

Echoing Churchill's famous aphorism about democracy, *Politics without Sovereignty* argues that the sovereign state is the worst form of governance except for all others. In a forceful post-revisionist critique, the editors and contributors contend that only the sovereign state allows both collective agency and political accountability. This volume is a powerful challenge to current theory in international relations and requires all of us to think deeper about the virtues and necessity of global political change. **David A. Lake, University of California, San Diego, USA**

This multi-sided onslaught on fashionable notions and theories about the decline and the mischiefs of state sovereignty is not likely to convince all readers, but the authors' central point, about the fact that political accountability and agency require state sovereignty, is one that needs to be faced rather than evaded out of distaste for the excesses and liabilities of sovereignty. **Stanley Hoffmann, Harvard University, USA**

The chapters provide bold, closely argued and provocative normative evaluations of the notion of state sovereignty. The arguments here will start a number of hares that will run and run... The ideas in this book will be tested in the vigorous reaction which will undoubtedly follow its publication. **Mervyn Frost, King's College, UK**

Curiously, the defense of state sovereignty has so far amounted to little more than the bland reassertion of analytical state-centrism. *Politics without Sovereignty* lifts this defense to a higher plane. Together, the editors and contributors advance a defense of sovereignty that is at once analytical, normative, and deeply political. It is a volume that will confront and provoke, and in so doing fuel debate and, in turn, insight. **Cris Reus-Smit, Australian National University, Australia**

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POLITICS WITHOUT SOVEREIGNTY

POLITICS WITHOUT SOVEREIGNTY
A CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Edited by
Christopher J. Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe
and Alexander Gourevitch

Edited by Christopher Bickerton

1 Politics without sovereignty?

*Christopher J. Bickerton, Philip Cunliffe and
Alexander Gourevitch*

It is standard fare to open a book on International Relations (IR) with a critique of realism, the theory of geopolitical rivalries and the balance of power. In this chapter we turn this convention around. We aim to deepen our theoretical investigation of the unholy alliance against sovereignty identified in the Introduction by isolating a particular strand of international theory for special attention, namely 'reflectivism'.¹ We shall focus in particular on constructivist and post-structuralist theories. Both of these reflectivist schools of thought have established themselves by offering critiques of state sovereignty. Indeed, the rapid advance of these theories in the discipline indicates just how out of step with world politics realist theories of IR have become. It is for this reason that we believe it is time to begin theoretical reflection with reflectivist, and not realist theories. The putative purpose of the reflectivist critiques is, first, to enhance our understanding and appreciation of change in international affairs, and second, to open up the possibility for new political actors to enter the global stage. Both of these theories claim that changing our understanding of international affairs is crucial to opening up new political possibilities. A further reason why we focus on these theories and their claims is that, given their recent origins, they are ostensibly best positioned to provide new insights into changing circumstances. Moreover, as we discuss in the Introduction, we agree with their basic premise that sovereignty is a constrained form of political activity. In keeping with the aims and methods of the book as a whole, then, we ask: How successful are new reflectivist theories at pointing to new forms of political creativity after having abandoned the sovereign, self-determining state? This is the question that we shall seek to answer in this chapter.

Despite their promising theoretical starting point, we believe reflectivist criticisms of state sovereignty miss the mark. Far from providing new conceptions of political agency, their theoretical claims do little more than reflect the attenuation of the already limited model of political agency embodied in the sovereign state. We open the chapter with a discussion of how these new theories are bound up with the end of the Cold War, which raised the pressing need to theorize change in international politics. We show how, in trying to theorize a greater role for change and political creativity in international relations, reflectivist theories are inexorably led to a critique of sovereignty, which has hitherto been the

fundamental mode of political interaction in international affairs. We then pursue the theories of constructivism and post-structuralism, exploring how the nature of their critique of the sovereign state leaves them unable to grasp human agency in international politics. After that, we take a step back and provide two wider criticisms of reflectivist theory as a whole. The first is that it tries to recapture agency without sovereignty by elevating fluidity and change. The second criticism is that, as a consequence of its inadequate grasp of the role of human agency, reflectivist theorizing is left without a causal theory, and is forced to import external, objective factors to explain change. As we shall see, the desire to discipline political agency among reflectivist theorists eventually leads some of them even to fall back on the sovereign state as a way of constraining political possibilities. We demonstrate this by reference to Andrew Linklater's critical theory. The presentation of our argument necessarily means that the differences between these various reflectivist theories are overlooked, doubtless to the detriment of their case. But this is made possible because of the common hostility across these theories towards agency and the sovereign state. A serious examination of reflectivist theories on their own terms shows, we argue, that the reflectivist critique of sovereignty neither improves our understanding of change, nor expands our sense of political possibilities.

Theorizing agency after the Cold War

Much of the thrust of reflectivist theorizing emerged as an attempt to inject conceptions of agency, contingency and historical context into a discipline dominated by the arid structuralism of Kenneth Waltz's seminal 1979 work *The Theory of International Politics*.² Waltz's neo-realism fixed on the structural arrangement of the international system, rather than states that make it up. It was the system, Waltz claimed, rather than the actions of any particular state that explained the dynamics of international politics, and in particular the recurrence of war. The defining aspect of this structure was the absence of any overarching authority – the states system is anarchic, thereby inhibiting the development of social order. Waltz described the concealed structure of international politics as functioning like the hidden hand of the market, which intercedes between the action of individual agents to generate common outcomes from vastly divergent inputs: 'A market constrains the units that comprise it from taking certain actions and disposes them toward taking others.'³

This emphasis on structure was coupled with a tight link between IR theory and the practical concerns of the Cold War. Cold War historian John L. Gaddis observes that much of the political science that was forged in American academies during the Cold War was shaped by the political needs of the American state, grasping for an intellectual apparatus that would help it to steer the world under American hegemony. The result was an intense focus on prediction: predicting the decisions of Soviet leaders; predicting the outcomes of nuclear rivalry and nuclear exchanges; predicting the outcome of development – capitalism or communism in the decolonized world. This affinity for prediction influenced Waltz's own

work: 'Theory explains regularities of behaviour and leads one to expect that... outcomes produced by interacting units will fall within specified ranges.'⁴ This entrenched tradition of prediction meant that the failure to foresee the end of the Cold War was acutely felt:

