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THEORY AND PRACTICE**

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# The Anthropomorphic Fallacy in International Relations Theory and Practice

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## ABSTRACT

A headline of the Venezuelan daily *El Nacionalista*, published June 16, 2008, read: “*Venezuela se negó a seguir de rodillas ante las pretensiones del gobierno norteamericano*”. A few weeks before, on May 8, president Hugo Chávez himself had said that Venezuela “would not watch crossed-armed” (“*Venezuela no se quedará de brazos cruzados*”) while Bolivia was driven into territorial desintegration by imperialist forces. The image of Venezuela with her arms crossed is one of slovenliness and negligence, whilst the image of it on its knees is humiliating. They both generate outrage and the need to set things “right”. This is only an example of the often unnoticed practical and theoretical consequences of the anthropomorphic language we all use when referring to states in terms of (for example) “weak” and “strong” actors who “suffer”, are “honored”, are “humiliated”, have “pride” and aspire to “glory”. This language obscures the fact that, oftentimes, when a weak state challenges a strong one at a great cost to itself, we are not witnessing an epic of courage (as might be the case when a weak individual challenges a strong one), but rather the sacrifice of the interests, welfare and sometimes even the lives of multitudes of poor people, to the vanity of their elite. The very fact that this is being obscured biases the value structure of international relations theory, which is not only not value-free, but often has totalitarian values unwittingly built into it.

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\* NOTA: Las opiniones expresadas en este trabajo son del autor y no necesariamente reflejan las de la Universidad del CEMA.

## **Introduction**

This paper deals with the often unnoticed practical and theoretical consequences of the anthropomorphic language that we all use when referring to states in terms of (for example) "weak" and "strong" actors who "suffer", are "honored", are "humiliated", have "pride" and aspire to "glory". Among other consequences, this language obscures the fact that, oftentimes, when a weak state challenges a strong one at a great cost to itself, we are not witnessing an epic of courage (as might be the case when a weak individual challenges a strong one), but rather the sacrifice of the interests, the welfare and sometimes even the lives of multitudes of poor people, to the vanity of their elite. The very fact that this is being obscured biases the value structure of international relations theory, which is not only not value-free, but often has totalitarian values unintendedly built into it.

Indeed, the development of international relations as a social science is made ever more difficult (if not hopeless) because this is a field in which we are the prisoners of language. The structure of language itself often determines modes of thought that condition our theoretical frameworks and their policy implications in diverse ways, to the point of placing a specifically linguistic limit to knowledge. For instance, it is difficult to think without metaphors and analogies (like a state's "suffering"), yet thinking with metaphors and analogies can easily lead to fallacies with serious unintended consequences

Indeed, when we speak of states we frequently engage in what E.H. Carr has called "the fiction of the group-person"<sup>1</sup>, and as a consequence, unknowingly, we often adopt attitudes toward states and their policies that would be fitting for individuals but are clearly unsuitable vis-a-vis institutions and politicians who are in turn responsible for the rights and interests of individuals. This is true of first-rate theoreticians, politicians, journalists, and the man-in-the-street alike: we all engage, often unwittingly, in the fiction of the group-person. Yet to deal with the state as if it were a person, abstracting its relations with its citizens or subjects, is to unintendedly incorporate a totalitarian bias into theory. On the other hand, to highlight the relation between a state and the individuals under its care, avoiding the latter bias, enormously limits our modeling capacity in interstate relations.

Nevertheless, I will argue that the modeling capacity generated by the state-as-person fiction leads to both theoretical fallacy and normative pitfalls. The state-as-person fiction puts us in a frame of mind whereby we spontaneously tend to think of the accumulation of state power within the interstate system as the "natural" goal of states. Looking at this phenomenon from a normative point of view, I argue that to some extent this frame of mind has often fed back into the ambitions of many an elite, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. On the other hand, looking at the same phenomenon from a theoretical perspective, this frame of mind tends to obscure the empirical fact that the major objective of states is often not the accumulation of state power within the interstate system, but the maximization of citizen welfare, or alternatively, the consolidation of domestic power for a certain state-structure, elite or individual. The natural flow of thought stemming from the state-as-person fiction leads the mind away

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<sup>1</sup> E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, London: Macmillan, 1962; page 149.

from the individuals to whose service the state should be dedicated, under liberal democratic assumptions.

Needless to say, these three basic types of state objectives can at times converge in terms of what the adequate foreign policies needed for their successful implementation might be, but this will not always be the case, and oftentimes the policies needed to maximize state power within the interstate system might turn out to be the very opposite of those needed to maximize citizen welfare. On the other hand, all three types of state objectives coexist in a state's policy agenda, but inevitably one will dominate the others, so that --for example-- the accumulation of state power in the interstate system will sometimes be subordinated to the quest for citizen welfare, while sometimes it will be the other way around. Obviously, the specific kind of relationship between these sets of objectives in a state's policy agenda will be connected to a country's specific attributes: its political system, its social structure, and its political culture, among others. To make it even more complex, it is often impossible to say which of these types of objectives dominates a state's agenda, insofar as this in itself can be subject to flux.

Modeling hence becomes close to impossible when we abandon the simplistic premises of the state-as-person fiction. Therefore, the latter is not, as has been previously supposed, a convenient fiction that helps to model reality, but one that distorts reality and our theoretical models of it, while it concomitantly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that contributes to model reality in a perverse way. Happily, the accumulation of state power in the interstate system is not and never has been the sole major priority of states. Both the consolidation of domestic power and the care of the citizens or subjects under the care of a state have been alternative types of state objectives that have competed with the accumulation of interstate power as a state's primary objectives. But, as already stated, this obvious fact has and continues to be obscured by the state-as-person fiction.

In turn, the anthropomorphic fallacy in international relations discourse is a linguistic offshoot of the state-as-person fiction which is worthy of attention and study. Even though I will argue that it is well nigh impossible to avoid value judgements in the construction of international relations theory, the linguistic mechanism whereby we tend to confuse the attributes and behavior of states with those of individuals, as well as its consequences for foreign policy and interstate relations, can be described and studied in a value-free way. The anthropomorphic fallacy is an universal mechanism which has not been explicitly pointed to in the literature, and to explore its causes and consequences everywhere will enhance our understanding of the way the world works, and might have significant theoretical consequences as well.

