

11-1-2014

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Recommended Citation

Oprisko, Robert Ph.D. and Kaliher, Kristopher (2014) "The State as a Person?: Anthropomorphic Personification vs. Concrete Durational Being," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol6/iss1/3>

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The State as a Person?:
Anthropomorphic Personification vs. Concrete Durational Being

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Abstract

In “The State as Person in International Theory,” Wendt explores the analysis and comparison of the classic unit of international relations to a human subject. In an unprecedented manner, Wendt takes his comparison to the limit, finding connections between the biological aspects of personhood as well as the social. In this essay, we use a structure similar to Wendt’s but come to different conclusions. Using the works of Searle’s intentionality and Mitzen’s ontological security, among others, we find that the social category of state personhood is determined to be both accurate and helpful for progressing IR theory. We depart from Wendt’s argument, however, and see the attempt to attribute biological personhood to the state as detrimental. By adding in perspectives from theorists such as Bourdieu, Oprisko, Lomas, and Wight, we determine that an objective biological state cannot exist within a socially constructed world. This leads to the conclusion that the state is a social person but not a biological one. Furthermore, making connections between the person and state beyond a broad social context is problematic for progressing IR theory.

Inscribing a corporate personality into the substance of the state is a tradition as old as international relations. Thucydides refers to city-states with feminine possessive pronouns, merging the plural persons that represent the citizens into a singularity (Thucydides, 431 BC). Recent literature, beginning with Wendt's "The State as Person in International Theory" attempts to fully engage the concept of personhood for the state (Wendt, 2004). To this end, we review the recent literature in order to flesh out the debate. Next, we argue that the state is a social person with a distinct yet fluid personality but that it is not a biological person because, unlike living beings, a state can exist indefinitely as an idea and can be resurrected long after it has died, has been consumed by a larger state, or has fragmented into many smaller states.

The near universal personification of state identities encourages us to adopt a policy of what Guattari calls "being an ideas thief" or what Michael Weinstein refers to as "love piracy": the incorporation of concepts into an argument without incorporating the thought-traditions from which they are stolen or pirated (Guattari, 2009, pp. 22-23; Weinstein, 1995, p. 4). We feel this is a necessary methodological choice because the practice of inscribing state personhood is so old, while the formal engagement on doing so is relatively young, which suggests that the line of inquiry is already standing upon the entirety of international relations literature generally.¹

The Debate Thus Far: A Review of the Literature

In "State as Person in International Politics," Wendt asks, "Is the State a person?" and answers with a resounding "Yes." He concludes not only that the state is socially and consciously a person but also that it *emulates* the traits of a biological organism² (Wendt, 2004, p. 291). Wendt's article opens conversation for scholarly debate concerning the topic of state personhood. The resultant debate within the literature has organized itself into two diametrically opposed camps: those who favor the notion of state-as-person and those who do not. In addition, current literature is trending in two directions. In one, the focus of debate rests almost completely on Wendt's social qualities of personhood and dismisses the biological. In the other, there is a resounding absolutist assumption that Wendt is either right or wrong, with no partial acceptance of state personhood being supposed or considered. By outlining this bi-polar debate, it is possible to place this work's contention of social (but not biological) state personhood within the literature and amend the failures of previous theorists.

State-as-Person

The "state-as-person" school of thought is led by Wendt, who asserts that state personhood is not simply the implication that the state acts "as-if" it were person but rather that the state is an intentional, physical, and conscious organism (Wendt, 2004). The heart of Wendt's argument relies heavily on the notion of intentionality, especially as conceived of by John Searle. Although Searle himself has very little to do with International Relations theory, Wendt appropriates Searle's theoretical and conceptual constructs concerning the reductionism of collective intentions. Using Searle's constructs, Wendt posits that states are persons because of "Collective Intentions and Actions," which state, "There really is such a thing as collective intentional behavior, which is not the same as the summation of individual intentional behavior."³ Wendt furthers his argument by providing numerous though sometimes inaccurate comparisons between the state and the biological organism and their respective qualities and abilities, such as homeostasis and reproduction.

Alexander Wendt identifies Arnold Wolfer's essay "The Actors of International Politics," written in 1959, as the only other major work sustaining debate on state personhood. According to Wendt, Wolfer is the "originator" of this debate, insisting that "if state behavior is to be intelligible and to any degree predictable, states must be assumed to possess psychological traits of the kind known to the observer through introspection and through acquaintance with other human beings" (Wolfer, 1962, p. 10). Wolfer provides the foundation for the "state-as-person" school of thought. His work originated within the historical context of the decline of Westphalian⁴ state-centric politics and the rise of international organization and non-state actors following World War Two.

Because the idea of state personhood has only recently sparked debate, many of the works within the literature are disorganized or relatively unaware of each other. For the purposes of consistency, we will briefly summarize and place other smaller works of the "state-as-person" school into their own sub-schools. This will help determine the placement of this work's argument in the realm of debate, especially compared to these selected relevant theories. The work that is most passionately in agreement with Wendt (and maintains a position closest to the one presented in this work) is Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's "Hegel's House or People Are States Too," which concludes not only that states are people but also that people are states. Jackson achieves this perspective by relying heavily on Hegel's theory of constitutive relation, as both persons and states create and continually maintain social reality (similar to Hegel's "House"), making them one and the same (Jackson, 2004, p. 282). Like the authors of this work, Jackson somewhat disagrees with Wendt's "realist scientific abduction" of the organism in relation to person but does not further touch on biology (Jackson, 2004, p. 281).

Along with Jackson, Jennifer Mitzen views states as persons from the perspective of ontological security. Due to the uncertainty of intentions of states, states are trapped in the security dilemma not only physically but also ontologically. This notion of entrapment comes from an *individual* level, which Mitzen explains as "the need to experience oneself as a whole" (Mitzen, 2006, p. 342). Ontological security is a craving of personhood that is developed through relationships. Mitzen never directly engages the state personhood debate, but she all but shows her loyalty to it through her acceptance of the state-as-person in social and ontological terms.

