begins his analysis by assuming two states that recognize the difference between self and other. We can have neither self-help nor other-help if we do not recognize the other. Because neither conflict nor cooperation is possible without an other, assuming the absence of an other also means assuming the self lives in harmony. Assuming harmony in the state of nature would be no better than assuming conflict.<sup>26</sup>

Wendt imagines the state of nature as follows: "Consider two actors—ego and alter—encountering each other for the first time. Each wants to survive and has certain material capabilities, but neither actor has biological or domestic imperatives for power, glory, or conquest . . . and there is no history of security or insecurity between the two. What should they do?"<sup>27</sup> What they should not do, suggests Wendt, is assume the other is a dangerous rival. There is no reason alter and ego should become trapped in a power relationship. Instead, they could try to assume the other's perspective: when ego acts, alter should try to understand what it would mean by such an act. Although this process can fail and result in a self-help system, it can also generate an other-help system of prosocial, altruistic behavior.<sup>28</sup>

24. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," pp. 401–2.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 407.

26. For a critique of harmony assumptions in international relations theory, see E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis, 1919–1939* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); and Kenneth Waltz, *Man, The State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

27. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 404.

28. *Ibid.* pp. 401 and 405.



Constructing the alternate security system of other-help requires taking the perspective of the other and then identifying with the other. Perspective taking is commonly known as standing in the shoes of another. We do this with both friend and foe—as in George Herbert Mead’s example of the “warrior putting himself in the place of those whom he is proceeding against.”<sup>29</sup> So Columbus and the Indians eventually were able to take each other’s perspective, to varying degrees of success, just as we would eventually be able to take the perspective of Martians who land in Times Square.<sup>30</sup> We take another’s perspective to predict its behavior.<sup>31</sup> For Wendt and the symbolic interactionists, perspective taking is necessary for any social interaction, whether it be self- or other-regarding.

Perspective taking is necessary but not sufficient for creating an alternate security system. An other-help system requires that, through perspective taking, actors identify with one another. To identify with another, we must have sympathy or empathy. As David Franks observed, “Without the affective component of empathy, the role-taking process would just aid in the Hobbesian war of all against all rather than provide critical support for social structures.”<sup>32</sup> By standing in another’s shoes, by making this imaginative leap and viewing ourselves from the perspective of the other, we may come to sympathize and thus identify with the other.<sup>33</sup>

By emphasizing the transformative potential of a role-taking process, Wendt argues that ego and alter can come to identify with one another. This identification creates a system founded not on the egoism of self-help, but on a definition of self that includes the other. Because process, not structure determines state identity, we can create nonegoistic identities through perspective taking and empathy. I argue, however, that a closer examination of intergroup relations suggests that nature trumps process.

29. George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), p. 326. See also Sheldon Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism* (Reading, Mass.: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 37–38 and 62.

30. See Peter Berger, “Identity as a Problem in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1966, pp. 105–15 and p. 111 in particular. Mead notes that initial communication with Martians would be impossible. See *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 257.

31. Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism*, p. 62.

32. David Franks, “Notes on the Bodily Aspect of Emotions: A Controversial Issue in Symbolic Interaction,” *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 8 (1987), pp. 219–33 and p. 220 in particular. Borrowing from Adam Smith and David Hume, Mead viewed sympathy as critical to identifying with others. See Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 366; Sheldon Stryker, “Symbolic Interactionism: Themes and Variations,” in Morris Rosenberg and Ralph Turner, eds., *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 3–29 and p. 5 in particular; and Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism*, pp. 19 and 62. Because empathy is a relatively new word—for example, “empathetic” was not used until after Mead’s death—it is not surprising that he did not use it in his writings. Staub notes that many writers consider role taking and empathy to be identical. See Staub, *Positive Social Behavior and Morality*, p. 44.

33. Mead’s emphasis on the importance of sympathy (or empathy) to identify with others is well-supported in the social psychology literature. For a review, see C. Daniel Batson and Kathryn Oleson, “Current Status of the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis,” in Clark, *Prosocial Behavior*, pp. 62–85.

## The minimal-group paradigm, SIT, norms, and culture

Until Henri Tajfel and John Turner's creation of SIT, the dominant explanation of intergroup conflict was realistic conflict theory.<sup>34</sup> This functional theory of intergroup conflict assumed that genuine conflicts of interest—either material or symbolic—triggered intergroup competition. Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif conducted the defining experiments for realistic conflict theory. The Sherifs found that intergroup competition transformed a group of seemingly well-adjusted and amiable boys at summer camp into something “wicked, disturbed, and vicious.”<sup>35</sup> One of the few attempts to replicate the Sherifs' experiment got out of hand. Intergroup hostility led to a knife fight among some of the boys. The police evacuated the camp to prevent further violence, and the researcher was hospitalized for exhaustion.<sup>36</sup> It was in response to this functional view of conflict that Tajfel conducted a series of experiments to discover the minimal conditions necessary to trigger intergroup discrimination. To explain the results from the minimal-group experiments, Tajfel and Turner developed SIT.

First, a word of caution and defense. Although all levels of analysis have their limitations, none is as commonly criticized as the psychological level. The eminent psychologist Herbert Kelman observes that any attempt “to conceptualize the causes of war and the conditions for peace that starts from individual psychology rather than from an analysis of the relations between nation-states is of questionable relevance.”<sup>37</sup> Whether one agrees or disagrees with Kelman's statement, it does not bear on my argument. This article uses SIT in part because it operates at the level of the group, not the individual. As one observer put it, SIT “is grounded in the critique of reductionism.”<sup>38</sup>

A group is different from the sum of its parts. Just as it would be mistaken to reify the group by speaking of a “group mind,” it is equally wrong to believe that using social psychology to explain anything beyond individual behavior is necessarily reductionist. Because psychology is about the way people think,

34. See Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Sherif, *Groups in Harmony and Tension* (New York: Harper, 1953); and Lewis Coser, *The Function of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956).