The abrupt end of the Cold War... astonished almost everyone, whether in government, the academy, the media and the think tanks. The end of the Cold War... was of such importance that no approach to the study of international relations claiming both foresight and competence should have failed to see it coming.⁵

The end of the Cold War therefore powerfully strengthened the case for more flexible conceptions of international politics that better incorporated the possibility of change. What is more, since this change seemed to be the product of positive action – popular movements in Eastern Europe, human rights campaigns and so on – it was felt that new theories had to incorporate human intentionality, rather than fixate on structure. In an article assessing the declining use of realism as an explanatory theory in scholarly journals across the years 1970 to 2000, Thomas C. Walker and Jeffrey S. Morton observe that with the 'end of the Cold War, the expansion of democracy, and the increasing importance of global trade and international organizations, the world is no longer nearly suited to realist concerns'.⁶

While critical IR theories were already incubating in the discipline throughout the 1980s,⁷ the end of the Cold War gave them a dramatic new opening to seize the initiative. Critically minded theorists responded to this opportunity by putting forward arguments that challenged the deterministic emphasis on the structure of the states system, pointing instead to the importance of historical context and the interrelationship between ideas and structures. These arguments militated for an emphasis on change rather than stasis. Alexander Wendt, one of the first to try to systematize reflectivism, mobilized the insights of structuration theory, injecting a much-needed dose of intellectual sophistication into the entire discipline. This brought the discipline of IR more into line with a wave of theoretical restructuring that had occurred earlier throughout the social sciences, and allowed for greater theoretical ambition while also not drifting too far from empirical research.

This theoretical reorganization brought to the fore theories concerned with human agency and reflexivity in world affairs, as a way of trying to grapple with change. Robert Keohane coined the term reflectivism, because they all allegedly 'emphasize the importance of human reflection for the nature of institutions and ultimately for the character of world politics'.⁸ As John Gerard Ruggie, former UN Assistant Secretary-General and one of the first to introduce reflectivist thinking to mainstream IR wrote, 'constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life'.⁹ The ostensible purpose of this emphasis on reflexivity was to call into question what seemed natural and given, thereby pointing towards its potential for change. Wendt claimed that the point of these new theories was to

'denaturalize' human institutions: 'constitutive or critical theory reminds us that social kinds like the international system are ideas authored by human beings'.¹⁰

As efforts to inject the discipline with a greater sense of agency, these reflectivist theories unavoidably converged on a discussion of the prime actor in international affairs: the sovereign state. As with their critique of structure, the reflectivist strategy was to call into question what had been taken for granted. Wendt's work again was instrumental in opening up a far-ranging discussion about the nature of the state, which had hitherto been taken for granted as the key actor in international affairs.¹¹ Writing with James Fearon, Wendt argued 'rather than taking agents as givens or primitives in social explanation... constructivists are interested in problematizing them, in making them a dependent variable'.¹² Calling the state into question pushed against the boundary that defined, some would say confined, the discipline.¹³ This was intellectually liberating. As post-structural theorist R.B.J. Walker, points out 'Many [intellectual] differences... arise far more from disagreements about what it is that scholars think they are studying than from disagreements about how to study it'.¹⁴ Instead of oscillating between power politics (realism) and the possibilities for greater international cooperation (idealism), the floodgates opened to a whole slew of 'awkward philosophical themes' that traditionally had been bracketed under other disciplines – ontology, ethics, ideology and relations between theory and practice.¹⁵

Reflectivist theories were correct that agency had been understood as something self-evident in international relations, requiring little theoretical reflection. Historian A.J.P. Taylor exemplified this attitude when he defensively qualified what he meant in referring to 'Great Britain' or 'Russia' in his celebrated textbook of international history, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe 1848–1918*:

I have written throughout this book as though states and nations were monolithic units, with defined personalities [as if implying] every Englishman and every Russian... The meaning is obvious enough, though no doubt technically indefensible. Nevertheless, there was something like a national outlook on foreign questions in each country, despite the indifference and the disputes.¹⁶

Leading realist scholar and political economist Robert Gilpin cheerfully admitted:

Of course, we 'realists' know that the state does not really exist... Only individuals really exist, although I understand that certain schools of psychology challenge even this... we do write as if some particular social or political entity really does exist and acts. It is a matter of convenience and economy to do so.¹⁷

Gilpin's and Taylor's blitheness about the role played by the agency of the state partially reflected the fact that this agency was relatively self-evident. The analyst could go quite far in international politics simply thinking in terms of the 'Russians did that' and the 'British did this'.

The great virtue of reflectivist theory, then, is that it asks higher order questions, with a good deal more theoretical sophistication, about the nature of political agency in international relations and about the possibilities for change. By posing these questions directly, and by developing their intellectual apparatus around them, reflectivist theories seem to be better positioned to grasp what is distinctive about the contemporary phase of international relations than theories, such as realism, that developed in a different set of circumstances. What is more, in alerting us to the contingent nature of international relations, and in pushing beyond sovereignty, reflectivist theories seek to avoid the realist apologia for power politics, and to open up whole new realms of political possibility that once seemed unimaginable. As Ruggie, puts it, "making history" in the new era is a matter not merely of defending the national interest but of defining it...¹⁸ But this begs the question. How successful are reflectivist theories at presenting a theory of agency without the sovereign state? Let us begin with constructivism.

Constructivism: social but not political

Constructivism has been one of the schools of thought that has been most instrumental in loosening the dead hand of neo-realism. Alexander Wendt, perhaps its most influential exponent, explicitly set out to use constructivism to breathe new life into the tradition of liberal internationalism, in order to accomplish its original goal – pacifying the anarchic international order by building institutions and international organizations.¹⁹ For too long, argues Wendt, liberal international theory conceded too much to realism. Liberal internationalism hobbled itself by refusing to acknowledge the way in which interaction between states may accumulate sufficient momentum that it tips over into something new, inaugurating a qualitative shift in the international order that is deep enough to penetrate and transform states themselves. Anarchy is not an immutable structure, but 'what states make of it'.²⁰ Wendt is saying that interaction, if properly theorized, offers the tantalizing promise of ameliorating the deprivations of international anarchy.

