Perry Anderson's Theory of International Relations

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Few living Marxists are more famous, yet Perry Anderson's theory of international relations (IR) remains underexplored. This paper is an interpretive analysis of Anderson, and finds a coherent, albeit changing and at times contradictory, IR theory. It marks three phases of his theorizing: an internationalism, which sought to combat Cold War rhetoric of Western powers; a structuralism that attributed the Westphalian system to a synthesis of ancient and medieval modes of production; and, a pragmatic radicalism of great power politics and increased agency. Yet this periodization also shows consistency of thought, including: a "historicized" vision of sovereignty; a sense of the world as a complex totality made up of interlocking sectors (in place of an anarchic network of states); and, a preference for analyzing objective forces, rather than perceived realities or discursively created structures. Anderson's IR theory traverses Marxian thought, such as that of the neo-Gramscians, world-systems analysts, and those returning to Trotsky's notion of uneven and combined development. His perspective is a distinct alternative to, yet relevant for, other radical traditions.

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Few living Marxists are more famous. He is an intellectual historian and a purveyor of macro-historical comparisons on scale some have called "Olympian." Over a long career, he has written complex and nuanced accounts of modern capitalism, hegemony, ideology, as well as histories or country profiles of European nations, the United States, China, and India. But what is Perry Anderson's theory of international relations (IR)? Many works address his ideas. His vision of global politics, however, is underexplored. This work aspires to Anderson's IR, noting areas of overlap and departure from fellow Marxists, including neo-Gramscians, world-systems analysts, and those in the tradition of uneven and combined development. It also compares Anderson's Marxism with realism. Though lacking in the universalizing rules of, say, neo-realism, Anderson's IR remains a coherent worldview, if also dynamic, subject to shifts, even contradictions. As he put it, characterizing Antonio Gramsci: "the thought of a genuinely original mind will exhibit—not randomly but intelligibly—significant structural contradictions, inseparable from its creativity" (2017a, 13). Anderson may well have described his own intellectual journey this way, which, thanks to a productive partnership with Tom Nairn, at one point drew upon Gramsci's ideas. He then turned to a kind of anti-Gramscian ultra-structuralism that offered (or appeared to offer) little room for agency. Finally, Anderson's Marxism took on a seemingly (and ultimately superficial) realist quality, albeit infused with a greater capacity for agency.

In pursuing an alternative neo-Marxism, this paper makes two assumptions: one, that theories are beneficial for the study of world politics; and two, that theories are inseparable from the human beings who write about them. On the first, some six decades after Stanley Hoffmann (1959) complained that IR scholars had not settled on a common mode of analysis, it may be safe to conclude that there is no single answer to what it means to have IR theory. Is theory: a), a

value judgment? b), a logic of cause-and-effect? c), a prescription for policy? Hoffmann, who saw no single tendency, criticized the field for incorporating a hodge-podge of disciplinary analysis—as he put it, "a flea market is not a discipline" (1959, 348). In lieu of an answer, some scholars contend that theories are at once descriptive, normative, and a style of practice (Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008; Zalewski 1996). Broadly, various IR theories are lenses through which we may view the world: like binoculars, theories focus some objects and blur others (Buzan 1996, 55-56; Sterling-Folker 2013, 5-7). Yet grand paradigmatic debate, such as that articulated by Wæver (1996), has also declined in the twenty-first century. In recent decades, major IR journals have also turned away from theory. By one measurement, some 90% of articles published in leading journals were data-driven, hypothesis-based studies that relied on empirical measurement (Maliniak, et al., 2011, 455). The decline of grand debate has been characterized both as a "theoretical peace thesis" (Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013) and as the total rejection of large-scale theory-building (Lake 2011; 2013). Yet a turn to hypothesis-testing, as Mearsheimer and Walt (2013) explain, may be a lost occasion for theory-building.

This work concurs with those advising caution. The opportunity to leave paradigms behind enables complacency, a sense that old disputes have been resolved at the theoretical, not political, level. Furthermore, theory-building remains important for the discipline, as suggested by recent projects for global IR (Acharya 2014; Qin 2016) as well as new perspectives on feminism (Fraser, Bhattacharya, and Arruzza, 2018), Gramscian IR (Carta 2016; Ives and Short 2013; McCarthy 2011), and uneven and combined development (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015; Davidson 2018). Such yearning for theory is perhaps a logical consequence of geopolitical uncertainty. Historically, scholars have viewed theories as explanations for real-world social or

scientific phenomena. IR may yet conclude that theory, after all, bridges the scholar-practitioner divide (Jahn 2017).

The second assumption is based on the idea that meanings are conveyed by individual scholars (or close networks of thinkers). As ideas, theories cannot survive apart from human thought. Abstract notions of realism, liberalism, and Marxism are imparted by realists, liberals, and Marxists. This paper's interpretivist approach stresses how actors (in this case, Anderson) understand concepts and how context shapes conceptualization of phenomena (Lynch 2014; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Shenhav 2015).

This work, based on research from a longer project, finds three phases of Anderson's IR theorizing. First, his *internationalism*, from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, characterized by translating continental Marxists for English readers of the *New Left Review*. Moreover, the Nairn-Anderson these sought to do for Britain what Gramsci, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Georg Lukács had done, respectively, for Italy, France, and Hungary: convey a sense of history and personality of the nation. Though in retrospect he would distinguish his worldview from that of Gramsci, Anderson would keep returning to the Italian thinker throughout his career. Second, Anderson went through a time of *structuralism*, extending from the mid-1970s to the end of east European communism, marked by an association with the thought of Louis Althusser and a preference for seeing historical change via shifting modes of production. In Western Europe, Anderson contended, capitalism could only be the grand synthesis of ancient world slavery and medieval feudal relations. And third, Anderson has most recently entered a phase of *pragmatic radicalism* of the twenty-first century, distinguished by a revulsion for what he believed were the ideological pronouncements of liberals and taking comfort in the sobriety of realists. In this period, Anderson engaged in debates over hegemony and the meaning of American power. He

did not abandon historical materialism, however. He sought to secure it against the temptations of economistic analysis. By comparing internationalist, structuralist, and pragmatic radical phases, a consistent view emerges: a fascination with hegemony; a historicized vision of sovereignty; a sense of global politics as a complex totality, rather than a collection of nation-states; and, a preference for understanding objective forces, rather than subjective understandings or discursively-created structures.

