



universität
wien

MASTER THESIS | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Rethinking International Anarchy: Kropotkin's Political Philosophy and The
Complex Structure of Global Order

verfasst von | submitted by

Elias Leon Clemens Ritter, BSc (WU)

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien | Vienna, 2026

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | UA 992 940
Degree programme code as it
appears on the student record sheet:

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt | Internationale Studien | International Studies
| Degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Betreut von | Supervisor: Professor Markus Kornprobst, M.A., Ph.D.



**diplomatische
akademie wien**
Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne



Pledge of Honesty

“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.”

Name: Elias Leon Clemens Ritter

Date: 05 / 06 / 2026

Abstract

This thesis aims to reconceptualize international anarchy, drawing on Petr Alekseyevich Kropotkin's political philosophy as its conceptual foundation. Today, the concept of anarchy represents a cardinal analytical category within the discipline of International Relations. Despite numerous alternative interpretations and conceptual critiques, neo-realist understandings of anarchy as a self-help structure continue to occupy a dominant position. Kropotkin's work offers a rich counter-position, allowing us to reconceptualize international anarchy as an inherently social domain characterized by institutions, norms and customs, yet subjected to constant reconfiguration grounded in material and immaterial power asymmetries. Likewise, his political philosophy provides grounds to reconsider the ontological primacy of the state in mainstream IR, alongside the assumption of sovereign political entities as unitary actors. To meaningfully transpose Kropotkin's political thought into the twenty-first century, this thesis brings his work into dialogue with contemporary complex systems theory. From this engagement, it develops the concept of COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY as an alternative analytical category through which the structure of the international state system may be abstracted. This interaction-based framework understands order as an emergent and temporary equilibrium produced through self-organization, non-linear processes and continuous exchange with its wider systemic environment. Applied to the contemporary discourse on global order, these insights allow for the conceptualization of system-level reconfiguration as a dynamic process grounded in shifting societal arrangements and changing patterns of association.

Keywords: International Relations (IR) Theory, International Anarchy, Kropotkin, Anarchist Political Philosophy, Anarchism, Complex Systems Theory, Complex Social Heterarchy, Global Order

Abstrakt

Diese Arbeit zielt darauf ab, das Konzept der internationalen Anarchie durch Verwendung der politischen Philosophie Petr Alexejewitsch Kropotkins als konzeptioneller Grundlage neu zu konzeptualisieren. Der Begriff der Anarchie verkörpert in der heutigen Zeit eine zentrale analytische Kategorie innerhalb der Disziplin der Theorien Internationaler Beziehungen. Trotz der Existenz zahlreicher alternativer Interpretationen und substanzieller konzeptioneller Kritik nehmen neorealistische Verständnisse der Anarchie als „Selbsthilfestruktur“ weiterhin eine dominante Stellung ein. Kropotkins Werk bietet eine reichhaltige Gegenposition, die es gestattet, internationale Anarchie als einen inhärent sozialen Raum neu zu denken, der durch soziale Institutionen, Normen und intersubjektive Gebräuche gekennzeichnet ist, jedoch einer ständigen, aus materiellen sowie immateriellen Machtasymmetrien begründeten Rekonfiguration unterliegt. Ebenso bietet Kropotkins politische Philosophie Anlass, den ontologischen Primat des Staates innerhalb der disziplinären Hauptströmungen sowie die Annahme souveräner politischer Einheiten als einheitlicher Akteure in Frage zu stellen. Um Kropotkins politisches Werk sinngerecht ins 21. Jahrhundert zu übertragen, setzt diese Arbeit sein Denken in einen Dialog mit zeitgenössischen Theorien komplexer Systeme. Auf dieser Grundlage entwickelt diese Arbeit das Konzept „COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY“ als alternative analytische Kategorie zur Abstraktion der Struktur des internationalen Staatensystems. Dieses interaktionsbasierte Gerüst versteht Ordnung als emergentes und temporäres Gleichgewicht, das durch Selbstorganisation, nichtlineare Prozesse und kontinuierlichen Austausch mit seiner Umwelt hervorgebracht wird. Angewendet auf den zeitgenössischen Diskurs über globale Ordnung ermöglichen diese Einsichten eine umfassende Konzeptualisierung systemweiter Rekonfiguration als dynamischen Prozess, der in sich verändernden gesellschaftlichen Anordnungen und wechselnden Mustern der Vergesellschaftung gründet.

Schlüsselwörter: Theorien Internationaler Beziehungen (IB), Internationale Anarchie, Kropotkin, Anarchistische Politische Philosophie, Anarchismus, Complex Systems Theory, Complex Social Heterarchy, Weltordnung

Table of Contents

Pledge of Honesty	ii
Abstract	iii
Abstrakt	iv
Table of Contents	v
Acknowledgement on the Use of AI	vi
Preface	vii
1. Introduction	1
2. International Relations Theory: The Discourse of Anarchy without Anarchism?	5
3. The Assumption of Anarchy: Origins, Meaning and Implications	9
3.1. <i>A Hegemonic Paradigm: Anarchy and IR Theory</i>	9
3.2. <i>The Origins of Anarchy: A Contested Genealogy</i>	11
3.3. <i>Classical Realism: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Morgenthau</i>	13
3.4. <i>Structural Realism: Hobbes, Waltz</i>	19
3.5. <i>Beyond Realism: Neoliberalism, the English School, Constructivism</i>	27
3.6. <i>Beyond Anarchy: Challenges and Criticism</i>	33
4. The Prince of Anarchy: The Political Philosophy of Petr Alekseyevich Kropotkin	37
4.1. <i>What is Anarchy? What is Anarchism?</i>	38
4.2. <i>Anarchic Society: the State of Nature</i>	40
4.3. <i>Societal Organization: Anarchy and Hierarchy</i>	47
4.4. <i>The Modern State: An Elite Network?</i>	52
4.5 <i>Beyond Mutual Aid: Conflict, Progress and War</i>	55

5. Enter Kropotkin: Towards an Anarchist Reinterpretation of International Anarchy	62
5.1. <i>Reconstructing International Anarchy: A Kropotkian Perspective</i>	63
5.2. <i>Two Traditions: Anarchy, Hierarchy and International Order</i>	68
5.3. <i>Unpacking the State: Kropotkin as a Second-Image Theorizer</i>	73
5.4. <i>Association beyond Borders: Transnationalism and the State</i>	80
5.5. <i>The Discourse of Anarchy: A Kropotkian Intervention</i>	84
6. Complex Social Heterarchy: The Contemporary Relevance of Kropotkin's Thought	87
6.1. <i>A Theoretical Pioneer: Why Kropotkin Still Matters!</i>	87
6.2. <i>Complex Systems Theory: An Appropriate Meta-Framework</i>	88
6.3. <i>Complex Social Heterarchy: A Dynamic Model of International Order</i>	92
7. Where Are We Now? Reflections on the Reconfiguration of Global Order	101
8. Conclusion	111
Acknowledgements	114
References	114

Acknowledgement on the Use of AI

I acknowledge having used Artificial Intelligence tools (including Anara and ChatGPT) to support my research and to check my writing for grammar, spelling, and academic tone. However, I pledge that Artificial Intelligence was not utilized to generate original content, arguments or any substantive passages included in this thesis.

Preface

„All of history bears witness, and logic itself confirms, that two states of equal strength cannot exist side by side. That is contrary to their nature, which invariably and necessarily consists of and manifests itself in supremacy – and supremacy cannot tolerate equivalence. One force must inevitably be shattered and subordinated to the other.”

- Mikhail Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*

WHEN I FIRST ENCOUNTERED the works of *Mikhail Bakunin*, I considered what I read to be highly interesting. What I found to be most intriguing, however, were less his utopian visions of a stateless society but rather his analytical account of reality. In other words, what captivated me the most were not Bakunin's normative conceptions of *what ought to be* but his systemic conceptualization of *what is*. Interestingly enough, some of the conclusions Bakunin draws in, what is perhaps his most influential work, *Statism and Anarchy* (see Bakunin 2005), seemed strangely familiar to me - familiar to concepts and theories that I had encountered, studied and applied during my studies of International Relations Theory.

At this point, it is important to note that Bakunin did not (intend) to craft a comprehensive theory of inter-state relations; yet certain assumptions and conclusions explaining the reason and rationale of state conduct are scattered throughout his writings, whether in the form of analytical reasoning or normative condemnation (see Bakunin 2005).

Relations among modern states, according to Bakunin, were governed solely by the law of the jungle, irrespective of the character of the government a certain entity exhibits (Maximoff 1964, p. 138). “Every State, [...]” he writes:

“[...] whether it is of a federative or a non-federative character, must seek, under the penalty of utter ruin, to become the most powerful of States. It has to devour others in order not to be devoured in turn, to conquer in order not to be conquered, to enslave in order not to be enslaved - for two similar and at the same time alien powers, cannot co-exist without destroying each other (Maximoff 1964, p. 138).”

The Hobbesian account of inter-state relations, Bakunin's work provides, undoubtedly resonates with modern realist theory; and had someone presented me the quotation above, and attributed it to John J. Mearsheimer, I likely would have believed it. However, while Bakunin and Mearsheimer might agree on the "what" of state behavior, they offer fundamentally different explanations for the "why." This divergence holds not only in comparison to Mearsheimer's "offensive Realist" understanding, but for Realist approaches as a whole.

However, despite Mikhail Bakunin's valuable insights, his work is, unfortunately, often greatly impaired and obscured by his polemics, prejudicial passages, and sometimes even blatant antisemitism. Therefore, I ventured deeper into the subject matter, ANARCHISM, and soon encountered the works of Petr Alekseyevich Kropotkin. Kropotkin, like Bakunin, did not devote his writings explicitly to the observation of inter-state relations; nevertheless, his writings provide a comprehensive ontological challenge to the contemporary mainstream of the discipline.

Although Kropotkin's work is certainly not explicitly directed at the functioning of inter-state conduct, his political philosophy nonetheless tackles a rich variety of issues that lie at the heart of modern International Relations theory. Above all, this concerns the organization of relations within anarchic structures. Instead of relying on abstract speculation, Kropotkin maintained that the nature of anarchic organization could be derived from the empirical observation of nature; and the resulting account that he provides appears significantly more nuanced and complex than dominant contemporary conceptions.

Set against this background and given the conceptual centrality of anarchy in IR, I wondered: "Why have I never heard of Kropotkin in International Relations Theory?" Indeed, theories of International Relations are full of references to canonical philosophers, drawing from a broad range of political thought reaching from Hobbes to Kant. Yet Kropotkin, as well as anarchism in general, remains largely absent from the discourse. Given the profound insights and comprehensive theoretical framework his work offers, particularly with respect to anarchic structures, I considered this at least surprising. As I ventured deeper into the subject, I realized that I was not the only one wondering. Although anarchist thought clearly remains marginalized within the mainstream canon of IR, several scholars have endeavoured to rediscover a rich and underexamined tradition as a source for rebuilding the discipline's theoretical foundations (see Calis & Söker 2024, p. 97; Prichard 2007, p. 623; Prichard 2011, p. 1647; Prichard 2012, p. 100; Falk 1978, p. 63). Yet at the present time, and despite these efforts, "[...] anarchism, the political philosophy of anarchy [...]" (Prichard 2012, p. 100)." remains largely sidelined in what Brian Schmidt has called "[...] the political discourse of anarchy (Prichard 2012, p. 100; see also Schmidt 1998, p. 39)."

1. Introduction

“Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo sponte sua,
sine lege fidem rectumque colebat.”

- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY has long treated anarchy as one of its cardinal conceptual categories (Milner 1991, p. 67), yet it has rarely taken anarchism - the political philosophy of anarchy - seriously as a theoretical source for understanding the meaning and implications of the concept (Prichard 2012, p. 100). To contribute to this still underdeveloped subdiscipline of International Relations theory, this thesis brings IR into dialogue with Petr Kropotkin’s political philosophy. Given the pivotal role of anarchy within IR theory, and Kropotkin’s profound philosophical inquiry into human interaction in the absence of superior authority, this thesis seeks to reconstruct the assumption of anarchy through the lens of his anarchist thought. The inquiry pursued in this thesis is therefore structured around the following RESEARCH QUESTION:

How can Petr Kropotkin’s political philosophy contribute to a reconceptualization of international anarchy in IR theory?

While focusing primarily on the concept of international anarchy and its implications, this thesis also addresses closely related issues, including the status of the state as a unitary actor and the role of non-state actors within the international system.

Considering that Kropotkin lived and worked more than a century ago, it may initially seem questionable whether his political philosophy still possesses direct relevance for contemporary International Relations theory. Given the limited significance of anarchist politics in the contemporary era, one might further wonder why we should turn to Kropotkin as an intellectual source for rethinking IR theory. This thesis suggests, however, that there is good reason to take his thought as a point of departure for reconstructing how international relations are conceptualized.

This becomes even more evident against the backdrop of the cardinal position of classical political thought within the canon of IR. Primarily, the works of Thomas

Hobbes are heavily associated with the modern formulation of realist approaches (see Lechner 2017). Yet the broader spectrum of the discipline likewise draws on a wide range of intellectual sources, from Kant (see Bull 1977, p. 39) to Spinoza and Rousseau (see Waltz 2001 [1959], Chapter 6). Set against this background, Kropotkin's political philosophy represents a particularly valuable source, as it not only engages profoundly with classical thinkers but also comprehensively addresses some of the issues at the heart of contemporary IR from a diametrically opposed position. This includes questions about human nature, war and the state, but above all the implications of anarchic association. In doing so, Kropotkin offers a coherent and extensive political theory that rejects utopian idealism while advancing an interdisciplinary approach grounded in scientific observation. His anti-reductionist and anti-essentialist framework, firmly rooted in proto-sociological inquiry, therefore provides a valuable philosophical baseline for reconstructing IR theory.

Building on this, I advance the argument that Kropotkin's political philosophy offers a powerful counter-position to entrenched conceptions of anarchy in International Relations. Seeing anarchic structures as profoundly social and interactive domains, Kropotkin's work challenges current hegemonic assumptions, particularly neorealist approaches that conceive systems without an orderer as self-help structures. From a Kropotkian perspective, anarchy as a conceptual category has been subject to a simplistic reduction that produces a distorted picture of systemic self-organization. While sharing certain affinities with alternative conceptions of anarchy, particularly those associated with Bull (1977) and Wendt (1999), this thesis argues that order in the absence of superior authority must be reconsidered as a domain that allows for the development of comprehensive normative arrangements irrespective of centralized authority.

Following from this, the thesis further argues that the assumption of states as unitary actors, alongside the notion of a structurally induced uniform national interest, must be subjected to comprehensive reconfiguration. Furthermore, as Turner (1998) already advanced almost three decades ago, Kropotkin's thought provides a valuable foundation for introducing the role of non-state actors into the equation, particularly by foregrounding non-coercive and voluntary patterns of transnational association beyond the state.

Structure & Organization. To provide a coherent answer to the research question, this thesis proceeds with a step-by-step reconstruction of international anarchy based on Kropotkin's work and thought. Set against this background, this thesis is organized into six substantive chapters (Chapters I – VII) as well as a concluding chapter (Chapter VIII). Following the introduction, CHAPTER II will briefly inquire why anarchism has been sidelined within the discipline of International Relations to further substantiate the existing research gap. Additionally, this chapter will address

the limited scholarship on the subject, particularly with regard to research engaging with the works of Petr Kropotkin.

Next, CHAPTER III conducts a comprehensive literature review in order to provide a structured account of the concept of international anarchy in International Relations Theory. While not merely drawing on explicit conceptualizations of anarchy, this thesis likewise investigates how the absence of a superior authority has been interpreted as a cardinal implicit assumption in classical realist literature. As structural realism represents the dominant contemporary paradigm in which anarchy assumes its most explicit theoretical form (compare Waltz 1979), particular focus will be placed on the neorealist conception of anarchy as well as its frequently assumed proximity to Hobbes' state of nature. Beyond realism, this thesis will also provide a brief outline of alternative and critical conceptions of anarchy that question the assumptions and implications of the structural realist framework: neoliberal theory, the English School and constructivism. Finally, this chapter will delve deeper into recent criticisms of the assumption of anarchy itself, as well as its associated implications, to set the stage for my theoretical intervention in Chapter V.

To prepare the reconstruction of the assumption of anarchy based on Kropotkin's political thought, CHAPTER IV introduces a coherent conceptualization of his most important analytical categories. Drawing on Meredith's (1992) notion of philosophical conceptualization, this section will structure the broader body of Kropotkin's various works along the lines of central recurring issues and concepts. In doing so, this section merges these writings into a synthetic whole by identifying recurring analytical components, contrasting emerging differences and extending them into a coherent set of overarching concepts based on inductive philosophical reflection (see Meredith 1992, p. 8). Focusing primarily on Kropotkin's analytical writings, the relevant sources are purposively selected based on their significance for answering the research question (compare Tajik et al. 2024, p. 1). While his canonical monographs such as *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]), *Ethics: Origins and Development* (see 1924b), *The State: Its Historical Role* (see 2025 [1898]) and *The Modern State* (see Kropotkin 2018) will serve as primary sources, this thesis will likewise incorporate a selected range of his shorter essays, printed lectures and political pamphlets.

Having prepared a coherent image of Kropotkin's thought, CHAPTER V will subsequently apply these insights to International Relations theory. Based on the weaknesses and limitations discussed in Chapter III, this thesis will proceed through a process of theory reconstruction as conceptualized by Meade & Walton (2025). In practical terms, this chapter will utilize the discrepancies between the implications of anarchy in mainstream IR theory and the critical objections raised against these dominant assumptions as a point of departure to reconstruct international anarchy

(compare Meade & Walton 2025, p. 1). Set against this background, Chapter V will reconsider the implications of anarchy, the significance of hierarchical patterns, the conception of the state as a unitary actor as well as the state's broader ontological primacy within the discipline.

To properly project the findings of Chapter V to the twenty-first century, CHAPTER VI will draw on complex systems theory (see i.a. Bousquet & Curtis 2011; Condorelli 2016; Orsini et al. 2019; Scartozzi 2018) as an appropriate contemporary meta-framework. Given the profound similarities between complexity approaches and Kropotkin's political philosophy, as already remarked by Cudworth & Hobden (2010), this emerging theoretical approach provides an appropriate conceptual umbrella. While Chapter V will reconstruct international anarchy as an analytical category, complex systems theory provides a toolkit to integrate processes and mechanisms that theorize development and change within the intricate network of interconnected actors. Against this backdrop, this thesis will introduce the concept of *complex social heterarchy* (CSH) as an appropriate framework for the reconceptualization of international anarchy.

Subsequently, in CHAPTER VII, complex social heterarchy as a modified analytical framework of international anarchy will be placed into dialogue with current dominant narratives surrounding the reconfiguration of global order. From the perspective of CSH, this chapter will depart from recurring narratives such as the "end of the liberal international order," reinterpreting contemporary developments through interaction-based societal arrangements. Finally, the findings will be brought together in the concluding Chapter VIII.

2. International Relations Theory:

The Discourse of Anarchy without Anarchism?

“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare
on the brains of the living”

- Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

GIVEN THE CENTRALITY of the concept of anarchy in most mainstream theories of International Relations, it might come as a surprise that “[...] anarchism, the political philosophy of anarchy, does not currently feature in the study [...] (Prichard 2012, p. 100)” of the discipline. Anarchism, indeed, is vastly absent from the canon of the studies of global politics (Calis & Söker 2024, p. 97; Prichard 2007, p. 623; Prichard 2011, p. 1647; Prichard 2012, p. 100; Falk 1978, p. 63) as well as the discipline of political science in general (Prichard 2012, p. 100).

