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It is with great pleasure that I find myself writing the introduction to the review forum for my friend and colleague Nicolas Guilhot’s *After the Enlightenment*. I begin this introduction by mentioning my relationship with Guilhot in the interest of full transparency: he and I have co-authored pieces in the past (including one republished in updated form in the book under consideration here); his scholarship has influenced mine; and we agree that the early realists promoted a strand of thinking in the tradition of the counter-Enlightenment and that this strand was imbibed and domesticated by IR scholars between the 1940s and 1970s.

*After the Enlightenment* is a masterful work that should become required reading for all students of IR in both political science and history. I have already added it to my own syllabi, and I hope others will do the same. More than any other book on the history of realism, *After the Enlightenment* convincingly demonstrates that realism’s origins are found in a set of anti-liberal principles that emerged as a result of the rise of Nazism and the myriad failures of liberal democratic governance in the twentieth century’s first half. Perhaps even more importantly, Guilhot shows that these principles continue to shape the contours of realist thinking—and hence IR, in which realism remains *primus inter pares*—today. If one wants to understand the discipline of international relations, one must read and wrestle with *After the Enlightenment*.

Guilhot’s book makes a number of substantial points relevant to our contemporary moment. Specifically, he rightly emphasizes the degree to which “security has become the universal framework of political thinking and the primary deliverable of any policy, foreign or domestic,” in both the United States and Western Europe. (1) Guilhot argues—correctly, to my mind—that our security-focused politics has desiccated modern political thought by eliminating from consideration “[t]he ideals that once seemed capable of mobilizing political energies behind transformative projects,” be they human rights, socialism, or democracy. (2) In the wake of the failures of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, western elites have understandably grown skeptical of the messianic impulses that drove U.S. foreign policy after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Instead of advocating “democracy promotion” or “nation building,” both IR scholars and members of the foreign-policy establishment have embraced a “realism [that] places limits upon the kind of political goals that one can pursue and … makes it difficult if not impossible to pursue positive or transformative goals.”

Theoretically, this could be a sanguine development; after all, since 1945 U.S. imperialism has done significant damage to the world and to the American polity (even as it prevented the outbreak of a general European war). But, Guilhot demonstrates, the “realism” that U.S. elites presently endorse is problematic because it conflates two ideas. On one hand, there “is realism as an ethical attitude, a reflexive relationship to one’s actions that relies on prudential conduct in the pursuit of whatever ends one has chosen. It is normatively neutral and does not preclude any political or moral end.” This is a realism that any serious political actor must embrace if she wants to shape the world in her image. On the other hand, however, there is a realism that functions as “an ideology.” This realism involves a specific conception of human nature and of historical time. It places limits upon what one can hope to achieve. These limits are not dictated by a concrete situation; they are metaphysical limits, constitutive of human nature and built into a historical process that, in the last instance, is considered to be in the hands of God—or at least not in those of men. This realism stifles the capacity to
elaborate any political project beyond the maintenance of order—it is, by definition, a conservative realism. (4)

Since World War II, Guilhot claims, American thinkers have fused these two realisms into a dominant foreign policy ideology that has infiltrated both the seminar rooms of academe and the halls of power. It is this Janus-faced realism that prevents foreign policy elites from imagining a better world, let alone helping to build it.

Modern political realism is therefore a philosophy of the counter-Enlightenment. Similar to early critics of the Enlightenment like Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre, twentieth- and twenty-first century realists were (and are) skeptical of human perfectibility and Whiggish notions of history. Specifically, Guilhot shows that realism is organized around three conservative assumptions: first, that liberal democracy is a weak political form that could easily fall prey to “totalitarian” threats; second, that humans have an innate will to power that no law could keep in check; and finally, that ordinary people are ignorant and irrational, and thus foreign policy must be made by an unaccountable elite of decision-makers.

After the Enlightenment reveals that realism emerged in the maelstrom of the interwar years, when the rise of Nazism appeared to demonstrate that the Enlightenment faith in “progress” was naïve at best and dangerous at worst. It is no surprise that many of the early U.S.-based realists, including John Herz, Hans Morgenthau, and Hans Speier, were German émigrés who had witnessed first-hand the destruction of the Weimar Republic, which they attributed to ordinary people’s irrationality. These individuals were convinced that history, as Guilhot eloquently puts it, had proved “that the fundamental liberal provisions that organized social life in the West could survive only if they were supplemented by forms of politics that were not liberal.” (7) For this reason, the exiles and American-born allies like George Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr affirmed an “aristocratic nostalgia for eighteenth-century style diplomacy and more generally for unaccountable forms of decision-making.” (15) Over the course of the twentieth century’s second half, this reactionary form of realism came to dominate the discipline of international relations and U.S. foreign policy discourse, though the mechanism for how realism influenced the latter is unclear in both After the Enlightenment and contemporary scholarship. Indeed, a fecund area of inquiry for graduate students and more advanced scholars might involve exploring the connections between academic and practitioner realism.

The reviews collected in this forum are all very positive. While each of the reviewers offers criticisms and poses questions to Guilhot, they are all in agreement that After the Enlightenment is a substantial achievement. I will highlight some of their concerns, as these get to the heart of several questions surrounding the historical origins of realism.

In his review, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins raises a critical question concerning the influence of Carl Schmitt on realism. According to Guilhot, early émigré realists, especially Hans Morgenthau, were deeply shaped by the Nazi jurist’s political writings. But, Steinmetz-Jenkins asks, do we really need Schmitt to understand realism? Were not many interwar intellectuals skeptical of liberal democracy and its ability to stave off existential challenges? Guilhot’s response to these questions provides needed nuance to his—and other’s—use of Schmitt. Schmitt, Guilhot convincingly argues, is not important because of who he influenced, but rather is important because he reflects “a common outlook shared by many anti-positivist thinkers that would be[come] central to postwar realism and IR theory.” “What Schmitt really did,” Guilhot explains, “was to express more cogently than anybody else, with superior rhetorical brilliance—and, one may add, with less analytical rigor—[ideas] that [were] floating around” Weimar Germany. Schmitt, in short, “gave particular
clarity and focus to a vision of politics that realists were absorbing, whether through him or not.”¹ According to this argument, realism did not, as Alison McQueen states in her review, “[take] its bearings from a Nazi intellectual.” Rather, Schmitt expressed opinions shared by a politically diverse array of thinkers living in the Weimar Republic who responded to the crises of liberal governance and classical modernity in a similar fashion.²

Or Rosenboim’s review raises three problems with After the Enlightenment: first, she argues that Guilhot ignores the relationship between IR and political philosophy; second, she claims that he is not always clear on how the IR canon was constructed; and third, she asserts that Guilhot presents “liberalism” as realism’s foil, yet does not imbue this term with substantive content. In my own research on the early realists, I have found very few intellectual exchanges between realists and political philosophers. To my mind, this lack of exchange was the result of the fact that many realists were convinced that philosophy distracted more than it illuminated. Most, if not all, realists believed that in an era of international crisis, they needed to explore how power functioned while being careful about not getting drawn into philosophical discussions that, while interesting, had little to say about real world affairs. They therefore largely, if not totally, ignored questions of political philosophy. In terms of the construction of the IR canon, I believe Rosenboim is correct: more work on this subject must be done before we can make any definitive statements concerning the canon’s origins, though After the Enlightenment provides a helpful starting point for this project. Finally, in response to Rosenboim’s point about liberalism, Guilhot argues that for the early realists, “liberalism” did not refer to “a coherent set of ideas.” As my own research demonstrates, realists often considered liberalism to simply be what totalitarianism was not. For the early realists, the mid-twentieth century was not the moment to develop a robust conception of liberalism, but rather was the moment to defend (an under-theorized notion of) democracy from first the fascist and then the communist threats. When totalitarianism was finally defeated, the realists assumed, they would then be able to turn toward figuring out what, exactly, liberalism was. That this answer is unsatisfying to intellectual historians does not affect the fact that it seems to be accurate.

