

To the Pacific? Alexander Wendt as Explorer

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Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander (eds.), *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his Critics* (London: Routledge, 2006, 246 pp.).

The book under review here consists largely of articles appearing in various journals between 2000 and 2003 in response to the publication of Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics (STIP)*.¹ Three chapters, however, are new. Two, by Drulák and Sárváry, bring the collection up to Wendt's 2003 article on the world state (WS).² The final chapter is a response by Wendt. His response in terms of *STIP* is fairly limited: Wendt is reasonably satisfied with what he did. However, the critiques in particular and the exchange are valuable guides to some significant issues in IR theory and in the philosophies of science and of social science. As well, there are some substantial suggestions that would contribute notably to IR theory, whether or not they would be acceptable to Wendt. Wendt's response goes well beyond a simple reply to his critics, however, instead presenting a far more audacious approach based on a quantum theory of consciousness.

Erik Ringmar argued in 1997 that there were two Wendts: the first focused on structurationism and scientific realism as ways of thinking about IR, while the second left scientific realism for constructivism, and applied that to IR theory.³ Writing before *STIP* was published, Ringmar was mistaken about the fate of scientific realism in Wendt's thought, and there are clear elements of agent–structure thinking remaining in *STIP* and its associated articles (e.g. 'Anarchy', 'Collective Identity Formation'⁴ and *WS*). Strategic choices made by Wendt in *STIP*, resulting in his strong emphasis on the state and the international system, mark an apparent shift in his thinking that sets him at odds with the other contributors in this volume. There now seems to be a third Wendt emerging, flagged most clearly in his turn to quantum theory, but also seen in his argument for the state as a person (*SP*), a theme that his quantum consciousness approach would support.⁵ But there are also continuities. These include his adoption of scientific realism, the central role of the state and, possibly, the teleological mode of

1. Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

2. Alexander Wendt, 'Why a World State is Inevitable', *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 491–542.

3. Erik Ringmar, 'Alexander Wendt: A Social Scientist Struggling with History', in *The future of International Relations: Masters in the Making?* ed. Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver (London: Routledge, 1997), 269–289. Ringmar found Wendt's application of social constructivism to IR theory but not to the philosophy of science puzzling.

4. Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization* 46, no. 3 (1992): 391–425; 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 384–396 (*CI*).

5. The development of the 'third Wendt' might be traceable to an exchange between Hayward Alker and Steve Smith on the one hand and Wendt on the other, also in response to the publication of *STIP*. See Hayward R. Alker, 'On Learning from Wendt', Steve Smith, 'Wendt's World', and Alexander Wendt, 'On the Via Media: A Response to the Critics', *Review of International Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 141–50, 151–63, and 165–80 respectively. Another precursor is Alexander Wendt, 'The State as Person in International Theory', *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 289–316 (*SP*), which refers to a study in preparation, *Quantum Mind and Social Science*. What appears to be a preliminary outline of this work may be found at <<http://www.quantumconsciousness.org/views/QuantumMindAndSocialScience.html>>. Note, however, that this outline speaks in terms of society rather than the state.

argument found in *WS*.⁶ Our focus here will be particularly on the second and third Wendts, playing the critical responses against *STIP* and then turning to the 'quantum Wendt'.

Wendt presents his turn to quantum theory as a high-risk bet and as exploratory – this, and the fact that his fully presented quantum consciousness position is not yet available, must be kept in mind in any critical response.

The Second Wendt: *STIP* and its Critics

STIP seems to have been addressed above all to an audience in the North American stream of IR scholarship, a stream dominated by positivism, methodological individualism, rationalism, state-centrism and a systemic orientation. In arguing for social constructivism as an approach to IR theory, Wendt initially sets out a more general approach to social theory based on the importance of ideational factors and on a holistic approach that emphasises the impact of the social on individual actors. On this basis, he develops a specific theory of IR as an illustration of the possibilities thus opened up: not the *only* social constructivist IR theory one could create, but an example. In doing so, however, he presents himself as a positivist as well as a scientific realist,⁷ and makes certain strategic choices borrowed from his foil, Waltz.⁸ The specific intent was to demonstrate how his social constructivist approach could generate an alternative even within a state-centric and system-oriented structure of IR theory. Within this, he focuses, in his second, IR theory, portion of *STIP*, on the regulation of collective violence in and through cultures of a society of states.

