

Introduction

IN THE modern history of political theory, and in most contemporary discussions of problems of political philosophy as well, international relations appears largely as a marginal affair. The image of a global state of nature, in which nations are conceived as largely self-sufficient, purposive units, has been thought to capture the relative absence of moral norms governing relations among states. At one extreme of the tradition—represented by Machiavelli, Bodin, and Hobbes—international theory has denied the existence of any controlling universal rules in relations between states, substituting *raison d'état* as the highest norm. Even when the possibility of international moral ties has been granted—for example, in post-Grotian writings on international law—these ties have been held to be substantially weaker than intranational moral bonds precisely because of the absence of supranational political authorities. The only problem in international relations to have gained significant theoretical attention is the justification and prevention of war—the main form of social intercourse in the global state of nature.¹

However justifiable this neglect has been in the past, many recent developments compel us to take another look at the "recalcitrance of international politics to being theorized about."² These developments include the increasing sensitivity of domestic societies to external economic, political, and cultural events; the widening gap between rich and poor countries; the growth of centers of economic power beyond effective regulation by individual states; the appearance of serious shortages of food and energy caused, at least in part, by the pursuit of uncoordinated and uncontrolled growth policies by national governments; and the increasingly urgent

¹ See, for example, the following remark in the introduction to a widely read contemporary work of analytical political philosophy: "In relations between states the problem of establishing a peaceful order overshadows all others." Brian Barry, *Political Argument*, p. xviii.

² Martin Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?," p. 33.

demands of third world countries for more equitable terms of participation in global politics and economics. To put the point in language more familiar to discussions of this subject, the rise of "welfare questions" in international forums, and of "low politics" in diplomacy, parallels the increasing impact of international arrangements and transnational interactions on human well-being. It is not that "high politics"—that is, the threat and avoidance of war—has become unimportant, but rather that it represents only one of many problems for which solutions must now be sought at the international level.³

These changes in international relations have a threefold relevance to political theory. Since states can no longer be regarded as largely self-sufficient political orders, the image of a global state of nature no longer provides an obviously correct picture of the moral relations among states, persons of diverse nationality, and other actors in the international realm. The orthodox theoretical image of international relations and many practical principles thought to follow from it require critical examination and modification in the face of the new and not-so-new facts of world politics.

At the same time, the attempt to formulate a more satisfactory normative theory puts the facts in a new light and suggests empirical questions that have been answered insufficiently thus far. The answers to such questions might form part of the justification of international normative principles, or they might be required to determine how international principles apply. In either case, a normative theory appropriate to the contemporary world raises questions and suggests problems that deserve greater attention from students of international relations.

Third, and perhaps most important, one must consider the relation of political theory and international practice. Political theory arises from a perception of the possibility of choice in

³ None of the arguments in this book actually turns on the claim that international interdependence is something new. Indeed, it seems more likely that the growth of the world economy did not follow, but rather accompanied, the rise of the modern state. Both were part of the same historical process. Thus, interdependence is at least as old as the modern state. See generally Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*.

political affairs. This possibility is presupposed by criticism of the established order as well as by engagement in efforts to change it. When choices are to be made regarding the ends and means of political action, or the structures and rules of institutions and practices, it is natural to ask by what principles such choices should be guided. An important function of the political theorist is to formulate and examine alternative principles and to illuminate the reasons why some are more persuasive than others. Now the developments that have undermined the orthodox theoretical image of international relations have also weakened the practical consensus that the rules and settled expectations of the present world system are legitimate. An international debate is underway concerning the future structure of world order, but political theorists have failed to provide the kinds of guidance one normally expects from theory in times of political change. Recognizing this, it would be irresponsible not to try to work out the implications for our moral ideas of a more accurate perception of the international realm than that which informs the modern tradition of political theory. For only in this way can we more rationally understand our moral identities and assess the modes of political practice in which we engage.

WHILE a more satisfactory international normative theory is necessary, the would-be international theorist may expect to encounter a variety of obstacles that do not embarrass the political theorist of domestic society. Chief among these is a widespread if unreflective conviction that normative international theory is not possible, since for various reasons (discussed in part one, below) it is thought to be inappropriate to make moral judgments about international affairs. Another obstacle is that it is not clear what the program of international theory ought to be. The main problems of the political theory of the nation-state grow out of the interplay of a rich tradition of philosophical argument and the recurrence of a set of relatively well defined issues in popular political debate. International relations, in contrast, has neither so rich a theoretical tradition nor so well defined or recurrent a set of

political issues. Third, our intuitions about moral problems in international affairs are less firm than our moral intuitions about domestic problems. Whatever one's view about the relation of intuitions and moral theory, it seems clear that the relative paucity of familiar and reliable intuitions about international problems will make it more difficult to formulate and justify normative principles for international practice. Finally, as I shall suggest, many international normative issues cannot be settled definitely without more satisfactory empirical information than is currently available. While empirical considerations are, if anything, more important in international than in domestic political theory, the social science of international relations is less advanced than the science of domestic society.

This book is intended to help lay the groundwork for a more satisfactory normative political theory of international relations. It is important to stress that I do not claim to provide a systematic theory analogous to those found in the familiar treatises on the political theory of the nation-state. In view of the difficulties noted above, this seems too ambitious a goal at present. Instead, I want to show that the obstacles to international theory are not insuperable and that there are international normative problems of sufficient practical importance and philosophical interest to warrant further theoretical effort. In addition, I hope to call into question some received views about international morality and suggest the plausibility of a more cosmopolitan and less state-centered perspective. But I do not regard my normative conclusions as final in any sense, and I have tried to indicate the directions in which criticism of my views seems most promising and further thought seems most needed.

Although my discussion is necessarily preliminary, I hope that it will have several kinds of value in its own right. The most important of these is that it can bring some conceptual clarity to an area in which confusion is endemic. If readers are not persuaded by my criticisms of prevailing views or by the alternative positions I outline, my discussion should at least illustrate the respects in which such views require more careful formulation and defense than they have heretofore

received. Even when I make no attempt to resolve outstanding controversies, my analyses of the normative concepts involved in them should make clear what the controversies are about and what would be needed to resolve them. Further, while not pretending to offer a history of international theory, I have surveyed the tradition of international theory and indicated the ways in which elements of it are relevant to my main concerns.⁴ The tradition is not, in general, very edifying, but nonetheless one finds suggestive formulations and illuminating arguments scattered about within it. Finally, I have given special attention to the relation of the empirical science of international relations and the normative issues of international theory. When possible, I have assessed relevant empirical considerations and shown how these require or incline us to accept some normative positions and to reject others. When necessary, I have tried to formulate unresolved empirical and theoretical problems in such a way as to show how further work on them would influence their resolution.

THIS book has three parts. Each part addresses distinct issues, but the discussion is progressive and suggests the outlines of a more systematic theory. Thus, I argue (in part one) that international political theory is possible, by showing that several arguments for skepticism about international ethics are

⁴ By "the tradition of international theory" I mean the writings of the classical international jurists (like Grotius, Pufendorf, and Wolff); occasional remarks on international relations that appear in treatises primarily devoted to the political theory of the state (like Hobbes's *Leviathan*); and works that consider the causes of war and advance plans for world peace (like Kant's *Perpetual Peace*). Perhaps surprisingly, there is no single work that gives a comprehensive and scholarly analysis of the growth of international thought. The most helpful discussions are: Wight, "Why Is There No International Theory?"; Arnold Wolfers, "Political Theory and International Relations," pp. ix-xxvii; F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace*; and Walter Schiffer, *The Legal Community of Mankind*. A detailed historical survey of the development of the idea of the law of nations, from Thomas Aquinas to the twentieth century, is available in E. B. F. Midgley, *The Natural Law Tradition and the Theory of International Relations*. See also F. Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, which contains a helpful bibliography; A. C. F. Beales, *The History of Peace*; and F. Melian Stawell, *The Growth of International Thought*.

incorrect, and furthermore, that the international realm is coming more and more to resemble domestic society in many of the features usually thought relevant to the justification of (domestic) political principles. To support this claim, I examine the traditional image of international relations as a Hobbesian state of nature and argue that it is misleading on both empirical and moral theoretical grounds.

If international skepticism of the sort criticized in part one represents the dominant view about international morality, then views stemming from the modern natural law tradition (which I call the morality of states) might be said to represent the most widely held alternative. Like international skepticism, the morality of states makes use of the analogy of states and persons, but it draws the normative conclusion that states, like persons, have some sort of right of autonomy that insulates them from external moral criticism and political interference. This idea lies behind such principles of international practice as nonintervention and self-determination, and some now familiar moral objections to political and economic imperialism. I argue in part two that the analogy of states and persons is highly misleading here, and that the appropriate analogue of individual autonomy in the international realm is not national autonomy but conformity of a society's political and economic institutions with appropriate principles of justice.

Finally, I return to the analogy of international society and domestic society to discuss whether the two realms are sufficiently similar that arguments for distributive justice within the state carry over into international relations. Current debate about a new international economic order clearly presupposes *some* principle of international distributive justice; I argue that a suitable principle can be justified by analogy with the justification given by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* for an intrastate distributive principle. Although it is clear that states continue to have great significance for the world's political and moral order, I argue that the importance which for various reasons we must accord to states does not undermine the case for global redistribution. The argument is of the first importance for the current debate about reforming the

international economic system, for its implication is that the existing global distribution of income and wealth is highly unjust. It is important, as well, for a more refined international political theory, because it suggests that the differences between the international and domestic realms, although significant in some respects, supply no reasons why such devices of domestic political theory as the idea of an original contract should not be extended to international relations.

I have said that this book is a first attempt to provide a political theory of international relations that is more systematic and more consonant with the empirical situation than traditional views. In the conclusion, I characterize such a theory as cosmopolitan (in Kant's sense) and distinguish it from international skepticism and the morality of states.

A consequence of the preliminary character of my remarks is that many questions must be left unanswered. Some of these questions are very important, for both empirical research and practical politics. If there is a defense for leaving such crucial matters open, it is that one cannot confront them responsibly without a prior grasp of the more elementary but also more basic concerns of this book.

I HAVE restricted myself to a few cursory remarks about the application of my views to problems of war and peace. Since these are often taken to be the central problems of international relations, their lack of emphasis in this book deserves some explanation. There are three main points. First, some issues related to war and peace—particularly those having to do with the concepts of violence and nonviolence, war crimes and the rules of war, and collective guilt and responsibility—have received considerable philosophical discussion in the past several years, often of very high quality.⁵ They have not

⁵ Two recent books are especially noteworthy: Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*; and W. B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War*. Also, see the essays contained in three most helpful collections: Richard Wasserstrom, ed., *War and Morality*; Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds., *War and Moral Responsibility*; and Virginia Held, Sidney Morgenbesser, and Thomas Nagel, eds., *Philosophy, Morality and International Affairs*. On nonvio-

suffered from the general neglect of international relations by moral and political philosophers.

A second point is that some problems about the morality of war, like traditional questions of *jus ad bellum*, cannot be resolved without a more general theory of international right. For example, claims of justice in war often turn on claims that particular rights (e.g., to land) have been infringed or that rules of international conduct (e.g., those defining a balance of power) have been broken. Such claims furnish a justification for resort to war partly because they rest on principles that distribute rights to international actors and define a structure of international life that actors have duties to promote or uphold. But to explain why some such principles rather than others are morally best, one needs an international political theory. If this is true, then much of what I say in this book will be relevant to the problem of *jus ad bellum*, even though I have not usually drawn the connections explicitly.

Finally, I repeat a point with which I began. Contemporary international relations consists of far more than the maneuvers of states "in the state and posture of gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another . . . ; and continual spies upon their neighbors."⁶ This additional activity raises distinctive moral problems to which solutions are increasingly essential, but which are likely to be overlooked because they fall outside the traditional conception of world politics. I certainly do not mean to suggest that the problems of war and peace are either unimportant or without philosophical interest; but, by setting these issues aside, I hope to show that other problems are at least as important, in some respects more basic, and of considerable philosophical interest in their own right.

lence and pacifism, see especially H.J.N. Horsburgh, *Non-violence and Aggression*.

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], ch. 13, p. 115.