35. Muzafer Sherif, *Group Conflict and Cooperation: Their Social Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 85.

36. See Lutfy Diab, “A Study of Intragroup and Intergroup Relations Among Experimentally Produced Small Groups,” *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 82 (August 1970), pp. 49–82; and Jacob Rabbie, “The Effects of Intergroup Competition and Cooperation on Intragroup and Intergroup Relationships,” in Valerian Derlega and Janusz Grzelak, eds., *Cooperation and Helping Behavior: Theories and Research* (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 123–49 and p. 125 in particular.

37. Herbert Kelman, “Social-Psychological Approaches to the Study of International Relations,” in Herbert Kelman, ed., *International Behavior: A Social-Psychological Analysis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), pp. 3–39. The quotation is from p. 5.

38. Michael Hogg, “Group Cohesiveness: A Critical Review and Some New Directions,” in Wolfgang Stroebe and Miles Hewstone, eds., *European Review of Social Psychology*, vol. 4 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), pp. 85–111 and p. 92 in particular. For further discussion, see John Turner, *Rediscovering the Social Group* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987); and William Doise, *Levels of Explanation in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

how a psychological theory can operate at anything other than the individual level of analysis is not obvious. While individuals constitute all social entities (such as armies, social structures, or states), this does not mean that all social entities can be explained by reference to individuals. For example, individuals make up bureaucracies, but we cannot understand the characteristics of bureaucracies (such as resistance to innovation) by examining only the beliefs of individuals. Likewise, individuals constitute groups, but we cannot understand behavior characteristic of groups—such as intergroup competition, discrimination, ethnocentrism, and in-group cohesion and conformity—by reference to the psychology of individuals. Some social phenomena have “emergent” qualities that cannot be derived from the beliefs, motives, or powers of individuals.<sup>39</sup>

I use SIT because it is a *social* psychological theory of intergroup behavior.<sup>40</sup> If SIT were reductionist—that is, if it used the individual level of analysis to explain group-level phenomena—then group behavior would be additive. We could simply sum the beliefs or tendencies of individuals to determine how they would behave in a group. SIT begins with the observation that interpersonal processes and intergroup processes can be different. It puts the “social” into psychology to explain how a group becomes different from the sum of its individual parts. For example, by placing the “group in the individual,” as Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams put it, SIT resolves the reductionist dilemma of why group behavior is sometimes not in the best interest of the individual.<sup>41</sup> Although the individual level of analysis can tell us a great deal about international politics, this article uses SIT because it examines intergroup behavior.<sup>42</sup>

Some readers may also question the value of evidence collected in artificial rather than natural settings. Kelman argues that what matters is not the difference in settings, but the relevance of the isolated variable.<sup>43</sup> To develop a cognitive argument, it is sensible to first strip away the noise. In the case of the

39. For a valuable discussion of methodological individualism and reductionism, see Daniel Little, *Varieties of Social Explanation* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), pp. 183–201. For a spirited structuralist critique of methodological individualism in social psychology and American sociology (including symbolic interactionism), see Bruce Mayhew, “Structuralism Versus Individualism: Part 1, Shadowboxing in the Dark,” *Social Forces* 59 (December 1980), pp. 335–75.

40. Sociologists and psychologists both claim their own brand of social psychology. Sociological social psychology tends to view the individual and society as inseparable and codetermining units; psychological social psychology tends to focus more on social cognition, affect, and motivation in individuals. For an introduction and further discussion, see Cookie White Stephan and Walter G. Stephan, eds., *Two Social Psychologies*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1990); and Rosenberg and Turner, *Social Psychology*.

41. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 3.

42. Elsewhere, I use attribution theory to examine when individuals are likely to give others reputations for being resolute or irresolute. Scholars usually use attribution theory at the interindividual level of analysis, but it also has been used to examine intergroup attributions. See Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

43. Herbert Kelman, “The Question of Relevance,” in Kelman, *International Behavior*, pp. 597–98.

minimal-group paradigm, the experiments provided a puzzle that led to the theory. The test of the theory is how well it explains intergroup behavior in natural settings, not whether the experimental setting resembles international politics.

### *The minimal-group paradigm*

How will ego and alter relate to one another in the state of nature? Tajfel led a group of European social psychologists to discover whether competition for real resources would generate conflict or if the mere perception of being in a group would be enough to trigger in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination.<sup>44</sup> The results of their minimal-group experiments can help us understand how ego and alter might behave toward one another in Wendt's state of nature.

Tajfel's experiment has two parts. Subjects are first divided into two groups based on some arbitrary criterion. For example, subjects may be briefly shown a slide filled with dots and then asked to estimate the number of dots on the slide. The experimenters collect and ostensibly review the dot estimates. Subjects are told that, miraculously, half of them underestimated and half overestimated the number of dots on the screen and that this serves as the basis for dividing them into two groups. The subjects do not know who is in their group or the other group, and there is no interaction with members of their own or the other group.

In the second part of the experiment, each subject is taken into a room or cubicle and asked to allocate money or points between two subjects—but never to oneself. Subjects understand that how they allocate rewards has no bearing on their own gain or loss, so there is no rational link between economic self-interest and in-group favoritism. Subjects then allocate the points or rewards to individuals who are identified only as members of their group or the other. To allocate these rewards, subjects choose from a menu with many distribution options, for example, fairness, maximum joint gain, relative gain, and absolute gain.