Alison McQueen’s primary criticism of After the Enlightenment centers on a question of continuity and change. Though she agrees with Guilhot’s argument “that Morgenthau read American intellectual history through twentieth-century German eyes,” she is skeptical of his assertions “that Morgenthau held his reactionary and anti-democratic commitments … as ‘dead dogmas’ that were immune to new ideas or that he viewed the American tradition as nothing more than a source of convenient window-dressing” for his already-developed opinions. In one sense, McQueen is correct; indubitably, Morgenthau’s (and other exiles’) ideas evolved over time and were profoundly influenced by American thought. Nonetheless, McQueen may underestimate the importance of Weimar’s collapse to the émigré Weltanschauung. For many—I would venture to say most—exiles, the downfall of the Weimar Republic was the most important political event of their lives, the trauma from which they never fully recovered. From 1933 onward, Morgenthau (and other émigrés) endorsed an elitism that doubted the capacities of ordinary people to make wise political decisions. While at

¹ This confirms recent historical scholarship, which has demonstrated that Schmittian-esque ideas were prevalent across the Weimar-era political spectrum. See Rüdiger Graf, “Either-Or: The Narrative of ‘Crisis’ in Weimar Germany and in Historiography,” Central European History 43:4 (December 2010), 592-615; Daniel Bessner, Democracy in Exile: Hans Speier and the Rise of the Defense Intellectual (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 5-6.

moments he may have praised elements of the U.S. republican tradition, this praise should not distract from the fact that for Morgenthau (and other exiles) the mid-twentieth century was a period of crisis in which a sagacious and unaccountable elite needed to make decisions regardless of whether they were supported by the demos. This conservative judgment remained remarkably stable in Morgenthau’s (and other émigrés’) thought throughout the twentieth century.

Nicolas Guilhot’s *After the Enlightenment* is the best treatment of the history of political realism within the discipline of international relations currently available. It is sure to provoke debate and inspire new research for years to come. Anyone interested in the history of realism, international relations, and political thought should read this impressive and engaging book.

**Participants:**

Nicolas Guilhot is research professor at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. His work sits at the intersection political theory, the history of political thought and international relations. His most recent publications include *After the Enlightenment: Political Realism and International Relations in the mid-20th Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), *The Invention of International Relations Theory: Realism, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the 1954 Conference on Theory* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

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Alison McQueen is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Stanford University. She works on the history of political thought, religion in early modern political thought, and political realism. Her book, *Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times* (Cambridge University Press) is forthcoming in early 2018.

Or Rosenboim is a Lecturer in Modern History at City, University of London. She studied history in Bologna and Oxford, and completed a Ph.D. in Politics and International Studies at Cambridge University. She was a research fellow at Queens’ College, Cambridge. Her new book, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and The United States, 1939-1950* is now out with Princeton University Press.

Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins is a Presidential Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Yale University. He is writing a book for Columbia University Press tentatively titled, ‘The Other Intellectuals: Raymond Aron and the United States.’
Nicolas Guilhot’s *After the Enlightenment* tracks the evolution of realism within postwar International Relations (IR). Like all good evolutionary accounts, the book tells two stories—an origin story and a persistence story.

The origins of (IR) realism lie in a counter-Enlightenment movement that sought to preserve liberal ends with illiberal means. Many postwar realists, like Hans J. Morgenthau, were Jewish émigré scholars for whom the failure of Weimar liberalism loomed large. For these thinkers, totalitarianism was the natural outgrowth of the Enlightenment. The survival of postwar liberalism would depend upon abandoning some of its most cherished ideals. Through close textual reading and rich archival investigation, Guilhot shows that many postwar realists took their intellectual bearings from the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt. They shared his suspicion of mass democracy, his nostalgia for the European diplomacy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his celebration of elite and unaccountable decision-making, and his reverence for traditional and religious authority. If liberalism was going to be defended against its Cold War enemies, the postwar realists concluded, it would have to adapt to dictatorial decision-making.

These counter-Enlightenment commitments help to account for the strength and vehemence of the early realists’ reaction against the behavioralist turn in postwar social science. The very idea of a value-free approach to the study of politics reflected, for Morgenthau and others, a form of moral blindness. If political science was supposed to be value-free, how could its practitioners make principled distinctions between good and evil, democracy and totalitarianism, liberalism and fascism?

But the suspicion of the early realists toward behavioralism can also be traced to a conception of politics that they shared with Schmitt. For the realist, power and conflict are “intrinsic to the human condition” (18). Because of this, politics is a realm of decisions unbound by preexisting laws or rules—decisions about whether to wage war or secure peace, about who is a friend and who is an enemy, about the very “rules of political existence” (18). If politics is a realm of unaccountable decisions whose results are deeply contingent and contextual, then political outcomes cannot be explained—let alone predicted—by general laws or abstract models.

This account of realism’s origins poses an interesting puzzle. How did a school of thought that took its bearings from a Nazi intellectual, rejected the ideals of the Enlightenment, and spurned the project of social science, come to dominate the study of IR and determine the course of foreign policy in Cold War America?

The answer to this puzzle comes in Guilhot’s second story—the story of realism’s persistence. Realism persisted by building a respectable intellectual provenance and making its peace with the culture of science. Let us take these developments in turn. Realists obscured their debt to reactionary thinkers like Schmitt by building a tradition for themselves—a tradition that began with Thucydides and picked up St. Augustine, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes along the way.

The recuperation of Machiavelli and his transformation from a teacher of evil to a realist defender of republican freedom proved crucial to this tradition-building effort. In the hands of historian Felix Gilbert and others, Machiavelli became a clear-eyed defender of political expediency in the service of republicanism. This reading of Machiavelli and of the republican tradition, Guilhot contends, served as arguments for “the possibility of articulating in non-contradictory ways dictatorial measures in the defense of freedom” (26).
the hands of Gilbert and others, Machiavelli became a gimlet-eyed republican, a Cold Warrior, and the “first modern realist” (151).

Beyond this effort at tradition-building, realists ensured the persistence of their ideas by accepting features of the scientific approach. This was not, as the typical framing of IR’s ‘second great debate’ would have it, a realist conversion to positivism. Rather, conceptions of science were changing in ways that made them more compatible with realism. The idea of bounded rationality, the rise of the decision sciences, the growth of cybernetics, and the development of nuclear war simulations in which decisions were entirely divorced from the messy world of democratic politics all contributed to a scientific approach that was congenial to realism’s core commitments. Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* was not, then, the rejection of the postwar realism of Morgenthau and his ilk.1 It was its culmination.