The qualities of state-centrism, a systemic orientation and the acceptance of positivism may have helped Wendt present himself in terms more amenable to North American scholars, while demonstrating a 'moderate' constructivist alternative to dominant lines of thought. As Guzzini and Leander note here, while he challenges the North American mainstream in his social constructivist approach, he adopts a relatively orthodox construction of IR's subject matter for his specific IR theory. These qualities, however, form a substantial theme in the critical response in the collection, most of which is from outside the dominant North American positions.⁹ Especially in the Kratochwil and Behnke pieces, he appears to be seen more as an incursion from the North American position than as a bridge between it and other constructivists in particular. In this respect, many of the contributions take issue with his systemic-level constructivism focused on the effects of norms on states as opposed to a more actor-oriented (and perhaps more 'reflexive?') constructivism focused on the emergence of norms.¹⁰ Although Wendt does address the construction of interests and identity within actors, his handling of this is reminiscent of Hasenclever *et al.*'s 'weak cognitivist' position, with its potential for a cognitivist-rationalist synthesis. 'Strong cognitivists', however, who would seem more represented among his critics here, would reject this possibility.¹¹ Wendt's constructivism as such seems otherwise most challenged in relation to his scientific realism, even if we disentangle the latter from concerns about his espousal of positivism.

Among other aspects of *STIP*, its relatively mild progressivism, which takes a stronger and teleological turn in *WS*, seems less problematic for his critics. A final quality of *STIP* worthy of

6. This is not strongly present in his chapter here, but it is indicated in the draft outline noted in footnote 5.

7. This possibly contradictory claim will be addressed below.

8. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

9. The Copeland piece is the exception.

10. See Antje Wiener, 'Constructivism: The Limits of Bridging Gaps', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 6, no. 3 (2003): 252–75. See also Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics* 50, no. 2 (1998): 324–48.

11. Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 211–24.

note is that, although it is theoretically rich at both the social theory and IR theory levels, it consciously does not develop a strong, detailed set of hypotheses for testing. His argument is typically fairly abstract and stylised, not empirical. This makes Wendt vulnerable to demands for more complex and empirically richer dynamics, as in the contributions by Cedermann and Daase, Zehfuss, Drulák and Sárváry.

The three qualities of state-centrism, systemic-orientation and positivism will be our primary foci here, as they also provide a grounding for the shift to the third, quantum, Wendt.

State-Centrism and the State System

These two qualities go hand in hand: in *STIP* Wendt produces a theory of the state system, thus focusing on states as his major actors. That this is limiting is clear to him, but he can hardly be faulted, he argues, for a concentration on the state in a state-system theory.¹² Much as Waltz argued that the international system as such has an effect that cannot simply be reduced to mere state interactions or to the internal qualities of states, Wendt wants to show the importance of a system-level factor – the culture of the society of states – on international relations. Inevitably, cultural factors emerge very much as the driver of his IR theory, despite some attention to how such cultures might be produced. The agent, then, appears in *STIP* very much as a receiver of cultural influences, which are then cycled back to reinforce the system level. States, as he notes elsewhere,¹³ are only partially included in his theory in *STIP*: as quasi-autonomous, indeed self-organising actors, they are not strongly a part of the dynamics he explores. Although *STIP* contains a chapter on the state, it is generally treated as a unitary and intentional actor. These characteristics, which in other hands would merely mark a conventional simplification, take on greater significance as Wendt moves to his third stage.¹⁴

In *STIP*, then, the state is the actor, yet it is, following the Waltzian strategy, primarily acted upon by the cultural system. One result of this, evident in Chapter 6, is that Wendt's account of structural transformation seems seriously hobbled. In his matrix of three cultures and three degrees of enculturation, the highest degree of enculturation for each is also the most stable: culture is treated as a relatively conservative force.¹⁵ At the lower and less stable

12. This is a forest-and-trees sort of argument: one cannot have a forest without trees, and thus a focus on trees as the defining characteristic of forests is understandable. A response would be that, while trees define a forest, it takes more than trees to keep a forest going. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 11–22. Behnke's concern about globalisation's impact on Wendt's theory in *STIP* seems well-taken, and Wendt himself notes that his focus on states and anarchy may seem 'a bit old-fashioned'.