### **Definition of the anthropomorphic fallacy**

As has already been stated, the anthropomorphic fallacy in international relations discourse is a metaphor. Language is permeated with metaphors, and it is almost impossible to avoid their usage. An ad hoc classification of metaphors would include:

I. General metaphors (present in the structure of language independently of the sphere of specialization of a given discourse), and

II. Metaphors which are specific to the field of international relations, which can in turn be subjected to a double classification. One classification of specifically international relations metaphors would include:

1. Organicist metaphors, which include both properly anthropomorphic metaphors as well as zoomorphic ones, and can in turn be subdivided into:
  - a. those related with individual feelings (such as "honor", "pride", "dignity", etc.),
  - b. those related with parts of the human body or "spirit" (such as "knees", "lips", "soul", etc.), and
  - c. those otherwise related to the state-as-person fiction.
2. Mechanicist metaphors (such as "bipolarity", "balance of power", "mechanisms", etc.).<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, a second classification of metaphors would include:

1. Innocuous metaphors (a metaphor that helps to conceptualize through the comparison of a concept or phenomenon with a more familiar one, but lacking identifiable emotional effects, as is the case of most mechanicist metaphors), and
2. Activating metaphors (metaphors with a potential for emotional mobilization).

Given this ad hoc classification of the metaphors found in the discourse of international relations, I will define the "anthropomorphic fallacy" as an "activating organicist metaphor". Thus, the anthropomorphic fallacy is one of several types of metaphors to be found in the discourse of international relations. It is a metaphor which establishes a comparison between a state and a living organism whose constitutive elements (e.g. individual cells, arms, legs or feet) are essentially subordinated to the whole and cannot have a separate existence. As such, it has built in totalitarian values. On the other hand, it is as well a metaphor with a potential for the mobilization of the loyalties and energies of individual human beings.

### **Normative implications of the anthropomorphic fallacy**

The calls for foreign policies based on national "honor", "pride", "dignity" or "glory" are to be found, in certain conjunctures, in all societies. Obviously, concepts such as honor, pride, dignity or glory refer to emotional values that are connected to an individual's nervous system. One does not have honor; one feels honor. An individual can feel honor, dignity or glory, but a collective entity that is not endowed with a nervous system of its own cannot. There is no such thing as "national" honor; in the best of cases, there is only the sum of the "honors" of the individuals that make up a "nation" or (more precisely) a country.

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Rosa Milos, a doctoral student at the University of Belgrano, brought to my attention this category of metaphors in international-relations discourse.

The latter may not be a logically valid statement, of course, if our assumption about the "nation" is organicist, as is the case with some totalitarian ideologies. But if we do not subscribe to totalitarian political values and want to prevent them from creeping inadvertently into our thought, we must be aware of the essential fallacy of ascribing to a "nation" qualities and feelings that are attributable to individuals but not to aggregates of individuals.

If we agree to reject organicist assumptions, then we must concede that the sacrifice of material values necessary for the livelihood of a people, to emotional values such as those proposed by the anthropomorphic fallacy (i.e., the call for foreign policies based on values such as "national pride", "glory" or "greatness") is:

1. Essentially elitist. The distribution of emotional values is usually unequal (Khadaffi probably enjoyed his challenges to the United States more than the average Libyan), and the distribution of the material sacrifices involved is almost sure to be unequal. The distribution of material values is also unequal, of course. The difference lies in the fact that because no one is fed with "dignity", the modest benefit obtained by the poorest sectors of society from, for instance, a better commercial balance, is much more important for these sectors, in terms of simple biological survival and welfare, than the modest share of nationalist pride that can accrue to them from a foreign policy that is willing to sacrifice material values for the sake of "dignity". Concomitantly, they will be the ones to suffer most from the material price paid for that "dignity". Honor, dignity, glory and pride are inevitably more important for those whose primary necessities are well covered than for those who are hungry and without shelter, and the state is under the obligation to serve both of these sectors of society fairly. The duels of honor of the days of yore were basically an affair of gentlemen, not of plebeians: generally speaking, and unless they are hypnotized by indoctrination, the great masses had and continue to have other urgencies, and policies designed to promote these emotional values cater to the vanity of the elites. This is not to say that they serve only the vanity of the elite in power. On the contrary, they frequently serve both the government and the opposition elite, and sometimes an aspiring counter-elite as well, and this is what makes it so difficult to expose these policies as just another kind of class exploitation. This sort of elitism is incurred in by elites of both the right and the left, under all sorts of social and economic systems.

2. Consumerist. Such policies often lead, for example, to arms purchases that are made at the expense of development projects, and thus lead to more poverty and less power in the future. Today's nationalist emotions are tomorrow's additional subordination.

For both reasons given above, policies based on the anthropomorphic fallacy are less justifiable the poorer a country is. Yet empirically, extreme policies based on the anthropomorphic fallacy that lead to great material sacrifices have often been adopted by Third World countries (Libya, Iraq, Iran, North Korea), and indeed in present days the frequent invocation of values that emerge from the fallacy as a basis for policy is much more frequent in the Third World than in the industrialized West.

This was not always the case, of course. Until recent decades, some of the foreign policies of the countries of Western Europe had a clear prestige orientation (the German expression *eine Prestige-frage* became a bane of European foreign offices), and such foreign policies were justified with arguments that incurred in the anthropomorphic

fallacy. In certain extreme cases, the anthropomorphic fallacy became a metaphysical fallacy: "eternal France", a cliché of educational textbooks and political discourse, is a case in point.