If Wendt set about updating the old liberal argument about cooperation between states, constructivism is not reducible to this impulse. At bottom, Wendt's argument against the overbearing structures of neo-realism is about validating agency.²¹ When Wendt penned his seminal 1992 article 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', he tightly lashed his ideas to the unfolding dissolution of the Cold War order, thereby giving his argument the force of immediacy and practical applicability:

The substantive issue at stake in debates about social theory is what kind of foundation offers the most fruitful set of questions and research strategies for explaining the revolutionary changes that seem to be occurring in the late twentieth century international system.²²

So how faithful is constructivism to its promise of giving greater theoretical scope to agency in international politics? Consider Wendt's discussion of how power politics is 'socially constructed'. Wendt argues that anarchy is insufficiently powerful as a causal nexus to set in motion the competitive dynamics of power politics seen in the Cold War. In other words, there is a conceptual gap between the absence of any central authority in the states system (anarchy), and the way states behave in ensuring their security and self-preservation (self-help). Realists have it that self-help forces other states to behave in a similar fashion, thereby setting in motion the competitive dynamics of power politics. As it is self-help, rather than anarchy per se, that bears the burden of generating power politics, Wendt spies a way of moving beyond power politics without needing to argue for world government.

Wendt argues that as the identities of states cannot be considered independently of context, it is possible that the process of interaction between states can gradually transform their identities, and by changing their identities, change their interests. Thus, Wendt points out that there is no such thing as agency independent of socialization; anarchy cannot presuppose actors that somehow exist prior to the system. Wendt argues that egotistical, power-hungry states could only become like this from the way they set themselves against other states:

[such] claims presuppose a history of interaction in which actors have acquired 'selfish' identities and interests; [but] before interaction... they would have no experience upon which to base such definitions of self and other. To assume otherwise is to attribute to states in the state of nature qualities that they can only possess in society.²³

Identity and agency is therefore brought into being through a mutually constitutive, relational process dependent on context. Wendt demonstrates this by pointing out the difficulty that the United States and former Soviet Union had in formulating conceptions of national interest at the end of the Cold War: "without the cold war's mutual attributions of threat and hostility to define their identities, these states seem unsure of what their "interests" should be".²⁴ Wendt concedes that this 'may all seem very arcane, but there is an important issue at stake'²⁵; namely, the possibilities for change within the international order. Thus what determines the political character of an anarchical system is not the balance of power – but rather the extent to which states' conceptions of themselves enable them to identify with each other: 'if the United States and Soviet Union decide that they are no longer enemies, "the cold war is over". It is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions.'²⁶

Thus even the most fundamental institutions of political order, such as state sovereignty, need not be regarded as immutable and fixed, but as social artefacts, open to change. While Wendt acknowledges that sovereignty has provided protection for weak states, it has also helped to 'harden territorial' identities, producing a spurious association between arbitrary national borders and security,²⁷ a doctrine of 'territorial property rights' that 'functions as a form of "social

closure" that disempowers nonstate actors'.²⁸ Change occurs as the process of interaction is gradually sedimented over time.

But Wendt's apparent elevation of agency over structure is deceptive. In his attempt to socialize structure, and to open it up to change, agency slips through Wendt's fingers. For having taken out any notion of agency as being in some sense over and above the flux of interaction, Wendt is unable to specify a moment at which agency is decisive, or logically prior to something else. Wendt tears causality away from anarchy, but instead of placing it onto states, he endows *process* with agency. For if there is no agency prior to social interaction, what is it that sets a process of social interaction into motion? Here it becomes impossible to grasp hold of subjectivity, submerged as it is in the flux of communication. Drawing on symbolic interactionist sociology and its conception of the 'looking glass self', Wendt uses the analogy of two mirrors facing each other to try to describe the process whereby agency emerges through a reciprocal process of identification. But a mirror reflecting a mirror is reflecting nothing; no matter how long they face each other, no image will spontaneously emerge.²⁹

Identities determine states' interests, argues Wendt, but these identities are only acquired from being slotted into a predetermined role, allocated within intersubjective frameworks of meaning. Agency has no constitutive power of its own. Rather, it belongs to formal legal rules and international agreements that are the contingent products of continuous interaction between international actors. In Wendt's terms, 'sovereignty is an institution, and so it exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations'.³⁰ In a sense, constructivism returns us to a hollow, legalistic conception of sovereignty, entirely defined by agreements external to sovereignty itself (see further Michael Savage's chapter in this volume). Sovereignty, on this account, becomes not a concept identifying the key actor in international affairs, but a legal instrument by which political actors are defined. But state sovereignty involves both recognition *and* self-assertion. Constructivism sacrifices the latter at the expense of the former. The difference can be teased out through Hegel's discussion of the sovereignty of revolutionary France, the archetypal modern nation-state, when France challenged the absolutist, dynastic states of pre-Napoleonic Europe:

When Napoleon said before the Peace of Campo Formio 'the French Republic is no more in need of recognition than the sun is', his words conveyed no more than that strength of existence which itself carries with it a guarantee of recognition.³¹

Here, Hegel's equation runs from 'strength of existence' (subjectivity) to recognition, and not vice versa, as with constructivism. The refusal of the absolutist states to recognize revolutionary France did not stop their armies being crushed and their consequent need to sue for peace. The sovereignty of revolutionary France was constituted through self-assertion and force of arms – not through formal recognition or lack thereof.