While no experiment can fully replicate the fateful first meeting between ego and alter in the state of nature, the experimental design of the minimal-group paradigm comes close. Group identification is minimal, and the groups have no history, do not compete over scarce resources, and have no distrust, self-interest, or interaction. Tajfel called these groups “purely cognitive” and dubbed them “minimal” groups.<sup>45</sup>

44. For the first minimal-group experiment, see Henri Tajfel, “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination,” *Scientific American* 223 (November 1970), pp. 96–102. Also see Michael Billig and Henri Tajfel, “Social Categorization and Similarity in Intergroup Behaviour,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1973, pp. 27–52.

45. Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin, eds., *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), pp. 7–24 and p. 14 in particular.

When in-group members distributed points or money to other (anonymous) members of the in-group, they favored mutual-gain or absolute-gain strategies. Yet when subjects distributed points or money between in-group and out-group members, they consistently preferred to maximize the difference between the groups rather than pursue strategies of mutual or absolute gains. Ronald Fisher summarized two decades' worth of minimal-group experiments: "The results showed that, when assigning points between an in-group and an out-group member, subjects consistently favored the in-group and tried to maximize the difference in scores between the in-group and the out-group. The evidence also indicated that the subjects also wished to be fair and, therefore, this discrimination was not as extreme as it might have been. These results are very robust and have been replicated many times."<sup>46</sup> No matter how trivial or ad hoc the groupings, and in the apparent absence of any competing values, the mere perception of another group leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. Simply put, "Beating the outgroup is more important than sheer profit."<sup>47</sup> Because even the most minimal categorization led to intergroup competition, Tajfel and Turner concluded that "we are dealing here with some factor or process inherent in the intergroup situation itself."<sup>48</sup>

After twenty years of minimal-group experiments, these findings cannot easily be dismissed as peculiar to English schoolboys. One observer argued recently that the minimal-group effect is culturally transparent; it has been found in "Wales, Holland, the former West Germany, the United States, Switzerland, Hong Kong, and New Zealand."<sup>49</sup> One group of cross-cultural psychologists concluded that the phenomenon probably is universal: "While full-scale cross-cultural replications have not yet been attempted, it is likely that such extensions will prove to be fruitful."<sup>50</sup> Also, there is no sex-based

46. Ronald J. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), p. 45. Condor and Brown note that the preference for relative gains is reliable "even if this involves a forfeit in absolute ingroup gains." See Susan Condor and Rupert Brown, "Psychological Processes in Intergroup Conflict," in Wolfgang Stroebe, Arie W. Kruglanski, Daniel Bar-Tal, and Miles Hewstone, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), pp. 3–26 and p. 10 in particular.

47. Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*, p. 49. Billig and Tajfel also found in-group favoritism when the groups were explicitly arbitrary and the subjects knew their group identification was due to chance. See Billig and Tajfel, "Social Categorization and Similarity in Intergroup Behaviour."

48. Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior," p. 15. For the argument that these findings are artificial, see H. B. Gerard and M. F. Hoyt, "Distinctiveness of Social Categorization and Attitude Toward Ingroup Members," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 29 (June 1974), pp. 836–42. For a response, see Henri Tajfel, "The Achievement of Group Differentiation," in Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 77–98.

49. James Sidanius, "The Psychology of Group Conflict and the Dynamics of Oppression," in Shanto Iyengar and William McGuire, eds., *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 183–219. The quotation is from p. 189.

50. See John W. Berry, Ype H. Poortinga, Marshall H. Segall, and Pierre R. Dasen, *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 303–4. Fletcher and Ward hold a similar view. See Garth Fletcher and Coleen Ward,

difference: men and women, boys and girls discriminate with equal gusto. According to Steve Hinkle and Rupert Brown, women “have been found to display intergroup differentiation just as readily as men in both laboratory and field contexts.”<sup>51</sup>

### *Social identity theory*

SIT is one of the most influential contemporary theories of intergroup behavior.<sup>52</sup> Instead of examining the individual in the group, social identity theorists focus on the group in the individual: our social group partially defines our social identity. Tajfel and Turner advanced the theory to explain the tendency to prefer relative over absolute gains in the minimal-group situation. This theory posits that people seek a positive self-identity that they gain by identifying with a group and by favorable comparison of the in-group with out-groups. These comparisons generate intergroup competition and could explain the pronounced tendencies for relative gains. Two parts of the theory deserve elaboration: why categorization is inevitable and how self-esteem is linked to social identity.

Why do ego and alter, before interaction and so without identity, distinguish between self and other? As noted earlier, we cannot discuss the possibility for conflict or cooperation unless we recognize self and other. More important is the cognitive requirement for simplification. Categorization is a cognitive necessity. We cannot act until we have simplified the whirl and buzz of our social environment. Categories help us order the environment and make it meaningful.<sup>53</sup>

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“Attribution Theory and Processes: A Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in Michael Harris Bond, ed., *The Cross-Cultural Challenge to Social Psychology* (London: Sage, 1988), pp. 230–44.

51. Some have found that girls are more discriminatory than boys. For supporting evidence and citations, see Steve Hinkle and Rupert Brown, “Intergroup Comparisons and Social Identity,” in Dominic Abrams and Michael Hogg, eds., *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances* (New York: Springer-Verlag: 1990), pp. 48–70. The quotation is from p. 59. Also see Rupert Brown and Amanda Smith, “Perceptions Of and By Minority Groups: The Case of Women in Academia,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 19 (January–February 1989), pp. 61–75.

52. Tajfel and Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour.” For reviews and critiques of SIT, see Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*; Miles Hewstone, “Attributional Bases of Intergroup Conflict,” in Stroebe et al., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict*, pp. 47–71; Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*; Donald Taylor and Fathali Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations: International Social Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1987); Henri Tajfel, ed., *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Jacob M. Rabbie, “The Effects of Intragroup Cooperation and Intergroup Competition on In-group Cohesion and Out-group Hostility,” in Alexander H. Harcourt and Frans B. M. Waal, eds., *Coalitions and Alliances in Humans and Other Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 175–205; Jacob Rabbie, Jan Schot, and Lieuw Visser, “Social Identity Theory: A Conceptual and Empirical Critique from the Perspective of a Behavioral Interaction Model,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 19 (May–June 1989), pp. 171–202; and Norman Berkowitz, “Evidence that Subjects’ Expectancies Confound Intergroup Bias in Tajfel’s Minimal Group Paradigm,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 20 (April 1994), pp. 184–95.

53. Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*, p. 19. Also see Waldemar Lilli and Jürgen Rehm,

Categorization explains comparison. When we categorize, we accentuate similarities within our group and differences between groups. Creating categories demands comparisons. These intergroup comparisons are not evaluatively neutral. Because our social group defines part of our identity, we seek to view our group as different and better than other groups on some relevant dimensions. In short, categorization is a cognitive requirement that demands comparisons; the motivational need for a positive social identity leads to comparisons that favor the in-group.<sup>54</sup>

To explain the extreme and ethnocentric nature of minimal-group competition, SIT posits a universal desire for self-esteem.<sup>55</sup> We maintain or enhance our self-esteem by maximizing the difference between our group and other groups on those dimensions that we think reflect positively upon our group. While categorization leads us to accentuate the differences between in-group and out-group, the need for a positive social identity leads us to accentuate our positive values in comparison with others. This enables us to feel better about our group, which in turn is part of our identity.

The SIT approach essentially proposes ethnocentrism as the logical corollary to egocentrism. It links the individual level (self-esteem) with the group level (social identity). In general, just as people explain events in ways that enhance their self-esteem, group members tend to explain behavior in ways that enhance their group.<sup>56</sup> While a desire for positive social identity drives our behavior, we define our identity through social comparison. In short, the key to discriminatory behavior is found in our effort to give our own group greater relative value.<sup>57</sup>

SIT can explain our pronounced tendency for relative gains in the minimal-group experiments. Once subjects are put into a category, no matter how arbitrary or minimal, their desire for a positive social identity leads them to maximize the differences between their group and the other group on the only dimension available in the experimental setting: the distribution of points or

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"Judgmental Processes as Bases of Intergroup Conflict," in Stroebe et al., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict*, p. 30; and Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour," pp. 15–16.

54. Michael Hogg, *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 90–92.

55. On the role that self-esteem plays in SIT, see Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution*; Hogg and Abrams, *Social Identifications*; Jennifer Crocker and Riia Luhtanen, "Collective Self-Esteem and Ingroup Bias," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58 (January 1990), pp. 60–67.

56. Hewstone, "Attributional Bases of Intergroup Conflict," pp. 52–53. It also appears that low-status groups discriminate less than high-status groups. This is because the less one identifies with one's group, the less important it is to view the group favorably. See for example, C. N. Masson and M. Verkuyten, "Prejudice, Ethnic Identity, Contact, and Ethnic Group Preferences Among Dutch Young Adolescents," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 23 (January 1993), pp. 156–68 and p. 158 in particular. For another study that tests hypotheses on ethnocentrism from SIT, see Peter Grant, "Ethnocentrism in Response to a Threat to Social Identity," *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, vol. 8, no. 6, 1993, pp. 143–54.

57. Taylor and Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations*, p. 78.

money. Because subjects seek to accentuate the difference between their group and the other group, they distribute rewards to maximize this difference rather than to maximize profit. Note that SIT is agnostic on the form this competition may take outside the minimal-group paradigm. How we compete and what values we think promote our social identity are socially constructed.

Scholars disagree over the extent to which intergroup discrimination results from a need for a positive social identity. Although the self-esteem assumption does enormous work for SIT, the evidence for it is mixed. After reviewing the evidence, two scholars concluded that self-esteem “may not be the only or the most fundamental motive in intergroup behaviour. While it clearly does play an important role, self-esteem may be one of a number of motives and effects of different forms of group behavior.”<sup>58</sup> Although scholars debate the extent to which self-esteem drives discrimination, they generally agree that people use their group to obtain a positive social identity. According to Hinkle and Brown, “The empirical case for the general importance of intergroup comparisons in creating and maintaining positive social identities is unarguable.”<sup>59</sup>

The need for a positive social identity explains why groups discriminate for no apparent reason. This does not mean that intergroup conflict is caused only by cold cognition. Often fear, power, historical myths, or the heat of affect (like hate for the other or love of one’s own group) accounts for intergroup conflict.<sup>60</sup> While the causal importance of a need for a positive social identity varies, it is sufficient to explain intergroup conflict in the absence of all other explanations.

No one contends that a need for a positive social identity drives all conflict. The claim is that our cognitions and need for a positive social identity are autonomous factors that may push relationships in the direction of conflict depending upon political, economic, or historical factors.<sup>61</sup> The argument is not that groups always prefer relative gains in nonexperimental intergroup situations but that categorization requires comparison, which in turn leads to competition. Although this competition can take different forms—it can be cooperative or conflictual—it is an inescapable feature of intergroup and interstate relations.

### *Norms and culture*

Although Tajfel initially thought the preference for out-group discrimination was normative, he quickly abandoned that notion in favor of a cognitive

58. Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, “Social Motivation, Self-Esteem and Social Identity,” in Abrams and Hogg, *Social Identity Theory*, pp. 28–47. The quotation is from p. 46.

59. Hinkle and Brown, “Intergroup Comparisons and Social Identity,” p. 68.

60. For an extension of SIT to cover “social emotions,” see Eliot Smith, “Social Identity and Social Emotions,” in Diane M. Mackie and David L. Hamilton, eds., *Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping: Interactive Processes in Group Perception* (New York: Academic Press, 1993), pp. 297–315.