Phase One: Internationalism

Late in 1962, Perry Anderson became editor of the *New Left Review* (NLR). He was twenty-four. Previously the NLR had been a place for organizing leftist activism in addition to producing a journal. Under Anderson, the journal took on a quieter tone. The real task for the NLR, Anderson and the other editors believed, was to take on the narrative of the Cold War promoted by the West. They thought socialism could be more appealing if socialists accurately portrayed world history. As one whose politics came of age in the conjuncture of 1956, Anderson sought an internationalism removed from the control of the capitalist west as well as the one-party communist states of Eastern Europe. The monumental events of that year—Moscow's assertions over Hungary, and London's and Paris' assertions over Suez—occurred during Anderson's first few weeks at Oxford. For him and other young radicals, socialists should no longer trust that those in power, even the socialist party of France, would stand for everyday people.

Internationalism for the new editors thus meant building a common set of ideas for leftists outside of governments, an objective mentioned in their first editorial:

> The Left has far too long simply affirmed its internationalism, while showing little knowledge or understanding of the world which is now decisively affecting its

destiny. We are determined, in this review, to help make good the deficiency. (NLR Editors 1963, 4)

Anderson later defined internationalism to mean an attitude or behavior that "tends to transcend the nation towards a wider community" (2002, 6). For the New Left, internationalism was understood as solidarity among political subordinates—comrades and members of the proletariat, broadly defined. At a practical level, their international project meant translating and reproducing for an English audience the writings of continental Marxists such as Althusser, Gramsci, Lucio Colletti, Georg Luckács, and Jean-Paul Sartre. It also meant adopting something of an outsider's perspective, analyzing Britain within a global context. According to one account, the editors approached Britain "as if it were a 'foreign' country" (Elliott 1998, 13). Anderson and Nairn penned a series of examinations of Great Britain that they hoped would reinvigorate radicalism in Britain and the wider English-speaking world. The Nairn-Anderson theses, as they became known, were launched with a conceited claim that Western Marxism had not yet traveled to Great Britain, home to Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and E.P. Thompson. The series nonetheless succeeded in presenting continental ideas to an English-speaking audience.

Gramsci's work on Italy inspired Nairn and Anderson in two respects: one, to explore England's history from the bourgeois revolution to the twentieth century; and, two, to strategize about socialist revolution (Anderson 1992, 3). At the heart of both objectives was Gramsci's concept of hegemony. The term was itself ancient, as Anderson would demonstrate decades later: it was a large, old bottle, which over the ages had been filled with various wines (2017b). The twentieth century was no different. Whereas Lenin's *hegemony* of the proletariat meant rule by consent (the term was later swapped for *dictatorship*, denoting rule by force), Gramsci

understood hegemony to mean the stable rule of any social class that rested—in more or less uniform parts—on both force and consent (Anderson 2017b, 18-23).

Anderson took up class dominance in England in a 1964 essay, "Origins of the Present Crisis" (cited here as reprinted in *English Questions*, 1992). In it, he argued that elite hegemonic power had stunted the popularity of socialists and the Labour Party. By elite, he meant those aristocrats, politicians, and owner-producers who promoted capitalism and benefited from an undisturbed social order. One of Gramsci's innovations was to apply hegemony to bourgeois rule (in addition to proletarian). Anderson's use in the English context, to a unified aristocratic-bourgeois class, was a logical extension.

For Anderson, the working class and its allies were at a historical disadvantage, in four ways. One, England did not fully undergo a bourgeois revolution. Rather than overthrowing the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie became co-opted by it. Instead of descending in status, becoming a mere reminder of a feudal past, the aristocracy transformed into a capitalist class (Anderson 1992, 20). Intra-class conflict exceeded inter-class conflict. The development of industrial capitalism, Anderson wrote, revealed common interests between merchants and nobles. In the early nineteenth century, a brief period of acrimony concluded when elites saw the political potential of a rising working class. By the 1830s, bourgeois voters often selected parliamentary candidates from an aristocratic pedigree (Anderson 1992, 20-21). Anderson wrote: "as late as 1865, over 50 per cent of the House of Commons were linked by intricately extended ties of kinship" (1992, 21-22).

Two, the world's first industrial proletariat was experimental in nature, and could not learn from the experiences of other places. England's working class, Anderson explained, was not "immature," but "premature" (1992, 23). Against a unified elite, whose character was

determined by aristocratic heritage, the proletariat suffered what he called "astonishing" defeats as it tried to invent tactics, strategies, even ideas (Anderson 1992, 23).

Three, far from having a unidirectional effect, the construction of empire abroad (especially the new imperialism of the late nineteenth century) solidified the strange synthesis of bourgeois and aristocratic elites. Leaders, whether Conservative, Liberal, or Fabian, all bought in to the program of "national-imperial mystification," the promotion of English power in the world as well as its inherent benevolence (Anderson 1992, 24-26). Suffrage arrived just as workers' organizations lowered their ambitions, a development Anderson saw as evidence of their new "docile" nature (1992, 26).

And, four, England's social structure was only marginally disturbed across the sequence of global wars. Perhaps sensing resistance from readers, who might point to the Labour's electoral victory and the creation of national health and other social welfare programs, Anderson noted that London's left turn was far milder than on the continent. Often, war leads to violent social upheaval. Near the close of World War I, socialist and communist parties shook-up the social and political order of France, Italy, Germany, and Russia. Except for the latter, they did the same after World War II. Only after the existing order had been transformed did conservative forces prevail, whether in the name of fascism (in the Twenties) or anti-communism (in the Fifties) (Anderson 1992, 27-29).