Jorg Kustermans sees states as persons from an ideological lens, viewing their legal status as states as a claim to personhood (Kustermans, 2011). Luoma-aho touches on state personhood in her work concerning international relations theory and religion, seeing the anthropomorphic nature of the state as a structuring of political theory into a Christian-like religion (Luoma-aho, 2009, p. 296). Both of these works serve as markers for the diverse nature of state-as-person argument, which sees agreement within the literature in terms of the certainty of state personhood but not with respect to its logic within political theory. The lack of further established sub-schools of thought is not only a testament to how underdeveloped this issue remains but also gives credence to the sub-school proposed by this work, which suggests the possibility of the "social" personhood of states without the implication of biological personhood..

The State is Not a Person

The natural progression of the state personhood engagement, and the understanding with which this work allies itself, leads to the school of thought that the state is not a person. The support for an argument against biological state personhood is much more developed than the support Wendt provides for his argument in favor of it. The engagements within this school of

thought are unique but are closely tied to definition and relevance of the state itself. Because of the relative agreement and shared basis of argument among the scholars within the second school, we will not be dividing this school into further categories.

When delving into literature that contends the state is not a person, it is pertinent to start with Colin Wight. Wight questions the reality of the state, noting that it is as much a theoretical concept as a physical one. For the sake of argument, Wight contends the state is real, but he disagrees with Wendt's assertion that states' having social agency fulfills the condition for identifying states as persons (Wight, 2004, p. 273). He asserts that the agents of social agency and human agency are vastly different, and because of this, "If agency is located in the state, then no themestation⁵ of *human activity* is deemed necessary" (Wight, 2004, p. 275).

Peter Lomas further explores the very nature of the state and disagrees with Wendt's assertion that the state is routinely treated as a person within international politics as well as with his claim that "IR theorists should accept, and [capitalize] on, this practice" (Lomas, 2005, p. 349). In Lomas' view, the relatively recent debate of state personhood is not a reaffirmation of strong political realism but rather renders the debate itself "wide open to contradiction" (Lomas, 2005, p. 350) Like Wight, Lomas sees that states consist of persons but clarifies that being comprised of persons lends to a state's "group mind," not its classification as a fully accommodating human. The idea of group mind is similar to Gilpin's "conflict groups," in which actions undertaken by the group are manifestations of the convictions of the individuals who comprise the group. Gilpin goes as far as saying that states themselves do not even act but rather that only individuals act, which may happen within the confines of a coalition (R. Gilpin, 1984, p. 290). To Lomas, Wight, and Gilpin, states are simply not all they are held up to be. Furthermore, while some human characteristics are given to states, these characteristics are neither all-encompassing nor entirely accurate. States are almost never described as having human qualities such as "greed" or suffering human emotions such as "humiliation," and if states are assigned human qualities, they are drastic oversimplifications that do not belong in IR or political theory.

Erik Ringmar acknowledges that scholars and practitioners of international politics have historically referred to states as persons "for at least four hundred years," but he argues fervently against it, saying, "States clearly are not persons. States can be compared to persons to be sure, but that does not make them into persons. Most obviously, a state has no unified consciousness, no single memory, and no subjective will" (Ringmar, 2010, p. 4). Ringmar emphasizes that arguments that seek to grant personhoods to states are "explicitly Eurocentric," before further suggesting that sociological tools, especially those used as toolkits for understanding identity and its formation, will be of particular importance for international relations theory generally and this line of argument particularly.

The Discourse of the Argument

Before delving into the necessary placement of this work within the context of the literature, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the spirited reply of Jacob Schiff to the entirety of the debate. Although his work does not fit into a traditional school of thought, it does question the validity of the debate itself. Schiff analyzes the structure and forum of this debate itself, analyzing the discourse rather than the content. He believes not only that the discourse itself must become standardized (e.g., What is an actor? What is a state? Are they the same?) but also that the reality of the state itself needs to be determined (Schiff, 2008, p. 365). He argues that

both schools of thought are currently acting on multiple assumptions while also talking past one another.⁶

The discourse of state personhood is also examined in J. Samuel Barkin's "Realist Constructivism." Attempting to bridge the gap between the seemingly contradictory theories of constructivism and realism, Barkin determines that the two are not as different as they would appear (Barkin, 2003, p. 325). Rather, he says, constructivism and realism are mutually inclusive. The methodology and ontology of constructivism can give insight to the power relations that govern classic IR realism, such as the categorization of the state (Barkin, 2003). In addition, Barkin notes that by clearing up the debates within the contemporary theory, it is possible to see realism and constructivism working together to explain the physical and social world to which the state belongs (Barkin, 2003, p. 326).

The Social and Biological in Context

Due to how recent the debate over state personhood is and the paucity of literature with which to engage, there are many missing pieces within the contemporary engagement. This work looks to revel in the empty space and seeks to fill some of these holes by engaging with Wendt's understanding of both (1) the state's social personhood and (2) a state's emulation of a biological person. This work naturally places itself into *both* schools of thought, affirming the argument that the state is a social person while simultaneously rejecting the conception of the state as a biological entity.

Social Anthropomorphism: State Intentionality

Wendt, in his definition of personhood, makes a distinction between "the inside and outside" of the individual. The "inside" includes the knowledge of and adherence to the social structure associated with being a person, described by Wendt as the "self-recognition" of personhood. The "outside" involves the social recognition of individuals by others and whether and how individuals are acknowledged as persons within the context of their social society. Importantly, according to Wendt, if individuals are not recognized as such, they are not afforded the rights and privileges of a person within that society (Wendt, 2004, p. 293). Throughout history, internal and external identities of personhood have been negated or accepted in various ways. Foreigners, minorities, and enemies have been denied personhood status, often even being called or graphically portrayed as animals. Conversely, animals can and have been given the legal protection of personhood, most recently, for example, when India declared whales and dolphins to be "non-human persons" (Hackman, 2013).

