

Revista Científica General José María Córdova, Bogotá, Colombia, enero-junio, 2017
ESTUDIOS MILITARES - Vol. 15, Núm. 19, pp. 29-81.

ISSN 1900-6586

Cómo citar este artículo: Dufort, Ph. (2017, enero-junio). The Influence of Changing Understanding of Power over Strategy: A Genealogical Essay. A Genealogical Essay. *Rev. Cient. Gen. José María Córdova* 15(19), 29-81. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.83>



The Influence of Changing Understanding of Power over Strategy: A Genealogical Essay*

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.83>

Recibido: 29 de agosto de 2016 • Aceptado: 2 de noviembre de 2016

La influencia de la comprensión cambiante del poder
sobre la estrategia: un ensayo genealógico

L'influence de la compréhension changeante du pouvoir
sur la stratégie: un essai généalogique

A influência da evolução do conhecimento em relação
ao poder sobre a estratégia: um ensaio genealógico

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* Working paper, based in the project 'Critical Strategic Studies' realised at the Cambridge, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom and financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Abstract. The link between social theory and the production of innovative strategic knowledge in different contexts and eras remains a complex question. Nevertheless, strategic studies being a radically instrumental discipline, the notion of power is at the centre of its relationship with the social world. In line with the Cambridge school of political thought, this article lays out a brief genealogical exercise applied to strategic thinking in the ‘West’ in order to better understand Western leaders’ changing approach toward strategy ‘in their own terms’. This exercise of ideational contextualisation allows for isolating the fluctuating understanding of the very notion of power, and its correlative concept of critique, as the most influential theoretical precondition for strategic innovation in strategic studies. Our analysis retraces a dual tradition competing to inform Western strategy, which is of primordial importance to the problematique of innovation in strategic studies. The first lineage—in line with Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault—advises the subject in terms of technical dynamics of power while the second—in line with Aristotle, Kant and Habermas—enlightens him on the legitimate footings of power. Critical strategic studies cannot integrate the insights of reflexivity—as its distinctive cognitive tool—as long as it encompasses these two distinct perspectives indiscriminately. Their coeval consideration generates an inherent cognitive tension from which arise both the desire for critical strategy to consider power as force and power as legitimacy separately, and the corresponding responsibility for the strategist to balance their implications in practice.

Keywords: Strategy; Genealogy; Nietzsche; Power; Critique; Clausewitz.

Resumen. El vínculo entre teoría social y la producción de conocimiento estratégico de innovación en diferentes contextos y épocas continúa siendo un interrogante complejo. No obstante, para los estratégicos que conforman una disciplina radicalmente instrumental, la noción de poder es el punto central de su relación con el mundo social. En consonancia con el pensamiento político de la escuela de Cambridge, el presente artículo presenta un breve ejercicio genealógico aplicado al modo estratégico de pensar en Occidente, con el propósito de obtener una mejor comprensión de su enfoque cambiante hacia la estrategia ‘en su propia dinámica’. Este ejercicio permite distinguir la fluctuante comprensión de cada una de las nociones de poder involucradas, y su concepto correlativo de crítica, como la precondition teórica más influyente para la innovación estratégica en estudios estratégicos. Nuestro análisis recorre de nuevo el camino de dos tradiciones con visiones antitéticas de la estrategia occidental, lo cual es de vital importancia para comprender la problemática de la innovación en estudios estratégicos. La primera tradición —siguiendo el pensamiento de Maquiavelo, Nietzsche y Foucault— concibe el sujeto en términos de las dinámicas técnicas de poder, en tanto que la segunda —siguiendo el pensamiento de Aristóteles, Kant y Habermas— lo dilucida a partir de las bases legítimas del poder. Los estudios estratégicos críticos no pueden integrar las percepciones de reflexividad —en tanto herramienta cognitiva diferenciador— dado que incorpora indistintamente estas dos perspectivas inconmensurables. Su consideración simultánea genera una tensión cognitiva inherente, de modo que suscita tanto el interés por una estrategia crítica para abordar discretamente el poder como fuerza y el poder como legitimación y la respectiva responsabilidad por parte del estratega de equilibrar sus implicaciones en la práctica.

Palabras clave: Estrategia; Genealogía; Nietzsche; Poder; Crítica; Clausewitz.

Résumé. Le lien entre la théorie sociale et la production de savoirs stratégiques innovants dans différents contextes et époques est une question complexe. Cependant, puisque la discipline des études stratégiques demeure radicalement instrumentale, la notion de pouvoir est le pivot central de sa relation avec le monde social. Conformément à l’approche méthodologique de l’École de Cambridge en histoire des idées politiques, cet article présente un essai généalogique appliqué à certains moments marquants de la pensée stratégique en occident. Et ce, afin de mieux comprendre son évolution dans ‘ses propres termes’. Cet exercice de contextualisation idéationnelle nous permet de d’isoler des compréhensions fluctuantes de la notion de pouvoir, et leurs concepts corrélatifs de ‘critique’. Il est argué que ces variations représentent la précon-



dition théorique la plus influente sur les principaux moments d'innovation en études stratégiques. Notre analyse retrace une dualité dans les traditions concurrentes informant la stratégie occidentale. La première tradition—en ligne avec Machiavel, Nietzsche et Foucault—conseille le praticien en termes de dynamique technique du pouvoir tandis que la seconde—en ligne avec Aristote, Kant et Habermas—l'éclaire sur les bases légitimes du pouvoir. Les études stratégiques critiques ne pourront intégrer les apports de la réflexivité—de façon cohérente et comme un outil cognitif qui les distinguent des études stratégiques classiques—tant que la forme de critique préconisée englobera indistinctement ces deux perspectives incommensurables. Nous concluons en préconisant leur considération simultanée, mais de façon distincte, de façon à ce qu'elles génèrent une tension cognitive heuristique où le producteur de “stratégie critique” doit considérer à la fois, le pouvoir comme *force* et le pouvoir comme *légitimité et ce*, avec la terrible responsabilité d'équilibrer leurs implications dans la pratique.

Mots-clés: Stratégie; généalogie; Nietzsche; Pouvoir; Critique; Clausewitz.

Resumo. A ligação entre a teoria social e produção de conhecimento estratégico inovador em diferentes contextos e épocas continua a sendo uma questão complexa. Entretanto, os estudos estratégicos sendo uma disciplina radicalmente instrumental, a noção de poder está no centro da sua relação com o mundo social. De acordo com a escola de Cambridge do pensamento político, este artigo expõe um breve exercício genealógico aplicado ao pensamento estratégico do “Ocidente”, a fim de compreender melhor a sua abordagem para mudar a estratégia em seus próprios termos. Este exercício permite isolar a compreensão da flutuação da própria noção de poder, e seu conceito correlato de crítica, como precondição teórica mais influente para a inovação estratégica em estudos estratégicos. Nossa análise refaz uma dupla tradição competindo para apresentar a estratégia ocidental, que é de importância primordial para a problemática da inovação em estudos estratégicos. A primeira linhagem vai desde Maquiavel, Nietzsche e Foucault—aconselha o assunto em termos de dinâmica técnicas de poder, enquanto a segunda linhagem com Aristóteles, Kant e Habermas—ilumina-lo sobre os fundamentos legítimos de poder. Os estudos estratégicos críticos não podem integrar os insights de reflexividade—como sua ferramenta cognitiva distintiva— enquanto englobe estas duas perspectivas incomensuráveis indiscriminadamente. Sua mesma consideração gera uma tensão cognitiva inerente partir do qual, surgem tanto o desejo pela estratégia crítica a considerar discretamente poder como força e poder como legitimidade e a correspondente responsabilidade do estrategista para equilibrar suas implicações na prática.

Palavras-chave: estratégia; genealogia; Nietzsche; poder; crítica; Clausewitz.

Introduction

Even general doctrines or complex theories can have distinct effects not merely on particular courses of action, but on the general structure of action in a given society.

Geuss (2008, p. 12)

Strategy and the study of war occupy an important place in the different disciplines of the social sciences. Ancient, classical and modern authors have discussed the nature of war and its conduct through their different epochal lenses. Reading Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz or



Morgenthau informs us as much on the authors themselves and their object, as on the spirit of their times.

A recurrent bias in strategic thought is to consider strategic principles as nomothetic rules in the conduct of war. Although it remains that some general strategic rules or principles may be deduced within specific and constant warfare contexts, some strategists, such as Clausewitz, benefited from an analytic advantage over their adversaries due to the incorporation of reflexive practices. Nevertheless, few strategists approached their study desk with intellectual tools (or depth) allowing them to distinguish between their normative engagement and notions of practical efficacy. Still, the strategist who is capable of a reflexive perspective in face of contemporary ideologies will benefit from an asymmetric advantage over adversaries who lack this critical distance over what is considered ahistorical or given in their context. Un-reflexive strategists may not perceive a latent strategic advantage in potential societal transformations.

For Clausewitz's reflexive intellect, as we have seen, this critical distance toward his revered state and own nationalism came from several disappointments, which forced him into academic reclusion.¹ Beyond individual and contingent circumstances, is there any other way to access this distanced form of instrumental thinking? As this article will underline, such an understanding of on-going historical forces is not the reserved mark of a Machiavellian genius but the result of critical analysis applied to strategic thinking in order to unveil all the possibilities of the present. Clausewitz himself was influenced by the extremely rich intellectual environment of early 19th century Berlin. As my book dedicated to Clausewitz (Dufort, 2017) demonstrates, the sophistication of *On War* was inspired by early dialectical methods. It is this reflexive perspective that allowed Clausewitz to think of societal change itself as a means in the conduct of war. However, the limited cognitive tools he had at hand in his context to systematise this approach left it incomplete even in *On War*, his celebrated masterpiece.

This article will lay out a very brief genealogical exercise applied to strategic thinking in the 'West' in order to better understand the conditions that prompted Clausewitz-like creative and innovative practices. In line with the Cambridge school of political thought, such an exercise aims at understanding the West's changing approach toward strategy 'in its own terms'.² Obviously, an exhaustive genealogy considering all ramifications of Western strategic thinking could not possibly be completed in a single book, let alone in a single article. While starting with an inescapable detour into Renaissance Florence, I shall rely emphatically on Clausewitz's intellectual environment and the following German social theories that most influenced Western strategic thinking.

1 A book, *Clausewitz and Society: A Biographical Introduction to Neo-Clausewitzian Readings*, published with ESCMIC in 2017 exposes how Clausewitz reflected upon the changing forms of post-revolutionary European society at the turn of the 19th century. He thought of the unequalled efficacy of the nascent nationalist ideology in unleashing the violence of a people in war at a time when competent obedience to the dynast was otherwise demanded of the army. While being himself a German nationalist, Clausewitz was capable by the end of his life of coldly understanding the importance of the 'changing spirit of his time' for the transformation of warfare. The Prussian army—which he helped to reform—played a crucial role in defeating Napoleon. Toward this aim, Clausewitz has studied the societal transformations brought about by the French revolution. He had a central role in the reforms of the Prussian polity. The latter gave reactionary armies the same efficacy that allowed Napoleon to conquer Europe while restricting any emancipatory or structural changes to a minimum.

2 Taken from Skinner's postmodern form of historiography, this expression refers to conceptual changes that lead "appraisive terms to lose – or to alter the direction of – their evaluative force" (Skinner, 2002a, p. 181).



The link between social theory and the production of innovative strategic knowledge in different contexts and eras is a complex question. Nevertheless, strategic studies being a radically instrumental discipline, the notion of power is at the centre of its relationship with the social world. Through the elaboration of this genealogical exercise it appears that the changing understanding of the very notion of power, and its correlative concept of critique, is the most influential theoretical precondition for strategic innovation in strategic studies. Indeed, while articulating different notions of power (*Macht*) with force/violence (*Gewalt*), legitimacy (*Legitimität*) and authority/domination (*Herrschaft*) into complete forms of historiography, social theories provide the strategist with more or less restrictive cognitive tools to pursue creative and innovative thinking.³ This is no simple task as Guzzini (2006, p. 2) warns since “‘power’ carries its overtones from social to political theory and vice versa.” One approach to power appears to be less inimical to innovative strategic thought as Guzzini (2007, p. 24) postulated from a constructivist perspective:

[...] one could hypothesise that only in contexts where politics is defined in a way to privilege manipulative features in the ‘art of the possible’, rather than the notion of a common good, does ‘power’ have this effect in political discourse.

To approach this question and its relation to strategic thought, the genealogy will cover a wide range of historiographical approaches—defining various meanings for the notion of power—and their influence on strategic studies, including pre-modern Christianity, the Enlightenments and its reactions, Marxism and Realism, critical security studies and post-modernism.

Strategy, Genealogy and Method

It is generally agreed upon that technological determinism is to a certain extent always implied when one talks of strategy. Developments in weaponry, communications and logistics all influence the field of potential action. The existing technical means are at once tools and constraints for the strategist. In his war taxonomy, John Keegan (1994) points at the complex relationships between technological change and strategic reconfiguration (see also Baylis et al., 1987; Liddell-Hart, 1946; McNeil, 1982; Wyn-Jones, 1999). For Toffler & Toffler (1994), the emergence of agrarian, industrial and information economies stand as the starting points of major strategic transformations. Influenced by soviet literature on strategy from the 1980s, Krepinevich (1994) identifies *technico-military revolutions* that divide military history into different *technico-military regimes*, and suggests that each has had a direct impact on strategic thinking and doctrines (see also Bousquet, 2009). The adjustment between technological evolution and changing strategic concepts thus presents a predominant set of problems for strategy theorists.

What is less generally integrated into modern strategic thinking is that the rationality governing strategy is itself rooted in the social context from which it emerges; it materialises in

³ Extensive studies of historical semantics concluded that the history of these concepts is marked by imprecise and overlapping definitions from antiquity to the early modern vernacular Europe (Brunner, Conze & Koselleck, 1978; Richter, 1995, p. 72). Nevertheless, their changing relations into forms of historiography are determinant in informing strategic thinkers in every context.



conjunction with the ideology, religion, traditions, problems and organisation of a given society. Philip Bobbitt (2002), who argues along these lines, puts forward a multidisciplinary analysis of the influence that both technological evolution and social forms might have on strategy. From a socio-historical perspective, he retraces the transformations of the interactions inside the triad formed by strategy, law and legitimacy. This triad structures the coming into being, the course, and the form of the main wars in recent Western history (see also in historical sociology literature Downing, 1992; Teschke, 2002 and Tilly 1975, 1992). Any particular conceptualization of strategy thus remains highly dependent on the social and historical context in which it is formulated, as well as the theoretical perspective upon which it is founded. Although the classical strategist aims for a universal definition of strategy and its governing laws, his discoveries remain invariably bound by historical specificity. Strategic studies are therefore not exempt from the universalising modern bias. Any strategic doctrine contains its own politico-normative worldview, its own theory of the social world—beyond being a simple instrument of policy; strategy is also ideological in itself (Barkawi, 1998).

To capture the role of ideology in strategic studies it should be understood how strategic thoughts and doctrines are determined by the changing social theories that inform them. In the last two centuries in Germany, this can be achieved by identifying the different forms of historiography that have informed strategic thought. Indeed, the evolution of historiography precedes the transformation of strategic studies in many ways and only a few strategists have reflexively considered the critical implications and limitations of this determinacy over their plans and policies.

The Cambridge School of historical thought will be used here in order to approach the philosophies of history informing past strategists. Under Skinner's historiographical program "we shall do well to concentrate in particular on the concepts we employ to describe and appraise what Hobbes called our artificial world, the world of politics and morality"—that is 'normative vocabulary' such as liberty, democracy or even the State. The latter "are those which perform evaluative as well as descriptive functions in natural languages" (Skinner, 2002a, p. 175). "[...] if we want a history of philosophy written in a genuinely historical spirit, we need to make it one of our principal tasks to situate the texts we study within such intellectual contexts as enable us to make sense of what their authors were doing in writing them" (Skinner 2002a, p. 3).

By applying the Cambridge School approach to the concept of strategy one discovers that it is only by accident—via the Medieval Christian heritage—that this idea became a 'normative term' following its condemnation along with the name of Machiavelli. More fundamentally, strategy remains a radically perspectival but still descriptive term considering the management of the means of political life. Strategy remains dependant on the constellation of other 'normative terms' supporting the strategist's vision of politics. This 'constellation'—or ideology—is approached as a historiography (i.e. a metanarrative or a guiding philosophy of history).

Specifically, the meaning of the very concept of power in Germany has determined much of what has been thought of in terms of strategy. Different German scholars articulate power, in its ubiquitous relationship to force and legitimacy, into forms of historiography that either impede or enable strategists to grasp all the possibilities their present contexts have to offer. As such, following the transformation of strategic thought through Volker Sellin's genealogy of power (1978) under its two main lineages—neo-Aristotelian and Machiavellian—one can observe the



consequences of a changing evaluative content of the notion of power on strategists' capacity for innovation. The objective of a genealogical understanding of strategy is to identify the attributes of different notions of power and historiography that may contribute to developing strategic thinking.⁴ The question here is therefore not just to 'see things their way' and to evaluate what these writers intended to *do* when writing their respective masterpieces, as for the Cambridge School, but also to expose why they (and their intellectual heirs) may have succeeded in realising what they actually intended to do.⁵ So this genealogy intends to assess the techniques of power intrinsically proposed by the authors being considered.⁶

A remarkable characteristic of such a diachronic comparative exercise is to encounter similar sensibilities, problems and answers over very different places and periods. Although the rationales, motivations and political contexts are irremediably singular⁷, many thinkers share cognitive practices. The question of reflexivity is often presented as a recent debate in IR, at best one originating with the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify similar echoes in previous German authors—from Kant to Marx or Clausewitz—in the forms of explicit or implicit intentions, fragments and practices. It seems more accurate to speak of recurrent moments of amnesia and rediscovery. The following genealogy looks specifically at suspected seminal periods of reflexive rediscovery or amnesia to identify strategic innovative intellectual practices.

Although some socio-political references are inevitable, the contexts of the strategists under consideration will be brought to light through an account of the 'ideologists'—as Skinner refers to important theorists (Skinner 2002a, p. 148)—who framed the social theories that informed important strategic writings and practices.⁸

Western Modern Strategic Thought and its Christian Heritage

Modern Western historiography gradually emerged after the demise of Christian historiography. Generally, the latter presented historical movements in terms of a linear divine plan only accessible to understanding through biblical revelations. Christian historiographers aimed at ordering and periodising the flux of events in terms of stages in the realisation of God's plan. Saint

⁴ As such, the primary aim of this genealogical exercise remains more limited and is not to expose all contemporary and past meanings we attach to a concept such as in Skinner's appraisal (1998) of the effect of a 'liberal ideology' over our understanding of liberty or of Dunn's assessment (2005) of the use and misuse of the idea of 'democracy' by Western historians.

⁵ As such, between various interests into genealogical endeavours, I am more interested in intentions of social change than individual aspirations. As an example Machiavelli's interest in convincing the Medici to grant him a position within Florence is of lesser interest in this specific project than his desire of influencing Medici to engage in the project of Italy's reunification (Skinner, 2000, pp. 25, 39-40).

