
5 The state and the problem of corporate agency

In part I I described a constructivist ontology of social life. Against materialism constructivism hypothesizes that the structures of human association are primarily cultural rather than material phenomena, and against rationalism that these structures not only regulate behavior but construct identities and interests. In this ontology material forces still matter and people are still intentional actors, but the meaning of the former and the content of the latter depend largely on the shared ideas in which they are embedded, and as such culture is a condition of possibility for power and interest explanations. Analysis should therefore begin with culture and then move to power and interest, rather than only invoke culture to clean up what they leave unexplained.

Constructivism is not a theory of international politics. Like rational choice theory it is substantively open-ended and applicable to any social form – capitalism, families, states, etc. – so to say anything concrete we have to specify which actors (units of analysis) and structures (levels) we are interested in. The discipline of International Relations imposes some broad limits on these choices, and within IR this book is concerned with states and the states system. States are key actors in the regulation of organized violence, which is one of the basic problems of international politics, and the structure of the states system is relatively autonomous from other structures of the modern international system, like the world economy, which enables us to study it at least partly on its own terms. As with any designation of actors and structures this will affect the resulting story;¹ the one I tell in the next three chapters would be very different were it about

¹ Frey (1985).

multinational corporations and the world economy. While we might not fully understand world politics until we understand the states system, however, this does not mean that world politics and the states system are equivalent, or even that states are more important than other international actors, whatever that might mean. Lots of things come under the heading of "IR." The states system is just one.

Political Realism has dominated thinking about the states system for so long that IR scholars sometimes assume states systemic theorizing is by definition Realist. This cannot be right, at least not if "Realism" is to be an interesting category. Taking the states system as our point of departure is a description of the world, like saying we are interested in the solar system. It is not in itself an explanation. Just as there can be competing theories of the solar system (Ptolemaic, Copernican), there can be competing theories of the states system. Realism is one such theory, and as I showed in part I it builds on a materialist and individualist ontology. Having laid the foundations of an idealist, holist ontology for IR, in part II I sketch another. This theory has many "Idealist" features, but I will not adopt that label. This book is an attempt to shed light on the states system by thinking through the logic and implications of constructivist social theory, and as such a constructivist theory of the states system best describes what it is about. Since constructivist social theory emphasizes the co-determination of agents and structures through process, my presentation of this approach is organized around the three elements of the agent–structure problem: chapter 5 addresses state actors, 6 the structure of the states system, and 7 their interaction through the process of international politics.

There cannot be a states system without states any more than there can be a (human) society without people. The units make their respective systems possible. Moreover, it is clear that at least in the case of society, the fact that these units are purposive actors makes a difference. Society would be a very different place were people not intentional creatures, even if there is much in society that is unintended. I shall argue that states are also purposive actors with a sense of Self – "states are people too" – and that this affects the nature of the international system. Note that this does not reduce a theory of international politics to a theory of foreign policy or state choices. As I argued in chapter 4, social life at any level cannot be explained solely through the lens of intentional action because macro-outcomes may be multiply realized at the micro-level, and because social structures

may constitute agents. However, human behavior is driven in important part by intentions, and as such even the most relentless macro-theory will depend upon at least implicit assumptions about their nature and distribution.² In chapter 3 we saw that this is true of Waltz's theory, which assumes that states are actors with egoistic, status quo interests. His theory of international politics is based on a particular theory of the state, in other words, even if it is not reducible to that theory.³ This is not a criticism, since systemic IR theorists cannot avoid having a theory of the state anymore than sociologists can of people. Their only choice is whether to make it explicit.

State theory literature is concerned with many important issues: the state's autonomy from society, its class composition, institutional capacity, legitimating discourse, and so on.⁴ Of these I shall be concerned here with only one, the constitution of states as "unitary actors," which is the starting point for theorizing about the international system. Let me also note that the modifier "unitary" seems to be the object of much of the ire that is directed at the state-as-actor assumption, but since it is not clear how something can be an "actor" at all if it is not "unitary," I will treat it as redundant.

The issue of how states get constituted as the "people" of international society has been neglected in the state theory literature. This literature is oriented toward domestic politics where the agency of the state may be less apparent than its internal differentiation. But state agency also has been neglected in IR, an essay first published in 1959 by Arnold Wolfers being virtually the last word on the subject.⁵ Paradoxically, this neglect may be due in part to the very centrality of the state-as-actor assumption to systemic theory, which could hardly begin without it. Yet it is not just academics who anthropomorphize the state, but all of us. In our daily lives citizens and policymakers alike routinely treat states as if they were people, talking about them as if they had the same kinds of intentional properties that we attribute to each other. We think the United States has "security interests" in the Persian Gulf, that it "believed" those were threatened by Iraq's "conquest" of Kuwait, that as a result it "attacked" Iraq, that its actions were "rational" and "legitimate," and so on. International law recognizes this anthropomorphic talk as referring to state "per-

² Emmet (1976). ³ Buzan, Jones, and Little (1993: 116–121).

⁴ For introductions to this literature see Carnoy (1984), Jessop (1990), and Poggi (1990).

⁵ Though see Achen (1989) and Cederman (1997).

sonality" (just as corporations are recognized as actors in domestic law);⁶ and indeed it is so deeply embedded in our common sense that it is difficult to imagine how international politics might be conceptualized or conducted without it. As Carr⁷ points out, it would be impossible to make sense of day-to-day IR without attributions of corporate actorhood. It is through such talk, in other words, that the realities of the international system are constituted.

This may be reason to leave well enough alone and not worry about the constitution of state actors. After all, even if sociology depends on an implicit theory of people, sociologists do not need to become biologists or psychologists to do sociology. In recent years, however, scholars have problematized the assumption that even people are (unitary) actors,⁸ and still more so the state-as-actor assumption, which has come under so much theoretical pressure from so many directions that denunciations of it are now *de rigueur*. Some critics simply emphasize the explanatory importance of domestic factors in international politics. Liberals, for example, argue that in order to explain state action we need to study the interest groups of which the state is an expression.⁹ Students of foreign policy decision-making argue similarly for opening up the "black box" of the state and focusing on the bureaucracies and individuals within.¹⁰ Other critics take aim more explicitly at the state itself. Individualists argue that the state is reducible to individuals and their interactions, with executives functioning as gatekeepers in a social choice process.¹¹ Postmodernists argue that agents are always effects of discourse anyway and so should be "decentered" rather than made a starting point for theory.¹² Empiricists argue that we have no epistemic warrant to give ontological status to unobservables like state actors. Even Realists seem skeptical, with Stephen Krasner¹³ reducing the US state to top decision-makers in the White House and State Department, and Robert Gilpin¹⁴ conceding that "the state does not really exist."

What unites these otherwise disparate views is the proposition that state actorhood is just a "useful fiction" or "metaphor" for what is "really" something else. The state is not *really* an actor at all, but merely a "theoretical construct."¹⁵ Philosophers would call this a "nomin-

⁶ See Coleman (1982). ⁷ Carr (1939: 147–149).

⁸ For example, Henriques, *et al.* (1984), Elster, ed. (1986). ⁹ Moravcsik (1997).

¹⁰ Allison (1971). ¹¹ Bueno de Mesquita (1981: 12–18). ¹² Ashley (1987).

¹³ Krasner (1978: 11). ¹⁴ Gilpin (1986: 318).

