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POLI SCI

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Social Rules and the State as a Social Actor [1975]

www.arras.net / april 2003

SOCIAL RULES AND THE STATE AS A SOCIAL ACTOR

[1980]

The analysis of foreign policy has yet to satisfy the ambitions of its theorists. Side by side with elaborate chronologies, typologies, and correlations, a variety of competing approaches still stands. This "open" — or unsettled — quality has had at least one advantage: it has made room for occasional new concerns. One of the more recent of these has been with the domestic sources of foreign policy, and in particular, of national security policy. The idea that the state is like an opaque billiard ball which reacts to the pressures of the international environment has proven unsatisfactory. It is now a commonplace that foreign policy is a domestic or political "product." Unfortunately, this new emphasis has left unanswered as many questions about the nature of state action as it has resolved. The problem of how we should conceive of the relationship between the state and the domestic social structure in a particular instance remains virtually innocent of any serious discussion. The authors of most case studies, studding their accounts offhandedly with domestic "factors," domestic "determinants," and domestic "causation," have instead proceeded in a loose, improvisatory fashion. Empirically, valuable evidence is generated; conceptually, the old confusion reigns.

In this essay, I will attempt to clarify some of these relationships and to elaborate a perspective which might be used in the explanation of foreign policy in social terms. Such a perspective is badly needed. Merely to ask these questions is to signal the practical impossibility of answering them successfully from the present literature. Though a term like "the national interest" provides a comforting familiarity, it can rarely be understood as only a reflection of the international "sources" of policy, a calculation of self-evident security

needs, or a deduction from a strategic calculus. Something more is required. I hope that this analysis will at least partially fill the gap by beginning to sketch out a conceptual model for the political sociology of state action.

CONTEXTS AND CONVENTIONS

If the behavior of states could be reduced to the status of physical events, and if unintended consequences appeared to overshadow the importance of purposiveness, we could fashion our explanation from the concepts of observers alone. But following the canons of the natural sciences so far as to dispense with the aims and self-understandings of the actors has little to recommend it. If, as seems more appropriate, we regard foreign policy as a series of largely purposive actions and not simply as physical happenings, we assume that the actions can be interpreted in terms of a shared set of reasons and intentions, rather than merely explained causally in terms of the antecedents which necessitated them. But even where we accept the value of a purposive understanding, it will usually fall short: actions are simply not the unique project of the policymakers. In state action, even where the consequences are intended, both purposive and "conventional" elements are generally involved, and the purposive element will frequently require its own explanation in terms of underlying domestic conventions.[1]

Too often, however, the domestic underpinnings of a state's frame of reference are neglected. In a narrow, decision-making approach to foreign policy, the meticulous descriptions and encyclopedic typologies tend toward self-enclosure, as does a strict emphasis on the point of view of the actors involved. Exclusive reliance on a purposive vocabulary can prove disabling, insofar as

[1] For an extended treatment, see Andrews, "Foreign Policy: Explaining and Understanding State Action," mimeo (1975), and John G. Gunnell, "Social Science and Political Reality: The Problem of Explanation," *Social Research*, xxxv (Spring 1968). "An action is first made intelligible as the outcome of [or, actually, as the expression of motives, reasons, and decisions; and is then made *further* intelligible by those motives, reasons and decisions being set in the context of the rules of a given form of social life. These rules logically determine the range of reasons and motives open to a given set of agents and hence also the range of decisions open to them." Alasdair Maclntyre, "The Idea of a Social Science," in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1970), 115-16.

the frame of reference of the actors remains unintelligible in social terms. The entire labyrinthine structure is left hanging in mid-air, for a list cannot by itself provide a social context and is not an explanation.

A similar shallowness has characterized the new analytic stress on bureaucratic factors. When outcomes are treated as resultants rather than as purposive actions, the policies underlying them are not always understood through reference to a shared outlook or a more basic set of values. The larger informing policy, and indeed the state apparatus itself, begins to take on an arbitrary or asocial existence.

This neglect can be avoided. As a first approximation, we might *redescribe* the purposive aspects of state action which are assumed to be important. Usually, state actors will articulate their aims in international terms; for example, American policymakers may speak of intervening in order to prevent the overthrow of anti-communist regimes or the collapse of a regional status quo. Especially when the use of force must be justified the actors tend to cast their reasons in the language of national security or international considerations. Yet, except in the rare instances where a nation's survival is unambiguously at stake, these considerations cannot be understood satisfactorily as a strategic deduction or reaction, and must be interpreted at another level. The purposes of states are not autonomous phenomena. Quite the contrary, they rely on a network of domestic conventions, boundaries, and meanings that provide a framework for both the goals and considerations of the actors.

The redescription I would suggest is as follows. In most cases, even considerations of national security are not intelligible apart from a specific conception of the domestic order which is to be protected or advanced. The international aims of a government, in other words, are very rarely either self-explanatory or ends in themselves (leading to actions performed for their own sake). For a complete account, they must eventually be redefined as *means* toward a more inclusive set of *social purposes.* Through this "second-order" purposive relationship, a government policy can be understood in an instrumental or contextual way. As a result, what might have been considered a mere idiosyncrasy or a purely international project is transformed into a conventional and social action. It also allows for the state's policies to be monitored

by society, while specifying a measure of reciprocity between the social and the political world.