The separation between "inside" and "outside" in Wendt's framework invokes a biopolitical dichotomy: a distinction between that which is interior or internal to the body—in this case, the state—(namely, the individuals that comprise it) and that which is external to it (such as other states). This is a sociological interpenetration with the concept of the political that has deep roots in international theory and presents the most basic political relationship as "us" versus "them" or, even more simply, me versus you (Schmitt, 1996, 2005). However, socio-political relationships, even at their most basic, are not sufficient to create a social *person*. As Wendt himself acknowledges, "Being socially recognized as a person does not mean you are capable of intelligent rational actions, just as not being recognized [as such] does not mean that you are not. Neither can be reduced to the other" (Wendt, 2004). Relating to the concept of internal and external sovereignty, Wendt articulates his case for state personhood only in the

internal social realm because, he says, the internal realm is the “[harder] case” to prove, for the international community by and large already does recognize the external realms of states (Wendt, 2004, p. 294). He also remarks he will focus his argument on the concept of personhood in psychological terms because doing so is most applicable to International Relations theory due to the inherently internal nature of psychology (Wendt, 2004, p. 295) This is a faulty presumption on Wendt’s behalf, to assume that it is the internal argument rather than the external that is the difficult element to prove. Using Bourdieu’s set ontology, we see the lines blur between the external and internal when differentiating between political bodies because a political actor (i.e., a state) can exist as a singularity, while nonetheless suffering internal political discord and fragmentation⁷ (Badiou, 2005, 2009).

If we accept that larger political abstractions include as subsets all smaller political abstractions (i.e., individuals are subsets of the groups to which they belong), we must evaluate interiority and exteriority based upon the extreme examples. At the smallest, the individual human is a political singularity that may belong to multiple social groups and political abstractions yet can include none. A human is a walking-talking “state” capable of forging alliances and waging wars (Hobbes, 2009). At the largest, we can only imagine a universal political entity, stretching out infinitely across the cosmos, including everything and belonging to nothing; that state would be the ultimate reality. For all intents and purposes, this extreme moves beyond even a “world-state,” as it must include *everything* and leave *nothing* out. It would simply *be*. The realization of such a phenomenon distorts contemporary understanding of politics, as there would be no political contestation between individuals or groups without an overarching sovereign political authority (Wendt, 2003).

The notion of the universal state is problematic for a number of reasons. First and foremost is that such a sovereign relationship would be infeasible to create and impossible to maintain. Entropy suggests that without energy being directed at maintaining such as pervasive universal order, it would disintegrate along lines of fracture until a multiplicity of sovereign authorities reemerged (Oprisko, 2014a; Schweller, 2014). Multiplicity, therefore, is almost certainly guaranteed in an ever-expanding universe filled with creatures of limited consciousness.

We begin here to assess Wendt’s argument. Wendt’s claim that the existence of “internal sovereignty” (i.e. the sovereignty of individuals within states) is more difficult to prove than external sovereignty (i.e. the sovereignty among states) is flawed. One need only to look at the ways in which states respond to civil uprisings to understand that states perceive individuals to have very real “sovereignty.” The strength of the individual is clear when states resort to violence and law to curb disaffected citizens and resolve internal divisions and strife. The internal rejection of a state’s sovereignty by its citizens may be more common than rejection of authority between states, but it is distinctly less effective and not tolerated. There is an impetus in all states to curtail any attempted overthrow of “legitimate” state authorities because such movements could spread, threatening the authority of the state. Indeed, acts against the sovereignty of a state are often declared to be criminal, thus resulting in the state declaring the authority of the individual to separate his “sovereign self” from the state to be invalid and illegitimate. Reclaiming one’s sovereignty is an act of supreme individuality but is most likely to end in existential, social, or material annihilation of the self at the hands of the much more powerful state (Camus, 1991; Oprisko, 2012c).

On the flip side of the coin, Wendt’s assertion that there exists a near universal acceptance of state sovereignty and that such acceptance implies that state sovereignty need not

be questioned is equally flawed. Not only is the external validation of sovereignty not guaranteed, it is foolhardy to assert that state sovereignty is recognized by the international community a majority of the time. There is power in the recognition of a group as sovereign, and recognizing another entity's sovereignty not only brings little benefit to the recognizing party, it also grants legitimate authority to an "other," carving out political space for the existence of that other, frequently in a contested space. If this were to be an uncontested area, Russia and the Ukraine would cease to be in conflict over which areas are to be left intact, which to be annexed, and which to be separated; Scotland would not have had to vote for independence because it would merely be recognized as separate from the United Kingdom and, therefore, an "other" sovereign region; Tibet would be more than a memory with a leader in exile; and the Israel-Palestine question would have an answer. It is on this problem of oversimplifying sovereign identity that Walker provides insight:

International relations simply takes for granted that which seems to me to have become most problematic. I prefer to assume that any analysis of contemporary world politics that takes the principle of sovereign identity in space and time as an unquestioned assumption about the way the world is – as opposed to an often very tenuous claim made as part of the practices of modern subjects, including the legitimation practices of modern states – can only play with analogies and metaphors taken from discourses in which this assumption is also taken for granted . . . [C]laims to sovereign identity in space and time . . . might be better placed under more critical suspicion. (Walker, 1993, pp. 8-9)

In other words, the normalization of state sovereignty as being timeless and universal is a happy fiction created in order to protect the integrity of the state as the premier political actor; it is an act of preemptive self-preservation.

Like Wendt, Finian Cullity also argues that not only is an analysis of internal and external identity important in the debate regarding state personhood, but he pays special attention to internal and external *legitimacy*. The discussion of state legitimacy often revolves around claims to territorial boundaries and monopoly of physical force (Cullity, 2014). For Cullity, a state must hold legitimacy to the majority of its inhabitants before it can have a true monopoly of force. If the institution attempts to monopolize force without such legitimacy, the institution will not be seen as an extension of the state but rather a rogue entity. Legitimacy is earned when the state recognizes the "reasons of belief" (i.e., the reasons why citizens believe what they believe) and does not deny or reject those beliefs or citizens' rights when monopolizing force (Cullity, 2014). As such, if an internal identity of the state must be determined according to Wendt's practice, then that identity must first be recognized as legitimate in order to be recognized and act upon that recognition.⁸