¹⁵ Ferguson and Mansbach (1991: 370), Powell (1991: 1316).

alist," "instrumentalist," or "skeptical" view of the state because it assumes that the concept of state actor does not refer to a real entity (see chapter 2). According to nominalism the opposing, (scientific) "realist" view engages in "reification."¹⁶ Although rarely made explicit, an important implication of nominalism would seem to be that once we know what states "really" are – admittedly some way off – it should be possible in principle to dispense with the fictions and metaphors and still explain international politics *without loss of meaning or explanatory power*. This is similar to the view of materialists in the philosophy of mind who think that folk psychology eventually can be reduced without loss to neuro-science.

In this chapter I argue that states are real actors to which we can legitimately attribute anthropomorphic qualities like desires, beliefs, and intentionality. Toward that end I pursue three more specific objectives in four sections.

The first is to give our model of the state a "body" by showing that it is an actor which cannot be reduced to its parts. This task is complicated by the fact that states are conceptually related to societies, and state theorists think about this relationship in different ways. In the first section I take up this problem, arriving at a synthetic definition that has as its core a Weberian view of the state as an organizational actor, but which partakes of the Pluralist and Marxist view that its character is constituted in important part by the structure of state–society relations. When states interact they do so as parts of state–society complexes which affect their behavior, much like the interaction between capitalists is affected by the fact that they employ workers, but this does not mean states can be reduced to societies – any more than capitalists can be reduced to workers. In the second section I narrow the focus to states per se, using the philosophical literature on corporate agency to show how their internal structure constitutes them as real, unitary actors. Applying the discussion of the agent–structure problem from chapter 4, I emphasize the key role that concrete individuals (who as agents form "governments") play in instantiating states, but show that this does not vitiate a realist view of state agency.

The second objective is to give our model of the state "life" by identifying its intrinsic motivational dispositions or "national interests." Since the concept of interest is related to that of identity and

¹⁶ Cederman (1997).

there are different kinds of both, this discussion begins, in the third section, with a typology of identities and interests. I distinguish four kinds of identity (corporate, type, role, and collective), and two of interest (objective and subjective). Each identity has associated needs or objective interests, and actors' understandings of these in turn constitute the subjective interests that motivate their action. The last section applies this framework to the concept of national interest. I define the national interest as the objective interests of state–society complexes, consisting of four needs: physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem. I argue in conclusion that states' interpretations of these needs tend to be biased in a self-interested direction, which predisposes them to competitive, "Realist" politics, but that this does *not* mean that states are inherently self-interested.

This talk of states' nature brings me to my last objective, which I develop throughout the chapter but state explicitly only in the conclusion: I want to show that states are ontologically prior to the states system. The state is pre-social relative to other states in the same way that the human body is pre-social. Both are constituted by self-organizing internal structures, the one social, the other biological. In effect, what emerges in this chapter is a theory that is "essentialist" in certain key respects, which supports the key intuition that motivates individualist approaches to the states system. Since this book takes a constructivist approach to the states system this will require some explaining. Against anti-essentialists to the "left," like postmodernists, I argue that we can theorize about processes of social construction *at the level of the states system* only if such processes have exogenously given, relatively stable platforms. But against thicker essentialists to the "right," like Neorealists and Neoliberals, I defend a minimalist vision of these platforms, arguing that many of the qualities often thought to be inherent to states, like power-seeking and egoism, are actually contingent, constructed by the international system. To do systemic theory in IR one has to give some ground to an essentialist view of the state, but this still leaves a lot of room for constructivist theories of international politics.

The essential state

In order to show how states are constituted as unitary actors we first need to be clear on what we mean by the state. This would be difficult

enough if we were dealing only with states, since the fact that states are not observable provides ample room for disagreements that are relatively unconstrained by evidence. Thus there are at least three significantly different conceptualizations – Weberian, Pluralist, and Marxist. But the task is made even more difficult by the fact that it seems impossible to define the state apart from “society.” States and societies seem to be conceptually interdependent in the same way that masters and slaves are, or teachers and students; the nature of each is a function of its relation to the other. Weberian, Pluralist, and Marxist theories think about this relationship in different ways, differences that affect more than just their conceptualizations of the state. Pluralists and Marxists hesitate to define the state as an “actor” at all. In other words, it is not that state theorists disagree about whether the state is defined by X, Y, and Z or just X and Y, as if they were all talking about the same underlying phenomenon, but that they disagree about what the putative object is to which the term “state” is supposed to refer in the first place. To that extent their definitions of the state seem incommensurable, not just different; one might say that the state is an “essentially contested concept.” Undaunted, in this section I first offer brief, stylized representations of the three theories with a view toward identifying a common referent object, and then discuss in more detail five properties which define the essential state.

The state as referent object

Weberians define the state as an organization possessing sovereignty and a territorial monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence.¹⁷ Two features of this definition stand out for my purposes here. The first is that the state is seen as an *organizational actor*. The Weberian view is the most anthropomorphic of the three – states have interests, make decisions, act in the world – and for that reason it is particularly well suited to systemic IR. The second is that this actor is seen as ontologically independent of society.¹⁸ Weberians emphasize the functions that the state performs for society (internal order and external defense), but for Weber the state’s nature is not conceptually dependent on society. For example, a state may happen to exist in a

¹⁷ On Weber’s definition of the state see (1978: 54), and for contemporary Weberians, Poggi (1990: 19), Tilly (1990: 1), and Mann (1993: 44–91).

¹⁸ Poggi (1990: 20–21).

capitalist system but to Weberians this makes it nothing more than a “state-in-capitalism,” not an inherently “capitalist state.”

Pluralists are a mirror-image of Weberians. Whereas Weberians highlight the state’s agency and differentiation from society, Pluralists attempt to reduce the state to interest groups and individuals in society. Classical Pluralists even denied the existence of “the state” altogether, saying it was nothing more than “government,” the concrete individuals who head the state at any particular time (see below).¹⁹ For Pluralists, the referent object of the term “state” differs from that of Weberians, if it is an object at all. In IR this society-centric approach is particularly useful for exploring the extent to which foreign policy behavior is affected by domestic politics; it has also become the basis for an emerging “Structural Liberal” theory of international politics.²⁰

Marxist state theory can be seen as a framework for integrating these two perspectives. If the referent object of “state” for Weberians is an organizational actor, and for Pluralists is really just society, then for Marxists the referent is the *structure* that binds the two in a relationship of mutual constitution.²¹ The state is “the enduring structure of governance and rule in society.”²² To say that this structure mutually constitutes state actors and society is to say that each is what it is only in virtue of its relation to the other. On this view, for example, a capitalist state is a structure of political authority (not an actor) that constitutes a society with private ownership of the means of production, and simultaneously constitutes a state actor that is authorized and required to protect that institution. In a sense, Marxists agree with both Weberians and Pluralists, since for Marxists state actors are “relatively autonomous” from society and yet not ontologically independent of it. But Marxists go beyond the others in emphasizing that neither state actor nor society can exist apart from the structure of political authority that constitutes them, any more than master and slave can exist apart from the structure of slavery.

¹⁹ The Classical Pluralist position is represented by Bentley (1908) and Truman (1951), and more contemporary Pluralisms by Almond (1988).

²⁰ Moravcsik (1997).

²¹ I am equating Marxism here with the “structural” or “neo-”Marxist tradition of Althusser (1970), Poulantzas (1975), and Jessop (1982); for other Marxist theories of the state see Carnoy (1984).

²² Benjamin and Duvall (1985: 25).

All three of these state theories – one might call them organizational, reductive, and structural respectively – get at phenomena commonly denoted by the term “state.” Each has a different referent object, only one of which (the Weberian state) is an “actor” at all. This is a book on systemic international politics, which assumes states are actors and so seems to privilege a Weberian approach. But when states interact they do so with their societies conceptually “in tow,” and this calls for supplementing our conceptualization of the state with insights from a Marxist or Pluralist analysis. From this standpoint, in other words, the referent object of “the state” should be conceptualized as an organizational actor that is internally related to the society it governs by a structure of political authority, which in effect rolls all three views up into one.