Most of a state's significant (or signifying, meaningful) foreign policies can be thought of in this way — guided and constrained by an array of domestic expectations which are considered legitimate, and by social conventions which both define and delimit those broader social purposes. If "meaning is use," then these social rules are rules of usage — for domestic society. They are both defining and constitutive (in that they suggest which ends the government must aim at if a particular domestic "act" or purpose is to be effected) as well as constraining (in that they regulate conduct by ruling out certain international ends which would jeopardize those social purposes). A kind of social entitlement or warrantableness enters in, because the state becomes in some way responsible to the interests of the domestic society, or representative of them. When these expectations are brought to bear on the actors in a restrictive fashion, they give them a reason to act in certain ways and not others; they give a domestic bearing to their international aims and values and specify some of the conditions for their domestic success. Any historical course (or matrix, or lowest common denominator of actions, such as that old sawhorse, the national interest) is not therefore simply followed. Rather, the state actors make it up as they go along, as they pursue certain policies in accord with, or as delimited by, the domestic rules. Their goals reveal the rules, and to a certain extent, the rules constitute their reasons for acting. "Every convention or rule that I accept is an intention that I declare."[2] International actions thus become domestic acts—regularized, socialized, and conformative. Foreign policy, in this conception, is a domestic social policy.

THE ROLE OF RULES: STATE AIMS AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

As a first approximation, we could say that the rules suggest a pattern of prescribed or proscribed behavior, resembling a canon of appropriateness or

[2] Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (New York: Viking 1959), 99.

social paradigm. Metaphorically, we might speak of the way in which a society maintains its conception of itself, and of the attributions and roles which it forces upon the governmental actors. In doing so, the outer boundaries of both international choices and "non-decisions" are set and legitimated. Rather than determining a specific choice, the rules tend to narrow the range of possibility to a realm in which state policies appear "pre-shrunk" or pre-interpreted.[3] By helping to structure the policymakers' hierarchy of preferences and values, these norms and expectations will in turn come to structure their presuppositions about the international setting — foreshortening the range of perception, desired objectives, and alternative paths of action. Agendas are shaped, universes are delimited, and actors are provided with a rough explanatory framework within which their own international actions can be understood.

This way of looking at state action leads us to other unfamiliar issues—in particular, those of reference, meaning, and semantics. For some writers, norms and meanings appear to be so tightly interwoven in the realm of action that "rule-guided" becomes synonymous with "meaningful" (i.e., full of meaning). Actions, like language, form a surface layer beneath which a pattern of social rules and expectations can usually be discerned—an underlying content or "deep structure" which both guides the actions *and* gives them their social significance. If we extend this argument to the level of states, a similar proposition may be advanced: without these rule-guided elements, state behavior would be socially unintelligible, even where it might be causally predictable. Unlike the more "horizontal" procedures of correlation and deduction, a social explanation would then resemble a process of excavation

[3] If, for example, we find a domestic rationale for an international action that opens with an untested assumption such as 'It goes without saying that ...," the presence of such constraining rules should be suspected. For example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan 1958), #231: "But surely you can see . . . ?' That is just the characteristic expression of someone who is under the compulsion of a rule." A similar theme is nicely treated by Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "Decisions and Non-Decisions: An Analytic Framework," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 57 (September 1963). "Indeed, the more important the rule, the greater is the likelihood that knowledge [of the nature of rule-guided activities and the consequences of breaching the rules] is based on avoided tests." Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall 1967), 70.

by means of which purposive actions can be understood as social practices.[4]

Domestic norms make up one of the *referential dimensions* of a state policy. They are patterns (outside the regularities provided by the actions themselves) which those actions both point to and implicate—in a symbolic or representative guise, for example. They take on their importance not as causal antecedents or background conditions in a deductive generalization, but as a setting of constraint and guidance for both the aims and the reasons of the actors. Instead of the bare "syntax" of state behavior which a naturalistic account can provide, we would look for an interrelated network of social as well as political processes in which to locate an action—a network which will reveal this semantic or referential dimension.

If a domestic rule "stands there like a signpost,"[5] then a rule-guided action will stand there like a signpost as well. It refers back not only to the rules but to the domestic social purposes which underly them. In this respect, state actions resemble language. The significance (or "motivation") of words, for example, is not intrinsic. It derives from their place within a framework of governing rules and expectations. Like counters in a game, they are emblems or signs that express (and reveal) the deeper patterns. Actions and the commitments which inform them can just as easily be regarded as such a form of communicative behavior, rather than merely the mute physical objects with which the natural sciences have dealt. To understand them, we would therefore refer back to the canons (of definition, logical connection, permissiveness, etc.) which are present behind them. In other words, no realm of discourse can be understood apart from its underlying conventions. For foreign policy, these conventions are domestic ones, not merely those of the international system.