PART ONE

International Relations as A State of Nature

Morality, then, as the channel to individual self-fulfillment—yes. Morality as the foundation of civic virtue, and accordingly as a condition precedent to successful democracy—yes. Morality in governmental method, as a matter of conscience and preference on the part of our people—yes. But morality as a general criterion for the determination of the behavior of states and above all as a criterion for measuring and comparing the behavior of different states—no. Here other criteria, sadder, more limited, more practical, must be allowed to prevail.¹

¹ George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy*, p. 49.

THE state, like other institutions that can affect people's well-being and their rights, must satisfy certain moral requirements if we are to consider it legitimate. It is by these standards that we evaluate the state's claims on us and orient our efforts at political change. The normative component of political theory is the search for such standards and for the reasoning that forms their justification.

We do not often take the same attitude toward the complex structure of institutions and practices that lies beyond the state. This is in accord with the modern tradition of political theory, but it is worth asking if there are reasons of principle for following tradition in this respect. In this part, I consider whether it makes sense to look for general principles of international political theory that can supply reasons for and against particular choices in the same way that the principles of domestic political theory guide choices about alternative policies within the state. Is normative international political theory possible?

Any attempt to lay the groundwork for normative international political theory must face the fact that there is a substantial body of thought, often referred to as "political realism," that denies this possibility. Skepticism about international morality derives from a variety of sources, such as cultural relativism, apprehension about the effects of "moralism" on foreign policy, the view that rulers have an overriding obligation to follow the national interest, and the idea that there can be no moral principles of universal application in a world order of sovereign states. In the first section of this part, I argue that none of these arguments supports international moral skepticism, either because such arguments involve elementary confusions or fallacious assumptions, or because they are incomplete.

A more sophisticated argument for international skepticism is that certain structural features of an anarchical world order make international morality impossible. This argument (reconstructed in detail in section 2) characterizes international relations as a Hobbesian state of nature, that is, as an

order of independent agents, each pursuing its own interests, without any common power capable of enforcing rules of cooperation. The image of international relations as a state of nature has been influential both in the modern tradition of political theory and in contemporary thought about international affairs. Moreover, it yields a plausible argument for international skepticism and so deserves close attention.

The Hobbesian argument for international skepticism combines two premises, which I examine separately in sections 3 and 4. The first is the empirical claim that the international state of nature is a state of war, in which no state has an overriding interest in following moral rules that restrain the pursuit of more immediate interests. The second is the theoretical claim that moral principles must be justified by showing that following them promotes the long-range interests of each agent to whom they apply. I shall argue that each premise is wrong: the first because it involves an inaccurate perception of the structure and dynamics of contemporary international politics, and the second because it provides an incorrect account of the basis of moral principles and of the moral character of the state. Both premises are embodied in the image of international relations as a Hobbesian state of nature, and in both respects this image is misleading.

If my argument against the Hobbesian conception of international relations is correct, a main reason for skepticism about the possibility of international political theory will have been removed. In fact, I shall argue, one cannot maintain that moral judgments about international affairs are meaningless without embracing a more far-reaching skepticism about all morality—something, I assume, that few would be willing to do. However, a successful defense of the possibility of international political theory does not say much about the content of its principles. In section 5, I characterize the traditional alternative to Hobbesian skepticism (represented in the writings of various modern natural law theorists) as the morality of states and distinguish some of its basic substantive features, which are criticized in greater detail later in this book.

1. The Skepticism of the Realists

FOR many years, it has been impossible to make moral arguments about international relations to its American students without encountering the claim that moral judgments have no place in discussions of international affairs or foreign policy. This claim is one of the foundations of the so-called realist approach to international studies and foreign policy. On the surface, it is a most implausible view, especially in a culture conscious of itself as an attempt to realize a certain moral ideal in its domestic political life. All the more remarkable is the fact that the realists' skepticism about the possibility of international moral norms has attained the status of a professional orthodoxy in both academic and policy circles, accepted by people with strong moral commitments about other matters of public policy. Although the realists have often used arguments with deep roots in modern political theory, I believe that their skepticism can be shown to rest on fallacious reasoning and incorrect empirical assumptions.

To support this view, I shall argue that one cannot consistently maintain that there are moral restrictions on individual action but no such restrictions on the actions of states. I begin by considering the distinction (implied by this argument) between (generalized) moral skepticism and what I shall call international skepticism and show in more detail exactly what is involved in the assumption that moral skepticism is incorrect. It should be emphasized that this is indeed an assumption; I make no attempt to provide a general argument against moral skepticism.

One might be skeptical about the possibility of international morality because one is skeptical, in general, about the possibility of all kinds of morality. Perhaps one thinks that all or most people are incapable of being motivated by moral considerations, or that moral judgments are so subjective as to be useless in resolving conflicting claims and in fulfilling the other social functions usually assigned to morality. Whatever its rationale, moral skepticism, and its derivative, skepticism about political ethics, represent a refusal to accept moral ar-

guments as sources of reasons for action. Moral skepticism might take a variety of forms, including a denial that moral judgments can be true or false, a denial that moral judgments have meaning, or a denial that the truth of moral judgments provides a reason for acting on them.

Generalized moral and political skepticism might be countered to some extent by examining the arguments that support them. Probably these arguments would turn out to contain important confusions or deep inconsistencies. But one could not thereby demonstrate the possibility of social or political ethics; other arguments for skepticism could be advanced, and at some point in the attempt to counter them one would need to rely on substantive ethical or metaethical views to demonstrate the weaknesses of the skeptical arguments. This, however, would be to assume that skepticism is wrong, rather than to argue it. Generalized moral and political skepticism can only be shown to be wrong by exhibiting an acceptable theory of ethics and of its foundation, because one of the functions of such a theory is to explain the possibility of just those features of ethics that the skeptic claims not to understand. At a minimum, such a theory must distinguish morality from egoism and explain how it can be rational to act on reasons that are (or might be) inconsistent with considerations of prudence or self-interest. Indeed, the idea that considerations of advantage are distinct from those of morality, and that it might be rational to allow the latter to override the former, seems to be at the core of our intuitions about morality.²

In what follows I shall have to assume without discussion that some such theory can be provided. The leading controversies in metaethics are likely to linger for a long while, and progress in normative areas ought not to await a resolution of these other problems even though they are in some sense logically prior. Obviously, one would like to offer a sufficiently complete theory to meet objections on both fronts. But this seems beyond reach at present. Instead, I shall pro-

² For a further discussion, see Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*, pp. 125-42.

ceed on the assumption that we share some basic ideas about the nature and requirements of morality (which I refer to as moral intuitions) and see whether international skepticism is consistent with them.

One important source of international skepticism is cultural relativism. International lawyers and cultural anthropologists have documented wide disparities in the views of rationality and of the good prevalent in the world's cultures. These differences are reflected in the structures of various legal systems and in the attitudes customarily taken by different cultures toward social rules, collective ideals, and the value of individual autonomy.³ In some cultures, for example, autonomy is readily sacrificed to the requirements of collective goals. In general, given any consistent ranking of social goods or any plausible view of how such rankings might be morally justified, it is possible (and often likely) that a culture or society can be found in which there is dominant a divergent ranking of goods or view of moral justification. If this is the case, a skeptic might say, then there are no rational grounds for holding one social morality superior to another when their requirements conflict. Any doctrine that purports to be an international morality and that extends beyond the least common denominator of the various social moralities will be insecure in its foundations. But, typically, the least-common-denominator approach will leave most international conflicts unresolved because these have at their root conflicts over which principles are to apply to given situations or which goods should be sacrificed when several goods conflict. Since principles adequate to resolve such conflicts are fundamentally insecure, the skeptic claims, no normative international political theory is possible.⁴

³ For example, see F.S.C. Northrup, *The Meeting of East and West*, esp. ch. 10; and Adda B. Bozeman, *The Future of Law in a Multicultural World*, pp. ix-xvii, 14-33.

⁴ This construction might account for Kennan's non sequitur: "[L]et us not assume that our moral values . . . necessarily have viability for people everywhere. In particular, let us not assume that the *purposes* of states, as distinguished from their methods, are fit subjects for measurement in moral terms." *Realities of American Foreign Policy*, p. 47; emphasis in original.

This argument can be met on two levels, depending on the kind of intercultural disagreement to which it appeals. If the skeptical appeal is to disagreements over, say, the rankings of various social goods or their definitions, it may be that there is no challenge to the possibility of valid international principles but merely to the contents of particular ones. A consideration of views held in other cultures might persuade us that our assumptions ought to be altered in some ways to conform with conditions of which we had previously been insufficiently aware. This may be true of disagreements about the relative importance of individual autonomy and economic welfare. We are accustomed to defending individual rights in contexts of relative affluence, but considerations of economic development or of nonindustrial social structures might move us to recognize a dimension of relativity in these defenses. I do not mean to take a position on this issue at this point; I only mean to note one way in which cultural variations might be accommodated within an international political theory. In this case we would recognize a condition on the justification of principles of right that had previously gone unnoticed. Here, considerations of cultural diversity enter our thinking as data that may require revisions of particular principles; they do not undermine the possibility of normative theory itself.

But skeptics might say that what is at issue is something deeper; since different cultures might have radically different conceptions of what morality is, we have no right to be confident that our conception is correct. This carries the argument to a second level, but now it is difficult to say what the argument means. Perhaps it means that members of some other culture typically count as decisive certain kinds of reasons for action that we regard as utterly irrelevant from the point of view of our own morality. If so, we may ultimately have to say that the other culture's conception simply is not morality, or, at least, that claims founded on that conception do not count against our moral principles, even those that apply globally. It might seem that this attitude involves some sort of intellectual imperialism because it imposes a conception on cultures to which the conception is quite alien. But surely this is not correct. At some point, having learned what we can from the

views of others, we must be prepared to acknowledge that some conception of morality is the most reasonable one available under the circumstances, and go forward to see what principles result. Notice that this does not say that everyone must be able to acknowledge the reasonableness of the same assumptions; actual agreement of everyone concerned is too stringent a requirement to place on the justification of moral principles (just as it is on epistemological ones). Notice also that the problem of relativism is not limited to international ethics; intrasocietal conflicts might involve similar disagreements over fundamental ethical assumptions. In either case, it is enough, in establishing standards for conduct, that we be able to regard them as the most rational choices available for anyone appropriately situated and that we be prepared to defend this view with arguments addressed to anyone who disagrees. In this way we reach decisions that are as likely to be morally right as any that are in our power to reach. We can do no more than this in matters of moral choice.⁵

One need not embrace cultural relativism to maintain that moral judgments are inappropriate in international relations. Indeed, political realism more often starts from different premises. Some realists begin with the assertion that it is unrealistic to expect nations to behave morally in an anarchic world. For example, Hans Morgenthau, a leading realist, objects that "writers have put forward moral precepts which statesmen and diplomats ought to take to heart in order to make relations between nations more peaceful and less anarchical . . . ; but they have rarely asked themselves whether and to what extent such precepts, however desirable in themselves, actually determine the actions of men."⁶ While conceding the existence of some weak ethical restraints on international behavior, Morgenthau argues that international morality is largely a thing of the past and that competing national interests are now the main motives in world politics. This, he claims, is as it should be: "[T]he state has no right to let its moral disapprobation . . . get in the way of success-

⁵ There is a helpful discussion of some general issues of ethical relativism in Richard B. Brandt, *Ethical Theory*, pp. 271-84.

⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, "The Twilight of International Morality," p. 79.

ful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival.⁷

How shall we understand this claim? One version is that we will fail to understand international behavior if we expect states to conform to moral standards appropriate to individuals. If we seek something like scientific knowledge of world politics—say, a body of lawlike generalizations with at least limited predictive power—we are unlikely to make much progress by deriving our hypotheses from moral rules appropriate to individual behavior.⁸ This seems fairly obvious, but perhaps Morgenthau's emphasis on it can be understood in the perspective of the "idealist" legal approaches to the study of international relations that he sought to discredit.⁹ In any event, this version of the claim does not imply that we ought not to make moral judgments about international behavior when thinking normatively rather than descriptively.

Another version of the claim, which is encountered more often, is this: we are likely to make mistaken foreign policy choices if we take an excessively "moralistic" attitude toward them.¹⁰ This might mean either of two things. Perhaps it means that a steadfast commitment to a moral principle that is inappropriate to some situation is likely to move us to make

⁷ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 10. There is an ambiguity here regarding the moral status of the national interest as an evaluative standard. One might call this view a form of moral skepticism, or one might say that it demonstrates that there is a moral warrant for following the national interest. I argue below that the former is the more appropriate interpretation. It should be noted, however, that some realist writers—probably including Aron and Morgenthau—have clearly thought that they were arguing the latter view instead. On this ambiguity, see Hedley Bull, "Society and Anarchy in International Relations," pp. 37-38.