The position of England's elites, Anderson believed, fulfilled Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Class superiority was more than mere force or even wealth, but also spread through cultural beliefs and attitudes. Cultural power, Anderson explained,

> is an imperative order that not merely sets external limits to the aims and actions of the subordinate bloc, but shapes its internal vision of itself and the world, imposing contingent historical facts as necessary co-ordinates of social life

itself. The hegemonic class is the primary determinant of consciousness, character and customs throughout the society. Such tranquil and unchallenged sovereignty is a relatively rare historical phenomenon. In England, however, the unparalleled temporal continuity of the dominant class has produced a striking example of it. (Anderson 1992, 30)

The universe of English practices and worldviews, in other words, was conditioned by those at the summit of society. Here, an idea that Anderson used to explain the cultural supremacy of aristocrats over the bourgeoisie may also account for the supremacy of elites (both aristocratic and bourgeois) over proletarians. Derived from Jean-Paul Sartre (and perhaps deployed by devotees in more concrete form than the French thinker intended), the concept explained how the character of one entity could be determined by a force outside of it. Subordinate classes were thus *detotalized totalities* because they adopted institutions and cultural practices of their class superiors (Anderson 1992, 22fn5). His definition aligned with another concept, that of a *corporate class*, which, unlike a *hegemonic class*, worked to improve its circumstances within a context not of its own making (Anderson 1992, 33).

Elite hegemony, according to Anderson, manifested in multiple ways. In society, rank was marked by accent, appearance, and social activities. Traditionalism served as its chief ideological accompaniment, tying the worlds of the prince and the Church to citizens' warm feelings of historical nostalgia and the nation. A third reinforcement came from a peculiar sense of leadership, characterized by amateurism, that enabled elites to spread notions of egalitarianism without having to practice it (Anderson 1992, 30-32). A truly successful hegemonic class, Anderson reasoned, could also break ideas that were dangerous to the social order. (He gave utilitarianism as an example of an ideology that, despite its popularity, never became hegemonic) (Anderson 1992, 32).

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The sum of Labour's efforts, in the eyes of NLR's young editor, was less than its parts: political fortitude never matched "social consciousness." The party's character could be summarized by its name. Rather than declare "an ideal society"—as do many socialist, social democratic, and communist parties—Labour simple describes "an existent interest" (Anderson 1992, 37). If the working class were to undercut elite hegemony, Anderson wrote, its party must become genuinely socialist (1992, 47). Such a conclusion emphasized, as Gramsci had, the cultural force of hegemony. True dominance, after all, relied on more than mere force.

The following decade, Anderson took a different stance, penning a lengthy article on the inconsistencies of Gramsci's thought (1976a). Anderson came to believe that Gramsci's sliding vision of the state in relation to civil society—at times in opposition, at times encompassing, at times equivalent—too greatly stretched its meaning (1976a, 13). Moreover, Gramsci falsely asserted that proletarian and bourgeois hegemony were the same (Anderson 1976a, 20). Supporters, of course, noted that Gramsci never intended concepts to take the same form in all contexts (e.g. Gill 1993). Anderson admitted as much several decades later, noting that his earlier prose was "overly dramatic" (2017a, 15). Nonetheless, he considered his Sixties' writings as really in the model of Sartre and Luckács, and attributed notes of Gramsci to Tom Nairn (Anderson 1992, 3).

Anderson's Gramscian turn, however brief, was not a truly global political thought. Though the NLR's internationalism was about the spread of ideas among Marxists, the ideas themselves—at least as Anderson used them—were mostly within national societies. More significantly, Gramsci himself did not have a theory of international politics. The transnational and international dimension of Gramscian hegemony and other terms would come with Robert

W. Cox (1981; 1993), Giovanni Arrighi (1982; 1990), and subsequent generations of neo-Gramscians.

Anderson was commonly regarded (with his approval, no doubt) as having little to do with Gramsci. The divergence was stark: his preference for structures, removed from the practices of humans, contrasted with the views of many neo-Gramscians (McCarthy 2011). (As shown in the next section, Anderson came to see international relations in terms of longstanding historical forces that, for millennia, have limited the choices of individuals.) Yet his internationalism also overlapped with those who followed in Gramsci's footsteps, such as Cox, whose seminal 1983 essay, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations," connected elements of Gramsci's thought to international politics (cited here as reprinted in 1993).

Cox's neo-Gramscianism emphasized state relations in terms of material and ideational forces. The rise and fall of hegemonic powers rested on a domestic hegemonic class extending its dominance to the world scene, encapsulated in the rhetoric of consent. Elites remained talented at co-option, which proved to be an enduring barrier to challenging hegemony from below. Cox thought intellectuals were necessary for a counter-hegemonic movement, first by building awareness, then by developing (or transforming) institutions (1993, 60-64). Anderson was similar to Cox in three respects. One, like Cox, he addressed the interplay of material forces and ideas, as illustrated by an early series on Portuguese colonialism (1962a; 1962b; 1962c). Two, his vision of hegemony contrasted sharply with that of realists, who contended that international dominance from military force. Anderson's sense of hegemony always relied on consent. And, three, unlike other Marxist IR theorists, Anderson also regarded intellectuals as necessary for upending the social order. In fact, in presenting Gramsci's and others' ideas, Anderson, Nairn, and the NLR sought to combat a potent geopolitical narrative of the West. If they were to be

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successful, leftists needed to explain (contrary to the official line from London and Washington) that Stalinism was not the same as socialism and that capitalist democracy was not the only path to a free and prosperous existence (Anderson 1965). For them, the answer lay in uncovering the historical roots of the present.

Nairn-Anderson ended in the Seventies. Politics had intervened. As the NLR worked for a reinvigorated Left internationalism from below, the rhetoric of a cooperative transnational was claimed from above. Over the decades, Anderson later remarked, internationalism came to mean something built and managed by elites. It took form as those associations among nation-states. In the twenty first century, he wrote, "the official discourse of the West resounds with appeals to a term that was long a trademark of the Left" (2002, 5). By this point, internationalism had come to be associated with the interests of America's foreign policy elite. Rather than representing socialist solidarity, the term had overturned.