Wendt's focus on the internalization of the state is compelling. He presents "three inside tests" or conditions necessary for assigning psychological personhood to the state: being an intentional actor, being an organism, and being conscious (Wendt, 2004, p. 296). Wendt focuses the requirement of being an "intentional actor" and relates it to the idea of intentionality, asserting that individuals' acting upon their intentionality is an "irreducible casual mechanism in the social world" (Wendt, 2005, p. 359). With respect to intentionality, Searle distinguishes between collective intentions and individual intentions. These two different types of intentions are helpfully distinguished in a football analogy by Searle:

Suppose we are on a football team, and we are trying to execute a pass play. That is, the team intention, we suppose, is in part expressed in part by "we are executing a pass play." But now notice: no individual member of the team has this as the entire content of his

intention, for no one can execute a pass play by himself. Each player must make a specific contribution to the overall goal. If I am an offensive lineman, my intention might be expressed by, "I am blocking the defensive end." Each member of the team will share in the collective intention but will have an individual assignment which is derived from the collective but which has a different content from the collective.⁹ (Searle, 2002)

If we then use the reductionist line of thought that allows for Searle's group intentions to ultimately be reduced to an "I" intention, without losing meaning, we may determine that a state (with its citizens having a collective intention) is at least an internal psychological intentional actor.¹⁰ Intentional actions typically attributed to the state, such as waging war and providing defense or developing and practicing an economic system, are not a summation of individual intentions but instead a single collective intention that no single individual may accomplish. Wendt furthers his engagement with collective intentionality while defending his refutation of a critique by Lomas. While collective intentionality does include varied intentions, says Wendt, focusing too much on the variation causes the analysis to *lose* strength. Wendt uses the example of German soldiers invading Russia. In this example, he notes that while some of these soldiers were committed to the cause, some may have felt coerced or even more loyal to their comrades than to Nazi Germany (Wendt, 2005, p. 359). Despite Wendt's discussion of the soldiers' potentially mixed feelings, it remains of greater relevance that all soldiers were all participating in an action (the invasion) that they could not have accomplished alone. As Wendt himself acknowledges, this makes them "not a heap of individuals" but rather single entity acting collectively (Wendt, 2005).

Despite significant discussion of the concept of unified intentionality, Wendt misses the more important point regarding its relevance, which is not so much related to whether or not it is undermined by internal division, varying levels of conformity and commitment, or internal contestation for control of the political apparatus as it is to the fact that unified intentionality itself is a threat to the rational-actor model of politics. A state is a socially schizophrenic creature with complex interests and a healthy dose of cynicism toward other states. It is important to remember that the state of nature hasn't been eradicated with the erection of the state and the existence of states meanwhile places conflict on a greater scale. Each sovereign political actor is both a potential ally and an emergent enemy. However, this potential for conflict is in no way unique to states but rather reflects the diversity of personality manifest in humanity. As such, in the social sphere, the state presents a very compelling argument for personhood.¹¹

Wendt also confuses his own explanation of unified intentionality by relying on the philosophy of supervenience,¹² in which lower-level components within a given system determine its higher-level components, Wendt proceeds to describe the failure of the state in managing or directing the intentions of the collective entity. Unfortunately, his reliance upon supervenience is only a continuation of the work of reductionism. Although we find his use of the supervenience ontology unnecessary and overcomplicated, what Wendt does accomplish in this section is equate the state having group intentions with personhood status. He says, not only does a group need common knowledge, but the group must also act upon that knowledge. This, according to Wendt and Searle, allows for group intentions to exist only in the realm of action, leading individuals within a group to deduce, for example, with a "pre-intentional, almost biological-like sense, that another individual is a good candidate for cooperative activity" (Wendt, 2004, p. 301). This "social to biological" turn, coupled with the idea of emergence, sees a creation of a single analogous mind, which Wendt sees as "the brain of the state."¹³

Within this analogous mind, a state not only practices intentionality but also seeks ontological security. In this sense, each state strives “to experience [itself] as a whole, continuous person in time—as ‘being’ rather than constantly changing—in order to realize a sense of agency” (Mitzen, 2006, p. 342). This ideal of agency and self-being lies at the heart of the social realm of state personhood. Much like the security dilemma proposed in structural realist theory, the ontological security of the state represents a continuous inner struggle for feeling of actualization (Mitzen, 2006, p. 341). Jennifer Mitzen outlines ontological security as being based on the individual level, with a state needing a stable cognitive environment for agency to happen (Mitzen, 2006, p. 342). Much like the individual, the state must be conscious of who it is and what its goals are before it can act upon its will. It is this self-understanding of a singular concept of identity and values that marks the true connection between state and person at a social level. Using this agency, states act and interact with one another, which, according to Wendt himself, is what creates reality. Wendt sees that “the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas ... and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas...” (Wendt, 1999, p. 1).

If human association creates reality through purposeful actors and actions, and if states are both intentional and purposeful via Searle and Mitzen respectively, then states must be social persons because they construct social reality. Wendt’s use of constructivism is loose enough to allow state incorporation while simultaneously being open enough to allow social expectations and dynamic shifts, as long as these dynamic shifts are within the confines of the state’s ontological security. It is, perhaps, important to concur with this sentiment only through the Zizekian lens of parallax, in which reality is presented as the actions taken that subsequently represent failure to achieve and maintain the ideal goal (Zizek, 2012). As Oprisko expands upon this sentiment, “reality as failure” emphasizes Walker’s warning about the tenuous position of the state as the ideal political form (Oprisko, 2014b, 2014c). The state is obviously flawed rather than perfect; it is the sovereign political authority we have and not what we sought to create.

In an intervention between the state personhood debate, Alex Prichard sees the constructivist views of Wendt’s reality as well. According to Prichard in his dissection of Proudhon, the state is a tool for understanding the anarchy that is the international world through the social interaction of “mutually recognized pacts” (Prichard, 2013, p. 4). States, much like other groups and systems, help explain the world around us, or, as Wendt and Mitzen would see it, they construct the social world that constitutes society as well. Although the international community is neither perfect nor utopian, it does exist on a very social level. This community is made of states that are actors and, more importantly, social persons who create and explain the chaos that surrounds them.