⁶ To further illustrate this, let's say that if Skinner agrees with some German historicists that "we need to treat our normative concepts less as statements about the world than as tools and weapons of ideological debate" (2002a, p. 177), I believe that some of these weapons may have been better conceived and managed and that these conditions of success are of direct interest for strategic studies.

⁷ As Skinner puts it against defenders of "perennial issues" of Western political thought, there is "the possibility that earlier thinkers may have been interested in a range of questions very different from our own" (2002a, p. 3).

⁸ The genealogy will jump from one author to another, considered as important benchmarks in the reconceptualization of power and of a corollary form of German historiography that will deeply influence strategic thought. This exercise remains primarily focused on their ultimate impact on strategy. Therefore, only a few aspects of lineages between authors are considered. These parenthoods are inherently partial and without any other pretention.



Augustine's *City of God* expressed this fundamental aspect of the medieval philosophy of history: society was to be understood as reflecting a divine order organised by a teleological impetus only recognised through the guidance of mystic revelation (Foucault 1988, pp. 74–7).⁹ In line with Thomas de Aquinas' assimilation of the Aristotelian teleological vision of ethics and polity into Christianity, the medieval meaning of human action was purely discerned in its religious signification as a function of the covert parameters of divine Providence (Best 1995, p. 1; Lines, 2002, p. 155). In this all mighty providential historiography, a critical viewpoint was limited to individual ethical choices from a transcendental reference "What has God commanded me to do?" (Geuss, 2005, p. 41).

The crisis of the Carolingian imperial war-economy and the following general downfall of early medieval governance would lead to the appearance of medieval heavy cavalry—the knight. Stemming out of the imperatives of the bellicose rivalries of predatory lordships over defenceless peasants (Teschke, 2002, p. 90), the knight was militaristically artless compared with its ancient ancestors.¹⁰ Strategic studies, as for most intellectual fields, were victims of medieval faithful obscurantism where ultra-conservatism in thought and society was reinforced as part of the Church's control strategy.

Modern thinkers perceive medieval authors as being "not at all trained for critical analysis" (Delbrück, 1982, p. 642). They did produce some technical treatises on strategy, such as those of Rabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mainz (pp. 780-856) or Christine de Pisan (pp. 1363-1430), but these have invariably fallen into disuse. It is no coincidence that none of their legacies are considered influential (see Delbrück, 1982: 635-48, Chaliand, 2001). Indeed, the complexity of military strategy associated with the ancient separation of arms progressively regressed into a most unsophisticated form of warfare.

It is only with the advent of the western Renaissance and a return to a 'humanist' interpretation of history that written strategic thinking regained its creative vigour. For Renaissance historiographers history was no longer a mere reflection of God's grand design but the result of human venture (Skinner, 2000, p. 30-1). From mere pawns of a divine plan, political actors were now entitled a certain form of agency (Vasoli, 1988, p. 61; Best, 1995, p. 1). For the humanist thinkers of the Renaissance period themselves, the secularisation of knowledge was a seminal and critical endeavour aiming at capturing the full purview of human history. With the downfall of the papacy and the empire, the two dominant medieval institutions, the foundation of authority was being transferred to many other existing forms of politics (Vasoli, 1988, pp. 58-9). The *artes*

⁹ John of Salisbury writes in *Policraticus* [1159] that rulers are "a kind of image on earth of the divine majesty" and in *De principis instructione* [1217] "the establishment of a princely form of power is actually a matter of necessity among men, no less than it is among the birds, the bees and the rest of brute creation" (quoted in Skinner, 1988, pp. 391-2). In agreement with the uncontested authority of St Augustine, "that God's purpose in ordaining such princely powers must have been, as John of Salisbury adds, 'to repress the wicked, to reward the good' and to uphold the law of God on earth" (Skinner, 1988, p. 392).

¹⁰ This domestic transformation imposed an external transformation of medieval warfare. From the 11th century to the late 14th centuries, this medieval mindset and socio-political structures expanded bellicously toward Europe's peripheries as a result of a mobile and restless transnational nobility in their growing need for lands and villeins (Delbrück, 1982, p. 226; Teschke, 2002, p. 97). The Crusades, far from a Western military golden age, represent the exportation of this basic form of warfare 'under God's will' in an attempt of the Catholic Church to limit medieval Europe's systemic proclivity for fratricide slaughter.



ascended as a knowledge breaking with scholastic epistemology and aiming at being useful for civil life (Skinner, 1988, pp. 414-5).

In this context Machiavelli undertook, in the small city-state of Florence, the task of understanding power beyond Christian morality—a task that would earn his name an ignominious reputation still alive half a millennium after his death. In direct contradiction to the Middle age Christian vision—but in agreement with the ancient texts that inspired the Italian Renaissance—for Machiavelli, ‘glory and riches’ were to be forsaken actively and ‘Fortune’ could be influenced by a prince’s bold and intelligent initiatives (i.e. *virtù*) (Skinner, 2000, pp. 32, 34). This understanding of historical agency—“where God does not want to do everything, in order not to deprive us of our freedom and the glory that belong to us” (Machiavelli, 1993, p. 89)—was widespread through the ancient humanist tradition and within Machiavelli’s contemporaries in Florence. For the latter, humans were therefore partly free of determinism in their actions and partly submitted to the goddess of Fortune (Skinner, 2000, pp. 28-35).

More than an influence from the classics, the *corpus Aristotelicum* constituted the heart of Florentine humanist education.¹¹ The renaissance period reinstated Aristotle’s historiography and practical philosophy (or *praxis*) centred on the fundamental premise of a *telos*—a ‘good life’ defined as the achievement of a human’s or a society’s potential. Humanists were primarily interested in questions of civic life and with Aristotelian *sapientia*—“which teaches how man may achieve perfection while still in this life”. Leonardo Bruni, Chancellor of the Florentine Republic before the reign of the Medici, studied, translated and inculcated Aristotle’s legacies (Vasoli, 1988, p. 63).¹² Machiavelli’s historiography emulated Bruni’s work (Kelley 1988: 755) and was well received. His *History of Florence* gained him a stipend from the University of Pisa (Kristeller, 1988, p. 116). Machiavelli’s historiography was similarly evaluative in its teleological orientation, considering all events in relation to the Aristotelian ‘good life’ in the city.

Machiavelli departed from an Aristotelian historiography—and the legions of advice-books for leaders it inspired his contemporaries to write—with *The Prince*. With this treatise he imposed the ‘Machiavellian revolution’ with a simple claim; the ruler shall not attain his highest goals by always adopting a virtuous attitude (Skinner, 2000, p. 42). The good life was still to be forsaken, but in order to be successful; the means could not always be virtuous. It was a frontal assault on the necessary unity and coherency of ends and means characterising the Christian legacy. Following Machiavelli, adopting virtuous behaviour may in some cases be an irrational and disastrous policy.

Machiavelli considered a fundamental issue of social life when he exposed the fact that no matter how rational humanity can be, irreconcilable political aims—corresponding with various definitions of the Aristotelian good life—will inexorably exist and will create conflictual politics (Geuss, 2005, p. 15). The exercise of force was not contrary to *virtù* but rather “an absolutely cen-

¹¹ Florence was the Renaissance centre of 15th century retranslations and commentaries on Aristotle’s *Ethics* (Lines, 2002, pp. 181-2).

¹² A peculiarity of Florence during the early 15th century was its dedication to Republican freedom (Skinner, 1988, p. 419). Bruni and other Florentines writers advocated for a classic formation for the leading citizens and defended the Republic and its free institutions against foreign conquest by Visconti Milan with the humanist tradition (Kristeller, 1988, p. 131). At the turn of the 16th century, Aristotelians considered theology and philosophy separately in order to free reason from the restriction of religious faith (Vasoli, 1988, p. 70).



tral feature of good princely government” (Skinner, 1988, p. 432). The prince shall “change one’s character to suit the times and circumstances” then he “would always be successful” (Machiavelli, 1993, p. 86; Skinner, 2000, p. 44). Therefore, Machiavelli (1993, pp. 51-2) concluded hyperbolically “[a] ruler, then, should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else except war and its method and practices” and added reversely that “if rulers concern themselves more with the refinements of life [...], they lose power.” Machiavelli’s gaze toward power was not concerned primarily with what the Christian and Aristotelian traditions evaluate as right and just. He opened the field of politics to a notion of power concerned with the ‘art of the possible’. In the latter, the management of politics was not dictated by a predetermined Aristotelian ethical line but evaluated in terms of competing strategic options.

To reconcile *virtù* with the imperatives of power, Machiavelli made use of the *technique of rhetorical redescription* (Skinner, 2002a, p. 182). He redefined a ‘virtuous ruler’ not as one based on the republican concept of *virtù* influenced by Christian morality, but rather as one that understand that he “cannot always act in ways that are considered good because, in order to maintain his power, he is often forced to act treacherously, ruthlessly or inhumanely, and disregard the precepts of religion” (Machiavelli, 1993, p. 62).¹³

Interestingly, Machiavelli made no reference to the consequences that such a stance dictated by the necessities of power would have for the ‘last judgement’. As Skinner (2000, p. 42) states it: “His silence is eloquent, indeed epoch making; it echoed around Christian Europe, at first eliciting a stunned silence in return, and then a howl of execration that has never finally died away.” As such, Machiavelli lived in a brief parenthesis that allowed unchristian intellectual political thought. For the first time recorded since a millennium of Medieval Christian obscurantism, power was exposed in its naked face, as force, as the fundamental explicans of a contingent history.¹⁴ Breaking with both Christian and Aristotelian teleologies, *The Prince* is attributed with having introduced in modern political thought *power as force* as the cornerstone—the very essence—of strategy.¹⁵

In contrast with his fellow humanists thinkers, Machiavelli’s princely *virtues* allowed the ruler to efficaciously maintain/expend influence and control. From the premise of the primacy of force, power was understood as a technique and justice as one of its symptoms (Machiavelli, 1993, p. 62; Skinner, 1988, pp. 433, 439). This was a radical breach with the Aristotelian *phronesis*, which integrated the normative imperative of the ‘good life’ into the practice of politics. Machiavelli negated this unitarian notion of power to concentrate only on the management of

13 Machiavelli makes a similar point concerning the interest of the Republic or of the polity as a whole when he states in *Discorsi* that “whenever what is at issue is the basic security of the community, no consideration should be given to questions of justice or injustice” (quoted in Skinner, 1988, p. 439).

14 Even if shared with a mythical goddess of fortune, agency falls within human reach. Machiavelli’s princely virtues embody this regained liberty since defined as the disposition and capacities to use all of the available means to reach political goals. These conceptions of political practice and freewill break with the Aristotelian practical philosophy by observing human in “what they do not what they ought to do” relative to some external design.

15 Machiavelli is often compared with Hobbes, who has been more influential in the Anglo-Saxon world, as equivalent funders of modern thought. Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s *The Prince* radically differs in the function of the knowledge produced. *The Prince* is concerned with practical advice to the ruler “learned through long experience of modern affairs” (Machiavelli, 1993, p. 3) in a given context over efficacious strategies for maintaining/increasing control. As with most early modern philosophers, Hobbes seeks to legitimate the power of the state by his philosophical discourses based on a hypothetical—and fictional—state of nature.



politics as a limitless ‘art of the possible’. Nevertheless, this does not mean that he was repudiating the importance of values and authentic goals in politics; he was himself one of the earliest modern partisans of republicanism and Italy’s unification. Machiavelli only underlined the need for a preliminary analytical emphasis on the dynamics of power. As Sellin’s genealogy of power uncovered, this alternative perspective on power would resurface in Modern Europe and compete with the teleological Aristotelian vision from within the epoch-making works of seminal scholars such as Kant, Hegel or Marx. On one side, power was considered in its ethical dimension as ‘history’s duty’ to unveil the Christian/Aristotelian ideal. On the other side, power served no other master than it-self and shall be regarded as following its own imperatives. Most of the time, as we shall see, these two visions were intertwined within the modern ‘spirit of the time’ and modern European strategy developed over this ubiquitous foundation.

Modern European Military Upheavals and (Counter) Enlightenment Faiths

An interesting moment for studying strategy and its dependency upon the intellectual context is early 19th century Prussia. It reveals to our eyes the terms in which Clausewitz thought of his troubled and fast-changing world. Since my last book was dedicated to his life and work, it is not necessary to review his doctrine here. Nevertheless, studying the social theories that shaped his work is of crucial importance for understanding—beyond mere personal and contingent circumstances—his ease for strategic innovation and which contradictions he never resolved. In particular, the following section aims at bringing back to life the early 19th century Prussian intellectual context and to consider its impact on strategic thought.

The historicist element contained in post-Renaissance historiography unleashed in Europe a vision of society as contingent and fluctuating, in sharp contrast to the static social order innate to Christian historiography. Yet, turning their backs on Machiavelli’s undetermined¹⁶ historiography, early modern and modern thinkers substituted an austere reading of Christian *Providence* with different Aristotelian versions of the ideal of *Progress*. The latter generally served afterward as the basic explanatory scheme of historiography in the terms of a linear moral, technological and political advancement of humanity. As such, reminders of a Christian grand design continued to underline most Modern literature under the form of a devout quest for the nomothetic functioning of history (Best 1995: 6). Moving beyond specific contexts and local occurrences, historiographical approaches/ thinking at the time generally sought to explain how an idealised humanity transitions from a state of potentiality towards a condition of actuality (Best, 1995, p. 4). As in Christian historiography, events were understood through an overarching structure containing its teleological impulse—a tendency that culminates with the Enlightenment.¹⁷

¹⁶ Although it will be noted that Machiavelli’s constitutional history in *Discourses on Livy* (1996, pp. 10–4, see also Kelley, 1988, p. 753) considers not only that all the possibilities of changes in human organizations have been attempted in ancient times but also, that they vary in a dialectical and cyclical manner.

¹⁷ This being said, it remains a generalisation of the ‘spirit of the age’.



This form of teleological historiography opened the idea of social transformation and progress to the field of strategy. But it came at a cost. The histories of the Enlightenment were one-dimensional and aimed toward a pre-determined end dictated by a linear philosophy of history. For this period and beyond, strategic thought was limited to exposing the practical necessities that would provoke the unfolding of a pre-written history. The strategists of the Enlightenment would remain embedded in a neo-Aristotelian vision of power. During the 17th through the 19th centuries, the universalistic ideas unleashed tremendous periods of warfare and transformations in European affairs. The French Revolution and its consequences was one of the most blatant examples of the potential of these ideas to put societies in motion. Paradoxically, strategic thinking remained mostly unable to comprehend the dynamics intrinsic to a form of warfare that extended its reach deep into society. Through a brief overview of the intellectual context of the period through Kant, Hegel and Fichte—tantamount to this form of teleological historiography—and its influence over Clausewitz's thinking, it shall be clear how these intellectual schemes, considering power both in terms of legitimacy and force, are intrinsically inimical to innovative and critical strategic thinking.

From the Universal to the National 'telos' of History: Clausewitz via Kant, Hegel and Fichte

During the Napoleonic Wars the question of the state was of prime concern for philosophers, politicians and strategists. Kant's philosophy had significant influence over the intellectual circles of Berlin and in the decades following the Prussian defeat, Hegel and Fichte became dominant voices at the University of Berlin. Both were in contact with a third philosopher; the author of *On War*. The influences of Kant, Hegel and Fichte on Clausewitz are still only loosely understood since Clausewitz paid little tribute to the origins of his inspiration. Needless to say, Clausewitz's understanding of *politik* and power remained loosely defined, however central they were to his project. By placing his works in his own intellectual context it is possible to retrace the meaning of power that inspired and defined *On War*—the most influential work on strategy.

Kant

Opening with Kant, the canonical thinker of the Enlightenment period, this section portrays an understanding of history that presupposes a teleological movement and dictates its means and ends over strategy—a historiography that uses human-wills and their conflicts in order to accomplish its purpose. Kant created the first “single dominating of political thinking in Germany” and “set in train a new mode of political thinking” (Reiss in his introduction to Kant, 2010, pp. 9-10). He was at the pinnacle of this vision of the Enlightenment when he published “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in November 1784. He stated his faith in one of the most powerful high-modernist ideas:



If it is now asked, whether we at present live in an *enlightened* age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*. [...] the way is now being cleared for them to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer (Kant 2010: 58).

Here, Kant elevated *Reason*, and its development, not only as the means towards the Aristotelian good life but rather as a necessary end in itself—that is, the progressive realisation of the ideal/rational arrangement of the world (as he conceived the abstract or *noumena* world] within the empirical world [*phenomenal* world). As such, Kant identified in the progress of the Enlightenment project of emancipation the fundamental determination in human history. It is in his second essay of December 1784, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, that Kant (2010, pp. 41-54) developed the role of rational individuals, engaging in relationships under their respective free will, in order to create a determinate direction to human history. Freedom was the motor of history but it would ultimately be restricted in a 'perfectly just civic constitution'. Through the antagonistic relationships within a civil-society of maturing rational subjects, a rational world was undoubtedly constructing itself. As such, Kant further developed his conception of reason as a teleological project—as an end *per se*—which shall ultimately tend to materialise in the perfect constitution and perpetual peace:

For if we start out from *Greek* history as that in which all other earlier or contemporary histories are preserved or at least authenticated, if we next trace the influence of the Greeks upon the shaping and mis-shaping of the body politic of *Rome*, which engulfed the Greek state, and follow down to our own times the influence of Rome upon the *Barbarians* who in turn destroyed it, and if we finally add the political history of other peoples *episodically*, in so far as knowledge of them has gradually come down to us through these enlightened nations, we shall discover a regular process of improvement in the political constitutions of our continent (which will probably legislate eventually for all other continents) (Kant, 2010, p. 52).

The Kantian philosophy of history was based on an anthropological conception of human subjects—as endowed with perfectible reason and free-will—who aggregate in society, causing the inevitable linear development of rationality and its materialisation tending towards a rational organisation of the world (Dean, 1994, p. 45). As such, even if he was drastically opposed to war, for Kant the French Revolution and the Revolutionary wars were symptoms of progress since they favoured civil constitutions and global cosmopolitanism.¹⁸

All in all, in such an understanding of history, critical reason was—in Kant—the faculty to discern between freedom and determination in history. It served to uncover the *necessity of the present* and its very development realised the intrinsic teleology of history as inscribed in human nature¹⁹. This perspective, highly influential in Prussia, made no detour and prescribed a

¹⁸ Walker (2008) differentiates within liberalism the legacy of Kant and Pain where the former preconized non-intervention and reforms and the latter military interventions and revolutions.

¹⁹ "For Kant, the categorical imperative is the objective principle of morality" (Reiss in Kant, 2010, p. 18). Kant nevertheless acknowledged the human complexity as part animal (instinct) and part intellectual (reason) and its consequent difficulties for the maturation of his project. He famously wrote, "Out of timber so crooked as that from which mas is made nothing entirely straight can be built." Kant's theory of justice or goodness was cosmopolitan and culminated in the equality of all world citizens. Meanwhile,



non-dualistic agenda for strategists and political agents: one had the duty to respond to the necessities of reason [following *noumena's* principles]. Epoch making, Kant's vision of politics was one of necessity. For history to follow its due course, one *ought to* refrain from responding to his animal/Machiavellian inclinations towards cunning and force [following *phenomena's* principles], respect other rational beings' moral autonomy and never treat them solely as means.