[4] For a discussion of the synchronic nature of such an analysis in other fields of inquiry, see Frederic Jameson's important work, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1972), and *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971). Compare Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (London: Routledge 1958); Alan F. Blum and Peter McHugh, "The Social Ascription of Motives," *American Sociological Review*, xxxvi (February 1971), 98-109; R. Harrh and P. F. Secord, *The Explanation of Social Behavior* (Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams 1973); and Gerard Radnitzsky, *Contemporary Schools of Metascience* (Chicago: Henry Regnery 2973).

[5] Wittgenstein (fn. 3), #85.

DECIPHERMENT

This will be our next task, and a particularly difficult one. At times, the purposes and reasons of state actors can be understood only vaguely. On the surface they may remain opaque; they may make no sense to us in the strictly international-strategic terms in which they are articulated. Yet even in those cases, what the international goals embody may be clear: the informing social purposes, or the distortive picture of the nation and the interests whose "security" is being protected. They can often be discerned through historical research and through a reconstruction of the policy frame of reference, enabling us to grasp the limits of choice which the rules have enforced and, in a sense, to comprehend the international claims by "translating" them into a domestic language. Unlike an additional element which is somehow tacked on, these international aims may at times be nothing more than a political channeling or articulation of a domestic expectation. We encounter this phenomenon on a national level just as we do on a personal or psychological one — whenever the conscious goals of an actor are simply forms devised for the expression of an underlying trait or an internal demand or aspiration.

The social conventions must still be explicable, however, for they form the linkage between governmental "means" and domestic "ends" in the second-order purposive relationship between state and society. They cannot simply be extrapolated from a foreign policy, for that policy embraces the very actions which the rules would help us interpret. The circularity is obvious. Too often the study of operational codes or "decision rules" falls into just such a trap, revealing regularities which are merely descriptive, and whose normative and explanatory status in relation to the actors' purposes is in grave doubt. Daniel Ellsberg's rules for generating predictions of American escalations in Vietnam could serve as an example: their achievement lies in a controversial reconstruction of a frame of reference, not in explaining it in substantive social terms.[6] Such accounts have a tendency to degenerate into a list of subsuming typologies.

[6] See Daniel Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1972).

Though regularities often alert us to the existence of rules, the two phenomena are logically distinct. There is some confusion on this point, because many assume that if a rule or law "for" action is adhered to, it will become a law "of" action from which predictions can be made. A regularity, however, can exist even where there are no domestic rules with the power of sanctions behind them; and a rule can remain in place even in cases of deviance, or where there is little regularity to illustrate it. A "rule" account simply responds to a different kind of question than a deductive or predictive one. The connections involved are often conceptual rather than causal ones — more like the relation of a part to a whole than of "exogenous variables" to a separate or literal happening. At times, they resemble the connection between a word and its use or referent, or even the connection between statements in an argument. Naturally, a substantial gap divides norms and actions. With state actions, we can nevertheless say that where rules are revealed, the regularities should be better understood, and when regularities present themselves, we would do well to look for the guiding rules. Otherwise, even predictable behavior may remain opaque.

Statements about a state elite's commitment to social rules and guiding domestic purposes do lend a different sort of intelligibility to its actions — a normative expectedness that differs from a causal retrodiction. Behavior may fit into predicted patterns of causal regularity. On the other hand, actors may do what we expect "of" them by following their articulated goals along the lines of domestic conventions, or by substantiating our account of the international aims of a state as a choice of means toward a more inclusive domestic end. Unexpectedness will also come in these two varieties. State behavior may diverge from (and become an exception to) causal laws of behavior, or state actors may deviate from normative or customary rules of conduct and engage in socially unintelligible actions. The two varieties should not be confused, nor should we attempt to assimilate them to an Inappropriate style of explanation. In discussions of the domestic sources of foreign policy, this is too often forgotten.

One vital distinction still separates an explanatory rule from one which is merely descriptive. Someone can *intentionally violate* an explanatory

rule. Correct and incorrect ways of acting in the light of rules must therefore be distinguishable, even if the actors cannot put them eloquently into words. The reason is simple. Rules cannot be applied (and are not explanatory) if the notion of misapplying them makes no sense. If there is no chance of intentional deviation on the part of state actors, a meaningful pattern of rule-guidance cannot be ascribed. As Wittgenstein's discussion of "private language" suggests, a bundle of purely idiosyncratic rules, or rules that are not *external* to the actions themselves, cannot be violated. Because they provide no stable constraint or guidance to the actor (or to his reasons and goals), they are of little explanatory use. As in the case of the use of "misperception" as an answer to "why-questions" in regard to an action, we cannot get beyond the actors' frame of reference with them. Unlike an observer's descriptive generalization (which can brook only exceptions but not contraventions), explanatory rules are not simply made up after the fact as a way of subsuming all that has happened. Instead, we must be able to conceive of the government going against the social rule, of failing to follow it, of choosing an alternative, of violating the network of expectations or showing them to be unwarranted. Rules are made to be broken.