Phase Two: Structuralism

In the Seventies, themes of structuralism displaced themes of internationalism. In place of national identity projects, Anderson turned to world history. At the time, studies in international relations were concerned with international organizations of the recent past (Keohane and Nye [1977] 2011) or ahistorical explanations of inter-state relations (Waltz 1979). Anderson and many other Marxists began from a different premise, one concerned with what is Fernand Braudel called the "structures of everyday life" (1981). Who makes food and clothing, and with what material? What economic, political, and juridical rules limit or enable social activity? How are such rules created? Anderson, who did not see himself in the tradition of Braudel, was concerned with such questions regarding the mode of production. For him and other Marxists, such questions meant thinking about politics (domestic or global) in terms of systems of

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economics and governance. Many of Anderson's one-time comrades at the *New Left Review*, such as E.P. Thompson (1963) and Stuart Hall (2016), focused on human activity—human institutions, ideas, and rules. Their views were closer to that of the neo-Gramscians. Anderson operated at a greater level of abstraction, namely, the ways in which human behavior was constrained by structures.

For his part, Anderson agreed that all social systems were comprised of human beings, as well as with the assertion that all modes of social organization are made up of ideological, economic, political, and cultural components. But he disagreed on causation, particularly the humanistic assumption that individuals or well-organized groups are the primary agents of historical change. He believed the humanists had overstated the link between human action— what Anderson (1980) called "human agency"—and historical change. In place of Hall's preferred description, a "totality of practices" (2016, 39), Anderson used two terms interchangeably: *complex totality* and (from Sartre) *totalization*. He invoked the latter more frequently, but the former was perhaps more descriptive. A complex totality represented a combination of moving parts that interact in historically-derived and contradictory ways. To consider any part by itself, Anderson wrote, would be an "abstraction" (1992, 58fn12). Still, to totalize did not mean to reduce everything to the economic. Nor did it mean privileging national over extra-national forces. In fact, Anderson found imperial bureaucratic largess, warfare, and epidemiological shocks (such as the Black Death) to be potent agents of social change (1974a; 1974b).

Anderson's totalization was reminiscent of other Marxist perspectives, such as world-systems analysis and uneven and combined development. The former, whose intellectual father published the first volume of his series on *The Modern World-System* (1974a) the same year as

Anderson's two-part study on the origins of the modern world, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974a, 1974b, hereafter *Passages-Lineages*). Like Anderson, Immanuel Wallerstein's sense of totalities took a structuralist view. But unlike Anderson, whose totalities were "open," that is, without a specific temporal or geographical boundaries, Wallerstein's totalities were "closed" singular politico-economic units. According to Wallerstein (1974b), world-systems have an internal evolution, beginning with their formation, expansion, exhaustion, and then collapse. Then, new systems form out of the collapse of the old (see Williams 2018). In this perspective, modern capitalism developed in Europe and the Americas over two centuries, roughly 1450-1650, and expanded in two phases to cover much of the globe (Wallerstein 1974a, 1989). Capitalism was far from inevitable, however: it could have just as easily formed in China as in Europe (Wallerstein 1974a, 59-63).

Many twenty-first century scholars of uneven and combined development agree with Wallerstein on the importance of modernity. Thinkers like Justin Rosenberg (2013a; 2016) Neil Davidson (2009; 2016), and Alexander Anievas (2011; Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2017), however, departed from Wallerstein and Anderson in their emphasis on Leon Trotsky's idea of uneven and combined development. For Davidson, the "concept was an attempt to give concrete expression to what totality might mean" on the international plane (2016, 35). Davidson's view resembled Wallerstein's in the sense that he did not draw upon pre-modern global politics to make sense of the present. But Davidson goes farther by suggesting that the totality in which we live only dates to late-nineteenth century industrial-imperial capitalism. For him, the debate hinged on the distinction between *uneven development* and *combined development*. Unevenness refers to societies at different stages of political and economic development. Often, uneven societies can learn from developed areas and adopt their technologies and politico-economic

forms, leaping ahead, benefiting from what Trotsky called "the privilege of historic backwardness" ([1930] 2008). Combined refers to the complex combination of the new and old, in a synthesis that is different than merely catching up (see Davidson 2016, 41-51; Rosenberg 2016, 23-25).

Unlike Davidson, Rosenberg and Anievas believe there are instances of uneven and combined development in the premodern world. A transhistorical view of uneven and combined development (see Rosenberg 2013a) is more in line with Anderson than Wallerstein, albeit expressed in divergent ways. Anderson, despite admiring Trotsky's politics (1976b, 101-102), modeled his works on other thinkers, including Lukács and Colletti. The historical changes he described *Passages-Lineages* partially corresponded with the principles of uneven and combined development (as described by today's neo-Trotskyists). Still, one should not read Trotsky into Anderson's work since the younger Marxist conceived of world-historical change in different terms.

The two volumes of *Passages-Lineages* represent the first half of an intended sequence, unfinished (at least formally), that halted with the birth of an almost capitalist inter-state system. By comparing labor coercion in Eastern Europe and Western Europe in the ancient and feudal worlds, Anderson sought to explain why capitalism originated in Europe's West. The answer had to do with the legacy of an earlier formation. In the East, the Roman Empire was built on top Hellenistic institutions that served as a mediating (at times antagonistic) force within the wider Roman bureaucracy. The West, with no such safeguard, became reliant on large-scale slavery. A Roman invention, the slave mode of production was vulnerable to economic crises (Anderson 1974a, 59, 87). Consequently, the West was also more susceptible to invasion, which began with

Germanic wars in the fifth century. Ironically, it was the relative strength of the East which placed it developmentally *behind* the West.