Hegel

The death of Kant in 1804 marked the end of the Enlightenment golden age in European political thought. It was Hegel who most effectively attacked Kantian reason, at the beginning of the 19th century, alleging that it was based on a principle of subjectivity (Habermas, 1998, pp. 55-6).²⁰ Hegel negated that this principle could determine the unique and true answer to the ethical question of "What I ought to do?" (see Geuss, 2005, pp. 40-66). For him, the 'cunning of reason' made teleological historical development, not dependent on individual wills, but a result of the complex and unplanned unfolding of human intercourses. As for the other German idealists, Hegel considered 'History' from a spiritual/moral interest.²¹ He regarded it as a *slaughter-bench* that presented before our eyes the phenomenal spectacle of its means to realise in different *grades* "the essential destiny — [...] the true *result* of the World's History" (Hegel, 2001 [1837], p. 35).²² *Contra* Kant, history and its crude means could not be in contradiction to ethics for Hegel since power-politics entanglements finally served to reveal the "higher justice of nature and truth" (Hegel as quoted in Meinecke, 1957, p. 357). In Hegel's (2012, p. 20) historiography, there was no dualism between the imperatives of power and ethics; "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational".

As we previously mentioned, on October 13th 1806, while drafting the last pages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel could observe from his study Napoleon entering Jena to prepare

he criticised "civilised and especially the commercial states" of Europe because they "drink injustice like water" and "regard themselves as the elect in point of orthodoxy" (quoted in Booth, 2007, p. 86).

20 Hegel is unsatisfied with Kant's opposition between reason and passions. The term 'spirit' is the unity of these opposites: "though diverse they were capable of coincidence" (Caird, 1883, p. 37). Hegel introduces a dialectic which represents the unfolding of the World Spirit: "If therefore, we regard the ultimate unity as a spiritual principle, there is good hope that we may find in it a key to the antagonism and conflict of things, and may be enabled to see in the world not mere wilderness and chaos of opposing powers, or the manichæan dualism of an absolute good and an absolute evil, but a rational order or system, an organic unity in which every member has its place and function" (Caird, 1883, p. 42). Hegel negates contingency in human affairs to subordinate it to a historiography understood as a teleological whole contained in the spirit. See Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. [1802], "On the Essence of Critical Philosophy", Trans. H. S. Harris, *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie [Critical Journal of Philosophy]*, 1(1), iii-xxiv.

21 It is not a coincidence that all the most influential early 19th century post-Kantian German idealists studied theology. Fichte studied at the Universities of Jena and Leipzig while Hegel and Schelling attended the Tübingen seminary while Schleiermacher is the son of a Prussian army chaplain. German idealism reintroduces the alliance of philosophy and religion to renew it with the highest forms of historiographical speculative pretensions (Duignan, 2011, p. 146).

22 "And in the same way as this distinction has attracted attention in view of the Christian principle of selfconsciousness — Freedom; it also shows itself as an essential G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 33 one, in view of the principle of Freedom generally. The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom; a progress whose development according to the necessity of its nature, it is our business to investigate. The general statement given above, of the various grades in the consciousness of Freedom — and which we applied in the first instance to the fact that the Eastern nations knew only that one is free; the Greek and Roman world only that some are free; while we know that all men absolutely (man as man) are free — supplies us with the natural division of Universal History, and suggests the mode of its discussion. This is remarked, however, only incidentally and anticipatively; some other ideas must be first explained." (Hegel, 2001 [1837], p. 32-3)



for the upcoming battle against the Prussian forces (Paret, 2009, p. 21). On this day, he wrote to a friend: “all of us here wish the French victory and success. The Prussians are suffering the defeats they deserve”. Supporting Napoleon, he mentioned three months later in another letter “[t]here is no better proof than the events occurring before our eyes, that culture is triumphing over barbarism and intellect over spirit-less mind” (Hegel quoted in Avineri, 1962, p. 461). For Hegel, the military conquests of the renewed French Empire were no less than the materialisation of a reasonable arrangement of the world, the materialisation of the ‘World Spirit’.

Hegelian historiography intended to resolve the ‘enigma of providence’ as engraved in Reason’s essence—that is, the progressive realisation of a universal order of Freedom through history as a necessary transitive sacrificial site.²³ For Hegel, to produce a critique was to reveal the harsh necessities of world history—beyond parochial views of the ‘spirit of the time’ [*Weltanschauung*]²⁴—in the development of the grand design pre-inscribed in a transcendental Spirit. From Kant’s non-dualistic ethics of means, Hegel operated a displacement where legitimacy was inherent to the necessities of history.

Fichte

After fleeing the capital following his King after the defeat of Jena, Fichte²⁴ returned to Berlin, “traumatised, yet convinced it was his duty to mobilise a defeated people and urge their spiritual renewal” (Moore in his introduction to Fichte, 2008, p. xi). This scholar—who had previously championed the French Revolution²⁵—turned against universal cosmopolitanism in a Berlin under French occupation. A fierce opponent of an oppressive state, Fichte now preached for the maximization of state-power in order to rescue national liberty.

[The] ‘fatherland of the really educated Christian European’ is ‘in each age that European state which leads culture’. [...] The Republic, on whose behalf Fichte had once pledged to work, had given way to a sham monarchy bent on conquest for its own sake. Accordingly, he formed a quite visceral hatred of Napoleon, the man who had betrayed the cause [...] To his mind, the French had ultimately shown themselves to be unworthy of their appointed role in spreading the evangel of Freedom (Moore, in *Fichte*, 2008, p. xxii).

²³ After him, the problem remained the same—in its distinct forms—for the critics of modernity: how can modernity understand itself without recurring to an external referent. It was the seed of the fundamental dispute over critique’s self-referentiality that would slowly grow until nowadays as illustrated in the Foucault/Habermas debate.

²⁴ Fichte, as the other Romantics recast the nature of the human subject as primarily a feeling one, and only then as the source of knowledge and values. As a harbinger of counter-Enlightenment, he “[...] stood every core tenet of the Enlightenment on its head and championed the particular over the general; the national over the cosmopolitan; the concrete over the abstract; direct sensation and lived experience over the construction of conceptual systems; imagination, instinct, and intuition over logic, reason, mathematics, and the natural sciences; the genius and free individual over community and social conformity; and traditional religion and faith over agnosticism, deism, or atheism” (Best, 1995, p. 7).

²⁵ Fichte wrote two pamphlets in 1793; *Reclamation of the Freedom of Thought from the Princes of Europe Who Have Oppressed it Until Now* and *Contribution to the Rectification of the Public’s Judgment of the French Revolution*. He even went further than Kant—his intellectual mentor—concluding that revolution is a duty to protect a people’s “right to liberty and self-realisation” (Moore in Fichte, 2008, pp. xvi-ii).



Doubled with this last appreciation of European politics, Fichte's philosophy confiscated the highest ideal of the 'good life' and legitimacy from both the French Revolution and aristocratic reactionaries to situate it within a nation that was still to construct—Germany.²⁶ He argued for the development of nationalism in his lectures of 1807-8 entitled provocatively *Addresses to the German Nation*:

[E]very nation strives to expand the unique good which it represents to the limits of possibility and to encompass within itself, insofar as it can, the whole of humanity. This is in accordance with God-given impulse in man, causing that interrelationship of creative tensions upon which the community of peoples rests (Fichte CPA quoted in Sterling 1958: 83).²⁷

Here Fichte re-established Machiavellian necessities within inter-national struggles in balance with the idealism embodied in the elected nation and its desire for expansion (see Meinecke, 1970, p. 79; Paret, 2007, p. 173; Moggach, 1993). If for Hegel the identity of Reason and reality was an accomplished deed, for Fichte, it remained an end to be actively forsaken. Therefore, the *Addresses* exposed "Fichte's determination to see the French invasion not only as a moment of national crisis for 'Germany', but also as a seismic shift of universal significance" (Moore, in Fichte, 2008, p. xx). Not only did Fichte call for embracing forceful and cunning means to defend the nation's freedom but he reinstated the State's legitimacy to do so in the name of Reason's grand design.²⁸ "From that hour forward," Fichte (2008, p. 151) "argued all independent and private endeavours disappear and are subordinated to the state's general scheme."²⁹ While merging with the 'nation' in Fichte, the state embodied both dimensions of power coevally as the bearers of the necessary force to defend the nation and as its legitimate authority—an answer to the French cosmopolitan civic nation (Moore in Fichte 2008: xv). As Machiavelli did three centuries before him, Fichte redefined the Aristotelian 'good life' to fit the demands of his time. By a rhetorical displacement of the prime site of emancipation—from global cosmopolitanism to the national space—Fichte's historiography established the legitimacy of the parochial nation-state's Machiavellian *raison d'état*. Witnessing the defeat of Napoleon, the later Hegel would ultimately join Fichte in considering the nation as the prime site for the realisation of the World Spirit. Confronted with Prussia's uncertain international status, these tenants of German Idealism

26 Fichte aimed not 'merely to think, but to act' "then he would revive the rhetorical character of ancient Greek philosophy; his oratory was designed to engage both the heart and the mind, to persuade his listeners as well as to move them to action" (Moore in Fichte, 2008, p. xviii, xix).

27 Or in his *Volk und Staat* "every nation wants to disseminate as widely as it possibly can the good points that are peculiar to it. [...] an urge on which rest the community of nations, the friction between them, and their development toward perfection", quoted in Paret, 2007, p. 173).

28 Fichte dedicated a series of seventeen lectures to his philosophy of history *The Characteristics of The Present Age*. In the latter, "he asserted that the human race is governed by the unfolding of a providential 'world-plan'" in which "the Race become[s] a perfect image of its everlasting archetype in Reason" (Moore in Fichte, 2008, p. xx). Ulterior and contemporary bellicose interpretations of his *Addresses* have to be balanced—following Moore (in Fichte, 2008, p. xxiii)—since for Fichte, the Germans are called to realize the world-plan not through war of arms but "to found an empire of spirit and reason". "The armed struggle is ended; now there begins, if we so will it, the new battle of principles, of morals and of character" (Fichte 2008: 174). It is both nationalistic and cosmopolitan.

29 Or here: "The State is the means to the higher purpose of the fulfilment of pure humanity in the nation" (Fichte, quoted in Sterling, 1958, p. 86).



departed from a global human polity and a unitary ethics, as in Kant, to centre upon a world of competing nations and dualistic ethics.³⁰

In Hegel, Kant, or Fichte's teleological historiography, human agency was harnessed to history's progress as the linear unfolding of the true nature of reason. Politics was thought of in terms of necessities and duties toward predetermined historical ends. Be they founded on the ideal of 'global cosmopolitanism' or the 'nation' these visions informed strategists in their work by defining the moral means, as in Kant, or to postulate the necessary ends as the strengthening of the nation, as in later Hegel and Fichte. These ideologists defined a 'necessity' to respond to the call of a universal history in precise ways while keeping their philosophies of history beyond the reach of critique and questioning.³¹

Emblematically, on both side of the Napoleonic Wars power struggles were largely thought of in terms of universal legitimacy. The French Revolution and the proclamation of the 'rights of man' legitimated Napoleon's claim for universal rule over continental European peoples and states—his conquests being perceived by many as materialisations of the rationalist ideal of the Enlightenment. Nationalist thinkers observed how the French revolutionaries "met least resistance were the spirit [Geist] was ready" (Ranke quoted in Meinecke, 1970 [1907], p. 327). Gneisenau, one of the Prussian reformers, noted that his "world is divided into those who voluntarily or involuntarily fight for or against Bonaparte's majesty" (quoted in Sterling, 1958, pp. 59-60). Universalist ideas also permeated reactionary and conservative intellectual circles. Friederich William IV considered himself a 'Christian king' and viewed the necessities of foreign policies in terms of moral and legal terms. Primarily concerned with pan-European aristocratic community, his main goal within the Holy Alliance was to defend and reinstate the God-given *ancient regime* beyond national interest.³²

After Napoleon's defeat at the hands of the Reaction, the burgeoning of European peoples' passion for nationalism would take over the rationalist/revolutionary Kantian and idealist ethics that marked 18th century history. First unleashed as a defensive counterweight for dynastic states toward disruptive humanist ideals (Herberg-Rothe, 2007, p. 20), the dissemination of Fichte's nationalist historiography would thereafter challenge the aristocratic ethical system in Europe during the 19th century.³³ Thus, the rise of nationalism as an end in itself carried more than the young Hegelian ideals; it created the patterns of thought that enabled a return to the Machiavellian tradition. Indeed, as we have seen, Fichte proceeded to unify—within *Volksstaat's* ideology [race or nation-state]—the *power as force* of the international struggles exalted by natio-

30 Fichte succumbed to a fever he contracted during his service in the Landstrum during the war of liberation of 1814 (Strachan, 2008, p. 91).

31 As such, the Enlightenment discourses and idealism abstractly comforted supported one of the most influential foundations for *power as legitimacy* in the age of European global imperialism. Faith in the universal reach of these forms of European historiographies served as "an aggressive intellectual and cultural platform meant to pound alternative conceptions of human nature into submission" (Solomon, 1993, p. xi quoted in Best, 1995, p. 10).

32 In fact, for the Prussian conservative of the restoration a strong state was antithetical with the *status quo ante* of land-based aristocracy (Sterling, 1958, p. 63). As discussed in my book dedicated to Clausewitz (Dufort, 2017), few state reformers were willing to accept drastic social alterations in order to fight French imperialism.

33 The aristocracy hurried to ban Fichte's *Addresses* second edition after the victory over Napoleon: "the princes were naturally opposed to such a development since it would destroy their sovereignty and power, and struggled to put the genie back into the bottle" (Moore in Fichte, 2008, p. xxxiii).



nalism and the *power as legitimacy* that was harnessed to the nation-state, ultimate guardian of the nation. This integration would serve as the foundation for *Realpolitik*³⁴ thinking, which postulated a priori the war between expansionist nations and located the primordial locus of legitimacy within the nation-state defending and expending national influence.

Re-emergence of the Machiavellian Tradition in the Age of Nationalism

The larger context of German reunification in the nineteenth-century through the early twentieth century brings nationalist Prussian theoreticians to think of power in terms of *Machtkunst* [the ‘art/craft’ of ‘power/governing’] (Guzzini, 2007, p. 37). Indeed, the adoption of positive law—the interest in statecraft—gave vigour to the ideas of *raison d’état* and *realpolitik* (Guzzini, 2005, pp. 516-7). From Clausewitz’s *On War* to Weber’s ‘legitimate domination’³⁵ passing by Ranke’s statist historiography, von Rochau’s *Realpolitik* or Meinecke’s *historism*, these intellectuals were all concerned with Germany’s international status (Guzzini, 2005, p. 517).³⁶ It was a resurgence of Machiavelli’s understanding of *power as force* [Macht] that spread its influence into German society under the impulse of international *realpolitik*.³⁷ As Sellin (1978) demonstrates through an extensive genealogical study of the notion of power, this period of German statecraft is emblematic. Indeed, we see in Prussia the resurgence of a non-Aristotelian understanding of power: “with early modernity, the Western conception of politics became dual: a neo-Aristotelian lineage stressing the common good and a Machiavellian tradition based on the reason of state” (Guzzini, 2007, p. 37).

Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) inspired the Prussian School of historiography with its accent upon the state and inter-state relations. But, here, this was no more the glorious state of Hegel—in which value and sense were manifestations of a transcendent realm of the World Spirit; Ranke’s state was “down to earth by a spiritualizing of power itself...in all its earthly glory, to be exalted if not worshipped by a generation of German historians” (Pois, 1972, p. 12). Under Ranke’s statist historiography the state had come to totally liberate its rationale from being a mere ‘play’ [*Schauspiel*] in the Hegelian historical necessities subordinated to the universal World Spirit in search of its own ‘fulfilment in self-contemplation’ (Pois 1972: 14). The state could be considered as a self-sufficient organism coldly seeking its own affirmation in front of other states through ‘nation-building’. Ranke’s Prussian historiography considered ‘internal’ development and reforms

34 This revival of societal and international strategy focused on the nation, of which Clausewitz was a protagonist, came to be known in Germany as *Realpolitik*.

35 “Although the last equivalent is perhaps the least objectionable, it produces cognitive dissonance, at least for English-speaking political theorists, when combined with “legitimate” to form “legitimate domination” as the translation of Weber’s *legitime Herrschaft*. Is domination ever legitimate?” (Richter, 1995, p. 59).

36 The national ideal was accepted widely in Germany as a sign of rational progress: “It is almost shocking to discover that Meinecke regarded the development from universalism and cosmopolitanism to nationalism as clear, unquestioned progress. The process . . . is recognized as a supreme value and final goal of history” (Gilbert, 1977, p. 69).

37 See Guzzini 2005: 517-8 for a very brief summary of Faber, Iltting, and Meier’s genealogy of the concepts of ‘Macht, Gewalt’, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Band 3, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze & Reinhart Koselleck (1982), 817-935 (only available in its German original version).



“as subordinate to and indeed *implemented* in response to the overpowering demands of external developments” (Pois, 1972, p. 15, original emphasis). In this specific historiographical perspective, political and judicial institutions were no longer considered in terms of the Aristotelian ideal of good life—they were strictly contemplated as means of state-power [Machtsaat] serving the supreme interest of the nation.

As such Ranke introduced the age of Prussian/German nationalist historiography. The end to be pursued—the empowerment of the German nation-state [Volksstaat]—was no longer open to question.³⁸ Power in its *neo-Aristotelian* sense was harnessed over an evermore-rigid line—the exalted legitimacy of the nation-state.³⁹ In contrast *Realpolitik*—crudely concerned with *Macht* (or *power as force*)—lost its exclusive attachment to the state and diffused into society (see Guzzini, 2007, p. 38). Meanwhile culture, education, industrialisation and nationalism itself became means for the complete incorporation of *Volksstaat* ideology into society to maximise state-power (Pois, 1972, p. 19). *Realpolitik* strategic thought considered all living forces of society within its field of concern.

Nevertheless, it is within this post-Kantian intellectual reaction against the Enlightenment and cosmopolitanism—which would also engender the anti-rationalist ideas of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—that some of the most influential ideas about strategy were produced under the pen of a participant of the Jena-Auerstedt battle, Carl von Clausewitz. Influenced by Kant, Hegel and Fichte (Strachan, 2007, pp. 90-5; Moore, in Fichte 2008, p. xxxii; Paret, 2007, p. 84)⁴⁰, Clausewitz took strategy an enormous leap forward in *On War* by considering heterogeneous elements—from rationalist, romantic and idealist scholarships—coevally: rational ends, romantic feelings and the contingent reality of fighting. Corresponding with Fichte after reading the *Addresses* and his defence of Machiavelli [1807], Clausewitz focused his practical concerns on the instrumental necessity of fostering German statist nationalism [Volksstaat] through education to win a war against the French Emperor (Paret, 2007, p. 160). Among other elements, his strategic legacy incorporated the fields of passion and identity under a Machiavellian perspective of power.⁴¹ His masterpiece of strategy—which would earn its author the title of the ‘philosopher of war’—was in part the fortunate result of the fact that he was a direct witness, in a single lifetime, to extraordinarily numerous and deep transformations in warfare. Nevertheless, the intellectual environment defined by the ideas of Kant, Hegel, Fichte and Ranke permeates *On War* and served as the rich ground in which Clausewitz’s most valuable insights flourished (Paret, 2007, p. 151).