Defining the state

States take many forms – democratic, monarchical, communist, and so on – that reflect the structure of state–society relations. However, here I am interested only in what all states in all times and places have in common, in the “essential state” or “state-as-such.” This is not to suggest that variations in the state do not matter to international politics. They clearly affect foreign policy, and in my view the logic of states systems as well. But in this chapter I am guided by the narrower concern of grounding systemic IR theory in a theory of how states are constituted as its moving parts. Since all states are actors this calls for a minimalist view of the state, stripped of its contingent forms. The purpose is not to help us analyze real historical states but rather to provide the necessary platform or “body” to begin doing systemic theory.

Anti-essentialists might argue that even a stripped down view of the state will be inappropriate because as social constructions states cannot have *any* transhistorical, cross-cultural essence.²³ I think states do have a common core, and must if we are to make sense. If states have nothing in common, then what distinguishes them from any other social kind? If the members of the Swedish state reorganize themselves as a bowling team but still call themselves a state, does that mean states can now take the form of bowling teams, or that

²³ For some postmodern interpretations of the state from which this conclusion might be drawn see Mitchell (1991), Campbell (1992), and Bartelson (1995).

Sweden is no longer a state? Can a state, in short, be *anything*? To my mind there seem to be significant constraints on what we can plausibly call a state, which I take to be their essential properties. On the other hand, the fact that states must have certain properties does not necessarily mean that these can be precisely specified, since social and even natural kinds have borderline cases. It might be useful, therefore, to think of the state as a fuzzy set, no element of which is essential but which tend to cohere in homeostatic clusters (chapter 2, pp. 59–60). The state does not seem particularly “fuzzy” as social kinds go, but it too has borderline cases,²⁴ which indicate that our emphasis should be on the cluster of properties, not individual ones.

The discussion in the preceding section suggests that the essential state has five properties: (1) an institutional-legal order, (2) an organization claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence, (3) an organization with sovereignty, (4) a society, and (5) territory. (1) is the Marxist’s state-as-structure, (2) and (3) the Weberian’s state-as-actor, and (4) the Pluralist’s state-as-society. (5) is common to all three. These properties form a homeostatic cluster, which provides a rationale for the familiar “billiard ball” model of states in systemic IR. Strictly speaking, however, only (2) and (3) refer to the state as an actor, and since in this chapter I am trying to clarify that notion it is important that my terminology be more precise. Thus, I will use the term “state” to denote the Weberian’s organizational actor, “state structure” to denote the Marxists’ structure of political authority, and Cox’s²⁵ “state–society complex” to refer to all five properties at once. I now take up these properties in more detail.

An institutional-legal order

The state understood as a structure of political authority is constituted by the norms, rules, and principles “by which conflict is handled, society is ruled, and social relations are governed.”²⁶ This structure distributes ownership and control of three material bases of power to state and societal actors: the means of production, the means of destruction, and the means of (biological) reproduction.²⁷ Different forms of state structure are constituted by how this distribution is organized. Capitalist state structures divide forms of power between

²⁴ Crawford (1979: 52–71). ²⁵ Cox (1987).

²⁶ Benjamin and Duvall (1985: 25–26).

²⁷ If the last seems an unlikely candidate for state control, consider the current Chinese policy of one child per family.

capital, state, and family; totalitarian state structures consolidate them in state elites; and so on. Regardless of the particular distribution of political authority, however, state structures are power structures that both regulate the behavior of preexisting subjects, and constitute who those subjects are and what they are empowered to do.

State structures are usually institutionalized in law and official regulations. This stabilizes expectations among the governed about each other's behavior, and since shared expectations are necessary for all but the most elementary forms of social interaction, state structures help make modern society possible. Institutionalization also stabilizes expectations about the use of force within society by state actors, who are empowered by law to use violence to enforce the rules. Security from the arbitrary use of force by officials is crucial if people are to go about their daily lives, and state structures achieve this end by formalizing how and why state actors can coerce society. Broadly speaking, then, law is essential to state-society complexes. Any structure meriting the designation "state" will have a legal order.²⁸

Institutional-legal orders constitute state-society complexes and as such include both state and societal actors within their reference. These complexes will be capable of varying degrees of agency depending on the character of the state structure. "Strong" state structures enable state actors to mobilize significant resources from society, and at the limit enable state and society to act routinely as a single agent. Systemic IR theorists implicitly assume that states are strong when they treat state-society complexes as billiard balls under the complete control of a state actor. In reality most state structures are considerably weaker than this, incapable of sustaining a perfect fusion of state and societal agency for any length of time. Thus, despite its limited potential for agency, the Marxist definition of the state as an institutional-legal order is best not seen as referring to an *actor* at all. It does not have identities, interests, or intentionality.

If we want to conceptualize state agency we need a Weberian view of the state. The connection to the Marxist view is that structures of political authority constitute state actors as organizations distinct from their societies, empowered with the right and duty to use force to secure those structures. This translates into two key functions: the maintenance of internal order, which involves reproducing the domestic conditions of society's existence; and the provision of external

²⁸ D'Entreves (1967).

defense, which protects the integrity of those conditions from other states. In order to fulfill these functions state actors are empowered by state structures with a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence and sovereignty, which constitute the second and third features of the essential state.

Monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence

States are specialists in the legitimate use of organized violence.²⁹ In Charles Tilly's³⁰ evocative terms, states are "protection rackets." In some societies state actors also control the means of production or even reproduction, but control over the means of destruction is the ultimate and distinctive basis of state power, and only this is essential to stateness.

"Organized violence" refers to the coordinated use of deadly force by a group. There are many kinds of violence that do not fit this description. Some refer to non-deadly force; states may engage in this as well, but so do private citizens (abusive spouses, bullies). Others refer to violence that is not really force, like the "structural" violence to which disadvantaged groups may be subject by structures of economic, racial, or other kinds of oppression. Still others refer to violence by individuals which is not generally done by groups (murder, rape), or which is done by groups but not organized (riots, mob violence). All of these forms of violence are important and can be found in varying degrees in world politics. In saying that we need to recognize the special role of organized violence in constituting the state, therefore, I do not mean to suggest that IR scholars should ignore other kinds of violence. But it is an essential and distinctive feature of state agency that states are capable of organized violence. Even states that have disbanded their armies, like Costa Rica, retain a capacity for it in their police. An organization incapable of organized violence would be hard pressed to qualify as a state.

The concept of a "monopoly" of violence is more problematic. Most modern states divide their coercive potential into two organizations, a police force for internal security and an army for external, and then further divide these into various functionally and territorially distinct organizations (local, provincial, and national police; army, navy, air force). What is it about this plethora of organizations that constitutes them jointly as a "monopoly"?

²⁹ Poggi (1990: 21).

³⁰ Tilly (1985).

The conventional answer is that their command and control is centralized in the head of state. Ultimately in the state there is a single locus of authority to make decisions concerning the relationship between its various coercive arms. However, the fact that this authority may reside in a single individual is in some sense beside the point: his or her authority is in any case a function of the institutional-legal order, and if the same result could be achieved in a more decentralized fashion then for all practical purposes we would still have a monopoly of force. What matters in constituting monopoly is the *effect* of centralization, not centralization itself. This effect must be twofold. First, the coercive agencies of the state must be *non-rivals* in the sense that they do not settle their disputes (for example, over budgets or jurisdiction) by force. In IR this is known as a "security community"³¹ which Deutsch argues can be either "pluralistic" (decentralized) or "amalgamated" (centralized) as in the modern state. Second, coercive agencies must be *unified* in the sense that each perceives a threat to others as a threat to itself, so that all defend against it together. In IR this is known as "collective security," in which actors define their individual security in terms of the collective, on the principle of "all for one, one for all." This requirement goes beyond non-rivalry, since non-rivals might be indifferent to each other's fate; unified actors are not.