13. Wendt, 'On the Via Media', 174–5.

14. Wendt, *ibid.* (175), also argues that his 'self-organisation thesis is a place-holder needed for my system-level theory, not an injunction against studying the internal determinants of state identity'. In his later stage, it is less clear that this argument is merely a placeholder. Instead, Wendt turns to more complex arguments relating actions within states to actions of the state. The state as agent is more than a mere organisational intermediate between individuals and the system, and must be if Wendt is to avoid being reduced to methodological individualism. Relations across levels of individuals as agents, groups of such individuals as conscious actors in their own right, and the larger system in which they are embedded become more complex as Wendt's thinking develops in *WS* and later.

15. The emphasis on culture as a stable set of shared meanings may also be challenged. Both Geertz and Archer suggest that culture may be less strongly self-reinforcing than it appears. Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 246–60; Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1–21. Problematising the construction and stability of shared meanings opens up the cultural level, but in so doing gives a stronger role to actors. It recasts culture as a realm of struggle and change, and as a resource as well as a mindset. See David Dessler, 'What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?' *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989): 441–73; and also Amitav Acharya, 'How Ideas

degrees, states as actors seem to have stronger roles, and the probability of transition seems greater. This leads us to the challenges by Zehfuss and by Cedermann and Daase, who point to dynamics within states. Zehfuss notes the complexity in the shift of German identity needed to move towards the deployment of German forces abroad. Cedermann and Daase, drawing on Simmel's 'sociationalism', look at both group formation in general and state formation in particular. Wendt's response to them is similar to Waltz's: he is not producing a theory of decision-making or of foreign policy, and so portions of state and lower-level processes are not strongly involved in his theory in *STIP*.

Copeland engages Wendt at the systemic level, from a more North American perspective, pointing out a number of limitations in Chapter 6, but with a hidden irony. In emphasising the role of uncertainty about the intentions of others in an anarchic condition, he not only opens up the questions of how states form their own intentions and understand the intentions of others, but also specifically refers to domestic theories of liberalism and constructivism. This, by implication, would seem to create the sort of gap that Wendt exploited in 'Anarchy'. As a consequence, even if we find Wendt's cultural argument limited, it would still seem that anarchy cannot bear the burden realists assign to it. Drulák and Sárváry take him to task on the state and system levels for omitting reflexivity and diplomacy, which would introduce more specific and more empirical mechanisms of interaction and learning within and among states as actors. Wendt's response here is also Waltzian.

Wendt argues in *STIP* that backsliding from less violent to more violent cultures is less likely than progress from more violent to less violent cultures. Taking his matrix, however, as implying a set of transition probabilities from one system-state to another, progress from one highly enculturated form to another form might be relatively unlikely, precisely because of the high stability of the more highly enculturated forms. But is it more likely than a collapse of a cultural form from a higher to a lower degree? If it is not, this opens up an alternative path: that such a collapse occurs, and is followed by a shift to another culture. But why should 'one step down' be preferentially followed by 'one step to the right'? Absent both a stronger approach to the autonomous state and a clearer specification of transition paths, we have neither the theoretical nor the empirical basis to predict patterns of transition. Chapter 7 is unconvincing in this.¹⁶

Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 239–75. Such an approach could be handled by constructivists who focus on norm emergence and on actor-centred approaches, and through the introduction of factors such as power differences among actors struggling to shape the systemic culture. See Wiener, 'Limits of Bridging Gaps'. Significantly, Wendt notes the question of power in this regard, but sets it aside to pursue the main line of his argument.