³⁸ It could be said that the *realpolitik* appreciation of the social world accerated a state of Bourdieusian *doxa* for strategists (see Guzzini, 1993, p. 466).

³⁹ A century later, Meinecke (1918 quoted in Pois, 1972, pp. 18-9) continue to consider *Volksstaat* as the ultimate normative end in itself, “the specific German sense of citizenship” since it combined ‘freedom of the individual with order and its ability to provide for the harmony and strength of the whole “and so to attain political consequences of the life ideal of our classical poets and thinkers”.

⁴⁰ As Herberg-Rothe (2007, p. 121), “[d]uring Clausewitz’s time in Berlin, the idealism of Fichte and Hegel was the dominant current of thought in intellectual circles.”

⁴¹ *On War* goes beyond many of the nomothetical biases characterising modern strategic studies and, for that reason, shall still be at the centre of this reflexion on strategy in future research.



On Strategic Genius

On the issue of ‘genius’, Strachan’s brilliant biography underlined Clausewitz’s use of Kantian phrasing, inspired by a seminar he attended in 1804 or 1805.⁴² It appears nonetheless to be a problematic reference due to the feeble influence *in content* of Kant on this core issue.⁴³ It is true that Clausewitz presented strategy in the Enlightenment tradition of Kant as an art where the artistic genius works within the rules but only the greatest may rewrite the rules (Strachan 2008: 94). Through this dialogue, the strategist was compelled to reconsider his certitudes and to alter his means to respond to the changing character of war. But it was an amalgam of available German idealist influences that allowed the author of *On War* to structure a reflexive theory of practice for the strategist.

The Hegelian concept of *Geist* [spirit] is of primordial importance in *On War* (Strachan, 2008, p. 94). Howard and Paret’s translation (1976) mostly settled for ‘intellect’ or ‘mind’ as a translation (Strachan, 2008, p. 94). In doing so the authors highlighted the rationalist/Enlightened dimension of Clausewitz’s thought, neglecting the essential idealist foundations of his thought. The German idealists alleged that the World is a reflection of its own transcendental ‘spirit’ as in Hegel (or ‘absolute’ in Fichte’s words). Likewise, Clausewitz believed that war also had a spirit of its own under its abstract absolute form. In his early writing *Geist* referred directly to ‘the spirit of the art of war’ but in *On War*, it was associated with the attribute of the strategist (Strachan, 2008, p. 93) as an admixture of ‘understanding’ [*Verstand*] and courage or determination (see Clausewitz, 1976, pp. 100 or 102).⁴⁴

Herein, Clausewitz’s whole understanding of the strategic genius is dependent on his capacity to perceive the transcendental ‘spirit’ of war in the midst of confusion in order to guide his decisions (Strachan, 2008, p. 142)—that is, the third major component of his wondrous trinity. For the early Clausewitz, Napoleon embodied the very ‘Geist’ of war. His action as a commander, Clausewitz thought at that point, revealed its transcendental essence in real wars. It had the effect of transforming the character and the rules of war, as they were previously known. By this Clausewitz introduced a dialogue between Hegel’s sublime⁴⁵ and the practice of strategy.⁴⁶ The

42 In 1804 or 1805, Clausewitz attended Kiesewetter’s lectures on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. In one of his essays he stated “Art is trained ability” (Paret, 2009, p. 140). Kiesewetter taught Clausewitz that “Genius is the innate psychological power (*ingenium*) through which nature establishes rules for the arts” (quoted in Paret 2007 [1976], p. 161).

43 In fact, Clausewitz used the method of a Kantian named Kiesewetter. Clausewitz aspired for his theory of war to attain both ‘formal truth (correspondence between the concept and logic) and material truth (correspondence of the concept and reality) but as he realized the difficulties that war’s plurality of forms caused for his theory, he distanced his project from the latter form of truth (Herberg-Rothe, 2007, p. 79).

44 *Verstand* is translated by Howard and Paret by ‘intellect’ but a more coherent translation shall be ‘understanding’.

45 Hegel’s criticism is activated by ‘leaving behind’ “the rationality of our every day life the use of the faculty which is all-pervasive and correctly deemed to be omnipotent in everyday life, the analytical power of the understanding (“*Verstand*”: “die verwundersamste und größte, oder vielmehr die absolute Macht”), and activate another faculty: “*Vernunft*.” Entering the realm of *Vernunft* is abandoning the world of common sense, everyday rationality, the formal rationality of mathematics, and scientific rationality (in our sense of “science”) completely.” (Geuss, 2005, p. 52).

46 Many authors have defined Clausewitz’s dialectic between *abstract* and *real* wars. Aron (1976) is interested in rehabilitating Clausewitz as a liberal. Therefore, he underlines the purely conceptual dimension of his notion of absolute war in order to save its author from his critics. The latter, mainly Keegan (1993) and Liddell-Hart (1933), seek the exact contrary by an emphasis on the early Clausewitz and his desire for a ‘war of extermination’.



idealist dimension of ‘genius’ as dependant on a transcendental spirit has been systematically obliterated by recent translations, believing this was a matter of anachronistic style without mentioning the translators’ lack of familiarity with Clausewitz’s own intellectual environment. Strachan (2008, p. 126) illustrated this systematic bias in Howard and Paret’s translation:

Clausewitz did not see a reflective intelligence (perhaps like his own) as an appropriate quality for a great commander. But the general still needed to possess the sort of ‘intellectual instinct which extracts the essence from the phenomena of life, as a bee sucks honey from a flower’. The German adjective for intellectual in this passage is *geistiger*, with its additional connotations of spirit and inspiration. Knowledge had to be translated into capability and decisiveness.

In his definition of genius, Clausewitz referred to *Geisteskraft* [spirit power] but Howard and Paret once again downplayed the transcendental connotation using ‘mental power’ as a translation (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 100). In sum, Clausewitz’s later understanding of absolute war was a Hegelian conception of the transcendental ‘spirit of war’—a theoretical understanding of war in its essential nature, which serve as a reference for the strategist (see 3.3.3).

On Normative a priori (or ‘the spirit of the time’)

Relative to the intrinsic normative content of his philosophy, Clausewitz situated his thinking on war in line with the historiography of Fichte, with whom he also shared Machiavelli’s understanding of power. This paradoxical association would have counter-productive effects on Clausewitz’s project during many decades. In 1809, eight months after he read the *Addresses to the German Nation*, Clausewitz corresponded with Fichte regarding an article the latter had written on Machiavelli (Paret 2007 [1976], pp. 159, 175). Redacted in this time of political collapse in Prussia, this article represented for Fichte the moment of his foremost radicalisation in his belief of the primacy of force. In order to defend national liberty and culture, Fichte’s radicalism “sought the most effective weapons and found them in Machiavelli” (Meinecke quoted in Paret, 2007 [1976], p. 178). Fichte articulated an idealist philosophical understanding of individual duties toward the state with *Realpolitik* at a time when Clausewitz struggled to find a philosophical foundation for his ideas on war and social reforms (Paret, 2007 [1976], p. 175). It is no coincidence that this article highly impacted him. “Both men feared that their contemporaries overestimated the political effectiveness of historical and spiritual traditions and ethical commitments, which, while placing important obligations on government, could not be trusted in themselves to provide the power to implement these obligations” (Paret, 2007, p. 172). They shared a Machiavellian understanding of power (Paret, 2007, p. 171). Clausewitz’s ideas on societal legibility and morality were inspired, or at the very least in accordance, with Fichte’s article on Machiavelli, to which Clausewitz replied in very positive terms:

[The] true spirit of war seems to me to consist in mobilizing the energies of every soldier to the greater possible extent, and in infusing him with bellicose feeling, so that the fire of war spreads to every component of the army ... To the extent that this depends on the art of war, it is achieved by the manner in which the individual is treated, but even more by the manner in which he is employed.



The modern art of war, far from using men like simple machines, should vitalize individual energies as far as the nature of its weapons permits (Clausewitz letter to Fichte quoted in Paret, 2007 [1976], p. 176-7).

Clausewitz and Fichte met in their common view that Napoleon's military might was not beyond reach since it was based on potential forces that were available to all. Machiavelli invited his readers to take into account each individual's moral to fight.⁴⁷ From this position, they agreed on the need for understanding the means of breeding and mobilizing Prussian moral forces. Fichte and Clausewitz believed that national identity [Volksggeist] could be fostered through state schools and universities. Social reforms—such as nationalist education—were obvious instruments of state-power for them (Fichte, 2008, p. 143).

Fichte's romantic reading of Prussia's lively national forces was not unrelated to Clausewitz's advice to consider war as an intercourse between two political entities that has no other *telos* than the contingent results of fighting.⁴⁸ As in Fichte, to study strategy in a Clausewitzian perspective is not uncovering nomothetic principles of mass concentration that lead to victory, but to understand the vivid forces of society in its current configuration in order to mobilise their bellicose potential. Clausewitz's idea of societal legibility developed in parallel with radicalised Fichte of 1809, when the latter married German Idealism to the Machiavellian definition of power as force.

The theoretical implications of the later Clausewitz's understanding of power—as contending complex societal forces that may be transformed and instrumentalised in war—were not written. He thought of war as an intrinsically disruptive phenomenon that may transform (and be transformed by) societies' forms and organisations. These intimate links between war and social change were in themselves for Clausewitz a limitless source of innovative means in war. This approach would inspire many later Marxist strategists such as Lenin and Mao. However, his closer readers (most notably Helmuth von Moltke, elder and nephew and Alfred von Schlieffen) mainly considered Clausewitz's contemporary reading of the technical transformation of warfare (Strachan, 2007, p. 12). This very partial legacy⁴⁹ gained Clausewitz's name a similar fate as Machiavelli's. Among other labels, Liddell Hart (1942, p. 120) called him 'the Mahdi of mass and mutual massacre'. This reputation—apparently shared by the theoreticians of *power as force*—obviously contributed to his limited influence outside military circles up to the end of the 20th century. His later readers would associate his legacy with the dramatic consequences of direct strategy and mass mobilisation that characterised 19th and 20th century warfare. This popular reading—which without a doubt has its foundations in *On War*—would promptly obliterate some of Clausewitz's most fundamental observations, which we just reviewed.

47 Clausewitz goes further and mentions that if he would reveal "the 'most secret thoughts' of his soul, he is in favour of using the most violent methods possible: 'I would use lashes of the whip to arouse the animal from its lethargy, so that the chain it has allowed to be placed upon it in such a cowardly and timid way would be shattered. I would set free in Germany a spirit that would act as an antidote, using its destructive force to eradicate the scourge that threatens to cause the decay of the entire spirit of the nation'" (quoted in Herberg-Rothe, 2007, p. 26).

48 It is therefore no coincidence if Clausewitz presents the dynamics of fighting not as dictated by God or Reason's grand design but as a result of contingent and lively forces (Strachan, 2008, p. 123).

49 Although not totally unjustified.



The idealist intellectual context made it difficult to appreciate other aspects of Clausewitz's ideas. Most importantly, the synthesis of idealism and nationalism put into operation by Fichte and Hegel was an important obstacle in Clausewitz's thinking and would lead him toward his most blatant contradiction. Clausewitz was deeply impacted by Fichte's philosophical views and he would give a preeminent place to absolute and existential warfare between nations within his work. It was not before 1827—four years before his death—that Clausewitz finally broke with this unitary perspective of *politik* and war.

When dissociated from the normative content of the nation, Clausewitz's thinking on war united theory and history. A theory of war became a reference—an abstract guide strictly considering *power as force* relations. The normative goal of the *Volksstaat* ideology and its fascination for the nation's strength was then irrelevant. Fichte's *Volksstaat* captivated the Clausewitz of the reform years as the best rhetorical 'weapon' to achieve his goals. Indeed, this discourse intrinsically linked a redefined state's legitimacy and the nationalist reforms Clausewitz believed to be necessary for military success. However, the older Clausewitz—who lived through severe disappointments with the realities of his dynastic state and became pessimistic after witnessing national unity under the Prussian state—was ready to overcome the ontological unity of the nation as a source of legitimacy and as a source of force. Only during his final years could Clausewitz consider his theory of war apart from Fichte's synthesis. *Politik* was on its way toward being divided in Clausewitz's theory of war. As a consequence, in his revision of *On War's* Book 1, absolute war became an abstraction of pure escalation:

[Theory] has the duty to give priority to the absolute form of war and to make that form a general point of reference, so that he who wants to learn from theory becomes accustomed to keeping that point in view constantly, to measuring all his hopes and fears by it, and to approximating it *when he can or when he must*. (Clausewitz 1976: 581, emphasis in the original).

Indeed, by the end of his life Clausewitz had discovered the ambiguities of his theory of war and exposed the tension between the inherent reality of limited war and its abstract absolute form. Clausewitz's notion of war only remained unitary in its practice. "This unity lies in *the concept that war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous*" Clausewitz (1976, p. 606, emphasis in the original). As a military theoretician, Clausewitz remained poorly equipped for clarifying the puzzle he himself had sketched. A reading informed by the contemporary distinction, between *power as force* versus *power as legitimacy*, alleviates his theory from an important contradiction.

In this line of thought, Aron identified two facets of Clausewitz's understanding of objective politics, which referred to socio-historical context and institutions, and subjective politics, where "[p]olicy is the guiding intelligence" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 607; Aron, 1986, p. 112).⁵⁰ Here, *politik* encompasses and confuses legitimacy, ideologies, interest politics and socio-historical conditions. Likewise, Herberg-Rothe contends that Clausewitz's 'dual concept of politics' rests on the "contrasting elements of the conceptual field of politics, 'power and agreement'" (2007, pp. 147-50, see also Echeverria, 2007, p. 91, 1995). The ambivalent foundation of Clausewitz's project

50 On this last point see Herberg-Rothe (2007, pp. 141-2; 2009, p. 210).



obliterates—or indeed exposes in its contradictions—the vital importance of differentiating these two contrasting facets of power.⁵¹

On the one hand, it appears that the abstract notion of absolute war is a reference informing *politik* as a web of Machiavellian *power as force* relationships where societal transformations and ideologies are conceived as means in war. On the other hand, *politik* as the Fichtean project is the “guiding intelligence” of war where war’s “grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 605). Under this last vision, not only the practice of “war cannot be divorced from political life” (*Ibid.*) in its politico-normative dimension but it is completely subordinated to its purposes and ideas.⁵² Reversely, war in its Machiavellian dimension assumes force and violence to be transversal and constitutive of national society, including its identity, its policy and its polity.

In *On War*, the normative facet of *politik* stated the primacy of *Volksstaat* policies but paradoxically remained external to a theory of war as “a total phenomena” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 89).⁵³ Indeed, the later Clausewitz remarked, in his revised Book 1⁵⁴, that the subordination of war to policy provoked all the “imperatives inherent in the concept of a war ... to dissolve, and

51 On this contentious interpretation, Echevarria II (1995: 77-8) explored in details Clausewitz’s notion of *politik* and concluded similarly: “In fact, Clausewitz’s varied usage of *Politik* and the historical context within which he wrote indicate that he meant three things by the term. First, Clausewitz did intend *Politik* to mean policy, the extension of the will of the state, the decision to pursue a goal, political or otherwise. Second, *Politik* also meant politics as an external state of affairs, the strengths and weaknesses provided to a state by its geo-political position, its resources, alliances and treaties, and as an ongoing process of internal interaction between a state’s key decision-making institutions and the personalities of its policy makers. Lastly, Clausewitz used *Politik* as an historically causative force, providing an explanatory pattern or framework for coherently viewing wars various manifestations over time. [...] In any case, the last three books of *On War* (Defense, Attack, and War Plans) contain most of Clausewitz’s mature ideas as they pertain to the influence of politics on war. They also reveal that his military thought was becoming increasingly historicist—he sought to interpret individual historical epochs on their own terms and thus understood that the people who lived and fought in the wars of the past were governed by institutions, values, beliefs and customs unique to a specific time and place. It is in his chapter on «The Scale of the Military Objective and of the Effort to be Made» (Book VIII, 3B), in particular, that Clausewitz has broadened his conception of *Politik* to encompass definitions 1 and 2 mentioned above.”

52 Through his analysis of Moscow and Waterloo Clausewitz gives politico-institutional factors primacy over military means. Herberg-Rothe (2007) alleged that Clausewitz reverted his previous stand in asserting his most renowned principle; the primacy of policy over war. On the contrary, if we consider Clausewitz’s readings of the Russian Campaign and of the Waterloo battle, it appears that the alleged Clausewitzian axiom of ‘the primacy of policy’ has a precise meaning which does not contradict his earlier understanding of the Machiavellian ‘primacy of force’. Indeed, Clausewitz mainly refers to the primacy of policy in *On War* when recuperating his analyses of the Russian Campaign [limit of military means to achieve political goals] and Waterloo [determinacy of domestic situation and diplomacy for belligerents’ troops numbers], respectively in Book VI and VIII. Considering the precise problématique that Clausewitz was contemplating, policy refers to the institutional capacities Napoleon had at home to recruit troops and his incapacity to shape European diplomacy to prevent an overwhelming alliance of enemies. So here the term policy does not refer to the normative content of political ideals he referred to in 1806-12 when considering the primacy of force over policy (as ‘inadequately armed ideals’). As such, this results in a false contradiction. Clausewitz’s analysis of Moscow and Waterloo allows him to further develop his ‘societal theory of successful warfare’ into a ‘political theory of war’. Far from contradicting the determinacy of policy as socio-political arrangements it further develops it to integrate post-Napoleon dimensions such as the escalatory dynamic of war as illustrated by the reforms, the superiority of defense as demonstrated by the Russian Campaign, the importance of limiting violence to avoid total defeat as in Waterloo or the determining effect (through troops numbers) of domestic and interstate diplomacy over the settlements of increasingly uniform battles. Contextualised, Clausewitz’s famous axiom from Book VIII has a specific meaning in its context: it refers to the determinacy of policy as politico-institutional factors in determining the number of troops involved in fighting on each side.

53 The theory of war as a whole in itself—the ‘wondrous trinity’—remains incompatible with its overall subordination to policy (in fact the latter appears as one of the three tendencies constituting war).

54 Debates around Clausewitz’s intents in revising *On War* before dying of cholera obviously exceed the objectives of this article. Nevertheless, it can be said that the later Clausewitz appears to have transcended the limitation of Fichte’s teleological nationalist historiography.



its foundations are threatened” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 89). The concept of war as a total phenomena described in the ‘wondrous trinity’ negated the primacy of policy, which is rendered merely as purpose, “and holds it a priori just as important as chance and hostility” (Echevarria, 2007, p. 95). Hence, a notion of war subordinated to the Machiavellian facet of *politik* “is entitled to require that the trend and designs of policy shall not be inconsistent with these [other] means” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 87). Here war operated in the realm of the primacy of force over policy—a subordination to be comprehended in terms of societal and institutional manipulations—and unleashed a totalitarian strategy determined by its socio-historical context.⁵⁵ A correct reading of the latter—societal legibility—became of primordial concern for Clausewitzian strategy. In this way, confusing two facets of power within *politik* left *On War*’s most famous formula with a fundamental contradiction (Herberg-Rothe, 2007, pp. 147-50).