To be sure, there are cases where sovereignty seems to be more artificial and dependent on the international order, rather than bubbling up from below. Writing in 1964, Andrew Boyd recounts, for example, how the survival of Jordan after the withdrawal of British troops was ensured by the United Nations:

Jordan was still there in 1963, the British having left in November 1958. Nobody was quite sure why; but [United Nations Secretary-General Dag] Hammarskjöld's three weeks of very quiet diplomacy... in Amman, Cairo, and other capitals... had something to do it. His only tangible creation was a UN office in Jordan... Yet this modest installation... [a]t critical moments... had a steadyying effect.³²

In cases like that of Jordan, we must ask why such a fictitious political entity had to be granted independence. Or in other words, why could British power in the Middle East no longer be exercised in the direct form of empire? The reason 'nobody expected' Jordan to survive the withdrawal of British troops was the strength of the centrifugal force of pan-Arabism at that point in time. Pan-Arabism was a political movement that sought to unite the Arab peoples by transcending the arbitrary grid of national borders inherited from colonial administrators. It was the strength of this very same nationalist movement, emanating principally from Egypt, which made imperialist power in the Middle East so illegitimate, forcing the granting of independence to states such as Jordan. The point is that even states that seem to be simply fabricated by international diplomacy are ultimately dependent on the existence of a constituted, self-organizing political power, even if this power exists elsewhere.

But by dissolving structure into intersubjectivity, Wendt is unable to give any depth to relations beyond the flux and instability of communication. Conscious that he is restricting precisely that quality that he set out to recapture – agency – Wendt strikes out in a number of directions to try to halt the slide into indeterminacy. So, for example, if agency is not able to exist in some sense outside of intersubjectivity, then what is to prevent a destructive process from continuing spontaneously to accumulate momentum? If there is no moment at which agency can tear itself away from this process, then eventually an 'atmosphere of distrust' becomes so entrenched that there is 'little room for... cooperation and its transformative consequences'.³³ By this logic, Wendt is no more able to explain the end of the Cold War than a neo-realist. So Wendt argues that agency must involve a moment of critical self-reflection independent of other actors' expectations. Such a moment is dependent on the development of new situations that challenge pre-given expectations. But how do these new situations arise, if not through the determinate effect of structure, or the prior exercise of another's agency? To stabilize the flux of communication, Wendt further stipulates that actors develop an interest in maintaining stable identities – but this only reverses Wendt's original proposition, by suggesting that interests are prior to identities. Two consequences flow from grounding agency in the indeterminacy and flexibility of legal and moral discourse at the international level. First, we get a

reified, juridical conception of sovereignty that is external to domestic politics. This husk of a state has no self-organizing dynamic of its own, drawn from mobilizing the collective power of its citizens, as in the example of revolutionary France. Thus in Wendt's hands, constructivism can only see mass politics as a bothersome contingency that threatens to undermine the high-level agreements of diplomats and statesmen. In answer to the question 'how much and what kind of a role [does]... domestic politics play in world politics', Wendt responds, 'The greater and more destructive the role, the more significant predation [between states] will be, and the less amenable anarchy will be to formation of collective identities.'³⁴ The second consequence is that international relations are reified as something beyond human agency. Instead of peoples and their governments shaping the ebb and flow of international politics, high-level agreements and conventions become the prime driver of international relations (IR).

Constructivism begins from the insight that to see sovereignty and international relations as properly social products entails the possibility of change. Yet constructivism ends by reifying sovereignty, and by transforming it into a legal arrangement extended to states on the basis of international agreement rather than something that is actively won.

Post-structuralism: denying history, denying agency

While sharing with constructivism a focus on theorizing change over stasis, post-structural theories of international relations are more scathing and extensive in their criticisms of orthodox IR. They see themselves as extending the post-modern philosophical interrogation of modernity, already carried out in the social sciences, through to IR. In the words of Erik Ringmar:

a first thing to notice is how the debate regarding the future of the state is directly linked to a debate on the future of man... man and state were born at the same time, they grew up together, and hence it is not unreasonable to expect them to die a simultaneous death. Or more distinctly put: what we are discussing here is not only the future of the state or the future of man, but rather the future of subjectivity tout court.³⁵

The wide-ranging character of the post-structural critique is evident in Richard K. Ashley's influential 1988 article 'Untying the Sovereign State'. This article begins by repudiating precisely those liberal approaches that constructivism set out to revive. Ashley does this by pointing to the paradox that, the greater the importance the scholar attaches to questions of international order, the greater the need to pay attention to the decentralized, anarchic structure of the states system. The more you want to boost international cooperation, the more you find yourself respecting the egotism of the sovereign state. In other words, liberal theories of international order are more insidious. For while the liberal scholar prefers internationalism to nationalism, elevates order and cooperation over

expansionism and militarism,³⁶ the questions that he sets out to answer only reinforce the underlying presuppositions of realism: 'How can there be governance in the absence of government? How can order be constructed in the absence of an orderer? How can cooperation be facilitated under a condition of anarchy?'³⁷

Here, Ashley is pointing to the anarchy/sovereignty paradox. That is to say, the very notion of supreme authority *within* the state logically necessitates the denial of any authority *above* the state. Ashley's point is that the deterministic element in this equation is not the structure of anarchy but sovereignty itself. In the words of R.B.J. Walker, 'State sovereignty works because it has come to seem to be simply there, out in the world, demarcating the natural orders of here and there.'³⁸ Talking about the deterministic structures of anarchy leaves the prior question of sovereignty unexamined. To theorize the possibility of real change in the international order, Ashley suggests, it is necessary to tackle sovereignty itself. 'Heroic practices invoke the sovereignty of reasoning man whose voice would displace the Word of God as the source of truth and meaning in the world.'³⁹

In other words, the problem with the conventional focus on anarchy in IR is that it deflects the scope of inquiry away from sovereign states, whose interactions produce this anarchy in the first place. Therefore, any attempt to transform international politics is restricted if it refuses to interrogate the foundations of the system, namely, state sovereignty. Other post-structuralists have gone further, to claim that sovereignty is not external to the workings of power, but is in itself a form of domination through which political alternatives are restricted, and through which the grid of inside/outside, 'international' versus 'domestic' politics is reproduced.⁴⁰ That is why, echoing Foucault, Bartelson argues we should 'avoid the direct question of what sovereignty is, and instead ask *how* it has been spoken of and known throughout a period of time'.⁴¹ Only when we reject the idea that sovereignty can be known can we understand how it is constituted. To begin from sovereignty as the key form of political subjectivity in international relations is to be nothing more than one of the 'irresponsible camp followers of power'.⁴²

As with constructivism, however, what begins as a theoretical critique of the limits on our understanding ends by dissolving the very possibility of agency. In post-structuralist literature, sovereignty is paradoxically recognized as a product of modernity without, however, being able to endow its existence with any necessity. Rather, sovereignty is seen as the contingent product of 'a more or less random succession of discursive and epistemic events'.⁴³ The appeal to randomness and accident appears as the infusion of history with human agency. Contingency and contextualization is emphasized in opposition to mechanical causality and transcendental hypotheses. But the problem is that the description of pure flux entails that we are unable to specify historically any given moment.