16. Probability issues arise as well in *WS*. Unless we accept an organic metaphor, combining embryonic development and growth to adulthood (which ignores the death rate in such processes), Wendt's teleology seems to boil down to the argument that, ultimately, a Hegelian-style world state based on individual recognition is particularly stable as compared to other system-states. So, given enough time and *ceteris paribus*, we will end up there. It is not clear that this is really a teleological argument: it may also be cast in terms of probabilities of transition into and out of a particular system-state (the shape of its 'probability well', so to speak), rather than in terms of some other inherent quality of the supposed final state. Such an argument cannot, in principle, be falsifiable: if it fails a test, we must simply wait longer. Other objections exist. First, especially if we accept the organic metaphor, it is based essentially on the existence and effectiveness of boundary conditions, which clearly must precede the effect they cause. Second, Wendt deals with only three kinds of state, ignoring other possible system-states entirely. Third, it is not clear why the world state is one type of 'attractor' and not another, or why the system-state time-path should not oscillate among two or more attractors. Fourth, even if we grant the world state as the ultimate 'black hole', there is no practical assurance that we will not be captured on the way by a local 'neutron star' and lack the ability to escape its gravity well (again, the death-rate problem). Fifth, in developing his argument based on individual recognition, Wendt necessarily treats as exogenous a wide range of possible

Positivism and Scientific Realism – and the State Once More

Wendt's espousal simultaneously of positivism, scientific realism and constructivism creates problems for many of his critics, such as Kratochwil, Behnke, Suganami, and Guzzini and Leander¹⁷ in this volume, as well as undoubtedly for others. As positivism would seem to be at odds with scientific realism, and scientific realism at odds with constructivism, there is much ground for confusion and argument. Working one's way through this is a difficult task, which might not resolve the apparent contradictions but might at least account for them.

Wendt's statement 'I am a positivist,' and his lining up for 'science' against its opponents,¹⁸ may reassure his North American audience even as his scientific realism opposes a hard and narrow empiricism that would question his reliance on unobservables. But what sort of positivist is Wendt? If we associate 'positivism' with the variety that its opponents love to attack – universal laws, nomothetic-deductive reasoning, fact-value distinctions, neutral scientists and neutral observations, and reliance on falsifiability – which seems to stand in opposition to scientific realism, then Wendt is not entirely a positivist of this stripe. Some elements he seems to accept, at least in degrees: the distinction between subject and object, for example, is central to him (as crucial to his scientific realism), and he accepts falsifiability in the sense of the need to back statements with evidence. (Against Kratochwil's 'court and process' approach to science, Wendt responds that even courts refer to evidence.) However, Wendt also accepts that observation is 'theory-laden' though not 'theory-determined,' that the fact-value distinction is problematic, and that causal explanations are not the only explanations to seek. He also accepts process-tracing as opposed to merely logical deduction. The problems here are multiple. Wendt tends to associate 'positivism' – whatever its content – with science,¹⁹ and in that sense his taking the label is understandable (though he argues that traditional positivism is *passé*²⁰) even as it invites confusion. It may be, as Wight contends, that Wendt cannot be both a scientific realist and a positivist in the old sense, but that conclusion in itself may no longer be particularly relevant if, as Wight also suggests, the term 'positivism' has lost meaning.²¹ We might conclude here that Wendt is confused (by reference to the old sense of positivism), or that

competing processes and perturbations. Why these might not overrule the dynamics he discusses is not clear. Drulák and Sárváry take issue with some of these, and other, aspects of the argument in *WS*.

17. For other critiques see also Hidemi Suganami, 'Agents, Structures, Narratives', *European Journal of International Relations*, 4, no. 3 (1999): 365–86; and Fred Chernoff, 'Scientific Realism as a Meta-Theory of International Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2002): 189–207.

18. *STIP*, 39.