Centralized states achieve non-rivalry and unity by subsuming coercive agencies under a single point with the authority to command obedience, but the same effect could be achieved by institutional mechanisms that relied on a decentralized consensus, as in a cartel. For example, when it comes to military security, a well-functioning collective security system like NATO does not seem essentially different than the security system of a territorial state like Brazil. In both cases functional and territorial responsibilities regarding the use of force are delegated to non-rival agencies with considerable autonomy in their domain, and a physical threat to one will be seen as a threat to all. From the standpoint of outside aggressors both systems will be *de facto* "monopolies" of force. This suggests the possibility of decentralized or "international" state structures that do not have a single head but are still capable of institutionalized collective action.³²

³¹ Deutsch, *et. al.* (1957).

³² On the concept of an international state see, Cox (1987), Picciotto (1991), Wendt (1994), Caporaso (1996), and Shaw (1997).

The most conceptually troublesome requirement here is that a monopoly of organized violence be “legitimate.” The state must have not just the ability to maintain the monopoly, but a *right* to do so which members of society accept even in the absence of coercion or self-interest.³³ This is a problem because a state’s right is almost always being contested by someone somehow somewhere, and as such legitimacy is in the eyes of the beholder. What about drug cartels that exercise monopolies of force in the territories they control over people who willingly support them? Or totalitarian states where people cannot express their true feelings? Is tacit consent sufficient for legitimacy? What about non-violent resistance to the state, like tax evasion or refusal to say a pledge of allegiance? Is legitimacy a matter of majority opinion? And so on.

These are hard questions that I cannot answer here. They can be side-stepped for IR purposes, however, by privileging the state’s *claim* to a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence, and treating that claim as a right until it is clear that popular opposition has made it impossible to sustain. The problem with this move, of course, is that the state’s capacity for violence enables it to defend its “legitimacy” by force if necessary, which means that in some cases there may be a big gap between claim and reality. Moreover, it is precisely this kind of analytical privileging that helps states reproduce their claim, which illustrates how the epistemic aspects of the states systemic project support its political aspect. Given an interest in how states *systems* work, however, what matters is the efficacy of the state’s monopoly, not its legitimacy.

Sovereignty

State structures also constitute state actors with sovereignty, which is in turn traditionally divided into “internal” and “external” sovereignty.³⁴

Internal sovereignty means that the state is the supreme locus of political authority in society. After all is said and done, it is states, rather than the Church, corporations, or private citizens who have the right to make final, binding political decisions – indeed, to decide what is (officially) “political” in the first place.³⁵ The fact that this is a “right” is crucial. Sovereignty is not about *de facto* freedom of action

³³ Hurd (1999).

³⁴ For example, Fowler and Bunck (1996).

³⁵ Thomson (1995).

relative to society, or “state autonomy,”³⁶ but about being recognized by society as having certain powers, as having *authority*. These powers may be limited, as in the night-watchman state, or extensive, as in the totalitarian, but as rights they are legal rather than political facts, *de jure* rather than *de facto*.³⁷ Democratic states are no less sovereign than fascist states, despite the greater domestic constraints they face.

The emergence of the doctrine of popular sovereignty in the eighteenth century complicates this simple conclusion. Popular sovereignty removes ultimate authority to the people, such that if they perceive a state as illegitimate they have the right to revolt, which would seem to undermine the whole idea of “state” sovereignty.³⁸ Even so, however, a democratic state will still have *de facto* sovereignty insofar as it remains a distinct organization delegated to make decisions and enforce the law on society’s behalf. The people may have ultimate authority over this organization, but short of a collapse of state legitimacy the state will be sovereign in all but name.

This relates to the vexed question of whether sovereignty can be divided. Bodin and Hobbes argued that sovereignty must be concentrated in a single person, but contemporary opinion generally holds that it can be disaggregated³⁹ – by functions (executive, legislative, judicial), levels (local, provincial, national, perhaps international), or issue areas (economic, military, welfare). The view that sovereignty can be “unbundled” enables us to grasp the fact that heads of state today do not have unlimited authority, but as Bodin and Hobbes foresaw, it does create the problem of how to conceptualize the state’s unity. Where is the state’s sovereignty if it is not concentrated in a single person?⁴⁰

One answer is to recognize that, even as a property of state actors, sovereignty is really a property of a structure. The Weberian conceptualization of the state as an actor itself refers to a structure – not the structure denoted by the Marxist definition of the state-as-structure, which includes society, but the *organizational* structure that constitutes the state as a corporate agent (see below). This “physiological” structure relates the various individuals and bureaucracies which make up a state actor to each other, assigning functional, territorial, or issue-area sovereignties within a framework of rules and procedures

³⁶ Nordlinger (1981). ³⁷ Dickinson (1927). ³⁸ See Antholis (1993).

³⁹ D’Entreves (1973: 316).

⁴⁰ For a good discussion of the difficulties of specifying the locus of sovereignty see Bartelson (1995: 12–52).

for settling jurisdictional conflicts and ensuring their harmonious operation. The argument here is similar to that made above about the state's monopoly of force: what gives a state sovereignty in the face of its internal division is an organizational structure of *non-rival, unified authority* that enables its parts to work together as a unit or "team." In this light we can see why it is difficult to find sovereignty in the modern state, since structures do not have a single location. The sovereignty of a state actor only becomes apparent when we look at the structure through which its parts become a corporate whole.

In contrast to these difficulties, the concept of external sovereignty is relatively straight-forward, denoting merely the absence of any external authority higher than the state, like other states, international law, or a supranational Church – in short, "constitutional independence."⁴¹ As with internal sovereignty it is important to emphasize that the issue here is not one of autonomy. Rising international interdependence means that states increasingly are subject to powerful external constraints on their action. This creates a gap between their *right* to do what they want and their ability to *exercise* that right, but it does not mean that outsiders have "authority" over states. Authority requires legitimacy, not mere influence or power.

Nevertheless, there is an important difference between external sovereignty that is recognized by other states and external sovereignty that is not. When the Aztec and Spanish states encountered each other in 1519 they both were constitutionally independent, but at least Spain did not recognize (in the sense of "accept") this, and as such considered the Aztecs fair game for conquest. One of the important contributions of constructivist IR scholarship has been to emphasize the role of mutual recognition of external sovereignty in mitigating the effects of international anarchy,⁴² and this forms a key part of the argument in chapter 6. However, what I want to emphasize here is that a state can have external sovereignty even if it is *not* recognized by other states. In Hobbesian international systems states may *claim* external sovereignty, but others do not recognize it as a *right*; external sovereignty is *de facto* or "empirical" only.⁴³ In Lockean international systems, however, states do recognize each other's sovereignty as a right. External sovereignty is here "juridical," not merely empirical.

⁴¹ James (1986).

⁴² See, for example, Ruggie (1983a, 1993), Strang (1991), Wendt (1992), and Biersteker and Weber, eds. (1996).

⁴³ Jackson and Rosberg (1982).

This has significant implications for foreign policy: states that recognize each other's sovereignty tend not to conquer each other, not because they cannot, but because recognition implies a willingness to live and let live.