⁸ On the other hand, we may be equally misled by the research hypotheses that follow from a variety of realist assumptions. There is a useful criticism of realism as a research orientation, rather than as a skeptical doctrine about international norms, in Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence*, ch. 2.

⁹ As Charles Frankel suggests in *Morality and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 12-18. See also Kenneth W. Thompson, *Political Realism and the Crisis of World Politics*, pp. 32-38.

¹⁰ Hans J. Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 37-38. Compare Dean Acheson, "Ethics in International Relations Today," p. 16.

immoral or imprudent decisions about it. Or it might mean that an idealistic or overzealous commitment even to an appropriate principle might cause us to overlook some salient facts and make bad decisions as a result. Each of these recommends reasonable circumspection in making moral judgments about international relations. But neither implies that it is wrong to make such judgments at all. What is being said is that the moral reasoning regarding some decision is flawed: either an inappropriate moral principle is being applied, or an appropriate principle is being incorrectly applied. It does not follow that it is wrong even to attempt to apply moral principles to international affairs, yet this conclusion must be proved to show that international skepticism is true. An argument is still needed to explain why it is wrong to make moral judgments about international behavior whereas it is not wrong to make them about domestic political behavior or about interpersonal behavior.

It is often thought that such an argument can be provided by appealing to the concept of the national interest. Thus, for example, Morgenthau seems to claim (in a passage already cited) that a state's pursuit of its own interests justifies disregard for moral standards that would otherwise constrain its actions.¹¹

Machiavelli argues in this way. He writes, for instance, "[I]t must be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion."¹² Machiavelli does not simply represent the prince as amoral and self-aggrandizing. His claim is that violation by the prince of the moral rules usually thought appropriate for individuals is warranted when necessary "to maintain the state." The prince should "not deviate from what is good, if possible, but be able to do evil if constrained."¹³

¹¹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 10; see also his *In Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 33-39.

¹² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* [1532], XVIII, p. 65.

¹³ *Ibid*; see also *Discourses* [1531], I, ix, p. 139, and II, vi, pp. 298-99.

Now Machiavelli is not saying that rulers have license to behave as they please, nor is he claiming that their official actions are exempt from critical assessment. The issue is one of standards: what principles should be invoked to justify or criticize a prince's official actions? Machiavelli holds that princes are justified in breaking the moral rules that apply to ordinary citizens when they do so for reasons of state. Another statement of his view might be that rulers are subject to moral rules, but that the rules to which they are subject are not always, and perhaps not usually, the same as the rules to which ordinary citizens are bound. The private virtues—liberality, kindness, charity—are vices in the public realm because their observance is inconsistent with the promotion of the well-being of the state. The rule "preserve the state" is the first principle of the prince's morality, and it is of sufficient importance to override the requirements of other, possibly conflicting, rules which one might regard as constitutive of private morality.¹⁴

Is Machiavelli's position really a form of international skepticism? The view that a prince is justified in acting to promote the national interest amounts to the claim that an argument can be given that in so acting the prince is doing the (morally) right thing. But if this is true, one might say, then Machiavelli's view and its contemporary variants are not forms of international skepticism. They do not deny that moral judgments are appropriate in international relations; instead, they maintain that moral evaluations of a state's actions must be cast in terms of the relation between the state's actions and its own interests. The distinction between international skepticism and the Machiavellian view turns out to be like the distinction between general moral skepticism and ethical egoism. One pair of views denies the possibility of morality altogether,

¹⁴ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III, xli, pp. 527-28. There is, of course, an extensive secondary literature devoted to the explication of Machiavelli's position. No doubt many would take issue with my reading of his view, but I cannot enter the debate here. On Machiavelli's notion of *virtù* and its relation to the national interest, see Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, pp. 224-28 and 230-31.

while the other pair advances a substantive moral principle. However, in both cases, the distinction is without a difference. What is distinctively *moral* about a system of rules is the possibility that the rules might require people to act in ways that do not promote their individual self-interest. The ethical egoist denies this by asserting that the first principle of his "morality" is that one should always act to advance one's own interests. To call such a view a kind of morality is at least paradoxical, since, in accepting the view, one commits oneself to abandoning the defining feature of morality. Thus, it seems better to say, as does Frankena, that "prudentialism or living wholly by the principle of enlightened self-love just is not a kind of *morality*."¹⁵ Similarly, to say that the first principle of international morality is that states should promote their own interests denies the possibility that moral considerations might require a state to act otherwise. And this position is closer to international skepticism than to anything that could plausibly be called international morality.

If Machiavelli's view is, after all, a version of international skepticism, it does not follow that it is incorrect. Perhaps there *is* nothing that could plausibly be called international morality. At this point, we can only observe that the position as outlined provides no reason for drawing this conclusion. Why should we say that right conduct for officials of a state consists in action that promotes the state's interests? It is not obvious that the pursuit of self-interest by persons necessarily leads to morally right action, and it is no more obvious in the parallel case for officials of states. The argument involves a non sequitur. At a minimum, what is needed to vindicate the national interest view is an argument to show that following the national interest always does produce morally right action in international relations.

There is a tendency to resolve this problem by bringing in considerations regarding the responsibilities of political leaders to their constituents. Leaders should follow the national interest, it might be said, because that is their obligation as

¹⁵ W. K. Frankena, *Ethics*, p. 19; emphasis in original.

holders of the people's trust. To do otherwise would be irresponsible.¹⁶ Leaving aside the fantasy of describing some leaders as trustees, the difficulty with this approach is that it involves an assumption that the people have a right to have done for them anything that can be described as in the national interest. But this is just as much in need of proof as international skepticism itself. In domestic affairs, few would disagree that what people have a right to have done for them is limited by what they have a right to do for themselves. For example, if people have no right to enslave ten percent of their number, their leaders have no right to do so for them. Why should the international actions of national leaders be any different? It seems that what leaders may rightfully do for their people, internationally or domestically, is limited by what the people may rightfully do for themselves. But if this is true, then the responsibility of leaders to their constituents is not necessarily to follow the national interest wherever it leads, without regard to the moral considerations that would constrain groups of individuals in their mutual interactions. The appeal to the responsibilities of leaders does not show that it is always right for leaders to pursue the national interest.

Faced with the charge that the national interest as an ultimate standard is indifferent to larger moral values (e.g., the global interest or the welfare of the disadvantaged elsewhere), realists often expand the definition of the national interest to include these larger values. For example, Morgenthau claims at some points that the national interest of a power must be constrained by its own morality.¹⁷ Apparently he means that the calculations that enter into the identifica-

¹⁶ See, for example, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Necessary Amorality of Foreign Affairs," pp. 72-73.

¹⁷ Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest*, pp. 36-37; see also his letter to the editor of *International Affairs*. There is a similar claim in Thompson, *Political Realism*, p. 167. In the context of policy questions, Morgenthau is more straightforward. For example, in a discussion of U.S. policy toward Indochina, he writes that intervention is justified whenever it advances decision makers' best judgments of the national interest, notwithstanding the customary prohibition of interventionary diplomacy in international law and morality. "To Intervene or Not to Intervene," p. 430.

tion of the national interest should include the relevant moral considerations. This maneuver seems to allow him to maintain the skeptical thesis (i.e., that the rule "follow the national interest" is the first principle of international conduct) while avoiding the non sequitur noted above. But it is hard to believe that any serious skeptic would be satisfied with such a revised national interest view. What the skeptic wants to maintain is that the definition and pursuit of the national interest is not subject to any moral conditions. In other words, it would be inappropriate to criticize leaders on moral grounds for their choices of foreign policy goals and means. Now suppose that Morgenthau's revised view were accepted, but that a leader mistakenly failed to include in his calculations identifying the national interest the relevant moral considerations. Then, apparently, the leader's conception of the national interest could be criticized on moral grounds, a possibility that the skeptic wants to avoid. Morgenthau's claim that the national interest of a power must be constrained by its own morality seems to be an ad hoc concession to a position inconsistent with his own skepticism. A consistent skepticism about international ethics must maintain that there are no moral restrictions on a state's definition of its own interests, that is, that a state is always morally justified in acting to promote its perceived interests. The problem is to explain how this position can be maintained without endorsing a general skepticism about all morality.

In response to this challenge, the international skeptic might claim that certain peculiar features of the international order make moral judgments inappropriate. National sovereignty is often claimed to be such a feature. On this view, states are not subject to international moral requirements because they represent separate and discrete political orders with no common authority among them. Jean Bodin is sometimes interpreted as arguing in this way. He writes, for example, "[T]here are none on earth, after God, greater than sovereign princes, whom God establishes as His lieutenants to command the rest of mankind."¹⁸ The sovereign power is

¹⁸ Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth* [1576], I, x, p. 40.

exercised "simply and absolutely" and "cannot be subject to the commands of another, for it is he who makes law for the subject."¹⁹ Such a sovereign is bound by obligations to other sovereigns only if the obligations result from voluntary agreements made or endorsed by the sovereigns themselves.²⁰

Bodin tempers his view with the claim that even princes ought to follow natural reason and justice.²¹ He distinguishes between "true kings" and "despots" according to whether they follow the "laws of nature."²² While the discussion in which this distinction is drawn concerns what we might call internal sovereignty—roughly, a prince's legal authority over his own subjects—one might infer that a sovereign ruler's conduct with respect to other sovereignties might be appraised on the same standard. This would give moral judgment a foothold in international relations, but such appraisals, in Bodin's view, would lack one feature that seems essential to full-fledged moral judgment. This feature emerges when a comparison is made between international and internal sovereignty. While it is possible for sovereign rulers to break the natural law, this would not justify subjects opposing their rulers because there is no superior authority to which appeal can be made to decide the issue.²³ Analogously in the international case, one might argue (although Bodin is silent on this matter) that no prince can justify opposition to the policies of another prince on the grounds that the latter has violated natural law, because there is no common authority capable of resolving the moral conflict. Notice that this is not to say that no prince can ever justify opposition to the policies of others; it merely makes *moral* (i.e., natural law) justifications inappropriate.

My interest here is in the suggestion that the absence of a common judge provides a reason for skepticism about international morality. It is clear that on some (particularly positivist) views of jurisprudence, the absence of a common

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, viii, pp. 27-28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

²³ *Ibid.*, v, p. 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²² *Ibid.*, II, iii, p. 59.

judge shows that there is no positive law.²⁴ But, even if we grant the positivists' claim that there is no genuine international law, it is difficult to see why the fact of competing national sovereignties should entail there being no sense at all in *moral* evaluation of international action. We do not make such stringent demands on domestic affairs; there are many areas of interpersonal and social relations that are not subject to legal regulation but about which we feel that moral evaluation would be meaningful. Furthermore, in principle, it does not seem that the idea of a common judge plays a role in morality analogous to its role in law. Even if we do assume that there is a correct answer to every moral question, we do not assume that there is a special office or authority responsible for providing the answer.²⁵

This is not enough to establish the possibility of international morality, however, for someone might say that it is not simply sovereignty, but certain special features of an order of sovereign states, that makes international morality impossible. A similar recourse is available to proponents of the view that the perceived national interest is the supreme value in international politics. In comparing international relations to the state of nature, Hobbes produced such an argument. Because it is the strongest argument available for skepticism about international normative principles, I shall consider it at length in the following sections.

2. The Hobbesian Situation

THE most powerful argument that has been given for international skepticism pictures international relations as a state of nature. For example, Raymond Aron writes: "Since states have not renounced taking the law into their own hands and remaining sole judges of what their honor requires, the

²⁴ For this argument applied to international law, see John Austin, *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* [1832], lecture 6, pp. 193-94, 200-1.

²⁵ Compare Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics* [1891], XV, sec. 1, pp. 238-41.

survival of political units depends, in the final analysis, on the balance of forces, and it is the duty of statesmen to be concerned, *first of all*, with the nation whose destiny is entrusted to them. The necessity of national egoism derives logically from what philosophers called the *state of nature* which rules among states.²⁶ The necessity (or "duty") to follow the national interest is dictated by a rational appreciation of the fact that other states will do the same, using force when necessary, in a manner unrestrained by a consideration of the interests of other actors or of the international community.