According to Prichard (2011), this absence, however, is by no means a coincidence. In fact, the author argues that anarchist political thought has been “[...] consistently ignored and marginalized, [...]” because it “[...] did not fit the traditional self-image or practical use-value of [International Relations Theory] (Prichard 2011, p. 1648).” For instance, despite Realism’s strong self-perception of a-moral objectivism as opposed to value-laden idealism, Prichard (2011, p. 1649) implies that the development of the school of thought was, in fact, driven by a normative commitment to ideological statism. Hence, anti-statist perspectives constituted an anathema to the logic and reason of most mainstream IR scholars (ibid., p. 1648-49).

While statist assumptions have become entrenched today, Prichard (2011) continues, this was certainly not the case during the early days of the discipline, as is exemplified by the debate between Hans Morgenthau and Harold Laski. Morgenthau, according to Prichard (2011), formed his assumption around a theoretical statist nucleus, informed by the works of German political theorist (and fascist) Carl Schmitt, who was particularly disgusted by Laski’s anti-statist approach. The eventual academic “triumph” of Hans Morgenthau, and hence, political Realism, laid the basis for the further development of the discipline and entrenched statist assumptions. Henceforth, Laski’s ontology of global politics vanished into oblivion

(ibid., p. 1648-49). Moreover, as Falk (1978) and Prichard (2025) explain, the common association of anarchist, and other theory based on “revolutionary” thought, with disorder and domestic terrorism exacerbated the marginalization of such approaches across the academic mainstream (Falk 1978, p. 64-65; Prichard 2025, p. 8).

Hence, for the longest time anarchism – as a political philosophy - was systematically omitted from the inquiry of International Relations theory; however, since the last quarter of the 20th century, scholars again began to turn to “knowledge” lost in the course of history. Yet, despite the ongoing “rediscovery” of Anarchist political thought and philosophy, research in the field remains highly limited. The initial impetus to include anarchist political theory in the discipline of international relations began in the 1970s. However, engagement remained marginal and limited to only a few critical scholars (see Noland 1970; Weiss 1975; Falk 1978). Starting around the early 2000s (Calis & Söker 2024, p. 97), a new wave of studies again gave momentum to the reintroduction of anarchist political theory (see Turner 1998; Cudworth & Hobden 2010; Prichard 2011; Falk 2010; Goodwin 2010; Havercroft & Prichard 2017; Newman 2012; Prichard 2007; Prichard 2010; Prichard 2012; Prichard 2013; Rossdale 2010; Christoyannopoulos 2022). In 2010, a conference on the subject of “Anarchism and World Politics” was held at the University of Bristol (Prichard 2010, p. 373). Above all, Alex Prichard (see 2007; 2011; 2010; 2012; 2013; 2025) has contributed to the development of the “sub-discipline” through his extensive work on the issue, particularly focusing on the international political theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (see e.g. Prichard 2013).

The research on the topic has been both critical and constructive: critical insofar as it challenges key assumptions of mainstream approaches to IR; and constructive insofar as it advances alternative conceptions of international relations based on anarchist political philosophy. Central recurring themes across the literature reviewed revolve around the concept of anarchy (see i.a. Havercroft & Prichard 2017; Prichard 2012; Prichard 2025), the criticism of the statist and state-centric approaches (see i.a. Turner 1998, Goodwin 2010, Prichard 2011), alternative ontologies derived from Proudhon’s theory of “international relations” (see i.a. Prichard 2007; 2011; 2010; 2012; 2013; 2025). In addition, Kazmi (2012) has offered a comprehensive approach to anarchy drawing on the works of William Godwin (see Kazmi 2012); his work, according to Prichard (2014), constitutes the “[...] first English-language monograph to present an explicitly anarchistic theory of international politics (Prichard 2014, p. 119).”

Other notable sources on the topic include Newman’s (2012) “post-anarchist approach”, to deconstruct statist realism through the use of the concept of anarchy (see Newman 2012), Rossdale’s (2010) reconstruction of the ontology of agency

through anarchist interventions to IR theory (see Rossdale 2010) and Christoyannopoulos (2022) anarcho-pacifist critique to international politics grounded in a strongly normative ethical framework (see Christoyannopoulos 2022).

While particularly the works of Proudhon have been thoroughly discussed, the literature linking Kropotkin's political theory with international relations remains scarce. This omission is particularly significant, since Kropotkin's body of thought offers a coherent theoretical framework directly addressing many of the conceptual categories that occupy the center of IR theory: anarchy, order, cooperation, conflict, the state, and the possibility of social organization without centralized authority.

However, while research directly engaging Kropotkin remains highly limited, some academic literature – linking him directly to the discipline of international relations - has been produced in recent decades. Goodwin (2010) suggests Kropotkin's mutual aid ontology as a profound challenge for contemporary mainstream IR Theory. Through Kropotkin's work, Goodwin (2010) attempts to reconsider mainstream “[...] collective-action problem-grounded theories that hold that the egoistic and competitive drive of humans must be overcome to promote cooperation (Goodwin 2010, p. 417).”

Indeed, the assumption of selfish individuals guided by ego-centric self-interest, it is often treated as the core of contemporary mainstream IR, whether in paradigms more permissive of perpetual conflict (such as Classical Realism) or cooperation (such as Neo-Liberal Institutionalism; Goodwin, p. 416). Contrary to Realist paradigms but also liberal approaches, Goodwin (2010) argues, Kropotkin assumes sociability to be an inherent evolutionary force stronger than individual competition implying a natural predisposition towards cooperation (ibid., p. 25). Against the backdrop of increasing globalization and the gradual rise of global civil societies, Turner (1998) likewise turns to Kropotkian assumptions to propose explanations for non-violent and cooperative international political conduct (Turner 1998, p. 25).

Furthermore, Cudworth & Hobden (2010) invoked Kropotkin's work to rethink the concept of anarchy by linking his views with theoretical insights from complexity theory (Cudworth & Hobden 2010, p. 406-411). The authors suggest that the assumptions of complexity theory – i.e. seeing systems as complex self-organizing entities – to greatly overlap with the observations of Kropotkin; therefore, the authors suggests his ideas as a valuable point of departure on the path for developing develop a “[theory] of complex international systems (see Cudworth & Hobden, 2010).”

Yet, despite some recent efforts, the scholarship on Kropotkin and international relations still remains extremely scarce. Given the very limited engagement with his work across the academic discourse of international relations, this thesis addresses

a fundamental gap in the literature. Whereas selected aspects of Kropotkin's thought have already been linked to global politics, they have rarely been reconstructed as a coherent theoretical framework for rethinking anarchy and its associated implications. In doing so, this thesis contributes to existing research by rediscovering political anarchism as a valuable theoretical and philosophical foundation for IR theory.

3. The Assumption of Anarchy:

Origins, Meaning and Implications

“I racked my brains to discover some sense in the events I had witnessed. I needed this intellectual exercise to escape from the despair that haunted me, to prove to myself that I was a man, [...] a reasoning creature who made it a habit to discover a logical explanation for the apparently miraculous whims of nature, and not a beast hunted down by highly developed apes.”

– Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*

THE PRESENT DISCUSSION aims to investigate the origins, meanings and associated implications of the assumption of anarchy within the discipline of international relations theory. Following a short introduction, this chapter will provide a coherent overview of both modern conceptions of anarchy as well as how it was interpreted as an implicit underlying element in classical realist literature across three main subchapters. Finally, in the last subchapter, this thesis will inquire how anarchy and its associated implications have been challenged by recent scholarship to set the stage for my own theoretical intervention in Chapter V.

3.1. A Hegemonic Paradigm: Anarchy and IR Theory

Presently, Lechner (2017) suggests, the concept of anarchy constitutes the “[...] cardinal organizing category of [International Relations Theory] (Lechner 2017, p. 1).” Both conceptually and theoretically, the assumption that global politics take place in an anarchic environment has established itself as a defining feature for the understanding of the conduct of world politics (ibid.). In a similar vein, Prichard (2012) argues that the concept of anarchy has become central to the study of global politics with its common conception exercising a profound grip on IR theory as a discipline (Prichard 2012, p. 100). Indeed, given the centrality of the concept, Buzan and Little (1994) describe the discipline of IR as distinctively marked by anarchophilia – i.e. the

assumption that the environment in which political entities interact has always been and always will be anarchic (Buzan & Little 1994).

Particularly within the Realist school of thought, Donnelly (2000) suggests, the assumption of certain patterns of behavior induced by the absence of a common focal point of authority, appears as theoretically essential (Donnelly 2000, p. 10). Above all neo-realist scholars argue that anarchy represents the fundamental fact of international relations as well as the constitutive element of international conduct (Milner 1991, p. 281-282). This conclusion is particularly important, since, among the various theories of international relations, Schmidt (1998) argues that neo-realist approaches nowadays represent the dominant strain of thought. Given its dominant position Schmidt (1998) continues, the neo-realist understanding of the meaning and implications of anarchy has exerted a strong influence on the discourse of international relations as a whole (Schmidt 1998, p. 40).

The Definition of Anarchy in IR. When talking about the subject matter of IR, most scholars today agree that anarchy has become the cardinal conceptual tool to theorize international relations (see e.g. Milner 1991, Prichard 2012, Prichard 2025, Lechner 2017b, Buzan & Little 1994). *But what exactly do IR scholars mean when they refer to the international system as being anarchic?*

Although the ways in which anarchy has been theorized will be thoroughly discussed throughout this chapter, it is useful to begin by presenting three broad categories that reflect how the concept has been understood within the discipline of IR as well as its broader philosophical foundations. By and large, anarchy has been defined as: (1) first, the absence of a common superior, or mutual government; (2) second, disorder or chaos; and (3) third, the constitutive feature of international order (see Lechner 2017, p. 1; Milner 1991, p. 283-284).

Derived from the ancient Greek words *ἄν* (*an*) and *ἄρχος* (*archos*) which refer to the absence of a superior ruling authority, anarchy - in its most generic and neutral sense - denotes the absence of a “[...] transcendent final point of authority (Prichard 2025, p. 7).” With regard to international relations theory, anarchy refers to the condition that relations among states take place in an environment without a common superior government (Lechner 2017, p. 1; Dowding 2011, p. 20). This distinction is commonly used to separate the domestic from the international realm: while relations within states are structured by hierarchy and government, relations among states are characterized by the absence thereof (Art & Jervis 2013, p. 1). Among sovereign states, relations are thus characterized by the fact that there is no one “[...] who can force the members of the system [...] to abide by the rules and keep their promises (Dowding 2011, p. 20).” This particular focus, Lechner (2017b) explains, serves as the crucial line of demarcation between political and social theory, on the one hand, and

international theory on the other hand; for the latter fundamentally addresses issues regarding systems that are in their essence anarchical in nature (Lechner 2017b). Within this context, the crucial question of the discourse concerns the implications this fact entails.

In its second generic sense, anarchy both in common language as well as within the discipline of IR has often been associated with conditions of chaos and disorder (see Lechner 2017, p. 1; Milner 1991, p. 283). Anarchy in this sense is often conflated with a condition of perpetual war and conflict – if only metaphorically (Milner 1991, p. 283). The association of anarchy with the intrinsic immanence of conflict and violence, Hedley Bull (1977) relates mostly to realist approaches grounded in a Hobbesian philosophical tradition (1977, p. 23-24). However, empirically observing the international system, it is evident that in reality it is not profoundly shaped by constant chaos and conflict. Indeed, states likewise associate, cooperate or indifferently co-exist (Milner 1991, p. 283).

Despite carrying a strong connotation of chaos, anarchy in fact does not necessarily imply disorganization (Milner 1991, p. 283-284). Indeed, Prichard (2012) suggests that perhaps the most surprising characteristic of the international state system is its relatively stable organization (Prichard 2012, p. 101). The association of anarchy with order is particularly evident in Kenneth Waltz work (see 1979). While Waltz maintains that states in anarchic structures are compelled to pursue their self-interest to ensure their survival, he likewise emphasizes that this structure-induced behavior eventually - and most importantly unintentionally - leads to the formation of a balance between the separate powers. In other words, anarchy as a systemic structure shapes patterns of state behavior; and while the structure certainly remains permissive of war (as there is no one to prevent it), patterns of order likewise emerge despite the absence of a formal orderer. Anarchy in this sense is, above all, conceived as an ordering principle (Milner 1991, p. 283-284).

3.2. The Origins of Anarchy: A Contested Genealogy

Today, anarchy ranks among the most important analytical categories within contemporary IR discourse. Mainly associated with structural realism (see Donnelly 2000, p. 11), the concept gradually transformed into the bedrock of contemporary mainstream approaches as a whole (Prichard 2012, p. 100). Alongside neo-realist approaches, anarchy today likewise represents a principal analytical tool of many common neo-liberal (institutionalist) approaches (see i.a. Keohane 1983), Rationalist theories (see i.a. Bull 1977) and even diffused into the mainstream of Constructivist Theory (see i.a. Wendt 1992; 1999). *How, then, did anarchy arrive at this seemingly unquestioned status?*

The origins - and even the significance - of the assumption of international anarchy within the history of IR scholarship remain contested (see Donnelly 2015). While some associate the advent of anarchy solely with the rise of structural realism (see Donnelly 2015; Korvela 2018), others assume the notion of anarchy to represent a foundational element of the broader canon of political realist literature (see Kissane 2011; Buzan & Little 1994). Within the latter – more traditional - interpretations, the assumption “[...] that the structure of the international system has always been anarchic, that this is natural, and (more selectively) that this is a good thing [...] (Buzan & Little 1994, p. 236),” is often considered the bedrock assumption of realist thought evident throughout the broader canon of its literature (Kissane 2011, p. 41). What is particularly true for neo-realist approaches, Buzan & Little (1994) contend is nevertheless equally evident for the realist tradition as a whole (Buzan & Little 1994, p. 236). Thus, before proceeding, it is accordingly necessary to clarify what is meant by the realist tradition as such.

With regard to political realism, Schmidt (1998) identifies a general tendency to assume “[...] that the history of the field can be explained by reference to a continuous tradition that reaches back to classical Athens (Schmidt 1998, p. 23-24).” Schmidt (1998) considered this framing as an “[...] epic tradition of thought [...]” largely a myth. As opposed to a historical (i.e. self-constituted) continuous lineage of theory, Schmidt (1998) asserts that this conception rather represents an *ex-post* constructed analytical tradition (ibid., p. 24-25). Nevertheless, the notion that realist thought – not as a single theory but as a tradition encompassing a range of common arguments and propositions (Walt 2002, p. 198) – can be traced back to a distinguished lineage of thought stretching from Ancient Greece (Thucydides) to Renaissance Italy (Machiavelli) and early modern England (Hobbes; Slomp 2016, p. 13), prevails among the historiographic discourse of the discipline (see Kissane 2011).

Whether or not constituting a coherent historical tradition, Schmidt (1998) nonetheless, emphasizes the relevance of core assumptions of classical literature. While the continuity theory may indeed represent a myth, the author argues:

“[That] is not to suggest, however, that international relations scholars have neither discussed nor been influenced by the ideas of Thucydides, Machiavelli or any of the other figures associated with the classic canon. A central component of the discourse of international relations has involved the task of appropriating the ideas of these figures in order to validate a claim about a particular feature of international politics (Schmidt 1998, p. 37).”

Among the classical representatives of political Realism, the notion of structural anarchy as the root of conflict is most closely associated with the works of Thomas Hobbes (Schmidt 2007, p. 52). As will be discussed later in more detail, others

likewise assume anarchy to represent a constant foundational underlying principle even in early works (see Kissane 2011). Yet, set against this background, Hobbes' political thought is often considered as the philosophical foundation of modern structural approaches, providing an embryonic illustration of anarchy as the principal condition shaping behavior under anarchy (Schmidt 2007, p. 52).

Yet, it is important to stress that despite the centrality of the concept to the discipline of international relations, there is no overarching agreement on the anarchy assumption concerning either its origin, its definition or its implications (see Milner 1991, p. 281). Given the centrality of the concept, it might even come as a certain surprise that recent scholarship suggests that its ontological importance constitutes a rather recent development (see Donnelly 2015). While Donnelly (2015) certainly identifies certain similarities with contemporary conceptions of anarchy in earlier works, such as Spykman's 1942 book *America's Strategy in World Politics* (see Spykman 1942), the author suggests, that previously anarchy only played a marginal role as an analytical category (Donnelly 2015, p. 399). Reviewing the most influential works within the discipline of the past century, Donnelly (2015) concludes, "[...] that anarchy was not an analytically central concept in pre-Waltzian IR (Donnelly 2015, p. 404)." Korvela (2018) strikes a similar note, suggesting that although the concept of anarchy had already begun to emerge throughout the inter-war period, it was only with the advent of neorealist theory that it transformed into the "[...] permanent condition of international relations (Korvela 2018, p. 24)."

This conclusion, however, stands in tension with the traditional interpretations of the roots and origins of the assumption of anarchy. Contrary to Donnelly's (2015) conclusion, most realist scholars infer a distinct overarching centrality to the absence of superior authority within the broader canon of the discipline of realism (Korvela 2018, p. 24; Kissane 2011, p. 40). Yet, as Kissane (2011) concedes, this centrality was not always matched by explicit analytical recognition. However, the author likewise highlights that implicitly it nonetheless has always represented a constitutive underlying element, which has influenced the tradition of realist thought since its very beginnings (Kissane 2011, p. 41). In the following section, I will therefore take a closer look at the supposed origins of the realist tradition and investigate how the concept of anarchy, notwithstanding its lack of explicit analytical recognition, was implicitly interpreted as a constitutive underlying element.

3.3. Classical Realism: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Morgenthau

Commonly, realism is divided into two camps based on their analytical emphasis on either anarchy or human nature (see Kissane 2011, p. 25). The former are typically grouped together as structural realists, who advance theories that place primary

emphasis on the anarchic structure of the state system. The latter comprise classical or “biological” realists, who assume the roots of war to be found in mechanisms grounded in an eternal essence of human nature characterized by ignorance and selfishness (Donnelly 2000, p. 11).

Primarily grounded in human nature, it is often suggested that the structural component as a distinct explanatory feature, was not explicitly developed within the canon of classical realist literature (see Keohane 1983, p. 508–509). However, despite the strong emphasis on human nature, Kissane (2011) suggests that the implicit assumption that relations among states take place in an environment without a superior power - that is, under conditions of anarchy - likewise constitutes a central underlying element of classical realist work (Kissane 2011, p. 41). The author argues:

“Despite the importance and centrality of the notion of anarchy to the literature of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Carr and Morgenthau [...] the word anarchy does not appear as often as one may imagine. The idea of anarchy, however, underlies almost all of the classical realist texts. Considering the work of these realists in turn, it will be shown that anarchy is a constant in the realist literature (Kissane 2011, p. 41).”