When everything is a 'random succession of events' we are unable to isolate any key moment, and to delineate the form that human agency takes in a particular time and place. Why, for example, is sovereignty a definitive form of collective subjectivity in modernity? Because, as we discuss in the Introduction,

it is the form politics takes under the specific historical conditions of capitalism. Human subjectivity assumes various forms, but it cannot just take any form at any given moment – it is socially determined. Illuminating these social determinations should open up the ways in which agency exists, is limited by existing forms, and can potentially transcend these constraints through politics. For Ashley, however, recognizing that something is socially produced entails recognizing that it is arbitrary, that is, the opposite of subjective activity, in the sense of human action that is conscious, transformative and meaningful. The slide from contextualization to vagueness, and the consequent inability to endow human agency with any concrete causality, is taken to its logical end-point by Edkins *et al.* '[Sovereignty] is an impositor, in a sense: any signifier... would do – divine providence, the invisible hand of the market, the objective logic of history, or the Jewish conspiracy, for example.'⁴⁴

Post-structuralist theories cannot, therefore, grasp subjectivity, because subjectivity emerges consciously, and not randomly, in response to concrete historical circumstances. The theory of sovereignty as the basis for international politics is grounded in real historical experience: the modern state system developed as political communities actively pressed their own claims, from revolutionary France right through to the struggle of colonized peoples for national liberation, who forcibly proved to their colonial overlords what they had been insistently denied, namely, a political existence as collective subjects. In this sense, the right of self-determination and the sovereign rights of independence are therefore the legal registration of a political fact – what Hegel called the 'strength of existence'. This 'fact' of sovereignty exists not in the sense of a timeless given, but as a historical product, emerging through specific struggles. But it is no less real for being historical.⁴⁵ We need to look no further than the transformation of the states system through decolonization to see that sovereignty really is a constitutive factor in international politics.

The post-structural critique of sovereignty results in an ambivalent stance. If post-structuralists aggressively reject sovereignty, they are cautious about replacing it. Ashley's analysis does 'not seek to undertake an emancipatory critique',⁴⁶ and Bartelson's deconstruction 'does not tell us where to go from here, neither as political scientists nor as citizens. It proclaims modernity an absurd dream from which we are about to escape'.⁴⁷ Their claims that they seek merely to show that sovereignty 'is not necessary or essential'⁴⁸ exhibit a false modesty concealing a deep uneasiness. Walker notes

just how fragile modern accounts of the location and character of the political have become. They are certainly much too fragile to permit much confidence in the capacity of modern theories of international relations to tell us where or what the political can now be.⁴⁹

Here there is only a sense of what politics cannot be. It cannot 'reproduce the codes of inclusion and exclusion that have made theories of international relations what they have become'.⁵⁰ Bartelson argues that deconstructing sovereignty

means showing it 'involves the political responsibility of deciding upon sovereignty'. Yet his final words are that this is 'a decision which we for the moment seem unfit to make'.⁵¹ Given the intensity of the focus on subjection and exclusion, it is awkward, though not accidental, for post-structuralists to be unable to establish politics on a new basis. Though they draw attention to the need to understand sovereignty contextually, they are unable to translate these insights into a distinct, post-sovereign theory of politics. That is because they are victims of their own methodology. For all the talk of contingency, their reading of sovereignty is not historically specific enough.

The previous two sections argued that neither constructivism nor post-structuralism are successful in their attempts to theorize political agency without sovereignty. Here we seek to gather the two theoretical approaches together and address criticisms to them jointly. We begin with their attempt to recast agency beyond the sovereign state.

Drift as mastery

Having rejected the self-determining sovereign state pursuing its interests as their favoured model, constructivists and post-structuralists are logically forced to rediscover some measure of open ended agency elsewhere. They rediscover this sense of possibility in the way in which identities are seen as indeterminate and fluid. Wendt speaks of sovereignty as an 'ongoing accomplishment of practice'.⁵² Ashley speaks of how the international order 'must be daily and everywhere fabricated anew', and how 'efforts [are] concerted', 'orchestrated' in a 'global process'.⁵³ This emphasis on fluidity seems liberating, in contrast to the image of a self-regulating balance of power that disciplines sovereign states regardless of their will. Yet instead of emerging with the full force of logic from the structure of reflectivist arguments themselves, the suggestion of dynamism in the new theories emanates more from their earnest and effusive rhetoric ('accomplishment', 'fabrication', 'orchestration').

But the emphasis on fluidity comes across more as accommodation than emancipation. For if so much energy is absorbed simply in maintaining the international status quo as an 'ongoing accomplishment', it is difficult to see where we would have any agency left over that could be harnessed for radical transformation of the system of states. The moment of abstractness, of standing above relations rather than being fully absorbed in them, is lost, and thus one dimension of agency simply falls away. In truth, fluidity means states are buffeted here and there by the vagaries of international conventions and institutions, more than they actively shape them. There is no conceptual means provided by which to distinguish drift from mastery; all change dissolves into the ether of globalized social relations. Thus while these reflectivist theories are sensitive to the attenuation of sovereign power, they are oddly unreflective about their rediscovery of freedom in fluidity.