The great virtue of Guilhot’s book is the way in which it unsettles the stories that the field of IR tells about itself. For example, *After the Enlightenment* challenges the notion that the big upheavals in IR theory were driven almost entirely by world events. Take, for instance, the textbook narrative of the ascendency of realism after World War II. This account holds that an amateurish liberal idealism could not explain the failure of the League of Nations, the rise of Germany, or the Cold War. Realism could explain these outcomes and therefore came to dominate the field. Others have pointed to problems with this story. It grossly caricatures the positions of its protagonists and it underplays the diversity and division among both idealists and realists.2

Guilhot makes these points, but he quickly moves on to a more interesting story. A major contribution of the book is the careful way in which it highlights the role of philanthropic funding in explaining the postwar trajectory of IR. While Guilhot focuses on the Rockefeller Foundation, which funded efforts to craft a theory of international politics in the 1950s, philanthropic money lurks around many of the book’s explanatory corners. The Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Stanford, which brought together IR theorists, cyberneticists, and economists at a crucial juncture in the 1950s, was funded by the Ford Foundation. Guilhot’s point is not that outside money disfigured a nascent discipline. Rather, it is that foundations contributed to theory-building, the introduction of new methodologies, and, most importantly, the reorganization of social authority away from academic departments and toward research labs, think tanks, and institutes. This was the beginning of the academic world in which, for better or worse, many of us must now operate.

There are two sets of critical questions I would like to pursue. First, *After the Enlightenment* has a healthy suspicion of realist tradition-building, or the effort to create a continuous intellectual lineage stretching back to Thucydides. Guilhot argues, to my mind persuasively, that the construction of a realist tradition was a postwar exercise in legitimation for a relatively new and troublingly Teutonic school of thought seeking a reputable ancestry. Even setting aside the Cold-War politics that these reinterpretations might have served or


the reactionary ideologies they might have helped to conceal, the temptation to tradition-building is especially strong for political realists. As Michael Williams notes, the assertion “that there is a Realist tradition” that stretches back to Thucydides “is a key component of claims about the continuing salience and wisdom of Realism itself.” If the Peloponnesian War was able to prompt a ‘realist’ analysis as readily as the Cold War, then realism’s insistence that there are certain enduring facts about the political world seems all the more warranted.

But what should all this mean for how we go about interpreting someone like Machiavelli? On the one hand, recognizing that the realist and republican readings of the Florentine thinker are the product of a Cold-War project of tradition-building may be salutary. It may prevent interpretive selection bias. If one reads The Prince as a work written by the “first modern realist,” one is more likely to attend only to those portions of the text that affirm this account, while failing to notice those that do not. However, if one keeps in mind that the realist “tradition” and its conscription of Machiavelli are Cold War constructs, perhaps a fuller interpretation can come into view.

On the other hand, the mere fact that the realist reading of Machiavelli emerged at a particular time and in the service of ideological ends is not, in itself, evidence that the interpretation is wrong. In fact, Machiavelli’s arguments about the autonomy of politics, the dangers of utopian thinking, and the priority of order over other political values are all eminently realist, even if he never assigned such a label to them himself. It would be a shame if our zealous debunking of traditions prevented us from seeing the ways in which Machiavelli’s arguments might contribute to a conversation about the grounds and limits of realism.

Second, Guilhot argues that postwar realists constructed a tradition not only to reap the legitimacy benefits of an intellectual lineage but also to mask “the immediate roots” of their ideas “in the reactionary canon of the interwar years” (83). Realists did not have to cite Schmitt on the state of exception or sovereign power. Instead, they could cite Machiavelli on why emergency powers are necessary to preserve republican freedom or American founding father Alexander Hamilton on the value of a strong executive. There is good evidence that Morgenthau used this strategy in ways that obscure not only the Schmittian, but also the Weberian and Nietzschean origins of his ideas. This is one reason why his work offers such rich and interesting fodder to intellectual historians.

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4 Portions of this paragraph and the previous one draw on Alison McQueen, “Political Realism and the Realist ‘Tradition,’” Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy 20:3 (2017): 296-313. They are explored as well in Alison McQueen, Political Realism in Apocalyptic Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2018), chapter 1.

However, while there seems little doubt that this citational strategy had the effect of concealing some of the reactionary sources of postwar realism, the question of intention is a bit more difficult to resolve. Did postwar realists use this strategy because they wanted to turn both the nascent discipline of IR and the practice of American foreign policy into reactionary and anti-democratic projects? Or did they use this strategy because they thought that some interwar arguments were worth saving and that, in order to do so in their adopted country, they would have to translate them into a friendlier idiom? Guilhot’s argument often leans toward the former possibility. Yet much of the evidence he presents seems also to support the latter.

In the case of Morgenthau, holding fast to the former view introduces an interesting problem. It reduces Morgenthau’s deeper engagement with American traditions in *The Purpose of American Politics* (1961) and his enduring interest in Lincoln to mere cover for reactionary arguments. It seems entirely right, as Guilhot suggests, that Morgenthau read American intellectual history through twentieth-century German eyes. He would have seen and noticed different things than American readers. For these reasons, his approach might well have been “revisionist” (107-8). Yet that does not rule out the possibility that Morgenthau—much like his German émigré colleagues at Chicago, Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt—was influenced by what he found in the American tradition. To assume that Morgenthau held his reactionary and anti-democratic commitments (such as they were) as “dead dogmas” that were immune to new ideas or that he viewed the American tradition as nothing more than a source of convenient window-dressing is not only uncharitable; it is also implausible.6

Still, Guilhot’s *After the Enlightenment* stands as an ambitious, deeply illuminating, and often troubling recovery of the roots of postwar realism in America.

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The last two decades have seen a growing concern with the disciplinary history of International Relations (IR). As IR scholars sought to investigate the historical development of their discipline, they challenged the conventional narratives of a ‘great debate’ between ‘idealists’ and ‘realists’, and even the very meaning of these categories in the field of international affairs. The attempts to fine-tune the historical understanding of the discipline were motivated not only by historical curiosity, but also by the idea that the categories of thought—or paradigms—construct current forms of thinking about world affairs. By rejecting simplistic mythologies, IR could potentially generate new and more sophisticated theoretical structures.

Nicolas Guilhot’s fascinating new book sheds light on the evolution of one of the key theoretical streams in post-war international relations, realism. Guilhot focuses on the development of the realist theory of international relations, to reveal the intellectual forces behind the rise of this mode of thinking to the dominant paradigm in the discipline. On the way, he dispenses with common myths and provides a contextualized intellectual history of key international thinkers in mid-century United States.

The book chapters are based on previously published articles, “revised, augmented and updated” for this new publication (1). The new introduction makes clear that these are “episodes of a single story,” revolving around the intellectual sources of a political tradition which is currently enjoying a new golden age. The revival of realism in American politics today motivated the author to reflect on the intellectual history of this ‘ideology.’