In contrast to some constructivists,⁴⁴ then, in my view sovereignty does not presuppose a society of states. Sovereignty is intrinsic to the state, not contingent. Empirical statehood can exist without juridical statehood. Recognition confers upon states certain powers in a society of states, but freedom from external authority *per se* does not presuppose it. This is an important source of the essentialist character of my argument, and I come back to it below.

Society

State actors are constituted by state structures with political authority over societies, and as such conceptually presuppose their societies. State actors are differentiated from their societies, but internally related to them: no society, no state. Thus, even though in this book I am concerned with relationships between state actors, and for that reason use the term "state" in the Weberian sense to denote an organization, we cannot understand the behavior of these actors without considering their internal relation to society. The content of this relation will depend on the form taken by state structures. Fascist, communist, and democratic structures create very different relationships between state and societal actors, even if in this section we are interested only in what is inherent to all state–society relationships.

What, then, is "society"? This question obviously cannot be answered here, but let me offer some intuitions that could in principle be developed into an argument. It seems useful to proceed by separating these intuitions into constitutive and causal issues.

The constitutive issue concerns the conceptual requirements for being a society. There seem to be at least two. One is that people have shared knowledge that induces them to follow most of the rules of their society most of the time. Although stateless societies exist, complex societies all have states, and as such many of these rules will normally be codified in law. The other requirement of society is that it have boundaries. These might be fuzzy, as in the case of frontier regions that are only loosely subject to state authority. But as long as there is more than one state there will be more than one society, since

⁴⁴ For example, Giddens (1985: 255–293).

each state has its own rules which the members of its society are expected to follow. To say that states and societies are internally related in a state–society complex means that not only is the state constituted by its relationship to society, but so is society constituted by the state.

The causal question concerns where societies come from. Common sense suggests two types of causes, bottom–up and top–down. On the one hand, there are important aspects of social life that seem prior to the state. Human beings are group animals, so much so that a case can be made that the most elementary unit in the “state of nature” was the group rather than the individual.⁴⁵ Group identities (from tribe to clan to nation, among others) are based first and foremost on things like language, culture, religion, and ethnicity. These things sometimes are effects of state policy, but some groups existed long before there were states, and some have endured despite states. To that extent these groups can be thought of as self-organizing social facts welling up from the “bottom” of the human experience.⁴⁶ Self-organizing group identities are still “constructions” (what else could they be?), but relative to states and states systems, these constructions are often external or exogenous.

Let me emphasize that in suggesting that societies may have self-organizing qualities I do not mean to suggest that this is always or even largely the case. The emergence of states, in which coercive resources become monopolized by political-military elites, creates enormous potential for constructing societies from the top–down. Indeed, since a law-abiding society is a more efficient basis for a state than an unruly, resentful subject population, this will often be a key goal of state policy. Education policy tries to teach children to become loyal citizens; language policy tries to build solidarity by erasing communal differences; foreign policy tries to convince people they face a common danger from external Others.⁴⁷ These policies all are backed up, if necessary, by organized violence. Given the power at states’ disposal, however, one cannot help but be impressed with the extent to which their efforts to construct societies (let alone nations) can founder on the rocks of preexisting group identities. A potential key factor in constructing societies, therefore, is the extent to which

⁴⁵ Alford (1994).

⁴⁶ See Smith (1989).

⁴⁷ Campbell (1992); also see Walker (1993: 125–140).

the boundaries and policies of the state coincide with the boundaries and needs of the preexisting groups subject to its rule.

Territory

In addition to societies, states are also internally related to territory. No territory, no state. States are not literally the same thing as territories, but in an important sense Michael Mann is right that "the state is . . . a place."⁴⁸ The term "territory" itself suggests the connection, joining the Latin *terra* ("earth" or "land") to *torium* ("belonging to" or "surrounding," presumably the state).⁴⁹ In this respect the authority of states is unlike the authority of churches or firms, neither of which is intrinsically territorial in character. State authority is.

An important implication of this is that an inquiry concerned with relations *among* states must take territory as in some sense given, in the same way that sociology must take as given the fact that people have spatial extension. This is not to say that we should never problematize territory "all the way down," but in doing so we should recognize that such a move changes the subject. Rather than a sociology of the states system we would be engaged in a "biology" of the state. On the other hand, the fact that territoriality is in some sense exogenous to states systemic theory does not mean it is in every sense exogenous. An important contribution of critical IR scholarship in the last decade has been to show that there are important aspects of territoriality which should not be treated as given by students of international politics.⁵⁰ This has both constitutive and causal aspects.

At least two points have emerged on the constitutive side. First, even though territory must have boundaries of some kind if it is to be anything more than simply land (which would make a state's internal relation to territory trivial, since people do not live in the water), the breadth and depth of this boundary may vary. In the modern world we are used to thinking of territorial boundaries as vanishing thin lines on a map, so that the state's spatial extension is precisely delimited. A state is complete up to its boundary, and then disappears equally completely as we cross it. Yet historically there have been many organizations with a monopoly of organized violence over some land, but the precise boundaries of which were contested,

⁴⁸ Mann (1984: 187).

⁴⁹ Gottmann (1973: 16). For discussion of some interesting ambiguities in this etymology see Baldwin (1992: 209–10).

⁵⁰ Ruggie (1993), Walker (1993), Agnew (1994).

overlapping, or simply faded away into nothing. This was the case in the frontier zones of ancient empires, in the heteronomous authority structures of medieval Europe, and is arguably reemerging today with the rise of a “neo-medieval” international system.⁵¹ The question of whether medieval structures of political authority were “states” is difficult for reasons beyond their ambiguous territoriality,⁵² but ancient empires seem very much like modern states except for the occasional imprecision of their boundaries. Some might say they were not “states” for exactly this reason, but this ignores the fact that all empires had geographical cores over which their monopoly of force was complete; does this mean they were states in some areas and not others? In my view the assumption that precise borders are inherent to states mistakes a contingent feature of the state for an essential one. A more fruitful approach would be to recognize that in principle states can have “fuzzy” boundaries, even if in practice they do not. This preserves our intuition that states must have some kind of boundary without prejudging the form it must take.

A second constitutive point is that even if the location of territorial boundaries is clear and constant, their social *meaning* can vary.⁵³ Realists tend to assume that territorial boundaries must also be boundaries of identity and interest, such that where a state’s authority stops so must its conception of Self and interest. Yet this is not even true of people, who are more constrained by their bodies than states. Despite having basic needs that our physical constitution predisposes us to meet as individuals, most of us identify cognitively in varying degrees with some Others, and sometimes even sacrifice our lives for them. Below I agree with Realists that states too have basic needs that predispose them to conflate cognitive boundaries with territorial ones, and so to be self-interested. If this exhausted the possibilities for state identity then territorial boundaries would always have a “Hobbesian” meaning: walls of exclusion to be policed and defended at all costs. But as I suggest below and argue at length in subsequent chapters, states’ territorial nature does not preclude expanding their sense of Self to include other states, and thus defining their interests in more collective terms. In that case territorial boundaries would take on a

⁵¹ See, respectively, Kratochwil (1986), Ruggie (1983a), Bull (1977: 264–276).

⁵² On the feudal state see Poggi (1990: 16–35).

⁵³ See especially Walker (1993) and Agnew (1994). The variable meaning of space is an important theme of the literature in radical geography; see Gregory and Urry, eds. (1985).

“Lockean” or even “Kantian” meaning: still differentiating states, but embedding them within a larger “cognitive region”⁵⁴ that works together toward common ends.