This prompts the question of how anarchy was interpreted with respect to classical realist thought even when it was not always explicitly named as such. The following section therefore takes a closer look at the implicit role of anarchy in classical realist work. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that conceptions of human nature in these foundational texts shape how the later implications of structural anarchy are understood. Forde (1995) explains:

“[The] precise character of the compulsions that anarchy exerts on states, the urgency of the threats raised by it, and the prospects for its melioration, are all deeply affected by our view of human nature (Forde 1995, p. 146)”

Thucydides. Given the foundational position of Thucydides’ work within the traditional history of the realist tradition (Garst 1989, p. 3), it is reasonable to begin by taking a closer look at his work. Throughout Thucydides’ analysis of the causes of imperialism and war, conflict is most closely associated with assumptions about eternal flaws in human nature. Humans are assumed to inherently strive for security, honor and self-interest (see Thucydides, Book I, 75–76), which in turn entails a distinct predisposition towards conflict. Fear, the principal motive behind the striving for security, leads them to take proper precautions to guard against potential threats and guarantee their safety. In an environment perceived as potentially hostile, only superior strength can protect against the attacks of others. Within this context,

imperialism and conquest come to be understood as rational modes of action (see Thucydides 1972, see footnote).¹

The motive of fear constitutes a major component of imperial policy and has often been interpreted as a structural analytical component. Given the absence of a superior authority, the constant fear among separate political entities can in this sense be understood as a classical account of the security dilemma, which, as Forde (1995) suggests, corresponds to structural arguments about anarchy (Forde 1995, p. 147). Accordingly, Tritle (2006) suggests that Thucydides' work already reflects certain problems closely connected with power politics: "[...] the problem of international anarchy and the accompanying security dilemma (Tritle 2006, p. 476)." Security concerns grounded in fear are therefore interpreted as a structural driver of the pursuit of power.

For instance, in the case of Athenian imperialism, it was the fear of Persia that ultimately encouraged her to expand and long for empire (Thucydides 1972, Book I, 75). Similarly, what later made inevitable the war between Sparta and Athens was not the grievances arising from specific events such as the controversy over Epidamnus and Corcyra (see *ibid.*, Book I, 1-24) or the revolt of Potidaea (see *ibid.*, Book I, 56-65). The roots of the conflict lay in the systemic condition of changes in the distribution of power between Athens and Sparta: what made war inevitable was ultimately the growth of Athenian power and the fear it caused in Sparta (*ibid.*, Book I, 23).

Reading Thucydides as a structural analyst, Kissane (2011) further suggests that his work overall paints the picture of a distinct difference between relations among Hellenic cities contrary to the nature of domestic relations (Kissane 2011, p. 43). While relations within sovereign political entities are characterized by the rule of law and standards of justice sanctioned by courts; relations among cities are precisely marked by the lack thereof. Domestically, justice and morality prevail; internationally, only relations of strength result (compare Thucydides 1972, see footnote).² Internally

¹ An example of this condition appears, for instance, in Book VI 83 in the speech of Euphemus at Camarina: "We have told you that it is because of fear that we hold our Empire in Hellas, and it is also because of fear that we come here to settle matters for our own security." Another clear illustration is to be found in Book I 76 in the speech of the Athenians at Corinth on the justification of Athenian imperialism: "There are three powerful motives that prevent us from doing so [giving up the empire] – security, honour and self-interest. And we are not the first to act in this way. [...] It has always been a rule that the weak should be subjected to the strong."

² An illustrative analogy to this distinction is found in Thucydides' contrast between the logic of judicial deliberation and the logic of political assembly. While courts address matters of justice (domestically), political assemblies, especially when deciding questions of external relations, are primarily concerned with matters of security or national interest. Responding to Cleon in the Mytilenean debate, Diodotus argues that "[...] the question is not so much whether they [the Mytileneans] are guilty as whether we are making the right decision;" and later insists that "[...] this is not a law-court, where we have to consider what is fit and just; it is a political assembly and the question is how Mytilene can be most useful to Athens (Thucydides 1972, Book III, 44)." A similar logic reappears in the Melian Dialogue,

individuals can rely on the rule of law, in their external relations political entities are forced to help themselves. As there are no arbiters and no guarantee that others will keep their promises, states must strive for power, since it constitutes the only safeguard for their own security. Unlike in domestic social relations, justice or morality does not primarily guide decisions in foreign policy. The international realm is above all an amoral one, governed by considerations of national interest (compare Kissane 2011, p. 45).

However, while this structural component is certainly evident in Thucydides' work, Forde (1995) suggests that it is not the only relevant variable in his analysis. Although imperialism and expansion based on security considerations rooted in mutual fear can be understood as a rational response to the anarchic condition among political entities, the factor of human nature, the author highlights, cannot be detached from the process (Forde 1995, p. 147–148).

Machiavelli. Often described as the “father of political realism,” Machiavelli constitutes another pivotal source for political thought across the realist tradition. Writing during a time when morality and virtue still constituted foundational elements of political thought, Machiavelli attempted to expose the unrealistic character of assuming these faculties as necessary foundations of politics. Trying to untie the connection between the two realms, one of the most important legacies of Machiavelli's thought for the discipline of political realism lies in the conceptual separation of politics from ethics (Korab-Karpowicz 2017, p. 8-9).

Based on a generally negative conception of human nature as selfish, disloyal, cunning and ambitious (Wicaksono et al. 2022, p. 84), Machiavelli aimed at advancing an approach to politics grounded not in justice but in realistic assumptions about human behavior (Slomp 2016, p. 16-17). Knowing about the inherent human predisposition to do wrong, a ruler, Machiavelli argued, had “[...] to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity (Machiavelli 1998, p. 61).” Against this backdrop, Machiavelli strongly emphasizes the crucial importance of the pursuit of self-interest and power in order to maintain one's position of authority (Slomp 2016, p. 16-17). For the ruler, the preservation of sovereign power and security therefore becomes the paramount concern (Donnelly 2000, p. 25).

Beyond this ethical separation of politics from morality, several scholars have argued that international anarchy likewise constitutes an underlying principle of

where the Athenians urge the Melians to leave justice aside and speak only in terms of what is feasible. In relations among cities: [...] the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept (Book V 89)."

Machiavelli's political thought (see Forde 1995; Leung 2012; Kissane 2011). Above all, these authors have associated this crucial distinction of domestic and international domains with an implicit account of anarchy in Machiavelli's work. The divergence of these two different realms - one public, one private - governed by fundamentally different logics, Korab-Karpowicz (2017) asserts is manifest in Machiavelli's work in a double standard of ethics: private morality on the one hand and *raison d'état* on the other. While internally morality sanctioned by law rules supreme; to maintain international sovereignty, immoral action becomes necessary (Korab-Karpowicz 2017, p. 8-9). Consequently, the Machiavellian conception of national interest and the necessity of applying to international affairs a mode of action devoid of moral concerns became an important reference point for the conduct of Realpolitik in the following centuries (Waltz 2014, p. 117).

The role of central authority, hence, constitutes a major underlying component of Machiavelli's concept of necessity in politics. Leung (2012) argues that across Machiavelli's work, domestic and international politics are distinguished by the presence or absence of coercive authority. While domestic order can be maintained by a sovereign power capable of containing internal threats, the international realm lacks any equivalent authority. Sovereign political entities therefore remain exposed to persistent external danger and operate in a condition of constant competition (Leung 2012, p. 4).

Forde (1995) similarly suggests that throughout Machiavelli's major works, particularly *The Discourses* and *The Prince*, the absence of a higher authority appears as a distinct structural condition shaping relations among political entities. In this context, the lack of any superior court or common jurisdiction constitutes a crucial determinant of interstate conduct (Forde 1995, p. 146). A clear example appears in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*:

“Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are; and these few dare not to oppose the opinion of the many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them: and in the action of all man, and especially princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the end (Machiavelli 1998, p. 71).”

Operating in a system without common jurisdiction, threats to security appear not merely as immediate dangers but as immanent possibilities. Peace, in this sense, does not denote the permanent cessation of war, but rather the temporary postponement of hostilities. Enemies - both present and future - constitute a ubiquitous threat, making preparation for conflict and the preservation of power an imperative for the ruler.

Morgenthau. A final reference point in this context is Morgenthau's classical realism, one of the most influential formulations of modern classical realists. As usual in classical realist literature, Morgenthau's approach inherently links the nature of international politics to the struggle for power rooted in flaws inherent to man (Schmidt 2007, p. 51). Morgenthau assumes politics, as well as society in general, to be governed by objective laws rooted in human nature. Knowing and understanding these laws allows for the construction of a rational theory through which state behaviour can be conceived and explained (Morgenthau 2013, p. 13).

At the centre of this theory stands the concept of interest defined as power. A major component of Morgenthau's premises is that political actors think and act in such terms. This fundamental fact sets politics apart from other spheres of human interaction, such as economics or ethics. Throughout history, according to Morgenthau (2013), the primary concern of state leaders is to acquire, maintain, or demonstrate power; this must be treated as an objective analytical category, universal and independent of the moral quality or intellectual climate of any given period of time (see Morgenthau 2013, p. 14–17). The struggle for power in Morgenthau's work is therefore grounded in human nature, insofar as man's selfish tendencies and his inherent desire for domination are treated as constitutive causes of political behaviour. Seeking power appears either as a response to the desire to survive, as a necessary means of self-preservation, or as the expression of an *animus dominandi*, a general lust for power or inherent drive to dominate (Schmidt 2007, p. 51). Since this desire for power is not limited to one actor but shared across political entities, international politics becomes a realm of continuous rivalry, suspicion, and conflict.

Although Morgenthau's theory is fundamentally rooted in a fixed essence of human nature, Kissane (2011) suggests that the underlying conception of international politics as anarchic nevertheless functions as a background feature. Morgenthau does not make anarchy an explicit organizing concept in *Politics among Nations*; however, looking at several crucial elements of his work, Kissane (2011) maintains that the absence of a focal point of authority likewise constitutes a central premise in Morgenthau's thought (see Kissane 2011, p. 56).

The fundamental explanation for this, as with Thucydides and Machiavelli, lies in the difference between domestic and external conditions. Importantly, Morgenthau does not assume that fundamentally different forces are at work in both domains. Rather, the same human drive for power operates both domestically and internationally. In practical terms, politics both internally and externally follow the same underlying logic. The crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that the domestic system possesses a normative structure whose purpose is to mitigate the destructive effects

of unrestrained power-seeking behaviour. While this gives domestic systems a different political character, the international realm, because of its decentralized and ungoverned nature, allows the struggle for power to be more freely played out (Kissane 2011, p. 56). Kissane (2011) therefore suggests that Morgenthau's work implies that the solution to this power-struggle dilemma can only be found in transcending anarchy through some kind of global governance. Anarchy, hence, Kissane (2011) suggests, represents the persistent underlying condition of the international realm and the enabling background of power politics. The problem of international politics can therefore only be fundamentally transformed by overcoming this condition (ibid., p. 56–58).

3.4. Structural Realism: Hobbes, Waltz

The notion of anarchy today is above all associated with the neo-realist or structural approach to international relations (see Donnelly 2000, p. 11). Set against this background, the works of Thomas Hobbes are commonly considered the philosophical foundation of the discipline. It has often been argued that Hobbes' assumptions about the conditions and implications of anarchy, seeing it as the structural force that explains why conflict is likely and cooperation limited, exhibit clear similarities to neorealist thought (Schmidt 2007, p. 46; Kashyap 2022, p. 1). In a similar interpretation, Williams (1996) explains that "Hobbesian Anarchy is often used as a short-hand characterization of the neorealist vision of international relations (Williams 1996, p. 223)." With respect to structural realism, Hobbes is today typically considered to be the discipline's "philosophical forefather," while Waltz represents its most important contemporary proponent.

However, despite these common associations, the relationship between the works of Thomas Hobbes and the theory of international relations advanced by Kenneth Waltz can without doubt be described as complicated. This is not least due to the fact that Waltz explicitly did not systematically ground his structural theory in Hobbes' analysis (Williams 1996, p. 222-223). Indeed, Waltz himself associated the works of Hobbes entirely with the classical tradition of realist thought (see Waltz 1991, p. 35; see Waltz 2001 [1959], p. 166). "Both Hobbes and Morgenthau [...]," Waltz (1991) argues,

"[...] see that conflict is in part situationally explained, but both believe that even were it not so, pride, lust, and the quest for glory would cause the war of all against all to continue indefinitely. Ultimately, conflict and war are rooted in human nature (Waltz 1991, p. 35)."

Similarly, in his earlier work *Man, the State, and War* (see Waltz 2001 [1959]), Waltz explicitly associated Hobbes with first-image (i.e. individual, human nature) explanations. Whereas, on his account of the structural level of analysis, Waltz

primarily invokes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom he considers the central reference point (Waltz 2001 [1959], p. 166). Criticizing the general assumption that Waltz's neorealist approach rests on Hobbesian assumptions, Clarkson (2024) likewise suggests that there are strong grounds for "[...] reading neorealism as Rousseauian (Clarkson 2024, p. 1)."

However, despite Waltz's explicit disregard of Hobbes' thought as a foundational element in his theory, both critics and proponents of the realist school of thought alike emphasized the importance and similarity of Hobbes' state of nature with regard to structural realist theory. Lechner (2017) suggests that the concept of anarchy as derived in analogy from the hypothetical condition of statelessness in Hobbes' account has profoundly shaped neo-realist scholarship (Lechner 2017, p. 1-2). Boucher (2018) likewise concludes that caricatures of Hobbes' thought taken literally prevail among modern structural realist thinkers and continue to shape their understanding of international anarchy (Boucher 2018, p. 186).

In this sense, realists, Lechner (2017) explains, by and large, have inherited and further developed the Hobbesian conception of human interaction in the absence of centralized authority. Classical Realism drew extensively on Hobbes' account of human nature as the inspiration for its conflict-oriented understanding of global politics; however, it was only with the emergence of structural Realist theory, that "anarchy" - based on a Hobbesian understanding - turned into a distinct scientific concept (Lechner 2017, p. 6). Polansky (2016) agrees that the structural logic derived from Hobbes' state of nature constitutes a key component of neorealist theory (Polansky 2016, p. 269) and further suggests that Hobbes' work is equally well reflected in Waltz's implicit theory of the state (ibid., p. 274-275). Similarly, Donnelly (2000) suggests that Waltz's theory appears heavily influenced by Hobbes' vision of "[...] fear of violent death, provoked by the aggressive pursuit of gain (Donnelly 2000, p. 100)."

Given this ambivalent and sometimes contradictory account, the following section will dissect both Hobbes' and Waltz's explanations for conflict and inquire how these two approaches resemble and contrast each other.

Hobbes. Given his reputation as a pioneer of structural realist thought, it is useful to begin by dissecting those aspects of Hobbes' work commonly associated with the concept of anarchy: *What do people mean when they talk about Hobbesian Anarchy?* Throughout his work, Thomas Hobbes envisioned interaction in the absence of a superior authority (i.e. the state of nature) as a violent and desperate (yet, metaphorical) state of perpetual war. The reasons for this very unfortunate circumstance, it has been argued, Hobbes assumed to be rooted in the structural dynamics of human interaction in the absence of a common government (Wolff 1996,

p. 8-9). Hobbes' picture of stateless human interaction was on the one hand characterized by equality yet likewise defined by mistrust and conflict. Driven by the mutual desire of the same object (which is above all self-preservation), Hobbes assumes that humans "[...] endeavor to destroy, or to subdue one another (Hobbes 1992, p. 87)." Individuals strive for power, not merely to attain more, but to safeguard the capability of acting decisively, when necessary, in the future (ibid., p. 77).

In the absence of a common authority to check their behavior, this results in a (metaphorical) war of all against all. Yet, being metaphorical in nature, Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* does not refer to a literal state of constant fighting but an omnipresent "[...] will to battle (Hobbes 1992, p. 88)." The primary reason for conflict Hobbes assumes to be rooted in mistrust. Given the uncertainty about another's intentions, humans resort to preemptive logic. In other words, to prevent another man from being able to take my life, the only definite action I can take is to take his first. The only way to resolve this dilemma is through the establishment of a higher authority capable of enforcing agreements and stabilizing expectations (Lechner 2017, p. 3-4). In such a state of nature, Hobbes recognizes no right or wrong or good or evil; moral conceptions in the state of nature are non-existent; individuals retain "natural rights of Liberty," which permits a man to act as he deems necessary for his own preservation (Wolff 1996, p. 14).

Hobbes certainly advances profound assumptions about human nature. For this reason, his work is often likewise associated with classical realism (see Lomia 2020, p. 593). Yet others disagree and emphasize the role of anarchy - as a structural condition - in Hobbes' work. Donnelly (2000), for instance, argues that the weight of human nature and anarchy is roughly equal in Hobbes' account (Donnelly 2000, p. 13-15). Schmidt (2007) likewise reads in Hobbes' work elements of proto-structural realism (Schmidt 2007, p. 52).

Conflict, in this interpretation, is not necessarily the outcome of aggressive human nature per se but of the anarchic structure as a permissive condition (see Schmidt 2007, p. 52). Given that humans in Hobbes' account of the natural state are assumed to be rational beings, equally vulnerable, inclined to seek power and ultimately driven by self-preservation (Slomp 2016, p. 19), structural interpretations suggest that it is above all the condition of anarchy (see Schmidt 2007), which ultimately leads to overlapping trajectories that transform the state of nature into a war of each against all. This is further emphasized through Hobbes' proposition that, despite human nature remaining constant, the establishment of a common sovereign authority - the Leviathan - allows conflict to be mitigated (Williams 1996, p. 225). Hence, while human nature certainly plays a crucial part, it is ultimately the absence of a common

superior authority that eventually facilitates determining the state of nature as a desperate, brutish state conceived on zero-sum terms (see Bull 1977, p. 23-24).

The crucial implication of Hobbes's account stems from the fact that the domestic state of nature can eventually be transcended. After sovereignty is established domestically, the state of nature ceases to exist internally; this, however, raises another fundamental issue. While internal or domestic relations are now organized by a superior authority and no longer characterized by a war of each against all, the same question reappears with regard to international relations. According to this interpretation, sovereignty at the state level necessarily implies that the state of nature prevails among sovereign political entities (Williams 1996, p. 225). Yet this interpretation, alongside its implications, has frequently been challenged, as Hobbes's thought primarily focused on the "[...] relationship between individuals and the state, [while] his comments about relations among states are scarce (Korab-Karpowicz 2017, p. 12)."

Set against this background a further question arises: *Can the state of nature be transcended among sovereign political entities too? Why do states not relinquish their sovereignty in favour of a global Leviathan?* (Kashyap 2022, p. 3). As far as realist interpretations of Hobbes are concerned, Lechner (2017) argues that the analogy between the individual state of nature and the international realm is commonly accepted, meaning that states under conditions of anarchy are assumed to behave like men in the natural condition. Yet the idea that states, like humans, could transcend international anarchy by establishing a global Leviathan is ultimately rejected. As states are ultimately unwilling to relinquish their sovereignty, societal relations among states analogous to those among individuals remain unimaginable (Lechner 2017, p. 6).

Waltz. Among contemporary approaches of International Relations Waltz's structural theory without doubt occupies a dominant position (Brown 2001, p. 4). Yet, throughout history, scholars have advanced different approaches to explaining conflict and international relations. In his 1959 work *Man, the State and War*, Kenneth Waltz (see 2001 [1959]) classified these explanatory attempts into three overarching categories - the three images. First-image explanations, according to Waltz, derive the roots of conflict from the individual level, locating them in human nature and in intrinsic human tendencies such as "[...] selfishness, [...] aggressive impulses and stupidity (Powell 1994, p. 315)." Second-image approaches, on the other hand, aimed at explaining war as a product of the internal structure of the state (ibid.). Marxist explanations, such as Lenin's theories perceiving imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, for instance, belong to this category (see Lenin 1963 [1907], Chapter VII). However, Waltz argued that while certainly bearing theoretical validity, first- and

second-image explanations alone are insufficient to explain relations among states. Hence, Waltz suggests that the systemic or structural conditions shaping global politics must represent the theoretical focus of attention (Powell 1994, p. 315).