Against those who claim an eternal pedigree for realist political thought, Guilhot flags the historicised, politicised evolution of realism, as a theory of politics that “places limits on what one can hope to achieve.” The idea that realism can be today a promise for progressive and ‘better politics’, is based on a misunderstanding of the historical and conceptual trajectory of realist thought in the last century. Indeed, the author highlights the connections between realism and neoliberalism, two ideological structures that emerged from the crisis of the 1930s and developed into powerful political tools in the United States, often drawing on the same repertoire of concepts and ideas. The republication of Guilhot’s articles, which have already have left a mark on scholarship in IR and the history of ideas, is a welcome addition to the ongoing attempt to outline the contours of realism as a key form of thinking on international affairs.

Who were the realists in mid-century American political thought? The book draws a heterogeneous, multi-generational cadre of disciplinary movers and shakers. Most of them were white American men, including Morton Kaplan, Kenneth Waltz, and Kenneth Thompson alongside German emigres, like John Herz, Arnold Wolfers, Felix Gilbert and Hans Morgenthau, who left their homeland during the war and brought along in their luggage the legacies of Weimar political thought and Carl Schmitt’s conception of ‘decision’ in politics.

In addition, Guilhot highlights some connections with Britain, especially through exponents of the so-called ‘English School’ of international relations, such as Herbert Butterfield and Hedley Bull. Thus, he outlines a multi-disciplinary, heterogeneous collection of thinkers, formed in law and philosophy, renaissance history, and

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and politics, who extended their expertise and drew on ideas in theology, science, philosophy, and history to discuss realism in international affairs.

One of the connecting links that brought together this diverse range of political thinkers is funding and support from the Rockefeller Foundation and other philanthropic organizations. Guilhot therefore returns here to a theme at the centre of his previous edited volume: the contribution of private foundations to the development of international relations theory in the United States.2 Here, again, it seems that the financial support granted by the foundations created the enabling conditions for international relations theory during the Cold War. The conceptual and political preferences of the foundation and its leaders, one of whom was Morgenthau’s student Kenneth Thompson, gave a sense of direction to ongoing attempts to define international relations for the post-war era.

The core of this book is not the story of philanthropic foundations in American international theory. Rather, Guilhot’s main argument is that realism should be understood through its connections with anti-Enlightenment thought in post-war United States. One of the innovative features of After the Enlightenment is the focus on the changing attitudes of realist thinkers to the notions of science and rationality as part of the international decision-making process. As Guilhot argues, “the 1950s were the age of science: to be taken seriously, any intellectual enterprise had to be scientific, and to be legitimate, any political decision had to be based on scientific evidence” (9). Political ideologies came out of the war on the losing side, while scientific rationality seemed to promise a better, more efficient and liberating future. Yet realist international thinkers were critical of the “turn to science,” sharing a “critical diagnosis of modernity” which explicitly put the blame on the Enlightenment for the ills of the twentieth century (13). Realism offered a platform for a conservative, anti-democratic and elitist vision of world order, in which morality and traditional values could play a role in the defence of liberty.

The crux of Guilhot’s argument is grounded in the complex and sophisticated relationship between realism and scientific rationality. The historical importance of the post-war realist movement should not, for Guilhot, be measured by its success in constructing an effective counter-Enlightenment critique. Rather, the realists were able to build and shape the discipline of IR in the United States, conditioning its long-term strategies and intellectual vocabulary. They did this by embracing surprising compromises with scientific culture and political liberalism. If, as Guilhot argues, “what made the main characters of this book ‘realists’ was a general wariness about any claims of being able to replace politics with rationalistic or scientific schemes” (18), then their new post-war challenge was to integrate and implement the knowledge and techniques provided by science within a distinctly political approach to international affairs.

The solution was a turn to cybernetics and artificial reality, which allowed IR scholars to measure, control, and study the irrational and decision-making patterns of political behaviour in sanitised and controlled experimental environments. International relations scholars did not want to emulate the methodologies and epistemology of physics; rather, cybernetics inspired a realist theory of international relations that was rational but not positivist, and allowed a space for political decisions. The credibility provided by scientific methods

encouraged IR realists to implement them in their discipline, but the underlying conservative, antidemocratic, and elitist counter-Enlightenment ideology was ever present.

By tracing the changing meanings of science for realist IR thinkers, Guilhot reveals how the initial critique of rationality was transformed into the current revival of neorealism and game-theoretical analysis of security and strategic problems. The counter-Enlightenment tradition may appear to lie far from the current trends in IR neorealism, but its normative preferences (and strong influence of Schmittian decisionism) cast a long shadow on contemporary realist political imagination.

The book’s conceptual focus is on ‘realism’ in the particular historical and institutional context of the predominately American discipline of International Relations. Although non-American modes of theorising realism ‘infiltrated’ the American discipline through the influence of émigré scholars and the English School approach, the story that Guilhot tells is essentially American, and grounded in the particular problems faced by the American academia after the war. Thus, the book offers not only a novel attempt at dissolving the myths around the evolution of the discipline of IR, but also a remarkable narrative on the hitherto unexplored social, intellectual, and political forces in the United States that had shaped the discipline.

These thinkers are embedded in a complex web of intellectual and personal connections, which serve to highlight the transition and transformation of ideas though the interpretation of key texts. Yet, Guilhot also shows that these texts were not interpreted ‘à la lettre,’ or in accordance with the author’s intentions. Rather, often the readers invested the text with an alternative meaning that suited better their own objectives. Thus, the history of the realist tradition becomes a story of appropriation, mishaps, and even reinvention, aimed at formulating a coherent and politically persuasive account of international relations for a concrete moment in history.

The evolution of realist thought from the wartime concerns of Herz and Morgenthau, to the post-war rebuilding of the realist canon and the final embrace of science through the proxy of cybernetics provides for an alternative disciplinary history as well as for a provocative argument about the intellectual sources for contemporary IR theory. Yet the origin of the book as a collection of separate articles necessarily leaves some gaps in the story, which trigger the reader’s curiosity. I will briefly raise here three points, on the interplay between realism in IR and political philosophy, on the construction of the ‘canon’ of realism, and on the meaning of liberalism.

First, the discussion of ‘realism’ in American IR downplays the possible interactions between IR and political philosophy on realism and its prospects for the post-war era. If, as Duncan Bell suggested in a recent article, IR and political philosophy often seem like ‘parallel universes,’ which generate little conversation and intellectual exchange, it is worth asking why. Were the conceptions of realism in IR and philosophy incompatible? Did these scholarly ‘universes’ provide alternative or competing versions of realism in the post-war era? Possibly, realism was not as central a strand in political philosophy as it was in IR. Yet it may be worth interrogating the interactions between ‘realists’ in IR and in political philosophy: was there an intense intellectual exchange? Were the boundaries clearly drawn, or did the two ‘universes’ collide? Judith Shklar, a political philosopher who is not often associated with the discipline of IR, appears in the book as a

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sympathetic commenter on the realist project, yet its affinities with her own scholarship in political philosophy are not explored in detail.