Perhaps in more normal circumstances, whenever state actors step beyond social conventions, their scope and outer limits will be highlighted. We need not rely totally on these boundary conditions in order to locate them, however, for a mixture of other evidence can back up our attributions. This evidence would include the domestic bearing of the actors' conduct, plans, beliefs, and perceptions, the regularity with which (and the ways in which) conformative acts are undertaken, the parade of admissions and denials on the part of state leaders, and a more detailed analysis of whether the constraints on particular kinds of action are real or imagined. It would also take into account how the supposed norms are supported and reinforced within the social system, apart from simple inertia or long-term socialization — whether by sanctions for deviance or rewards for conformity. Once the content of the rules is specified, the range of permissible interpretations can be sketched out.

Without the presence of sanctions and reinforcements, we can easily

be misled. What may at first glance look like an important convention may turn out to be simply an ingrained "decision rule" without the weight of social expectation behind it, or it may be a self-serving bit of deception. Such a difference is not trivial, for it has important political implications. One example would be the various prescriptive claims embedded in the literature on imperialism. If imperial policies, for example, rest only upon historical habits or misperceptions that are no longer anchored in present-day social relations and institutions, they may be far more open to change than before. The pressure of influential elites or groups would not stand as squarely behind them. Also, in the absence of potential sanctions, the so-called rules might be indistinguishable from the sorts of national ideals which modern governments are so adept at ignoring when it suits their needs. The idiosyncratic intentions of the actors might overshadow the apparent conventions, and the latter would then be of little help in interpreting the former.

STRENGTH OF RULES: ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

We find out very little by merely positing explanatory conventions in regard to a particular policy. Do they resemble statutes which rigorously constrain the aims of states, or are they more like permissive "stylistic canons" which only guide the way or offer a kind of legitimation? This question will parallel another important concern: the *degree* to which the policies of a government can be said to be socially-grounded and referential, or rule-guided and conventional.

There are two conceptions in sociology—a "normative" and an "interpretative" model[7]—whose contrast might give some outline to this discussion

[7] See Thomas P. Wilson, "Concepts of Interaction and Forms of Sociological Explanation," *American Sociological Review*, xxxv (August 5970). See also Ralph Turner, 'Role-Taking: Process versus Conformity," in Arnold M. Rose, ed., *Human Behavior and Social Process: An Interactionist Approach* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1962), 23, cited in Wilson, p. 700: "The idea of role-taking shifts emphasis away from the simple process of enacting a prescribed role to devising a performance on the basis of an imputed other role. The actor is not the occupant of a status for which there is a neat set of rules — a culture or set of norms — but a person who must act in the perspective supplied in part by his relationships to others whose actions reflect roles he must identify." The literature on the "level-of-analysis" problem in international relations is also relevant.

and allow us to group the alternatives around two opposing poles. We might, as I have said, assert that the foreign-policy behavior of the state actors is largely governed by a set of domestic rules as well as by the requirements of a pre-established role. Or at least this is what a normative model would imply, if we transferred its insights into social behavior onto the realm of state action. Or we could say (following the contrasting interpretative model), that the state elite is given a free hand in devising its role in relation to domestic society. In that case, when specific roles are hammered out by the actors rather than simply embraced or negotiated, the social rules which underlie them can define the state's action only tentatively. There will be less constraint, as well as added space for improvisation.

At this second pole we would have a conception of state behavior which disregards the domestic social context while in turn emphasizing the importance of international interactions and of the autonomy of the government. Here the most illuminating setting for a state's deeper purposes and constraints would be located in the actions of other, comparable states. The state, according to this contrasting model, moves in and out of roles which are freely developed through its interactions in the world environment rather than through contact with a pre-established and powerful social field-the domestic social context. Aside from these international interactions, the domestic order seems to provide little of the content of foreign policy, and knowledge of domestic processes does not make the policy significantly more intelligible. Not only would the international setting provide a referent for the objectives of the state in such a case, but it would largely supply their meaning and explanation as well. In the justificatory arguments about contemporary American policy, for example, we find these assumptions at work — where "national security" becomes a literalism, without reference to the particularities or divisions of domestic society. The actions of other states demand an obvious *reaction*, and very little else is thought to inflect the frame of reference of the government or its conception of the national interest. Instead of international leeway, we might find international compulsion. Instead of a kind of domestic embeddedness, a free-floating or anomic sphere for state behavior would prevail.

Both of these conceptions may be partially relevant, of course: elements of domestic rule-guidance do exist side by side with the creation of more specific roles during the interactions among states. But the distinctions are not devoid of value. In the purest, most extreme case for an interpretative conception, where they could shape the domestic purposes (or ignore them) in accord with the self-evident demands of the global environment, state actors might be making up or changing "the rules" as they go along, relying on improvisation rather than attempting to follow a set of pre-existing norms explicitly. The avowals of diplomats, perhaps nostalgically, have often been oriented toward such an ideal, where domestic constraints or deeper purposes lose their force and the international "game" can be played for its own sake. An "emergent situation" could be defined in this way. One could try out new roles for a foreign policy in relation to domestic society, or visibly violate the old ones. It is an artist's situation in regard to aesthetic canons[8] — where norms are far from being unchanging, unified, obvious, or automatically applied. For the artist in an aesthetic setting (unlike the political actor standing in a less authoritative relation to a domestic order), actions may need *less* "contextualizing" of a social sort to make them intelligible. Their significance is often more intrinsic, more autonomous, more self-enclosed.