If the constitutive questions about territorial boundaries concern where they are located and how they are meaningful, then the causal questions concern how and why they acquire the locations and meanings that they do. As with the causes of society here too we can distinguish between bottom-up and top-down causes. Thus, on the one hand, territories stem in part from self-organizing groups seeking to settle in relatively stable places,⁵⁵ which induces them to push out on the world around them. If there are no other groups in the area then boundaries will be determined by the interaction of a group’s size and technology with the natural environment. Groups lacking navigational technology, for example, will find their borders constrained by oceans, whereas sea-faring groups will not. Even in the more usual situation where other groups are present, boundaries of a particular group will be determined in part by factors welling up from self-organizing processes that are exogenous to the states system. On the other hand, war and diplomacy between groups are clearly also important causes of territorial boundaries, and to that extent the process will have a systemic or top-down dimension. As Tilly puts it, not only do states make war but “war makes states,”⁵⁶ and a key aspect of that process is defining their boundaries. To that extent states are effects of boundary construction as much as they are its causes.⁵⁷ Moreover, systemic interaction is important not only in the initial determination of boundaries but in sustaining them over time. If boundaries are stable, this will either be because states have enough power to prevent others from changing them unilaterally, or because they recognize each other’s borders as legitimate. Both involve ongoing causal interactions, and to that extent the construction of state boundaries is never a finished affair, even if it becomes unproblematic in some cases.

In sum, the essential state is an organizational actor embedded in an institutional-legal order that constitutes it with sovereignty and a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence over a society in a territory. The class of states may be somewhat “fuzzy” in practice, but it excludes lots of things from ever being states: dogs, trees,

⁵⁴ Adler (1997a).

⁵⁵ Sack (1986: 19); cf. Abbott (1995: 873).

⁵⁶ Tilly (1985).

⁵⁷ Abbott (1995).

football teams, universities, and so on. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize how stripped down this model is, which can be seen if we briefly consider what it does *not* attribute to the essential state. Being a state does not imply any particular political system, any particular mode of production, recognition by other states, nationalism, or undivided sovereignty. I argue below that it even does not imply self-interest. All of these involve contingent forms of state, not the essential state. Critics might reply that this definition is *so* stripped down that it is of little use for analyzing states in the real world, which necessarily take on various and complex forms. To be sure, but that was not my intention: it was to identify what is common to all discussions of how states are constructed by the states system.

A minimalist definition also has another virtue: it helps us see that the state is not an inherently modern phenomenon, and thus, once we have identified its motivational dispositions, as I purport to do below, it should be possible to develop transhistorical generalizations about its behavior.⁵⁸ The attempt to identify such generalizations has long been a staple of Realism, and animates several recent studies of international politics.⁵⁹ Critics may argue that these efforts are anachronistic because the term “state” has only been used since the thirteenth century,⁶⁰ which might be thought to imply that there were no states before then. To my mind this illustrates the problem with nominalist thinking. In the realist view, if there were organizations with sovereignty and a territorial monopoly on organized violence before the thirteenth century then there were states. And there clearly were: Greek city-states, Alexander the Great’s empire, the Roman Empire, and so on. Social kinds are constituted by how they are organized, not by what they are called. This is not to say that there are no important dangers in making transhistorical claims, such as projecting contingent features of the modern state backward, and ignoring important differences in the systemic contexts in which states operate. This latter danger is especially likely if, as in Realism, structure is not conceptualized in cultural terms. These problems suggest that any valid transhistorical generalizations about the essential state will be very thin, but such generalizations are not ruled out altogether.

⁵⁸ Much the same point could be made about transcultural generalizations.

⁵⁹ See Watson (1992), Buzan and Little (1994), and Kaufman (1997); cf. Reus-Smit (1999).

⁶⁰ Harding (1994).

“States are people too”

In the previous section I defined the state as an actor, but did not show that such talk refers to a real corporate being to which we can properly attribute human qualities like identities, interests, and intentionality. I have not yet shown, in other words, that the state has a “Self,” as suggested, for example, by the Realist assumption that states are “self”-interested. The question of whether we can anthropomorphize corporate actors goes back at least to medieval debates about the Church. It concerned Hobbes, figured prominently in nineteenth and early twentieth century debates about the nature of the state and the corporation, and continues to interest scholars in a variety of disciplines today.⁶¹ All sides seem to agree that corporate agency is actually a kind of *structure*: a structure of shared knowledge or discourse that enables individuals to engage in institutionalized collective action. (Not to be confused with the broader structures in which corporate agents might in turn be embedded, like structures of state–society relations.) But there is deep disagreement between nominalists and realists about the ontological status of this structure. Nominalists, who seem lately to hold the upper hand in IR scholarship, believe that corporate agency is just a useful fiction or metaphor to describe what is “really” the actions of individuals. Scientific realists believe it refers to a real, emergent phenomenon which cannot be reduced to individuals. In what follows I defend the realist view, explore the internal structure of corporate agency that makes it possible, and conclude with some thoughts on the limits to anthropomorphic talk about corporate agents. In my discussion I focus on states, but the argument is applicable to other forms of corporate agency as well.

*On the ontological status of the state*⁶²

One reason that centuries of debate have not solved the problem of corporate agency is that nominalists and realists each face difficulties.

⁶¹ See, for example, Dewey (1926), Copp (1980), Coleman (1982), French (1984), Douglas (1986), Gilbert (1987), Tuomela (1989), Vincent (1989), Searle (1990), Sandelands and St. Clair (1993), and Clark (1994). Runciman (1997) looks to be a superb study of corporate personality that came out too late to address in this discussion.

⁶² The heading is taken Ringmar (1996).

The problem for realists is that corporate agents are unobservable. What we see are only individuals and their behavior. Individuals may say they belong to the same organization, and engage in collective action to prove it, but we never actually see the state. What we see is at most *government*, the aggregate of concrete individuals who instantiate a state at a given moment. State action depends on the actions of those individuals, since social structures only exist in virtue of the practices which instantiate them. The challenge for realists is to show that state action is anything more than the sum of these individual governmental actions.

The problem for nominalists stems from the fact that despite this dependence of states on individuals, we routinely explain their behavior as the "behavior" of corporate agents, and these explanations *work* in the sense that they enable us to make reliable predictions about individuals. If on June 21, 1941 we had attributed to "the German state" the intention to invade the Soviet Union the next day, we would have correctly predicted the behavior of millions of individuals on the 22nd. Without that attribution it would have been difficult, even impossible, to predict and make sense of what was going on. The challenge for nominalists is to explain why this is the case. If the concept of state agency is merely a useful fiction, *why* is it so useful as to seem almost indispensable?

The realist has a ready answer: because it refers to a real but unobservable structure. Drawing on the Ultimate Argument for the reality of unobservables discussed in chapter 2, the realist could argue that it would be a "miracle" if a concept that predicted observable behavior so well did not refer to something real. Like quarks, capitalism, and preferences, we know that states are real because their structure generates a pattern of observable effects, as anyone who denies their reality will quickly find out. If John refuses to pay taxes on the grounds that the US state is merely a fiction, then he is likely to experience consequences just as real as he does when he stubs his toe on a table. The reasoning here is abductive: positing a structure that is capable of intentional action is "an inference to the best explanation" for the patterns of behavior that we observe (chapter 2, pp. 62–63). In the realist view, any system, whether biological or corporate, whose behavior can be predicted in this way counts as an intentional agent.⁶³

It may be that the concept of state agency refers to a real but

⁶³ See Campbell (1958: 22–23), Dennett (1987: 15), Clark (1994: 408).

unobservable structure, but what if this structure is reducible to the properties and interactions of the individuals who make it up? By invoking realist philosophy of science we may solve the nominalist's problem of explaining why attributions of state agency work so well, but what about the realist's problem of showing that the state is anything more than the government? The answer is that the structure of states helps explain the properties of governments, which can be seen by invoking the two arguments against individualism made in chapter 4.