Feudalism emerged as the synthesis of a Roman "slave" mode of production, based on ownership of the human labor force, and a German "barbaric" mode of production, based on the extended tribe or clan. As in antiquity, feudal laborers were coerced through extra-economic means (such as legal codes or brute force). But unlike slaves, feudal serfs were neither property nor free laborers. Bound to work another's land, serfs stood at the bottom of a complex social framework. The lords they served were in turn vassals to others, and so on, to the monarchical summit of society.

Anderson's view of feudal sovereignty was uncommon in IR, a field which often assumed anarchic relations among sovereign states (for a critical review, see Donnelly 2015). To the contrary, Anderson's approach to inter-group relations did not take anarchy as a fundamental reference point. He envisioned political authority in terms of its limitations and contradictions. According to Latham (2018), IR scholars tended towards three non-discreet senses of sovereignty: presentist, a view of sovereignty as a uniquely modern phenomenon (e.g. Krasner 1999); genealogical, which treats sovereignty as a modern development, informed by pre-modern Western ideas (e.g. Latham 2012); or, historicist, a broader interpretation that finds a "strong family resemblance" between modern and various premodern forms of authority across a given territory (Latham 2018, 497). Presentism may be the most prevalent, but, Latham claimed, genealogical and historicist visions of sovereignty may help the field advance to conception of IR as more than the study of modernity.

In *Passages-Lineages*, Anderson demonstrated a commitment to historicized sovereignty. He drew upon notions of authority and territory but did not limit the term to the modern world.

Feudalism contained a nascent sovereignty, distinct from the modern nation-state but possessing similar characteristics. Feudal authority, as explained in *Passages-Lineages*, came from multiple sources:

> political sovereignty was never focused in a single centre. The functions of the State were disintegrated in a vertical allocation downwards, at each level of which political and economic relations were, on the other hand, integrated. This parcellization of sovereignty was constitutive of the whole feudal mode of production. (Anderson 1974a, 148)

Though feudalism meant the unification of politics and economics, a feature inherited from antiquity, no single authority wielded politico-economic power. Anderson noted four traits of feudalism in the West, which existed in its complete form between the ninth and fifteenth centuries. One, sovereignty was parcellized in the sense that local authority was constrained by geography as well as by figures higher up in the feudal hierarchy. Two, there were places seemingly beyond the power of local lords. Another vestige of antiquity, communal lands (such as woods, fields, and pastures), remained under the control of peasants. There were also free estates, allods, that were mostly independent of the feudal economy; along with communal lands, they remained consequential for political resistance as well as total agrarian productivity. The economy in the West enabled the development of another autonomous place, the medieval town, home to trade and skilled artisans (Anderson 1974a, 148-9). Three, Anderson described a "decomposition of sovereignty" at the summit of society: unable to govern directly, the monarch was responsible to those immediately beneath him. "The monarch…was a feudal suzerain of his vassals…, not a supreme sovereign set above his subjects" (1974a, 151). And finally, there was the separate power of the Church, which reigned over feudal culture (Anderson 1974a, 135-6).

In the West, feudalism peaked in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Its economy was driven by the struggle for land. Socially, according to Anderson, the "tension between rulers and ruled" led to the decline in free land holdings and increased enserfment (as well as, ironically, a shift towards wage labor in some areas) (1974a, 189). Ecologically, land reclamation, the conversion of wetlands and forests to agricultural lands, greatly increased agricultural output (Anderson 1974a, 188-9).

In the fourteenth century, untouched land grew scarce and reclamation slowed. Entropy set in as exhausted lands yielded fewer returns. In 1315, a harvest shortfall led to famine across central Europe. Populations fell, causing a labor shortage. Then, in 1348, the Black Death struck from East to West. Demographic contraction ensued. This time the population fell by forty percent, a scale of destruction which far exceeded total losses of World Wars I and II (Anderson 1974a, 201fn9). In the short-run, nearly all peasant revolts were put down. In the long-run, however, the West slowly shifted away from enserfment and towards wage labor. To make up for shortages, merchants successfully enticed peasants away from rural areas. Thus, peasants entered modernity more as free laborers than as serfs.

The East, which Anderson loosely defined as east of the Elbe and north of the Danube, had no prior slave mode of production. Thus, the East developed serfdom gradually, in fits and starts over the centuries. Enserfment, he concluded, "was much slower and more halting than in the West…because it had no original 'synthesis' behind it" (1974a, 263). In the East, the tribal mode of production had no antithesis (such as Roman imperial slavery), and thus evolved according to other processes (Anderson 1974a, 215-216). Yet, it too suffered in the fourteenth century. Despite vast territory, agrarian practices led to land exhaustion. Ironically, abundance had incentivized exploitation and abandonment (Anderson 1974a, 251). And like the West, the

Black Death cut down the population. The East had relatively weak towns, a structural feature that left peasants with few alternative labor options. In need of laborers, the nobility subjugated the towns and imposed serfdom (Anderson 1974a, 253). Eastern feudalism thus came to full form centuries after the West, between fifteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Economic and ecological crises, centuries in the making, were triggered by poor harvests. Anderson saw structural requisites for historical change; there was little room, he thought, for individual humans to change their circumstances without a structural advantage. Still, structuralism did not mean endogeneity. The final destruction of West European serfdom arrived exogenously, in the form of the Black Death. In the East, structural forces led in precisely the opposite direction: an endogenous politico-economic crisis (of land and labor), when combined with an exogenous epidemiological crisis, consolidated serfdom.

Feudal sovereignty—parcellized, overlapping, decomposed, and distinct from Christian culture—had only a few similarities with modern sovereignty, but its successor was more familiar. Anderson saw the absolutist state as an intermediate form, neither medieval nor modern. He did not conceive of the transition from the middle ages to modernity in binary terms. Unlike the earlier "catastrophic" transition to feudalism, the transition to the modern capitalist state was "cumulative" (Anderson 1974a, 18).