The confusion arising from a synthetic understanding of power and *politik* reached another fundamental dimension of his theory of war. Adopting a Machiavellian understanding of power and negating the primacy of politico-normative policy (i.e. the Fichtean *Volksstaat*’s ideology), the later Clausewitz considered coevally passions, contingent possibilities and political purposes as the tendencies composing the environment of war—and therefore, the basic dynamics relating to one another the elements to be instrumentalised in the conduct of war. *Politik*—under its neo-Aristotelian definition—became for the later Clausewitz an element that had an instrumental role in his theory of war. Clausewitz did not elaborate on the consequences of such a stance. His own experience gave him the necessary distance to think of the ‘spirit of the time’ with a cold distance. Bonded within the teleological social theories and historiographies of Kant, Hegel and Fichte, Clausewitz could not systematize the reflexive consequences inherent to his own theory. But his later ideas contained the seeds of reflexivity applied to strategy (a practice he himself had inherited from practical experiences). The limited writings and remodelling of the *On War* of his ‘Machiavellian period’—understood in the context of the last four years of his life—still fascinate strategists in the 21st century. However, they have not responded to this implicit call for the development of reflexivity as a fundamental notion of strategic studies. Since its potential was not radically incorporated, strategic studies has remained mesmerized and dependent on *On War* as a source of reflexive inspiration up to our days.

Clausewitz’s Readers and his Alleged Legacies

In the bellicose context of German reunification from the nineteenth-century through the early twentieth century, the Machiavellian tradition of *power as force* re-emerged in Germany in order to serve inter-state competition. Early Clausewitz-like emphasis on the necessity of societal legibility and passions continued to inform strategists who conceived of the empowerment of the nascent German state as an end in itself. Nevertheless, no place was left for reflexive concerns toward the incontestable nationalist ideal. The doctrine of *Realpolitik* and its correlated Machiavellian notion of power became hegemonic under Otto von Bismarck’s (1815-1898) chancellorship.

⁵⁵ In line with a neo-Nietzschean form of contextualism, the subordination of war to *politik* as socio-historical determinism takes a circular sense since war itself determine these future conditions.



Under his pragmatic command and through three successive wars from 1866 to 1871, Prussia succeeded at unifying the German states. If Napoleon had the ‘genius’ of exploiting an already existing societal context created by the ideals of the Enlightenment in order to revolutionize warfare, Bismarck conscientiously engaged in societal engineering from above in order to maximize German nation-state power. As did Clausewitz and the other reformists before him, Bismarck promoted progressive social reforms while being a conservative and elitist nationalist, institution such bills as the *Health Insurance Bill* (1883), the *Accident Insurance Bill* (1884) and the *Old Age and Disability Insurance Bill* (1889). The cold Machiavellianism exhibited by Bismarck’s instrumentalisation of the whole of society, tied uncritically to pan-German chauvinism as an end in itself, culminated in the World Wars. The totalizing tendencies of the National Socialist ideology of the third Reich brought the Fichtean idea of the nation-state [Volksstaat] to its ultimate consequences by promoting the intellectual concepts of *Führung* [prevalence of leadership] and *Volksgemeinschaft* [total integration of state and society in the nation] on the mere basis of their alleged purely German origins. It emphasized the purported organic unity of *society as a race* and the state (see Richter, 1995, pp. 30-2, 77). The un-reflexive acceptance of Fichte’s synthesis within the nation—as sole source of both strength and legitimacy—led to a totalizing strategy, which may consume the very end it seeks to protect, Clausewitz emphasized.

The Nazi regime brought Clausewitz’s idea of societal legibility to its extreme while actively inhibiting all reflexive consequences a referential concept of absolute war may permit. As such, the war that followed underlined the dangerous potential of the ideas of the younger Clausewitz still absorbed in Fichte’s synthetic historiography—that is, in Clausewitz words, war as the continuation of *Volksstaat* politics with the addition of the means of fighting. At the turn of the twentieth century, some German historians were true heirs of the later Clausewitz’s strategic approach. As lesser-known examples of Clausewitz’s genuine critical heritage/ legacy, their works are worth considering since they developed the role of both reflexive thinking and societal legibility for strategy. All of them struggled, as Clausewitz, to free their ideas from the grasp of the German nationalist ‘spirit of the time’. Their reflexive endeavour led the project in different directions but all have brought precious contributions to the reflexive turn of a Clausewitzian approach to strategy.

Friederich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Friederich Nietzsche endeavoured to liberate German philosophy from its teleological necessities. As did Machiavelli before him he operated a frontal philosophical charge against Christianity but also attacked the modern rationalist faiths. With charges against optimistic Aristotelian views that a reasonable understanding of the world leads to a good life, Nietzsche preferred Thucydides’ realism. The latter was not afraid to postulate that there may in fact be no order in the world, only contingencies, or that human reason’s motivational appeal was limited in the face of desires (Geuss, 2005, p. 223-5). Questioning the value of morality *per se*, Nietzsche stood outside of ethics (Geuss, 2005, p. 54). His understanding of historicism was one centred on relations of power with no guiding intelligence or grand design. He introduced a historiography that is fundamentally contingent in its results. Likewise, Nietzsche took a drastically opposite direction from Kant and Hegel by situating reason as *a thing of this world*. “What is a word?” Nietzsche asked. “It is the copy in sound of a nerve stimulus” (quoted in Duignan, 2011, p. 170). When



Nietzsche proclaimed the end of philosophy, he stated no more than the unavoidable entanglement of a *reason* in a contingent history, a multiplicity of social conflicts and the turmoil of human desires (McCarthy in Habermas, 1988, p. vii). Morality, as with any other conception, was the result of precise histories of struggles, which he explored retroactively as *genealogies*. His scepticism in face of the concrete capacities of reason was the antithetical response to the Kantian absolute principle of *Reason*. Its fundamental premise was that Kantian reason was a veil for a disguised will to power and domination. As did the idealists Nietzsche rejected the existence of one moral *ought* but unlike them he traced a genealogical account of it “as arising out of the natural reactions of people in positions of weakness; he hope[d] that giving this account will break its categorical hold over our imagination” (Geuss, 2005, p. 54).

Nietzsche criticised idealist theoretical depth as a fraudulent invention of the philosopher. The vertiginous height attained by Zarathustra was the reversal of German idealism’s profundity. Nietzsche’s historicism as “the good excavator of the lower depths” (Nietzsche quoted in Foucault, 1998, p. 273), explored the role of instincts, passions and myths in human endeavours. For Nietzsche, to understand society without these ‘all too human’ dimensions—as did the idealists—was delusional and hypocritical. By revealing the limits of pure reason’s epistemology, he exposed the superficiality of its knowledge. This last stance gained for the author the title of the ‘philosopher of power’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 53), since it uncovered the role of power relations in shaping concepts, emotions and moralities in human history. Nietzsche’s development of societal legibility apart from the Enlightenment rationalist bias was of fundamental importance to understanding what and how society is put in motion within conflicts.

Nietzsche also developed a form of reflexivity—as genealogical accounts—, which Clausewitz could never approach due to his rationalist and idealist theoretical influences. Nietzsche’s most important legacy is therefore to liberate historiography from teleological necessities and to harness it to a Machiavellian understanding of *politik* as the ‘art of the possible’. A Nietzschean critique is to reveal all the possibilities of the present beyond ahistorical conceptualisations of the ‘spirit of the time’.

However, Nietzsche’s legacy remains controversial mainly due to its association with 20th century fascism. On the one hand, in his crusades against the authority of Christian morality, it cannot be denied that Nietzsche advanced more than a basic materialist posture toward the human spirit in order to embrace force and domination as virtue *per se*. This last normative stance, which is central to his ‘will to power’, shall bond—not without ground—his philosophical legacy with the fascism of the 20th century. On the other hand, Nietzsche’s theory of power aimed precisely at extricating the dictates of values from a historical understanding emphatically determined by power relationships. Herein, Nietzsche denounced the discourse of progress and modernity as veiled forms of domination (Habermas, 1988, p. 56). In *Ecce Homo* he condemned the fact that “German has become an argument” (quoted in Ansell-Pearson, 1995). Likewise, he denounced the *Volksstaat* drifts and opposed anti-Semitism and pan-Germanism.⁵⁶ These teleological historiographies were, as were many new faiths, without transcendental or legitimate substance.

⁵⁶ In the *Gay science* [1887] he states: “We who are homeless are too manifold and mixed racially and in our descent, being “modern men,” and consequently do not feel tempted to participate in the mendacious racial self-admiration and racial indecency that parades in Germany today as a sign of a German way of thinking and that is doubly false and obscene among the people of the “historical sense.”



Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1964)

Friedrich Meinecke, “Ranke’s foremost modern interpreter” (Serling, 1958, p. 3), accepted Ranke’s doctrine of the primacy of international power politics over the domestic realm. The former remaining ‘untamed’ necessitated the consideration of force, guile, arbitrariness and bad faith (Sterling, 1958, p. 9). He continued the German historiographical tradition by considering societies through the perspective of *power as force* in order to detach ‘real history’ from national myths—therefore conceiving of culture, institutions, norms, etc. as instrumental strategic components of the power of the state. Although himself a German nationalist politically and philosophically, Meinecke proposed detaching this form of historiography from its racist underpinning. An opponent of National Socialism in the Weimar republic, Meinecke (1970 [1907]) aimed in particular at harmonizing these “parochial concerns with an authentic cosmopolitanism” (Sterling, 1958, p. 5).⁵⁷ Meinecke follows Ranke’s views in giving an essential role to power [Macht] ‘in the process of moral expression’ (Sterling, 1958, p. 44).

The intrinsic contradiction of Ranke’s insights on power and his liberal values would occupy Meinecke’s mind, “seeking that narrow meeting-ground where power and justice could join to support the good society” (Sterling, 1958, pp. 112, ix). This was a riddle he first—most conveniently—settled by considering the potential creation of a representative assembly during the years of reforms (1807-1808) as “a proud and mighty weapon for a war of liberation.” Considering cosmopolitanism under its instrumental form allowed the early Meinecke to reconcile force and legitimacy: “The political rights which the nation would have achieved through the establishment of a Reichstag were designed primarily to create enthusiasm and strength for the struggle” (Meinecke quoted in Sterling, 1958, p. 105). This contingent explanation did not hold for the German context after 1870 where Meinecke argued that authoritarian forms of rule are more adapted to ensure state-power (Sterling, 1958, p. 110). The contradiction would eventually lead Meinecke to abandon the domestic realm and to postulate the necessity of independence of foreign policy from mass passions where “[t]he constitution must protect the state as well as the people. Its mission must be to effect an optimum relationship between the liberty of the citizen and the state’s need for power” (Sterling, 1958, p. 113).

It is only by the end of World War I that Meinecke reconsidered his prescription since he considered that national culture—degenerating into ultra-nationalism—had not effectively acted as a limitation to the state’s drive for power (Sterling, 1958, p. 166-8). The two World Wars that he personally experienced led him to consider the intrinsic contradiction of the imperatives of power and ethics. Contrarily to Weber’s ahistorical and unreflexive stand⁵⁸, *Raison d’état* was characterized by the very ubiquity of power and held within itself the limitation of the use of force. Meinecke finally arrived at the conclusion that the real limitation to abuses of power was not to attempt to suppress power calculus (i.e. strategic thinking) but to critically “expose it as fully as

57 Notwithstanding, Meinecke opposed the ideas of universal cosmopolitanism. He believed that only the nation-state could be a legitimate community whereas “the struggle of ideas which culminated in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era as one wherein both contenders rationalized and justified their specific political interests by invoking cosmopolitan symbols and universalistic theories” (Sterling, 1958, p. 55).

58 Contradicting Weber’s assertion of faith in timeless inter-state *Realpolitik*, Meinecke argues for a historicist understanding of possible bridges between *Realpolitik* and cosmopolitanism.



possible to the light of the day” (Sterling, 1958, p. 211). For Meinecke, a reflexive perspective that would unveil power relations would allow for limiting the totalizing tendencies of societal strategism—a question that would also absorb his contemporary thinkers of the Frankfurt School. As we shall see, the latter settled for abandoning instrumental reason instead of intending the taming of power as in Meinecke.

Hans Delbrück (1848-1929)

Hans Delbrück also continued Ranke’s approach, in line with the essential Clausewitzian legacy, as an integrated account of societal forces. Whereas Meinecke considered the process of the formation of the German nation-state, Delbrück applied the Prussian form of historiography to military strategy. His *History of the Art of War* informed a major critique of the German High Command. Delbrück argued that the German High Command conceived the grand strategy more on the basis of historical legends and myths than on real historical accounts. If national myths have their instrumental force for the nation-state, they would not be allowed to inform strategic thinking for Delbrück. The glorification of the Schlieffen plan was more a matter of irrational military pride for the offensive than an efficacious strategy.

Delbrück’s historiography aimed at a critical appraisal of strategy against the corruption of ideological prejudices. Indeed, Alfred von Schlieffen, Helmuth von Moltke Elder and his nephew of the same name—who “dominated Prusso-German military thought from the mid-nineteenth century into the First World War and beyond” had a limited understanding of Clausewitz’s legacy (Rothenberg, 1986, pp. 296, 297-8, 312). The German High Command adopted an uncritical and strictly military approach toward the strategic ‘ideal of the battle of annihilation’ preached by the young Clausewitz.⁵⁹ Delbrück’s strategic history demonstrated that no theory of strategy could be maintained trans-historically—strategy being a complex nod reaching way beyond a strictly military understanding and where socio-economic institutions determine the character of the war (Craig, 1986, p. 343).

Otto Brunner (1898-82)

Before Hitler’s seizure of power, Otto Brunner’s⁶⁰ writings of the 1920s and 1930s developed German historiography through considering coevally the history of conceptual meaning [*Begriffsgeschichte*] and the history of social structure via studies of the medieval period. Following

⁵⁹ On the transformation of German military thought during the 19th century see Wallach (1986), Rosinski (1976), Kitchen (1979, 1988). On a rather contradictory perspective see Echevarria (2000).

⁶⁰ One of the first nationalist antidemocratic conservatives to shift to Nazism, Brunner aimed his inter-war scholarship toward dismantling the legitimacy of key concepts supporting constitutional democracies. His emphasis was on the relationship between civil society and the state. Like Carl Schmitt, the concepts of pluralism, representation and the division of power—which were all meant to limit state-power—were his prime targets. His positive agenda was to historically legitimate the National Socialist intellectual concepts of *Führung* and *Volksgemeinschaft* (see Richter, 1995, p. 30).



Brunner's form of historiography, "historians could establish the relationships among changes in the actual structures within which their historical subjects lived, and the concepts they used at different times to refer to their institutions, organizations, and practices" (Richter, 1995, p. 20). Brunner expanded his critique to German idealism and historical materialism as equally, although inversely, reductionist forms of historiography. Later historians rejected this approach, which was closely associated with the official racist history institutionalized under Nazi Germany. After the war, Brunner renamed his *Volksgeschichte* (German people's history) as *Strukturgeschichte* (structural social history).

Leaving behind the nationalist bias, Brunner's historicist and hermeneutical approach was later developed with the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (GG) (Brunner, Conze and Koselleck 1978), which "hold[s] that there is a dynamic interaction between conceptual and social change" (Richter, 1995, p. 39). Koselleck continued the project after his nearest collaborators' death. The GG applied German historicism to the evolution of ideas by studying the rapid transformation of political concepts during what Koselleck called the *Sattelzeit*, an era of crisis and hastened transformation that lasted roughly from 1750 to 1850. The concepts studied by the GG registered and affected the important socio-economic change of the *Sattelzeit*. As such, not only were the institutions instrumental and deterministic in human conflictual practice but so were the contested conceptualizations of the organization of politics and society.⁶¹ Clausewitz's strategic inclination toward societal legibility was extended by the GG to hermeneutic.

Historicism under the influence of Meinecke, Delbrück and Koselleck respectively developed reflexive historiographical practices as applied to institutions, military strategy and ideas. By considering dually the notions of power as both force and legitimacy, they brought into historicism many paths for transcending the teleology of the *Volkstaat* historiography. In doing so, they freed strategy from its teleological dictate. In this, they represent a continuation of Clausewitz's critical endeavour, which has been mostly ignored due to its paradoxical association with Nazism. Indeed, all of them aimed at limiting the state's tendency to drift toward nationalistic excesses.

Power and Strategy in Mainstream 20th Century IR Strategy

Despite being associated with Nazism, the German scholars—whom developed their ideas in reaction to the consequences of *Volkstaat* historicism—have significantly influenced the strategic ideas of the second half of the 20th century. As the second section of this article discusses, authors

61 An interesting parallel can be traced between Pocock's and Skinner's approaches and the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project. The former focuses more emphatically on individual thinkers while the latter considers social relations more generally as deterministic without considering their performativity (the only exception being Pocock's (1985) interest in English and Scottish theorists' understanding of the rise of capitalism in the 18th century). These point to one major deficiency of the Cambridge School. Indeed, this absence in Skinner's work underlines one acknowledged lacuna (Skinner, 2002a, p. 180) of his instrumental approach in his lack of consideration of social or structural change by the theorists he studies (see Richter, 1995, p. 137 by which Skinner came to know of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* project (2002a, p. 177)). "Both of us [Skinner and Koselleck] have perhaps been influenced by Foucault's Nietzschean contention that 'the history which bears and determines us has the form of a war' (Skinner, 2002a, p. 177). "Koselleck is interested in nothing less than the entire process of conceptual change; I am chiefly interested in one of the techniques by which it takes place. But the two programmes do not strike me as incompatible, and I hope that both of them will continue to flourish as they deserve" (Skinner, 2002a, p. 187).



such as Marx and Weber—and the associated traditions in mainstream strategic studies—did not break with teleological historiographies. In fact, the idea of a reflexive strategic perspective based on a strictly Machiavellian understanding of power—as in Nietzsche—returned to oblivion with the all encompassing condemnation of historicism due to its association with the European drift toward ultra-nationalism. At this critical crossroad, strategy missed its encounter with Nietzsche.

Weber, its Misreading and IR Conservative Strategic Ethics

Although not uncritically, Weber wrote within a context of foremost interest for Germany's international status. After the First World War both the European order and historicism were in crisis. Breaking with Kantian Enlightenment and historicist traditions, Weber firmly rejected the notion that 'Reason' can identify the *end*—such as the *Volksstaat*—to be achieved through progress as well as provide the *means* for the perfection of humanity (Bernstein, 1991, p. 37). He insisted on the necessary and tragic acknowledgement of the impossibility in identifying any basic ethical-political end on a rational foundation.⁶² For Weber, "[t]his is a matter of decision and commitment without the comfort of rational grounding" (Bernstein, 1991, p. 7).⁶³ While adopting a value-based perspectivism, Weber "tend[ed] towards a form/content division in order to save the universality of rationality" (Dean, 1994, p. 85) in order to distance himself from the risks of relativism. Indeed, Weber considered means and ends as discrete categories—where the former remained within the reach of Hegelian reason and the latter felt outside of it.⁶⁴ In reaction to the 'rationalisation' and 'disenchantment of the world', Weber aimed at reintroducing ideal ends into public life. He introduced his concept of 'ethic of responsibility' which "entails the rational selection of means, ethical or otherwise, to attain valued ends" (Barkawi, 1998, p. 159).