While earlier accounts of realist theory, above all classical realist scholars, focused primarily on a fixed essence of human nature (see Donnelly 2000, p. 11), Waltz's approach moves in a different direction. Waltz primarily sought to modernize the discipline by rejecting unverifiable philosophical claims about human nature and developing a structural theory (Antunes & Camisao 2017, p. 16–17) in analogy to microeconomic theory (see Waltz 1979, Chapter 5). To understand the implications of this shift, it is necessary to first examine how Waltz conceives of political structure. According to Waltz (1979), political structures are defined "[...] first by the principle according to which they are organized or ordered, second by the differentiation of units and the specification of their functions, and third by the distribution of capabilities across units (Waltz 1979, p. 88)."

Hence, the first element to consider is the ordering principle according to which political structures are organized. To illustrate the nature of structural conditions and their implications, Waltz (1979) develops his argument by distinguishing between domestic and international structures. Domestic structures, Waltz (1979) asserts, are characterized by hierarchic organization, granting some the prerogative to command, while others are expected to obey. International systems, on the contrary, are instead defined by the absence of a higher point of authority. Hence, relations among states are characterized by their decentralized character. States in the international realm co-exist in anarchy. Given this condition, states operate in a system of formal equality: Since no one is entitled to command, there is no obligation to obey the will of another (ibid., p. 88).

Having defined the ordering principle of the structure of the international system as anarchic, Waltz (1979) turns to the latter two defining features of the structure. While domestic contexts imply relations of sub- and superordination, anarchy on the other hand by and large implies the sameness of units (Waltz 1979, p. 93). For the structure it also does not matter whether these units are city states, nations or empires - the structure remains the same. Internal composition may change but the structural conditions remain the same. This structural continuity is grounded in the functional status of the units. Unlike units in domestic, hierarchic systems, states co-existing in anarchy do not differ in their function. Being confronted with similar structural constraints, on the whole, states operate in fulfilling the same set of tasks whereof survival is assumed to be the primary objective. In other words, states do not differ in what they do. Unlike domestic structures characterized through specialization and division of labor, anarchic structures - such as the international state system - exhibit

no functional differentiation among units. However, while they are all fulfilling similar sets of tasks and striving to attain the same ultimate objectives, units in anarchic structures do differ in the capabilities to fulfill these tasks. Hence, while being functionally undifferentiated, states nevertheless remain different in capabilities (ibid., p. 96-97).

Within this context, Waltz's (1979) theory rests on the crucial assumption that in the light of this structural condition a certain predetermined pattern of behaviour follows. Contrary to domestic systems, where people can rely on a supreme authority for their protection, anarchic structures compel their members to fend for their own security. Unable to appeal to a collective government, success or failure is, hence, determined by capability to independently achieve their goals through their own efforts (Waltz 1979, p. 91 & 104). Therefore, unlike domestic politics, the international sphere is a self-help system.

However, despite common associations of structural realism with Hobbesian rationalist epistemology, Waltz (1979) explicitly refrains from grounding his theory in behavior derived from reason. According to Waltz (1979), states do not necessarily choose self-help behaviour as the result of rational calculation. Rather the international system itself selects for such behaviour: within an anarchic structure, those who help themselves are more likely to prosper, while those who fail to adapt to the requirements of self-preservation risk decline or disappearance (Waltz 1979, p. 118) According to Waltz (1979), specific "[...] structures encourage certain behaviours and penalize those who do not respond to the encouragement (ibid., 1979, p. 106)." Structures in this sense do not determine behaviour but rather push units towards a certain pattern of action, rewarding systemic success (Schörnig 2014, p. 43). In the absence of a higher authority, units are compelled to take care of themselves. In such so-called self-help systems, units need to provide for their own security, as "[...] no one else can be counted on to do so (ibid., p. 107)."

Closely related to the necessity to prepare for one's own security and preservation is the uncertainty about future intentions (Waltz 1979, p. 105). Reckoning that even in spite of agreement, future developments cannot be foreseen, and violent conflict is always an option, states have to take proper precautions in order to ensure their security (ibid., p. 186). Treating security as a scarce good (i.e. understanding it in zero-sum terms), it is impossible for everyone to enhance their security other than at the expense of another state. The security dilemma, as first theorized by John Herz (see 1950, p. 157), is inherent to such anarchic structures accompanied by systemic uncertainty. As future intentions are not foreseeable, a unit's attempt to increase its own security inevitably decreases the security of its neighbors, who will in turn respond by enhancing their capabilities themselves, for they too wish to be secure.

This vicious circle thus represents a dilemma that cannot be avoided but if anything, addressed in a limited manner (Waltz 1979, p. 186-187). Miscalculation and uncertainty leading to mutual mistrust appear in Waltz's account as the primary cause of conflict (ibid., p. 168) with structural anarchy constituting the permissive condition (compare Waltz 1979, p. 113).

Cooperation in such a system is limited. Although states may pursue manifold goals that require association, individual survival remains their principal task (Waltz 1979, p. 134). Within this context, cooperation might be mutually beneficial for both units, but states are nevertheless continuously confronted with the question of "Who gains more?" To prevent the other unit from emerging stronger from the proposed cooperation than oneself, which, against the backdrop of uncertainty about future intentions, may compromise security, states weigh relative gains. Hence, cooperation is possible but constrained. Domestically, in systems of hierarchy where one's own security does not need to be prioritized to the same extent, units are free to pursue specialization and division of labor for mutual benefit. However, internationally, units must take care of themselves so as not to be placed in a position of dependence vis-à-vis another actor (Waltz 1979, p. 107).

Affairs among states, in the context of self-help structures, Waltz (1979) posits, are often assumed to be shaped by violence and disorder. Against this backdrop, Waltz (1979) further explains, it is often assumed that the nature of relations among states constitutes a state of constant war. "War" in this sense, however, does not amount to a state of perpetual hostility, but rather to a constant threat for which conflict must be anticipated. As there is no one to prevent force from being applied, states must prepare for and anticipate violent conflict (Waltz 1979, p. 103). In this decentralized environment, force serves as more than just a remote contingency. On the contrary, the use of force internationally does not merely represent the ultima ratio but indeed remains a first and constant resort (ibid., p. 113).

However, contrary to common associations of anarchy with violence, chaos, disorder, and the constant threat of force, Waltz (1979) counters that, despite these circumstances, the international realm over prolonged periods has remained relatively stable. Although some outbreaks of violence are certainly inevitable, the relations among states have likewise often exhibited a low degree of actual hostility over prolonged periods of time (Waltz 1979, p. 103). Anarchy, hence, does not imply complete disorder or chaos; the absence of a common superior authority does not exclude the possibility of order. The question that arises from the structure of the international system is: "[How] to conceive of an order without an orderer (Waltz 1979, p. 89)."

Order, according to Waltz (1979), emerges from the co-action of states. In pursuing their ultimate objective - survival - states may enhance their capabilities both internally (e.g. military strength) and externally (e.g. alliance formation) to counteract the rising power of others and ensure their own survival (see Waltz 1979, p. 134). The fear unwanted consequences in turn "[...] stimulates states to behave in ways that tend toward the creation of balances of power (Waltz 1979, p. 118)." Self-help drives them to balance against stronger players. Assuming survival and security as the principal objective, Waltz (1979) suggests that states treat power as a means to an end, yet not an end in itself. When making alliance choices, states hence tend to join the weaker side to restore the structural distribution of capabilities towards an equilibrium (ibid., p. 126-127). This produces a somewhat stable balance of power among the units. Order emerges as unintended and spontaneous from the pursuit of their self-interest by the separate units (ibid., p. 91). However, while such an order may be relatively stable, the structure nevertheless remains permissive of war, as there is no higher authority to prevent it (ibid., p. 134).

Hobbes & Waltz. Although Waltz did not develop his theory in reference to Hobbes' state of nature, the similarities between neo-realist conceptions of anarchy and Hobbesian assumptions remain a recurring theme in the discourse (see Lechner 2017). This association has rightly been challenged, since Hobbes' own account offers a fundamentally different picture than many of its caricatures suggest (Boucher 2018, p. 186). However, if Hobbes' state of nature is read as a structural condition, it allows for a meaningful comparison with dominant Waltzian conception of international anarchy. In Hobbes' account, as we have seen, the absence of a common superior authority produces a condition shaped by equality, vulnerability, mistrust and uncertainty. Against this background, these conditions compel individuals to make arrangements for themselves in order to ensure self-preservation. The possibility of force in this system is immanent, although not omnipresent. This logic reappears, in modified form, in Waltz's distinction between domestic hierarchy and international anarchy: while domestic systems are ordered by superior authority, the international domain remains defined by the absence of such authority. Although Waltz's account profoundly diverges on epistemological terms (Williams 1996, see footnote),³ since Hobbes' rationalism is explicitly absent in Waltz, the structural

³ The issue, however, is more intricate. Williams (1996) captures the complexity of the epistemological controversy surrounding Hobbes. Pointing to the cardinal role of skepticism and nominalism in Hobbes' thought, the author challenges the comparability with rationalist approaches or positivist theories by and large. Such readings, Williams argues, stand in tension with Hobbes' rejection of objective facts and the often-forgotten heavy normative character of his work. Seeing Hobbes' work as a synthetic whole rather than reducing it to a few famous passages, Williams identifies, in an almost liberal fashion, a call for ethical international conduct based on self-imposed restraint (Williams 1996, p. 215, 216, 222 & 229-230). However, as the theories addressed here mostly deal with caricatures of Hobbes' work (see Boucher 2018, p. 186), this thesis will not direct particular attention to this epistemological controversy.

condition of “anarchy” and the primary objective of “survival” provide an analogous foundation for a system that rewards self-help behavior. Similar to Hobbes’ account, anarchy in Waltz does not entail constant battle. As with Hobbes, the condition is not one of permanent fighting but of the immanent possibility of the use of force, as there is no one to prevent it. Set against this backdrop, Donnelly (2000) assumes a clear influence of Hobbes’ ontology on Waltz’s conception of fear of violent death, survival as the primary objective, and the pursuit of interest by means of hard power. The central role of uncertainty in Waltz’s account, particularly as a factor limiting cooperation and reinforcing self-help, further illustrates this ontological proximity.

3.5. Beyond Realism: Neoliberalism, the English School, Constructivism

Given the dominant position of structural realism within the contemporary discourse of international relations, its core assumptions have gradually diffused into broader conceptions of global politics. While representing the cornerstone of modern realist thought, anarchy thereby also shaped IR approaches that are commonly positioned in opposition to Waltzian IR. Potentially the most influential of these "counter-approaches" to Waltz's hegemonic position is neoliberal institutionalism. Alongside neoliberal approaches, scholarship associated with the English School as well as modern constructivist challenges sought to dethrone structural realism from its ontological primacy. The following section will, hence, investigate how conceptions of anarchy travelled beyond realism and became embedded in broader theoretical approaches to international relations.

Neoliberalism. In recent decades, the academic controversy between proponents of the neo-realist and neo-liberal school of thought (a.k.a. the neo-neo debate) constituted a major area of intellectual contestation (Pfefferle 2014, p. 1). Although the debate has shaped much of the contemporary discourse within the field of IR, it is perhaps surprising that the actual difference between these two approaches, at least with regard to their shared assumptions about anarchy, appears rather marginal. Ogunbanjo (2021) argues that despite its prominence, the debate between neorealist and neoliberal scholars so far has neither particularly been controversial nor can “[...] the intellectual difference between the two theories [be described as] significant (Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 20).” To investigate this claim, it is important to take a closer look at the main theoretical features of neoliberal approaches and their underlying assumption of anarchy alongside the assumed behavior it entails.

Like neorealists, neoliberals contend that within the international arena, states constitute the key actors, seeking to maximize their interest. Similarly to neorealist theory, neoliberal approaches likewise assume that states operate in a competitive anarchic environment (Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 19). For instance, with respect to

Keohane's institutionalist approach, Powell (1994) suggests that much like neorealism, it assumes states to function as egoistic, unitary units seeking to fulfill their self-interest under conditions of self-help (Powell 1994, p. 312). Like neorealist theories, neoliberal approaches agree that the lack of a superior authority, particularly the resulting issues of enforcing agreements, constitutes the foundational background assumption shaping international relations (see Powell 1994, p. 312; Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 19–20). Against this backdrop, neoliberals accept the assumption that the anarchic condition of the international system creates a self-help system, which leads states to take unilateral action (Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 20).

However, while neorealist scholars generally contend that such an environment severely and necessarily limits cooperation, neo-liberal scholars have repeatedly emphasized that this pessimistic view rests on flawed logic and is, hence, not defensible (Powell 1994, p. 326). While neorealists generally assume cooperation to be limited by international anarchy, neoliberals contend that cooperation, despite anarchy, is not only possible but at times even necessary. While the anarchic system stays ontologically competitive, Ogunbanjo (2021) suggests that neoliberal approaches have emphasized that “[...] the opportunities for cooperation in areas of mutual interest may mitigate the [negative] effects of anarchy (Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 20).”

In an interdependent world, Pfefferle (2014) explains, states in the neoliberal conception are incentivized to take collective action for mutual benefit (Pfefferle 2014, p. 2). Within this context, much of the neo-neo debate has revolved around the importance of *relative* and *absolute gains* in relation to cooperation. Neorealists commonly contend that states are particularly concerned with the relative distribution of gains from cooperation, which in turn acts as a significant limitation to long-term association. Neoliberal approaches, on the other hand, have advanced the argument that states are primarily concerned with absolute gains, meaning that any cooperation that is beneficial to their self-interest can be pursued (see Powell 1994, p. 335–337).

Although the issue of non-compliance and cheating in mutual agreements remains, since there is no higher authority to enforce them thoroughly, neoliberal approaches suggest that mutual institutions among states can help to mitigate the limiting effect of mistrust (Ogunbanjo 2021, p. 19). Assuming complementary interests and effective institutions, neoliberal theories suggest that patterns of cooperation are certainly compatible with neorealist assumptions about anarchy (see Powell 1994, p. 335–337). Hence, while generally accepting the neorealist conceptualization of anarchy, neoliberal approaches disagree with neorealism over the behavioral consequences that follow from it.

The English School. While not commonly featured in the traditional mainstream canon of IR theories, the various approaches associated with the “English School” offer a rich tradition of thought on international politics. While resonating with modern approaches on different levels, the English School likewise poses important challenges to entrenched conceptions and assumptions of mainstream theories. However, despite the valuable intellectual contribution and theoretical insight rooted in methodological pluralism, historicism and above all the conceptualization of the international realm in terms of societies, the English School, Buzan (2001) suggests, still remains an unexploited source (Buzan 2001, p. 471).

Scholars of the English School of International Relations maintain that throughout history there have been three distinct approaches to international relations (Bellamy 2007, p. 78). Initially defined by Martin Wight as Realism, Rationalism and Revolutionism (see Buzan 2001, p. 474), Hedley Bull later reconceptualized these approaches as theories focusing on: (a) international systems - i.e. the Hobbesian tradition; (b) international societies - i.e. the Grotian tradition, and (c) a universal world society - i.e. the Kantian tradition (see Buzan 2001, p. 475; Bull 1977, p. 8–19 & 23–36). It is crucial to note that these different traditions are not conceived as discrete bodies of thought, but together form a synthetic whole, whereby understanding all three traditions is essential to acquire a proper understanding of international politics (Bellamy 2007, p. 78). Hedley Bull (1977) explains:

“The modern international system in fact reflects all three of the elements singled out, respectively, by the Hobbesian, the Kantian and the Grotian traditions: the element of war and struggle for power among states, the element of transnational solidarity and conflict, cutting across the divisions among states, and the element of co-operation and regulated intercourse among states (Bull 1977, p. 39).”

The English School, hence, does not assume ontological supremacy for any one tradition, but requires the scholar to tell three parallel stories – not in opposition to each other but in an attempt to find a synthesis between them (Buzan 2001, p. 480). However, due to the fact that thought in the Hobbesian and Kantian tradition has been extensively discussed in the past, the representatives of the English School have placed substantial focus on the rationalist or Grotian approach to international relations (ibid., p. 474). Given his foundational position as one of the key representatives of the English School (Neumann 2006, p. 7), the following paragraphs will focus mainly on the writings of Hedley Bull, particularly his seminal work *The Anarchical Society* (see Bull 1977).

Lechner (2017) explains that with regard to the international state system, traditional realist and neo-realist approaches have commonly held that, unlike individuals,

states do not associate along the lines of “society (Lechner 2017, p. 6).” Hedley Bull explicitly disagrees with these assumptions and suggests that the absence of a common superior authority does not impede the formation of societal arrangements among states (Lechner 2017, p. 10). However, this does not imply that this is always and necessarily an automatic process (see Bull 1977, p. 49).

Set against this background, Bull (1977) distinguishes between international systems and international societies. In Bull’s (1977) work *The Anarchical Society*, the author defines an international system as being “[...] formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions, to cause them to behave [...] as parts of a whole (Bull 1977, p. 9).” In such a system states co-act, but they do not consciously share common interests, values or rules. Relations in a system of states may be shaped by cooperation or conflict, but also by neutrality or indifference (ibid., p. 10).

This distinction is crucial, since a system of states does not necessarily constitute a society of states, although it acts as its logical prerequisite. In a system of states, states co-act but through repeated and prolonged interaction they eventually may develop mutual relations of a different order, namely an international society. In Bull’s (1977) work, societies of states are commonly assumed to:

“[exist] when a group of states, conscious of common interest and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions (Bull 1977, p. 13).”

While the environment of the system remains anarchic – sovereignty is not relinquished to a higher authority – the recognition of common rules or institutions such as diplomatic conduct leads to different patterns of behavior. Shared values and rules, Bull suggests, help to mitigate distrust and self-help behavior. Anarchy in this sense has to be conceived neither as a place of disorder alone, nor as a “billiard ball model” in which order only emerges through unintentional interaction, but has to be understood in analogy to domestic structures in terms of society (see Prichard 2012, p. 101-102)

Another important observation by Bull, which will become relevant for the later comparison with Kropotkin’s political philosophy, concerns his analogy to primitive anarchic societies. The author explains that while order in modern states emerges through centralized authority, international order cannot be conceived in similar ways since such an authority is absent. However, looking at primitive anarchic societies, Bull (1977) suggests that anarchy in the domestic context does not necessarily imply disorder. Observing stateless societies in scientific ways – and not, as historically

common, through flawed speculations – shows that such social structures exhibit comprehensive codes of conduct that serve the purpose of facilitating social co-existence. Arising from mutual practice, such networks of rules are later transformed into custom and reinforced by imperatives provided by religious belief or morality. There certainly are cases in which such social structures collapse and descend into self-help struggles; however, the Hobbesian state of nature cannot be assumed to be the general rule. Self-help itself is restricted by common practice and rules, which likewise serve the purpose of uniting groups and helping to develop a common consciousness of right and wrong. While Bull (1977) asserts that these examples provide a useful analogy and partly resemble the functioning and character of international society, the author likewise points out crucial differences, particularly with regard to solidarity based on ethnic homogeneity or culture as well as religious dogma. In international anarchic societies, particularly the factor of social solidarity among states is relatively weaker (Bull 1977, p. 57–62).

Constructivism. Presently, constructivist theories constitute a further avenue, challenging the dominant paradigms of international relations theory. Constructivist approaches do not dismiss material factors completely. Yet they fundamentally challenge the primacy of purely material explanations. While material strength certainly matters to some degree, constructivists argue that “[...] the social construction of reality [likewise] plays a vital role in comprehending international relations (Zauzah 2024, p. 56–57).” As with the English School (although the two approaches should not be conflated), shared identities, norms and rules constitute a crucial variable determining inter-state relations. These assumptions are commonly encapsulated by Alexander Wendt’s famous claim that “Anarchy is what states make of it (Dornan 2011, p. 2; see Wendt 1992).”