Organizationally, absolutist states were feudal constructs with centralized monarchical power. Monarchs did not have truly *absolute* power (Anderson 1974b, 49). The term, Anderson explained, referred to the "weight of the new monarchical complex on the aristocratic order itself" (1974b, 429). Serfdom concluded with the end of parcellized sovereignty, though the upper landed nobility continued to extract labor rents via extra-economic means. The absolutist state was thus a step closer to the presentist model but did not quite establish the singular

territoriality symbolized by Westphalia. As a mode of production, however, the age of absolutism was rather different in its separation of political authority from the economy. In the West, the relative independence of the merchant class, protected by towns, led to the emergence of a proto-capitalist economy. There, absolutism was a "complex combination of *feudal and capitalist modes of production*" (Anderson 1974b, 428-9, original emphasis).

In the West, absolutism was a way for princes to hold on to power. They compensated for the end of serfdom, a rising merchant class, and an urban economy by centralizing political authority (Anderson 1974b, 179). In the East, however, absolutism served a rather different purpose. Princes centralized power to consolidate serfdom and limit the power of towns. Absolutism was also a response to the threat of war from the West, a conclusion which supported Charles Tilly's famous line: "war made the state, and the state made war" (1975, 42). Absolutism began in Spain and reached its high point in France, the latter of which is the most familiar example of absolutism. But, Anderson made clear, the strongest absolutist state took form in the East. The final but most enduring example, Russia, consolidated feudal political authority in the early 1600s, and did not let go until the 1917 revolution.

Passages-Lineages was not merely a work about Europe. In addition to a chapter on the Ottoman Empire, Anderson penned a 115-page addendum, notes on modes of production in Asia. His remarks on Japan were intended to further demonstrate the historical specificity of European capitalism. Japanese feudalism, which developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was similar in structure to feudal Europe, but, curiously enough, did not naturally give way to capitalism (Anderson 1974b, 413). Feudal Japan was a politico-economic system of coerced labor. It was also a system of parcellized sovereignty, with political authority hierarchically organized under hereditary title. It lacked a European-style free estates system as

well as the cultural authority of the Church, and thus, Anderson noted, was "more organized, systematic and stable" (1974b, 414).

Far from producing absolutism, however, Japan's internal evolution led in the other direction: economic seclusion and an incremental weakening of the military (Anderson 1974b, 454, 458). The arrival of great powers—American, British, French, Russian—beginning with Commodore Perry in 1853, interrupted Japan's developmental trajectory. Imperialism led to an opening-up of the economy that, in turn, set off a revolt from within. Anderson wrote: "Economically and diplomatically undermined from abroad, once the safety of its seclusion had gone, the Tokugawa State was politically and militarily undone from within by the very parcellization of sovereignty that it had always preserved" (1974b, 460). Like much of Eastern Europe, Japan's process of modernization arrived exogenously. But unlike Eastern Europe, the new political authority, the Meiji State, did not wish to preserve the feudal past. Japan effectually skipped absolutism. The state centralized power but abolished feudalism, reformed land holdings, created a single market and currency, and introduced citizenship. Anderson concluded: "The passage from feudalism to capitalism was effected, to a unique extent, without political interlude in Japan" (1974b, 461).

In covering two millennia of social formations, Anderson sought to repudiate the ahistorical Marxism of European communist parties, which he regarded as the mechanistic application of Marxism to world history. Instead, he wanted to show nuances and exceptions to rules. He did not begin with the economic base, but instead found much explanatory power in the political superstructure. He concluded that capitalism could only have emerged from the long-term historical trajectory of Europe's West. Geographical divergence revealed the necessity of developmental stages. The West began the sequence—of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism—

earlier than the East. Thus, its internal dynamic drove forward developmental change across the continent.

Anderson's longer view set his Marxism apart from that of world-systems analysis, though not because the former was "political" and the latter was "Smithian," as was often debated (see, e.g., Brenner 1977; Skocpol and Somers 1980). Instead, Anderson's work eschewed boundaries, a fundamental component of world-systems analysis. His open totalization, almost without temporal or geographic limits, was both burdensome and liberating. *Passages-Lineages* detailed historical trends, with exceptions, across centuries and continents. Yet there was also freedom in drawing on examples from nearly any time or place. By contrast, Wallerstein's world-systems were bounded politico-economic constructs, however grand, whose existence needed to be defined and redefined. Anderson was also liberated from the historical versus transhistorical debates of uneven and combined development. His totalization saw our modern forms unfold across several centuries. He came to see absolutism was a semi-modern intermediate phase, neither feudal nor capitalist.

Phase Three: Pragmatic Radicalism

In the Eighties, Anderson stepped down as editor of the *New Left Review* and began teaching at UCLA. He had seen little success combating capitalist narratives, which in fact had only grown more potent under the stewardship of Thatcher and Reagan. More than an accompaniment to democracy, free market capitalism was portrayed by its champions as synonymous with human freedom (Harvey 2005). The rise of neoliberalism and its adjacent ideology, capitalist democracy as the conclusion of history (Fukuyama 1992), demonstrated to Anderson that socialists had lost the twentieth century. In 2000 he returned to serve another three years as principal editor of the NLR. This time, he announced a new mission. Rather than promote a singular socialist narrative,

the journal was defined by its oppositional stance, contesting capitalism through a multitude of left perspectives (Anderson 2000). Without a line to toe, the NLR was defined merely by its refusal to surrender.

Readers familiar with *Passages-Lineages* might wonder why Anderson remained concerned over the decline of socialist organizations. In Anderson's long narrative, people seemed incapable of changing their totalities. In truth, he had more complex views of humans and their relationship to politico-economic structures. The Nairn-Anderson theses, after all, had been premised on the idea that people, armed with history, could change a structure from below. His true view was something of a synthesis of expressed opinions on agency in the Sixties and Seventies. One work, published in 1980, explains the paradox. The book took form as a defense of Louis Althusser and the Marxists he inspired against the criticisms of E.P. Thompson (1966), who had a complicated (and at times contentious) friendship with Anderson. Althusser and other structuralists epitomized structuralism, seemingly conceiving of little maneuverability for human choice and action. Still, thinkers hardly live up to their caricatures. Anderson suggested a more nuanced perspective in *Arguments Within English Marxism*.