Ultimately, the anthropomorphic fallacy and associated phenomena are finely-tuned mechanisms used to mobilize irrational energies at the service of a "national" cause (which is frequently only the cause of an elite). By referring to the collective entity to which the individual belongs in language that is identical to that used to refer to the individual's body, the sense of an identity inextricably linked to the collective entity is reinforced in very powerful terms. The collective entity "suffers", "kneels", is "humiliated", is "glorified", "loves" its "children", has "brethren", its provinces are each others' "sisters", and territorial losses are painfully referred to as "dismemberments" (as in the loss of a human arm or leg): these anthropomorphic expressions are typical of the contemporary Latin American political discourse, and abounded in nineteenth century Western European literature, among several other times and places. Fed to citizens from earliest childhood, they help to activate nationalistic emotions through the unconscious identification of the collective entity with the individual's own body. Later, when used as a justification for policy, it is psychologically very difficult for the individual not to accept a rationale which would be impeccable if it referred to his/her own biological body. The mechanism serves therefore to mesh the levels of the individual and of the collective entity into one and the same in the citizens' minds, facilitating mobilization and making opposition to policy based on anthropomorphic rhetoric appear ignoble and criminal. Thus, the use of the masses for the purposes of the elites is facilitated.

As already said, the poorer a country is, the greater the relevance of the costs of such policies in terms of the welfare of the populace. Yet this self-evident argument is usually obscured by the very power of the anthropomorphic fallacy, a power that is enhanced by its widespread use for centuries, everywhere.

### **The historical origins of the anthropomorphic fallacy**

This is interesting and paradoxical, because the fact that "dignity" and other such concepts are not attributes of collective entities but of individual human beings and can at times be at odds with the general interest, is something that became obscure in the Modern Age, but that was clear to some ancient civilizations. For instance, in his essay about private life in the Roman Empire, Paul Veyne tells us that:

*Since public dignity was in truth private property, it was admitted that whoever was elevated to public office should show it off and defend it as legitimately as a king defends his crown. No one thought of reproaching Caesar for crossing the Rubicon, marching against his country and throwing it into civil war. The Senate had attempted to curtail his dignity, and Caesar had made it known that he preferred his dignity to everything, including his life. Nor is it reasonable to blame El Cid for having killed the king's best soldier in duel in order to save his honor.<sup>3</sup>*

Likewise, in his essay about late antiquity, Peter Brown tells us how, with the advent of Christianity, the elites of the Roman Empire abandoned the old sort of philanthropy that

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<sup>3</sup> P. Ariès and G. Duby (eds.), *Historia de la Vida Privada*, Buenos Aires: Taurus 1990,; Vol. I, page 109.

had the objective of elevating the status of their city and thus excluded the very poor from its benefits, and channeled their efforts towards the latter. Christianized, the Roman notable converted from *philopatris* (a lover of his native city) to *philoptôchos* (a lover of the poor), in terms of his ethical ideology.<sup>4</sup>

This substitution of a model of urban society that underlined the duty of the well-born towards the status of their city (itself often referred to in anthropomorphic terms), for another based in the solidarity of the richer vis-a-vis the poor, that took place towards the second century A.D., illustrates to what extent the elitism of any discourse centered on the emotional values related to the status of a collective entity should be obvious. Likewise, the greater compatibility of a more materialistic discourse (such as that of early Christianity) with the ideal of social justice should be obvious too. But the private character of the emotional benefits of policies geared towards values such as the "dignity", "glory", "honor", "pride", etc., of collective entities; the essential elitism that underlies such policies; and the incompatibility of these policies with ideals of social justice (especially in the case of countries with large masses of poor people), were all obscured by the functionality acquired by the discourse based on the anthropomorphic fallacy with the emergence of "nation-states".

Indeed, the anthropomorphic fallacy would have made no sense in the medieval world. Following John G. Ruggie's able synthesis in the context of a different discussion,<sup>5</sup> that was a world in which:

1. There existed multiple titles to the same territory, generating "a patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights of government" in the context of chains of lord-vassal relationships.<sup>6</sup>
2. Not only were there no clear boundaries between what would later become modern states, but the concept of boundary made little sense.<sup>7</sup>
3. Its ruling class was continental and was able to travel and take charge of government from one extreme of Europe to another.
4. Property was not absolute but conditional, carrying with it explicit social obligations. On the other hand, authority was private, residing personally in the holder of the fiefdom.
5. There were "common bodies of law, religion and custom that expressed inclusive natural rights pertaining to the social totality formed by the constituent units". They served the function of legitimizing this system of rule.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In Ariès and Duby, *op.cit.*, pages 255-256 and 284.

<sup>5</sup> J.G. Ruggie, "Continuity and transformation in the world polity: toward a neorealist synthesis", in R.O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 141-148.

<sup>6</sup> J.R. Strayer and D.C. Munro, *The Middle Ages*, 4th. edition, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts 1959, p. 115; cf. Ruggie, *op.cit.* p.142.

<sup>7</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York: Academic Press, 1974, p. 32; cf. J.G. Ruggie *op.cit.* p. 155, note 22.

<sup>8</sup> J.G. Ruggie, *op.cit.* p. 143.

6. The constituent units of the system were considered to be "municipal embodiments of a universal community".<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the medieval world was not "international" simply because it made no sense to speak of nations in that context, but it was far more inclusive and universal than the state system that followed. In the medieval world it thus made no sense to anthropomorphize a territorial unit that could one day be ruled by a prince from Aragón and the next by a Burgundian duke; a territorial unit that might be the fiefdom of a ruler who, in a different territorial setting, was the feoffor of the very prince of which he was feoffee in the former. In such a world it made no sense to engage in such metaphysical metaphors as "eternal France", and it was perfectly logical that the coat of arms of the English crown carry mottos in French or in any other European language. In such a context, soldiers fought for their religion, for their king or prince, or for their very lives and those of their kin, but not for their "fatherland" or "country", which would have been nonsensical concepts.

In contrast, the shift toward the modern state system implied the "rediscovery from Roman law of the concept of absolute property and the simultaneous emergence of mutually exclusive territorial state formations", which gave a new, "modern" meaning to the old concept of sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the medieval plural allegiances and asymmetrical suzerainties tended to disappear, as the "patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights of government" faded. In this way the state, as an unambiguous territorial unit, replaced the fief and the chains of lord-vassal relationships. The concept of "nationhood" --the often fictitious link of culture and kin between the people who inhabit a territorial unit organized as a state-- helped to legitimize the new political realities, to the extent that insofar as it is taken as unproblematic, the very concept of the "nation-state" is, more than a theoretically useful descriptive category, an ideological instrument for legitimization, and to some extent a self-fulfilling prophecy as well.