Second, the construction of the ‘canon’ of IR is studied here from the perspective of Niccolò Machiavelli’s insertion into the American IR discussion, with Felix Gilbert playing the midwife’s role. Was the re-appropriation of Machiavelli by IR realists a symptomatic episode in the retrospect construction of the discipline’s canon, or were other realist ‘canonical thinkers’ as Thomas Hobbes (who is mentioned on the book cover but is absent from the index), or Thucydides imported into the canon through a different path?

Finally, Guilhot’s careful analysis of ‘realism’ contributes to the persuasiveness of his argument. Yet the notion of ‘liberalism’ is not treated with the same attention. While the destiny of realism is often linked to the idea of the post-war defence of liberty and liberal values, it is unclear at times what these values might be. Like ‘realism’, liberalism necessarily embodies a fragmented, complex, and multifaceted intellectual history. In some chapters, Guilhot links liberalism to a Christian interpretation grounded in theological motifs which aims in essence at the reappraisal of traditional values. Yet, in other chapters, liberalism is tied to a democratic system incapable of delivering on its promises. Are these two ‘liberalisms’ one and the same? What place, if any, did the realists give to ‘liberty’ in their imagined world orders? The book alludes to these problems, and it could benefit from more concrete and direct discussion.

*After the Enlightenment* offers a provocative and thoughtful analysis of the evolution of realism in the American discipline of IR, which will resonate beyond disciplinary history scholarship. By dissolving the myth of realism in IR, Guilhot invites the readers to discover the implicit assumptions on which realism is built and thus, potentially, to enrich their political imagination.
Interest in the intellectual origins of international relations realism theory (IR realism theory) exploded after 9/11. It proved attractive to scholars and politicians who disdained the Bush administration’s desire to spread democracy abroad. Intellectual historians and political theorists also became intrigued by the political and philosophical inspirations of the 2001 Patriot Act, and specifically the idea of a states of political exception, which also led them down the path to realism.

While many first-rate works are now available on the history of IR realism theory. Many of them could be accused of focusing too heavily on a single influential thinker. This, in part, explains why there have been so many books on the thought of Hans Morgenthau published over the last decade or so. Of course, there have been more expansive attempts to provide a comprehensive history of the ideas that have inspired American foreign policy during the twentieth century. David Milne’s Worldmaking: The Art and Science of American Diplomacy is a point in case, as are two books recently published by Perry Anderson: The H-Word: Peripeteia of Hegemony and American Foreign Policy and its Thinkers.

Yet in terms of scholarly acumen and depth, the best book available on the intellectual history of IR realism theory as a discipline in the United States is easily Nicolas Guilhot’s After the Enlightenment: Political Realism and International Relations in the Mid-Twentieth Century. The book not only examines the leading figures of IR realism and so called Neo-realism in the United States, but in doing so unearth a treasure trove of philosophical and political influences with deep roots in European thought.

Guilhot’s story ultimately begins with the failed Weimar Republic, and the German émigré scholars who fled Adolf Hitler for the United States. Many of them arrived in the land of freedom with a great deal of suspicion of mass democracy. Thinkers such as Hans Morgenthau, Carl Friedrich, Felix Gilbert, Hans Speier, and many others, believed that Hitler’s rise to power depended on the enfranchised masses’ willingness to place their faith in the irrationality of a charismatic dictator. As a consequence, these “defensive liberals” (64), as Guilhot describes them, came the United States with a desire to defend theories of elite and wise governance that were insulated from the whims of the ignorant populace.

But these thinkers did not look to the Enlightenment or science for theoretical inspiration: in fact, just the opposite. Weimar’s legal positivism and neutralist approach to constitutionalism proved that the attempt to replace politics with rationalism or technologies was bound to fail. Instead, Guilhot argues, they conceived of politics as a “pre-rational, existential dimension of the human condition that could not at all be reduced to scientific categories or transcended with social technologies” (18).

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In doing so they bucked Enlightenment reason and exuded nostalgia for an eighteenth-century ‘wise man’ approach to statecraft. Guilhot’s point is clear: by the time these scholars arrived in the United States, their thinking about international affairs was anti-democratic to the core.

Thrust into global supremacy after the War, the United States proved intellectually and politically ill equipped for understanding its role in the new planetary order. Policy institutes, universities, and charitable organizations, especially the Rockefeller Foundation, rushed to bring scholars together in the hope of creating some type of theoretical foundation for the practical training of a new generation of foreign policy personnel, diplomats, and political analysts.

It is this specific context, Guilhot affirms, that allowed for a cross-pollination of ideas to occur between anti-democratic émigré thinkers, especially Morgenthau, and various native-born American thinkers who expressed a similar conservative outlook on the post-World Order. The traditionalism of George Kennan, the theological realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the blatant elitism of Walter Lippmann did not seem all that different from the general outlook the Weimar émigrés Guilhot examines. Out of this mélange of thinkers international relations realism was born.

The thesis that political realism is ultimately anti-democratic is illuminating. The book also does much to show how systems theory, cybernetics, and rational choice theory—all of which are typically linked with so called neo-realism—came to replace the ‘great statesmen’ view of diplomacy that had so marked early political realism. The problem remains the same. Whether political elitists are operating the levers of power at an undisclosed location, or some type of Algorithmic Warfare Cross-Functional Team3 is deciding on military action, the bottom line is that the people are shut out of the conversation.

Yet one wonders if some of the book’s more provocative theses are not only hard to historically prove, but are not even necessary to make for the sake of the argument. For instance, Guilhot argues that émigré thinkers, specifically, Morgenthau, were inspired by problematic anti-liberal German thinkers who played key intellectual and legal roles in helping bring down the Weimar Republic.

He claims that Morgenthau’s main theoretical inspiration was none other than Carl Schmitt, the so called Crown Jurist of the Third Reich, who touted an influential anti-moral conception of politics, critique of international law, and stress on executive authority. This basic outlook, Guilhot believes, can be found throughout Morgenthau’s works, specifically the earliest editions of Politics among Nations, which became the bible of political realist thought.4

Such problematic Teutonic influences would have never met with approval in the United States, Guilhot argues, so how did émigré thinkers like Morgenthau manage to Americanize and conceal such an anti-democratic German way of thinking about politics? They invented, he argues, a tradition of political realism that went back to Thucydides and Saint Augustine, to Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and beyond.

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The question is whether the German émigrés he studies really did consciously seek to conceal their problematic inspirations from their new naïve countrymen. That they were educated in Germany and influenced by the trendiest ideas of the day seems hardly surprising. Yet the bogeyman of Carl Schmitt seems to lurk behind every chapter of the book, and often without the hard evidence necessary to prove such an influence.

One senses that in order to convince the readers just how anti-democratic political realism is the authors provides a link between the argument and the thought of a former Nazi is needed. But one wonders how necessary it is to invoke Schmitt, or a reactionary strain of German thought, to make the case that the early American political realists were afraid of the masses. In other words, why is tracing back the illiberal roots of realism to Germany necessary since such elitism and suspicion of the masses were already hardwired into the American political system?

This also raises the question of evidence for these claims. I take it that most scholars now agree—to one degree or another—that Morgenthau was significantly influenced by Schmitt’s thought. But the idea that émigré thinkers hid their problematic German inspirations is a difficult one to prove. The real connection of importance is that their ideas found such a warm intellectual and academic reception in the United States by the likes of Walter Lippmann, Reinhold Niebuhr and others.