At this point, personhood, intentions, cognitive knowledge, and activity in accordance with group intentions have been linked to the state. However, Wendt does not see this analysis of state personhood as deep enough, however (Wendt, 2004, p. 289). He further asserts that all groups, including states, have corporate interests and act proceptively in furtherance of achieving those interests. Because of social reality and the nested nature of group belonging and inclusion, as long as individual humans belong to a group and group identity has meaning to the individual, action will be taken in furtherance of these corporate interests, whether or not such actions are successful and whether or not the individuals undertaking them are enthusiastic. The result—the imperfect actions of a minion on behalf of a master—forms reality, regardless of the will or vision of the state decision-makers.

Biological Anthropomorphism: State as an Organism

Wendt doubles down on his argument that the state is a person, seeking to forge a link between the biological concept of a person and the political state. Wendt uses NASA's definition of an organism as "a self-sustained chemical system capable of undergoing Darwinian evolution."¹⁴ Scientifically speaking, this is only one of numerous definitions of an organism. Instead of defining the state as an organism by a single definition, however, Wendt proceeds to designate the state as an organism by the observations of states' innate organismic characteristics, including "individuality, organization, autonomy, [and] homeostasis..." (Wendt, 2004, p. 307). These terms are the focus on Wendt's analysis of biological state personhood.¹⁵

Darwinian Evolution. Individuality, organization, autonomy, and homeostasis are four organismic terms used cleverly to describe various IR theories of the state, confined within the context of biological categorization. *Homeostasis* is the need for the state to resist a form of entropy and decay; in other words, the classic realist idea of individualistic survival; *autonomy* is the sense that state behavior is not completely determined by the environment; *individuality* is the idea that states are unique, which, for Wendt, means spatially. Finally, states, in order to be functional organisms, regardless of how complex the state is, must be *organized* as singular entities, with interdependent but mutual parts (Wendt, 2004, pp. 307-309). Confining himself within this framework, Wendt leaves no room for exceptions, contradictions, or flexibility. The state of Yemen, for example, does not have a defined northern border, posing an issue with respect to its individuality, nor does the recognized state of Somalia have much of an organized governmental structure or hierarchy, which compromises its autonomy.

This line of Wendt's argument regarding biological personhood of the state is less defensible than his argument for social personhood and, at times, undermines the strength of his own argument regarding the unique social reality and personality of the state. Wendt limits his anthropomorphism of the international to the state, which is contested as being the sole or even most important actor within the practice of contemporary international relations. Gilpin clearly articulates the hedge against sole focus on the state in his chapter of *Neorealism and its Critics* (R. G. Gilpin, 1986). The argument can be made against state organic personhood with many real world examples,¹⁶ but we will begin by focusing on Wendt's selected definition and its foundation in Darwinian evolution. Darwinian evolution comes with a list of intrinsic life properties, including: metabolism, self-replication or reproduction, and mortality. Metabolism suggests that a state must consume "high energy starting materials and produce lower-energy products that drive the processes of replication and whatever is necessary to support replication" (Joyce, 2013). What is not necessary is limiting the form of material that must be consumed by a state because the most generous understanding of the state does not require a certain prototypical form. In fact, using Darwin's understanding of evolution, it would be realistic to assume that states would specialize based upon their specific situations and positions in time and space in order to maximize their unique position and to minimize competition. With this in mind, it is possible to conceive of some forms of state organization to be more predatory and others to be prey. This line of research is quite interesting and worthy of greater consideration to determine what, if anything, states consume and, more importantly, what they generate that assists them in reproduction.

Reproduction is the creation of offspring—new organisms similar to but genetically distinct from the parent(s). In international relations, there are some potential arguments to be

made that reproduction has happened. Colonization, conquest and annexation, and nation-building each spring to mind, with analogies that are more or less defensible. However, in order for states to emulate biological organisms, they must direct action toward reproduction, which historically is not defended.¹⁷ By looking at the international system as being finite (at least practically so), encapsulated within the Earth, we would expect a fierce competition to create mini-states, thus carving the planet into smaller and smaller sovereign powers until we arrive back at the Hobbesian state of nature, with each man being his own state, every individual in a political relationship with all others. Problematically, this sort of reproductive fragmentation disagrees entirely with Wendt's vision of the world state as being inevitable (Wendt, 2003). If Wendt sees the state as a vehicle for integration and coalescence, the state is, itself, merely a vehicle to a universal order, and is actively working toward its own annihilation.

The mortality of states represents an important separation between a biological organism and one that is a social organization. Biological organisms are concrete, durational beings with an expiration date (Weinstein, 1978, pp. 5-6). Living beings take the doom of mortality into consideration when projecting themselves into the world—thus providing a need for reproduction. According to Weinstein, there is an important difference between living organisms, especially human organisms, and social groups, though Weinstein sees humans and social organizations as being symbiotically connected:

What is relevant to the organization is not the person's concrete durational being . . . but the person's official biography, composed of the record of the person's involvement with various organizations such as schools, business firms, military services, hospitals, prisons, . . . and other government bureaus. . . . [A] person tends to evaluate the organization as an obstacle or an opportunity with regard to private projects. The basis of relations between conglomerates and the individuals whom they try to organize is mutual exploitation, not mutual aid. (1978, pp. 76-77)