Although constructivism cannot be reduced to Wendt, his work constitutes one of the most influential strands of constructivist IR theory (Guzzini & Leander 2006, Preface). Given his comprehensive challenge to entrenched mainstream conceptions of anarchy (Lawler 2024, p. 282; Hopf 1998, p. 171), it is useful to take a closer look at how the meaning and consequences of anarchy have been conceptualized by Alexander Wendt.

Neorealist approaches commonly maintain that anarchy necessarily constitutes a self-help system in which units are forced to advance their immediate self-interest in a bid to strive for survival. Challenging the alleged eternal validity of neorealist assumptions about the type of behavior entailed by anarchy, Wendt (1992) inquires whether interests truly can be assumed to be exogenously given – i.e. dictated by the laws of anarchy – or rather have to be explained endogenously – i.e. produced within the system (Wendt 1992, p. 402).

According to Wendt (1992), neorealist assumptions already presuppose a history of interaction that shaped state identities and interests, leading them to acquire a pattern of behavior based on the belief that self-help is the appropriate mode of action. Wendt's theory (see Wendt 1992; see Wendt 1999) posits that state behavior cannot be merely conceived as exogenously determined in terms of material conditions (Zauzah 2024, p. 57). Wendt (1992) suggests that "[...] people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them (Wendt 1992, p. 397)." Hence, according to Wendt's constructivist approach, international relations are fundamentally shaped by "[...] intersubjectively shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors (Copeland 2000, p. 187)." The ideational structure between states therefore constitutes behavior and shapes interaction, while structure and actors within the system co-constitute each other (ibid.).

Wendt (1999) maintains that the mere absence of a common authority, in fact, does not dictate a certain logic of behavior (Wendt 1999, p. 247); therefore, neorealism lacks the consideration of a crucial concealed variable determining the formation of interest (i.e. interaction), which impairs the theory's explanatory value (Copeland 2000, p. 194). To properly understand the meaning and functioning of anarchy, one must consider shared identity, norms and rules as the basis for forming state interests and shaping the conception of appropriate behavior. Social structures, according to Wendt (1992), emerge through reciprocal interaction. Self-help as a mode of action, in this approach, is merely one form the system can take. If actors engage in threatening behavior, this creates the expectation of hostilities and compels others to mirror such behavior (Wendt 1992, p. 397–399 & 403–407). However, as Wendt points out, anarchy can, based on different intersubjective understandings, likewise take the form of restrained competition or cooperation (see Wendt 1992; see Wendt 1999).

Wendt (1999) identifies three distinct categories of anarchic structures. Drawing on Martin Wight's categorization (see Wight 1991, p. 7) – although not necessarily on his conclusions – Wendt (1999) coins these three potential cultures of international anarchy as: (a) Hobbesian enemies, (b) Lockean rivals and (c) Kantian friends (Wendt 1999, p. 247). Hobbesian anarchy resembles the realist conception of states perceiving each other as enemies, leading to self-help behavior. In a Lockean culture of anarchy, states perceive each other as rivals, whereby violence is sometimes necessary to achieve interests, but restraint is likewise practiced, as states refrain from efforts of mutual extermination. In a Kantian culture – as seen, for instance, among modern democracies – on the other hand, states generally reject the use of force as a legitimate tool. Culture depends on social practices and mutual perception and is determined by the degree of internalization of these shared norms by the actor.

A system, hence, will be maintained as long as actors have internalized the shared identities or values, but these are not carved in stone (Copeland 2000, p. 195). Anarchy, after all, depends on what states make of it. Whether it is a hostile or a benign place depends on the identities political actors hold and on the perception of appropriate behavior vis-à-vis other members of the system (see Wendt 1992; see Wendt 1999).

3.6. Beyond Anarchy: Challenges and Criticism

As we have seen, anarchy presently occupies a dominant position within the discourse of international relations. While many traditional accounts conceive anarchy as a fundamental underlying condition and almost eternal fact of realist thought (compare Kissane 2011), others, however, argued that the focus on anarchy is entirely misplaced (Donnelly 2015, p. 393). As shown in the previous section, Donnelly (2015) suggests that until the 1980s anarchy did not represent a central conceptual category. This historical contingency already casts doubt on the idea that anarchy must necessarily function as the organizing principle of IR theory. Milner (1991) advances the argument that despite its hegemonic position within the discipline, the concept remains haunted by ambiguity and vague definitions. While commonly inflated as the single most important condition of international politics, Milner (1991) criticizes this emphasis as exaggerated (Milner 1991, p. 85).

This is not to say that alternative conceptions and criticism have not been advanced. On the contrary, Corry (2010) suggests that such attempts against the contemporary mainstream have often failed to translate into coherent theoretical challenges (Corry 2010, p. 9). Nevertheless, the criticism of the centrality and conception of anarchy is vast and diverse. In the following section, I will focus on four distinct avenues of criticism with regard to the concept of anarchy as well as its associated implications, which will later serve as the foundation for my own theoretical intervention in Chapter V. The following paragraphs will (1) first examine the criticism directed at the assumed implications derived from the assumption that global politics take place under anarchy. (2) Second, I will then briefly introduce examples of recent scholarship that suggest anarchy as a simplistic representation of global structures. (3) Next, this section will investigate criticism suggesting that state behavior may not be entirely reduced to responses to structural conditions; and (4) lastly, I will turn to approaches challenging the supposed primacy of state actors within an allegedly anarchic international system.

The Implications of Anarchy. The first broad avenue of criticism with regard to the mainstream conceptions of anarchy commonly associated with neorealism concerns its implied behavioral consequences. While the notion of self-help had long

ruled supreme within the discourse, the 1980s witnessed an academic movement suggesting that the logic of self-help does not necessarily follow from anarchy. Given the premise of states as rational actors, the absence of a common point of authority, they claim, does not necessarily lead to self-help behavior. Although the assumption of anarchy as such might be accepted, the implications associated with it can be dismissed. Implications such as self-help, the inevitability of the security dilemma or the primacy of relative gains were challenged and critiqued as rhetorical exaggerations (Donnelly 2015, p. 412).

In the previous section of this chapter, I already investigated several alternative conceptions of anarchy pointing directly in that direction: neoliberal theory, the English School as well as constructivist approaches. Neoliberal approaches, for instance, have emphasized the primacy of absolute gains, thereby solving the neorealist problem of cooperation, while also highlighting how international organizations and mutual institutions may mitigate the effects of anarchy. Constructivists, on the other hand, have pointed out the constitutive character of norms, identities and self-perceptions of states in determining how relations are organized under anarchy (Koschut 2014, p. 525). Similarly, the various approaches associated with the English School have emphasized that societal arrangements among states may likewise restrict interaction and mitigate self-help behavior.

Drawing from Kant's notion of a pacific union among democratic political entities, Sørensen (1992) likewise suggests that the absence of a common central authority does not necessarily result in mutual suspicion or preclude cooperation. The author suggests that pacific unions in the Kantian sense can be translated into modern IR taxonomy as security communities, which may operate under a totally different logic: prioritizing cooperation and interdependence. While anarchy still constitutes the formal organization of relations, self-help behavior is not a necessary outcome, particularly with regard to relations among consolidated democracies (Sørensen 1992, p. 411–412; see also Koschut 2014, p. 524).

Anarchy or Hierarchy? The next avenue of criticism that emerged in recent decades questions the conceptual centrality of anarchy as such (McConaughy et al. 2018, p. 181). In the widespread Waltzian account, states differ only in their capabilities but not in their function, as they pursue the same objectives and perform the same tasks (see Waltz 1979). However, against the backdrop of profound differences in capabilities among small states and great powers, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of patterns of hierarchical organization in international relations (see i.a. Lake 1996).

McConaughy et al. (2018) explain that in recent years a growing trend emerged among IR scholars to turn their focus to patterns of subordination or domination in

international relations and their implications for behavioral patterns of states (McConaughy et al. 2018, p. 181). Lake (1996) suggests that whereas states in the international system remain nominally sovereign, not all relevant relations are genuinely anarchical (Lake 1996, p. 10). Patterns of hierarchy, which are implied in crucial differences in real power, “stratify, rank and organize” relations (Mattern & Zarakol 2016, p. 3). While weaker actors, hence, formally remain sovereign, they do not possess the same degree of freedom of choice, as their choices are limited and determined by more influential actors (Lake 1996, p. 10).

While emphasizing the role of hierarchy, scholars likewise advanced the argument that anarchy and hierarchy are not to be conceived as mutually exclusive opposites (Donnelly 2017, p. 255). In fact, McConaughy et al. (2018) consider it analytically more convincing to think of anarchy as opposed to the notion of governance and hierarchy as the conceptual opposite of equality. Against the backdrop of this reinterpretation, formal anarchy does not exclude hierarchic patterns. On the contrary, the authors explain that while some relations might be best characterized by the concept of anarchy, others within the same system may be simultaneously better explained in terms of hierarchy. The system itself hence should not be described as either anarchic or hierarchic but as heterarchic (see McConaughy et al. 2018, p. 182–184).

Returning to the Second-Image. Another trend closely related to the critique of the structural anarchy assumption is the scholarly return to reemphasize the importance of domestic politics (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith 2012, p. 161). Kaarbo (2015) suggests that although the study of domestic politics constitutes a crucial and emerging feature of international politics, mainstream theoretical approaches of international relations have largely neglected this dimension (Kaarbo 2015, p. 189). However, throughout recent decades, researchers have begun to rediscover the “second-image.”

Unlike mainstream approaches arguing that state behavior can be ultimately explained in terms of structural conditions (see Waltz 2001 [1959]; Waltz 1979), recent researchers have returned to unravel institutional variations and the internal composition of states to provide a more comprehensive account of the determinants of foreign policy. While anarchy may be a crucial underlying component of the international system, these approaches contend that it might not represent the constitutive element of state behavior. Henceforth, the individual factor of leadership as well as the importance of influential intra-state actors or the population at large have similarly regained theoretical recognition (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith 2012, p. 161).

Recently, Kaarbo (2015) suggests that developments in IR exhibit greater openness towards the incorporation of domestic factors. Particularly liberal approaches, the author suggests, have contributed significantly to challenging the assumption of the state as a unitary actor since the 1990s (Kaarbo 2015, p. 196). Scholars have advanced the opinion that fundamental policy choices, such as war or peace, cannot be understood without considering the internal composition of the state. The notion of the state as a unitary actor in this sense constitutes a convenient analytical fiction, similar to the abstract notion of a uniform and exogenous national interest determining foreign policy choices (Bueno de Mesquita & Smith 2012, p. 164).

To understand state behavior, the structural condition of anarchy, hence, remains underdetermined. What truly determines state behavior is not only its relations to others but also its internal composition. Against this backdrop, the recent decades have witnessed the emergence of a multitude of theoretical approaches linking peace and cooperation to democracy (see Lukasavage 2020, para. 1). Unlike authoritarian regimes, systems based on popular sovereignty and majority rule are assumed to exhibit non-violent behavior, which, alongside a common set of democratic values and a tendency towards cooperation, produces generally peaceful relations (Sørensen 1992, p. 399), at least among each other (Lukasavage 2020, para. 1).

Transnationalism. Alongside alleged monolithic state preferences, recent scholarship has likewise turned to challenge the assumed primacy of state actors in the international realm. While most mainstream conceptions of IR remain intrinsically state-centric (see Prichard 2011; Charountaki 2018), Charountaki (2018) suggests that non-state actors likewise may exert significant impact on global politics and hence represent a constitutive force in their own right (Charountaki 2018, p. 528).

Although recent scholarship suggests the increasing importance of non-state actors in the light of accelerating globalization (Baumann & Stengel 2013, p. 489), most current mainstream approaches, Charountaki (2018) argues, appear to be oblivious to actors other than state entities. Against the backdrop of growing global interconnection, Baumann & Stengel (2013) propose that global politics is increasingly affected by non-state actors. Contrary to approaches seeing the state as the principal unit, the authors argue that non-state actors exist not merely as extensions of states, but as autonomous entities exerting significant impact on state policy and international behavior (Baumann & Stengel 2013, p. 489). Alongside the state, comprehensive networks of “[...] state officials, representatives of NGOs, business companies, IOs, and (if indirectly) terrorist and criminal networks (ibid., p. 491)” emerge as crucial actors in international politics and therefore should not be neglected.

4. The Prince of Anarchy:

The Political Philosophy of Petr Alekseyevich Kropotkin

“Anarchism is an ideology which is too realistic not to comprehend the modern world and real events”

- Nestor Makhno, *My visit to the Kremlin*

THIS CHAPTER AIMS to provide a coherent conceptualization of the major aspects of Kropotkin’s political philosophy based on my interpretation that will serve as the basis for situating his thought within the context of international relations. The following chapter will be divided into five subchapters, each treating one major recurring concept from Kropotkin’s perspective. To begin with, the (1) first subchapter will tackle the issue of Kropotkin’s understanding of the meaning and definition of anarchy and anarchism. In the (2) second subchapter, I will proceed by conceptualizing Kropotkin’s theory of human interaction in the state of nature followed by the (3) third subchapter, which will expand on his understanding of the organization of social relations with and without superior authority. (4) Fourth, I will venture deeper into his conception of the modern state as a distinct type of organizing social relations. Finally, in (5) the fifth subchapter, I will focus on Kropotkin’s understanding of conflict, progress and war, against the backdrop of his broader philosophical account.

In order to conceptualize Kropotkin’s thought as a coherent and comprehensive political theory, this chapter relies on a close reading of a broad variety of his most important analytical texts. The main focus will be placed on his most influential books *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]) as well as his unfinished work *Ethics: Origins and Development* (see Kropotkin 1924b). Additionally, his other books and extended essays such as *The State: Its Historic Role* (see Kropotkin 2025 [1898]), *Modern Science and Anarchism* (see Kropotkin 1908) as well as *The Modern State* (see Kropotkin 2018), will likewise serve as crucial sources to conceptualize his thought in a coherent manner. Given his reputation as a political pamphleteer, this chapter will also consult a variety of his shorter essays, pamphlets and printed

lectures such as *The New Era* (see Kropotkin 1896) or *War or Peace?* (see Kropotkin 1896b).

4.1. What is Anarchy? What is Anarchism?

To conceptualize Kropotkin's political philosophy, I will begin by elaborating on his conception of the meaning and nature of anarchy and anarchism. In "[common] language," Kropotkin acknowledges, "[...] anarchy [...] is [often used] synonymous with disorder and chaos." In this sense, anarchy is generally conflated with the clashing of mutually exclusive interests or the image of individuals struggling against each other (Kropotkin n.d., p. 1). Strongly rejecting the association of anarchy with a condition of chaos or lawlessness, Kropotkin offers a diametrically different definition.

Anarchy is ORDER. In its most general sense, Kropotkin argues, anarchism or anarchy (coming from the Greek word ἀν-αρχία; transl. an-archia) refers to a form of organizing social relations in the absence of a centralized government (Kropotkin 1896, p. 1). This first and general sense of anarchism refers to any kind of organizing social relations without interference of a permanent or centralized authority, in which order is established through free arrangement between individuals or groups (Kropotkin 1910, p. 1). Kropotkin strongly emphasizes that this type of societal organization is not a hypothetical utopia, but a mode of action derived from the natural human tendencies, practiced in various forms throughout the entire history of mankind (Kropotkin 1896, p. 1). Within this general context, Kropotkin argues that his vision of anarchism is profoundly different from other (socialist) conceptions of a future society, for it is not a utopian construct created on a priori assumptions (Kropotkin 1910, p. 2). Throughout his works, particularly *Mutual Aid: a Factor of Evolution* (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]), *Ethics: Origins and Development* (see Kropotkin 1924b) as well as *The State: Its Historic Role* (see Kropotkin 2025 [1898]), Kropotkin vigorously attempts to present coherent evidence of the anarchic form of organization from the very beginnings of mankind to modern societies.

Anarchy is SCIENCE. However, anarchy or anarchism in Kropotkin's work does not merely appear as a type of social organization. Indeed, in Kropotkin's interpretation, it is much more than that. Anarchism, in the Kropotkian sense, likewise represents a scientific method of observation, focusing on the development and functioning of human society. Anarchism, in this sense, comes to be perceived as a social science. It is defined as a social theory placed within the framework of the modern sociological sciences (Kropotkin 1908, p. 91). As a scientific approach, anarchism seeks to contribute to the "[...] study of human institutions [through] generalizations gained by

means of the natural scientific inductive method.” Its normative objective being “[...] to foresee the future steps of mankind on the road to liberty, equality and fraternity, with the view to realizing the greatest sum of happiness for every unit of human society (ibid. 91) (Kropotkin 1887, p. 2).” Understanding the history and functioning of institutions and social arrangements plays a crucial role in Kropotkin’s conception of anarchism, because, according to him, they constitute the “[...] shadows of the past that outline the future (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 141).” Particularly the investigation of structures of formalized authority lies at the heart of his investigation (ibid.). Whether the assumptions of anarchism in general are correct, Kropotkin asserts will be determined by (future) scientific verification (Kropotkin 1908, p. 94).

Anarchy is PHILOSOPHY. In the third and most abstract sense, Kropotkin likewise presents anarchism as a general system of philosophy. Writing mostly during the late 19th as well as the early 20th century, Kropotkin assumed the newly emerging fields of science (i.a. anthropology, biology, sociology and above all evolutionary theory) to open the door to study any phenomenon in a similar manner to physical phenomena (Kropotkin 1908, p. 12). Although the new sciences were still in their infancy, the world, according to Kropotkin, was gradually opening itself to investigation and scientific inquiry (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 10). Witnessing the rapid developments in the various fields of science, Kropotkin emphasized the necessity to develop a synthetic philosophy encompassing the world as a whole based on scientific observation of nature (Kropotkin 1908, p. 25-26). Rejecting metaphysical explanations, anarchism, in a philosophical sense, endeavors to provide the foundation for such a “synthetic philosophy” (Kropotkin 1908, p. 10, 25-26). Anarchism, in this sense, Kropotkin explains, seeks to become “[...] a world-concept based upon [a kinetic] explanation of all phenomena, embracing the whole of nature, [...]” including human societies as well as their economic, political and moral concerns (Kropotkin 1908, p. 54).

Writing during the heyday of the popularity of Darwin’s evolutionary theory, the assumptions of the novel discipline exerted a profound impact on Kropotkin’s work and philosophy. “Darwin, [...]” Kropotkin argued, “[...] furnished a new key to the understanding of all sorts of [natural] phenomena (Kropotkin 1908, p. 35)” – including, in his perspective, likewise the foundations of man’s societal relations. Against this backdrop, the radical rejection of any assumptions based on metaphysical explanations (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 13) as well as any notions of pure reason, as exemplified by his criticism of Kantian philosophy (ibid., p. 167-177), became central for Kropotkin’s approach to philosophical questions. Anarchism, in his definition, makes the claim to make no use of any such “metaphysical concepts (Kropotkin 1887, p. 1).” Similarly, it does not assume the existence of any abstract “natural rights” (e.g. the right to life or property) that are somehow inherent to man, as any such right

has to be understood as the consequence of human life in society (Kropotkin 1886, p. 6). For instance, with regard to morality and in response to Kant's notion of the "categorical imperative," Kropotkin writes that "[man] becomes truly moral not when he obeys [...] the law, which he considers divine [...]; man is moral only when his moral acts have become second nature to him (ibid., p. 174)."