The idea that international relations is a state of nature is common in modern political theory, particularly in the writings of modern natural law theorists.²⁷ It makes a difference, as we shall see, which version of this idea one adopts as the basis for understanding the role of morality in international affairs. Since most contemporary writers (like Aron)²⁸ follow Hobbes's account, we shall begin there.

According to Hobbes, the state of nature is defined by the absence of a political authority sufficiently powerful to assure people security and the means to live a felicitous life. Hobbes holds that there can be no effective moral principles in the state of nature. I use "effective" to describe principles with which agents have an obligation to conform their actions; effective principles oblige, in Hobbes's phrase, "*in foro externo*" and are not merely principles that should regulate a preferred world but do not apply directly to the actual world. Principles of the latter sort oblige "*in foro interno*" and require us only to "desire, and endeavor" that the world were such that conformity with them would have a rational justification.²⁹

In Hobbes's view, one has reason to do something (like adhere to moral norms) if doing the thing is likely to promote

²⁶ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 580; emphasis in original.

²⁷ See the references in Otto von Guericke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*, vol. 2, p. 288, note 1.

²⁸ Aron, *Peace and War*, p. 72.

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], ch. 15, p. 145; compare Hobbes, *Philosophical Rudiments concerning Government and Society* [*De Cive*] [1651], III, sec. 33, pp. 49-50.

one's interests, in particular, one's overriding interests in avoiding death and securing a felicitous life. Morality is a system of rules that promote each person's overriding interests, and hence to which each person has reason to adhere, only when everyone (or almost everyone) complies with them. In other words, a condition of the rationality of acting on moral rules is that one have adequate assurance of the compliance of others.³⁰ Hobbes thinks that adequate assurance of reciprocal compliance with moral rules can only be provided by a government with power to reward compliance and punish noncompliance. Where there is no such assurance—as in the state of nature, where there is no government—there is no reason to comply. Instead, there is a very good reason not to comply, namely, one's own survival, which would be threatened if, for example, one abstained from harming others while they did not observe the same restraint.

Hobbes gives two accounts of why the state of nature is sufficiently dangerous to render compliance with moral restrictions unreasonable. In the earlier works (*Human Nature* and *De Cive*) he relies heavily on the psychological assumption that people will be moved by the love of glory to contend with others for preeminence.³¹ In *Leviathan*, he develops another account which relies less on substantive psychological assumptions and more on uncertainty. Here the claim is that some (perhaps only a few) people in the state of nature will be seekers after glory, but that prudent persons aware of this fact would become "diffident," distrustful, and "competitive," always ready to protect themselves by all means available.³² On both accounts the outcome is the state of war, "a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known."³³ In such an unstable situation it would be irrational to restrict one's behavior according to moral rules, "for that were to expose himself to prey, which no man is bound to."³⁴ Thus,

³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 11, p. 85, and ch. 14, pp. 116-17.

³¹ Hobbes, *Human Nature* [1650], ch. 9, pp. 40-41; *De Cive*, ch. 1, pp. 6-7.

³² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 111. This account also appears in the earlier works, although with less emphasis. See *De Cive*, Preface, pp. xiv-xv, and ch. 1, p. 6.

³³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 113.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. 14, p. 118.

Hobbes concludes, in the state of nature "nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place."³⁵

Some commentators have thought this conclusion too hasty. For, they point out, Hobbes allows that covenants may be made in the state of nature, and that some such covenants give rise to binding obligations to perform even when performance cannot be shown to be in the interest of the agent. In particular, Hobbes says that covenants are binding on a person not only "where there is a power to make him perform," but also "where one of the parties has performed already."³⁶ Since Hobbes's definition of justice is the performance of covenants, it seems that he is committed to the view that justice *does* have a place in the state of nature, at least in cases involving covenants "where one of the parties has performed already." This position receives additional textual support from Hobbes's discussion of the ransomed soldier, in which he claims that such a soldier, having been released on promise of subsequent payment of a ransom, thereby incurs an obligation to make good on the promise even though there may be no common power to enforce it.³⁷

These passages have led some to think that Hobbes does not hold what might be called a prudential theory of obligation, for he seems to say that there are cases in which one has an obligation to perform as one has agreed even though supporting reasons of self-interest are absent.³⁸ This is a difficult position to maintain since it is in direct conflict with other portions of Hobbes's text. For example, he claims, without qualification, that "covenants without the sword, are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."³⁹ Furthermore, Hobbes's own justification of the claim about covenants where one of the parties has performed already rests on clearly prudential arguments.⁴⁰ While I cannot argue this issue at length, I believe that these textual considerations, taken together with Hobbes's psychological egoism, support the view that his

³⁵ Ibid., ch. 13, p. 115.

³⁶ Ibid., ch. 15, p. 133.

³⁷ Ibid., ch. 14, pp. 126-27.

³⁸ See, for example, Brian Barry, "Warrender and his Critics."

³⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 17, p. 153.

⁴⁰ Ibid., ch. 15, pp. 133-34.

theory of obligation is purely prudential; people have no obligation to perform actions when performance cannot be shown to advance their (long-range) self-interests.⁴¹

To say that persons situated in the state of nature have no obligation to follow moral principles is not to say that there are no such principles. Indeed, Hobbes proposes nineteen "laws of nature" as the constitutive principles of "the true moral philosophy."⁴² These principles are such that it is in the interests of each person that everyone abide by them. Hobbes argues that life in a society effectively regulated by the laws of nature would be infinitely preferable to life in the state of nature, since, in the state of nature, where no one has an obligation to restrict his actions according to moral principles, "the life of man" is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."⁴³ The problem posed by Hobbes's theory is how to create conditions in which the laws of nature would be effective, that is, would oblige "*in foro externo*." Hobbes thinks that a common power is needed to assure each person that everyone else will follow the laws of nature. The dilemma is that creating a common power seems to require cooperation in the state of nature, but cooperation, on Hobbes's account, would be irrational there. (Who could rationally justify taking the first step?) There appears to be no exit from the state of nature despite the fact that any rational person in that state could recognize the desirability of establishing a common power and bringing the state of nature to a close. Thus, while there are moral principles or laws of nature in the state of nature, they do not bind to action in the absence of a common power.

International skeptics have seized on this feature of Hobbes's theory to support the view that there are no effective moral obligations in international relations. This conclusion follows from the analogy that Hobbes himself draws between international relations and the state of nature: "But though there had never been any time, wherein particular men were in a condition of war one against another; yet in all times, kings, and persons of sovereign authority, because of

⁴¹ For helpful discussions, see David P. Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, pp. 57-62; and J.W.N. Watkins, *Hobbes's System of Ideas*, pp. 55-64.

⁴² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 15, p. 146.

⁴³ Ibid., ch. 13, p. 113.

their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms; and continual spies upon their neighbors; which is a posture of war."⁴⁴ In such a situation, each state is at liberty to seek its own interest unrestrained by any higher moral requirements: "[I]n states, and commonwealths not dependent on one another, every commonwealth, not every man, has an absolute liberty, to do what it shall judge, that is to say, what that man, or assembly that representeth it, shall judge most conducing to their benefit."⁴⁵ Supposing that moral rules cannot require a man (or a nation) to do that which he (or it) has no reason to do, the argument holds that it is irrational to adhere to moral rules in the absence of a reliable expectation that others will do the same.

This seems to be the strongest argument that the skeptic can advance, because it is based on the plausible intuition that conformity to moral rules must be reasonable from the point of view of the agent in order to represent a binding requirement. When the agents are persons, the force of this intuition can be questioned on the ground that other things than self-interest can come into the definition of rationality. A successful counterargument of this kind results in the view that some sacrifices of self-interest might be rational when necessary to achieve other goods. But this kind of counterargument is not as obviously available when the agents are states, since it can be argued that, as a matter of fact, there is far less assurance that states would sacrifice their perceived interests to achieve other goals.⁴⁶ Thus, even if Hobbesian skepticism about indi-

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 115. See also *De Cive*, Preface, p. xv; and *De Corpore Politico* [1650], II, ch. 10, p. 228.

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 21, p. 201. Compare ch. 30, p. 342: "[E]very sovereign hath the same right, in procuring the safety of his people, that any particular man can have, in procuring the safety of his own body. And the same law, that dictateth to men that have no civil government, what they ought to do, and what to avoid in regard of one another, dictateth the same to commonwealths."

⁴⁶ Compare Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, pp. 166-69.

vidual ethics in the absence of government is rejected, it might still move us to deny the possibility of effective regulative principles for the conduct of nations.⁴⁷

It is important to be clear about the conclusion to which the skeptic is committed by this argument. The conclusion follows from applying Hobbes's theory of obligation to international relations. Accordingly, we might reformulate the conclusion as the claim that the officials of states have no obligation to conform their official actions in international affairs to moral principles. Such principles are not effective when there are no reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance. However, this is not to say that it would not be desirable for all states (or their officials) to conform their actions to certain principles, or that some such principles, analogous to Hobbes's law of nature, cannot be formulated. It is only to say, to repeat Hobbes's phrase, that whatever international principles exist apply "*in foro interno*" but not "*in foro externo*."

As I have said, the moral problem posed by Hobbes's theory is how to create conditions in which the laws of nature would be effective. Characterizing international relations as a state of nature poses a similar moral problem. If international relations is a state of nature, it follows that no state has an obligation to comply with regulative principles analogous to the laws of nature. But it also follows that widespread compliance with such principles would be desirable from the point of view of each state.⁴⁸ Carrying through the analogy with the

⁴⁷ This seems to have been Rousseau's view. See "L'état de guerre" [1896; written 1753-1755?], pp. 297-99. Perhaps this explains the hesitation about questions of international political theory expressed in *The Social Contract*. See *Du contrat social* [1762], III, xvi, p. 98, note 2, and IV, ix, p. 134.

⁴⁸ Apparently Hobbes recognized that this would follow from his own characterization of international relations as a state of nature, but he did not argue for an international Leviathan. Perhaps the reason is his view that, since states in a posture of war "uphold thereby, the industry of their subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery, which accompanies the liberty of particular men." (*Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 115.) To say the least, it is not obvious that this claim is empirically accurate. Furthermore, even if it is correct, it would not follow that international agreement on regulative principles for nations is not desirable, but only that such agreement is less urgent than the analogous agreement to institute civil government.

state of nature therefore raises two further questions: what is the content of the principles it would be desirable for every state to accept? How can conditions be brought about such that it would be in the interests of each state to comply with these principles?

That such questions arise as a consequence of the characterization of international relations as a state of nature may suggest that the skeptics are inconsistent in invoking this characterization to support their view. For the first question presupposes that it would be desirable that conditions be created in which states would have reason to comply with certain normative principles, and the second question at least suggests that it is possible to create such conditions. From this one might argue that states have an obligation to do what they can to establish the requisite conditions, at least when they can do so without unacceptable risk. If this is true, then international skepticism is false, since it would not be the case that states are not subject to any moral requirements.

Hobbes does not posit an *effective* obligation to escape the interpersonal state of nature because the actions necessary to escape from it are inconsistent with the actions required for self-preservation within it. To defend international skepticism against the difficulty noted above, one would have to argue that international relations, like the state of nature, involves conditions such that the actions needed to establish an effective international morality are inconsistent with the actions required for the preservation of states. In that case it would follow that states are not subject to any binding moral requirements. And, while it would still be the case that conformity with appropriate international normative principles would be desirable, it would be academic to inquire about their content since there would be no way of rendering them effective.

3. International Relations as a State of Nature

THE application of Hobbes's conception of the state of nature to international relations serves two different functions in the argument for international skepticism. First, it provides an analytical model that explains war as the result of structural properties of international relations.⁴⁹ It produces the conclusion that conflict among international actors will issue in a state of war ("a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known") in the absence of a superior power capable of enforcing regulative rules. Second, the state of nature provides a model of the concept of moral justification that explains how normative principles for international relations should be justified. This explanation holds that since the basis of a state's compliance with moral rules is its rational self-interest, the justification of such rules must appeal to those interests states hold in common.

These two uses of the idea of an international state of nature are distinct because one leads to predictions about state behavior whereas the other leads to prescriptions. While the two uses are related in the sense that the predictions that result from the first use are taken as premises for the second, they should be separated for purposes of evaluation and criticism. In the first case, we need to ask whether the Hobbesian description of international relations is empirically acceptable: do the facts warrant application of this predictive model to international behavior? Our question in the second case is different: does Hobbes's state of nature give a correct account of the justification of moral principles for the international realm?