Personhood is granted to a biological organism that acts in ways that seek to achieve unique meaning through time to other persons. This social necessity reflects part of the problem that one cannot hold an identity without that identity being observed by others; social reality is a continuous (re)negotiation of what *is* what (Oprisko, 2012a; Speier, 1989). This would not be problematic if states were mortal, but a state is an ideational construct for social organization and may not have an expiration date, thus making time less meaningful or even not meaningful to a state. In order for a state to exist, the idea of it must remain with individuals willing to grant that the state exists as such. States can effectively die only to be resurrected. Israel, for example, arguably ceased to be a state during the Babylonian exile, during the imperial dominion of Rome, and during the Middle Ages as the object of continuous struggle. Poland has also been resurrected one more than one occasion: after forceful partition by Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and Russia. When looking at Somalia, one wonders if it is a state with internal turmoil, a fragmented area containing multiple states where one state once existed, or something entirely different (Oprisko, 2014d). Also, when multiple states combine in union to form a larger sovereign body such as an empire (e.g., British, Roman, Ottoman) or a union (e.g., the European Union, the United States of America), does it mean that the states that choose to sacrifice part of their sovereignty are annihilated to create this new sovereign power? Is it possible for said sovereignty to be reclaimed and for the union or empire to break? If so, does that mean that the state was ever sovereign? In the contemporary political reality, where state fragmentation is far more likely than state union, this question gains greater significance. Will current states cease to exist if they lose provinces? Fragmentation movements are numerous and there is historical precedence that

fragmentation is a legitimate option in today's international political arena, including the Sudan breaking into multiple parts, Yugoslavia and the USSR fracturing, Scotland seeking to break away from the United Kingdom, Moravia and Silesia seeking to leave the Czech Republic, Greenland seeking independence from Denmark, Catalan independence movements in Spain, Brittany threatening to leave France, and numerous ethnic groups and nationalities seeking to leave Russia. Thus, we are left with little to no information regarding state metabolism, negative examples of state reproduction, and historical evidence of state immortality. Therefore, we find it unlikely that Darwinian evolution provides evidence of states' emulation of biological organism.

The Social Imprimatur of State Organization

Although we find Wendt's argument for the state's emulation of a biological organism less than compelling, we find that Wendt is highlighting an important element of social organizations—that they gain personality because of how they are organized and who is organized within them. The emulation of human personality within social groups, states included, is a result of humans (those concrete, durational beings with personality) being the foundational element of all groups. Because a group's personality is connected to the individuals who comprise its membership, a state's personality is fluid and may appear to be schizophrenic, especially when power is shared and the organizational structure increases in complexity. Happily, this is normal. The high levels of anxiety that create the differential insecurity of the international system, the state of nature so feared by Hobbes, is predicated on emotional, irrational, uncontrollable others who are in this system together. Each person and their circumstances are different. Though individuals may share motivational catalysts, they internalize them differently to varying degrees dependent upon their situations and positions in time and space. As Walker says, applying a formal system onto this arena is worthy of skepticism. The lack of a biological component in states (i.e., of being neither concrete nor durational) suggests that a state's personality and personhood are indefensible from a biological perspective.

With respect to state organization, Lomas describes Wendt's state personhood as not only a social personification but as being anthropomorphic in nature, creating a biological individual that succumbs to realist tendencies.¹⁸ Bourdieu's "social reality" also heavily contradicts Wendt's constrained organismic argument. This social reality constitutes true reality and the *perception* of reality. This creates spontaneous visions of the social world that are dynamic and unique. The analysis only becomes deeper and more dynamic when realizing that those who contribute to this very construction create the sociological constructions of the world. Bourdieu speaks of the intensely complicated nature of social reality, in which the state is a direct component. Defining the state as a person contradicts this notion, trying to put a biological classification on a social concept that cannot be universally understood or contained. Bourdieu acknowledges that there is an attempt to create a "legitimate version of the social world" but that "the holders of bureaucratic authority never establish an absolute monopoly, even when they add the authority of science to their bureaucratic authority..." such as Wendt's all-encompassing scientific foundation for the social issue of personhood (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18).

Like Bourdieu, Oprisko sees honor as a set of social processes that represent the negotiation between individual(s) and group(s) over value and identity, with such negotiation establishing personhood.¹⁹ For Oprisko, honor is a social process of "altering reality through the medium of value," which, like Bourdieu's social reality, affects not only the honoree but also

other persons involved under the sovereignty of the “honoring agent” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 22). This dynamic system of values and identity suggests a continuous restructuring of reality, which goes directly against Wendt’s argument for a static biological classification of the state.

According to Oprisko, *external honor* is formed through relational processes between groups and individuals to classify how social value (including a valued identity) is changed, gained, and lost. Honor processes are simultaneously internal, (i.e., formed by relational processes within an individual’s psyche) and include the formation and evaluation of the execution of projects through time (Oprisko, 2012b, p. 5). The allowance of internal and external socio-political exceptions and change can exist within the acceptance of the social personhood, but the outcomes are consequently too volatile and cannot be compliant within the limiting scope of an organismic personhood. The process of honoring “creates, destroys, and alters norms through the maintenance and revision of the social status quo” even though the status quo is determined by Wendt to be a largely unchanging organic formation (Oprisko, 2012b, p. 6).

Oprisko also shows that there is an internal competition of will within states and that a political relationship can exist between the state (as a unified social being) and its component parts (i.e., the individual humans who form it) (Oprisko, 2012b). He details how the social realm is a negotiation between actors, both individual and corporate, which forms the internal and external pressures, catalyzing change (Oprisko, 2014a). Reality, therefore, is the failure to achieve and maintain an ideal state because of the constant, dynamic pressures placed upon it (Oprisko & Caplan, 2014). Oprisko argues that the state is better seen as a fabric, woven together by the individuals within it and their corresponding actions (Oprisko, 2014b) and argues for an existential theory of international politics because of the ability of such a theory to link the levels of analysis (or what he calls realms of action) together, which allows for a more complex understanding of the international system, rather than a forced positivism (Oprisko, 2014c).

The dynamic social system that undermines much of Wendt’s organismic state is based on social constructivism, a paradigm most closely associated with Wendt in IR theory. Constructivists do not see politics as reflective of a material reality but rather of a social, interpersonal reality (Oprisko, 2014d). As Barkin precisely states, “What actors do in international relations, what interests they hold, and the structures within which they operate are defined by social norms and ideas rather than by objective and material conditions” (Barkin, 2003, p. 326). Even Wendt himself writes extensively on the topic of social constructivism but identifies it more materialist perspectives (Barkin, 2003). This causes his biological state to lean more towards the objective rather than the ontological inter-subjectivity of social personhood.