19. *STIP*, 38–9. On p. 49, he writes: 'Scientific realism assumes that reality exists independent of human beings – that subject and object are distinct – and can be discovered through science. To that extent realist philosophy of science, like empiricism, is "positivist." This poses no special problems for materialists, who think society is not fundamentally different from nature. Positivism is more problematic for constructivists, who think that social kinds are made mostly of ideas.' On the problems and confusions that follow from this see, e.g., Ruth Lane, "Positivism, Scientific Realism and Political Science: Recent Developments in the Philosophy of Science," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 8, no. 3 (1996): 361–82; and Colin Wight, "Philosophy of Social Science and International Relations," in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 23–51. Lane also notes (364, n4) that many of the supposed fathers of the traditional positivist position were much less rigid in the details of their arguments, and to a degree more open to a possible scientific realist interpretation, than the summary models based on their thinking.

20. In that sense, then, he may be closer, e.g., to Nicholson's account of current positivism in some respects than to the traditional view. Michael Nicholson, 'The continued significance of positivism', in *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128–45.

21. Wight, 36.

he has created (or alternatively failed to create) a viable mixed position based on a view of what positivism now is, or that the label 'positivism' simply is not particularly helpful any more.

The opposition – assumed by Ringmar – between scientific realism and constructivism arises from a fairly absolutist approach to constructivism: if we create the world through our thinking, this holds on the 'scientific' plane as well as on the substantive plane, and thus the subject/object distinction used by scientific realism cannot hold.²² This particularly, Wendt's critics would argue, holds for 'social kinds' – a point also addressed at length in *STIP*. His constructivism, simply, is less absolutist, even if we are condemned only to see through a glass darkly.

Wendt's scientific realism rejects the notion that the world is merely a construct of our discourse: there is something out there, though we may not have direct access to it. We respond to the world as we see it, but the world responds to us as it is. The notion that we are not engaged merely in a solipsistic conversation is crucial to Wendt's scientific realism.²³ What we make of the world's response may be a particular point of difficulty, since we could get things wrong or at least change our minds later, but the notion that we are not simply bound and determined to hammer the square pegs of results into the round holes of prior theory is fundamental. Claims for scientific progress as approximation to reality must therefore be tempered but the idea should not, it would seem, be totally abandoned. Another problem is that how others see the world is itself part of the world that we might see, and part of the world that responds to us whether or not we see it correctly.²⁴

Wendt's scientific realism is central to his IR theory, whether *vis-à-vis* North American theory or his critics here. As a champion of the cultural system, he must defend the possible reality of unobservables. In particular, however, it is central to his approach to the state. As against Kratochwil's concern about social kinds, Wendt posits the state as a self-organising entity – something that is more than simply a construct of an observer or of external forces. To that degree, the state is also not simply a product of a larger cultural system: states are only partially included in Wendt's cultural theory in *STIP*. Neither, however, can the state be simply a sum of knowledges of actors within it. He thus wants to go beyond Suganami's suggestion that it is not so much institutions that exist as the belief that they exist, and the consequences that follow from this belief.²⁵ Whether he succeeds in this in *STIP* might be questioned, though his discussion of scientific realism in Chapter 2 there and the responses of his critics here are well worth considering. The full-blown certainty demanded by his critics and at times Wendt's willingness to move forward regardless of the danger seem a bit much on both sides. On the one side, for some of us it might be sufficient to accept the state and the system as good bets given our present knowledge, and then get on with our theory and empirical research. On the other, at this point we must recall that Wendt is producing a theoretical argument (and appears to be pushing it quite a distance), not presenting a set of hypotheses for testing. He may be moving a bit ahead of the evidence. For later purposes, however, Wendt's scientific realism

22. Ringmar, 282.

23. See, e.g., *STIP*, 52. To borrow a claim from Vasquez, the world resists, and so testing is not irrelevant. John Vasquez, 'The Post-Positivist Debate: Reconstructing Scientific Enquiry and International Relations after Enlightenment's Fall', in *International Relations Theory Today*, ed. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 217–40. One recalls a line attributed to the science fiction writer Philip K. Dick: 'reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away'. In *CI*, Wendt argues that 'intersubjective constructions confront actors as obdurate social facts' (389). This would be true particularly in the short term for individuals, including researchers, though of course over time social facts will alter as their basis among those who believe them alters. See *STIP*, 75–6.