Let us look first at the predictive use of Hobbes's international state of nature. The description of international rela-

⁴⁹ In this sense, Hobbes uses the state of nature to give what Kenneth Waltz has called a "third image" account of the causes of war—that is, an account based on the image of international anarchy. See *Man, the State, and War*, pp. 159-86, in which Waltz concentrates on the third-image explanations given by Spinoza and Rousseau.

tions as a state of nature leads to the conclusion that a state of war will obtain among international actors in the absence of a superior power capable of enforcing regulative rules against any possible violator. As I have suggested, this conclusion is required as one premise in the argument for international skepticism, for, on a Hobbesian view, the reason that no actor has an obligation to follow rules of cooperation is the lack of assurance that other actors will do the same. Indeed, each actor has a reason not to follow such rules, since, in a state of war, an actor might rationally expect to be taken advantage of by other actors in the system if it were unilaterally to follow cooperative rules. Even if we accept Hobbes's conception of morality, for international skepticism to be a convincing position it must be the case that international relations is analogous to the state of nature in the respects relevant to the prediction that a state of nature regularly issues in a state of war.

For this analogy to be acceptable, at least four propositions must be true:

1. The actors in international relations are states.
2. States have relatively equal power (the weakest can defeat the strongest).
3. States are independent of each other in the sense that they can order their internal (i.e., nonsecurity) affairs independently of the internal policies of other actors.
4. There are no reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance by the actors with rules of cooperation in the absence of a superior power capable of enforcing these rules.

If these conditions are not met by international relations, then the analogy between international relations and the state of nature does not hold, and the prediction that international relations is a state of war does not necessarily follow.

I shall argue that contemporary international relations does not meet any of these conditions. Let us begin with the first. It establishes the analogy between the state of nature and international relations by identifying states as the actors in international relations just as individuals are the actors in

the interpersonal state of nature. This may seem so obvious as not to deserve mention, but it is very important for the skeptic's argument that this condition actually obtain. The radical individualism of Hobbes's state of nature helps to make plausible the prediction of a resulting state of war because it denies the existence of any other actors (secondary associations, functional groups, economic institutions, or extended families, to name a few examples) that might mediate interpersonal conflict, coordinate individuals' actions, insulate individuals from the competition of others, share risks, or encourage the formation of less competitive attitudes. The view that states are the only actors in international relations denies the possibility of analogous international conflict-minimizing coalitions, alliances, and secondary associations. Since it is obviously true that such coalitions have existed at various times in the history of international relations, one might say flatly that international relations does not resemble the state of nature in this important respect.⁵⁰

The difficulty with this claim is that Hobbes himself allows for the possibility of coalitions and alliances in the interpersonal state of nature.⁵¹ However, he argues that these would not be stable. They would, if anything, increase the chances of violence among coalitions, and the shared interests that would lead to their formation would not be long lasting.⁵²

One might make similar claims to defend the analogy of international relations and the state of nature, but it is not obvious that the claims would be empirically correct. Some alliances appear to confirm Hobbes's hypothesis that forming alliances increases the chances of war, despite the fact that alliances are often viewed as mechanisms for stabilizing a balance of power and making credible the threat to retaliate on attack.⁵³ On the other hand, several types of coalitions have produced opposite results. For example, regional political and economic organizations appear to have played significant

⁵⁰ Oran Young, "The Actors in World Politics."

⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 17, pp. 154-55.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ See, for example, J. David Singer and Melvin Small, "Alliance Aggregation and the Onset of War, 1815-1914."

roles in the nonviolent resolution of international conflicts. They have also made it easier for national leaders to perceive their common interests in peace and stability.⁵⁴ The same seems true, although in a more limited range of circumstances, of global international organizations like the United Nations.⁵⁵ To Hobbes's view that coalitions (and, by extension, universal organizations short of world government) are unlikely to be long lasting, it can only be replied that the important question is how long any particular conflict-minimizing coalition is likely to endure. Clearly, one should not expect such coalitions to persist forever, but it is historically demonstrable that some coalitions have enjoyed life spans sufficiently long to defeat the claim that they have made no significant contribution to peace and cooperation.

The view that states are the only actors in international relations also denies the possibility that transnational associations of persons might have common interests that would motivate them to exert pressures for cooperation on their respective national governments. The view does so by obscuring the fact that states, unlike persons, are aggregations of units (persons and secondary associations) that are capable of independent political action. These units might be grouped according to other criteria than citizenship, for example, according to interests that transcend national boundaries. When such interests exist, one would expect that transnational interest groups or their functional equivalents might exert pressures on their respective governments to favor policies that advance the groups' shared interests.

Since the second world war, the number, variety, membership, and importance of transnational groups have all increased, in some cases dramatically.⁵⁶ Early academic attention to transnational interests focused on groups of specialists

⁵⁴ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Peace in Parts*, chs. 4-5.

⁵⁵ Ernst B. Haas, Robert L. Butterworth, and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Conflict Management by International Organizations*, esp. pp. 56-61.

⁵⁶ The most useful survey of the growth of transnationalism is provided by the essays in Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics*.

(economists, labor leaders) and on functionally specific transnational organizations (the World Meteorological Organization, European Coal and Steel Community) and hypothesized that successful collaboration with respect to some functions would promote by a process of social learning collaboration with respect to other functions. The resulting progressive enlargement of areas of transnational collaboration was expected to undermine international political conflict by making clear to domestic constituencies and decision makers the extent of transnationally shared interests.⁵⁷ Subsequent experience has failed to corroborate the early functionalists' hypothesis for all cases of functional collaboration, but there are particular cases in which the hypothesized social-learning process has taken root.⁵⁸

Although the central hypothesis of the theory of functional integration has been discredited, the insight that transnational interest groups might alter the outcomes of international politics by exerting pressures on national government policy making has not. In fact, the effectiveness of such groups in promoting their interests at the national level has been illustrated in several quite different areas. Two important examples of politically effective transnational groups are multinational corporations and informal, transnational groups of middle-level government bureaucrats. In each case, although to very different extents, it is clear that transnationally shared interests have sometimes led to substantial pressures on government foreign policy decisions.⁵⁹ As the difficulties of integration theory suggest, it should not be inferred that the effect of rapidly increasing transnational po-

⁵⁷ The most influential early statement of this view is David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*. There is a revised formulation in Ernst B. Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State*, part 1. For a review of the more recent literature, see Michael Haas, "International Integration."

⁵⁸ See James Patrick Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics*, parts 1 and 3; and Ernst B. Haas, "The Study of Regional Integration."

⁵⁹ See, on multinational corporations, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Multinational Corporations in World Politics," pp. 155-59, and the references cited there; and, on interbureaucracy contacts, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Transgovernmental Relations and International Organizations."

litical activity is necessarily to minimize the chances of international conflict or to promote international cooperation, because a variety of other factors is involved.⁶⁰ In particular, transnational political activity is unlikely to promote international cooperation in the absence of perceptions by national decision makers of significant shared interests that would justify such cooperation.⁶¹ The theoretical importance of the rise of transnational politics lies elsewhere. It lies in the fact that nation-states can no longer be regarded as the only, or as the ultimate, actors in international relations, since their actions may be influenced significantly by pressures from groups that represent transnational interests. Depending on the strength and extent of these interests, this new element of complexity in international relations renders problematic the Hobbesian explanation of why international relations should be regarded as a state of war.

The second condition is that the units that make up the state of nature must be of relatively equal power in the sense that the weakest can defeat the strongest.⁶² The assumption of equal power is most obviously necessary for Hobbes's claim that the state of nature is a state of war because it eliminates the possibility of dictatorship (or empire) arising in the state of nature as a result of the preponderant power of any one actor or coalition. This assumption might seem unnecessarily strong, since the possibility of dictatorship within the state of nature might be ruled out with the weaker assumption that no actor is strong enough to dominate the rest. However, there is another reason for assuming equal power, and in this case nondominance will not do. The further reason is to rule out as irrationally risky, actions by any actor designed to promote the development of conditions in which moral behavior (i.e., behavior according to the laws of nature) would have a rational justification. In other words, Hobbes defines the state

⁶⁰ Donald P. Warwick, "Transnational Participation and International Peace," pp. 321-24.

⁶¹ As John Gerard Ruggie suggests, "Collective Goods and Future International Collaboration," p. 878.

⁶² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 110.

of nature so that both conformity to the laws of nature and action to escape the state of nature are equally irrational. The stronger assumption of equal power secures both conclusions, whereas, on the weaker assumption of nondominance, it could be argued that the relatively stronger actors may have obligations to work for changes in those background conditions that make moral behavior irrational for all. This would be because some such actions might be undertaken without undue risk to the relatively stronger actors.

Now our question is whether it is appropriate to make the relatively stronger assumption of equal power about contemporary international relations. It seems clear that this condition is not met; there are vast disparities in relative levels of national power.⁶³ David Gauthier has argued that the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons render these inequalities less severe and make international relations more like a Hobbesian state of nature than it had been previously.⁶⁴ But this is too simple. While the possession of nuclear weapons may increase the relative power of some states not usually considered major powers, it is not true that all or most states are developing or will develop operational nuclear arsenals. The likely result of proliferation is not a world of nuclear powers but a world divided between an expanded number of nuclear powers and a large number of states that continue to lack nuclear weapons. Gauthier suggests that it is not equal nuclear capacity but equal vulnerability to nuclear attack that secures the analogy of nuclear politics and the state of nature.⁶⁵ But this shift does not help, since states are highly unequal in this sense as well, as a result of their varying levels of retaliatory capabilities (and hence of deterrent strengths) and of nuclear defenses.⁶⁶ Also, as long as the

⁶³ It has been suggested that this is one reason Hobbes thought that the inconveniences of the international state of nature would not lead to an international Leviathan. States of unequal power and vulnerability can "secure their ends by treaties and alliances, rather than by a resignation of their sovereignty." Howard Warrender, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, p. 119.

⁶⁴ Gauthier, *The Logic of Leviathan*, pp. 207-8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁶⁶ There is a detailed discussion of these issues in Albert Legault and George Lindsey, *The Dynamics of the Nuclear Balance*, esp. chs. 3-5.

deterrence system works, conventional-force imbalances—which are often substantial—will continue to differentiate strong states from weak ones. If this is true, then the most that can be claimed about relative levels of national power is that no state can dominate all the others. As we have seen, this alone may be enough to show that compliance with moral rules is irrational for any state, but it is not enough to show that some states (the strong ones) do not have obligations to try to change the rules of the international game so as to render compliance with moral rules more rational. As we shall see, even the relatively weaker assumption is thrown into question by some further characteristics of power in contemporary international relations.

The third condition is that the units be able to order their internal (i.e., nonsecurity) affairs independently of the internal policies of the other units. (As economists would say, the units must have independent utility functions once corrected for security considerations.)⁶⁷ If the units in the state of nature were interdependent in the way suggested, then the pursuit of self-interest by any one unit might require cooperation with other units in the system. The relations among parties in the state of nature would then resemble a game of mixed interests rather than a zero-sum game. Thus, if the units were interdependent, Hobbes's assumption that the pursuit of self-interest by the parties in the state of nature will usually lead to violent conflict would be undermined.

Again, it seems unlikely that this condition applies to international relations. It is increasingly true that the security and prosperity of any one state depends to a greater or lesser extent on that of some or all other states. In terms of security, this is reflected in the recognition that the great powers have a shared interest in avoiding a nuclear confrontation, and this justifies a measure of trust and predictability in their relations

⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, pp. 112-13. Actually, Hobbes's assumption may be stronger than this. When men quarrel for reasons of honor and glory, one might say that their utility functions are inversely related and hence (negatively) interdependent. But the argument only requires the condition of independence given above.

with one another.⁶⁸ The interdependence of state interests has recently been illustrated in the broad area of economic and welfare concerns as well. Here it has been argued that the success of states in meeting domestic economic goals (e.g., full employment, control of inflation, balanced economic growth) requires substantially higher levels of cooperation among governments than has been the case in the past.⁶⁹

Such interdependencies explain the rise of international institutions and practices that organize interstate rivalries in ways that require cooperation if the practices are to be maintained and conflicts resolved by nonviolent means. In the economic area, these include the organizational and consultative practices of the International Monetary Fund and its rules governing adjustment of currency exchange rates, and the related rules of trade formulated in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Taken together, these institutions can be seen as the constitutional structure of international finance and trade; their role is fundamental in promoting or retarding the growth of trade, the flow of investment, and the international transmission of inflation and unemployment.⁷⁰

There is no doubt that such practices and institutions (or "regimes," as they are sometimes called)⁷¹ have come to occupy a far more important place in international relations than previously as a result of the increasing volume and significance of transnational transactions. They are noticeable primarily in economic relations, but they are also significant in other areas (for example, regulation of the oceans and of the atmosphere, control of resource use, coordination of

⁶⁸ This conclusion emerges most clearly from the debate over the application of game theoretic models of conflict and cooperation to nuclear strategy. See, for example, Anatol Rapoport, *Strategy and Conscience*, part 2. There is a thorough review of this literature in John R. Raser, "International Deterrence."