Rebels without a cause: losing grasp of historical change

The stress on contingency indicates a deeper lack of reflexivity on the part of the new reflectivist theories. For though they are spurred by a sensitivity to change in the post-Cold War era, as reflectivist theories lose grasp of the relationship between historical processes and historically specific forms of subjectivity, they quickly forget their own origins, with disastrous consequences for their ability to grasp what is new. The sharpness of reflectivists' analytical tools is consequently blunted, as we have a less precise sense of what it is about the post-Cold War era that is historically specific. As Hedley Bull once observed, 'An understanding of the historical conditions out of which a theory grows, or to which it is a response, provides vital materials for the criticism of that theory and, for the theorist himself, provides the correction of self-knowledge.'⁵⁴ Reflectivists tend to ignore this injunction, instead taking the contingency of the post-Cold War period from which they draw their inspiration and reading it back into international history.

To be sure, some reflectivists try to pre-empt this criticism by rejecting the argument for a historically specific approach. Ashley, for example, admits that his own work is modern in so far as modernity is defined by the use of reason to demystify arbitrary ideological limits. Nonetheless, Ashley still argues that we should not accept that our criteria of validity be bound by historically specific 'interpretative attitudes and procedures'. Such dispositions are in fact authoritarian, part of the 'disciplining' by which modernity restricts our range of thought.⁵⁵ It is here that Ashley most clearly rejects the need for reflexivity, in effect arguing that theorizing need not reflect on how it is socially embedded in a particular time and place. Ashley's revolt has ended by taking him back to the orthodoxy against which he rebelled – the conceit of an independent, social scientific enterprise that could detachedly analyse international politics as if it were entirely removed from it.⁵⁶ Hedley Bull, again, reminds us of the need for historical specificity: 'theory itself has a history, and theorists themselves elaborate their idea with the preoccupations and within the confines of a particular historical situation.'⁵⁷ When not rooted in historically specific analysis, the idea that the world is socially constructed can quite easily shade into the idea that society is constructed from the knowledge we have of it – the logical conclusion being, of course, that new types of societies can spring fully-formed from the heads of IR theorists. This is what is meant by Ruggie's vague reference to change coming about from discourse and 'collective representations'⁵⁸ and Ashley's intimations of power in 'the wave of the theorist's hand'.⁵⁹

In effect, by casting aside the 'disciplining' of modern 'interpretative attitudes', Ashley is removing the final logical barrier to unmitigated flights of mental fancy. For all his mockery of the 'heroic discourse', Ashley is forced to marvel at a process by which

the orchestration of the inscription of man and domestic society in ways that make possible the co-ordinated displacement of anarchic dangers, not from one 'domestic society' onto others, but beyond the places and times of 'man' in every 'domestic society' of a multistate system (original emphasis).⁶⁰

The prose reflects Ashley's confusion: unable to locate human agency or identify historical specificity, the coordinated effort needed to keep modernity in motion – 'arbitrary', 'contingent', 'constructed', 'deferred' as it is – unsurprisingly begins to appear as an inscrutable effort of cosmic complexity. The invocation of a mysterious, Herculean process of coordinated 'displacement' needed to reproduce the inside/outside distinctions of modern politics is more akin to the 'hidden hand' than a historically grounded discussion of state sovereignty.

As they are unable to capitalize on their own insights about contingency, many reflectivist theories collapse back onto under-theorized 'objective developments', notably globalization, which is brought in as an intellectual *deus ex machina* to prop up the argument. John J. Mearsheimer astutely describes this limitation:

[Reflectivists]... emphasize that the world is socially constructed, and not shaped in fundamental ways by objective factors. Anarchy, after all, is what we make of it. Yet when critical theorists attempt to explain why realism may be losing its hegemonic position, they too point to objective factors as the ultimate cause of change. Discourse, so it appears, turns out to be determinate, but mainly a reflection of developments in the objective world. In short, it seems that when [reflectivists] who study international politics offer glimpses of their thinking about the causes of change in the real world, they make arguments that directly contradict their own theory, but which appear to be compatible with the [realist] theory they are challenging.⁶¹

Mearsheimer uses the example of critical theorist Robert Cox. R.B.J. Walker provides another example of the reliance on globalization as the flipside of contingency: 'The most trenchant reminder that ours is an age of speed and temporal accelerations has been the simultaneous dissolution of Cold War geopolitics and the rapid entrenchment of a globally organised capitalism',⁶² and 'the experience of temporality, of speed, velocity and acceleration, is more and more bewildering'.⁶³ The first joint criticism we advanced now folds into the second. We pointed out the reflectivist theory replaces agency with contingency. Now we see that reflectivist theory has left us without the means to distinguish fluidity from the economic networks of 'globally organised capitalism' and other transnational processes that escape our control.

A final turn: sovereignty against subjectivity

Our criticisms have accepted the reflectivist premise that agency is not limited to sovereignty. As we suggest in the Introduction, subjectivity in its political form even pushes beyond the state, insofar as it seeks a universal basis for collective action, though this often means pitting one nation against another. Here, we have instead shown that the particular way in which reflectivist theory criticizes the sovereign state leaves us with an impoverished conception of political subjectivity. If reflectivist theories have failed to introduce a superior grasp of the role and

possibilities of human agency in international politics than traditional theories, their diminished conception of political possibility does not always take the form of a straightforward attack on sovereignty. As a brief examination of a proponent of a third reflectivist school – Andrew Linklater's critical theory – demonstrates, a retreat from collective subjectivity is achieved through a back-handed defence of the sovereign state.

Linklater has added his voice to those criticizing sovereignty. In particular, he argues that national citizenship is only one arbitrary exclusion among many: 'the nation-state is one of the few bastions of exclusion which has not had its rights and claims against the rest of the world seriously questioned'.⁶⁴ Yet Linklater also frequently reaffirms the stable requirements of order as a precondition for moral progress. In *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998), Linklater argues that expanding the boundaries of the political community beyond the nation-state means that it is citizens that must adapt to the challenge of globalization. In Linklater's words 'communities will not survive unless their members are prepared to define their interests in the light of a more general good'.⁶⁵ But shifting the burden of change onto the behaviour of citizens means that the states system is left the same. Human agency is exhausted by the achievement of the ethical duty of broadening community, rather than the greater project of systemic transformation. Therefore, of necessity, Linklater's project forces him to fall back onto the existing system of sovereign states:

A pluralist international society strikes a balance between the principle of state sovereignty and universal principles of order and peaceful co-existence. A solidarist international society endorses the principle of state sovereignty but strives to balance it with a commitment to universal moral principles.⁶⁶

It is the latter, 'solidarist', international society that wins Linklater's sympathy. Linklater further argues that 'post-Westphalian' political arrangements can be pioneered by 'the majority' or 'the most powerful' of nation-states – with the caveat, of course, that these states are 'committed to constitutional rule, deliberative politics, social welfare and universalistic moral beliefs which value radical cultural differences'.⁶⁷ In Linklater's innocuous, back-handed reaffirmation of state sovereignty there lurks a conservative scepticism towards the exercise of human agency. Arguing for 'inclusion' within the existing international order downplays criticizing the nature of the order in which we are to be included. Thus we can see that when state sovereignty is reaffirmed even by one of its reflectivist critics, this reaffirmation expresses the same impulse that leads to the attack on state sovereignty in the first place – namely, scepticism towards the exercise of human agency.

The new camp followers

As a consequence of this scepticism towards agency, existing power relations are tacitly reaffirmed, by being recast as the domain within which agents act. But the problem is not exclusive to Linklater. It plagues all reflectivist theories because

of their inability to grasp adequately the specific forms in which power is exercised in contemporary politics. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of reflectivist theories is the way they present themselves as radical critiques of existing orthodoxies when they have, in fact, substantially replaced realism as the intellectual accomplices of the present. For example, writing in 1992, Wendt bitterly polemicalized:

Sovereignty norms are now so taken for granted, so natural, that it is easy to overlook the extent to which they are both presupposed by and an ongoing artifact of practice. When states... kill thousands of Iraqis in one kind of war and then refuse to 'intervene' and to kill even one person in another kind, a 'civil' war... they are acting against the background of, and thereby reproducing, shared norms about what it means to be a sovereign state. If states stopped acting on those norms, their identity as 'sovereigns' (if not necessarily as 'states') would disappear.⁶⁸

It is clear in retrospect that Wendt was kicking against an open door. Since he wrote these words over a decade ago, Western states have repeatedly violated state sovereignty by intervening in civil conflicts throughout the world, including the civil war that Wendt is referring to (in former Yugoslavia), Britain and the United States have even found their way back to Iraq. This 'new interventionism' indicates the extent to which 'sovereignty' is far from 'taken for granted'. As Philip Cunliffe's chapter in this volume suggests, those who have set about redefining sovereignty as 'responsibility', through international conventions and inter-elite consultation, are demonstrating that sovereignty is seen as an artefact that can be rewritten following the latest international report. But it is an elite artefact, not a social artefact, as it is arbitrarily redefined apart from mass politics. The Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty clearly draws upon new IR theories when it makes a thinly veiled attack on realist ideas about structure:

The notion of responsibility itself entails fundamental moral reasoning and challenges determinist theories of human behaviour and international relations theory. The behaviour of states is not predetermined by systemic or structural factors, and moral considerations are not merely after-the-fact justifications or simply irrelevant.⁶⁹

Ashley too is unaware of how much his ideas accommodate contemporary politics. In 1988, Ashley placed his hopes for a deconstruction of traditional international politics in non-state actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs):

once nonstate actors are introduced into [the] discourse and taken seriously, every attempt to represent such a [sovereign] is immediately undone. It is no longer possible even ideologically to represent a coherent sovereign presence, an identical source of meaning and power.⁷⁰

Today, we have NGOs directly involved in governing countries in the developing world, sitting on committees alongside major international organizations like the World Bank, as John Pender's discussion of governance in Tanzania, and David Chandler's discussion of global civil society in this volume make clear. James Hearfield's chapter on the European Union in this volume makes clear how another non-state actor has pushed ahead not by expanding political horizons, but by systematically lowering and restricting them.

Jenny Edkins was cited earlier as condemning the realists for being 'camp followers of power', but as the examples from Linklater, Wendt and Ashley suggest, reflectivist theories have somewhat unreflectively become the new camp followers. In their haste to attack sovereignty as an exclusive, tyrannical political form, they have overlooked the reorganization of power on non-sovereign terms. They have repeated the same mistakes as realism by intellectually formalizing the contemporary period. And with their underlying suspicion of decisive, unifying political acts such as struggles for self-determination and state-based mass politics, they even ditch the conceptual apparatus by which these power relations can be called into question as a whole.

Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that critical new theories of IR, principally constructivism and post-structuralism, have difficulty grasping the dynamics of international relations. While they are alive to the way in which state sovereignty can no longer be taken for granted in international politics, they overreach themselves in their attacks, leaving them unable to theorize the efficacy and meaning of human agency. As a result, their radical claims to rethinking politics outside states in fact serves to limit political possibilities. In their critiques of sovereignty, they lose what the concept has historically expressed, however imperfectly, which is the exercise of political subjectivity. A fuller grasp of agency should identify the significance of sovereignty, both historically and conceptually, and point beyond it. Constructivists and post-structuralists help us achieve neither.

Notes

- 1 There is no ideal way of bracketing the theoretical developments that emerged in response to the neo-realist and neo-liberal schools. Keohane's label 'reflectivism' has been chosen here in preference to 'post-positivism' because the latter falsely suggests that positivism is a spent force in the academy, which is far from being the case.
- 2 K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Columbus: McGraw Hill, 1979.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.90.
- 4 Waltz, cited in J. Lewis Gaddis, 'International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War', *International Relations Theory*, 1992/93, p.9.
- 5 Gaddis, 'International Relations Theory', pp.5-6.
- 6 T.C. Walker and J.S. Morton, 'Re-Assessing the "Power of Power Politics" Thesis: Is Realism Still Dominant?', *International Studies Review* 7.2, 2005, p.353.