Throughout his work, the conception of anarchy or anarchism can, hence, be understood as divided into three general categories. According to Kropotkin, anarchism is: (1) a GENERAL MODE OF SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION evident in human history; (2) a SOCIAL THEORY, based on the scientific investigation of human institutions with the aim of providing the basis for a future society founded on the principles of equality and liberty; as well as (3) a GENERAL SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY aiming at incorporating the whole of nature based on scientific principles.

4.2. Anarchic Society: the State of Nature

Seeking to establish anarchism on a scientific basis (Kropotkin 1910, p. 1), Kropotkin endeavoured to build his political theory in reference to the newly emerging scientific disciplines of the late 19th century, *i.a.* anthropology, sociology or biology, but above all evolutionary theory (Kropotkin 1908, p. 24). Kropotkin considered Darwin's observations as foundational for the progress of modern science, as well as fundamental, revolutionary steps towards a better understanding of the world in general and particularly the development of society (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 100). However, while Darwin's work provided an important foundation and source of inspiration for Kropotkin's political philosophy, Kropotkin strongly deplored what he regarded as the vulgarization of Darwin's theory by later interpreters (Kropotkin 1908, p. 40-42).

The foundation of Kropotkin's philosophical thought is vastly built upon the reinterpretation of the main conclusions of Darwin's works, which according to him had been vulgarized by self-proclaimed Darwinists, particularly Thomas Henry Huxley and Herbert Spencer (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 100). According to Kropotkin, most interpretations of those self-declared Darwinists (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 20) misinterpreted Darwin's theory by reducing it to a crude emphasis on competition; hence, equating the concept of the "struggle for existence" to nothing but a confirmation of Hobbesian assumptions of the natural state as a war of each against all (Kropotkin 1908, p. 45). According to this reading of Darwin's work, Kropotkin explains, nature came to be seen as an immense battlefield, in which "[...] evil [was] the only lesson which man could get from nature (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 19)." By focusing narrowly on *The Origin of Species*, these writers, Kropotkin argues, projected

a distorted vision of nature onto human society. Darwin's own observations, particularly those presented in *The Descent of Man*, where he emphasized sociality and sympathy as important factors of evolution, largely remained unnoticed (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 20; Kropotkin 1924b, p. 20).

In response to the flawed interpretation of Darwin's work, which came to represent nature as nothing but "an immense battlefield (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 19)," Kropotkin aimed at developing a comprehensive antithesis. His main points are outlined in his most influential analytical work *Mutual Aid: A Factor of evolution* (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]) and were later expanded in his unfinished book *Ethics: Origin and Development* (see Kropotkin 1924b). However, a coherent narrative can be identified throughout the entire corpus of his work, serving as a crucial foundation of his political philosophy (see i.a. Kropotkin 1887 or Kropotkin 1908).

Three aspects are central to Kropotkin's objection to simplistic interpretations of Darwin's observations: (1) First, Kropotkin asserts that alongside individual competition, sociability and association represent necessary conditions for survival in nature. Hence, mutual aid among individuals of the same species (and to a lesser extent even among members of different species) has to be recognized as a determining factor of evolution as well as a natural necessity. (2) Second, accordingly, nature constitutes not only a competitive but also an inherently social domain, which does not at all resemble the Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*. (3) Third and lastly, there is no fixed essence of behavior in nature. Although sociality, for Kropotkin, amounts to the paramount factor of evolution, self-assertion or individual competition likewise represents a co-persistent element of existence in nature. Relations ultimately are shaped by the constant interplay of these tendencies. The following section will explore these crucial objections in detail.

Who are the Fittest? Echoing Darwin's work, Kropotkin opens his antithesis by asserting that "life, [indeed], is a struggle; and in that struggle [only] the fittest survive (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 63)." However, as far as Kropotkin was concerned, the answer to the question about the factors determining "fitness" had been largely distorted: while he agreed that in nature only the fittest survive, he likewise disagreed with general assumptions about who the fittest are. Kropotkin certainly admits that nature, indeed, exhibits an immense amount of individual competition, warfare and extermination (*ibid.*, p. 22). This represented simply an observable fact. However, Kropotkin likewise argues that the notion of the "struggle for existence," which according to him constituted a fundamental "law of nature" had to be conceived in its broader metaphorical sense (*ibid.*, p. 63). Kropotkin did not intend to disprove or reject the assumption that individual competition constitutes a central fact of nature

as well as major factor of evolution (see Kropotkin 1924b, Chapter III). However, the “struggle for existence” in its metaphorical sense (i.e. the collective struggle of groups against adverse circumstances of their environment) became the central focus of his work as well as the basis for his reinterpretation of Darwinian assumptions (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]; Kropotkin 1924b). Indeed, for Kropotkin it came to represent the more decisive struggle in nature. While the response to the direct struggle takes the form of individual competition, the metaphorical struggle for life could not be determined by physical power of the individual (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 21). On the contrary, it could only be addressed through sociability and association (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 58 & 63-64).

Sociability. While Kropotkin “[...] fully [admits] that [those] qualities making the individual the fittest, [...]” are of substantial importance, he likewise suggests that there was another decisive element shaping the longevity and success of individuals and species as such: SOCIABILITY – defined as the need to associate in order to survive (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 60-61). Accordingly, he argues that the most successful species, the most resilient and plentiful, are those who associate not merely with the purpose of reproduction but also for mutual protection, and hunting. MUTUAL AID, he emphasizes, hence represents as much a factor of evolution as competition and plays an equally decisive – perhaps even more important - role in determining the success of a species (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 32-40). Seeing nature merely as a battleground, in which the strong exterminate the weak (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 19), Kropotkin claims, constitutes a simplistic notion of nature that exaggerates one factor out of proportion while simultaneously ignoring another decisive part. Sociability, also seen as the basis of life in societies, hence, represents no exception in nature but a fact that Kropotkin frames as a general law of nature (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 60): “[...] a certain degree of identification of the individual with the interest of the group [has] *necessarily* existed since the very beginning of social life (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 32).”

Given his focus on sociability and mutual aid (see i.a. Kropotkin 1924b), Kropotkin has often been accused of advancing an overly romantic notion of nature (see Sandberg 2023). However, as Sandberg (2023) suggests, this criticism is mostly based on a selective reading of Kropotkin’s texts (Sandberg 2023, p. 16). It is evident that Kropotkin consciously shifted the focus to what he perceived as the neglected aspect of nature, namely mutual aid and cooperation, in an attempt to provide an antithesis to flawed interpretations of Darwinism. However, his persistent emphasis on the “other factor of evolution” does not imply that Kropotkin simply denied the existence of struggle or competition. Rather, it reflects the polemical aim of his intervention: since the reader could be assumed to be familiar with Darwinian, Huxleyan,

Spencerian, and Hobbesian accounts of conflict, Kropotkin deliberately foregrounded the neglected role of cooperation and mutual aid (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902]; Kropotkin 1924b).

On Hobbes. Although Kropotkin's work is primarily directed against the misinterpretation of Darwin's evolutionary theory, he likewise frequently positions his conception of natural social relations in opposition to Thomas Hobbes' account of the state of nature (see i.a. Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 21, 28, 76-80, 100; Kropotkin 1924b, p. 14, 40-41, 44, 63, 66, 111, 119-123, 241; Kropotkin 1908, p. 45). This philosophical opposition, particularly evident in *Ethics: Origins and Development* (Kropotkin 1924b), is significant because Darwin's work had frequently been read as a scientific vindication of Hobbes' state of nature. For the present thesis, this is especially relevant, since Hobbes serves as a foundational reference point for the realist conception of anarchy reconstructed in Chapter III.

Although Kropotkin fundamentally disagrees with Hobbes' conclusions - which he considered to be based on a rather superficial representation of human nature - he likewise acknowledges his contribution to the liberation of philosophy, ethics and the study of human nature from the yoke of metaphysical and religious explanations (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 111& 120). Considering Hobbes a pivotal figure in laying the foundation for a more realistic philosophical approach grounded in the observation of nature, Kropotkin goes so far as to describe him as one of "[...] the best thinkers of the seventeenth [century] (ibid., p. 14)."

Relatedly, it can be argued that - to some extent - Kropotkin certainly agreed with Hobbes on epistemological grounds. That means that in envisioning life before the inception of centralized authority, Kropotkin likewise sought to deduce tendencies inherent to human nature, in order to understand the origins and development of social organization. To determine the nature of human interaction as well as the origin of morality and ethics, Kropotkin strongly endorsed attempts to proceed with what he called a "naturalistic" approach. In doing so, Kropotkin regarded such an approach as proper and scientific, while on the other hand, rejecting, for instance, Kantian attempts, solely grounding its explanations in the faculty of reason - which he discredited as an exercise in metaphysics (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 167; Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 14).

What concerned Kropotkin most about Hobbes work was certainly not a disagreement on epistemological grounds or method, but rather his flawed representation of a primitive state of existence - in other words the state before the inception of a central point of superior authority. From Kropotkin's perspective it can

be argued that Hobbes' fundamental error was the way he imagined such primitive interaction. Perceiving everything outside institutionalized authority as a "nasty and brutish" condition of sheer survival, Kropotkin, maintains that Hobbes simply got the "savage" wrong (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 76-77). Influenced through the experience of the English Civil war as well as the general lack of empirical knowledge about the actual nature of primaeval societies (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 119-120), Kropotkin argues that Hobbes came to perceive human beings in pre-state environments as "[...] bands of wild beasts, [living an isolated life] until some benevolent authority appeared (Kropotkin 1908, p. 45)." Their mutual relations were characterized as a state of perpetual warfare (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), fighting over the means of subsistence based on narrow calculations of self-preservation and benefit. In this very simplistic conception of life based on rationalist reduction, Kropotkin asserts, man is assumed to be a wolf to man (*homo homini lupus*). Morality, in this environment, was perceived as being entirely absent (ibid., p. 133).

Subsequently, Kropotkin asserts, throughout the general vulgarization of Darwin's thought, his works came to be widely considered as a confirmation of Hobbes' account of the state of nature. This was particularly true in the case of Thomas Henry Huxley (Kropotkin 1908, p. 45), who, Kropotkin claims, propagated the view that the ethical process (i.e. the moral life of man) existed entirely independent from the cosmic process (i.e. the universal life of man) determined by nature (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 220). The natural state of existence, according to Huxley, after all amounted to a Hobbesian war of each against all (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 21).

As far as Kropotkin was concerned, he considered this conclusion to be severely flawed. The notion of primitive pre-state human organization as an aggregate of isolated individuals in a state of perpetual warfare, Kropotkin considered to be entirely unrealistic and likewise not backed up by scientific observation. This misconception, Kropotkin regarded as symptomatic for a general tendency of contemporary thought to conceive everything outside the framework of state authority as amounting to a condition of complete chaos and disorder (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 2 & 5).

A Social State of Nature. Building his theory on the assumption that sociality and association constitute a fundamental fact of nature, Kropotkin naturally reaches an entirely antithetical conclusion. Not only Hobbes but most philosophers of his time, Kropotkin suggests, went astray by conceiving egoism and selfishness as the prime faculties of man. What follows from his observation that sociability is a necessary condition in the "struggle for existence," is that the state of nature is necessarily a social state. What is true for any species, according to Kropotkin, is particularly

evident with regard to the most cognitively developed species – above all, man. Here, higher intellectual development transforms association from an instinctive activity to a reasoned action (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 60-61).

According to Kropotkin, mutual aid and social habits provide the basis for the development of a collective sense of justice, which later evolves into an intrinsic intersubjective foundation of morality. This internalized sense of morality rooted in sociality, in turn, serves as a crucial mechanism to contain conflict and mitigate self-assertive behavior (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 61-63). This is not because it is based on the fear of punishment, but on the intrinsic conviction that restraint is morally obligatory. The state of nature is, hence, a state of close and complex social relations; it is ultimately a state of SOCIETY – characterized by a complex state of rules and customs rather than the unrestrained conflict and clashing personal interests (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 82-85). This leads Kropotkin to the pivotal conclusion that society predates the state as well as any form patriarchal authority and necessarily develops irrespective of the presence of a higher point of authority (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 1).

In Kropotkin's state of nature conflict and competition are certainly not absent, however, his conception of human interaction without a common superior, does not resemble a Hobbesian war of each against all (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 105). Although Kropotkin suggests that "[in] any society [...] there will be individuals aiming to take advantage of their strength, daring, cleverness to subrogate the will of others (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 63)," he likewise maintains that "[sociability] and the need of mutual aid and support are such inherent parts of human nature that at no time in history can we discover men living in small, isolated families, fighting each other for the means of subsistence (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 133)." Therefore, Kropotkin concludes, the common - Hobbesian - conception of men living as isolated beings (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 58), fighting "[...] among themselves over food and wives (Kropotkin 2022 [1902] p. 45)," hence, had to be discarded.

A Utopian Vision of Human Nature? *Prima facie*, particularly against the backdrop of Kropotkin's extensive criticism of Hobbesian conceptions of the nature of human organization, it seems that Kropotkin's account of human association overall paints a rather benign and cooperative picture of human nature. However, by taking a closer look at the synthetic whole of his work, it appears that this certainly is not the case. Contrary to often raised criticism (see Sandberg 2023), despite rejecting Hobbesian assumptions, Kropotkin likewise opposed the idealization of human nature, particularly with regard to assumed pre-state human association (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p.100). Hence, romanticizing the savage - a tendency, which Kropotkin mainly

associated with humanist philosophy of the 18th century, in particular Jean-Jacques Rousseau – Kropotkin considered equally fallacious (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 64).

Idealizing – as much as demonizing - human nature, according to Kropotkin, constituted a major philosophical fallacy. Kropotkin argues that “[men] are not, [...]” and also never have been “[...] those free-minded independent, provident, loving and compassionate fellows (Kropotkin 1888, p. 2),” some people wish them to be. Looking back at the issue of primitive organization as well as the general life before the inception of institutionalized authority, Kropotkin reminds us that despite seeing man as inherently social, any attempt to romanticize primitive association remains equally problematic. “[The] primitive man is not at all [...] a tiger like beast,” however at the same time, he should neither be considered “[...] a paragon of virtue (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 64).” Overall, Kropotkin concludes, it is crucial not to exaggerate the virtues of man and to admit the imperfection of human nature. This is particularly important too with regard to acquiring a realistic vision of a future society based on the principles of equality and liberty (Kropotkin 1888, p. 3).

Taken together, human nature, in Kropotkin’s account, is ultimately portrayed as being neither inherently peaceful and cooperative nor ultimately aggressive or violent. Overall, Sandberg (2023) concludes that Kropotkin’s philosophy does not assume a *fixed essence of human nature*. Human nature is ultimately characterized by different autonomous faculties and tendencies – both social and conflictual - with no authentic center (Sandberg 2023, p. 16). On principle, I strongly agree with Sandberg’s (2023) assessment about the absence of a fixed essence of human nature in Kropotkin’s theory. However, I likewise suggest that, as far as human nature is concerned, the co-existence of two diametrically opposed sets of faculties – (a) the first representing the drive for *sociality or mutual aid*, (b) the second representing *self-assertion* (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 242) – remains an important analytical category, constantly present throughout Kropotkin’s theoretical account.

The Dual Tendency. According to Kropotkin, humans are generally driven by two opposing sets of feelings, two cardinal tendencies, which are both diametrically opposed to each other (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 26) as well as constantly in conflict with each other (Kropotkin 1908, p. 6). Kropotkin explains:

“In one set are the feelings which induce man to subdue [others] in order to utilize them for his individual ends, while those in the other set induce human beings to unite for attaining common ends by common effort: the first answering to that fundamental need of human nature – struggle, and the second representing

another equally fundamental tendency – the desire for unity and mutual sympathy (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 26).”

Human interaction and organization, in turn, is shaped by a constant struggle between those TWO CONSTITUTIVE TENDENCIES. Kropotkin asserts:

“After all, the whole history of the human race may be regarded as striving, on the one side, for seizure of power by separate individuals [...] or groups, and, on the other hand, the striving [...] to pressure the equality of rights and resist the seizure of power (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 67)”

Following from these two inherent tendencies of human nature, it follows, in Kropotkin’s account, that both cooperation and conflict are intrinsic faculties of human nature and constitutive elements shaping human organization (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 106). Potentially the most important aspect in Kropotkin’s perspective is that these two tendencies are not to be seen as mutually exclusive but co-present as well as co-constitutive. In order to properly understand the structuring of social relations and eventually arrive at a realistic theory of ethics and human behavior, it is necessary to find a synthesis for this supposedly “[...] fundamental contradiction (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 26).”

Moving towards the question of primacy among these tendencies, Kropotkin asserts that the faculties of self-assertion that drive humans to seek power and domination are generally comparatively weaker than those social habits favoring mutual aid. To explain this, Kropotkin argues that, on the one hand, the social instinct must be perceived as a permanent instinct, present at all times in human interaction. The self-preservation instinct triggered, for instance, by hunger or fear of death, on the other hand, constitutes merely a temporary impulse (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 40). Drawing from both the philosophical account of Francis Bacon as well as Darwin’s work *The Descent of Man*, Kropotkin concludes that the individual instinct of self-preservation, hence, can be described as reactive and thus weaker, while the social instinct appears as the more constant and therefore stronger force (ibid., p. 42).

4.3. Societal Organization: Anarchy and Hierarchy

One of the main conclusions of Kropotkin is the assumption that ordered social relations preceded the inception of institutionalized authority. In other words, society precedes the state. As opposed to Hobbesian speculations that the lack of sovereign authority necessarily results in a war of each against all, Kropotkin asserts that stateless associations are far from exemplifying the rule of unchecked personal

interest and self-preservation. In the absence of formal hierarchy, social organization, according to Kropotkin, always took place on customary terms, resulting in rules-based organizations grounded in mutual aid and customary rules (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 80-90). These anarchic societies, in Kropotkin's theory, are not merely a utopian vision, or an imaginary thought experiment, but a historical fact and lived reality of human history. Despite the general tendency in political thought to perceive society only in terms of hierarchy and subordination, the state, according to Kropotkin, is but "[...] one form society has taken throughout history; [...]" and in the form of the modern state, it is, too, a relatively recent development (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 2)

According to Kropotkin's understanding of the development of social organization, both hierarchical as well as anarchic forms of organization are firmly rooted in human history (Kropotkin 1896, p. 2). I suggest that the modes of organizing social relations can be perceived in analogy to the two fundamental tendencies described in the previous chapter: self-assertion and mutual aid. The manifestation of these faculties, in Kropotkin's understanding, results in two traditions of societal organization that have been present at various times in different shapes through the history of mankind, co-existing in permanent opposition to each other. The first mode of societal organization is (A) ANARCHY – in Kropotkin's words: tradition of the people. This mode of organization Kropotkin further describes as the popular, federalist or libertarian tradition. On the other end of the spectrum, Kropotkin identifies (B) HIERARCHY - in Kropotkin's words: the tradition of the elites, which he characterizes as Roman, imperial and authoritarian (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 60).

Anarchy. Following the conclusion that man necessarily always lived in societies (see Kropotkin 1908, p. 49), Kropotkin maintains, that the absence of a common focal point of authority does not impede the development of order based on mutual rules and norms (Kropotkin 2022 [1902] p. 80). This initial state of existence, which can be described as anarchy in the first general sense in his definition (Kropotkin 1910, p. 1), Kropotkin assumes to be shaped by an inherent tendency of social relations that has been practiced throughout history – and thus constitutes an observable fact of nature (compare Kropotkin 1896, p. 1). Accordingly, Kropotkin considers this type of organization the "natural" type of structuring social relations as it preceded social organization based on hierarchy and subordination (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 5-6).