⁶⁹ Edward L. Morse, "The Transformation of Foreign Policies." For a helpful discussion of the recent debate about the extent and kinds of interdependence, see Richard Rosecrance, "Interdependence: Myth or Reality."

⁷⁰ Richard N. Cooper, "Prolegomena to the Choice of an International Monetary System."

⁷¹ By Keohane and Nye, for example. *Power and Interdependence*, p. 19.

health policies).⁷² As a result, the character of power in international relations has been transformed.⁷³

Power might be defined, very roughly, as an actor's capacity to cause other actors to act (or not to act) in ways in which they would not have acted (or would have acted) otherwise. The use or threat of violence is a paradigmatic instrument of power because there are very few situations in which we can imagine violence or its threat not causing others to act. But there is nothing about power that limits its instruments to the instruments of violence. Threats of something other than violence, as well as positive inducements, might count as forms of power in appropriate circumstances. The instruments of power available to an actor are partly determined by the kinds of relationships in which the actor stands with respect to the other actors it wishes to influence. In particular, common membership in institutions or common participation in practices often constitutes nonviolent forms of power. Thus, for example, members of organizations like the United Nations can bargain their votes for desired actions by other global actors. Or, traders in some commodity (say, oil) can withhold the commodity from the market to cause others to change their behavior in prescribed ways.

It is difficult to say how the rise of these new forms of international power will affect prospects for recourse to older forms. One might expect the international role of violence or its threat to vary inversely with the density of international institutions and practices that serve important interests. Common institutions and practices of the kind described require stable environmental conditions for their operation and a measure of consensual support, at least from their more significant members. It is likely (though not necessary) that all or most participants would share an interest in minimizing the

⁷² The literature is large; see, for example, Richard N. Cooper, "Economic Interdependence and Foreign Policy in the Seventies"; Edward L. Morse, "Transnational Economic Processes"; and Alex Inkeles, "The Emerging Social Structure of the World."

⁷³ Seyom Brown, *New Forces in World Politics*, pp. 112-17 and 186-90; and Stanley Hoffmann, "Notes on the Elusiveness of Modern Power."

chances that continued functioning of their institutions and practices will be undermined by outbreaks of violence.⁷⁴

On the other hand, while agreeing that new forms of power have arisen as a result of the development of new actors and relationships in international politics, one might think that this is, in fact, a reason to expect the use or threat of violence to become more rather than less common.⁷⁵ Perhaps the rise of new forms of power simply reflects the fact that states demand more from international relations now than in the past. A common example is that now, unlike, say, the eighteenth century, states are widely committed to maintaining high levels of domestic employment. Success in this commitment often depends on other international actors following particular kinds of policies. Since more is at stake in international relations now than previously, one might conclude, states have more reasons rather than fewer for using violence or its threat to protect and advance their interests.

This position, while not entirely incorrect, seems to overstate the case. First, as I have pointed out, the international mechanisms that states rely on to pursue various domestic (especially economic) goals often require stable environmental conditions and broad consensual support. Both of these might be upset if a state resorted to violence to pursue its goals. Violence, in other words, might be self-defeating in such circumstances. Furthermore, the view assumes that various forms of power in international relations are interchangeable; for example, if one cannot obtain an objective with a nonviolent form of power (say, one's influence in the decision-making structure of international finance institutions), one can still obtain it with superior military power. But it is not clear that forms of international power are so interchangeable, especially in view of the increasing diversity of

⁷⁴ This appears to be Kant's view in the First Supplement to *Perpetual Peace* [1795], p. 114.

⁷⁵ This view derives from Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité* [1755], pp. 203-6. See also Stanley Hoffmann, "Rousseau on War and Peace," *The State of War*, pp. 62-63. But see Hoffmann's more recent remarks in "Notes on the Elusiveness of Modern Power," pp. 191-95 and 205-6.

objectives that states and other actors seek in international relations. The use of military power may not only be self-defeating, but its costs may be too great, or it may simply be irrelevant to the objective being pursued.⁷⁶

The fourth condition is that there be no reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance in the absence of an authority capable of enforcing moral rules.⁷⁷ Hobbes is guilty here of formulating an overly restrictive condition. It has been pointed out that the reliability of the expectations involved is more properly understood as a function of the degree to which there is a settled habit of obedience to moral rules in the society.⁷⁸ A common power might effectively raise the level of obedience or it might not; what matters to the state-of-nature argument is that the appropriate expectations are lacking. But this does not fundamentally damage the Hobbesian position. One need only redefine the state of nature as a situation in which there are neither settled habits of obedience to moral rules nor well-established moral conventions.

This modification of Hobbes's position should be applied in the comparison with international relations as well. However, even some (like Kurt Baier) who have proposed the modification have failed to apply it to the international case. According to Baier's reconstruction of Hobbes's argument, "the doctrine of the sovereignty of nations and the absence of an effective international law and police force are a guarantee that nations live in a state of nature, without commonly accepted rules that are somehow enforced."⁷⁹ But this empirical claim hardly stands up against evidence of actual international behavior. Although there is no international police force, the international community possesses a variety of devices for promoting compliance with established norms. These range from such mild sanctions as community disapproval and censure by international organizations to coordinated national policies of economic embargoes of offending

⁷⁶ For a further discussion, see Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, pp. 11-19, 27-29.

⁷⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 14, pp. 114-16.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, pp. 238-39.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

states. As international organizations grow in size and scope, exclusion from participation in the production and distribution of collective goods (for example, information and technology) is likely to become increasingly effective as an additional sanction.⁸⁰

Regardless of the presence or absence of such machinery for enforcement, a wide variety of areas of international relations are characterized by high degrees of voluntary compliance with customary norms and institutionalized rules established by agreement. These areas are primarily associated with specific functions in which many states take an interest, but from which no state benefits without the cooperation of the other states involved. Governments participate in a wide range of specialized agencies (the Postal Union, the World Health Organization, the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, etc.) and in many sectional associations like military alliances (NATO, the Warsaw Pact) and regional trade and development organizations (the European Economic Community).⁸¹ In addition, there are rules and practices that are expressed in other than organizational forms—for example, customary international law, the conventions of diplomatic practice, and the rules of war.⁸² The sphere of economic organizations and practices presents even clearer evidence of the existence of a highly articulated system of international institutions.

Evidence of areas of cooperation in which expectations of reciprocal compliance are reasonable could be multiplied, but enough has been said already to defeat the claim that the absence of a global coercive authority shows that international relations is, in the relevant sense, analogous to a Hobbesian state of nature. It is worth pausing to ask why, in the face of such fairly obvious empirical considerations, people might

⁸⁰ See Roger Fisher, "Bringing Law to Bear on Governments"; Wolfgang Friedmann, *The Changing Structure of International Law*, pp. 89-95; Michael Barkun, *Law Without Sanctions*, esp. ch. 2.

⁸¹ See Lynn H. Miller, *Organizing Mankind: An Analysis of Contemporary International Organization*, esp. chs. 3-5.

⁸² A convenient discussion of these matters is in J. L. Brierly, *The Law of Nations*, esp. chs. 2-3.

continue to think that the analogy holds. Perhaps, H.L.A. Hart suggests, this is the result of accepting a more fundamental analogy between the forms and conditions of interaction among individual persons and among communities organized as states. States, unlike persons, are not of such relatively equal strength as to make possible, or perhaps even desirable, machinery for coercive enforcement on the model of domestic society. There is no assurance that an offending state can be effectively coerced by a coalition of other states, while the use of sanctions even by a preponderant coalition might involve costs far in excess of the benefits to be derived from general compliance with appropriate rules.⁸³ It might be added that states can coordinate relatively complex activities with less reliance than individuals on centrally administered coercive threats because of their more diversified administrative and information-gathering capabilities. As a result, in a world not hierarchically ordered on the model of domestic societies, one can talk of a "horizontal" ordering which nevertheless involves substantial expectations of reciprocal compliance with rules of cooperation.⁸⁴

This picture of international relations might seem to leave little room for war, and this might seem rather unrealistic in view of the massive violence that has marked the last hundred years. But I have not meant to argue that war is a thing of the past, nor that it is no longer in some sense the ultimate problem of international politics. The point is that the concerns of international relations have broadened considerably, with the result that competition among international actors may often take a variety of nonviolent forms, each requiring at least tacit agreement on certain rules of the game that express important common interests of the actors involved. The actors in international politics, their forms of interaction and competition, their power, and the goals the system can promote have all changed. While international relations can still be charac-

⁸³ H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, p. 214.

⁸⁴ For a further discussion, see Richard A. Falk, "International Jurisdiction: Horizontal and Vertical Conceptions of Legal Order"; and Gidon Gottlieb, "The Nature of International Law: Toward a Second Concept of Law," esp. pp. 331-39.

terized as "a tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known," it has become more complex than this as well. But this new complexity, which has both analytical and normative importance, is likely to be obscured if one accepts the model of international relations as a state of nature in which the only major problem is war.

If these empirical criticisms are correct, then, even if one holds that states are obligated to observe moral rules only when it is in their interests to do so, it seems that there are some rules of cooperation that are binding on states. This is because states have common interests, and there are reasonable grounds for expecting reciprocal compliance with some rules that advance these interests even in the absence of a higher coercive authority. Of course, a substantially more sophisticated analysis would be required to identify these rules.⁸⁵ Furthermore, when established practices are flawed (in some sense yet to be specified), or when certain kinds of actions or policies are not governed by established practices, it is still not the case that no state has an obligation to improve the system. Since states are of unequal power, it may be that some states (those that are relatively powerful) can take remedial actions without incurring substantial risks. Thus, the analogy of international relations and the state of nature fails, and as a result neither of the conclusions of the Hobbesian argument for skepticism carries over to international relations.

A final caveat should be added, if only because the point is so often obscured. My claim that it is wrong to conceptualize international relations as a Hobbesian state of nature does not imply that the international realm should be understood for all purposes on the analogy of domestic society. I have suggested, and will argue further in part three, that the two realms are similar in several respects relevant to the justification of principles of social justice. But there are important differences as well. The institutions and practices of international relations perform fewer tasks than their domestic

⁸⁵ One appropriate framework for such an analysis is provided by collective-goods theory. This project is begun in Ruggie, "Collective Goods and Future International Collaboration."

counterparts, are generally less efficient, and are less capable of coordinating the performance of tasks in diverse areas. More important, from our point of view, international relations includes fewer effective procedures for peaceful political change, and those procedures that do exist are more prone to problems of noncompliance. Rather than assimilate international relations to the state of nature or to domestic society, it would be better to understand it as occupying a middle ground. As in domestic society, there are, in international relations, both shared and opposed interests, providing a basis for both cooperation and competition. But effective institutions for exploiting the bases of cooperation are insufficiently developed, and their further growth faces great obstacles. These considerations do not argue for the meaninglessness of talk about international ethics, but they do present distinctive problems for any plausible international normative theory. In part three, I shall explore in more detail how these problems might be faced.

4. The Basis of International Morality

THE second, prescriptive, use of the state of nature explains the justification of regulative principles for political or international life. It does so by showing that a principle or set of principles would be the most rational choice available for persons situated in a state of nature.