24. To further complicate things, if we devise a model of the world based on actors behaving in ignorance, and those actors then learn and apply our model, the basis of the model's applicability may then be destroyed. And, of course, our model, which these actors adopt for their use, could still be mistaken.

25. Suganami, 'Agents, Structures, Narratives', 378.

seems essential to his argument: for the state to be a person it must first be real not only as against the international system but also as against actors within the state.

Quantum Leap: The Third Wendt

While Wendt's essay includes brief replies to his critics from the perspective of *STIP*, it is overwhelmingly devoted to a preliminary exposition of the case for a quantum approach to the social sciences; most particularly, it presents a case for quantum consciousness and for collective quantum consciousnesses. He then responds to his critics on this basis as well. He is consciously making a number of bets here: (1) the turn to quantum theory; (2) that the mysteries of consciousness and of quantum theory are intertwined and have the same solution; and (3) that quantum consciousness does not end with us – collective consciousnesses are possible, and particularly a conscious state.²⁶ Accepting one of these bets need not entail accepting the others. We could accept quantum theory at the quantum level but argue that its effects wash out at our macroscopic level. We could challenge the claim for quantum consciousness.²⁷ Even if we accept the state as real in some sense, we could reject the claim for its consciousness. We will briefly consider each bet here and some of its implications.

The Quantum Turn

A clue to the origin of Wendt's shift to quantum theory might exist in the Alker–Smith–Wendt exchange noted earlier.²⁸ Smith and Alker both took Wendt to task over his treatment of the interface between material and ideational factors. Smith, similar to Kratochwil in his suspicion that social phenomena cannot be handled by scientific realism, saw Wendt's handling of the interface as confusing and contradictory, at times treating the ideational and the material as separate and at times as linked. Alker noted the problem but suggested one could move beyond the 'ideas versus material forces' structure of argument by looking at additional literatures on complexity, cognition, computational linguistics, etc. Wendt, for his part, there accepted the Cartesian dualist label.

Here, Wendt turns to quantum theory, the first step to quantum consciousness as the resolution of the mind–body problem. He argues that the debate on ideas and related issues in the social sciences is founded on a fundamentally classical – physicalist or materialist – physics. He is unhappy with this, with dualism, and with the 'linguistic turn' as alternatives, and so looks to quantum theory. In approaching his critics here in philosophy-of-science terms, he seeks to transcend and incorporate them. Taken as an analogy, this would be merely a plea for the recognition of the incompleteness of any single theoretical perspective, and thus the desirability, at least for the moment, of theoretical pluralism. As more than analogy, it argues that the materialist and ideational views are complementary in a quantum sense, applying in a situation before decoherence occurs.²⁹ Taking both materialism and ideationalism 'all the way down' allows him to attribute the argument between them, and thus also the argument between positivists and interpretivists, to our decohering of the fundamental quantum character of the phenomena we are trying to observe: we literally force the split upon the object of our study.

26. Or, possibly, society. See footnote 5 above.

27. Chalmers, a dualist, rejects a quantum approach to the explanation of consciousness, but is willing to consider the case that objects other than humans and animals – and including collectives – may have experiences, be conscious or even self-conscious. David J. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 293–99, 313–57.

28. See footnote 5.

29. 'Decoherence' is the collapse of probabilistic wave functions at the quantum level into the world we perceive. The very acts of measurement or of perception seem to precipitate this collapse.

This brings Wendt's anti-positivist critics within a larger, quantum, but still presumably positivist,³⁰ social science. So, while his *STIP*-based response to Zehfuss, Cedermann and Daase, Drulák and Sárváry was rather Waltzian, here he argues that a quantum response might include them.

The Conscious Quantum State

Wendt turns to quantum consciousness for the foundation of the argument for the state as a conscious collective actor. His second bet is therefore unfruitful for him unless it leads to the third.