According to Anderson, human agency was limited in centuries prior. Thompson, he explained, regarded as exploitation as a catalyst to collective reckoning and the formation of resistance measures among the exploited. Anderson thought exploitation did not always lead to group awareness and resistance. It rarely did, he thought. It was only very recently that such awareness, or *class consciousness*, came into existence with industrialism (Anderson 1980, 56). But, once created, class consciousness was a potent force against exploitation at work, in politics, or in the marketplace. Thus, Anderson concluded, human agency had greatly increased in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Furthermore, it was the job of social historians to help

working classes achieve their goals, to actualize "popular self-determination for the first time in history" (Anderson 1980, 22, original italics removed).

Arguments' final verdict on agency rested somewhere between (though not exactly in the middle) of Anderson's interpretations of Althusser and Thompson. Each, Anderson wrote, had wrongly conceived of the role of human experience. For Althusser, experience was mere illusion, whereas Thompson saw experience as informative and illuminating. Anderson believed Althusser was more on the mark, but unable to adjust for new historical periods. In being unable to account for the world's modern labor classes, Althusser's account remained incompatible with socialist activism of the industrial age (Anderson 1980, 57-58). After witnessing the May 1968 revolts, Anderson explained in another work, Althusser offered only mild concessions to the "masses" who made history (1983, 39).

The neo-Marxism of Anderson did not overlap neatly with other traditions on the question of agency. The Gramsci-inspired writings of Cox and others (e.g. McCarthy 2011) adopted, as did Anderson, Marx's famous sentiment about the need for philosophers to change the world rather than simply interpret it. Yet whereas Anderson preferred analysis over action, the neo-Gramscians sought to transform their criticism into action. Cox, after all, spent a career at the International Labour Organization before turning to the academy. In places, his famous essay on Gramsci reads like a guidebook for counter-hegemonic action (1993, especially 54-65). Anderson saw his role as providing the theoretical and historical accounts that aided political action. Furthermore, Nairn-Anderson, *Passages-Lineages*, and *Arguments* suggest that Anderson saw history and narrative as crucially important, both for class consciousness and for proletarian revolution.

Other Marxist IR traditions sharply contrasted with Anderson's. Many adhering to uneven and combined development emphasized agency, of peripheral and non-European areas, and of the peasants and others in the lower strata (e.g. Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2017). Anderson also diverged from world-systems analysis. Wallerstein and others were different in stressing the natural lifespans of totalities: although strong states or even individuals could change the course (or even existence) of a system, it was more likely that systems would end because they had run their course (Wallerstein 1974b). In times without a system (or at least when a system was weak, in decline), human agency could be significant. Wallerstein's structuralism was thus more restrictive, in one major way. Depending on the time and place in history, his interpretation of agency could have been identical, or radically opposed to, Anderson's. In the twenty-first century, however, they happened to agree. Wallerstein saw capitalism in structural crisis, falling apart according to its contradictions. Thus, he stressed the importance of everyday resistance. We are all like butterflies, he would say, flapping their wings in a storm (2014, 171-172). He put the odds of a better world at roughly fifty-fifty, an optimism that exceeded Anderson's by a long shot.

Still, pessimism had its advantages. Free from political goals, Anderson explored his interests. His writings became a totalization of the world, divided by region. In substance and style, his project recalled *Passages-Lineages*, but rarely did his later works extend into antiquity. The range and volume were impressive. Among recent works have been an informal update to his totalization of Europe (2009), an analysis of India (2012a), and several essays on China (2010; 2012b), Brazil (2016a; 2019), the Middle East (2011; 2016b) and the United States (2015; 2017c). Furthermore, he wrote about post-Cold War ideologies (1998) and the notion of anti-systemic movements (2017d), themes familiar to world-systems analysts.

Three recent books reprise earlier themes. One, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (2017a), was an edited reprint of his essay from four decades prior. Together with two others, *American Foreign Policy and Its Thinkers* (2015) and *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (2017b), Anderson turned, once again, to the ways in which governments and social elites, internationally and domestically, exercise power through dominance and persuasion.

In its conceptual breadth, *The H-Word* was reminiscent of Anderson's intellectual history of Western Marxism (1976b; 1980; 1983), though the latter was limited to two centuries and one continent. The author and his subject were a good fit: neither accepted the confines of time, geography, or context. Hegemony, like Anderson himself, had a peripatetic nature. The concept emerged in the ancient world in the writings of Thucydides and Aristotle, traveled to China, and found its way back to Europe in the writings of nineteenth century German thinkers. Since then, it jumped from Russia to Italy, England, America, India, China, and Japan.

In tracking divergent meanings, Anderson did not advance a Marxian dialectic. In fact, *The H-Word* showed continuity over the ages, immune to changes in the mode of production, class struggle, even type of governance. One reviewer thought Anderson seemed more like a realist than a Marxist (Robbins 2018). Others have made similar observations about Anderson's twenty-first century writings (Mazower 2010). Their judgments have been reinforced by Anderson's recent tendency to write approvingly about realists and disapprovingly about liberals (e.g. Anderson 2015, 197-217, 253; 2017b, 65-83). Yet the comparison was limited. An apparent affinity had more to do with a distaste for liberals than conversion to realism. Anderson was realist only in the sobriety of his tone, of revealing the naked power ambitions of states, of dismantling liberal rhetoric.

In addition to acknowledging the left's defeat in the last century, Anderson's pragmatic attitude meant recognizing American dominance and criticizing its apologists (2000; 2015). Great powers, Anderson concluded, often spoke of the benevolence of their leadership. In the domestic context, as discussed above, hegemony was more reliant on persuasion than coercion. On the world stage, the balance tilted towards coercion (Anderson 2017b, 116). For him, the loudest defenses of American power came from liberal IR theory. In succession over the decades, liberal thinkers who feared the decline of the United States first turned to consolation in the form of "regimes," multilateral networks which can effectively manage issue areas (Keohane 1984). By the Nineties, and once again secure in preeminence, "soft power" became the buzzword (Nye 1990). The logic was straightforward: because of its values and popularity, the world craved Washington's leadership (Anderson 2017b, 73-75). Finally, by the early twenty-first century, liberals abandoned pretenses: the United States was a hegemonic power and the world was better off for it (Owen 2001; Ikenberry 2006). In this narrative, Anderson wrote, the real danger was whether Washington would relinquish its necessary role (2017b, 158-159).