Eventually, the modern state system and its main legitimization instrument, the concept of nationhood, became so hegemonic (in Gramscian terms) that "nation-state" status is automatically awarded to almost any existing territorial state, even the newest and most artificial ones. As a consequence, most political scientists today do not ask themselves whether, for instance, Ecuador is or is not a "nation"-state. It is accepted as such if it is a member of the United "Nations", and this is of course what its dominant elite needs and demands. And we speak of a field of "international relations" even though most scholars will agree that it deals mostly with "interstate" relations. It is indeed curious, for example, to read a 1992 article by John C. Garnett in which the author specifies that "scholars have emphasized (...) that the focus of the subject is interstate relations", notwithstanding which this is practically the only place in the paper where such a term is used, and on that very page it is twice replaced as "international society" and "international relations".<sup>11</sup>

"International" gained much wider currency than "interstate", even though "interstate" is (for this analysis) much more accurate a concept than "international", simply because

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<sup>9</sup> J.G. Ruggie, *op.cit.* p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> J.G. Ruggie, *op.cit.* p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> J.C. Garnett, "States, State-Centric Perspectives, and Interdependence Theory", in J. Baylis and N.J. Rengger, *Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992; page 64.

"international" is more mobilizing and therefore more functional to dominant interests than "interstate". Thus even though a scholar may be conscious of the fact that he or she is not really talking about international relations, usage commands, and the subconscious often plays tricks as well, in such a way as to enmesh us in mental and linguistic traps which lead to the reinforcement of the interstate system under the emotion-activating guise of an international system. Furthermore, this linguistic phenomenon is not limited to the realm of international relations: male supremacy, for example, has been reinforced during centuries by language habits that assume that supremacy.

On the other hand, as soon as the concepts of the nation, the country, the state and/or the nation-state become unproblematic, are confused with the government and/or the individual statesman, and are meshed together in the state-as-actor model, the possibility of disguising government or statesman-centric policies as "nation"-centric policies arises, and this is what actually happened with the advent of the modern state system. In addition, it is taken for granted (at this level of analysis) that the "nation" represents the citizenry, and that the problems that affect the citizenry fall outside the scope of this type of theory. Thus the "nation" became a motor for mobilization and a justification for demanding the greatest individual sacrifices, which were dressed in the ethically alluring guise of altruism and "patriotism", although they often served the pettiest and most unholy interests. And concomitantly with this ideological phenomenon, political rhetoric became plagued with anthropomorphic and even metaphysical images of the "nation"-state, which became yet another instrument for legitimization and for the generation of an irrationality functional to the mobilization of loyalties. This in turn helped to legitimize the quest for state power in the interstate system as the generic state's basic objective, and to subordinate the quest for citizen welfare to the quest for state power, at least at the theoretical level.

The anthropomorphization of the "nation"-state was almost an automatic process. While John Locke legitimized the state in the new bourgeois society in terms of the need to protect natural individual property rights (a relatively new concept and phenomenon), Emeric Vattel legitimized the interstate system that acquired a recognizable profile with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, in terms of the need to preserve the separate existence of states. For Vattel, an inter-"national" community and international law were necessary precisely for this reason: to protect the sovereign states, just as each state and its domestic law were necessary to protect the rights of individual men (especially proprietors).

Anthropomorphization followed naturally. All that was necessary was to bring back to life an ancient tradition, easily identifiable in, for example, Thucydides, for whom the subject of history was not the individual but the polis, the former being under the obligation of caring for the "honor" of his city.<sup>12</sup> When, in *Droit de Gens* (1758) Vattel wrote about "the international law of political liberty", he was referring to the "liberty" of states, i.e., he was ascribing to the state an attribute that corresponds to the individual, who has a nervous system, a mind and a will with which to use his/her liberty. "Liberty" was applied to the individual within the state and to the state in the interstate system. Thus, the anthropomorphic fallacy is built into the language of the fields of international law and international relations as a sort of birthmark or original

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Pericles' funeral oration. Thucydides, *Historia de la Guerra del Peloponeso*, México D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, 1989; page 83 (Book II, Chapter VII).

sin. Indeed, the fields themselves were born as an effort to legitimize the modern state-system, and the anthropomorphic fallacy has that functionality. The fact that the fallacious analogy for which the state is to the interstate system what the individual is to the state, ultimately leads to totalitarianism and contradicts the contractarian logic of Locke and others, mattered little and deterred no one from adopting it. After all, those were not precisely democratic times, and even had they been, the need to legitimize the state and to mobilize loyalties has always been greater than the need to avoid logical contradictions and flawed thinking.

It could be argued, of course, that to speak of the "liberty" of states is simply to engage in a metaphor, just as I engaged in one above when I wrote about the field's "original sin". My reply to this has already been suggested in my definition of the anthropomorphic fallacy: it is indeed very difficult to write or to speak without metaphors (and this should lead to a reflection on the limits to this type of knowledge), notwithstanding which there are metaphors with identifiable consequences and metaphors without them. The anthropomorphic fallacy in international relations discourse is not innocuous, is not without consequences, and often has had mobilization effects and therefore, policy consequences and an impact upon the real world.

### **Theoretical flaws generated by the anthropomorphic fallacy**

That Vattel should have spoken of the liberty of states is neither surprising nor outrageous. But that Robert O. Keohane should state that:

*an actor with intense preferences on an issue may be willing to use more resources to attain a high probability of a favorable result than an actor with more resources but lower intensity (preferences).*<sup>13</sup>

is somewhat more disconcerting, as is the fact that in *Power and Interdependence*, R.O. Keohane and J.S. Nye reason that "poor, weak states" can sometimes impose their policies on stronger ones because they "may be more willing to suffer".<sup>14</sup>

Even more depressing is that Kenneth Waltz should assert that:

*States, like people, are insecure to the extent of their freedom. If freedom is wanted, insecurity must be accepted.*<sup>15</sup>

"Freedom", we must remember, is a term that is always unconsciously endowed with positive and noble qualities. Quite unintendedly, the above quotation is almost a glorification of tyranny, insofar as this "freedom" of states leads to the subjection of masses of individual men and women who, without consultation, are mercilessly thrown into battle and destruction.