The tentativeness of the roles, along with the actors' ability to improvise or manipulate the rules, may evaporate much more quickly in the political sphere. Here the demands and the reciprocal as well as warranted expectations of society are usually registered more sharply, thus giving state actions a distinctiveness not always found among the moves and gestures of individuals. Whenever the guiding rules of policy are social and not exclusively technical in nature, and whenever the goals of the state can be interpreted as domestic practices, the original normative paradigm will be illuminating. In

[8] See, for example, Morris Peckham, *Man's Rage for Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts* (New York: Schocken 1965), 76 ff, 80: "The artist's role is to violate the rules, though he may fail to violate the rules enough to interest a particular perceiver." Or compare Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1972), 50-53, for a discussion of common law, where the rules are somewhat refashioned with each case, and are derivative of particular cases or are abridgements of the activity itself, not something completely prior to it.

these cases, the state is no longer allowed to act as independently, or to devise its own role — occupying it tentatively or even improvising one new role after another. Its aims cannot be as oblivious to the underlying domestic interests which they will advance or inhibit. The perspective of this normative model, in other words, will roughly parallel the conception of state behavior as rule-guided or socially-grounded purposive action which I have suggested.

A scale of relative strength might be constructed. At one end of the scale would be the state policies which are *totally dominated by domestic norms* and are close adaptations to very explicit domestic ends or pressures. Here we might find instances of domestic "necessity" expressed in a variety of ways: in political terms (as electoral opinion might necessitate a role — for example, the defense of long-term allies whose plight evokes nationwide sympathy and identification); in social-structural terms (insofar as an international course undermines important class interests — for example, a governing elite may not tolerate it); or, articulated more vaguely (for example, a refusal to accept an international loss, which is seen as a grave threat to domestic stability or national self-esteem, even though it would have little impact on the prospects for national survival — such as France's resistance to colonial devolution in the postwar years). These norms may come in the form of demands and requirements, as well as of prohibitions, negative choices, or nondecisions. In the foregoing instances, the social rules stand there self-evidently like a set of orders to be obeyed, so that deviant actions appear unthinkable and governments may follow the dictum: "When I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*." [9]

A second point on the scale might be the state policies that are only *rule-guided* (or rule-nourished, or rule-dependent). The international aims would be given more flexibility by the rules that articulate the deeper domes-

[9] Wittgenstein (fn. 3), #219, #206-7. Domestic rules and expectations about state aims are rarely this explicit or unproblematical. They will therefore diverge somewhat from an analogy with linguistic rules, which "are much more often than not applied correctly without their correct application being an issue at all." Hector-Neri Castafieda, "The Private-Language Argument," in E. D. Klemke, ed., *Essays on Wittgenstein* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1971), 228. In addition, see A. R. Louch's list of Increasing departures from a game model in his *Explanation and Human Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1966), 212.

tic interests and purposes. There would be more leeway, and more chance for the government to engage in conscious manipulation or willful neglect. For instance, in the relationship between recent American policy and the public, there might have been no significant danger of a mobilized mass backlash if the crusade against Third-World revolution had been rejected, but some risk of retaliation might still exist — especially from corporate elites or a conservative "attentive public." The "reasons of state" might be more asocial, the domestic expectations might be weaker, or the government might feel that the expectations are less warranted. Concerning these social rules, this intercrossing of the scales of strength and entitlement is worth noting.

Third on the scale are those actions or goals which are simply *permissible* under the rules, but not at all constituted by them. At this point, the policies are referential simply by their circumscription; only at their outer limits do they implicate the rules. The state elite, as one example, might have a virtually free hand in its dealings with the public. It would be at liberty to neglect the overall domestic bearing of its aims, to respond to narrow social pressures or even exclusively to its own (institutional or personal) fantasies, values, and inclinations — up to a point. Yet even here, state actors take notice of the broad limits of valuation, perception, and behavior provided by the norms, for the domestic society is never entirely "put to sleep." Its interests and felt needs continue to serve as both an audience and a gauge.

As long as these limits and meanings are reflected, the domestic norms should figure in our interpretation of the actors' frame of reference and in our explanation of state action. The instance in which they matter in a largely negative way represents the other end of the scale — a case of social deviance, where the linkage between governmental aims and the legitimated social norms and purposes breaks down. Here the government disregards whatever pre-existing domestic rules may stand in its way. By going beyond their province, it pays the price, which may be disruptive social change, or a visible and dangerous loss of public support for the nation's foreign policy. In many cases, the desire to put off paying such a price accounts for the government's hesitancy to deviate. Adherence to the norms may preserve its legitimacy or its tenure.

Even so, the passage between conventions and actors is not a one-way street. Only in rare cases do norms specify their own interpretations or provide an endlessly specified role for the state to occupy, any more than they do on another level for the most conformist individuals. Because most social norms (and domestic needs) can be interpreted with a certain degree of freedom, state actors will frequently try to take advantage of these ambiguities as they adjust to the changing international realities. The degree of rule-guidance or "requiredness" is therefore never a constant. It differs among periods, among issue areas, among issues, among situations, and among the perceptions of different actors.