- 7 O. Waever, 2002, 'The Rise and Fall of the Inter-paradigm Debate', in S. Smith, K. Booth and M. Zaleski (eds), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.149-185.
- 8 R. Keohane, 1988, 'International Institutions: Two Approaches', in J. Der Derian (ed.), *International Theory: Critical Investigations*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p.284.
- 9 J. Ruggie, 'What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge', *International Organization* 52.4, 1998, p.856.
- 10 A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.374.
- 11 A. Wendt, 1992, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', in Der Derian, *International Theory*, pp.130-131.
- 12 J. Fearon and A. Wendt, 2002, 'Rationalism versus Constructivism: A Skeptical View', in W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse and B. Simmons (eds), *Handbook of International Relations*, London: Sage, 2002, p.57.
- 13 J. Bartelson, 'Second Natures: Is the State Identical with Itself?', *European Journal of International Relations* 4, 1998, pp.295-296.
- 14 R.B.J. Walker, 1989, 'History and Structure in International Relations', in Der Derian, *International Theory*, pp.313-314.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p.316.
- 16 A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe: 1848-1918*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp.xxi-xxii.
- 17 R. Gilpin, 'The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism', in R.O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p.318.
- 18 Ruggie, 'What Makes the World Hang Together', p.875.
- 19 Wendt is of course not the only significant constructivist, others of which include John Ruggie, Friedrich Kratochwil, Christian Reus-Smit and Kathryn Sikkink. We focus on Wendt because, in this particular case, he best expresses their common presuppositions. Wendt's later work like *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) is less important for our argument in this chapter, than his earlier articles, which focus more directly on sovereignty. Also, see Michael Savage's chapter in this volume, where he extends the critique of constructivists, including Kratochwil.
- 20 Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', pp.130-131.
- 21 Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.374.
- 22 Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', p.161.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.139.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p.136.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p.139.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.135.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp.151-153.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.150.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.139.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p.150.
- 31 G.W.F. Hegel, in Allen W. Wood (ed.), trans. H.B. Nisbet, *Elements of Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.367.
- 32 A. Boyd, *United Nations: Pity, Myth, and Truth*, New York, Penguin Books, 1966, p.110.
- 33 Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', pp.156-157.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p.144.
- 35 E. Ringmar, 'On the Ontological Status of the State', *European Journal of International Relations* 2.4, 1996, pp.458-459.
- 36 R.K. Ashley, 'Unifying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 17.2, 1988, pp.237-238.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p.227.

- 38 R.B.J. Walker, 1995, 'International Relations and the Concept of the Political', in K. Booth and S. Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, p.322.
- 39 R.K. Ashley, 1988, 'The Powers of Anarchy: Theory, Sovereignty, and the Domestication of Global Life', in Der Derian, *International Theory*, p.107.
- 40 R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- 41 J. Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.4.
- 42 J. Edkins, N. Perseman and V. Pin-Fat (eds), *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999, p.7.
- 43 Bartelson, 'Second Natures', p.246.
- 44 Edkins, Perseman and Pin-Fat, *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, pp.6-7.
- 45 The same could be said for the individual legal subject or the 'man' that Engmar sees as the flipside of the modern state. See J. Heartfield, 'Rights and the Legal Subject', unpublished, 1996.
- 46 Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', p.228.
- 47 Bartelson, 'Second Natures', p.248.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p.239.
- 49 Walker, 'International Relations and the Concept of the Political', p.324.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Bartelson, 'Second Natures', p.248.
- 52 Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', p.151.
- 53 Ashley, 'Powers of Anarchy', p.117.
- 54 H. Bull, 1972, 'The Theory of International Politics, 1919-1969', in Der Derian, *International Theory*, p.183.
- 55 Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', p.231.
- 56 R.K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', in Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*.
- 57 Bull, 'Theory of International Politics', p.183.
- 58 Ruggie, 'What Makes the World Hang Together?', p.884.
- 59 Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', p.250.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p.259.
- 61 J.J. Measheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions', *International Security* 19:3, 1994/95, p.43.
- 62 Walker, 'International Relations and the Concept of the Political', p.322.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p.5.
- 64 A. Linklater, 'The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21:1, 1991, p.93.
- 65 A. Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, p.1.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p.176
- 67 *Ibid.*, p.169
- 68 Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It', pp.150-151.
- 69 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, Background*, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001, p.129.
- 70 Ashley, 'Untying the Sovereign State', p.235.

2 Sovereignty and the politics of responsibility

Philipp Cunliffe

Introduction

The traditional idea of sovereignty as autonomy, or freedom from external interference, faces a serious challenge in the idea of 'sovereignty as responsibility'. This new doctrine holds that state sovereignty cannot be restricted to inviolable legal authority. Rather, sovereignty must be extended to embrace not only authority, but also a two-fold 'responsibility to protect', as it is called in the official literature.¹ The first responsibility of the state is to protect the welfare of the citizens that fall within its jurisdiction. The second responsibility is to the wider society of states. The state is also responsible for preventing human suffering within its borders from spilling over into threatening 'international peace and security', in the words of the United Nations (UN) Charter. This framework of overlapping obligations is held to derive from the UN Charter itself. David Chandler summarizes the new doctrine thus: 'In brief, the three traditional characteristics of a state... (territory, authority, and population) have been supplemented by a fourth, state... (territory, authority, and population) have been supplemented by a fourth, respect for human rights.'² If a sovereign state is unwilling to uphold these obligations to either its internal or external constituency, or even if a state is merely unable to do so, then its authority is forfeit. In such a scenario, the doctrine of sovereignty as responsibility holds that the UN, and even states acting outside the UN's authority, have the duty to alleviate human suffering however they can.

The purpose of this chapter is to advance some criticisms of this new doctrine of sovereignty, which has won such widespread support throughout the world. The key criticism that I want to make is that the new doctrine is incompatible with a proper politics of responsibility. For power to be truly responsible, it needs to be at least potentially accountable. Sovereignty as responsibility, however, makes the exercise of power unaccountable, and therefore ultimately irresponsible. One of the virtues of the traditional understanding of sovereignty is that, through its claim to supremacy, it clarifies the exercise of power. Obviously, no state ever possesses 'total' power over every event that occurs under its jurisdiction. But the fundamental point is that by *claiming* supremacy, the sovereign cannot defer responsibility for its actions elsewhere. Mohammed Ayoub writes that sovereignty 'acts as a "no trespassing" sign protecting the exclusive territorial domain of states'.³ This is true (or should be true) from the external perspective of all