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<sup>13</sup> R.O. Keohane "Theory of world politics: structural realism and beyond", in R.O. Keohane (ed.) op.cit. 1986, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1977, pages 18, 19, and 53.

<sup>15</sup> K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979, Spanish-language edition page 165.

Stephen O. Krasner's language (and vision) are still more corrupt, insofar as he is closer to understanding the normative implications, for the Third World, of his words and concepts, and he simply does not seem to care. His anthropomorphisms sometimes reach colossal proportions, as when, for example, he tells us that "*the South will have no enthusiasm for the North's attempts to change international norms in areas such as (...) human rights*".<sup>16</sup> What does the "South" and its "enthusiasms" mean? Who is the subject of its enthusiasms or lack thereof? Obviously not the people, but the elites. A small group of people are thus endowed by the author with legitimacy and representation over billions of people. Krasner's South is a monster that does not care for human rights. That monster, however, does not in reality exist, but is Krasner's creation. In other words, with his language, Krasner has metamorphosized the small power elites who do not care for human rights but that do exist, into something much bigger and more powerful that does not exist and has no right to exist.

Yet another shocking anthropomorphism comes from the pen of Hedley Bull, when he tells us that:

*A corollary or near-corollary of this central rule is the rule that states will not intervene forcibly or dictatorially in one another's internal affairs.*<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the use of the term "dictatorial" to the intervention of one state in the way another state controls its citizens or subjects is one of the better examples of the anthropomorphic fallacy in contemporary international relations literature, insofar as it is a way of denying the essential social compact within each society. If we say that state A is "dictatorial" vis-a-vis state B because it forcibly attempts to prevent human rights violations in state B, then we are acknowledging the right of state B to violate human rights within its territory, and we are furthermore treating state B (and indeed, all states) as if they were organic entities where what counts are not the individual cells (or arms, legs, feet or fingers of the organism) but rather the will of the totality, as it stems from the state. Political values are clearly built into this language. The very use of the term "dictatorship" in a state-to-state level is, unintendedly and in the ultimate logical instance, a justification of dictatorship at the domestic level.

Finally, going back to a previous quotation, that real liberals like Keohane and Nye should say that weak, poor states may be "more willing to suffer" than strong ones is downright astonishing and illustrates to what extent almost the entire field is caught in a linguistic trap with perverse practical and ideological consequences which are quite unintended. That an individual be willing to suffer in order to attain an objective is usually the product of virtue. But states do not suffer. When we say that a state is willing to suffer, what we really mean is that a statesman or government is willing to subject his or its people to suffering. This is usually not the product of virtue but of vice, and moreover it often happens while the statesman himself is feasting. Yet people, including scholars and specialists in the field, rarely stop to think about what "a country's strong resolve" really means, and stand in admiration of this sort of "willingness to suffer".

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<sup>16</sup> S.D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict and the Third World*, page 242 of the Spanish-language edition, my translation of the translation.

<sup>17</sup> H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 70.

It should be underlined that these are not accidental gaffes but rather the conventional language of the field, to be found very often in the literature. John C. Garnett, for example, tells us that "although B may be weaker than A, it may be more determined (...) which may make it more powerful in terms of political effectiveness".<sup>18</sup> Examples could be cited endlessly in every language. It comes from diplomatic practice and spills over, without critical examination, into this pseudo-scientific field that is caught in numerous language and mental traps. In this way, international relations theorists play into the hands of tyrants. Their language is functional to their interests, insofar as a weaker state's greater "willingness to suffer" or heroic "quest for freedom" is taken as a matter of fact. Insofar as we have incorporated the state-as-person fiction, we do not grasp the often gruesome real meaning of these fine-sounding words.

Thus, even for most scholars, the Vietnam war was a contest between two anthropomorphic entities, the United States and the massively mobilized Vietnamese people, and this tends to generate admiration toward the latter instead of pity, which would surely be the more befitting sentiment if our frame of mind were citizen-centric instead of government or state-centric. Likewise, accomplished U.S. Latinamericanists have said to me that they regretted that Argentina "caved in" to Britain under the Menem government. In their minds, Argentina and Britain are two anthropomorphic entities. They generously side with the underdog, but they do not stop to think about the consequences of a continuation of abnormal tension in the South Atlantic in terms, for example, of Argentina's country risk index, investment and development opportunities and, specifically, economic relations with the European Community, all of which affect the standard of living of the average Argentine citizen. Intuitively, they would have preferred a greater "willingness to suffer", because their mind frame in interstate affairs is government or state-centric, and they do not realize that this is contradictory with their liberal democratic convictions and their contractarian political philosophy.

If First World intellectuals fall into this mental trap vis-a-vis contexts that to them are foreign, it goes without saying that, within Third World societies, governments frequently make use of anthropomorphisms to mobilize the masses, and ordinary people (as well as intellectuals) are often deceived by the policy implications of the anthropomorphic fallacy. Indeed, the government-centric and/or state-centric frame of mind is so hegemonic that when a government official makes use of anthropomorphic metaphors to generate emotions functional to his policy, he usually does not realize exactly what he is doing, or where the trap lies.

Obviously, these ideological phenomena help to legitimize the state (regardless of how tyrannical) and are functional to the interests of the elites vis-a-vis their manipulation of the masses. They are mechanisms whereby irrationality is generated and put at the service of allegedly "national" interests that are often nothing more than elite interests. As has been said, they can be traced (at least) to Vattel's time and are built into the fields of international law and international relations. Since Vattel's time, however, the West has evolved ideologically and politically. It has forsworn absolutism and even authoritarianism. Yet at least some significative segments of its language and thought categories have remained unchanged, sometimes leading it unknowingly in such

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<sup>18</sup> J.C. Garnett, "States, state-centric perspectives and interdependence theory", in J. Baylis and N.J. Rengger (eds.), Dilemmas of World Politics: International Issues in a Changing World, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1992, page 76.

unintended directions as the legitimization of elite manipulation of the masses in foreign, usually Third World contexts.