Given the assumption that association is necessary for survival (see i.a. Kropotkin 2022 [1902,] p. 39), Kropotkin maintains that throughout the entire history of mankind, even among – what he calls - "the savages," people have existed in a highly social environment, practicing mutual aid, which in turn led to the development of

rules and customs later transformed into common conception of justice and subsequently internalized as an intersubjective conception of morality (ibid., p. 85). "Social life, [...]" he writes, "[...] - that is, we, not I, - is the normal form of life. It is life itself. Therefore 'we' must have been the habitual [form of] thought with the primitive man (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 54)." Within this context, Kropotkin argues that social arrangements were first structured based on kinship, collective responsibility and communal practices - long before the advent of permanent, institutionalized authority. Procuring nourishment was conducted collectively and leadership remained temporary in times of clashes with other groups (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 7-8). Remarkably averse to conflict (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 80) these primitive associations, Kropotkin maintains, "[...] abhorred bloodshed." They therefore developed comprehensive set of customary rules, norms and institutions that would serve the purpose of preventing feuds from arising (Kropotkin 2022 [1902] p. 120). Comprehensive codes of customs ensured that "[...] self-restraint [was practiced] in the interest of the [group] (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 65)." This type of natural anarchic association, in his interpretation, does not merely resemble a self-help system based on conflicting interest, but likewise a mutual-aid structure largely inclined towards peaceful co-existence.

Solidarity. Within this mode of organization, which Kropotkin coined as "Primitive Communism (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 88)," conflict and feuds, however, were certainly unavoidable. Nevertheless, Kropotkin suggests that contrary to Hobbesian assumptions, feuds did not primarily originate from resource scarcity that entailed keen individual competition for survival. On the contrary, Kropotkin suggests that social bonds between individuals in anarchic societies appear to be the strongest in environments where the struggle for life is the harshest (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 88). Conflict, in his perspective, was among other causes primarily generated by superstition as well as behavior associated with the immanent individual tendency to strive for domination (2022 [1902], p. 88).

The crucial line of demarcation within these such anarchic structures, Kropotkin suggests, concerns the relations across groups. While maintaining that within established societies relations among individuals of the same group were structured around the principles of peaceful co-existence and solidarity, the same logic often did not necessarily apply in the relations between groups (see Kropotkin 1924b, p. 66). SOLIDARITY, he suggests, rarely extended beyond one's own group (Kropotkin 2025 [1898]), p. 8). Within separate societies the "[...] rule of each for all is supreme [...]." However, relations between groups were not structured around that principle of solidarity (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 101).

According to Kropotkin, such anarchic systems exhibit the development of a double standard of ethics: (a) First, the local or domestic standard; and (b) second, the “international” standard – i.e. the relations among separate groups. While the former is generally signified by peaceful relations held together by intersubjective morality and in-group solidarity, the latter remains a realm of “[...] dispute and war” based on the persistence of the perception of out-group individuals as “strangers.” However, this does not mean that relations were merely conflictual. Indeed, Kropotkin suggests that attempts to mitigate unneighborly relations were always conducted, although their effect did not reach the same extent as compared to in-group relations (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 66). These attempts to diminish the risk of conflict among groups, Kropotkin suggests, as the popular origin of “[...] *international law* (ibid., p. 61).”

Hierarchy. As opposed to anarchy, Kropotkin identifies a second tendency of organizing social relations: hierarchy. Being grounded on the pattern of “imperial Rome,” this mode of organization finds its contemporary expression in the modern centralized state. Like anarchy, hierarchy constitutes a mode of organizing social relations inherent to human evolution (compare Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 3 & 60). Regarding Kropotkin’s explanations within this context, I suggest it is important to differentiate between hierarchical structures and the formation of the centralized state, which in turn represents institutionalized authority or hierarchy of the highest order. The state in this sense, Kropotkin asserts is not society as such, but a superstructure of institutionalized power placed on top of it: a society atop society (ibid., p. 2).

The origins of the development of hierarchical structures, Kropotkin assumes to lie in the interplay of (1) first the tendency of man to subdue others to their own will (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 63) and (2) second the general peaceful inclination of the masses (Kropotkin 2022 [1902] p. 134). Contrary to widespread philosophical assumptions that the roots of sovereign authority lay in the conclusion of a social contract among the people establishing authority to secure peace (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 5), Kropotkin takes a diametrically opposite stand. Indeed, he frames the establishment of institutionalized power as a gradual process emerging from the interplay of these forces against the backdrop of specific historical circumstances.

According to Kropotkin’s two inherent tendencies, human action can be characterized by two fundamental desires or habits with regard to the organization of social relations: (a) First, the desire to maintain customary life in society; and (b) second, the desire to dominate in order to enrich oneself at the expense of another (Kropotkin 1886, p. 6-7). While the former desire gave rise to societal life based on

customary, anarchic principles, the latter manifested itself in the accumulation of individual power and eventually the establishment of separate powerful classes or castes of society (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 102).

Despite the fundamental conclusion that power necessarily follows wealth (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 135), the roots of dominant positions in society, in Kropotkin's account, are conceived not merely in material terms. Power, that later translated into political might and permanent authority, appears in Kropotkin's account in several different forms. With regard to the early stages of human organization, the roots of domination, in their most basic form, originate particularly from the possession of knowledge as well as the provision of security (ibid., p. 102).

As far as the former is concerned, Kropotkin asserts that knowledge served as a crucial means to produce initial individual power. Through holding knowledge and particularly through keeping it secret and thereby controlling access, certain individuals managed to establish themselves in a dominant position of hierarchy within society. Acting as the gatekeepers of knowledge allowed those whom Kropotkin called *the elders* (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 67) to gradually mold customary norms and rules as the foundation for their individual domination (Kropotkin 1886, p. 6-7). These groups of initially individual sorcerers, shamans or priests were over time transformed into castes of priesthood (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 102), laying the foundation for the later development of institutionalized religion (Kropotkin 1924b, p. 261).

Alongside the power generated through knowledge, Kropotkin suggests that domination also emerged through the provision of security and protection. Feuds between groups as well as conflict caused through external pressures such as migration, Kropotkin argues, led to the gradual "[...] specialization of warrior's trade, [...] which [...]" eventually gave rise to a separate military caste and contributed to the consolidation of hierarchical authority (Kropotkin 2022 [1902] p. 121). To unpack this claim, it is crucial to take a closer look at the role Kropotkin attributes to the general aversion to conflict and bloodshed of the masses.

According to Kropotkin, the establishment of a separate caste of warriors alone was not enough to produce domination. Within this context, Kropotkin claims that power, which later served as the source for oppression, found its origins in the peaceful inclinations of the masses (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 16). Following their habit of preferring to till their soil rather than provide for their own security, Kropotkin asserts, the broader masses gradually "outsourced" security to those who had made war their profession. Contrary to the conception of a conscious social contract, the people

thereby unconsciously fell into servile obligations towards “[...] the protector of the territory [...],” while power and wealth began to accumulate in the hands of a few powerful military warlords (ibid., p. 135). Hence, it was “[the] very peacefulness of the barbarians, [...]” Kropotkin argues, “[and] certainly not their supposed warlike instincts, [...] that became the source of their subsequent subjugation to the military chieftains (ibid., p. 134).” Following from this, Kropotkin further projects responsibility onto the peaceful inclination of the masses, suggesting that the causes of domination and oppression are to a large extent rooted in “[...] routine, superstition, indolence and cowardice (Kropotkin 1886, p. 6–7).” These faculties, which I suggest can be seen from Kropotkin’s perspective as shortcomings of the general aversion to conflict (compare Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 136), invited exploitation by those striving for domination (Kropotkin 1886, p. 6–7).

4.4. The Modern State: An Elite Network?

Having outlined the general concept of hierarchy in Kropotkin’s work, the following section turns to the state as one of its most central and historically consequential manifestations. As with any other institution of human association, Kropotkin argues that the state (see Kropotkin 1908, Kropotkin 2025 [1898]) must be studied through what he calls the “naturalist” lens. In his conception, this means that to fully understand its working, functioning and purpose, one needs to pay close attention to its origins and evolution within the historical context (Kropotkin 1908, p. 75–77).

The State. Kropotkin offers a comprehensive theory of the functioning and development of centralized hierarchy, which is mostly developed in his works *The State: Its Historic Role* (see Kropotkin 2025 [1898]) as well as *The Modern State* (see Kropotkin 2018). While these texts certainly contain the most comprehensive account of Kropotkin’s theory of state formation, a coherent narrative (see Kropotkin 1896b, p. 1), can be found in most of his political works. The main focus of Kropotkin’s thought with regard to the state and hierarchical structures centers around two important topics: (a) first, their origin, development and ascent; and (b) second, its internal structure and logic.

As discussed in the previous section, Kropotkin broadly differentiates between hierarchical and anarchical types of organizing social relations. Contrary to anarchic stateless societies, held together by kinship and custom, hierarchic structures represent another form of structuring social relations based on authority and subordination. However, authority or hierarchic relations alone should not be conflated with the state as an institution. Patterns of authority emerge gradually and unevenly and co-exist with patterns of self-organization that are present at any time

in human history. The state, in Kropotkin's understanding (see 2025 [1898]), constitutes a distinct arrangement of institutionalized and legalized hierarchy, in which domination is successfully transformed into a permanent institution (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 3; Kropotkin 1908, p. 75–77).

Looking at its inception in its historical context, Kropotkin maintains that the modern state is of fairly recent origin - although its organizational logic can be traced back much further. The Roman Empire, Kropotkin suggests, represented the state *par excellence* and provided a focal point of reference for future generations of rulers seeking to consolidate their domination (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 3; Kropotkin 1908, p. 75–77). However, despite this Roman point of reference, Kropotkin suggests that the roots of the modern centralized state are not to be found in a direct continuity with Rome. Rather, he locates the roots of the modern state in the political transformations that began to take shape from the sixteenth century onward and which - perhaps ironically - culminated at the end of the French Revolution. Despite the initial popular character of the revolutionary movement, Kropotkin suggests that, over the course of the Revolution, a state still in its infancy was gradually elevated into an all-powerful, centralized and totalitarian entity that later became the blueprint for modern statehood (Kropotkin 1908, p. 84–85 & 87).

Elite Alliances. In the previous section, I outlined Kropotkin's account of the gradual emergence of hierarchical relations through the accumulation of knowledge, military power and social authority. However, the concentration of certain aspects of power alone, Kropotkin considers to be insufficient for the establishment of permanent and institutionalized authority – that is, the state. In order to consolidate power on a permanent basis, Kropotkin suggests that the different faculties of authority or hierarchical forces had to fuse into one (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 29). Leadership certainly emerged in early phases of human association, yet without tactical alignment these forces were incapable of institutionalizing authority on a permanent basis (*ibid.*, p. 9).

The concept of ELITE NETWORKS as a quintessential feature of statism appears in various forms throughout Kropotkin's work. The concept is most commonly defined as the *triple alliance* formed between the “Roman” judge (i.e. those holding power over jurisdiction), the soldier (i.e. those holding power over military force), and the priest (i.e. those holding spiritual authority and control over knowledge; see 2025 [1898], p. 17; see also Kropotkin 1908, p. 76–77 & 79). In other sections, it likewise appears in the form of a *quadruple alliance* through the inclusion of the lord or king as an additional meta-figure of authority (see Kropotkin 2025, p. 146). With regard to later periods, particularly the modern state, Kropotkin suggests that this alliance is further joined by a class of industrialists or business tycoons (i.e. those holding financial

power; see Kropotkin 2025, p. 157-162, 166-168 & 172) - thereby adding another layer to the concentration of authority for the purpose of “[subjecting] the masses to the will of the elites (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 57).”

Only by fusing into one entity - the state - Kropotkin suggests that these already privileged groups succeeded in permanently preserving their privileges through a system of mutual insurance designed to guarantee their continued position of domination by legitimizing their rule through legislation, hegemonic narratives and financial dependency. Against this backdrop, Kropotkin comes to see the state not only as a hierarchical structure but above all as an elite network, providing mutual insurance for its members’ continued domination (see Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 29).

The Role of Law. Set against this backdrop, the control over LAW and JURISDICTION constitutes a crucial step towards the establishment of permanent authority and the upholding of privileges. Assuming conceptions of “natural laws” governing men as a metaphysical fallacy, Kropotkin asserts that legal norms emerge either as a consequence of social interaction or as a deliberate construction. He distinguishes between two different characters law has taken throughout the history of mankind: (a) customary law - which refers to the rules that are the spontaneous products of life in society and emerge naturally in any kind of human association to sanction behavior and regulate social relations (e.g. “you should not kill or steal”); and (b) codified law - which appropriates customary institutions and combines them with additional legal provisions designed to institutionalize and secure domination (e.g. “you should not kill or steal, but also taxes must be paid to the government;” Kropotkin 1886, p. 6-9).

To better understand this claim, it is useful to consider the different categories of legal norms Kropotkin identifies in his work *Law and Authority* (see Kropotkin 1886). Kropotkin suggests that there are three categories of legal norms concerned with either the protection of (a) people, (b) the government, or (c) property. The first category forms the nucleus of customary arrangements and is hence to be found in any kind of primitive association; the latter two categories, on the contrary, constitute the product of deliberate will on the part of the ruling classes to sanctify and legalize their domination (Kropotkin 1886, p. 7-13).

Kropotkin maintains that in establishing codified systems of law, the ruling classes cleverly intermingled customary norms that protect individual security with provisions designed to institutionalize their own leadership. By claiming that without the institutions justifying their domination, those other rules concerning life and well-being of the individual would not exist, the ruling classes were able to position themselves as legitimate “defenders of the law” vis-à-vis the broad masses (Kropotkin 1886, p. 7-13). Against this backdrop, the control over education or religion represents a vital mechanism of the ruling classes to enforce societal conformity.

Through the production and dissemination of narratives, privileged groups secure obedience not only as the consequence of fear of punishment but also by embedding constructed morality as socially obligatory. With regard to the modern state, Kropotkin suggests that particularly the control over the media is a crucial tool to keep public opinion in awe and in line with the interests of “the few” (ibid., p. 3).

Financial Elites. With respect to its composition, the modern state differs significantly from prior - for instance, feudal - systems of domination. This can be attributed to the increased significance of powerful financial classes, which are able to translate economic wealth and capital accumulation into political power (Kropotkin 2025, p. 157-162 & 166–168). The development of capitalism, in Kropotkin’s work, is seen as a parallel, inseparable development of modern state frameworks (Kropotkin 1908, p. 75-77). Against this backdrop, Kropotkin argues that so-called classical liberal political economy, which preached the idealization of the market and non-intervention with regard to the larger population, functioned primarily as an ideological framework rather than a description of actual state practice. However, in practice, this laissez-faire model remained largely rhetorical. With respect to elite groups, the principle of non-interference, Kropotkin maintains, was never practiced. On the contrary, he suggests that the state actively and systematically interfered in favor of the interests of privileged groups to help establish and maintain monopolies, facilitating the emergence of an increasingly important class of industrialists and business tycoons within the framework of the modern state (ibid., p. 79). The relationship between the political establishment and this novel financial class represents a quintessential and distinctive feature of elite interaction in the modern era (Kropotkin 2025, p. 157-162 & 166–168).

4.5 Beyond Mutual Aid: Conflict, Progress and War

Looking at the modern state as the prime example of centralized authority in the hands of the few, it is important to note that Kropotkin clearly did not perceive the state as a transhistorical or eternal form of social organization. Rather, the state constitutes the contemporary expression of one particular way of organizing social relations, always embedded within its historical context - for instance, feudalism or capitalism - which in turn shaped its logic and composition. The state in this sense comes to be conceived as a spatiotemporal reality, rather than a transhistorical fact. This conception reflects Kropotkin’s general perspective of reality and particularly social institutions as constantly subjected to continuous development and evolution. What concerned Kropotkin the most was, conversely, to uncover and understand the origins, purpose and shifting meaning of precisely those inherited arrangements.

Etiology. This perspective corresponds to what Sandberg (2023) refers to as Kropotkin's process-oriented thinking. Throughout the canon of Kropotkin's work (see e.g. Kropotkin 2022 [1902], Kropotkin 1924 or Kropotkin 1908), the inception and evolution of institutions and social relations are central to understanding society. To understand the society and its institutions, Kropotkin suggests, it is necessary to understand their origin, purpose and development, how their meaning changed over time, and how they were appropriated and redirected from their original purpose. Societal relations never follow a distinct and predetermined path, expressing a fixed essence. The modern state, for instance, constitutes one particular expression of institutions that gradually developed and changed over time, rather than an institution that has always existed. It emerged historically and continues to co-exist in opposition with the "anarchic" or "mutual aid" tendency of societal organization (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902], Chapters III-VIII; see also Kropotkin 2025 [1898]).

The assumption of the constant co-evolution of these opposing tendencies exemplifies why Kropotkin, unlike other contemporary thinkers on the radical left (e.g. Marx), should by no means be seen as a teleological thinker. Kropotkin, indeed, does not perceive anarchy as the logical endpoint of historical development. On the contrary, anarchy above all constitutes historical fact and, if anything specific, a potential point of departure on which relations of authority were later constructed. Conversely, the focus of Kropotkin's work lies in the observation of the interplay of these opposed constitutive tendencies – anarchic and hierarchic (Kropotkin 1908, p. 6). The interaction between opposing tendencies of social organization manifests itself historically. It is therefore important to stress that their constant struggle and interaction do not follow a linear pattern: "[history], [...]" Kropotkin strongly emphasizes, "[has] never followed a single continuous tradition (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 61)." This process-oriented ETIOLOGY is crucial not only for understanding Kropotkin's account of the state, but also for reconstructing his theory of conflict and war: if history is driven by the constant interaction of opposing tendencies, then conflict is not an abnormal interruption of social life but one of its constitutive mechanisms.

Conflict. Having established Kropotkin's process-oriented account of social development, it becomes necessary to clarify the role conflict plays within this broader ontology. Sandberg (2023) suggests that Kropotkin's process-oriented approach constitutes a quintessential feature of his philosophical ontology, in which change appears as a fundamental condition of life. Building on the assumption that perfect harmony is both unattainable and theoretically also not desirable, Sandberg (2023) interprets Kropotkin's social philosophy as a process of continuous change (Sandberg 2023, p. 29).

Since the mutual or associated struggle of groups against their environment forms the basis for sociability and the formation of society, Adams (2012) suggests that within Kropotkin's body of thought, conflict and change constitute an inherent condition of life. Mobility and change are seen as progressive elements. Immobility and stagnation, on the other hand, represent the condition associated with decay. Sandberg (2023) likewise argues that the notion of a continuous struggle constitutes the precondition for all evolution, development and progress; and that in Kropotkin's work the cessation of conflict in society would resemble the cessation of life itself (Sandberg 2023, p. 26-27).

Indeed, Kropotkin strongly disagreed with certain assumptions of communist thought according to which, with the overcoming of capitalism and oppressive structures, the roots of conflict would simply disappear. While agreeing that the disappearance of idiosyncratic behavior induced by the capitalist system and economic inequality would lead to decreased intra-societal conflict, a post-capitalist society certainly would not result in eternal harmony (Adams 2012, p. 161-162). In fact, a society based on free association and free from any kind of conflict, Adams (2012) suggests, would stand in fundamental contradiction with Kropotkin's notion of freedom and progress. Indeed, Kropotkin (2025 [1898]) suggests that the presence of disagreement is a necessary condition for the development of social relations based on free agreements. He explains:

"A commune only represents the image of a moral whole, only reveals itself as universal in its way of being, like the human mind itself, when it has admitted conflict and opposition within itself (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 28)."