Wendt does not present in this essay a full discussion of the evidence for quantum consciousness and for collective consciousnesses. Rather, he outlines the course of the possible argument and its implications. He is not, at this point, so much arguing the truth of the case as asking what it might mean if it is true. He suggests that it provides new lines of thinking about identity and subjectivity. We become agents, and we acquire identities, in doing: as probabilistic wave functions collapse, rather than as a consequence of pre-existing determinate causes. He also attempts to use his quantum approach to reconcile free will and a teleological approach. The interactions of individuals and larger units also become a significant question. All of this is only briefly sketched, and all of it would undoubtedly be highly contested.

How might we fold this into IR theory (a significant issue which space does not permit him to address)? On the level of individual actors, quantum theory could provide some interesting language for thinking about decision processes: what if we were to approach decisions-in-process as probabilistic wave functions that only 'collapse' when a decision is made? However, there may be limits to this language. Sometimes apparent decisions are nowhere near this decisive. Instead, competing strands of thought continue even into the implementation process, while the decision itself represents a botched compromise by contending parties rather than some definite resolution.

What of raising consciousness to the level of the state? In *STIP*, Wendt introduces the state as a person, as part of a larger discussion of the state as a corporate actor. His understanding of the state is broad enough to incorporate a variety of more specific organisational forms, but he wants to move beyond treating the state merely as a mode of organisation. In *SP*, Wendt explicitly presents a case for the state as a collective consciousness, not as a collective actor through a mere quirk of language or shorthand.³¹ His focus is specifically on the requirements that would have to be met if the consciousness argument was to be accepted.³² This entails, he notes, going beyond a purely physicalist approach, making this article the preliminary to the quantum essay. He presents three tests for the state: intentionality, organism and consciousness. Whether or not the state meets these criteria requires much more detailed argument than is possible here. This is a deliberate choice of a hard case to argue, itself a risky strategy. Its payoff is in the exploration of these requirements: in adopting this approach, he sets out the terms of debate and some of its ramifications.

If we accept the argument for the state as a higher-order consciousness, other questions inevitably arise. Does this imply that decision processes visible to us are (on our level) quantum processes of decoherence? Are we to the state as neurons to the mind? Further, as Wendt seems

30. Recall here the problems regarding Wendt's positivism noted above.

31. Those who accept these explanations will not, of course, be convinced. Nor will those who regard the anthropomorphised state as simply a disciplinary artefact – the product of a division between foreign policy and decision-making theory (not the stylised rational action version on the state level) on the one hand and a focus on the state and state-system theory on the other – which seems to have hardened into basic doctrine. Perhaps it is past time to re-examine this divide.

32. Thus, while other possibilities are noted – in particular the conventionalised legal and moral 'personality' of the state – these are not really explored in any detail as alternatives.

to recognise, there is no inherent need to stop the generation of such consciousnesses with the state. In that case the question of governments arises: why should we accept the state yet reject governments (not to mention other collectives) as consciousnesses? The number of actors in international relations, as well as the levels of analysis to be handled, would be increased significantly. Moreover, it would seem possible for individuals to participate in more than one such consciousness simultaneously. If such higher-order consciousnesses exist, how would we know it? Would they know we exist? What would be the connection between our processes and their thoughts and activity: could we deliberately influence them? What connection, if any, would their purposes have with ours? Would we be at best as flies to wanton boys? Particularly if Wendt wishes to develop his argument in a teleological vein, there could be serious problems for a progressive element in that argument.

To the Pacific?

Lachine, a district in metropolitan Montréal, supposedly draws its name from the ambitions of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle. One of the great explorers of New France, La Salle sought a water route through North America to the Pacific – and on to China – and sold his holdings in the colony to meet his expenses. He opened up much of the interior of North America to French influence but never found his route to China. He died in Texas, on a failed expedition to the mouth of the Mississippi. Lachine – ‘China’ – was not named in his honour, but possibly in derision.