The mechanisms that contribute to generate this irrationality have seldom been demythified. Although no worthy thinker has ever taken seriously the pretention that his/her "fatherland" was "eternal", this sort of nonsense has been stated shamelessly through the educational systems of most countries during centuries, and few mainstream thinkers have publicly rebelled against this type of discourse. And anthropomorphisms are much more frequent and effective linguistic traps than metaphysical ones like the one just cited, to the point that sophisticated analysts and theorists of international relations fall unconsciously into their trap.

For most international relations theory developed in the United States (including neorealists and institutionalists) the state is to the interstate system what, for individualist contractualism, the individual is to the state. The problem is that in likening the state to the individual, we inadvertently legitimize totalitarianism, which is the very opposite of contractarian individualism. This is so because by establishing the above analogy, we forget that while for contractualism and liberal democracy the rights of the individual are sacred, the only thing sacred about the state is its duty toward the individuals who are under its care. The state has individuals underneath it, while the individual is, speaking metaphorically, like an atom of society. Hence, the individual's position vis-a-vis the state is simply not comparable to the state's position vis-a-vis interstate system. To assert this, of course, is to assert the political values of contractualism, which is to abandon value-free theory. But not to assert this, and to hence go on to establish an analogy between the individual's relation to the state and the state's relation to the interstate system (and engage in all of the anthropomorphizations that follow naturally from this operation) is to implicitly incorporate totalitarian political values and also to abandon value-free theory.

In my opinion, there is no way of escaping from this interesting paradox: general international relations theory cannot be value-free. If it does not explicitly endorse "good" values and build them into its assumptions, it will implicitly and unknowingly build in values that are functional to the powers that be, irrespective of their contents. A corollary to this assertion is that international relations theory will inevitably be more normative than explicative, irrespective of the illusions of the theoreticians.

Hans Morgenthau managed to escape these contradictions because he never forgot his commitment to the liberal political value whereby, while the individual is responsible for him or herself, the state is responsible for the individuals whom it must represent and serve. Indeed, putting it in his own wise words:

*The individual may say for himself: 'Fiat justitia, pereat mundus (...),' but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.*<sup>19</sup>

If the state has no right to sacrifice the individual for the sake of justice abroad (this is the issue that Morgenthau had in mind), then much less has it got the right to sacrifice it to satisfy the whims, vanity or ambition of an official or an elite. This is, of course, a

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<sup>19</sup> H.J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York: Albert P. Knopf, 1948, page 10.

value judgement based upon an assumption about what the relations between the individual and the state should be. The assumption is a contractarian one and comes from the tradition of Hobbes, Locke, John Stuart Mill, Rousseau, Alberdi and Renan: the state is based on an underlying, implicit social compact, and the only valid justification for the existence of the state lies in the defense of the rights and interests of its individual citizens. It is my contention that the use of the state-as-person fiction unintendedly carries the opposite, totalitarian assumption, whereby the individual lives to serve the state, and that it is impossible to build a general international relations theory without an implicit conception of the state, which will not be value-free.

It should be noted here that I find it remarkable that my reasoning on this point should converge with that of an interpretive scholar such as Richard K. Ashley. The philosophical assumptions on which the present paper is built, which are those of contractarian individualism, are explicitly rejected by Ashley. Yet this difference in our initial assumptions does not interfere with the identification of the serious logical contradictions incurred into by the neorealists and institutionalists. On the other hand, there is no need to recur to critical theory to identify these contradictions: a correct logical analysis leads to their identification from within contractarian individualism. This is much more useful and convincing than doing so from the arguments of a contending radical perspective.

But Ashley's exercise is interesting because it serves as corroboration. Criticizing utilitarianism and contractualism, Ashley tells us that they threaten to fracture the "statist" pillars of neorealist and interdependentist international relations theory.<sup>20</sup> Assuming myself as a contractualist, I would put it the other way around: the "statism" (i.e., the conception of a state-as-actor that is analogous to the individual) of mainstream international relations theory betrays liberal democracy itself. Thus, I fully endorse Ashley's conclusion on this score:

*Despite its statism, neorealism can produce no theory of the state capable of satisfying the state-as-actor premises of its international political theory. On the contrary, by adopting a utilitarian theory of action, order, and change, neorealists implicitly give the lie to their idée fixe, the ideal of the state-as-actor upon which their distinctions among "levels" and their whole theory of international politics depend.<sup>21</sup>*

And the extent of my convergence with this author reaches what to me are bewildering proportions when he tells us that:

*The history of utilitarian thought is, after all, largely the history of philosophical opposition to the "personalist" concept of state required by neorealism's international political theory.<sup>22</sup>*

Indeed, the history of the political philosophy on which liberal democracy hinges is the very opposite of the policy implications of both the statism of mainstream international relations theory and the policy implications of the anthropomorphic fallacy. Yet despite this philosophical tradition at the level of civil society, the vested interests of the state as

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<sup>20</sup> R.K. Ashley, "The poverty of neorealism", in R.O. Keohane (ed.), *op.cit.* 1986, p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> R.K. Ashley, *op.cit.* p. 279.

<sup>22</sup> R.K. Ashley, *op.cit.* p. 280.

an absolute unit and the need to legitimize it and its manipulations of its citizenry vis-a-vis the interstate system, have conspired to make it very difficult to identify these contradictions, and have made a statist theory of international relations functional to the established powers.

On the other hand, it may be no accident that these phenomena can be more easily identified, exposed, and their contents demythified today, in the dawn of a new age in which the nation-state is increasingly in crisis. Paraphrasing Robert W. Cox, the anthropomorphic fallacy corresponds to a hegemonic structure of a world divided into states. To some extent and for a variety of reasons, the present world order, which is still divided into states, has evolved towards a nonhegemonic structure. The management of power relations is at present more difficult to obscure. And we can, rationally, identify logical flaws in our discourse that are the product of the historical process that led to the present power configuration and frame of mind.

In other words, it has become more feasible to identify the contradictions incurred by ideologies whose function has been to legitimize the nation-state, and it has likewise become possible to identify linguistic traps and thinking-modes such as the anthropomorphic fallacy that (while functional to the legitimization of the nation-state as an unproblematic concept), are contradictory to foreign policies based on an honest and true (albeit bounded) citizen-centric rationality under contractarian assumptions.