Hobbes argues that the first law of nature—that is, the first principle to which rational persons situated in the state of nature would agree—is “that every man, ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it”; this law is qualified by what Hobbes calls “the right of nature,” namely, that when a man cannot obtain peace, “he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of war.”⁸⁶ The justification of these prescriptions, as I have argued, is based on rational self-interest. The analytical use of the state of nature shows that

⁸⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 14, p. 117.

compliance with the laws of nature in the absence of an effective agreement by others to do the same would not be in the interests of any person. The prescriptive use of the state of nature provides the grounds for inferring that this is a reason not to comply with the laws of nature unless the compliance of everyone else can be assured. “[I]f other men will not lay down their right” of nature, “then there is no reason for any one, to divest himself of his: for that were to expose himself to prey.”⁸⁷

It is clear that the description of the state of nature, and of the persons located in it, should express the point of view from which regulative principles should be chosen. Hobbes thinks that this point of view is adequately captured by the idea of self-interest: principles for domestic or international politics must be justified, respectively, by considerations of individual or national self-interest. This view is expressed by his description of a state of nature in which the parties do what is in their own interests, and by his conception of a law of nature as a rule “by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same.”⁸⁸ Our problem in assessing the prescriptive use of the international version of the state of nature is not, as it was with the analytical use considered above, to determine whether there are common interests among states that can support rules of cooperation, and whether the circumstances of international relations ever allow states to follow those rules without unacceptable risk. Instead, we must ask whether the Hobbesian account, applied to international relations, provides an acceptable theory of the justification of international moral principles. There are two questions. First, should the justification of principles for international relations appeal ultimately to considerations about states (e.g., whether general acceptance of a principle would promote each state’s interests)? Second, should the justification of such principles appeal only to *interests*?

The argument that states should pursue their own interests in the absence of reliable expectations of reciprocal compli-

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-17.

ance with common rules depends on the analogy drawn between persons in the interpersonal state of nature and states in international relations. But this analogy is imperfect. In the interpersonal case, the idea that persons can pursue their interests unrestrained by moral rules might seem plausible because we assume that each has a right of self-preservation. Hobbes's claim that the laws of nature are not effective in the state of nature follows from the empirical claim that compliance with laws of nature in such a situation could require a person to act against his or her legitimate interest in self-preservation. But this reasoning does not obviously apply in the international case. By analogy with the interpersonal case, the argument for following the national interest when it conflicts with moral rules would be that there is a *national* right of self-preservation which states cannot be required to give up. The difficulty is that it is not clear what such a right involves or how it can be justified. States are more than aggregations of persons; at a minimum, they are characterized by territorial boundaries and a structure of political and economic institutions. How much of this—to say nothing of such other elements of statehood as cultural tradition, social structure, and so on—is covered by the presumed right of national self-preservation?

The plausibility of the claim that there is a basic right of national self-preservation seems to diminish as the idea of statehood is expanded. For example, it might seem relatively unobjectionable to say that the national interest justifies some action or policy when this is necessary to preserve the lives of the state's inhabitants against an external threat. In this case, the analogy with the interpersonal state of nature seems most acceptable, because it can be argued that the state's right of self-preservation is based directly on its individual members' rights of self-preservation. The presumed right is less acceptable when it is not lives but a state's territorial integrity that is at stake, since there is not necessarily any threat to individual lives. Persons often survive changes in national boundaries. If we expand the idea of statehood still farther—say, another state threatens a particular government but does not threaten lives or territory—the analogy loses even more of its persua-

siveness. I am not arguing that persons would not have legitimate claims against other states and persons in these cases, but rather that these claims could not be based on individual rights of self-preservation. In each case, the grounds on which pursuit of the national interest could be justified are the effects of the external threat on other rights of persons. These are not captured by the analogy with the state of nature.

This point is obscured because the skeptical position carries over the analogy of states and persons from the analytical and descriptive use of the international state of nature to the prescriptive use. I have argued that this analogy is misleading even in the analytic use. But even if this is incorrect, it would not follow that the analogy may be employed appropriately in justifying prescriptions for international behavior. It is easy to see how one might be led to carry the analogy too far. When the state of nature is used for analytical purposes and the actors are persons, there is no difficulty in using the same construct to justify principles of conduct, since these are in any event to be based on a consideration of the moral properties of persons. But when the state of nature is applied to international relations, one must recognize that analytical and prescriptive interests may require different interpretations of the state of nature. If we wish to *understand* the behavior of states, perhaps it would be helpful to view them as rational actors which respond to international circumstances on the basis of a calculation of their rational self-interest. (The analysis in section 3 suggests some doubts about the realism of rational-actor models of international politics, but that is beside the point at the moment.) But if we wish to *prescribe* principles to guide the behavior of states, we are involved in a quite different sort of question. For then our justification of normative principles must appeal ultimately to those kinds of considerations that are appropriate in a prescriptive context, namely, the rights and interests of persons. If the idea of the national interest plays any role in justifying prescriptions for state behavior, it can only be because the national interest derives its normative importance from these deeper and more ultimate concerns.

Those who wish to apply Hobbes's argument to international relations should say that the parties to the international state of nature, when it is used as a device for showing which rules of conduct are rational, are to be conceived as persons rather than as states. This state of nature is international in the sense that the parties to it are of diverse citizenship. But they are still persons, and their choice of rules for the behavior of states (on such a revised Hobbesian view) is guided by their desire to preserve themselves as persons rather than simply to preserve their states as states. The effect of redefining the international state of nature in this way is to limit the choice of international rules in accordance with the considerations advanced above. The parties would still agree to a principle that used the national interest as a guide to behavior in the absence of reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance with moral rules. But now they would limit the national interest to what is required to preserve their lives. On the other hand, where there *are* reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance, there is no need to appeal to the national interest to justify principles of international conduct at all. For in that case individual rights of self-preservation are assured by the existence of stable expectations. The important question in identifying justifiable rules of international conduct would then be the effects of mutual compliance with the various alternative rules on the other rights of persons.⁸⁹

The national interest is often invoked to justify disregard of moral principles that would otherwise constrain choices among alternative foreign policies. Thus, for example, Morgenthau writes that "the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation . . . get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival."⁹⁰ It

⁸⁹ To say that the (prescriptive) international state of nature is made up of persons rather than states (or their representatives) is not to eliminate states from the purview of international theory. My claim here is that principles must be *justified* by considerations of individual rather than "national" rights. But there is no theoretical difficulty in holding that such principles still *apply* primarily to states.

⁹⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 10.

is tempting to interpret Morgenthau as claiming that "the moral principle of national survival" should receive greater weight in deliberations concerning foreign policy than those other principles on which officials might base their "moral disapprobation." If my remarks above are correct, however, this interpretation is unhelpful because it fails to remove an important ambiguity from Morgenthau's formulation and hence fails to explain why his view is plausible at all. The ambiguity concerns the scope of "national survival." When this means "the survival of the state's citizens," the view seems *prima facie* acceptable, but this is because we generally assume that persons (not states) have rights of self-preservation. When "national survival" extends further (for example, to the preservation of forms of cultural life or to the defense of economic interests) the view's *prima facie* acceptability dissipates precisely because the survival of persons is no longer at issue. In such cases the invocation of the national interest does not necessarily justify disregard of other moral standards. What is required is a balancing of the rights and interests presumably protected by acting to further the national interest and those involved in acting on the competing principle that gives rise to moral disapprobation. While it cannot be maintained *a priori* that the individual rights presumably protected by the national interest would never win out in such cases, the opposite cannot be maintained either. Yet this is exactly what an uncritical acceptance of Morgenthau's view invites. Thus, to clarify the issues involved in debates regarding foreign policy choices, it would seem preferable to dispense with the idea of the national interest altogether and instead appeal directly to the rights and interests of all persons affected by the choice. Similarly, nothing is gained, and considerable clarity is lost, by attempting to justify principles of international conduct with reference to their effects on the interests of states. It is the rights and interests of persons that are of fundamental importance from the moral point of view, and it is to these considerations that the justification of principles for international relations should appeal.

The other objection to the Hobbesian state of nature as a

device for justifying rules of international conduct goes deeper and requires further changes in the definition of the state of nature. This criticism is generally relevant to the view of ethics according to which moral rules oblige only when they can be shown to be in the interests of everyone to whom they apply. The view does not allow moral criticism of established practices (although it allows criticism on other, e.g., prudential, grounds) nor does it admit principles whose general observance might seem morally required but would not benefit every party. But both of these seem, intuitively, to be part of the idea of morality.

The issue raised by this objection, of course, is fundamental to ethics: how can anyone have a reason to do particular actions or subscribe to general practices that cannot be shown to work to his advantage when a more advantageous alternative is available? In other words, how is ethics possible? The question is made complex because it requires a joint solution to the problems of moral justification—in what sense is compliance with moral rules rational?—and of moral motivation—how can these rules move us to act? These questions deserve discussion in their own right, but this would carry us far from the subject of international norms. Rather than pursue the question in any depth here, I shall assume that we share some general intuitions about the nature of ethics and try to show that the Hobbesian view falls far short of them. Then I shall return to the problem of expectations of reciprocal compliance and ask how it is relevant to the justification of principles for international relations.⁹¹

The view that ethics is based on enlightened self-interest is inadequate. It fails to account for certain principles that intuitively seem to impose requirements on our actions regardless of considerations of actual or possible resulting benefit to ourselves. Elementary examples of such principles are the rule not to cause unnecessary suffering or to help save a life if that can be done at acceptable cost and risk. Although, in

⁹¹ The most elegant and subtle recent discussion of the issues raised here is Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*; on Hobbes, see Thomas Nagel, "Hobbes's Concept of Obligation."

general, we are likely to think that others would behave similarly if they were in our shoes and were called upon to comply with these rules, it does not seem that this is the reason we would give for acting on them. Indeed, we would say that there may be at least some moral obligations that impose requirements on action regardless of the presence or absence of expectations of reciprocal compliance, and, a fortiori, of conventions and enforceable rules that institutionalize these expectations and enhance their reliability. If the notion of natural moral requirements has a clear reference, it is to these sorts of obligations which do not gain their binding quality from the expectations, conventions, and institutions of particular communities.

One might agree with all of this, but claim that some other principles are based on self-interest—in particular, principles of justice that require compliance with political institutions or actions aimed at their reform. The argument would be that only self-interest provides a sufficiently strong motive for the sorts of actions required by justice, since natural moral requirements (for example, those discussed above which are, perhaps, based on such moral sentiments as altruism) are too few and too weak to support a very extensive system of social cooperation.⁹² However, the Hobbesian view is inadequate here too. For it seems impossible to justify on the basis of self-interest compliance with the general rules governing participation in institutions. Consider, for example, the principle of political obligation. In one formulation, this principle holds that those who have submitted to the rules imposed by an institution, thus restricting their liberty, "have a right to a similar submission from those who have benefited by their submission."⁹³ Any defense of this principle based on self-interest sooner or later runs into the free-rider problem—why should someone submit to a restriction when he can benefit equally from nonsubmission? It requires truly heroic empirical assumptions to defeat such objections without giving

⁹² A view of this kind is expressed in Philippa Foot, "Moral Beliefs," pp. 99-104.

⁹³ H.L.A. Hart, "Are There Any Natural Rights?," p. 185.

up the claim that political obligation must be based on considerations of self-interest. But a Hobbesian view of ethics leaves no alternative.⁹⁴

The Hobbesian position and that expressed by these intuitive reflections represent two points of view from which we might make choices about how to act. To assert that ethics is possible is to say that there are occasions when we have reason to override the demands of self-interest by taking a moral point of view toward human affairs. Speaking very roughly, the moral point of view requires us to regard the world from the perspective of one person among many rather than from that of a particular self with particular interests, and to choose courses of action, policies, rules, and institutions on grounds that would be acceptable to any agent who was impartial among the competing interests involved. Of course, this is not to say that interests are irrelevant to moral choice. The question is how interests come into the justification of such choices. From the point of view of self-interest, one chooses that action or policy that best serves one's own interests, all things considered. From the moral point of view, on the other hand, one views one's interests as one set of interests among many and weighs the entire range of interests according to some impartial scheme. Both points of view are normative in the sense that they may impose requirements on action—for example, by requiring us to subordinate some immediate desire to some other consideration: either long-range self-interest (on Hobbes's view) or the interests of everyone. But only the moral perspective allows us to explain the basis of such natural moral requirements (and perhaps some institutional ones as well) as may move us to act even when there is no assurance of reciprocal compliance, and hence no self-interested justification, available.

This conclusion may seem stronger than it is. While I have argued that the moral point of view is not irrelevant to political theory, I have not said anything about the content of the moral norms that should constitute its substance. Thus, while

⁹⁴ See the illuminating discussion of the relation of rational self-interest and ethics in David P. Gauthier, "Morality and Advantage," esp. pp. 468-75.

it follows that the putative absence of reliable expectations in international relations does not show the impossibility of international political theory, very little is obvious about the strength or extent of the theoretical principles appropriate to such an environment. In other words, there is a gap between the structure of moral choice and the content of the rules, policies, and so on that should be chosen to govern various realms of action. How the gap is filled depends on the morally relevant features of the realm in question.