Because of the way political power is distributed within a society, and because social norms are related to material processes and not merely to idealizations of a nation's experience, these norms take on a considerably greater force than that associated with vague moral admonitions. Invasions may be launched, diplomatic provocations staged, and opportunities bypassed, but rarely at the price of destroying domestic welfare or of utterly alienating the most prominent social forces and conceptions. State actions are not merely locatable within a set of cultural norms, for there is often some apparatus of enforcement that has attached itself to these rules. In a more direct way, they *count.*

The social settings are more often assigned than suggested, and the expectations of the policymakers (at least according to democratic theory) are perennially influenced by the threat of sanctions or domestic setbacks. In cases of contravention, the consequences on an overtly *political* level might include electoral punishment, disastrous declines in public acquiescence, or a growing intransigence of countervailing political forces. It has been asserted, for example, that American presidents in the postwar era incorporated such fears very prominently into their foreign policy choices, particularly in regard to a visible loss of South Vietnam to the communists. A closer examination of the literature on public opinion and electoral behavior,[10] however, suggests that this

[10] For a fuller treatment, see Andrews, "Of the People, By the People, For the People: Public Constraint and American Policy in Vietnam" (Sage Professional Papers in International Studies, forthcoming).

danger was consistently exaggerated, and that some other form of domestic "embeddedness" will have to be found if we are to interpret the international apprehensions of these policymakers in substantive social terms.

As this example suggests, however, we may find a cluttered array of rules, several of which are relevant to the situation — where "for every convention in the hand, there are two in the bush."[11] Shifting balances of conflict and harmony can occur among them, just as they do among the differing domestic interests affected by an international policy in the absence of a national consensus. In consequence, state actors may find it difficult at times to integrate their bearings and sustain a set of international aims which can thread its way through their definitions and prescriptions. At other times, when the linkages in this relationship are much looser, state actors may be able to pick and choose among them, to make elaborate compromises, or find backing for their own autonomous objectives. As bureaucratic conceptions of foreign policy have intimated, what appears as a departure from one social norm may express something entirely different. It may be strategy in a narrower, organizational game, as in Seymour Melman' s suggested explanation of the Vietnamese war as an attempt on the part of America's "state-management" to enlarge its "decision-power."[12] An elite will occasionally split — some parts of it trying to steer policy in accordance with one rule or one aspect of a rule, and other parts with another or with none at all. Some aspects of the rules may also be inconsistent or have contradictory or even "double-bind" implications, as for example Ellsberg's treatment of the "Indochina Bind," where U.S. policy was supposedly caught between public prohibitions against loss on one hand and certain kinds of escalating methods on the other. The international role or broad policy may thus represent a negotiated coherence within domestic expectations. But while this variety will complicate any analysis or "decoding," the complications should not prove insurmountable. The unity, strength, and limits of the relevant norms cannot be uncovered through a yearning for premature generality, but through a close and contex-

11 Louch (fn. 9), 164.

12 Seymour Melman, *Pentagon Capitalism: The Political Economy of War* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1970), chaps. 6 and 7.

tual examination of the particular cases. An explanation of a state's actions, and an interpretation of its policies in social terms, will usually depend upon such an understanding.

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Unless we can "see through" the rules,
we only see through them. [13]

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SOCIAL RULES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Rather than tracing a few parsimonious premises under which many divergent actions could be subsumed and shown to be causally necessitated, we need to reveal a network of rules that is large enough to show the relationship of government actions to the purposes and constitutive meanings of domestic society and to make actions intelligible in social terms. At this point we might employ another metaphor: *a series of concentric circles,* the smallest of which represents the policy to be understood, and the outer circles expressing the various contexts in which that action can usefully be located for an explanation. Our problem becomes one of how far outward to proceed with the explanation. A purposive account which considers the intentional side of the action from the actors' perspective would take us outward a certain distance. For example, a puzzling state action can often be roughly understood by reference to the actors' prior plans. These plans may be placed in the trajectory of the longer-term international goals of the state; these, in turn, could be illuminated by the frame of reference shared by the principal actors, which is likely to concentrate on the international reasons and considerations behind a choice. A purely purposive or phenomenological account will most likely come to rest here, in a sort of court history, giving the impression that international "determinants" or international "motives" are all that is behind a pol-

[13] R. D. Laing, *The Politics of the Family* (New York: Pantheon 2969), 105. 535

icy, or that they are sufficient for our understanding.

But there are outer "circles" which surround these intentional elements and help us interpret the international actions which they inform. The international values and aims of the state elite are often "givens" for the actors, presupposing a whole series of assumptions about the nature of the domestic society and its needs, but they need not be "givens" for the analyst. Such presuppositions must be examined. The international environment offers barriers and opportunities to a state and excludes certain choices. But a knowledge of its processes often provides us with only the shallowest of interpretive accounts. Rather than giving rise to warrants for legitimate mutual expectations, its rules are more *ad hoc*, fragile, transient, and pragmatic. Domestic society, on the other hand, can often be said to provide the interests and values to which the international considerations are geared and in whose terms they can be redescribed.