61. David Wilder, “Cognitive Factors Affecting the Success of Intergroup Contact,” in Worchel and Austin, *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, pp. 49–66 and p. 50 in particular.



explanation.<sup>62</sup> The debate continues over the role of norms in the minimal-group situation.<sup>63</sup> People are motivated by different things and influenced by different norms at different times. A number of studies suggest that norms of fairness influence subjects' behavior in the experiment; without the norm, discrimination would be stronger.<sup>64</sup> Social norms appear to act as a brake on preferences for relative gains.

The important role of norms can be seen in a study of Polynesian children. Perhaps because these children were raised to value generosity and cooperation, they were more generous in the minimal-group paradigm toward the out-group than were European children—though they still favored the in-group.<sup>65</sup> It may be that because Polynesian society associates generosity with status, these children attain a positive self-image by being generous. This means two things. First, even subjects who value generosity and altruism will discriminate against the out-group. Second, and more optimistically, collectivist cultures may be more generous and less discriminatory toward out-groups than individualist cultures.

This second point—the possibility that collectivist or more prosocial cultures will be more generous and less discriminatory to out-groups—seems intuitive. For example, Wendt suggests that the more developed the collective self, the more prosocial the security policies.<sup>66</sup> While this is probably true within a group, the opposite is probably true between groups. In other words, the more individualist the culture, the weaker intergroup discrimination; the more collectivist the culture, the stronger intergroup discrimination.

Interpersonal relations and intergroup relations differ fundamentally. By identifying with a group, we de-emphasize our personal identity (e.g., I like the color red) and emphasize our group identity (e.g., I am a Bosnian Muslim). We see ourselves as an exemplar of the group rather than as an individual. Social and personal identity represent different levels of abstraction and are compet-

62. For a normative explanation of the minimal-group paradigm, see Henri Tajfel, M. G. Billig, R. P. Bundy, and Claude Flament, "Social Categorization and Intergroup Behaviour," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1971, pp. 149–78.

63. For discussion and citations, see Hogg and Abrams, "Social Motivation, Self-Esteem, and Social Identity."

64. Henri Tajfel and Michael Billig, "Familiarity and Categorization in Intergroup Behavior," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 10 (March 1974), pp. 159–70. Also see Alan Branthwaite, Susan Doyle, and Nicholas Lightbrown, "The Balance Between Fairness and Discrimination," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 9 (April–June 1979), pp. 149–63; and John Turner, "Fairness or Discrimination in Intergroup Behaviour? A reply to Branthwaite, Doyle, and Lightbrown," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 10 (April–June 1980), pp. 131–47. For additional evidence on the strength of fairness norms, see Kristina Diekmann, Steven Samuels, Lee Ross, and Max Bazerman, "Self-Interest and Fairness in Problems of Resource Allocation," manuscript, Kellogg School of Business, Northwestern University, 1994.

65. Margaret Wetherell, "Cross-Cultural Studies of Minimal Groups: Implications for the Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Relations," in Tajfel, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, pp. 207–40 and pp. 220–21 in particular.

66. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 401.

ing.<sup>67</sup> The minimal-group paradigm illustrates some of the differences between intergroup and interpersonal identifications. Because of the very minimal nature of the groupings, subjects are likely to have viewed the other at least in part in interpersonal terms. In the case of the Polynesian children, for example, it may be that the intergroup distinction (skill in dot estimation) insufficiently triggered intergroup identities. Given their strong prosocial and altruistic norms, these children continued to view the other as part of the in-group.<sup>68</sup> Of course (and contrary to my argument), it is also possible that they viewed the other as part of the out-group and sought to obtain a positive social identity by competing in altruism.

By recognizing the difference between interpersonal and intergroup behavior, we can see why strong in-groups will have equally strong out-groups. Strong in-group identity leads to sharing, cooperation, perceived mutuality of interests, and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for group interests. But this has a cost. The more we identify with our group, the more we will differentiate our group from other groups. This leads to between-group competition, perceived conflict of interests, and a preference for relative over absolute gains. This has been dubbed the double-edged sword of social identity—in-group identity promotes intergroup discrimination.<sup>69</sup> Or as a team of psychologists argued: “Competition in collective cultures is among ingroups, not among individuals. In individualistic cultures it is individuals who achieve; in collectivist cultures, groups achieve.”<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps the best evidence for the inherent sociability of humans is the pervasive influence of ethnocentrism.<sup>71</sup> If we were not social, we would not form groups; and if we did not form groups, we could not be ethnocentric. As Marc Ross put it, “Sociality promotes ethnocentric conflict, furnishing a critical building block for in-group amity and out-group hostility.”<sup>72</sup> Although SIT has considerable cross-cultural support, the majority of evidence is drawn from

67. Turner, *Rediscovering the Social Group*. See also Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi and William Doise, “Levels of Analysis and Social Identity,” in Abrams and Hogg, *Social Identity Theory*, pp. 71–88.

68. For a discussion of the influence of intragroup and interpersonal norms in the minimal-group experiment, see Turner, “Fairness or Discrimination in Intergroup Behaviour.” For additional evidence of the prosocial orientation of Polynesian children, see Nancy Graves and Theodore Graves, “The Cultural Context of Prosocial Development,” in Diane Bridgeman, ed., *The Nature of Prosocial Development* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), pp. 243–64.

69. Marilyn Brewer and Sherry Schneider, “Social Identity and Social Dilemmas: A Double-Edged Sword,” in Abrams and Hogg, *Social Identity Theory*, pp. 169–84.

70. Harry Triandis, Robert Bontempo, and Marcelo Villareal, “Individualism and Collectivism: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Self-Ingroup Relationships,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 54 (February 1988), pp. 323–38. The quotation is from p. 335.

71. Edgerton suggests that “ethnocentrism is as widespread and virulent today as at any time in history.” See Robert Edgerton, *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 55. For a review of theoretical explanations for ethnocentrism, see Robert Levine and Donald Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: Wiley, 1972).