This explains how it is possible, as I observed above, to reject Hobbes's general conception of the state of nature (and with it his moral skepticism) and yet persist in the conclusion that the only effective principle of international morality is that of self-preservation. The empirical situation might be such that, when it is appraised from the moral point of view, the most that can be said is that agents should each pursue his own interests. While I have argued that such an empirical situation does not exist in some important areas of contemporary international relations, it could exist, and if it did, the moral conclusions that would follow would be, so to speak, extensionally equivalent to those reached on Hobbes's view. There is an important difference, however; while these conclusions rest, for Hobbes, on considerations of enlightened self-interest, on the other view they are founded on a consideration of all affected interests, balanced by an (as yet vague) impartial process. Thus, my claim that international political theory is possible does not imply that its principles are the same as (or analogous to) those that characterize the political theory of the state. Surely one factor that one would consider in choosing international principles from the moral point of view is the relatively lower reliability of expectations of reciprocal compliance in international relations. If it turns out that this factor is morally relevant in particular contexts of justification, then it would certainly affect the strength and extent of the resulting principles.

The position I have sketched as an alternative to Hobbes's is a reconstruction of that taken by many writers of the natural law tradition. The most familiar of these is Locke. Like Hobbes, he specifically compares the relations of states to the

relations of persons in the state of nature.⁹⁵ Unlike Hobbes, Locke argues that even the state of nature "has a Law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: And Reason, which is that Law, teaches all Mankind, who will but consult it, that being equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions."⁹⁶ However, Locke paid little attention to the specific requirements of the law of nature as applied to international relations.⁹⁷

Although less familiar to us than Locke, Samuel Pufendorf is far more instructive on the application of natural law to nations. His major work on the subject, *Of the Law of Nature and Nations* (*De jure naturae et gentium*), is especially interesting because it explicitly takes up Hobbes's arguments and attempts to defend the natural law tradition against them while producing similar conclusions regarding the weakness of moral rules in international affairs.⁹⁸ Against Hobbes, Pufendorf claims that justice and injustice were "defined by natural law and binding upon the consciences of men . . . before there were civil sovereignties."⁹⁹ Furthermore, these principles are effective even in the absence of a superior power on earth who explicitly proclaims and enforces the law; it is enough if they can be regarded as commands of God "arrived at and

⁹⁵ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* [1689], II, sec. 9, pp. 290-91, sec. 14, pp. 294-95, and sec. 145, p. 383.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, II, sec. 6, p. 289. Compare Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*, vol. 1, p. 97.

⁹⁷ Only one chapter—chapter 16, "Of Conquest"—of the Second Treatise is devoted specifically to this subject. However, it has been argued that a concern for international problems animates much of the remainder of Locke's theory as well. See Richard Cox, *Locke on War and Peace*. This interpretation is highly speculative, and there is little direct textual evidence in its support.

⁹⁸ Anglo-American scholars have paid too little attention to Pufendorf as a political and especially as an international theorist. There is a useful, largely historical, discussion of his views in Leonard Krieger, *The Politics of Discretion*. A brief, and I think accurate, account of his view of the law of nations can be found in Walter Schiffer, *The Legal Community of Mankind*, pp. 49-63. The best work is in German. See the bibliography in Horst Denzer, *Moralphilosophie und Naturrecht bei Samuel Pufendorf*, pp. 375-85.

⁹⁹ Samuel Pufendorf, *De jure naturae et gentium, libri octo* [1688], VIII, i, p. 1, 138 (the order of the phrases has been reversed). See also II, ii, pp. 158-59.

understood in any way whatsoever, whether by the inner dictate of the mind, from the condition of our nature, or the character of the business to be undertaken."¹⁰⁰

Pufendorf has a problem with principles for nations because he wants to derive essentially Hobbesian results from a moralized (one might say Lockean) image of the state of nature. Like Hobbes, he argues that principles for nations can be derived from principles for individuals in the state of nature by regarding nations as "moral persons." Then principles for nations would be just the principles for individuals writ large.¹⁰¹ Yet he also holds that the result of reinterpreting the principles in this way is a group of principles weaker in several respects than their analogues for individuals. For example, he seems to hold that pacts and treaties are binding on nations only when they serve mutual interests, whereas promises among individuals bind regardless of such considerations.¹⁰² Also, while he holds that individuals always have a reason to combine into states to escape the state of nature, he does not believe that nations have an analogous reason to form some sort of supranational federation or world government.¹⁰³

The explanation for these apparent inconsistencies is that Pufendorf does not view international relations as precisely analogous to the state of nature for individuals.¹⁰⁴ The interpersonal and international states of nature are similar insofar as both are characterized by rough equality of strength of the units and lack of a common enforcer of laws.¹⁰⁵ In both cases reason determines the regulative principles. But other circumstances differ, and the contents of the principles vary accordingly. There seem to be two main respects in which the analogy fails to hold. First, Pufendorf claims that states are

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, II, iii, p. 219. Pufendorf is responding to Hobbes's claim in *De Cive* (III, sec. 33, pp. 49-50) that "laws of nature . . . are not in propriety of speech laws" outside of civil society.

¹⁰¹ Pufendorf, *De jure naturae*, II, iii, p. 226; VII, ii, p. 983.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, VIII, ix, p. 1,338; VIII, x, p. 1,342-43.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, II, iii, p. 163; VII, i, p. 949-63.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, vi, p. 1,292.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, II, ii, p. 163; III, ii, p. 330; VIII, iv, p. 1,253.

less likely than persons to be moved by other-regarding considerations when these come into conflict with self-interest.¹⁰⁶ If this is generally true, then it can be argued that those forms of obligation that depend on the availability of other-regarding motivations (such as keeping promises) are correspondingly weaker. A further, and more fundamental, difference is that the safety and liberty of individuals is far less secure in the interpersonal state of nature than in a state of nature made up of independent nations. The "state or commonwealth" is "the most perfect form of society, and is that wherein is contained the greatest safety for mankind."¹⁰⁷ Because the "safety" of individuals is adequately assured by the organization of commonwealths, the international state of nature "lacks those inconveniences which are attendant upon a pure state of nature."¹⁰⁸

Some aspects of Pufendorf's view of the international state of nature are subject to the same empirical criticisms that I have made against Hobbes's. In particular, Pufendorf seems to accept the view that states are the only actors in international relations, that they are largely noninterdependent, and that they entertain few reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance with rules and common practices. I shall not rehearse my criticisms of these views again here. The importance of Pufendorf's system is that it gives a more acceptable account than Hobbes's of why principles for nations may sometimes fail to be analogous to those for individuals in civil society. This possibility, which seems to be a common intuition about international ethics and is clearly captured in the relative weakness of customary international law, need not force us to the extreme conclusion that morality and the normative political theory that derives from it have no place in international relations. Indeed, it is impossible to maintain this view as a matter of principle short of adopting a thoroughgoing skepticism about all morality. It is more reason-

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, II, ii, p. 176; VII, i, p. 962. Pufendorf gives no account of why this is the case. Rousseau held a similar view. See above, note 47.

¹⁰⁷ Pufendorf, *De jure naturae*, VII, i, p. 949.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, ii, p. 163. Compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, p. 115.

able to explain the peculiar features of international principles as the result of empirical differences between the domestic and international environments, viewed from a common perspective of moral justification. If this is true, then we can reformulate the relationship between principles for individuals in the state of nature and for nations in international relations. Rather than derive the former and reinterpret them, putting nations for persons, to obtain international principles, we might choose another procedure. We might, instead, regard the choice of international principles as a problem of political theory in its own right, which is to be solved independently of the choice of principles for persons outside of civil society. Principles for persons in the state of nature would then come into the discussion of international theory in the form of arguments by analogy. While they have no special status in the international context, they provide guidance in formulating international principles just in case the analogy between international relations and the state of nature is in the relevant respects appropriate. But the justification of international principles is independent of this comparison; it is to be sought in a return to the machinery of justification—which I have vaguely called the moral point of view—that is the common foundation of principles in both realms.

5. From International Skepticism to the Morality of States

THE most sophisticated argument available to the skeptic flows from the characterization of international relations as a Hobbesian state of nature. This position combines an empirical analysis of international relations, according to which no state has an interest in following cooperative rules, and a theory of moral justification that holds that all moral restrictions on action must promote the long-range interests of the agent. If moral rules must advance the interests of

everyone to whom they apply, and if it is not in any state's interest to follow moral rules, then, the argument concludes, there is no international morality.

The first part of this position results from an analytical application of the state-of-nature analogy, and the second part from a prescriptive application of it. I have argued that both applications of the idea of the state of nature to international relations are inappropriate. First, when the international state of nature is viewed as an analytical device, it produces the empirically false conclusion that there can be no reliable expectations of reciprocal compliance with cooperative institutions and policies in the absence of an overarching world authority. Such an analysis tends to obscure the fact that the interactions that comprise international relations take a variety of nonviolent forms, many of which require cooperative maintenance of common rules. Even if it were true that morality is based on self-interest (that is, even if Hobbes were right about moral-theory), international skepticism would be wrong for empirical reasons, for states have interests in following these rules, and there are circumstances in which it is rational for them to expect each other to do so.

However, I have argued that Hobbes is wrong about moral theory, and this leads to further reasons for rejecting international skepticism. When the state of nature is viewed as a moral construct, and interpreted as it is by Hobbes, it supplies an unacceptable account of the justification of moral principles, and a fortiori of moral principles for international relations. The Hobbesian view invites a justification of international principles in terms of the interests of states; but, even if Hobbes's metaethics were accepted, it is the interests of *persons* that are fundamental, and "national interests" are relevant to the justification of international principles only to the extent that they are derived from the interests of persons. More basically, moral requirements on action can have justifications other than the rational self-interest of the agent. For example, participation in common practices and institutions can be morally obligatory even when compliance with the appropriate rules in any particular case does not advance the agent's own interests. Further considerations (e.g., fairness,

equality) should be taken into account in the design of such practices and institutions. Moreover, there may be circumstances not involving participation in standing practices and institutions in which action can be morally required even when it does not advance the agent's interests. This class is important because it includes actions that would promote the development of morally acceptable institutions.

These conclusions remove a main source of skepticism about the meaningfulness of moral judgments concerning international relations by undermining the most powerful argument available to the international skeptic. Unless one is willing to embrace a general skepticism toward all morality, the analysis of international relations as a state of nature does not yield the conclusion that moral judgments do not provide reasons for action when they concern the international realm.

To say that international skepticism is incorrect, then, is to say that international political theory is possible. But it does not say much more, and, in particular, it does not say anything about the substance of the normative principles that should govern action in the international realm. I have illustrated this by considering Pufendorf's critique of Hobbes: while Pufendorf rejects Hobbes's skepticism about the possibility of international morality, he proposes international principles that are very weak. There would be little difference, in practice, between following Pufendorf's principles and Hobbesian prudence.

If the Hobbesian view of international relations is the dominant one in the Anglo-American tradition, then the view represented by Pufendorf is the most widely favored alternative. We might call this view the morality of states, because it is based on a conception of the world as a community of largely self-sufficient states which interact only in marginal ways. States, not persons, are the subjects of international morality, and the most fundamental rules that regulate their behavior are supposed to preserve a peaceful order of sovereign states.

Two basic features of the morality of states are especially striking. One is the principle of state autonomy: like persons in domestic society, states in international society are to be treated as autonomous sources of ends, morally immune

from external interference, and morally free to arrange their internal affairs as their governments see fit. The other is the absence of any principle of international distributive justice: in the morality of states, each state is assumed to have a right to the wealth of its territory, and there are no moral rules regarding the structure and conduct of economic relations between states. Taking these two points together, the morality of states might be understood as the international analogue of nineteenth-century liberalism. It joins a belief in the liberty of individual agents with an indifference to the distributive outcomes of their economic interaction.

In the rest of this book, I criticize these two elements of the morality of states. I shall argue that each is incorrect; and, while I cannot now provide a comprehensive theoretical alternative to the morality of states, I shall suggest several important respects in which the received view should be revised.

PART TWO

The Autonomy of States