Last, it would be interesting to know what Guilhot thinks of Schmitt’s popularity on the Left today. The bulk of scholars who openly draw on Schmitt’s work today are seemingly on the left or often describe themselves as being post-Marxists or socialists. Guilhot, of course, knows this literature, but I wonder if he believes in the possibility of un bon usage de Carl Schmitt and if so is it simply a matter of how one is using Schmitt’s ideas. If that is the case, might he agree that maybe a bit of political theology is not so bad after all?
It is a gratifying and humbling experience to see one’s book discussed with much intellectual generosity by three colleagues whose work on international political theory I admire. I am very grateful to the reviewers for their comments, and to Diane Labrosse and the H-Diplo editors for organizing this roundtable and giving me the opportunity to engage with my distinguished readers.

*After the Enlightenment* was written at a time when realism was making an impressive comeback among IR scholars, intellectual historians and, as the reviewers note, political theorists. It seemed to me then that the resurgence of historical interest in the subject, and in particular in the so-called “classical” realism of the mid-twentieth century, as well as the efforts seeking to provide political realism with stronger normative justifications, were part and parcel of an ideological offensive that sought to cast realism as a promising if not progressive vision of politics. This offensive took place at a time when the ‘idealism’ underpinning liberal globalization had entered a deep crisis, following the weaponization of human rights by the neoconservative movement and the global financial meltdown. A re-enchanted realism was offered as an antidote to the ideological disarray that many felt: it promised both historical wisdom, nourished by a sense of the contingency of power, and a grasp of the true nature of politics, which could never be enclosed very long within the safe confines of legal institutions or dismissed in favor of some blissful and imminent technological future. For some, it also appeared to offer the last-ditch possibility to think “politically” at a time when the traditional subjects of modern politics seemed to have disappeared or reneged on the messianic role that History had allegedly bestowed upon them. Going back to classical realism meant recovering a capacity to discriminate between concrete and imaginary antagonisms, to draw new global lines and thus to set limits to U.S. power. Essentially, the return to realism meant that the United States was reckoning with its incapacity to exercise hegemony over globalization any longer.

While one can rejoice at this perspective, it seemed to me that this ‘realist moment’ was also fraught with ambiguity. After all, there are many ways to limit power: they range from building or constitutionalizing counter-powers to being a benevolent autocrat, and some are arguably better than others. Moreover, the de-imperialization of U.S. power and its recentering on national interests can take many forms, one of which has been the election of Donald Trump. There is certainly nothing univocal in this moment, and while realism may act as a coolant upon the imperial projection of power, its current appeal should not be a substitute for a sober and comprehensive examination of its roots. It seemed to me particularly urgent to understand the nature of realism, in particular of the academic realism that has shaped—indeed, defined—the discipline of IR in the United States and acted as an intellectual compass for much of the postwar foreign policy establishment up to this day. The book suggests that the ‘timeless wisdom’ of realism took shape as a response to specific social and political problems that can be located in the first half of the twentieth century. In order to succeed, however, it had to erase these origins by casting itself as the endpoint of a long historical tradition, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, by adopting the abstract and systemic language of modernist social science, which today defines the “neorealism” taught to cohorts of students. The problems realism sought to address, it goes without saying, are not necessarily those we face today, and realism may not be the panacea it claims to be, no matter how beneficial some of its lessons may be.

As the reviewers point out, I argue that one of the main defining traits of modern realism is a critique of the Enlightenment’s faith in political rationalism. Realist thinkers, and in particular German émigrés, saw the crisis of liberal democracy in the 1930s as the outcome of a flawed belief in political rationalism that had
spread since the French revolution. They thought that politics was a sphere of activity that could not be fully rationalized and required a constant capacity to make decisions outside the extant legal order and the regular operation of political bureaucracies—a belief that indeed placed them outside of the mainstream of American political culture, but proved central to the postwar emergence of a coherent realist discourse applied to international politics and counterpoised to the social sciences. The combination of a reactionary critique of the Enlightenment and a ‘decisionist’ vision of politics that was carried over from Weimar Germany to America (where it found powerful allies amongst some conservatives and Cold War liberals) ensured that realism encapsulated some political ideas which, as all three reviewers point out, were associated with the reactionary jurist Carl Schmitt. One of the questions I explore in After the Enlightenment is indeed how these ideas were transformed, reworked, and incorporated into the Cold War liberal mainstream, thus contributing to redefining it.

Both Daniel Steinmetz Jenkins and Alison McQueen raise the issue of the extent of Schmitt’s influence, which they argue may not be as pervasive as I suggest. One reason for their skepticism stems from an interesting question of method: how can one ‘prove’ the influence of a thinker whom everybody refrains from citing after 1945 because of his deep intellectual compromise with Nazism? Was the disappearance of Schmitt’s name and work from the discussions of international politics, Steinmetz and McQueen ask, the result of a deliberate intention on the part of theorists eager to obscure the now compromised source of some of their ideas, or am I reading too much in to IR?

These are important questions and criticisms. I first want to clarify the extent of Schmitt’s influence, before turning to the question of intention. The ‘Schmittian’ foundations of IR theory have been flagged by other scholars before me, in particular Martti Koskenniemi and William Scheuerman,1 both of whom suggested that Hans Morgenthau’s take on international law and politics was an extension of Schmittian insights. I have only broadened the focus and shown that Schmitt’s status as the arch-realist opponent of Hans Kelsen in Weimar’s legal debates ensured that he became an important figure in the intellectual formation of a number of future IR theorists. Beyond Hans Morgenthau, Schmitt was an important reference for John Herz throughout his life; Waldemar Gurian was one of his students; Arnold Wolfers, who knew Schmitt’s work and had certainly met him when Schmitt taught in Berlin, shared the same critique of Weimar democracy and was an ardent defender of German foreign policy goals (at least as late as 1934); Carl Friedrich was essentially a Schmittian in the 1930s and a self-described ‘decisionist’; the New York-based National Committee on American Foreign Policy was co-founded in 1974 by George Schwab, a long-time Schmitt protégé and apologist;2 in the French context, Raymond Aron discovered Schmitt in 1930, carried over some

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of his ideas in his work, and became a life-long correspondent… The connections are documented and well established.

Nonetheless, Steinmetz formulates a fair criticism when he writes that Schmitt seems to “lurk behind every chapter” and he gives me an opportunity to clarify, and hopefully rectify, this impression. I wrote *After the Enlightenment* as a series of discrete essays, and decided only subsequently to turn them into a book. I did not foresee that collecting the essays would create an impression of Schmitt’s omnipresence, which I now realize it does. Yet, my intention was not to engage in some *reductio ad Schmittum* that would read back an entire discipline into the interwar production of a Nazi jurist, nor even to suggest that the realists were Schmittians. Rather, I have used Schmitt as a short-cut for an intellectual position, a common outlook shared by many anti-positivist thinkers that would be central to postwar realism and IR theory. The decisionistic vision of politics that Schmitt articulated was indeed quite diffuse in the 1930s. The second chapter of Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* (1929), for instance, is a decisionistic tract, locating politics in the sphere of power struggles and non-rationalizable decisions. Otto Kirchheimer, who had been Schmitt’s student, essentially made the same argument about the impossibility of a “science” of politics and criticized Weimar’s constitution as a “constitution without decision.” Carl Friedrich’s first (1937) edition of *Constitutional Government and Politics* develops a decisionistic theory of the constitution. Similar elements can be found in many other anti-formalistic legal and political thinkers, and all this background is what really shaped the realists’ worldview. What Schmitt really did was to express more cogently than anybody else, with superior rhetorical brilliance—and, one may add, with less analytical rigor—an idea that was floating around and tie it to a counter-revolutionary ethos. So it is not so much that Schmitt is behind every realist: rather, Schmitt gave particular clarity and focus to a vision of politics that realists were absorbing, whether through him or not.