THE STATE AS A SOCIAL ACTOR

This discussion suggests at least one approach to the political sociology of state action: a Social Actor Model. This starting point stands in contradistinction to the rather disembodied "Rational Actor Model" that Graham Allison has reconstructed, and should help us interpret even the technically rational policies which the latter leaves essentially unexplained.[14] The baseline, from which various lapses could be charted, would be formed by the broad policies of a state which are guided by and appropriate in the light of the domestic society's consensual norms and expectations—the policies that can be successfully redescribed as means toward more inclusive social ends. No single "literal" notion of rationality would be sustained; all such definitions would be importantly contextual.

Once we identify the relevant social norms and can locate the policies

14 In spite of its reluctance or disinterest in extending its analysis to the deeper domestic levels and linkages which I suggest are essential to any completely adequate account, Allison's work remains one of the few sophisticated treatments of the problem of explanation in the study of foreign policy. *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown 1971).

and international role and outlook of a state within them, we can advance a deeper contextual account of the kind I have suggested. At this stage, the temptation to take these social norms for granted is understandable. But, it cannot be maintained too strongly, an explanation should not and need not stop when someone can interpret an instance of behavior as being rule-abiding. *The rules are themselves referential.* They point beyond the level of technical rationality with which earlier theorists have dealt (i.e., the relation between the ends and means of government policy itself), and extend into the underlying social context. Their restraints, attributions, and warranted expectations resemble what Habermas has called the realm of symbolic interaction. And, as he has said, "Symbolic interaction is as much a form of *representation* as is linguistic communication"[15] By locating a relevant rule or custom, we need not halt the excavatory process of explanation, the "expansion" of an act into a succession of concentric circles.

A *breach* of custom naturally presents us with a puzzle. But on many occasions so does the custom itself: a particular action may illuminate the custom just as the custom may illuminate the action. "A deviation is not a sin but a clue."[16] It seems logical that once we are given an intentional action, our first task is to sketch out the rules which give to government action its socially conformative character. But knowing the rules does not necessarily tell us why governments are guided by them, just as the rules of a game do not elucidate the reasons for playing it. We cannot presuppose any particular form of linkage between the rules and the state, or between the rules and the underlying social fabric. There is a variety of possibilities; it is to be hoped that they will reveal themselves as we locate the place of the rules within a social structure, by reference to the values, aspirations, contradictions, constitutive mean-

[15] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press 1971), 165; emphasis added. Compare his impressive "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'" in *Toward a Rational Society* (London: Heineman 1971). As David Braybrooke warns, 'action investigations easily degenerate into complacent and self-limiting recitations of cultural peculiarities: they readily impute to the fabric of the world the concepts and norms associated with contingent social arrangements and in spite of the lessons to be found in history and anthropology find it difficult to envisage any basic variations on these arrangements." Braybrooke, ed., *Philosophical Problems of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan 1965), 16.

[16] Pitkin (fn. 8), 19.

ings, or historical formation of a particular society.

To understand why government actors follow (and find legitimate) the substantive norms of the domestic social order, we must go to the heart of the national distribution of power.[17] In this connection, it is important to make at least one point: when given a broad international policy (which in and of itself can partially explicate an action), it is necessary to search for social rules that delimit it and provide it with a domestic signification. When given such a rule, we should look for the underlying social interests and ends (and not an artificial "national interest") of which it is an expression or precipitate. Once this is done, we can investigate those causal mechanisms which generate unintended lapses from the policies that are to a varying degree guided by the social rules—for example, the procedures of large organizations and the personal psychology (or psychopathology) of a country's leaders. Critical analysts, recognizing the almost "anthropological" nature of their task, will not be satisfied with tracking down these causal encumbrances, however. State goals and stated policies should not be seen as self-explanatory, as they often are in a Rational Actor Model. Nor should these elements of error or miscalculation be allowed to assume center stage. In recent years, with the growing popularity of examining organizational processes and bureaucratic politics, this problem has too often been disregarded. Great stress has instead been laid upon the departures from a technically "rational" model which bureaucratic or social-psychological deformities may have fostered — for example, in comparisons of the American involvement in Cuba in 1961 with that in the Dominican Republic in 1965. What gradually recedes from view is the stubborn fact that the broad policies and premises, and even the "national interest" itself, may be far more intransigent and at times even pathological — inspired as they often

[17] This is a closely interrelated task which I must unfortunately defer. Compare Wittgenstein (fn. 3), #564: 'The game, one would like to say, has not only rules but also a *point*." For some recent discussions applicable in the case of the United States, see Walter Dean Burnham, "Crisis of American Political Legitimacy," *Society*, x (November/December 1972); Gabriel Kolko, "Power and Capitalism in Twentieth Century America," in J. David Colfax and Jack L. Roach, eds., Radical Sociology (New York: Basic Books 1971); Milton Mankoff, "Watergate and Sociological Theory," *Theory and Society*, I (1974); Trent Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination* (New York: George Braziller 1973), chap. 7.

are by their relationship to "irrational" social processes. We should not only be interested in *incompetent* actions that violate *technical* rules (the rules that connect government tactics with government policies); but, more importantly, we should investigate the areas of conformative behavior and social deviance — where the consensual norms of a society are violated or pursued.