The first is that most social structures (here, states) have a collective dimension that causes macro-level regularities among their elements (governments) over space and time. Social systems are structured on two levels, micro and macro. The former refers to the desires and beliefs of existing individuals. If this were the only level on which states were structured then they would be reducible to governments. Yet, we normally think of states as persisting through time despite generational turnover,⁶⁴ in part because their properties seem quite stable: boundaries, symbols, national interests, foreign policies, and so on. Such continuities help give temporal continuity to the succession of governments, enabling us to call every national government in Washington, DC for 200 years a "US" government. And even at any given moment we normally think of states as being more than just their current members. Had Bob Dole won the 1996 election, even though the US government would have changed the US state would have remained the same. These temporal and existential continuities are explained by structures of *collective* knowledge to which individuals are socialized,⁶⁵ and which they, through their actions, in turn reproduce. Individuals are the "leading edge" of state action, so to speak, but insofar as macro-level regularities are multiply realized by their behavior, we have a situation in which state action cannot be reduced to action by governments.

The other argument against the individualist attempt to reduce states to governments is that we cannot make sense of the actions of governments apart from the structures of states that constitute them as meaningful. Structures can have two kinds of effects, causal and constitutive.

The former assume that cause and effect are independently existing, and so if corporate structures had *only* causal effects it might be

⁶⁴ Carr (1939/1964: 150); cf. Sandelands and St. Clair (1993).

⁶⁵ Gilbert (1989: 274–288).

possible to reduce them to individuals, since nothing about the latter would presuppose the former. A state would be reducible to individuals' shared belief that "we are a [state]." ⁶⁶ However, this ignores the constitutive effects of structures. Individualism depends on aggregating independently existing parts into a whole. Holists think this presupposes the truth of holism, since assuming that we can know a whole from its parts begs the question of how we can know ourselves as parts if not by prior knowledge of the whole. ⁶⁷ What gives meaning to an individual's belief that he or she is a member of the "US government," for example, is not only their own beliefs but the structure of shared beliefs in which they participate. This structure is both a micro- and macro-level phenomenon: Bill Clinton's belief that he is the President, for example, only has the content that it does as long as other members of his administration (and society) recognize this, and the common knowledge of his administration is in turn constituted as the "US government" by the structure of collective knowledge which defines the US *state*. A group of individuals only becomes a government, in other words, in virtue of the state which it instantiates.

The structure of state agency

The foregoing discussion suggests that state actors are real and not reducible to the individuals who instantiate them. This is true of most social structures, not just states. Most social structures are not corporate agents and as such are not capable of intentional action. In order to become an agent a structure must have three particular features: an "Idea" of corporate agency and a decision structure that both institutionalizes and authorizes collective action. ⁶⁸

The first requirement is that individuals' shared knowledge reproduces an Idea of the state as a corporate "person" or "group Self." There is a Hegelian quality to this claim, although as I argued above it is compatible with a realist view of the state. ⁶⁹ As

⁶⁶ Bar-Tal (1990: 36), Tuomela (1989).

⁶⁷ Sandelands and St. Clair (1993: 433–434); also see Douglas (1986: 67), Searle (1990), and Sugden (1993).

⁶⁸ Cf. Buzan (1991: 65–66).

⁶⁹ Palan and Blair (1993); cf. Abrams (1988). Given my realist interpretation of the state a less ambivalent forerunner of my argument might be the nineteenth century German jurist Otto von Gierke's "reality theory of the state" (see French, 1984: 36–37, and Vincent, 1989: 706–708).

Weber put it, "one of the important aspects of the 'existence' of a modern state . . . consists in the fact that the action of various individuals is oriented to the belief that it exists or should exist."⁷⁰ Elements of this belief will include a representation of the state's members as a "we" or "plural subject,"⁷¹ a discourse about the principles of political legitimacy upon which their collective identity is based,⁷² perhaps written down in a Constitution or "Mission Statement,"⁷³ and collective memories that connect them to the state's members in the past. All of this commonly takes a narrative form,⁷⁴ which means that the empirical study of state identities and their evolution over time will include a substantial element of discursive and intellectual history.⁷⁵ It should also be noted that these narratives are structures of collective rather than common knowledge, and so saying, with Weber, that individuals' actions must be "oriented" toward the corporate Idea does *not* mean that everyone in the group must have this idea in their heads. Common knowledge is neither necessary for corporate actors, which can believe things that their members do not, nor sufficient, since individuals can have common knowledge and not constitute a corporate actor.⁷⁶ What matters is that individuals accept the obligation to act jointly on behalf of collective beliefs, whether or not they subscribe to them personally. Acting on this commitment is how states acquire their causal powers and get reproduced over time. The concept of state agency is not simply a useful fiction for scholars, in other words, but how the members of states themselves constitute its *reality*.

In addition to an Idea of the state as a corporate person, state actors must also have an "internal decision structure"⁷⁷ that institutionalizes and authorizes collective action by their members. Since these two requirements are distinct let me address them separately.

To say that collective action is institutionalized is to say that individuals take it for granted that they will cooperate. The expectation of cooperation is sufficiently deep that their collective action problem is solved. Corporate structures achieve this through centralization and internalization. Centralization involves hierarchical

⁷⁰ Weber (1978). ⁷¹ Gilbert (1989). ⁷² Bukovansky (1997).

⁷³ See Swales and Rogers (1995). ⁷⁴ Ringmar (1996), Barnett (1998).

⁷⁵ See especially Bukovansky (1999b).

⁷⁶ Gilbert (1987); on the collective character of organizational knowledge see also Schneider and Angelmar (1993).

⁷⁷ French (1984).

decision-making that discriminates in favor of some individuals over others.⁷⁸ Top officials (“principals”) are given a disproportionate role in determining corporate policies, and control over selective incentives to induce subordinates (“agents”) to cooperate.⁷⁹ Rationalists tend to emphasize centralization as a solution to the collective action problem because in their view people only cooperate when it is in their self-interest. However, this is unlikely to succeed unless a second condition is also met: that individuals have *internalized* corporate norms in how they define their identities and interests. When norms are not internalized people have an instrumental attitude toward them; they may go along with the group, but only because they have calculated that it is useful for them as individuals at that moment to do so.⁸⁰ In this situation individuals will constantly question the rationality of their cooperation, constantly look for ways to free ride, and so on, and as such corporate cultures will survive only as long as they are efficient. This is a recipe for institutional frailty, not taken-for-grantedness. Internalization means that corporate culture is considerably thicker than this.⁸¹ In most organizations people cooperate not merely because of what is in it for themselves, but out of a sense of loyalty to and identification with corporate norms. Principal-agent problems might still exist, but overall it will be much easier to institutionalize collective action under these conditions than if actors have a purely self-interested attitude toward corporate structures (see chapter 7).

The institutionalization of collective action gives corporate agency the unity and persistence that it needs, but by itself does not fully convey the sense that the entity which is doing the acting is a corporate agent rather than merely a set of individual agents who happen to work together on a regular basis. The “authorizing” effect of internal decision structures is thus a final constituent of corporate agency: a structure must be organized such that the actions of its members can be attributed to or redescribed as the actions of a corporate body.⁸² The key to this are rules that specify relations of authority, dependency, and accountability among a group’s members that transfer the responsibility for individual actions to the collective,

⁷⁸ See Achen (1989). ⁷⁹ Olson (1965), Moe (1984). ⁸⁰ Hardin (1995a, b).