72. Marc Ross, “The Role of Evolution in Ethnocentric Conflict and its Management,” in *Journal of Social Issues* vol. 47, no. 3, 1991, pp. 167–85. The quotation is from p. 177.

Western-oriented cultures. This is ironic, since it seems likely that the more collectivist the culture, the more applicable SIT.<sup>73</sup> To the extent that SIT has been confirmed using predominately male Western individualists, it has passed the hardest test.

There is growing (but still limited) empirical support for the proposition that collectivist culture and intergroup discrimination are positively related. For example, two psychologists recently confirmed this hypothesis in a study of Saudi Arabians (who have a collectivist culture) and Americans. The authors found that "Saudis showed much more out-group derogating and more intergroup bias than did Americans."<sup>74</sup> In general, much evidence suggests that humans in society can be free of aggression; but this same evidence shows intergroup discrimination. For example, a recent anthropological study argued that people are "*a priori* social beings," but noted that these same people "may attribute unattractive and negatively valued characteristics to their enemies or neighbors, but most certainly not to themselves."<sup>75</sup> Two scholars who examined thirty ethnic groups in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda found ethnocentric biases alive and well.<sup>76</sup>

But what of ego and alter? Are they doomed to fall into a pattern of competitive and relative-gains-seeking behavior or will they create an other-help system? Two questions remain. One, how should we expect ego and alter to behave upon first meeting one another in the state of nature—that is, before identities (either egoistic or altruistic), before regimes, before institutions, and before all the trappings of the modern world system are formed. Second, what are the chances of transforming the system if ego and alter become, for example, France and Germany?

### Competition in anarchy

Once we assume that we have two states, we can assume each will compete against the other regardless of the other's behavior. Competition need not be triggered by economic or security concerns and is not necessarily a function of selfishness or limited resources; instead, competition results from categorization, comparison, and a need for a positive social identity. As a result, ego and

73. Hinkle and Brown, "Intergroup Comparisons and Social Identity," pp. 69–70.

74. Saad Said Al-Zahrani and Stan Kaplowitz, "Attributional Biases in Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures: a Comparison of Americans with Saudis," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 56 (September 1993), pp. 223–33. The quotation is from p. 231.

75. Signe Howell and Roy Willis, "Introduction," in Signe Howell and Roy Willis, eds., *Societies at Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1–28 and p. 10 in particular.

76. Marilyn Brewer and Donald Campbell, *Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Attitudes: East African Evidence* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976). See also Marilyn Brewer, "The Role of Ethnocentrism in Intergroup Conflict," in Worchel and Austin, *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* pp. 88–102; and Donald Horowitz, "Group Comparison and the Sources of Conflict," in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 141–84.

alter are predisposed to compete against one another prior to interacting with one another.

Unlike Waltz, who thinks this competition is due to structure, and unlike Wendt, who thinks competition is due to process, I argue that our cognitions and desire for a positive social identity generate competition. Thus for cognitive and motivated (rather than structural or social) reasons, ego and alter will compete against one another. This view of politics fits with Hans Morgenthau's belief that international conflict has its roots in human nature.<sup>77</sup> However, Morgenthau thought people had an insatiable thirst for power. I argue only that groups are inherently competitive; this supports the neorealist claim that the principle of action in anarchy is self-help.

It might be argued that I exaggerate the power of SIT and diminish the importance of perspective taking. As discussed above, Wendt and the symbolic interactionists argue that we can create an other-help system in the presocial state of nature by taking the other's perspective and by being empathic. It may be that however ego acts, alter will seek to understand ego's intent. Wendt suggests that alter will surmise ego's intent by imagining what it would intend "were it to make such a gesture itself."<sup>78</sup>

According to Wendt, the ability to take another's perspective is central to establishing an other-help system: "Being treated as an object for the gratification of others precludes the positive identification with others necessary for collective security; conversely, being treated by others in ways that are empathic with respect to the security of the self permits such identification."<sup>79</sup> Rather than mindlessly linking an undesirable act with an undesirable character, alter will put itself in ego's shoes and thereby be capable of "seeing" situational explanations for ego's behavior. It has long been recognized that while observers generally explain actors' behavior in character terms, actors generally explain their own behavior in more situational terms. By taking the actor's perspective, an observer may be more likely to view the actor's behavior in neutral situational terms.<sup>80</sup>

By putting itself in ego's shoes, alter can check the downward spiral of nasty causal attributions. Yet the desire to take the other's perspective does not guarantee the accuracy of our judgments. It may only make matters worse.

Perspective taking is often extremely difficult. Although Wendt suggests that alter should imagine what it would intend were it to behave like ego, this is likely to be nothing but projection. As two psychologists recently observed: "It has become increasingly evident that the willingness and even the ability to engage in mental perspective taking does not ensure the accuracy of the

77. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1962), pp. 3–4.

78. Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 405.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 407.

80. This is called the actor-observer difference. See E. E. Jones and R. E. Nisbett, *The Actor and the Observer: Divergent Perceptions of the Causes of Behavior* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1971).

empathic inference. . . . Empathic accuracy requires that the perceiver's cognitive activity be based in large measure on real knowledge of the other and of his or her circumstances and not merely on supposition, analogy, or projection."<sup>81</sup> Yet alter cannot rely on real knowledge of ego's circumstances because the two have no knowledge of one another. Alter's views can be nothing but supposition, analogy, or projection. Even if alter wants to be empathic, its explanations are likely to be ethnocentric, and this is just as likely to cause as to prevent conflict.