Weber's impulse to revalorise individual agency and the subjective foundations of political actions was a consequence of his discomfort with Marxist-like social theory of praxis and normativity. The latter reduced human agency to a mere bearer of historical necessities (Aron, 1967) and critical endeavour to technical or 'scientific' demonstrations of necessary means and ends. Weber's move toward methodological individualism (against Marxist class based ontology) influenced Western historiography decisively. Nevertheless, most of Weber's heirs failed to coherently integrate the consequences of his formal division between ends and means (Barkawi, 1998).

Most eminently, it was Morgenthau whom conveyed this misinterpretation into strategic studies. His intention was to establish the independence of the international realm on the basis of a distinct 'morality' of the *national interest* (Guzzini, 2005, p. 518). Morgenthau shared with

⁶² Weber's foundation for critique lies in a form of value perspectivism, which led to a distinction between substantive and formal rationalities. This distinction allows for the preservation of the intrinsic and universal qualities of Hegelian formal rationality—as a historical invariant defining the human subject.

⁶³ Rationality is related here to the Hegelian philosophical anthropology of the subject (Dean, 1994, p. 85). First, the universal formal qualities of reason, such as consistency and systematicity, are intrinsic features of Weber's vision of the human subject (Dean, 1994, pp. 72, 85). Second, the subject has the capacity to choose its values freely, which will serve as foundational ends for the instrumental rationality of means (Dean, 1994, p. 69, 85).

⁶⁴ This division between instrumental means and normative ends "gives rise to the distinction between *formal* rationality involving calculability and consistency of means and ends and *substantive* rationality concerning the value of actions and their consequences" (Dean, 1994, p. 69, original emphasis).



Weber a conviction of the need to use coercion and the use of force to secure national survival, wealth and values. The two also shared a Machiavellian perspective as a “profound awareness of the unethical nature of the essential means of political action, power and force” (Barkawi, 1998, p. 163). Nevertheless, Morgenthau’s ‘ethic of responsibility’ was detached from its foundation into Weber’s sociology of modern culture—which aimed at securing “a central role for ethical and cultural values in political decision-making” (Barkawi, 1998, p. 160). Realist political ethics was reduced with Morgenthau to a justification of using violence to protect ‘the unique end’: state power maximization—a revival of Fichte’s *Volksstaat* force-legitimacy synthesis, this time based on national security, not race. Harnessing the Weberian project to the very forces it sought to contradict, Morgenthau introduced a rationalisation⁶⁵ of power-politics where the means (state power or *national security*) became the very end in itself—the only ‘rational’ referent.

As in the age of *Volksstaat powerpolitik*, Western strategic thinking of the second half of the 20th century would be dominated by the realist paradigm and concentrated its attention on the strictly military means of state power—nuclear weaponry, nuclear war-fighting strategies and targeting doctrines—without reflexive introspection on purposes. Although classical strategy remained an inspiration and an important reference in strategic studies, in the second half of the 20th century it was the Realist theory of IR that informed conventional strategy.⁶⁶ In this period, the ‘golden age’ of strategy, the field of IR and strategic studies were almost fused into a Realist theory that understood interstate relations in terms of military (nuclear) might.⁶⁷

From the 1940s onwards, strategy became a civilian matter. In the US, scholars from various fields (History, Political Science, Economics, Physics, Mathematics) analysed strategy through the application of different techniques (empiricism, rationalism, systems theory, game theory, etc.). With the advent of a bipolar nuclear world order and the intensification of the Cold War, nuclear deterrence and military weaponry had an unchallenged monopoly in the mainstream strategic field. This context reduced strategy to extremely limited and technical debates (see Kaufmann,

⁶⁵ Strategic rationalization’ can be defined as the proliferation of means to national security occurring simultaneously with disenchantment, the detachment of national values and political purposes from the development and analysis of military means. This is precisely the charge that ‘classical’ or Clausewitzian strategists levelled at nuclear war-fighting strategies (Barkawi, 1998, p. 161).

⁶⁶ Following their integration in IR, strategic studies are described by Buzan (1987) as a subfield of security studies. Strategy thus lags behind the main paradigmatic debates that occur around the notion of security. The application of strategy on a global scale offers a conception of the international strategic order that is based on the different theoretical traditions of IR and follows from their respective ontologies. Though there are some that tackle this problem from a critical perspective (see Cox & Sinclair, 1996), the international strategic order remains an essentially realist and liberal issue.

⁶⁷ For realists (Carr, 1939; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Gilpin, 1981; Modelski, 1987; Walt, 1987; Doran, 1991) an international strategic order is a temporary state of the international system characterized by the absence of war. Its (un)balance is explained by the type and configuration of the international system’s politico-military structure. Strategic order is thus determined by the intersection of a vertical axis (type of order structured according to the hierarchy within the system) and a horizontal axis (changing configuration of the distribution of power and threats). In liberal approaches, the international strategic order is a more recent matter of concern (Keohane, 1989; Nye, 2006). In broadening their perspective on security, liberals argue that a strictly military conception of security is obsolete, as their thinking with regards to interstate strategy includes other objects such as international institutions, intra-state variables and intra-trans-state actors (Kolodziej, 1992). The main liberal argument is that the development of international regimes would increase interdependence between states and reduce the risks of strategic confrontations and competitions. This interdependence leading to a less conflict-ridden world order is thus a three step process: the democratisation of states, the intensification of international commerce, and the creation as well as the strengthening of international organizations (mainly security organisations). The resulting cooperation would eventually take the international structure beyond realist dilemmas.



1956; Kissinger, 1958; Snyder, 1961; Schelling, 1980; Freedman, 1983; Baylis et al., 1987). The era's main doctrines and strategies were focused on the bomb: 'Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD)', 'Brinkmanship', deterrence, and limited, general, flexible or controlled retaliation.⁶⁸

The Realist statist ontology reified the 'international system' into a structurally invariant environment where change was only conceivable in terms of power repartition in line with Morgenthau's misreading of Weber (Barkawi, 1998). Not only limiting in strategic terms, this intrinsically conservative perspective had important consequences:

The choice of a strategy involves a decision about which values to pursue, and analysis should explore the consequences for values in questions of strategic policy. By eschewing disciplined discussion of values, realist policy science disarmed itself from consideration of the strategic question that of the political objectives at stake (Barkawi, 1998: 181).

Holding to its conservative stance, realist strategic studies remained highly rationalised and externalised societal and international transformation. The evaluation of international dynamics through a limited statist Realpolitik perspective impeded compromises and fostered escalatory dynamics. This uncritical approach, also adopted by the USSR at times, proved highly dangerous for the two blocs in numerous instances and threatened human survival in some others.

Marx, Materialist Historiography and Revolutionary Strategy

Historiography—and strategic studies—took a different theoretical direction when Marx (as did Nietzsche) insisted on *desublimating* reason by divergent strategies and definitively turned his back on Hegel's metaphysical answer (Habermas, 1988, p. 54). Marx argued that it was through the process of production that historiography, and a correlative revolutionary philosophy of praxis, could be founded. Influenced by Kantian historiography through Hegel (Reiss in Kant, 2010, p. 14), Marx stated that the ineluctable forces of social relations drive history in a linear manner. As for natural sciences, history would therefore be approached by nomothetic explanation. Reason, through critique⁶⁹, served to dialectically expose this material process in order to strategically bring about its necessary endpoint—the revolution of the proletariat. In doing so, Marx brought historiography's determinants out of the Hegelian metaphysical arena into concrete societal development. Nevertheless, he reproduced the modernist flaw by introducing a pre-determined philosophy of history within his work. Marxist critique was limited at exposing the *necessity of the present* in order to quicken the pace of the train of history.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Waltz (1977), the founder of neorealism, brings this logic to its extreme formulation in advocating for the dissemination of nuclear weapons: "more may be better". Waltz's neorealism terminates the process of 'rationalization' and 'disenchantment' of strategic thinking by posing as an a-priori Cold war IR practices and structures. Indeed, neorealist anti-empiricist epistemology restricts rational prescriptive strategies as necessary responses to the anarchical international system.

⁶⁹ Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* elaborated Marx and Engel's notion of critique through the concept of *reification*—"the cultural process in capitalism by which subjects are turned into objects, and objects into seeming "subjects," under the twin pressure of commodification and rationalization" (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 75).



Marxist strategy is the most historically significant among revolutionary approaches to strategy.⁷⁰ It emerged in the 19th century on the basis of the concept of class struggle. An interesting consequence of this approach was that it brought the cornerstone of strategic thinking away from the strictly military battlefields to resituate its core around societal transformation. Still, the classic Marxist approach, as a social theory of praxis, exhibited a positivist epistemology and was based on a form of historical determinism that prescribed strategies for bringing about the inevitable passage from capitalism to communism. In Russia, Lev Davidovitch Bronstein aka Trotsky (1879-1940) wrote the *History of the Russian Revolution* in such terms: “Events can neither be regarded as a series of adventures, nor strung on the thread of a preconceived moral. They must obey their own laws. The discovery of these laws is the author’s task” (Trotsky 2000 [1930], p. ii).

In line with their societal emphasis, revolutionary strategists of the 20th century adventured beyond strictly military strategy, expanding its field to problematize questions of social relations of power, ideology and culture. Vladimir Ilitch Oulianov, aka Lenin (1870-1924), reflected upon the tasks of a revolutionary army and its relation to the revolutionary government in the mobilisation of Russian workers. A reader of Clausewitz, Lenin wrote that: “armed insurrection is a special form of political struggle”. Asking “Who whom?” (кто кого) Lenin defined power always as a relation of force between someone doing something to someone else (or between classes). Aiming at taking Marxism out of academia, Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* [1909] extended this understanding of partisanship to theory while stating that there are only two basic philosophical approaches: materialism and idealism. “These are incompatible global theories that constitute the respective correctly understood worldviews of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and they are as irreconcilably at war with each other as are their respective hosts” (quoted in Geuss, 2008, p. 29).

Of a fierce efficacy, Lenin’s strategic thoughts inspired the Bolshevik Revolution, the Red terror and war communism. The authoritarian nature of the Leninist understanding of the revolutionary vanguard party would bring its own collapse while being exacerbated and, ultimately, delegitimized by its application as the official USSR political doctrine—Marxism-Leninism—under Lenin’s successor, Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili aka Joseph Stalin (1878-1953). Strategic thought grounded in Soviet Marxism undermined reflexive practices due to the necessary character of its historiography. Critics of this rigid approach would swiftly be rejected or eliminated.

Other Marxist strategists would develop Marxist-Leninist theories in practical praxis guidelines. As a strategist, Trotsky mixed direct and indirect classical principles with revolutionary warfare in the organisation of the Red Army in order to defend the Bolshevik Revolution from the white Russians’ army. In China, Mao (1893-1976) expounded revolutionary strategies based on the peasantry and guerrilla warfare (see Schram, 1969).⁷¹ Echoing Clausewitz’s words, Ernesto

70 Notwithstanding, other contestatory approaches proved to be extremely important as political practices such as anarchism and feminism. Nevertheless, Marxism remained prominently *primus inter pares* in terms of strategic thought production (Sanbonmatsu, 2007, p. 22).

71 Thinkers of ‘indirect’ strategy are often associated with the revolutionary school, and rightly so. Guerrilla wars go back to the resistance to Napoleon, to the Peloponnesian wars, and to Ancient China. That being said, the revolutionary school is hard to classify within the parameters of classical strategy. Indeed, it diverges from the almost exclusively militaristic conception of classical strategic thought. John Baylis (Baylis et al., 1987, p. 211) thus speaks of a problem of ‘commensurability’ between the classical and contemporary forms of guerrilla warfare. If it remains the case that contemporary revolutionary strategy can make use of guerrilla



Guevara aka Che (1928-1967), strategist and tactician of revolution in Latin America, stressed the intrinsically ideological dimension of guerrilla warfare in the 20th century: “[t]he positive feature of guerrilla warfare is that each guerrilla fighter is ready to die not just to defend an idea but to make that idea a reality. That is the essence of the guerrilla struggle” (Guevara, 2006, p. 20). In Italy, the theorist and strategist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) addressed the question of the relationship between political and cultural consensus (hegemony) and the so-called *objective* conditions and their respective roles in revolutionary strategy (see Macciocchi, 1974).⁷²

Although they opened many pathways of societal legibility in terms of class, ideology, social structures, or even common sense, the ‘science’ of Marxist-Leninist historiography obliterated the possibility of reflexive practices. Under this teleological form of historiography, power was considered coevally as *force*, through class struggle, and as *legitimacy*, through communism, its necessary emancipatory consequence. These two disparate/ distinct understandings of power merged into an ‘objective’ science of revolutionary praxis. Ends and means conflated again here perfectly and reflexive thinking was rendered obsolete. Above all, the unquestioned legitimacy of actions following this ideology led to some extremes in many conflict theatres of the Cold War era, against those considered to be reactionary elements that were slowing the emancipatory pace of history. Stalin’s and Pol Pot’s genocidal societal strategies are two sad examples of this ideology pushed to the extreme. Furthermore, Marxist historiography presented the universe of possible means as essentially composed of antagonistic classes. Non-economic dimensions of struggles such as ethnic/national identities or genders were considered epiphenomenal. This reductionist lens limited the ‘art of the possible’ in strategy to a unidimensional environment.

Marxism erected its strategic thought on a Fichtean-like synthesis of force and legitimacy into the science of revolutionary praxis. Strategy was normatively harnessed to the teleology of an inevitable proletarian revolution herein reducing means calculation to a matter of necessity. As for the revolutionary Marxist science of praxis, conservative strategic thought was harnessed in its various forms to the necessities of national security. Considered coevally as the ultimate end/means, *national security* was the ideology that legitimated Western Cold war practices around the world to contain and roll-back communism. Antithetically, Marx and Weber inspired strategic thought systems that impeded the division of means and ends and consequently turned their strategy into a ‘science’.

Under their mainstream versions, Marxist and Realist approaches to strategy were characterised, respectively, by a teleological and rationalised historiography. The former neglected non-economic antagonisms and postulated the necessity of historical development, of which

warfare, the latter still refers essentially to military and paramilitary tactics used in irregular wars. In its strict sense, guerrilla warfare is thus covered by classical thinkers such as Sun Tzu. However, revolutionary strategy breaks with the essentially dynastic and statist referents of strategy which are merely aiming at a redistribution of power, territory, or access to resources. Revolutionary strategy is rather focused on intra/trans-state struggles aiming at qualitative transformations of the socio-political order.

⁷² Gramsci is interested predominantly, as was Machiavelli’s *Prince*, in the construction of a collective will to guide society toward a new order (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 17). Accordingly, Gramsci theorizes, at the social level, the strategic importance of intellectuals and information (war of position) in parallel to armed struggle (war of movement). These wars must be waged through the “modern prince, the myth-prince” which “cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can only be an organism, a complex element of society in which a collective will [...] begins to take a concrete form. History has already provided this organism, and it is the political party [...]” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 129).



strategy could only slow or quicken the pace. The latter precluded the very possibility of historical transformation through the reification of the international cold-war system.

The remainder of this article outlines the evolution of a reflexive approach—and its heirs—, which remained of little significance within strategic studies until recently: the Frankfurt School. Evolving in opposition to the mainstream approaches discussed above, the Frankfurt School brought back to life many of the reflexive tendencies. Contrarily to Clausewitz's use of reflexivity for innovation in strategic studies, contemporary reflexive IR theories did use reflexivity to improve strategic efficacy. By discussing its recent evolution, we aim at underlining what in its intellectual context may have gone wrong for contemporary reflexive IR scholarship in terms of strategic thinking.

The Reflexive Paradigm in the Social Sciences and the Rise of Anti-strategism

It was during the pre-war period in Germany, alongside the ascent of Nazism, that a neo-Marxist current—unsatisfied with both capitalism and Soviet socialism—gained importance with the creation of 'The Institute for Social Research' (Institut für Sozialforschung) within the University of Frankfurt. Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm, its iconic figures, joined the *institute* following an invitation from Horkheimer, its acting director during the 1930s. Nowadays known as the 'Frankfurt School', these loosely associated dissident Marxist thinkers would criticise orthodox readings of Marx and rigid party lines. They problematized the objective status of Marxism, which allegedly allowed it to define other forms of knowledge as ideological. Thinkers of the early Frankfurt School propounded and developed the concept of reflexivity. Returning to Kant's critical philosophy, they explored alternative pathways to social change while integrating various influences from Hegel, Weber, Lukács, Freud and others.

In 1937, Horkheimer published *Traditional and Critical Theory* in the institute's journal, where he formalised his reflexive perspective already explored in the works of the thinkers discussed above such as Kant, Nietzsche or Brunner. According to Horkheimer, the fundamental analytical task of a 'Critical theory' was to expose historically "the human bottom of nonhuman things" where "facts which our senses present to us" are "socially performed" ... "through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural, they are shaped by human activity" (Horkheimer, 1972 [1937], p. 200-1 quoted in Booth, 2007, p. 43). By problematising the epistemological foundation of critique itself, the Frankfurt scholars paved the way for the reflexive paradigm of the 20th and 21st centuries and as a result to the central problématique of critique's self-referentiality.

Since then, this analytical approach has been reworked and rediscovered under many angles within the constructivist IR literature after Hoffman (1987) reintroduced it. As the later discussion on Critical Security Studies and Postmodernism will underline, the singularity of the Frankfurt School's reflexive scholarship—in contrast to many previous works characterised by theoretical reflexivity—is precisely the fact that their reflexive legacy was incorporated by their



strategist heirs. However, it is necessary to delineate the particular form of historiography of the early Frankfurt School in order to understand the nature of its influence on contemporary strategic thought.

In Adorno and Horkheimer's (1974 [1947]) seminal text, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, power was not restricted to class control of the material means of production as in orthodox Marxism but also extended its reach over reason itself. Indeed, recuperating Weber's concept of the rationalisation of the world under capitalism, *The Dialectic* exposed how reason is colonized by exogenous influences resulting from power relations intrinsic to capitalist production and bureaucratic states. As such, this approach implied a specific form of historiography characterised by levels of domination resulting from the progressive distortion of reason towards its *instrumental form*. Critique of Western development and modernity was centred on the equating of rationalisation "with the path of the progressive extension and deepening of *instrumental* rationality in the West" (Dean, 1994, p. 97, emphasis in the original). In fact, for Adorno, reason and domination came to be equated in Western modernity, where reason culminated in its positivist and instrumental form (Dean, 1994, p. 99; Bernstein, 1991, p. 42).