Some remaining questions center around what sort of social actor the state can be considered to be. We have to learn to what extent the state and its actions are "socialized" and to what degree they adhere to more than the state's own technical rules for the success of its strategies. We need to know how self-conscious the pattern of rule-guidance is and exactly of what the character of these rules consists. How contradictory are the attendant demands? In what way are the rules transmitted or reinforced or subverted, and in what way are they formed? Also, how fragile are they, or how deeply entrenched? The relationship they bear to the regularities of culture and of socioeconomic organization as well as to the political behavior of the public should also be revealing. Finally, we can probe the ways the rules have been adjusted or accommodated to the changing international realities of an individual period, as the world environment provides a focus for the state, as well as a sometimes conflicting and sometimes reinforcing set of obstacles to its behavior. In some cases international pressures are so great that only the survival of the nation can be assured through foreign policy: there is no room for domestic "deflection" or for expansive conceptions of national needs. In many other cases, however — especially in instances of international insulation, great-power behavior, or hegemony — a purely international or "national security" account of state aims will be hopelessly inadequate.

Once the explicit demands of national survival are interpreted and satisfied, the state is granted a range of possible movement, corresponding to the spectrum of the strength of the social rules. At one end of this range would be an autonomous "self-referential" or "non-referential"[18] state actor, capable of

[18] Terms adapted from recent art and literary criticism. See, for instance, the related discussions in David Antin, "Some Questions About Modernism," *Occident,* viii (Spring 1974), 7-38; Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, v (June 1967); Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel* (New York: Grove Press 1965); and Andrews, "Surface Explanation," *Ironwood*, III, No 1 (#5, 1975), and "Index: On Reference, Objects, and Language," in *Open Letter,*

virtually unfettered maneuver and planning in relation to domestic society, oblivious to larger social needs, and evolving its own guidelines as it goes along. Consensual norms or rules of domestic "usage" would decline drastically in importance relative to the technical rules of the governmental subsystem of "purposive-rational action."[19] The result may be a further debilitation of domestic needs and a bolstering of traditions of governmental irresponsibility. The behavior of the state would be self-contained, self-motivating, and even self-explanatory, based more on the problems of specific goal attainment defined in terms of an unquestioned ends-means relationship and less on a conformity to social roles, whether internalized or externally sanctioned. That may be the result of willful contravention or of the decline of seemingly shared and warranted expectations stemming from the domestic society. At its extreme, the state's international policies would appear completely anomic and unintelligible in domestic social terms.

At the opposite end of the range would be a completely referential and socialized policy, the "socially instrumental" character of its aims being guided by reciprocally shared expectations that take the form of social norms. Such norms and expectations define a domestic role for foreign policy, and place it in direct contrast to "objectless dispositions" or to actions performed and valued for their own sake. There is then invariably a trade-off, which our style of explanation should reflect, between international policies that can be characterized as ends in themselves (such as Schumpeter's famous definition of imperialism as expansion which is its own "object"), and those that can be successfully redescribed as rule-guided means toward more inclusive social ends.

Second Series (forthcoming 1975). 1 will treat this issue more extensively in a future monograph, "The Social Embeddedness of State Action."

[19] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society* (fn. 15), 91-94, 113-20, and passim. A fragmented social order may parallel the "decline of the referentials" (to borrow Henri Lefebvre's term), so that the government can attempt to Jorge the rules rather than refer (and defer) to them. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row 1971), chap. 3. Compare Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill & Wang 1972), 109-59; Jeremy J. Shapiro, "One-Dimensionality: The Universal Semiotic of Technological Experience," in Paul Breines, ed., *Critical Interruptions* (New York: Herder and Herder 1972); Sheldon Wolin's discussion of rules and Leviathan in *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown 1960); and Habermas, "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence," in Hans Peter Dreitzel, ed., *Recent Sociology No. 2: Patterns of Communicative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan 1970).

Between these extremes lies the complex variety of relationships connecting the state and society. They can be usefully understood in terms of the degree of rule-guidance, social meaning, and conventionality which is involved.

The Social Actor Model therefore appears to offer a means of interpreting an individual foreign policy or role by locating it within the array of "concentric contexts" which can be specified by reference to domestic rules and purposes, and which can serve as a framework for our explanations, both of particular state actions and of non-decisions. Primary emphasis would in this way be placed squarely upon both the purposive and the conventional side of state behavior, rather than on the "microchronology" of its bureaucratic planning or the psychohistory of its leaders, or on taking the international aims and outlook of the policymakers at face value. Finally, by penetrating the taken-for-granted domestic world within which policymakers often operate, we can create a kind of emancipatory perspective on the present and future policies of a state. The domestic society's norms and interests, the broader social ends to which even an elite's conception of national security will ultimately refer, might then come to be revealed and better understood.