The essence of ethnocentrism is the belief that the out-group shares the in-group's definition of the situation; this makes it very difficult to imagine how the other construes the situation.<sup>82</sup> People consistently underestimate and underappreciate the uncertainty, variability, and impact of subjective interpretations or construals.<sup>83</sup>

Not only will people differ in their judgment of an object but they may also differ over the object that is being judged. Solomon Asch's classic example of this is the statement: "A little rebellion . . . is a good thing." The object of judgment changes if the statement is attributed to V. I. Lenin or to Thomas Jefferson.<sup>84</sup> A conservative might agree with the statement because she thinks of Jefferson; her reaction would be different if she thinks of Lenin. By construing an event one way, we often fail to see alternative construals and so assume others will see the event the same way. In general, we fail to recognize that others may not have a different judgment of an object, but that the very object of judgment may itself be different.

The problem of construal further illustrates why it is so difficult to make accurate empathic judgments. By construing an event one way, and by failing to recognize possible alternative construals, we often are unduly confident that others will view an event as we do. Imagine American diplomats' surprise when U.S. efforts to express goodwill toward Iran by supplying Kurdish refugees in northwestern Iran with secondhand clothes and blankets instead deepened Iranian hostility. As one diplomat put it: "In the West, people understand that good, clean, secondhand clothes or blankets are better than nothing; here it is

81. Linda Stinson and William Ickes, "Empathic Accuracy in the Interactions of Male Friends Versus Male Strangers," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62 (May 1992), pp. 297–315. The quotation is from pp. 787–88.

82. Brewer, "The Role of Ethnocentrism in Intergroup Conflict," p. 101.

83. Wendt and the symbolic interactionists recognize that perspective taking can be difficult and can result in misperceptions. See Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," p. 405; Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*, p. 256; and John Hewitt, *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1984), p. 143. On the importance of construal, see Lee Ross, "Recognizing the Role of Construal Processes," in Irvin Rock, ed., *The Legacy of Solomon Asch: Essays in Cognition and Social Psychology* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990), pp. 77–96; and Dale W. Griffin and Lee Ross, "Subjective Construal, Social Inference, and Human Misunderstanding," in Mark P. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 24 (New York: Academic Press, 1991), pp. 319–59.

84. Ross, "Recognizing the Role of Construal Processes."

seen as insulting and even provocative, a suggestion that Iran merits nothing better.”<sup>85</sup>

Even when ethnocentric projection and construal do not cause problems, and even when we know the other well, it is still hard to make accurate predictions about another’s behavior. Indeed, Ernest May draws the conclusion from case studies before both world wars that “attempts by one government to see things from the standpoint of another government were invariably failures.”<sup>86</sup> For example, before 1941 the Soviet high command did its best to imagine how the Germans might conduct a war against the Soviet Union. They were aware of German capabilities and German tactics (having seen them in France, Poland, and the Scandinavian countries). Soviet guesses were sensible; they were also completely wrong.<sup>87</sup> Even knowing the other well does not guarantee accurate judgments. In Wendt’s state of nature, ego and alter are strangers.

Although “identification with others” is “necessary for collective security,” taking the other’s perspective requires extended knowledge of the other.<sup>88</sup> Perspective taking between strangers is likely to be little more than ethnocentric projection. With the hope of empathy dashed, the prospects for other-help are dim.

## Self-help and European Union

The second question remains—what happens if ego and alter become France and Germany? The European Union illustrates that states can cooperate with one another. It may even illustrate how states can come to identify with each other. We can imagine that someday, if not now, the French may elevate their social identity to include all of Europe. After all, my argument is not that group boundaries are fixed but that a group—however constituted—will be egoistic. This means that collective identity among some states brings us no closer to establishing an other-help system; if anything, it takes us deeper into self-help.

There are different names for the phenomenon of increasing European integration. Karl Deutsch and his colleagues would call it a pluralistic security community: “The kind of sense of community that is relevant for integration . . . turned out to be rather a matter of mutual sympathy and loyalties; of ‘we-feeling’ trust, and mutual consideration; of partial identification in terms of

85. Cited by Alan Cowell, “Iran Sees U.S. Aid to Kurds as Insult,” *New York Times* 5 May 1991, p. A18.

86. Ernest May, “Capabilities and Proclivities,” in Ernest May, ed., *Knowing One’s Enemies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 503–42. The quotation is from p. 538.

87. John Erickson, “Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930–1941,” in *ibid.*, pp. 375–423.

88. The quotations are from Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It,” p. 407.

self-images and interests; of mutually successful predictions of behavior.”<sup>89</sup> Duncan Snidal might call it cooperative clusters; Donald Campbell would call it clique selfishness.<sup>90</sup> All three names aptly capture the central phenomenon behind European integration—an expanded or more collective definition of self to encompass selected others. Yet this brings us no closer to other-help. As Marilyn Brewer observed, an expanded definition of self, or clique selfishness, “may well be a more powerful and intractable form of selfishness than even the most extreme individual self-interest.”<sup>91</sup> The European Union does not imply a transcending of egoistic incentives but a more expansive definition of one’s in-group.

This does not solve the self-help problem; it raises it to a higher level. Full European integration would represent a change in the number of units, not a change of system. There is no reason to think that a European identity will yield more prosocial or altruistic security policies toward out-groups than a French identity does now. There is some reason to believe intergroup cooperation would decrease. Snidal suggests that concern for relative gains increases with a decreasing number of units; the fewer the actors—the more encompassing the groups—the more acute becomes the problem of relative gains.<sup>92</sup>

The European Union may represent a significant change in the way some states relate to one another. If France and Germany identify with one another, this shows the malleability of identity and the possibility of fundamentally changing relations between some states. But, again, this is not a change of system. France and Germany may have transcended egoistic identities in their relations with one another but not in their relations with Japan. We cannot identify with a group if we think it is no different than other groups. The more strongly we identify with a group, the greater the perceived difference between in-group and out-group. The stronger the sense of European identity, the greater the sense of difference between “us” and “them” or between the European and the Japanese identities.