It is this narrow and objective biological formation that Jens Bartelson sees as an inaccurate perspective from which to view the international. Taking from Brian Schmit, Bartelson sees that by constructing reality and the past “with the narrow aim of legitimizing present identity, one not only loses touch with the richness of the past but also neglects the explanatory and critical potentials of disciplinary history” (Wendt, 1999, p. 1). Although Bartelson’s work concerns history, the implications of his work vis-à-vis the greater international system are relevant. It is the distinction between an international system and an international society on which Bartelson focuses. He sees a *society* as something that is not specifically defined but inherently *is*, as opposed to a *system*, which is a basic form of social organization that can exist with or without a society (Bartelson, 1996, p. 341). Simply put, when states or actors interact with consciousness of issues or common values, a society is formed. As such, almost any fruitful or positive interaction made by states constitutes a society.

An international society aims to maintain sovereignty through the process of anarchy while simultaneously attempting to fulfill the structural goals of the society of actors. This dichotomy creates a state that will perform expected behavior but does not follow all guidelines and rules (Bartelson, 1996, p. 341). States may choose when and how to follow the structure of the international system to which they buy in but can never leave the anarchic and ultimately unpredictable nature of a fluid and dynamic international society. In order to make his theory of biological state personhood true, Wendt must approach the world as an ever-present international system that has structures that have little room for movement or change. The static biological nature of an organism cannot cope with a universe in which a society and system coexist and the principle actors are created by the tools of “dialogue and consent” and not structures and cells (Bartelson, 1996).

In looking at a combined perspective of Bourdieu, Oprisko, and Bartelson, a trend begins to emerge: the notion that social reality is constructed and dynamic. Social reality is, necessarily, always changing. However structured or rigid systems of politics may seem, Wendt cannot fully create his view of a biological state when the world that the state inhabits is simultaneously being established, altered, and annihilated. Be it a new distinction of honor, an evolving doxa, or a new vision of social reality, the rules of the game and the nature of states (or any other corporate person or social group) are always changing and never finite.

Despite this, it seems that states achieve legitimate personality through sovereignty, regardless of the volatile system in which they exist. Even if state borders or rulers change, the exceptional power of sovereignty as a political reality enables the consciousness of a group to become state. Sovereignty is to a state what anima is to a biological person: the prerequisite for existence and individuality. Although a state gains sovereignty over individuals through the individuals’ willful or tacit relinquishing of their own sovereignty, the corporate entity holds sovereignty until the instant an individual decides to reassert self-sovereignty, making states a social and political reality, whatever form they take.²⁰ As Fowler and Bunck argue, “Determining sovereignty should not be a matter of conferring compliments; rather, it should be a matter of describing reality” (1995, p. 39). Ultimately, sovereignty is not a tool of the state but rather a tool of reality. By no means can a state use any means of sovereignty to claim a biological classification in a social world.

If the ultimate weapon of sovereignty cannot be used to prove a state-as-person analogy, then at this time, nothing can. That is not to say that Wendt’s work is without merit but rather that it failed to see the larger picture. Through the above works, it becomes apparent that social, international, and political reality is given legitimacy but is ultimately created, and the state is linked to the political in a way that the human is not linked to their respective worlds. Presently, the state is one of (if not the most) key components concerning the political and social worlds, and this close linkage brings dynamics of created reality to the presence of the state. Coincidentally, humans may change the world, and the world may change around them, but the two are not dependent on each other or as vitally linked. In a greater context, this is why a state is very similar to a person socially but varies greatly when going further on the continuum of classification into the domain of the biological organism. In the political and social domains, things cannot change or evolve, but rather, individuals must cope and survive with the world around them.²¹ Human input is meaningful but not altogether constitutive of a world humans do not fully shape and control.

It is this human input that Colin Wight dissects in his work that serves as a reply to Alexander Wendt. Wight contends that states do have agency but not *human* agency nor human

activity, as Wendt posits (Bunck, 1996, p. 385). Putting human agency onto the state is detrimental to the very core of IR theory according to Wight, who notes:

To treat the state as a person, we once again denude the social field of human agency. We have agency but no human activity. As such, to treat the state as a person simply leaves open an individualist riposte that threatens any attempt to construct a structurally aware, though non-structuralist, theory of IR (Wight, 2004, p. 270).

Wendt's treatment of the state as a person not only confines its social nature too closely to that of the static biological, but it also leaves the area of international relations theory void and confused. Attempting to bring human agency to social structure creates a dichotomy too difficult to overcome (Wight, 2004, p. 271). This is because much of state agency is not based on self-identity or recognition but rather on social positioning. Every state engages with self-actualization and seeks a social wholeness in Mitzen's ontological security, but that security does not heavily influence the overall agency and action of the state beyond the recognition that there is potential for action. The state has agency within the context of this "capacity to do" but fails to be human in the terms of real materialist action (Wight, 2004, p. 274).

Conclusion

Transitioning the state personhood argument into the field of biology was a bold but ultimately unsuccessful academic move for Wendt. It seems that at least for now, states can only be considered persons in a broad sense, constituting the social aspects of personality being a unique perspective that is situated and positioned in time and space. When the logic of international politics mixes biology and socio-politics, a breakdown of the analogy becomes apparent. States cannot simply be held to the limiting nature of biological classifications in the face of the architecture of the manufactured and multifaceted social reality. In Wight's own critique of Wendt he simply asks, "If social actors treat the state in this manner [i.e., as possessing personhood], what right have social scientists to question it" (Wight, 2004, p. 276)?

So what happens when actors go beyond the category of social and treat the state as a biological person? Current IR theorists weigh the debate of international politics much more than news articles using state anthropomorphism to increase reader comprehension. If the state is not a biological singularity, as we have concluded, then treating it as such *does* have consequences within international relations and politics. IR theory takes many things for granted in its debates, especially the existence and supremacy of the state. From a practical standpoint, these findings alter the theories and ontologies of IR, and the community of international relations scholars would do well to assume a healthy skepticism of them rather than posit theoretical abstractions with anthropomorphic personification of states as concrete, durational beings.

Notes

¹ As Weinstein states with his usual aplomb, love piracy is the “plundering of a text for whatever insights it has to offer, including new ones and throwing away the dross.” A love pirate is a “devoted appropriator on a mission of appreciative plunder.” In other words, this methodology for reading political theory contains a Nietzschean spin, as it refuses to adhere to thought traditions or to assume that concepts from competing paradigms are incongruent simply because the current understanding within the literature is that it should be so. If we can argue over whether or not a state can be a biological organism with sincerity, we must be willing to take the paths less traveled.