Nonetheless, in the Third World, where states are indeed often weak, and specifically in Latin America, where states are often more artificial than in some other regions and where nationhood is more a myth than a reality, the anthropomorphic fallacy is still of great functionality to the ruling classes as an instrument for mobilizing loyalties. It is thus widely used, often affecting foreign and defense policies, and contributing to lead them away from a citizen-centric rationality. Its demythification is therefore all the more relevant and all the more difficult.

### **Local “nationalisms” and the anthropomorphic fallacy in Spanish America**

Needless to say, "nations" are always artificial to some extent, and commonality has been built intentionally by their states in a measure that is always substantive but varies from case to case. This variation is of great interest and cannot be ignored. In the case of Spanish America there is a huge contiguous land mass with countries that share elements such as language, a predominant religion, a common Colonial heritage, and to some extent a similar racial mixture, the sum of which would be more than sufficient to define a "nationality" in Europe. Yet continental Spanish America is divided into fifteen independent states. One major problem faced historically by these states has been to justify their independent existence, when the similarities with their immediate neighbors have been so great. Thus, ever since independence, the states of Spanish America have dedicated themselves, basically through their educational systems and the military draft, to the generation of perceptions of differences with their immediate neighbors, generating myths about their essentially ambitious and evil character, which abound in educational texts. In this way, they have devoted themselves to the destruction of a pre-existing commonality.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For the Argentine myths, see C. Escudé, *El Fracaso del Proyecto Argentino: Educación e Ideología*, Buenos Aires: Tesis/Instituto Di Tella 1990, and C. Escudé, "Contenido nacionalista de la enseñanza de la

This commonality had to be replaced by a new one, that had ideally to be limited to the borders of the state. Thus, another problem that these states have had to cope with has been their internal heterogeneity, since the ethnic and cultural differences that do exist many times cut across boundary lines. A state like Ecuador, for instance, is made up of two sharply different regions, the coast and the *sierra* (or mountain). The second of these regions is inhabited by a state-less nation, the Quechua-speaking Andean Indians, who are basically the same as their cousins in the Peruvian and the Bolivian Andes. For more than a century and a half, the Ecuatorian state has devoted itself to the task of attempting to convince the Indian population of the Quito region that they have more in common with the mestizo population of the Guayaquil region than with their cousins from Cuzco. Concomitantly, the Peruvian state has devoted itself to teaching the Cuzco Indians that they have more in common with the mestizo population of the coastal Lima region than with the Quito or Bolivian Indians. To some extent, something similar happened in Argentina, where an inhabitant of Buenos Aires has objectively more in common with an Uruguayan than with an inhabitant of the Argentine province of Corrientes; where an inhabitant of Corrientes has more in common with a Paraguayan than with an inhabitant of the Argentine province of Jujuy; where an inhabitant of Jujuy has more in common with a Bolivian than with an inhabitant of the Argentine province of Mendoza; and where an inhabitant of Mendoza has more in common with a person from central Chile than with an inhabitant of Buenos Aires.

Hence, differentiating themselves from their neighbors, and neutralizing perceptions about existing heterogeneities within the territory of each state, have been complementary tasks of artificial nation-building by the Spanish American states. In this task, the anthropomorphic fallacy has been recurred to continuously. The educational texts of these states have constantly referred in anthropomorphic terms to the pseudo-nations that they attempt to consolidate, thus generating an identity between the individual citizen and the artificial collective entity. The task of local "nationalisms" has been to hide and destroy the realities of the larger Spanish American commonality (which could have been the ground for a less artificial nationhood), and of local heterogeneity (which could have jeopardized the local "nation"-building efforts).

This has been (and continues to be) functional to the interests of local elites, because of several reasons. The need for independence of one Spanish American state from another does not emerge so much from the interests of their peoples, but from those of their local elites. Local "nationalisms" are constructed to serve the interests and vanity of these elites, very often at the expense of the people, who as a consequence have suffered the burden of expensive arms races that have deteriorated their already low living standards. Thus, frequent recurrence to anthropomorphic justifications for policy in terms of glory, honor, dignity and pride, supported by myths about the dangers posed by ambitious if not evil immediate neighbors, are not only fallacious in their logical structure but often conceal the very material selfish interests of military corporations that demand huge budgets, sacrificing economic development and the welfare of the masses. Although progress with the contemporary projects of Latin American integration might eventually neutralize these long standing historical phenomena, the

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geografía en la Argentina, 1879-1986", in A. Borón and J. Faúndez (eds.), *Malvinas Hoy: Herencia de un Conflicto*, Buenos Aires: Puntosur 1989.

anthropomorphic fallacy continues to be used for these purposes in Spanish America, sometimes seriously distorting foreign and defense policies.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, there are other associated and complementary uses to the anthropomorphic fallacy that have been hinted to in the previous section. In Spanish America, the "nation" is not the only object to be treated anthropomorphically. With considerable frequency, so is the territory, and this takes us to the realm of irredenta, another phenomenon that leads to foreign policy irrationalities, not only in Spanish America. This use of the anthropomorphic fallacy is very similar to the one whereby there is a call to material sacrifices for the sake of honor or glory, with the difference that in this case (at least in Latin America) it is the land mass instead of the "nation" what acquires the attributes of a living organism.

There are many examples of the use of this sort of linguistic mechanism for irredentist mobilization throughout the Argentine literature on foreign relations. For example, one author (who was motivated by geopolitical considerations vis-a-vis Chile, the arch-enemy of Argentine territorial nationalists) said that poor Patagonia "*continued being an empty and abandoned land, the perennially cast-aside member of the Argentine family*".<sup>25</sup> This language has the function of rallying support for the geopolitically-inspired Patagonian cause (encouraging population and investment policies), using the emotional trick I have described. As a consequence, few people stop to think that to postpone the development of Patagonia is a grave error if it means underutilizing Argentine resources (that should be used to give the Argentine people the best possible standard of living), but that Patagonia is not an end-in-itself, and that it is the people, and not the territory, who are endowed with rights and interests: the territory is merely a resource of the people and for the people. There is in this discourse a curious (and indeed frequent) inversion of values: the priority is not placed on the individual, and not even on the people (as a collective entity), but on the territory. This is the logical consequence of thinking of the very "nation" in anthropomorphic terms: the territory is like the nation's body, and Patagonia or Falkland/Malvinas become the equivalent of an arm or a leg. Not investing in Patagonia becomes the equivalent of letting a foot gangrene; it thus becomes irrelevant that the investment might happen to be the worst possible allocation of resources from an economic perspective.