This puts me now in a better position to clarify the issue of what the realists’ *intentions* were as they developed a theory of international politics that owed much to what I have called a decisionistic conception of politics. Steinmetz writes that it is “difficult (…) to prove” that the émigré scholars in IR deliberately sought to hide the reactionary origins of their ideas and that there is a lack of “hard evidence” for Schmitt’s influence. McQueen also rightly points at the difference between what may have been an “effect” in the construction of a realist canon (i.e. the understandable disappearance of Schmitt after 1945), and actual “intention(s).” There are two issues that need to be distinguished here: one is methodological, the other is interpretive. Asking for “hard evidence” for, or proof of, the influence of an author whom it is better to no longer acknowledge as a source of inspiration leads to a foregone conclusion: it is not possible to provide such “hard evidence.” But it also needlessly limits the field of legitimate historical investigation to matters that can be settled exclusively

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when such straightforward evidence exists, leaving out all the cases for which either the evidence is not available (but arguably was at some point in the past) or has been deliberately erased.

Dealing with such cases means leaving behind empiricist notions of “evidence,” yet it does not imply that one cannot formulate reasonably plausible answers to the questions at stake on the basis of indirect evidence. Carlo Ginzburg has devoted a number of studies to precisely such cases, suggesting that they point at a form of historical investigation that does not fit the positivistic-empiricist model of social science. He suggests that one looks for “traces” or “clues” rather than straightforward evidence, signs that may have escaped their authors’ attention and may indirectly reveal something about their purposes. While it is of course difficult to find international relations theorists or realist thinkers approvingly citing or quoting Schmitt in order to adopt his way of thinking about the political questions they were struggling with, it is nonetheless possible to keep an eye out for clues pointing at such an influence. This is what I tried to do by paying attention to expressions that were also indexes of specific debates, or echoes of what seemed to be unreferenced references: Morgenthau’s identification of political realism with “concrete” thinking; the similarity of descriptive terms used by Felix Gilbert to describe Niccolò Machiavelli on the one hand, and Schmitt and Mannheim on the other; the conceptualization of the political “decision” as a limit of rationality by Carl Friedrich; the theologico-political language, and so on. These are indeed nothing else but clues, yet they are congruent and they all point at the decisionistic substratum that informed political realism and early IR theory. Added to the familiarity of most authors with Schmitt’s work, they cannot be dismissed on the basis of the lack of “hard evidence.”

These two elements—Schmitt’s role as a placeholder for a broader political and intellectual substratum, and the recurring traces of this substratum in the realists’ writings—now put me in a better position to address the second issue, namely interpreting the realists’ intentions. I realize from the reviewers’ criticisms that at times it may sound as if I ascribe to the realists the deliberate intention to hide the reactionary origins of realism. This is certainly not what I wanted to suggest. That realism is rooted in conservative critique of the Enlightenment political tradition and that this critique was carried over into postwar IR theory is something which, I think, can no longer be dismissed. The realists were involved in translating into a new language—that of the social sciences—in a new context, and for new publics, a certain number of ideas associated with 1930s decisionism, with an antimodernist critique of liberalism, and indeed with a political vision given a certain intellectual flair by Schmitt. This does not mean that they were engaged in a cover-up of some sort. It indicates that they considered that these ideas were relevant to the problems which they thought were plaguing postwar America—the intrinsic weaknesses of liberalism, the need for swift decision-making in the face of security threats, a misunderstanding of power politics, and a dangerous attachment to legalism in world affairs—but also that they were adapting them to a new environment. In trying to adapt this political-intellectual

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6 E.g. Carlo Ginzburg, “Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario,” in Miti emblemi spie. Morfologia e storia, (Torino: Einaudi, 1986). Beyond the obvious differences, similar problems of interpretations are raised by Leo Strauss’s notion of esoteric writing.

7 The translations of this conservative political outlook into a social scientific idiom was not exclusive to IR theory. Something similar took place in postwar Germany with social history. See Jürgen Kocka, “Ideological Regression and Methodological Innovation: Historiography and the Social Sciences in the 1930s and 1940s,” History and Memory 2 (1990), 130-138.
substratum to the new cultural context, the émigrés turned to what Skinner has called “oblique rhetorical strategies.” My argument in After the Enlightenment is indeed that realism in IR cannot be adequately understood if we do not keep in mind that it is largely the result of such an oblique strategy. More specifically, it became an attempt at restating a certain critique of political modernity and a common decisionistic outlook in such a way as to claim for it the mantle of scientific ‘rationality.’ Such a process, of course, was one of compromise, and both decisionism and rationality ended up being redefined—‘rational choice’ being the hybrid result of this strategy. In that sense, I entirely agree with McQueen’s suggestion that what the realists “thought that some interwar arguments were worth saving and that, in order to do so in their adopted country, the would have to translate them into a friendlier idiom.” But by removing entirely the conservative and at times reactionary interwar background of realism, we deprive ourselves of the possibility of understanding the type of problems to which realism saw itself as a response.

Another reason why the realists were not necessarily trying to hide some shameful source of inspiration has to do with the fact that, from an intellectual point of view, Schmitt exerted a broad and transversal influence during the interwar years (and, some may argue, even after World War II): some of his disciples—the Marxist Otto Kirchheimer comes to mind here—were squarely located on the Left. Yet, the realists were certainly no Marxists and they often bought into a critique of modernity that was alien to the latter. This point allows me to address briefly a side question raised by Steinmetz Jenkins, about Schmitt’s popularity today on the Left. On this subject, some distinctions are in order. As the example of Kirchheimer suggests, there has always existed a Left Schmittianism, so to speak, and some contemporary political theorists adopt Schmitt’s critique of liberalism and his denunciation of the international legal order as a façade for hegemony (thus Danilo Zolo or Chantal Mouffe, both published by Verso in English) or glean from him a notion of the autonomy of the political or a theologico-political disposition (as in the case of Mario Tronti.) But this problematic embrace of some Schmittian tropes should not be confused with radically different uses in which Schmitt is taken as one of the major theorists of the (reason of) state, and therefore as symptomatic of the pathologies of our time (as in the otherwise very different readings of Giorgio Agamben and Toni Negri, for instance.) In the former case, he is enlisted as an intellectual ally while in the latter he is treated as an enemy—Negri even considering him as “an extreme fascist”—and blanket judgments about some generic connection between Schmitt and the Left can only obfuscate such crucial distinctions and generate political confusion. The current fascination with political theology reflects a limitation of political imagination on the Left, an incapacity to think beyond the traditional forms of transcendental sovereignty that posits the nation-state as the only true and ultimate instance of politics. As for the critique of liberalism, turning to Schmitt is a real dead-end: what After the

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Enlightenment shows is precisely that liberalism became Schmittian long ago by absorbing the friend-enemy distinction, the capacity to decide upon the exception, etc.: the Schmittian critique has produced all of its effects and defines liberalism today. If anything, it is the political-theological nexus that should be undone.