⁸¹ For a good overview of the implications of this point see Dobbin (1994).

⁸² French (1984: 46–47). This requirement is often seen as important for distinguishing the action of “mobs” or “crowds” from that of corporations; see, for example, Copp (1980), Gilbert (1989), and Tuomela (1989).

so that individuals act as representatives or on behalf of the latter.⁸³ This is not an “as if” claim. Authorization means that individuals’ actions are constituted *as* the actions of a collective. For example, we do not hold the soldier who kills an enemy in war responsible for his actions because he is authorized to kill by his state. Of course, how one draws this boundary between individual and corporate responsibility is a complicated issue and at the heart of debates about war crimes. It is questionable whether individual responsibility ever is fully given over to the state. Still, corporate agency cannot be reduced completely to the actions of its elements because the latter are not merely “actions of its elements” in the first place.

In sum, concrete individuals play an essential role in state action, instantiating and carrying it forward in time, but state action is no more reducible to those individuals than their action is reducible to neurons in the brain. Both kinds of agency exist only in virtue of structured relationships among their elements, but the effect of those structures is to constitute irreducible capacities for intentionality. These capacities are real, not fictions. This is not to say we should never decompose the state into its elements, any more than the fact that the mind cannot be reduced to the brain means we should not do brain science. A reductionist analysis will shed much light on the constitution of state agency. Insofar as the state is ontologically emergent, however, anthropomorphizing it is not merely an analytical convenience, but essential to predicting and explaining its behavior, just as folk psychology is essential to explaining human behavior.

Why anthropomorphizing the state is still problematic

There are nevertheless at least three important differences between individual and corporate agents which point to the limits of anthropomorphizing the state.⁸⁴ Acknowledging these limits moves us considerable distance toward the critics of the unitary actor model, but does not entail their conclusions.

The first difference is that corporate agents are less unitary than individual ones. Although people can have multiple identities, and often engage in contradictory or irrational behavior, biology gives their bodies more coherence, and constrains their action to a greater

⁸³ On corporate responsibility see French (1984).

⁸⁴ The following discussion is indebted to Geser (1992).

extent, than is the case for the discursively constituted state. Because they are made up of many individuals (and organizations), each with their own intentional capacities, states can do more things at once than people can, often without “the right hand” knowing what “the left hand” is doing. From an observer’s (or another state’s) point of view, in other words, there may be more “noise,” perhaps much more, in the “signal” of state agency. Interestingly, this may be less of a problem in state agency than for other corporate bodies – which scholars seem more willing to call actors – since even if a state has multiple personalities domestically they may manage to work together when dealing with outsiders. Nevertheless, there is at least a difference in degree between the unitariness of individual and corporate agents, which makes attributions of intentionality to the latter problematic.

Second, and in some sense conversely, it may actually be easier to assess the intentions and therefore predict the behavior of states than it is of individuals. Political Realists have often extrapolated from the difficulties of reading the human mind (the “Problem of Other Minds”)⁸⁵ to a supposed difficulty in knowing the intentions of states, and on that basis justified worst-case assumptions about the threat posed by those intentions. This inference may be unwarranted. It is hard to read individual minds because we cannot see inside them. Lacking telepathic powers, we have to fall back on context and behavior to infer what others are thinking. In contrast, the structure of corporate “minds” is typically written down in organizational charts that specify the functions and goals of their constituent elements, and their “thoughts” can often be heard or seen in the public debates and statements of decision-makers. To be sure, any claim that states are more transparent than individuals must be tempered by several considerations: the difficulty of knowing which of the many statements of officials represents the “official” line (the signal to noise ratio problem), the relatively thinner social context in which states operate (which provides fewer external cues to intentions), and the fact that states may want to maintain secrecy about their decision-making processes for security reasons. Yet, very few states today are complete black boxes to each other (North Korea is one of the few whose “mind” seems as hard to read as the human mind), not least because states are internally related to societies over which they rarely have

⁸⁵ Hollis and Smith (1990: 171–176).

complete control. The actors and processes of civil society provide considerable information to other states on their own state's intentions and capabilities, and the spread of democracy will only increase this openness in the future. More and more, in other words, states will be able to literally look inside each other's "heads" in a way that individuals never will.

Finally, states have alternatives to "interaction" that people do not. As biological creatures human beings have indivisible and unmergeable bodies with only limited capacities for specialization. Whatever improvements they can make in their lives will therefore almost always require interaction, or action *between* ("inter") distinct bodies. As Hans Geser⁸⁶ points out, because they are social structures corporate actors have additional strategies available to them that biologically constituted bodies do not: division (Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Divorce"), growth (conquest), merger (German reunification), interlocking (international regimes), and specialization (delegating responsibility for security to another state, as in spheres of influence). To varying degrees these strategies do not presuppose a given body and as such are not "interaction" in the usual sense. Compared to other corporate actors states may be less willing to pursue such strategies because the institution of sovereignty teaches them to be especially jealous of their individuality. However, even states are increasingly resorting to non-interactive strategies, and with the spread of democracy and growth of trans-societal linkages this seems likely to continue.

These differences between individual and corporate agents suggest that building the academic study of the states system with theoretical tools taken solely from the intentional sciences (especially psychology, social psychology, and economics) will limit or distort our understanding. In some ways and contexts states are simply not "people." If this is all that nominalists mean to call our attention to then there is not much to disagree with, since whether or not anthropomorphizing the state is appropriate will then be an empirical question. But their claim often seems to be broader, that states are not actors, period. This claim is unwarranted. In many ways and contexts states *are* actors, and in those cases intentional explanations are an essential part of our theoretical tool-kit. State-skepticism implies that in principle we could dispense with state-as-actor talk

⁸⁶ Geser (1992: 440–446).

and not lose any explanatory power. I doubt this will ever be possible, any more than folk psychology will ever be reduced to brain science.⁸⁷

Identities and interests

I have argued that states are the kinds of entities to which we can attribute identities and interests. In this section I define these two concepts and illustrate their application to states.⁸⁸ We will then be in a position to discuss the national interest at the end of the chapter.

In the philosophical sense an identity is whatever makes a thing what it is. This is too broad to be of use here, since then even beagles and bicycles would have identities, and so I will treat it as a property of intentional actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions. This means that identity is at base a subjective or unit-level quality, rooted in an actor's self-understandings. However, the meaning of those understandings will often depend on whether other actors represent an actor in the same way, and to that extent identity will also have an intersubjective or systemic quality. John may think he is a professor, but if that belief is not shared by his students then his identity will not work in their interaction. Two kinds of ideas can enter into identity, in other words, those held by the Self and those held by the Other. Identities are constituted by both internal and external structures.

The character of this internal–external relationship varies, however, which suggests that rather than being a unitary phenomenon susceptible to general definition there are actually several *kinds* of identities. Building on several extant and not entirely compatible typologies,⁸⁹ I shall discuss four kinds of identity: (1) personal or corporate, (2) type, (3) role, and (4) collective. This list is not exhaustive, nor do I pretend that my definitions are definitive. At a crude level there seem to be important differences between these concepts, but the closer I look the fuzzier the differences get, and so what follows should be seen as only a first cut.

Personal – or in the case of organizations, corporate – identities are constituted by the self-organizing, homeostatic structures that make

⁸⁷ See Jackson and Pettit (1990) for a defense of folk psychology.

⁸⁸ Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein (1996: 52–65).

⁸⁹ McCall and Simmons (1978), Hewitt (1989), Fearon (1997).