Adorno and Horkheimer's proposition for a 'Critical theory' aimed specifically at exposing the falsity of the metanarrative of progress and the naturalisation of contemporary forms.⁷³ In this sense, for the Frankfurt School, reason—under its *critical form*—enabled an understanding of how this metanarrative has been distorted by exploitative Western bourgeois society. Here, Adorno and Horkheimer recuperated the pretention of Hegelian pure rationality to their own account when claiming that 'Critique' separated reason from its 'extraneous elements'. The latter was understood as power under its diverse forms of incursion such as class exploitation, forms of social domination and interests (Dean, 1994, pp. 117-8). Critique 'revealed' a single truth by purging knowledge from power.⁷⁴

In order to do so, a reference was needed. The Frankfurt School recuperated the notion of emancipation—the universal notion of goodness for humankind provided by Kant—and by doing so, reintegrated the teleological impulse of modernity into their work (Dean, 1994, p. 117). Therefore, contrarily to Marx, emancipation would be forsaken under the form of reconciliation with nature; to value things and people in themselves and not only as means.⁷⁵ Emancipation served as an ultimate goal and as a foundation while lying beyond the reach of Critique. Indeed, the very notion of emancipation was intrinsic to reason as understood in Kant's critical philosophy.⁷⁶ Critique was therefore reduced to uncovering the intrusive forms of *instrumental reason* in order to unleash a very specific notion of Kantian emancipation.⁷⁷

73 Here in the strict sense of Lukács's concept of reification.

74 As for Meinecke, its reflexive endeavour aims at identifying and revealing the mechanisms of power in modern society in order to prevent its abuse. However, Adorno and Horkheimer would endeavour in another direction.

75 The ideas of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse are in line with the contemporary environmentalist movement (Hobden and Wyn-Jones, 2005, p. 240). Ulrich Beck developed this approach under the label 'ecological enlightenment'.

76 It is only on this basis that reason allows for identifying the normative end to be pursued.

77 On this basis, the Frankfurt School occupies a medium ground between perspectivism and the rational grounding of critique that remains somehow rhetorical. This is especially true when considering the early writings of Adorno and Horkheimer, such as their text 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment'. They equate the development of instrumental reason with the rise of western modern society as the contingent locus where it has been unveiled. All other forms of rationalities are only mentioned rhetorically.



Via the unproblematised adoption of Weber's concept of rationalisation⁷⁸, the Frankfurt School's analysis was still centred on the Hegelian concept of reason as the foundation for immanent critique as an emancipatory practice. 'Critical theory' remained, therefore, implicitly connected to the Weberian philosophical anthropology of the subject providing a teleological history culminating in emancipation.⁷⁹ Its need for a universal foundation (emancipation), its essential reflexive self-limitation (normative concept of reason) and its unity of object (the 'bourgeois society/ideology') curtailed Critique in its potential for unveiling the possibility of the present. Critique became guided by this philosophy of history characterised by levels of domination as a result of a distortion of reason.

Adorno and Horkheimer's Critical theory greatly influenced contestatory strategies during the second half of the 20th century. One lineage, passing through Marcuse, became iconic of the New Left and counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s and matured by joining contemporary postmodernism. Another lineage passed through the work of Habermas, who is the inescapable reference in 21st century critical security studies.

Aesthetic Expressivism and Post-modern IR

Extending the Frankfurt School's rejection of instrumental rationality, Marcuse inspired the New Left in the *great refusal* of the "entire cultural and psychic fabric of society" (Sanbonmatsu 2004: 22). For Marcuse, positivist interest in prediction and technical control was normatively linked to 'domination' where "the manipulation of human behaviour and even human thought is key" (Neufeld, 1995, p. 104).

One may still insist that the machinery of the technological universe is 'as such' indifferent towards political ends ... However, when technics becomes the universal form of material production, it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality—a 'world'. [...] Scientific-technical rationality and manipulation are welded together into new forms of social control (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 153-4, 146 quoted in Neufeld, 1995, p. 104).

In terms of political practices, this theoretical orientation glorified decentralisation and multiplicity in direct action as transgressive self-expression (Teodori, 1969). The latter was a practice of contestation repudiating instrumental reason and forsaking individual expression as the pathway toward emancipation. Marcuse's writings marked a return to the German Romantic tradition that based its praxis not on Kantian rational 'grand design' but on the expression of the inner self (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 24). Repudiating instrumental knowledge and prediction, this approach

It is within this specific normative conception of rationality that Adorno and Horkheimer can state, "enlightenment is totalitarian" (1972, p. 6, cited in Dean, 1994, p. 99, Bernstein, 1991, p. 42). This conception remains "derived from a doctrine that is of a particular time, place, and social order" (Dean, 1994, p. 118).

⁷⁸ Due to this specific influence, the Frankfurt School's Critical theory—as a form of historiography—postulates a human nature and a peculiar finality to history.

⁷⁹ Although they do consider the role of power in shaping reason, the adequacy of a universal form of reason and domination (contingently unveiled in the West) give way to a totalising Critique of Reason. Rationality, understood in this form, remains a guide—a situated normative orientation of what reason ought to be if purged from its extraneous elements through critique (Dean, 1994, p. 115).



culminated in anti-strategism or expressivism. The New Left's ethos mirrored an older anarchist tradition. "Purity of action, and the demonstration or exteriorization of one's faith, became privileged over the achievement of consequences in the world" (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 33). Marcuse's call for libertarian socialism gained appeal in line with other vaguely anarchist authors such as Camus, Silone, Goodman or Debray (Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 31). Through the use of *speech-acts* and *creation*, the New Left effectively challenged Western conservative culture and communist parties' hold on social movements. Nevertheless, its lack of strategic vision resulted in the dissipation of its energies in the 1980s.

Most contemporary post-modern scholars are direct heirs of this tradition, while they reject most of the romantic/existentialist pulse to retain only the expressivist ethos as a formal method—a praxis reduced to unveiling the mechanisms of the utterance of discourses.

Ironically, postmodernists expunge the best features of expressivism, such as rooting politics in passion and experience, critiquing instrumental reason, and distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic modes of being while preserving its least convincing and indeed most debilitating aspects: a shallow temporality, the shrinking of praxis to enunciation, self-righteous self-certainty, contempt for reason, and a cavalier disinterest in questions of strategy (Sanbonmatsu 2004: 31).

Post-modern literature had an extremely valuable impact on the social sciences by delegitimising the authority of modern grand narratives (Capitalism, Communism, Enlightenments, Liberalism, etc.). Its powerful insights exposed the multiple, constructed and contingent nature of identity and, more generally power relations. The discourses of Progress, Revolution or Emancipation were slowly dissected to confiscate from them their long lasting monopoly on the subject's essence and history's finality. In line with Nietzsche, the grand narratives of modernity came under attack through a form of historiography negating the ambitions of any philosophy of history.

The uncompleted project of historicism is at the very heart of the postmodern project. In fact, post-modern social theory departs from the necessity of historicising and contextualizing reason, modern universal philosophies of history, and their correlated natures of the human subject. It was the sceptical historicist standpoint already present in Nietzsche, which informed their methodological assaults over universalism and foundationalism. As Lyotard (1984, p. 79) cleverly underlined, "the postmodern is undoubtedly a part of the modern"—it is the completion of the decolonization from premodern Christian epistemological and normative claims. Teleological laws, perennial human essence or humanist culmination in global harmony are systematically problematized in order to pass from a one-dimensional, progressive and linear vision of history toward the Schopenhauerian historiography that inspired Nietzsche: "a discontinuous, fractured plurality of micronarratives governed by an indeterminant play of contingent forces devoid of purposes, immanent logic, or coherent direction" (Best, 1995, pp. 22-3). Postmodernism is not essentially 'new' as the prefix of its label may entail: it is the gathering of the critiques towards modern metanarratives.⁸⁰ It is the overt project of completing modernity in its endeavour to free its reason from the Christian reminiscences of an overarching 'grand design' over history.

⁸⁰ "From various critical quarters, including Enlightenment thinkers themselves, Enlightenment principles were attacked on three different grounds. First, a philosophical argument questioned assumptions concerning the existence of an immanent logic



Beyond their radical critiques of modern discourses, the postmoderns can be seized as a *Zeitgeist*—a culture or a spirit of the time. If modern social theories stemming out of the Enlightenment have praised reason and science as emancipatory, post-modern thinkers condemn them as intrinsically repressive:

[...] many postmodern theorists reject the ideals of both reason and freedom and find nothing but the seeds of a totalitarian order in modern utopian schemes of a rational transformation of society and humanity. The realization of the ideals of the French slogan “Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!” in the Reign of Terror and Napoleonic invasions, the social engineering scenarios of St. Simon and Comte, or the catastrophic outcome of the Bolshevik revolution are precisely the kind of examples postmodern theorists have in mind when they refuse modern activist programs based on abstract, utopian, global, or elitist visions of change (Best, 1995, p. 24).

While the early thinkers of the Frankfurt School intended to rethink the relationship between reason and emancipation, the postmoderns rejected it. On the one hand, Baudrillard, Kroker and Cook slid into nihilism and broke the links between theory and practice (Best, 1995, p. 25). On the other hand, Foucault represented a line of activist post-modernists by standing closer to the blurred line of the modern ideals of freedom and emancipation. He revealed the processes of identity constitutions by normalizing power through the use of Nietzschean genealogy in order to refashion them in less coercive forms. Others such as Deleuze and Guattari (1972, 1980) and even the young Baudrillard and Lyotard, analysed the repressive dimension of capitalism or rationalization processes and sought political resistance in order to “evade psychological and bodily domination” (Best, 1995, p. 25). As such, the abandonment of modern philosophies of history did not mean the abandonment of modern individualism, “both epistemologically (the isolated knowing self) and politically (the desiring monad)” (Best, 1995, pp. 23-4).

Taking the forms of elaborated critiques toward *realpolitik* practices, seminal contributions to the fields of security and strategy stemmed out of post-modernism and hermeneutics. Huysmans (1998) considered the performative effect of ‘securitisation’ as a political strategy used in order to prioritize specific issues and to justify the use of exceptional means. Fundamentally, the performative effect of security serves to ‘de-politicise’ a question leading to the reification of the objects of security. Bousquet (2009) analyses the symbiotic relationship between changing scientific regimes and warfare. Each *scientific way of warfare*—mechanistic, thermodynamic, *cybernetic* and *chaoplectic* warfare—“refers to an array of scientific rationalities, techniques, frameworks of interpretation, and intellectual dispositions which have characterised the approach to the application of socially organised violence in modern era” (Bousquet, 2009, p. 4). For Bousquet, technology has more than a simply instrumental role in warfare since each of its regimes comes with peculiar principles and assumptions on warring practices. Likewise, Porter (2009) evaluates the role of

in history, historical laws, and the unified nature of history and humankind. Vico, Herder, Spengler, Nietzsche, Weber, Marx, and others in the modern tradition subjected totalizing and teleological visions of history to sharp critique, advocating countervisions of historical plurality, nonevolutionism, or cyclical theories of history. More vehemently than anyone, Schopenhauer advanced a vision of the world as blind, purposeless, aimless will. Second, an existential argument denied the supremacy of reason over the emotions, will, imagination, and intuitive insight. Romantics like Schelling, Fichte, Wordsworth, Coleridge, as well as existentialists like Dostoyevsky, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard argued that human beings are not primarily rational beings but rather are governed by more powerful emotional, instinctual, volitional, and unconscious urges” (Best, 1995, p. 7).



culture as an ever-changing ‘repertoire of ideas’ through which strategy is thought of. He explores how cultural identities shape war and, in their dynamic interconnectedness, are themselves transformed through war. ‘Orientalism’—or the historically construed perception of the Western Self to the Eastern Other—, is understood as “a plural and shifting set of epistemological ideas, attitudes and practices” (Porter, 2009, p. 14). *Military Orientalism* evaluates the strategic costs of cultural bias and ahistorical myths while considering reflexive practices’ military benefits.

Only a few original propositions to guide contestatory strategy came out of anti-foundational postmodern approaches. This is not only due to the relative novelty of this corpus, but also to the fact that these approaches are often non-prescriptive. Nonetheless, Foucauldian authors such as Hardt & Negri (2001, 2004) and Laclau & Mouffe (2001), explicitly proposed dissenting strategies based on important poststructuralist contributions. Hardt & Negri (2004) studied the ‘multitude’ as an agent of dissent, and identified democratic violence as a means for opposing liberal war and terror (see also Reid’s critique 2006). Laclau & Mouffe (2001) advocated for a non-teleological recognition of the plurality of antagonisms (class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.), inside a double context that is understood to be broader than orthodox Marxism’s relations of production. This double context was formed, on the one hand, by the social relations of the post-war hegemonic order and, on the other hand, by the effects of the displacement of the egalitarian imaginary. The latter is reconstituted around liberal and democratic discourses, toward other social spheres. Der Derian (1995) praised ‘insecurity’ in front of the homogenising and oppressive effects of security practices. Campbell advised engaging with politics by and for alterity (1992) and enabling multiple selves (Campbell & Dillon, 1993, p. 175). Nevertheless, as with many other postmodernist scholars, Campbell emphasised that “[p]oststructuralism [...] is an emphatically political perspective” but one “which refuses to privilege any partisan political line” (George & Campbell, 1990 quoted in Neufeld, 1995, p. 113).

As these rare examples show, postmodern radical reflexive practices have an immense strategic potential. Nevertheless, most of such scholarships have retreated into academia and shifted their attention from popular strategy to *deconstructing the syntax* and *disrupting signs* or *discourses* (Kurki, 2011; Sanbonmatsu, 2004). In this sense they have remained entangled into Marcuse’s expressivist tradition and mostly abandoned strategic knowledge production.

Habermas: Revitalised Enlightenment and Critical Security Studies

Another lineage of contemporary strategic thinking stemming out of the Frankfurt School passed through the work of Habermas. The latter was situated at the opposite end of postmodern relativism within contemporary reflexive scholarship. Indeed, contrarily to postmodernists, Habermas argued for a universal grounding of ‘normative’ ends in reason—and therefore, a definitive and inescapable rational foundation for Critique. Habermas’ transcendental theory of an ‘ideal speech situation’ precisely aimed at redefining critique (Geuss, 1981, p. 64, note 25). His proposition counterbalanced the turn away from Marxist-Leninist strategism by the heirs of May 1968 and the New Left and their return to romantic/aesthetic individual expressivism (e.g. Marcuse, 1969; Taylor, 1989; or more recently, Hardt & Negri, 2004).



Facing the expressivist challenge, Habermas produced a metatheoretical approach that reinstated Kantian cosmopolitanism, drawing on the Frankfurt School's reflexive approach. In doing so, he too integrated Weber's concept of rationalisation (Habermas, 1984, p. 143). However, contrary to the early Frankfurt School and later postmodern thinkers, Habermas (1987, p. xvii) argued that not less, but *more* Enlightenment was needed. In sum, Habermas' intent was to redeem the Enlightenment tradition from within the reflexive paradigm by grounding Critique on a rational foundation.

Habermas' resulting proposition was the 'logic of the conceptions of the world' [*Logik der Weltbilder*] in which 'beliefs that lie at the base of forms of legitimation' are mapped as evolving structures (Geuss, 2008, p. 36). On this ground, the *theory of communicative action* considered rationality as existing independently of power relations (Habermas, 1984) within "the general structures of possible communication" (cited in Bernstein, 1983, p. 191). Communication and consensus were therefore the only pathways to accessing unbiased and universal rationality in order to determine the necessary normative ends and most adequate instrumental means. As in Kant, this theory also imposed a necessary harmony between predetermined communicative means—communication and consensus—and its end—emancipation—as the way to transcending conflicts and accessing unbiased and universal rationality. The ends were emancipatory norms that could be identified rationally through undetermined and free debate.

This was limiting in a number of ways since it remained intrinsically linked to the specific ideological agenda of the Enlightenment. The essentialist concepts of reason and rationalisation—imported from Weber by the early Frankfurt School thinkers and reformulated in Habermas—here again limited 'Critique'.⁸¹ This gave birth to subject-centred analyses where reason is considered as an anthropological invariant (Foucault, 1981, p. 8). The philosophical anthropologies of the subject—the human as the site of an alleged pure reason—and a neo-Kantian historiography formed an epistemological obstacle to critique. The subject situated his actions in a general account of history in which a reformed reason through 'Critique' gave access to emancipatory pathways in the face of domination. Praxis was, once again, driven by on a metanarrative allowing social change to operate linearly between more domination and more emancipation (Geuss, 1981, p. 58).⁸² This impediment over critical self-referentiality inherent to Habermas' approach would have great impacts on later strategic approaches that built on these theoretical foundations.⁸³

81 The Frankfurt School implicitly ended up providing a rational foundation for Critical theory by equating reason and domination in modern western society. Furthermore, for Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas, an unproblematic adoption of the Weberian account of the totalizing process of rationalisation provides a general philosophy of history to Critical theory and yields to a metanarrative standing as a limit to 'Critique'.

82 Although the 'Critical' thinkers share this basic philosophy of history, they of course disagree on the content of the main concepts involved (instrumental rationality, emancipation, modernity, the 'West', etc).

83 As Barkawi and Laffey (2006, p. 346) note "Eurocentric accounts of great-power competition tend to take the weak – the 'natives', the colonies, the periphery, the Third World, the global South – more or less for granted. They do so in the specific sense that agency, rationality, power and morality, as well as the fundamental dynamics of world order, are assumed to reside in the global North. Alternatively, these various others are assumed to be just like us, only weaker. This generates a different problem, inasmuch as it denies them their own history, their difference".¹⁰⁴



The ideas of Habermas influenced the field of strategy through their reintroduction into the IR discipline by Ashley (1981) and through their critique of Realism. Indeed, with the downfall of the Cold War and as part of a reflexive turn in the IR discipline since the 1980s, the place and effects of the Realist strategic perspective has been questioned (Rengger & Thirkell-White, 2007; Hutchings, 2001; Smith, Booth & Zalewski, 1996; Peoples, 2007).⁸⁴ The works of Booth (1991, 2004, 2007), Krause & Williams (1997), Wheeler (2000) and Wyn-Jones (1995, 1999) popularised among left-wing scholars a normative critique of the traditional approach to Strategic Studies under the label of Critical Security Studies (CSS).⁸⁵ Habermas' neo-Kantianism has inspired most of the recent writings of the Aberystwyth School⁸⁶ (e.g. Booth 2007, Wheeler 2000, Wyn-Jones, 1999, see also earlier works by Hoffman, 1987). These critical views have generally identified the Westphalian sovereignty of the state as the root of the problem. Booth (1995, p. 119) has warned us “[a]gainst the destructive and dismal rationality of Westphalia, Machiavelli and Clausewitz, which has shaped the statist outlooks of this and earlier centuries.”

The Realist account of a dual world order divided between the domestic and the international sphere is both archaic and immoral for most critical thinkers. It is archaic since it does not account for the complex pleiad of contemporary intra/inter/trans-state actors. It is immoral since its vision of necessity in the international sphere: “can excuse the most intolerable barbarism” (Walker, 1997, p. 75). In addition, the dogmas of state sovereignty, as Dunne and Wheeler have argued, “provide a protected space in which individuals can be subjected to inhuman treatment with virtual impunity” (2004, p. 9-10 all quoted in McCormack, 2010, p. 7). For Booth (2005, p. 8 all quoted in McCormack, 2010, p. 7) “[r]ealist ethics are narrow and selfish, based on the power politics of place. This is contrary to human interest.” Booth’s reflexivity was at its pinnacle while underlining that “[b]ehind a mask of science, supposedly describing “the world as it is”, are traditional security intellectuals describing their own reality through ethnocentric class and masculinist eyes, albeit tempered by academic values and methods” (2007, p. 175).