Exploration is fraught with peril. Wendt could present his quantum arguments as an excursion outside IR, reflecting a different set of interests and subject to a different set of considerations in evaluation. He does not. So, even before a full text of *Quantum Mind and Social Science* is seen, the chief danger that it faces is already apparent: that it will be relegated to that special corner of the IR literature reserved for works on the philosophies of science, social science, history and mind. Wendt’s suggested reconciliation of positivist, scientific-realist and interpretivist approaches, even without the quantum basis, also risks being ignored: we are too much in love with our quarrels.

Wendt argues the normative and the explanatory (in the broadest sense) possibilities for his approach. In normative terms, it is certainly desirable to bear in mind the effects of our theories on others and on the world in general, and that our theories will presume certain bases and viewpoints in our assumptions, our explications and our intentions. None of this is really avoidable, but these concerns do not depend on a quantum approach. That these responsibilities might grow if we are part of some ‘instantiation’ of world politics may be granted, though the element of speculation is clear. *If* Wendt’s approach is correct, we must still have reason to believe that our thoughts, decisions and actions have a particular, predictable, and even intentional impact on the workings of a higher-order entity, and that our fates are intertwined with its fate. That is a tall order, but otherwise what *is* the responsibility of one neuron to another, much less to the mind as a whole? Or of the mind to its neurons, for that matter? Leaving this aside, if we grant the usual arguments for normative considerations, the first rule for theory still stands: a ‘nice’ theory that does not work is above all else a theory that does not work. It may be true that we participate in the making of our world, but (the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach notwithstanding) it helps if we really do know what we are doing. Otherwise, the butcher’s bill may be even more, and unnecessarily, horrendous.

The crucial argument for most of us, then, will be that Wendt’s quantum approach offers interesting and fruitful new insights – new ways of thinking about old things, ways of recognising and thinking about phenomena we had not previously considered, etc. – which might organise some of our current intellectual equipment more effectively, account for at least some anomalies, and give rise to expectations in explaining phenomena at least some of which are borne out. Wendt notes, in the closing page of his essay, that a quantum theory might be

able to incorporate much existing theory, but that critics may see this as no particular gain, merely a repackaging: 'This value added question is an important one, and we will not be able to answer it until after a quantum social science has been developed.'³³

We are, of course, not there yet, nor will we get there for some time. The nature of the argument thus far has been primarily to lay out the path that seems necessary to get to Wendt's general end-point, through a variety of contentious choices. Every step of the way, every turn of phrase, every choice, will be scrutinised, and the whole could easily be dismissed as one contested statement piled on top of another. Even the end-point is speculative, rather than being a phenomenon of which we are reasonably sure. If Wendt's line of thinking is to be sustained in terms of IR, then, it must eventually be converted into a series of more specific arguments, explanations, hypotheses and tests, clearly connected to the discipline.

So, what specific changes in our thinking, in our research, and in the conduct of IR must follow? What specific, testable hypotheses and explanations relevant to our enterprise would it generate? Note that the general theory of relativity still permits us to play billiards in a perfectly satisfactory Newtonian manner. There is the danger that the quantum variant, even if true, is so deep and distant as to be largely irrelevant to our disciplinary concerns. At this stage, Wendt is operating on a very high level of theory, not that of more vulgar, pedestrian and empirical IR theory. This essay, like *SP*, is at best a prospectus, presenting largely what the course of the argument would likely be. *Quantum Mind and Social Science* may take us further, but still not to the point of IR theory in detail. It is the application that must follow that will be crucial for judging the nature and degree of success of the third Wendt.

In this broad quantum research programme, Wendt has taken on a hard, complex and risky case to argue. That he has embarked on this at all speaks to his confidence, his daring, and his willingness to pursue questions that are both unusual and fundamental. If it does work out for IR as intended, of course, the implications are tremendous. If it does not, it could still be a valuable contribution in the discussion and the work it provokes.

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33. Alexander Wendt, 'Social Theory as Cartesian Science: An Auto-critique from a Quantum Perspective', in *Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his Critics*, ed. Stefano Guzzini and Anna Leander (London: Routledge, 2006), 219.