² Our emphasis. We think that the emulation aspect is an important distinction and we will come back to this later.

³ From “Collective Intentions and Actions” (Wight, 2004, p. 270).

⁴ The Westphalian System is a form of customary international law in which nation-states emerge as the singular legitimate political authority. A government is sovereign over a group of people in a given territory. This concept emerged following the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years’ War.

⁵ Wight has misspelled thumos (also commonly spelled “thymos”; Greek: θύμος) which expresses the spiritedness of a living man and was the source of both rational thought and felt emotion. What he is getting at in this passage is that if states have enjoy agency as a singularity, then we need not seek to inscribe them with human traits and characteristics. If they are not agential as singularities, then they are not bio-organisms.

⁶ We concur that both schools are talking past one another and ignoring the hat of challenge that Wendt initially threw into the ring.

⁷ In fact, this blending of that which is the political actor is a point of profound contestation within international relations theory. The levels of analysis rest firmly upon a human element for politics merely to exist in the world – raw, existential division, yet often give primacy either to the system (Waltz, Marx, et al.) or to the state (liberalism, neoclassical realism, etc). We lean heavily on Oprisko’s treatment of this in *Honor: A Phenomenology and Existential Theory of International Politics*, in which this is examined in great detail.

⁸ It would be counterintuitive for a person not to recognize his or her own identity as legitimate. This process of legitimation of personal identity is so imbedded within human consciousness it is easy to forget. States, on the other hand, may find it more difficult to prove their own internal legitimacy, which makes the process of internalization much more vital when concerning state anthropomorphism.

⁹ From “Collective Intentions and Actions.”

¹⁰ Wendt summarizes Bratman’s view of reductionism in that it requires shared beliefs and common knowledge for a structure. Within that structure, “we” intentions become interlocking “I” intentions towards a group, allowing group intentions to be eliminated into a single individual intention of a state.

¹¹ State personhood is not an isolated area of contestation. With *Citizens United v. F.E.C.*, personhood has been granted to corporations by the U.S. Supreme Court, including the religious rights of persons. In India, personhood has been granted to dolphins and whales. It appears that within contemporary social reality, all humans may be persons but not all persons are human.

¹² Supervenience is an ontological relationship between levels of a system where the lower level properties influence if not outright determine higher level properties. This hierarchy is easy to see in politics where sovereignty and authority escalate in levels like matryoshka (Russian nesting dolls). For example, the international system includes nation-states which include provinces with counties with cities with townships with neighborhoods, etc. However, Wendt is using supervenience not only in the hierarchy of biological organisms or social structure, but in philosophical priority. He suggests that as individuals are the component pieces of the state, the state possesses personality, and therefore personhood as well.

¹³ Here, Wendt focuses on the idea of *collective cognition* and its nature within the state. Simply put, collective cognition refers to the thought that just as activity is divided in group intentions to accomplish a greater goal, so too is cognitive work of the group. This gives rise to the idea that a state has a “hive mind” in which no member may know everything happening in the state. (Name the source here, p. 304-05).

¹⁴ This definition is neither a formal statement nor an endorsement or official definition used in projects at NASA but was the result of a 1992 panel on the issue of how to define life in order to have a *de facto* standard for determining whether life exists outside of the Earth.

¹⁵ Wendt does note that genetic reproduction is essential to the organism but accepts that states cannot reproduce, detracting from his biological argument at the outset.

¹⁶ Lomas cites more examples of imperfectly shared conceptions of the state such as a believer of Scottish independence in the EU or a Sahelian nomad’s rejection of territorial division.

¹⁷ Emulation, by definition, requires imitation with the intent to match or surpass that which is being imitated.

¹⁸ Lomas defines *anthropomorphic* as the identification of a non-human entity as a human one (Searle, 2002, p. 3)

¹⁹ In this way, Oprisko is an extension of Weinstein and in complete agreement with Walker insofar as asserting that identity is the social value of an individual to a group situated and positioned in time and space. The attainment, cultivation, and maintenance of identity, including status as a state, requires constant and continuous reinforcement lest the identity be lost.

²⁰ Sovereignty is always held by someone. Each person holds his or her sovereignty or relinquishes it in full or in part to a group. Within the group, the decision maker(s) hold sovereignty over the collective. “Rulers come and go; governments end and forms of government change; but sovereignty survives. A political society cannot endure without a supreme will somewhere. Sovereignty is never held in suspense. When, therefore, the external sovereignty of Great Britain in respect of the colonies ceased, it immediately passed to the Union” (Fowler & Bunck, 1995, p. 69). This immediacy to sovereign transfer has been parodied by Terry Pratchett in *Mort* via his creation of the kingon, the particle that represents sovereignty being passed from deceased to inheritor, which is the fastest moving particle in his multiverse. He writes, “The only thing known to go faster than ordinary light is monarchy, according to the philosopher Ly Tin Wheedle. He reasoned like this: “You can't have more than one king, and tradition demands that there is no gap between kings, so when a king dies the succession must therefore pass to the heir instantaneously.” “Presumably,” he said, “there must be some elementary particles – kingons, or possibly queons – that do this job, but of course succession sometimes fails if, in mid-flight, they strike an anti-particle, or republicon.” His ambitious plans to use his discovery to send messages, involving the careful torturing of a small king in order to modulate the signal, were never fully expanded because, at that point, the bar closed.

²¹ Heidegger posits that there are four possible concepts of the world. The first is ontic, referring to beings as objects present in a life-world, the second is ontological and interpreted as “things in general” (both are dismissed by Heidegger as derivative and epiphenomenal), the third is ontic and refers to Dasein, the fourth is ontological and existential. (Prozorov, 2014, p. 15) We have approached this paper using the ontologico-existential concept of the world as we find it to best represent personhood's apprehension of and proceptive crafting of their world from the unlimited possibility of the World as void. (Prozorov, 2014, pp. 27-30)

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