What gradually dawned was that what purported to be rational and objective strategic theory was often a rationalization of national prejudice, and that strategic practice was best understood as applied ethics—a continuation of (moral) philosophy with an admixture of firepower. Strategic theory helped to constitute the strategic world, and then strategic studies helped to explain it—self-reverentially and tautologically (Booth 1997, p. 96, cited in Peoples, 2010, p. 363).⁸⁷

As Klein (1994) argued, Realist Strategic Studies provided a world-map that always placed the West on the ‘good side’ while its militaristic and statist perspective obliterated the cultural and

⁸⁴ Wyn Jones (1999) describes strategic studies as a ‘means-fetishist’ field. Drawing on the Frankfurt School, he identifies this tendency as ‘instrumental rationality’ abandoning the normative ends implied in the use of military might (see also Booth, 1997, 2005, and Peoples, 2007).

⁸⁵ Although centrally constructed on the Frankfurt School legacy, CSS draws on a large body of influence including the English School of IR, Peace Research, ‘alternative defence thinking’, Dependency, post-positivist and feminist theorists or groups such as the US ‘Freeze’ movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and European Nuclear Disarmament (END).

⁸⁶ CSS is also referred to as the Aberystwyth School due to its institutional origins. Indeed, Booth, Wyn-Jones and Wheelers, all CSS’s preeminent figureheads, are all professors at the Department of international politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

⁸⁷ See also Kaldor (1990).



economic components of this integrative project. From this point of view, Strategic Studies were itself a reification of the Western cultural worldview and participated in its bellicose prominence (Klein, 1994, 125; Garnett, 1987, p. 22-3; Peoples, 2010, p. 364).

Repudiating the Western bias of Realist strategic studies, Booth (1979, 2007) argued for developing a *Critical Theory of Security* (CTS) based on a Habermasian foundation—that is, the Enlightenment’s notion of emancipation and global cosmopolitanism (Booth, 2007, pp. 238-9).

The concept of emancipation shapes strategies and tactics of resistances, offers a theory of progress for society, and gives a politics of hope for common humanity (Booth 2005, p. 181).

In this line of thinking, the central idea of Booth’s CTS (2007, pp. 115, 253, 428-41) corresponds to Habermas’ neo-Kantian pledge “to practise ‘non-dualism’ with respect to ends and means” in order to overcome the dangers of instrumental reason stemming out of the Enlightenment.⁸⁸ Security and emancipation are two sides of the same coin where the former represents the means and the latter the ends, while both must respond to the same moral imperatives (Booth, 2007, p. 114; 2005, p. 182). This leads Booth (2007, p. 148) to embrace the Kantian vision to build “world security on a platform of growing world community, organised through a pattern of global governance”. ‘Communicative competence’ on a global scale is the means to materialising emancipation under its diverse forms. Booth writes, “[t]he missing link between the idea of a dialogic community and the global realm is the idea of cosmopolitan democracy” (Booth 2007: 271). CTS pre-establishes the restrictions of means within the fields of cosmopolitan democratic practices as a necessary conditions for success.⁸⁹ Under these condition CTS represents a clear extension of the Habermasian project within the IR discipline as well as a global emancipatory strategy.

Because of their Habermasian views, McCormack (2010) argues that CSS may themselves suffer from the very same flaws they accused the Realist of—that is to be *anachronistic* and *immoral*. On the one hand, they are anachronistic since their critique of the Cold War ontologies is by now largely shared in power circles and their proposals largely accepted through liberal interventionism (McCormack, 2010, p. 39). Indeed, CSS appraisal of the consequences of a Realist approach to world politics was of acute importance at the dawn of the Cold War. Engaged in the second decade of the 21st century, the discourse of human rights and interventionism has been at the centre of the legitimacy market within global power politics for two decades by now. Nevertheless, CSS scholars remain oblivious to the fact that the great powers have relied more on the neo-Kantian discourses than on the Realist *realpolitik* to legitimize their interventions (McCormack, 2010, p. 40).

The contemporary international context and security problematic is clearly very different from that of 20 years ago, yet reading critical and emancipatory theorists one could be oblivious to the fact that a major feature of post-Cold War security policy discourse has been a reorientation around human rights, empowerment and a critique of the old framework of sovereign equality and non-intervention. (McCormack 2010: 40)

⁸⁸ Booth (2007, p. 132) appropriates Habermas’ call for ‘more Enlightenment’.

⁸⁹ Booth (2007, p. 62), of course, remains sympathetic with the more Machiavellian views of Gramsci arguing for supporting ‘organic intellectuals’ to overthrow global common sense. This may be incoherent with its Habermasian foundation.



This situation is paradoxical since, following Booth (2007, 253), considering the current configuration of power relations and legitimacy should be the main preoccupation for critical scholars (see Jahn, 1998, p. 623). This rather uncritical perspective towards liberal views can be explained from the foundational position of emancipation that remains beyond the reach of critique in CSS. This has important consequences for CSS's limited critique towards *realpolitik* waged in the name of cosmopolitan and humanitarian principles.

Indeed, posing the Enlightenment as the keystone of a theory of world security is most certainly an immanent practice but not necessarily a reflexive one. The cosmopolitan approach to world politics coincides with the current foundational discourse of legitimacy but not with current global institutions. The instrumentalisation of emancipatory discourses to legitimate power politics is a widespread practice that remains a tricky question for CSS scholars since their Kantian historiography coincides precisely with the philosophical foundations of Western international institutions. This brings Barkawi and Laffley (2006, p. 332) to underline the paradox of this eurocentrist foundation par excellence:

Many constructivists share similar commitments as in attempts to make sense of international order in Hobbesian, Lockean or Kantian terms. Recent efforts to move beyond the realist-liberal debate, such as Critical Security Studies, draw their core concept of human emancipation from these same intellectual traditions. Each of these traditions, as postcolonial thinkers take pains to point out, rest on profoundly Eurocentric and racist assumptions. As Immanuel Kant, a figure dear to both liberal and critical scholars, observed, 'Humanity achieves its greatest perfection with the White race'. (Barkawi & Laffley, 2006, p. 331-2)⁹⁰

Considered within the Enlightenment's concepts—the intellectual cornerstones of Western institutions—the depositories of legitimacy [emancipation] take Western forms.⁹¹ This critique of CSS is important since it emphasizes that CSS generally, and CTS in particular, are characterised by the very same bias of which the Aberystwyth group accused Realist Strategic Studies: considering and reconstructing the world through the lens of the 'West', comforting the legitimacy of institutions of their own making. Only this time, the institutions in question are not the (Realist) great powers involved in security dilemma but (Liberal) international organisations and NGOs such as the United Nations, the Red Cross or Human Rights Watch, distributing ethical superiority and managing humanitarian interventions (Booth, 2007, p. 271 ; Gowan, 2003 ; Barkawi & Laffey, 2006, pp. 341-2). To pose the question of global politics through the lens of emancipation (vs. domination) circumscribes the reach of critique and CSS contributions end up contributing to stabilising and legitimising the liberal world order. For a strategic approach that explicitly aspires to challenge current power structures this is incontestably a major flaw.

⁹⁰ Booth (2007, p. 354) replied in general terms by mirroring a remark about Barkawi and Laffley's reference: "Readers will make up their own minds about this charge, but the soundness of such 'postcolonial' argumentation can be judged by the fact that the authors of the critique, who announced their intention as being to lay 'the groundwork for the development of a non-Eurocentric security studies', chose to label their own approach 'Melian security studies'; they thereby appropriated as the title for their 'non-Eurocentric' approach not only one of the most cited stories in Western international relations, but also one that derives from Thucydides' founding text in the Western historical canon about war."

⁹¹ Moreover, as Barkawi & Laffey observe: "Even when the concrete agents of emancipation are not themselves Westerners, they are conceived as the bearers of Western ideas, whether concerning economy, politics or culture" (2006, p. 350).



This brings us to the second flaw inherited from CSS's neo-Kantian tradition: the emancipatory discourse of CSS paradoxically bring about *immoral* materialisation according to its own normativity. Wheeler (2002), a member of the Aberystwyth School, dedicated his book, *Saving Strangers*, to the question of intervention legitimated by humanitarian (emancipatory) objectives.⁹² Wheeler articulates CSS into an interventionist interstate policy. In Wheeler (2002) the source and current locus of emancipation remains the international institutions that the Kantian views participated in founding. CSS ends up relying on Western great powers as subjects for humanitarian intervention in order to supply funding and armed forces. This raises the point that those humanitarian interventions may remain a rewriting of the legitimating discourses of past European imperialist practices.⁹³

In sum, Booth's approach limits strategic possibilities in many ways and culminates in legitimating great power interventionism. The limited relevance of his approach to inform efficacious strategies is rooted in the primacy of questions of legitimacy while considering power politics. Although a neo-Kantian understanding of power gives CTS a clear vision of what the world *ought to* aspire to, it impedes Booth's ability to critically assess how his emancipatory discourse interlocks with current power structures—that is, the instrumentalisation of his emancipatory security discourse also serves to legitimate the great power *realpolitik* it aims to challenge. In this sense, Booth's approach is problematic since its own *emancipatory orthodoxies* relegate strategy to a series of necessities dictated by the desired neo-Kantian cosmopolitan arrangement of world power structures—that is, “emancipatory global governance and [...] ‘cosmopolitan states’” (Booth, 2007, p. 141).

McCormack (2010) underlines how CSS scholars, especially Booth, externalize the question of strategy and organisation:

The precise character of those arrangements at this point is less important than the ideas that inform them, and in this respect enlightened world order values are central: if the global—we look after the processes, the structures will look after themselves. (Booth, 2007, p. 141, quoted in McCormack, 2010, p. 13)

The desired end—creating global emancipatory governance and cosmopolitan states—, is considered in normative terms as desirable but the means to reach it are almost limited to spreading shared values.⁹⁴ “As a result of the rejection of the fact/value distinction we see within the work of contemporary critical theorists a highly unreflective certainty about the power of their moral position” (McCormack, 2010, p. 58).

⁹² Booth does not share Wheeler's (2002, p. 35 at footnote 57) confidence on the specific question of *military* intervention, seeing *humanitarian war* as an oxymoron (Wheeler, 2002, p. 35 see also footnote 57 at the same page). No matter where one places the boundary of legitimate ‘emancipatory instruments’, the question of intervention remains the consequence of CSS's anti-statist human object of security. Interestingly, Habermas (1999) himself welcomed an armed humanitarian intervention in Kosovo as an emancipatory act despite the absence of a UN Security Council resolution.

⁹³ See Douzinas (2007, p. 179), Jabri (2007) and Duffield (2007) references in McCormack (2010, p. 17).

⁹⁴ McCormack (2010: 58) notes that the Marxist “materialist method has been left behind and there has been a reversion to a Hegelian framework in which the idea can create the world. [...] R]eflectivity seemingly replaces substantive analysis of a given historical structure.”



This strategic lineage anchored in the Frankfurt School and passing through Habermas remains nevertheless an appealing perspective that still has much to offer in terms of progress for the human condition. Its major flaw lies in its strategic capacity for innovation inhibited by its theoretical foundations. The neo-Aristotelian approach to power and praxis, even from within the reflexive paradigm, acts as a blockade to critical thinking since strategic orientations are dictated by the theory, which maintain Kantian emancipatory orthodoxies out of critique's reach. 'Non-dualistic politics'—coherence between normative ends and instrumental means—is without a doubt the most desirable strategic answer to human suffering, as Gandhi demonstrated its potential, but in many cases may just be an inefficient answer and, in others contexts, a disastrous and suicidal path.

What is at stake fundamentally is therefore the very idea of praxis inherent to the neo-Aristotelian definition of power, which transited from Kant and Habermas into Booth's CTS. In this lineage, power is already situated as illegitimate or just within praxis⁹⁵. Strategies are understood in terms of necessary means dictated by the theory. Strategic decision-making remains dependant on neo-Kantian historiography. Although one can only be sympathetic to global democratic cosmopolitanism, the epistemology of CTS forbids all imminent debates of its core strategic orientations. The Habermasian ideal can only be sought through democratic means. Violent struggles are tantamount illustrations for demonstrating that CTS's non-dualistic strategic formula may not have been of use in many cases:

In contrast to those today who place their hopes upon Western use of force under the auspices of the UN or the international community, generations of Southern resistance movements instead put faith in their own use of force. For Frantz Fanon, Mao Zedong and others the use of force by the weak themselves was an inherent and useful dimension of liberatory projects. Force indeed has had some significant successes in the global South, as in China, Indonesia, Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and Nicaragua. (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006, p. 351).

CTS's strategies remain limited at developing and applying the neo-Kantian recipe already written as praxis. As in Kant, Marx or Habermas, the understanding of *power as legitimacy* within an overarching philosophy of history uncritically dictates the necessities of actions.

On the one hand, there is an obvious tension between the normative vision corresponding to Habermas' neo-Kantian project—which introduces within CTS strategies necessary 'non-dualistic' means of action⁹⁶—and the strategic realities where CSS discourse remains not much more than a discourse legitimating the decisions of great powers to intervene somewhere and often following not so emancipatory objectives.

Because of the critical refusal to separate facts and values and the conflation between theory and political action there is no room to consider the way in which critical theory may serve political and normative agendas independent of their value commitments (McCormack, 2010, p. 60).

⁹⁵ Booth (2005: 182) defines praxis specifically as the "coming together of one's theoretical commitment to critique and political orientation to emancipation in projects of reconstruction."

⁹⁶ Linklater (1990: 172) underlined that a critical approach "is not to offer instructions on how to act but to reveal the existence of unrealised possibilities".



In other words, a critical view based on a neo-Kantian concept of power—fusing legitimacy and practical possibilities⁹⁷—cannot take into account the possible instrumental value of its core dichotomy; emancipation/domination. On the other hand, this tension takes another form since the strategic necessities—here also imposed by this ‘non-dualistic’ means intrinsic to the Kantian/Habermasian ideal—relies on several socio-historical assumptions concerning the context of actions that correspond to the reality of Western democracies (Anderson, 1992). Indeed, this perspective ends up condemning political entities that do not correspond to developed world forms of intervention or activism. From World War II to the decolonisation period, examples are legions showing that “the forceless force of the better argument” (Habermas, 1975, p. 108) is often not enough when faced with a non-solidaristic adversary. Barkawi and Laffey (2006: 351) remark that “[t]o advise the weak that they should not take up arms but instead await liberation at the hands of the West is wishful thinking given the historical record of the West in this regard.” The categories and practical necessities promoted in CTS may not correspond to the strategic imperatives of the Global South, which is too often on the other side of the barrel.

To conclude on CSS, claims of neutrality, as in the case of Realism and Marxism, are intrinsically ideological as critical scholars justly pointed out. But CSS’s claims of explicit normativity are intrinsically unreflexive relative to its engagement with power structures. Strategic orthodoxies may have some *immorally inefficacious* consequences outside their ideal contexts.

Conclusion

Through the exploration of various strategic thinkers and their intellectual context some consistent observations have emerged. Even if their goals varied—or were simply antagonistic—the conditions in producing innovative strategic thoughts were similar in a number of ways. Some historiographical traditions appear to be more prone to promoting creative thinking. The use of reflexivity is a key cognitive tool radically related to efficacy in strategy, although its use differs greatly due to varying intellectual contexts of the history of strategic thought. Fundamentally, it nonetheless remains a strategic ‘good practice’.

Two traditions compete for informing Western strategy. It appears that the influence of two lineages, which take their roots in Aristotle and Machiavelli, is of primordial importance to the problématique of innovation in strategic studies. Within their changing vision of historiography and their correlated notions of power, we therefore find a fundamental dichotomy that is not only conceptual but is also determinant of the cognitive context of strategic innovation.

One lineage, in line with Aristotle, Kant and Habermas, enlightens the strategist on the legitimate footings of power. It shares a notion of *power as legitimacy*—an Aristotelian understanding of politics in terms of the common good—informing on what is just or wrong in politics (see Guzzini, 2005, p. 517). Its evaluative potential is one of moral evaluation ‘good/evil,’ probably linked to Europe’s relationship with Christianity before and throughout its modernity (Geuss,

⁹⁷ What Jahn (1998, p. 623) underlined that “conflating the epistemological and the methodological levels” is a generalized bias in IR appropriation of Critical Theory.



2008, p. 39). The strategic theories based on this perspective take the forms of what has come to be known in social sciences as *praxis*—the unitarian integration of theory and practices. From Kant onward, reason is a universal source of legitimacy explaining history as determined by the interaction of an idealised human subject. As in Marx or the Frankfurt School, *praxis* cannot but remain grounded within a grand-narrative of history—reminiscent of the Christian intellectual heritage based on a linear history of a ‘grand design’.

This lineage presents the world to the strategist under the one dimension evaluated by its historiographical lens (e.g. class war / interstate competition) and correspondingly limits the perception of potential means of action. Second, the definition of the subjects and of the direction of history dictates which of these perceived means can be used. Genealogists have labelled this unitary understanding of power—encompassing both the normative and the feasible dimensions of politics—as neo-Aristotelian (Sellin, 1978, quoted in Guzzini, 2005) or neo-Kantian (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Contemporary strategies of the postmodern or neo-Kantian are built on “a reversion to a Hegelian framework in which the idea can create the world” (McCormack, 2010, p. 58). Contrarily to the uncritical orthodoxies of CSS in the ‘forceless force of the better argument’ (Habermas, 1975, p. 108) what appears to be related to original strategic thinking is an approach that considers how the world is shaped—including its ideas—but that has no taboo regarding critically considering the most efficient way to engage the power relations that are inherent to these processes.

It is the second lineage—which considers questions of politics as the ‘art of the possible’ and derives from the Machiavellian tradition—that promotes innovation for a number of reasons. In line with Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Foucault, its evaluative potential is in terms of the technical dynamics of power. Here, there are contingent human strategic rationales produced within irredeemably incommensurable and plural contexts.

This lineage advises the subject in terms of the technical dynamics of power while the second, in line with Aristotle, Kant and Habermas, enlightens him on the legitimate footings of power. Analytically, their coeval consideration confuses more than it reveals. From this fundamental dichotomy arises the necessity for critical strategy to consider *power as force* and *power as legitimacy* as distinct, and the corresponding responsibility for the strategist to balance their implications in practice. Critical strategic studies cannot integrate the insights of reflexivity—as its main distinctive cognitive tool—as long as it encompasses indiscriminately these two contrasting perspectives. Future research should be dedicated to operationalising reflexivity as a cognitive tool solely on neo-Nietzschean foundations and in isolation from the strategic distortions brought by neo-Kantian influences. Serving a similar function as the abstract absolute war may have served in Clausewitz’s philosophy of war, this new model would represent an abstract reference for the strategist, which would be ontologically purified from elements external to an understanding based on *power as force*. Much work still need to be done to develop the Clausewitzian legacy as a praxeology of social conflicts.



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