Supporters of U.S. power and interests might have wondered: what harm could come from promoting American values? Certainly, scholars the world over may endorse their nation's foreign policy. The problem with narratives, it turned out, was imitation. In the case of the world's rising power, hegemony had long been eschewed. In fact, Mao's slogan was "never seek hegemony" (qtd. in Anderson 2017b, 140). Today, China's foreign policy rhetoricians speak of "humane authority" and "a new kind of hegemon" (qtd. in Anderson 2017b, 140). No longer condemned, hegemonic power became publicly desirable.

The H-Word also showed the agency of state actors. If hegemony was a specific relationship between coercion and persuasion, then states could choose to be hegemonic powers.

This portrayal contrasted with the judgment of fellow Marxists, Wallerstein (1989) and Arrighi (1994), who thought structural circumstances (of production, the world-economy, and global conflict) caused hegemony. Did Anderson's view of human agency increase for leaders of nations as well as the proletariat? His explanation in *Arguments* (regarding conscious working classes) would not extend to state actors, whose self-awareness and capacity for change presumably remained the same. The puzzle remains unresolved. Nonetheless, Anderson's pragmatism did not mean the abandonment of structuralism. Rather, his structuralism was modified by a return to public narratives, which had been central to his writings of an earlier age.

Neo-Marxist International Relations

Perry Anderson's vision of global politics changed with the times, new circumstances which led to new realizations. In the Sixties, Anderson's research and politics awaited socialist revolutionary action. He and Nairn applied continental ideas to a British audience. Anderson applied Gramsci's ideas to England, demonstrating the hegemonic power elites. The following decade, Anderson produced his magnum opus. His history of the modern world demonstrated portrayed a Marxian dialectic—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—that also reflected the uniqueness of social formations. Then, beginning in the Eighties, amplified in the Nineties, Anderson became despondent about socialist revolution. He did not give up, however. His work turned to a totalization of the world, region by region.

Across three phases—internationalism, structuralism, and pragmatic radicalism—Anderson maintained a consistent perspective of the world's order. As the editor of the *New Left Review*, Anderson's internationalism was Gramscian, at least insofar as he applied Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and bourgeois revolutions. Subsequently, despite writing a lengthy criticism, Anderson's work accepted basic elements of Gramsci's sense of hegemony. Ultimately, he

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concluded that, within states, hegemony was secured through the cultural arena. In international relations, force became more important but not all-important.

Anderson saw politico-economic power in terms of long-term trends, reinforced culturally by skilled rhetoricians. In his interpretation, the modern capitalist system of sovereign nation-states came about due to forces mostly beyond the abilities of humans to change them. Yet he regarded social history as necessary for upending this order, portraying the world as it really exists, not to be idealistic or to apologize for its disparities. Initially, he sought an alternative narrative of the Cold War. Then, with more modest ambitions, Anderson exposed justifications for American dominance.

Such productivity represents an original interpretation. But does it constitute a theory of international relations? Justin Rosenberg (2013b) recently took up a similar question, applying Kenneth Waltz's (1979) criteria to the tradition of uneven and combined development. As Rosenberg explained, Waltz saw three requirements for a worldview to be an IR theory. One, a theory must cover an area or "domain" of analysis. Two, the theory must provide "patterns of law-like behavior" that show how "social structures" affect such behavior (Rosenberg 2013b, 185). And three, in a closely related point, a theory is the outcome of "a brilliant intuition" that leads to "a creative idea" (Waltz 1979, 9). Such creativity thus guides the theoretician to understand even what cannot be directly observed (Waltz 1979, 9; Rosenberg 2013b, 185). Theories guide our intuitions.

Anderson's neo-Marxism fulfilled Waltz's criteria. First, his view of international politics as a complex totality breaks with the conventional state to system dichotomy in IR, which Waltz's neorealism reinforced. Thus, Anderson joined other Marxist perspectives in creating a unified framework that accounted for political divisions (e.g. the nation-states), economic

systems (e.g. capitalism), and ideas (e.g. neoliberalism). Yet Anderson's totalization remained distinct. It avoided the rigid boundaries of geography and time often found in works by world-systems analysts. Yet its attention to regional trends (and exceptions) made it more sensitive to boundaries than what was commonly found in neo-Gramscianism and uneven and combined development.

Second, on law-like phenomena, Anderson's conceptualization of historical change and human agency explained the dialectical origins of the modern world as well, marking continuity and discontinuity. *Passages-Lineages*, for example, explains stages of European development, split by East and West, across two millennia. He noted contradictory economic and political forces, as well as exceptions. Later works explained how such long processes, suddenly, could give rise to well-organized campaigns for proletarian liberation.

And, third, on the creative insights of theories, Anderson's neo-Marxism provides for a sense of historicized sovereignty; and, it examines excuses for elite dominance in the cultural sphere. On the former, by portraying the absolutist state as an intermediate phase, neither medieval nor modern, Anderson's history shows an incremental development of sovereignty. On the latter, Nairn-Anderson and more recent works like *The H-Word* interpreted how narratives affect the world's order. Sometimes, this order is reinforced by hegemonic classes, persuading more than coercing. At other times, this order is reinforced by discussions of hegemony itself.

No theorist retains consistent worldview over a lifetime. An unyielding attitude, or a perspective incapable of adjustment, would be too generic to be insightful or creative. Anderson's faded optimism, influenced by his times, in part enabled a coherent neo-Marxist theory of international relations. It may prove useful for understanding the structures of today's international system, and the narratives used for justification.

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