Moreover, the anthropomorphic fallacy can also be used to justify aggressive foreign policies. Indeed, in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, some of the most interesting Latin American uses of this fallacy are associated to Venezuela's policies of challenging the United States rhetorically and of intervening in the affairs of neighboring countries. For example, a June 16, 2008 headline of the local daily *El Nacionalista* read: "*Venezuela se negó a seguir de rodillas ante las pretensiones del gobierno norteamericano*". A few weeks before, on May 8, president Hugo Chávez himself had stated that his country "would not watch crossed-arms" ("*Venezuela no se quedará de brazos cruzados*") while Bolivia was driven into territorial desintegration by imperialist forces. The image of Venezuela with its "arms" crossed is one of slovenliness and negligence. It is a call to action, maybe even to arms. On the other hand, the image of

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<sup>24</sup> Political discourse is particularly affected by this phenomenon, and speeches of leaders are often an anthology of anthropomorphisms,

<sup>25</sup> C. Escudé, *La Argentina, ¿Paria Internacional?*, Buenos Aires: Belgrano 1984, pages 118-119. The author cited is Miguel Angel Scenna, "Argentina-Chile: el secular diferendo", Part I, *Todo es Historia*, No. 43, Nov. 1970, page 10.

the country on its “knees” is deeply humiliating. It generates outrage and the need to set things “right”, as the Chávez government supposedly has done.

These linguistically-activated emotions, that sometimes become embodied in foreign policy with disastrous and even criminal consequences, probably would not be avoided if international relations theorists were keenly aware of the anthropomorphic fallacy as a phenomenon that hinders our understanding of our subject matter and projects itself into policies. Interests are usually more powerful than theory, philosophy and/or ideology, and the sort of emotional reaction that is encouraged by the anthropomorphic fallacy would continue to operate in the world. Nonetheless, if theorists were more careful with their words, tyrants such as Saddam Hussein would at least not have been encouraged by brilliant Ivy League professors who issued *urbi et orbi* the "empirical, value-free" statement that claims that "poor, weak states may be more willing to suffer". The unavailability of such pseudo-scientific nonsense could make a big difference from time to time.

If, furthermore, theorists dedicated themselves to unveiling this mechanism for the mobilization of emotions and loyalties, the rationality of political life, both domestic and interstate, might in the long-run be enhanced, and humanity's chances for survival increase.

### **Conclusions**

The identification of the anthropomorphic fallacy is of normative, explicatory, and even epistemological value insofar as this fallacy:

1. Is a type of metaphor conducive to flawed thinking and to the generation of emotional behavior functional to the mobilization of loyalties toward the state, whose identification and policy consequences can and should be the object of empirical study. In this sense its identification and study can help to explain some foreign policies that make use of this mechanism through which support for symbolic objectives linked to a society's collective self-esteem is generated. Concomitantly, its identification can be of normative use, helping to prevent the formulation of policies based on this sort of emotional manipulation for the sake of objectives that are usually not truly citizen-centric but are disguised as such by elite interests and by a government or state-centric frame of mind.
2. Is related to totalitarian and organicist assumptions about human nature and about the relation between the individual and the state that inadvertently creep into international relations theory.
3. Is found both in political and in theoretical discourse. A situation is thus created whereby allegedly value-free international relations theory unintentionally helps to legitimize totalitarian polities and their elite-serving foreign policies.

Nonetheless, although the identification of the anthropomorphic fallacy and of its policy implications are relevant for all of these reasons, it must be pointed out that the use of anthropomorphic language, the unproblematic character of the state for mainstream international relations theory, and the normative implications of these linguistic and conceptual problems, can be said to lead to actual logical fallacy only insofar as, by

rejecting organicist assumptions, we implicitly or explicitly adopt contractarian assumptions. Hence, the very identification of this phenomenon in international relations discourse is an eloquent proof of the fact that philosophical assumptions are of necessity built into the very logic of international relations theory.

The anthropomorphic fallacy and the state-as-person fiction from which it stems is present in most international relations theory, including the neorealist, interdependentist, institutionalist and dependencia literature. It seriously flaws most of the present-day thinking on the subject. However, its effects are more serious vis-a-vis the neorealist approach to the study of world politics, because this model's founding assumption is that the accumulation of power is the foremost objective of the generic state in the interstate system, and both the state-as-person fiction and the anthropomorphic fallacy have consistently served to emphasize this assumption, subordinating alternative but equally relevant state goals in the formulation of foreign policy (such as citizen welfare or the consolidation of domestic power) at the theoretical level.

Indeed, anthropomorphization and the state-as-person fiction naturally lead to the realist assumption that the quest for power will be the generic state's foremost objective in the interstate system. Yet this is clearly not empirically true in many cases. Foreign policies are often formulated with citizen welfare in mind. And oftentimes, they are formulated with the aim of consolidating a domestic power structure, for the benefit of either an individual statesman or an elite.

All three types of objectives are usually present in a foreign policy agenda, but which is the predominant objective to which the others are subordinated will make an important difference. This is clear when we consider the fact that although there are some intermediate foreign policy objectives such as "national security" that can be justified both in terms of the accumulation of state power and in terms of citizen welfare, the amount of national security that a state will buy if its foremost priority is the accumulation of power will usually be greater than what it will buy if its foremost objective is citizen welfare. The state-as-person fiction and the anthropomorphic fallacy obscure this basic normative dilemma, to the point that even liberal theoreticians use language such as a weak state's greater "willingness to suffer" than a strong one, without realizing the often deeply perverse meaning of an anthropomorphic collective being's alleged readiness to accept sacrifice.