Both McQueen and Or Rosenboim ask me about the consequences of resituating the realist interpretation of Machiavelli in the Cold War context within which it operated as indeed one of the “oblique rhetorical strategies” for a non-liberal political formula. Rosenboim asks whether the episode was symptomatic of the construction of a realist canon, or whether it was replicated with Hobbes or Thucydides. I can only formulate a tentative reply, which would require extensive research to be confirmed or disproved. It seems to me that Machiavelli was indeed one of the first authors to be reexamined for inclusion in a realist canon, largely because of the arrival of Felix Gilbert at Princeton and his connection with Mead Earle (a bit earlier, Reinhold Niebuhr had declared Augustine to be the first realist, but Augustine never became as widely associated with realism as Machiavelli.) It seems to be the case, however, that Hobbes and Thucydides were later enrolled as well, and that the process followed a pattern not unlike the one I describe about Machiavelli: contrasts were smoothed out or ignored, prior criticisms formulated by the realists themselves were quietly set aside, texts were read with new questions in mind, new interpretations were produced. Although the question would require an entire study, it looks like an important moment for the realists’ adoption of Hobbes was in 1980, when Hedley Bull dedicated an article to the English philosopher in the framework of a special issue of Social Research on Morgenthau: after pointing out that Morgenthau had taken issue with Hobbes in a number of instances (just as he had done with Machiavelli), Bull proceeded to locate Morgenthau in a “Hobbesian tradition.” Since that time, Hobbes has featured prominently in any reconstruction of the realist tradition. But this genealogy remains to be written.

What matters for the authors under consideration is that such interpretations are often perfectly legitimate: McQueen is absolutely right to point out that an interpretation serving an ideological purpose is not necessarily wrong. The questions we ask from texts are rooted in the present and it could not be otherwise, lest we fall into some form of purposeless antiquarianism. In that sense, it took the Cold War and some Princeton-based academics, to foreground the republican aspects of Machiavelli’s thought. But the awareness of the historical nature of interpretations should make us sensitive to the various interpretive layers that make up the reception of a text over long periods of time, and also wary of conflating one of them with the author’s original argument. The postwar realist interpretation of Machiavelli was not wrong—in fact, Gilbert dramatically changed the course of Machiavelli studies in the English-speaking world and certainly influenced Skinner to no small extent—but Machiavelli’s arguments cannot be equated with those of the postwar realists. Yet, McQueen seems to overlook this crucial distinction when she suggests that Machiavelli was theorizing the “autonomy of politics” and the “priority of order”: these are by now standard notions that belong to a reading of Machiavelli popularized in IR, but they were pointedly absent from the realists’ understanding of Machiavelli (and in many ways antithetical to it) and, more importantly, from Machiavelli’s own writings.

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13 If they are “Machiavelli’s arguments,” then they are his arguments only starting in the 1920s, when Croce reads him as the theorist of the autonomy of the political. But the historiographical vein that goes from Felix Gilbert to Quentin Skinner has dismissed such a notion and it seems difficult to defend it today.
Rosenboim also points at the connections between realism in IR and in political philosophy, and asks why they evolved in parallel, with few if any interactions. Here again, I can only venture a few conjectures. Certainly, as Rosenboim suggests, Judith Shklar would feature prominently in this story: a student of Carl Friedrich, a critic of legalism and a connoisseur of realism, she occupied a key position between political theory and IR and was influential for many contemporary realist political theorists such as Bernard Williams. So would other philosophers (Michael Oakeshott comes to mind here) but also historians (Maurice Cowling, for instance). And while there may have been more communication between international theorists and political theorists fifty years ago, it is clear that the situation has changed. It would be interesting indeed to look into the reasons why a distinct strand of realist theorizing about international politics has developed in the field political theory in almost complete insulation from IR, but also to observe the recent signs of their possible reunification—not least thanks to authors such as McQueen herself or William Scheuerman.14 There are several possible explanations. One is that IR theory has evolved in the direction of an abstract neorealism that has totally removed from its own purview considerations regarding the complex interplay between state power, legal norms, and legitimacy. It then stands to reason that the recent re(dis)covery of classical realism has opened new channels of communication between IR scholars and political theorists. Another reason is that, as Duncan Bell points out in the article Rosenboim mentions, a self-conscious realist school of political theory emerged only “in the last decade or so.”15 Political theory was not characterized by the equivalent of the compact realist contingent that dominated IR theory, and it is only in retrospect that a certain number of political theorists privileged some “realist” features they shared over what distinguished them from one another. But the history of realist political theory from the postwar decades onward would require a study at least as extensive as the one I have attempted about international political thought, and it is well beyond the confines of this cursory response.

Finally, Rosenboim suggests that there is a discrepancy between my detailed analysis of realism and a more nonchalant use of the notion of “liberalism.” In part, this is unavoidable when one seeks to provide a historical account of a specific ideology: while it is necessary to situate it in relation to other ideological formations, it is not possible to treat those others with the same degree of detail. One must eventually accept the approximation that goes with words finishing in “-ism” and carry on writing. The realists were essentially trying to convince their publics that liberalism could only survive if it was limited—by which they meant that the freedoms offered by liberal constitutionalism could not be considered absolute, and that American political culture ought to tolerate forms of decision-making that were not bound by it. At the heart of postwar realism was the idea that freedom could not be guaranteed by the free play of liberal institutions and individual choices but needed instead an elite of strong-willed guardians who took upon themselves the moral burden of making existential decisions for the entire polity. “Liberalism” appears in After the Enlightenment as it was seen through realist eyes, and this means that it did not take the form of a coherent set of ideas. For Waldemar Gurian, for example, it was a secularizing ideology that was the root cause of the ills of modernity and could be corrected only by a return to traditional Christian values. For John Herz, it was a progressive ideology that needed realism in order to achieve its goals. Moreover, it is not wholly impossible that it was


precisely the kind of attacks represented by realism that helped give rise to a self-conscious liberal tradition
more or less at the same time. Whatever American liberalism was until then, it was transformed beyond
recognition by the realist contribution. Neither realism nor contemporary liberalism can be understood in
isolation and independently from each other. What After the Enlightenment traces is the unprecedented
ideological fusion that took place after the war, when an anti-liberal paradigm was brought to bear upon, and
eventually blend into, a liberalism weakened by decades of crisis. The result was not just Cold-War liberalism,
but a whole new way of making and legitimizing political decisions as a form of ‘rational choice’ that is still
very much with us today.

16 On the emergence of a liberal tradition, see Duncan Bell, “What is Liberalism?” Political Theory 42:6 (2014):

682-715.