Understanding the difference between intragroup and intergroup relations highlights the importance of distinguishing domestic from international politics. Unless the group encompasses all of humanity—and this is improbable at least in part because group cohesiveness decreases as it becomes more

89. Karl Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 36.

90. See Snidal, “International Cooperation Among Relative Gains Maximizers,” pp. 400–401; and Donald Campbell, “The Two Distinct Routes Beyond Kin Selection to Ultrasociality: Implications for the Humanities and Social Sciences,” in Bridgeman, *The Nature of Prosocial Development*, p. 33.

91. Marilyn Brewer, “Ambivalent Sociality: The Human Condition,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 12 (December 1989), p. 699. Caporael et al. share this view: “We agree with Brewer that clique selfishness may be the most intractable form of selfishness.” See Linnda Caporael, Robyn Dawes, John Orbell, and Alphons van de Kragt, “Selfishness Examined: Cooperation in the Absence of Egoistic Incentives,” and “Author’s Response: Thinking in Sociality,” both in *ibid.*, pp. 683–99 and 727–39, respectively. The quotation is from p. 734.

92. Snidal, “International Cooperation Among Relative Gains Maximizers,” p. 400.

abstract—humans will always form groups.<sup>93</sup> And with groups come social comparison and competition. While psychologists sometimes characterize in-group relations by varying degrees of prosocial and perhaps altruistic behavior, they rarely doubt the egoism of groups.<sup>94</sup> Contrary to Wendt's view that society created egoism, it appears that only society can tame egoism. For example, the advocates of innate sociability use SIT to show how group identification can overcome individual self-interest.<sup>95</sup> Whether the different levels are called hierarchic versus anarchic or intragroup versus intergroup, the processes and possibilities at each level are very different.

## Conclusion

SIT provides theoretical and empirical support for the neorealist assumption that states are a priori self-regarding. This assumption of state egoism leads directly to Waltz's self-help deduction: self-interested states in anarchy will create a self-help system. This intergroup competition often will take the form of a preference for relative gains when dealing with out-groups and absolute gains when dealing with members of the in-group.

Anarchy is not what states make of it. Self-help is not one of a multitude of plausible institutions in anarchy; instead, it is a consequence of intergroup relations in anarchy. We know that people who have minimal identification with a group will discriminate against people in the other group for no apparent reason. It appears that the more we identify with our group, the more likely we are to discriminate against out-groups. While we can escape egoism within a group by forging a strong group identity, this requires differentiation from others. Group comparisons are not neutral; people generally do not strongly identify with groups they believe to be inferior to other groups. This is why strong in-groups are most likely to have strong out-groups; why ethnocentrism is ubiquitous; and why group egoism, self-help, and relative gains are ever present in international politics.

SIT argues that categorization requires comparison that leads to competition. Ego and alter will compete against one another. The form that competition assumes, however, is socially constructed. For example, cooperation is often a sensible course for a defensive positionalist. Although states can pursue cooperative or confrontational policies, they cannot escape from a self-help system.

93. On group cohesiveness, see Brewer and Schneider, "Social Identity and Social Dilemmas."

94. Most psychologists doubt that individuals can be genuinely altruistic. Batson is an exception, though even he is circumspect in his claims. See C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991). For a more optimistic view, see David Lumsdaine, *Moral Vision in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

95. Caporael et al., "Selfishness Examined," pp. 692–93.



But we also know that identities can change. When identities change, so do definitions of self-interest. The constructivist emphasis on identity is an exciting and potentially productive way to think about changing aspects of international politics. Expanding definitions of self to include former adversaries—as might be the case between France and Germany—is as desirable as it is remarkable. An expanded or collective definition of self would represent an important change in relations between some states; it would not represent a change of system. This might be clearer if we think of collective security as a form of clique selfishness. Indeed, it may be that the tendency to compare and compete will be greater when the number of groups is small and group identity is strong.

The application of SIT to international politics suggests that we are stuck in a self-help system. It does not show, however, that war, conflict, and misery are natural and inevitable products of international politics. National leaders can pursue policies that increase their neighbors' and their own security. They can invoke superordinate goals or attempt to recategorize the other as a way to foster a common group identity or improve intergroup relations.<sup>96</sup> They can promote cultural and scientific exchanges or participate in international organizations in an effort to break down intergroup barriers.<sup>97</sup> They can do what they want; their competition can be either cooperative or coercive.

Constructivists have reminded us that how we compete and what we think is worth competing for are socially constructed.<sup>98</sup> By emphasizing a more sociological approach to the study of international politics, Wendt has brought attention to a literature from which we can all profit. A more process-oriented approach to international politics may help us figure out how to live better in a self-help system, but it is not going to help us overthrow it.

96. Samuel Gaertner et al., "The Common Ingroup Identity Model," in Wolfgang Stroebe and Miles Hewstone, eds., *European Review of Social Psychology*, vol. 4 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993).

97. Analysts cannot agree on when contact will ameliorate rather than exacerbate intergroup conflict. For a brief review, see Diane Mackie and David Hamilton, "Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping," in Diane Mackie and David Hamilton, eds., *Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping*, pp. 371–83 and especially pp. 378–80. Also see Marilyn Brewer and Norman Miller, "Contact and Cooperation: When Do They Work?" in Phyllis Katz and Dalmas Taylor, eds., *Eliminating Racism: Profiles in Controversy* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), pp. 315–26.

98. See Lynn Eden, "Constructing Destruction: The Making of Organizational Knowledge About U.S. Nuclear Weapons Effects," manuscript, Stanford University, 1995; Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: France and Britain Between the Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Ming China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Audie Klotz, *Protesting Prejudice: Apartheid and the Politics of Norms in International Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming); Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation Among Democracies: Norms, Transnational Relations, and the European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).