Against this backdrop, Kropotkin (2025 [1898]) likewise emphasizes the potential harm caused by imposing peace for peace's sake. Conflict - freely conducted without the interference of an external power - is seen as a necessary condition for communities to "[...] emerge renewed from each struggle, [flourishing] even amid the clash of arms (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 28)."

Given Kropotkin's assumption that the entire course of human life is characterized by a struggle between the tendency to strive for closer association and the tendency to assert one's individuality and rule over others, conflict is not only to be seen as an intrinsic feature of social life, but also as a practical necessity to prevent some individuals or groups from falling at the mercy of another (see Kropotkin 1924, p. 242). With an eye to Kropotkin's account of stateless communal arrangements, struggle and conflict in this sense play a pivotal role in the perpetuation of liberty (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 28). This likewise resonates with the point discussed above that the roots of oppression lie above all in inaction, routine and passive submission

(Kropotkin 1886, p. 7). As Kropotkin puts it: “[...] to struggle is to live, and the fiercer the struggle the more intense the life (Kropotkin 1897, p. 25).”

Communality, Individuality. Although, *prima facie*, Kropotkin’s work appears to emphasize the role of communality and the importance of the group within his political philosophy, his work should not be understood as a call against individuality. Particularly with regard to his conception of liberty and freedom, it becomes evident that both the individual as well as the group are seen as sacrosanct (see Adams 2012, p. 161-162). Looking back at Kropotkin’s two major factors of evolution - mutual aid and self-assertion - it becomes clear that while the former is generally associated with mutual struggle and progress, the latter often appears to resemble the individual pursuit of power and superiority as the basis of conflict and the foundation for hierarchical structures. However, despite being commonly associated with the individual striving for domination, the tendency of self-assertion likewise appears at times as a progressive element in Kropotkin’s thought. By breaking through rigid social bonds and challenging entrenched societal structures, individual self-assertion may become a force for progress, so long as it is not translated into systems of individual supremacy (Kropotkin 1924, p. 242). Indeed, the initiative of individuals to produce mobility in mutual relations constitutes a crucial part of the notion of progress in Kropotkin’s work. This is based on the understanding that “[variety], conflict even, is life and that uniformity is death (Kropotkin 1898, p. 21).”

Conflict, overall, appears in Kropotkin’s work as an intrinsic feature of social association and above all as a necessary precondition for progress and the preservation of liberty. The common struggle against hostile environments constitutes the basis for sociality, while internal disagreement facilitates mobility and change within social arrangements and thereby provides the basis for their evolution. Conflict, even arising from the individual tendency to assert oneself, comes to be seen as an element of progress. This logic of conflict is, however, distinct from conflict produced by entities based on centralized authority. Although conflict may represent a progressive element within free social relations, it takes on a different character when organized through hierarchical institutions. This leads to a different form of conflict, governed by a different logic - the wars of the state (compare Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 28).

War. Although conflict constitutes an integral feature of social relations as a whole, not all types of confrontation that emerge from it can be understood as progressive. Within anarchic societies, Kropotkin (1924) suggests that conflict across groups particularly arises due to the fact that mutual aid and solidarity are commonly not extended beyond the social boundaries of the clan or tribe. Relations within and across groups, hence, come to be expressed through a double standard of ethics:

while local or domestic relations are primarily the realm of close social networks, the “international” remains characterized by a stronger tendency towards dispute and war. This tendency is based on the perception of out-group members as strangers. This, however, does not mean that war is necessarily unavoidable. Attempts to mitigate “unneighborly relations,” Kropotkin suggests, formed part of inter-group relations from an early stage and led to the establishment of rules and norms to prevent and sanction conflict - the customary basis of international law (Kropotkin 1924, p. 66).

Although the international domain with regard to pre-state societies remains more strongly predisposed towards conflict, Kropotkin likewise suggests that, over time, solidarity increasingly extended from tribes to clans into confederation, which eventually culminates in a common conception of nation, regulating relations among relatively autonomous entities long before the inception of the nation state (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 120). Given the lack of reciprocal solidarity, stateless societies were initially prone to conflict. However, they were likewise characterized by the continuous development of customary norms and arrangements designed to mitigate conflict, alongside a gradual extension of solidarity beyond the immediate group.

The crucial question, however, remains whether these assumptions about relations among decentralized societies can be applied analogously to the causes of conflict among modern states. To this question, Kropotkin (see Kropotkin 2025 [1898]; or Kropotkin 2025) answers with a clear no. While conflict among anarchic groups arises primarily from absent solidarity, warfare within the context of statism appears to follow an entirely different logic. Warfare and the deliberate use of force, Kropotkin maintains, constitute an essential feature of both the formation as well as the survival of state entities. States are born through imperial conquest and depend on coercion and expansion in order to maintain their dominance (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 54; Kropotkin 2025, p. 172-173): “[Once] a region is treated as a state, [...]” Kropotkin suggests, “[...] it is assumed to have interests opposed to those of its neighbors; and war becomes inevitable (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 54).”

The Real Motives. However, “interest” in this context should not be conflated with the protection and enrichment of the population or the nation as such but has to be understood as a means of enrichment and preservation of power for the ruling classes (Kropotkin 2025, p. 172-173). The causes of war, with regard to sovereign state entities, are hence to be deduced from the specific interests of the *dominant elite groups*. “National interest,” similarly, has to be detached from public concern and understood in terms of the interests of the few.

Seeing social relations as being in a constant flux of change and transformation, it is impossible to derive an eternal logic of elite interest capable of providing transhistorical explanations. What can be said from Kropotkin's perspective, however, is that wars - in the sense of conflict among centralized political entities - always came from above. The concrete motives are embedded in the historical circumstances and the specific composition of the respective elite networks. With respect to earlier feudal times, Kropotkin suggests that the reasons for war were closely tied to the interests of ruling groups. The kings aimed at refilling their cash-boxes, distributing rewards among their loyal subordinates to legitimize their rule and preparing for further expansion. The religious caste in turn sought to justify the war supernaturally in order to maintain their own societal position and their relationship of mutual dependency with the king. The ruling class of soldiers and warlords, on the other hand, depended on war, for they had made war their profession; and peace ultimately implied unemployment (Kropotkin 1896b, p. 1-2).

Although the logic remains the same with respect to the modern state, the concrete intentions vary against the backdrop of societal and technological change (see Kropotkin 2025 or Kropotkin 1914). Turning to the modern state, Kropotkin (1896b) suggests that particularly the disappearance of the central role of the king and its replacement by the increasing importance of financial elites and business tycoons transformed the logic of war and conflict (Kropotkin 1896b, p. 1-2). While "[...] in former times when there was war men at least knew in what cause they were killing each other (Kropotkin 1914, p. 1)," such as feuds between rival royal families, the causes of modern conflict became increasingly blurred. In the modern era, Kropotkin suggests that in fact all major conflicts during the 18th and 19th centuries were essentially fought over commercial interests and rights of exploitation (Kropotkin 2025, p. 164).

The real causes of war, hence, were primarily economic. Kropotkin (1914) suggests that economic preponderance on the international market constituted the major reason for 19th century conflict. According to his account, for roughly 150 years prior to his writing, states primarily jostled over economic supremacy, the forceful opening and acquisition of markets and the imposition of their products on foreign populations (Kropotkin 1914, p. 1-2). Hence, all talk about "[arbitration], the Balance of Power, reduction of standing armies, disarmament - [are] all fine ideas but practical bearing they have none, [...]" given the fact that they do not attempt to address the real issue in Kropotkin's perspective - economic preponderance (ibid., p. 3).

Against this backdrop, the development of big industrial conglomerates within a country is intrinsically connected to modern warfare in Kropotkin's causal explanation. Kropotkin suggests that "big industry" is constantly in search of new

markets for its goods; hence, industrialists are compelled to push the respective political authorities in favor of expansion to increase their profit. The state, on the other hand, is receptive towards these demands because of its dependency on financial elites to provide the means for its general objectives. The relationship between lender and state, as well as the increasing leverage of financial elites to exert immense influence on international affairs, becomes a central feature of the modern state. As debt starts to accumulate, dependency on these financial elites also increases (Kropotkin 2025, p. 165-168). The logic of conquest and warfare, Kropotkin suggests, is therefore based on this relation of mutual dependency. War emerges as the result of the intersection of their interests.

Kropotkin strongly emphasized the importance of distinguishing between these REAL MOTIVES (i.e. the actual intentions of war) and the publicly communicated reasons (i.e. the political narratives). Narratives, he suggests, are commonly constructed around questions of political rivalries, historic grievances or religious disputes and serve the purpose of misleading and mobilizing the masses for war. However, the actual motive is to be found behind the scenes - in the case of the modern state – in the struggle for control over international markets and in its connection to the direct influence and interest of big industrial companies (Kropotkin 2025, p. 168). He argues:

“Where the naïve believe they have discovered deep political reasons or national hatreds, there are only plots hatched by the buccaneers of finance (Kropotkin 2025, p. 167)”

5. Enter Kropotkin:

Towards an Anarchist Reinterpretation of International Anarchy

“As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy.”

- Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property?*

“Staat heißt das kälteste aller kalten Ungeheuer. Kalt lügt es auch; und diese Lüge kriecht aus seinem Munde: «Ich, der Staat, bin das Volk.» Lüge ist's!”

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*

HAVING OUTLINED THE CONCEPTUAL LIMITATIONS of mainstream accounts of anarchy in CHAPTER 3.6, this section turns to Kropotkin's political philosophy as an alternative point of departure. To reconceptualize the mainstream image of anarchy, this chapter proceeds by introducing Kropotkin's thought into the equation and gradually deriving a modified picture of international anarchy. In the first subchapter, I will discuss how Kropotkin's conception of anarchic domains as inherently social spaces allows us to rethink dominant notions and often rationalist assumptions about behavior induced by anarchic structures. Next, against the backdrop of Kropotkin's account of the struggle between anarchic and hierarchical patterns of organization, this thesis will inquire whether relations within a modified state of anarchy can still be described as “anarchic.” After investigating this crucial question, I will proceed by examining whether the domestic-international analogy - i.e. whether state behavior can be seen as analogous to individual behavior - can be maintained, and how this further modifies the conception of Kropotkian international anarchy. In the fourth section, I will move beyond a state-centric approach and consider (global) transnational actors as constitutive elements in shaping the conduct of global politics. Finally, the findings will be summarized and discussed in Chapter 5.5. Although this chapter will not rely on case studies as such, short illustrative examples (some historical, some more contemporary) will be provided to elucidate the empirical manifestation of its more abstract conceptual claims.

5.1. Reconstructing International Anarchy: A Kropotkian Perspective

To introduce Kropotkin's political philosophy as an analytical framework to reconceptualize international anarchy, it is instructive to begin by scrutinizing social organization in the absence of a superior authority. As outlined in Chapter III, Kropotkin conceives anarchic structures as entirely social spaces, where order emerges through necessary interaction in the light of external pressures. The absence of a common superior authority in this sense by no means implies the absence of order. However, since Kropotkin's observations refer primarily to relations among individuals in stateless communities, it is essential to consider to what extent these assumptions can be coherently transferred to relations among states.

The Domestic-International Analogy. The crucial question, hence, revolves around the problem of whether the domestic-international analogy can be accepted. The answer to this question is open for interpretation as Kropotkin did not intend to construct a theory of inter-state relations. I suggest that there are several issues, to say the least, with the assumption. Kropotkin's work points to profound differences between the functioning and logic of anarchic societies, on the one hand, and sovereign entities based on centralized and institutionalized authority on the other. Above all, this difference manifests itself in the formation of interest, which Kropotkin assumes to be governed by a fundamentally different logic than the behavioral incentives among relatively equal entities in pre-state settings. Stateless societies are characterized by temporary leadership embedded within customary arrangements and tend to be oriented toward the interest of the broader community. States, by comparison, operate according to a different logic, reflecting the cumulative interest derived from the intersection of elite networks.

However, approaching Kropotkin's assumptions as an analytical whole rather than isolating individual elements of his thought allows us to open an avenue for logically drawing conclusions from the individual state of nature to relations among states. It is true that, internally, states are based on institutionalized authority. Nevertheless, Kropotkin likewise emphasizes that establishing permanent authority, cooperation or mutual aid among elite groups constitutes a quintessential feature. Individual power alone is not what ultimately solidifies state structures. Only in tactical alignment with one another, only by practicing reciprocal support among themselves, these elites manage to establish domination permanently. This association, in turn, can be conceived as a "society atop society."

What follows from this observation is that while relations within a sovereign centralized entity are characterized by patterns of subordination, the internal composition of the state as such is governed by powerful social forces cooperating to maintain their position of domination. Relations among such elites, being marked by a certain relative equality of status and mutual dependence, are not characterized

primarily by subordination, but may be interpreted as resembling an anarchic condition. What is already evident in the internal composition of the state, I argue, becomes theoretically valuable if projected onto relations among such sovereign elite networks, in other words: states. So, for the moment, let us bracket the objections to such an analogy and accept the validity of the domestic-international comparison provisionally.

Anarchic Societies. The mainstream contemporary conception of anarchy has often been criticized for assuming rather than explaining state preferences and behavior under anarchic conditions. Anarchic interaction is commonly understood through the image of isolated individuals engaging in conflict when their individual trajectories overlap. In the absence of a higher superior authority, individuals must fend for themselves, as there is no higher court to appeal to. Thus, the system is one that demands self-help. Cooperation in this scenario is limited, as relative gains matter and intentions must be treated as uncertain. Grounding his theory on the assumption of sociability as a necessary condition for survival, it may not come as a surprise that Kropotkin's account offers a diametrically different image of anarchic structures. But what would such a Kropotkian anarchic system look like among states?

Given Kropotkin's strong emphasis on sociability as a necessity for survival, it is evident that anarchy in a Kropotkian understanding necessarily must be thought in terms of "society." This would lead us in a direction resembling the English School of International Relations, though without simply conflating the two approaches. Following Kropotkin's conclusion that the state of nature is a state of sociality, we would first have to think of states not as isolated units ricocheting off each other, but as parts of a closely connected network. Hence, extrapolating the assumption about sociability, we may first assume that states likewise possess a tendency to associate with each other to respond to pressures emanating from their environment. Far from being isolated, relations in a Kropotkian type of anarchic system would be characterized by constant interaction and exchange. Constantly engaging with each other, states, like people, would acquire intersubjective meaning and at least partially identify themselves with the transcendent interest of their group as a whole. Behavior would be constrained through common rules, customs, norms and practice and would eventually lead to the formation of a mutual intersubjective conception of morality.

Two Constitutive Struggles. If we accept states as sovereign entities whose relations in the absence of centralized authority are structured analogously to the relations of individuals in stateless societies, then, from Kropotkin's perspective, such entities will likewise be confronted with a *dual struggle* for survival: (1) first, the individual struggle, and (2) second, the associated struggle. The former refers to individual competition, which, contrary to common misconceptions, forms an integral part of

Kropotkin's thought. Units - in this case, state entities - would, on the one hand, exist in a continuous struggle against one another over resources, influence, security, and power. Such confrontation may resemble the Hobbesian war of each against all and would certainly lead us toward familiar behavioral assumptions, ranging from classical realist literature to modern structural accounts. Yet, Kropotkin would certainly suggest that individual competition is not the only form of struggle - and perhaps not even the most important one.

Set against this background, mutual societal relations constitute a fundamental structural response necessary to ultimately achieve permanence. While constantly faced with the problem of individual survival, units would likewise need to respond to the associated struggle against the various threats posed by a hostile environment. "ENVIRONMENT" in this sense can be understood broadly as encompassing those conditions that represent a common threat to the survival or reproduction of all relevant entities. Such threats may be reducible to the intentions of other entities within the system but may likewise exist irrespective of their individual mutual relations. To meet the challenges posed by their broader environment, states necessarily need to associate to survive. States, hence, do not merely struggle against one another in the form of self-help; they may also find it necessary to associate against a hostile environment through forms of mutual aid. Contrary to reductionist realist conceptions of anarchic structures, cooperation would not appear as a systemic anomaly, but rather as an expected form of behavior.

States, hence, could be assumed to co-exist in a close network of social relationships, which in turn constitute the foundation for the development of customary norms and shared practices. Contrary to a Hobbesian battle of each against all, states - through interaction - would develop comprehensive frameworks of social relations aiming both at mitigating or avoiding any Hobbesian struggle among them and providing a regulated basis on which to prevail in the common struggle against adverse conditions. Through a prolonged process of mutual interaction and shared social practice, states would eventually translate these customs and traditions into a sense of justice, which would later be internalized among them as a shared intersubjective conception of morality. While conflict is certainly unavoidable to some degree, as individual competition likewise continues to exist, states would become subject to limitations of their behavior - not only because they consider it useful, but most importantly because they consider it morally necessary. Order ultimately emerges as a necessary outcome of close social relationships. Rather than co-acting against the backdrop of shifting material capabilities, states are shaped by their interaction and ultimately form societies.

Solidarity. In this view, states tend to form societies in order to persist. The constraining variable, however, that needs to be introduced here concerns the limits

of SOLIDARITY. Assuming a world full of interacting, sovereign entities does not necessarily imply that all of them participate in one set of common societal relations. What appears more logical to assume, from a Kropotkian perspective, is that societal relations emerge out of shared practices, common experiences, perceived affinities and common threats. While primitive anarchic societies, for instance, are held together by kinship, common ancestry, tradition or myth, societies of states may by analogy emerge around shared political tradition, religious ties, hereditary connection, ideological commitments or common security concerns. The crucial issue remains how far such solidarity extends among the separate units. While ties based on solidarity may emerge among states that share certain traditions, interests or identities, this kind of solidarity does not necessarily extend to entities conceived as belonging to an out-group. Hence, while relations among certain actors in such an anarchic environment would be shaped by mutual aid and common associated struggle, relations across groups may remain conflictual or competitive.

Set against this background, it is analytically valuable to distinguish between different degrees of societal arrangement based on social proximity and inter-unit solidarity. Instead of relying on a dyadic conception of units as either belonging to an in-group or an out-group, the intricate web of international interaction requires relations to be understood along a broad spectrum. On one end of this spectrum are SOLIDARITY COMMUNITIES characterized by a shared sense of morality, mutual identification and comparatively strong intersubjective obligations. On the other end are DISSOCIATED RELATIONS, in which social ties remain thin, and interaction is limited to minimal rules of conduct, such as reciprocity, equality of retaliation, or basic norms of coexistence (compare Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 98). Between these two poles lies a wide range of social arrangements, differing in the depth, density and scope of shared meaning, solidarity and normative internalization.

To illustrate these assumptions, it is useful to examine how environmental pressures may induce associated struggle among states and how shared identity and elite solidarity can mediate behavior historically. To detach the concepts derived from Kropotkin's political philosophy from their normative associations and use them as analytical tools, I will begin with an example that appears as far removed as possible from any Kropotkian vision of anarchic, communal, or egalitarian association: the Holy Alliance. At first glance, this may seem counterintuitive. The Holy Alliance was reactionary in purpose, hierarchical in structure, and grounded in the defense of absolute monarchical authority. Yet precisely for this reason, it offers a particularly revealing test case. If mutual aid is understood not as an inherently emancipatory principle, but as a general mechanism of survival under conditions of uncertainty and threat, then the Holy Alliance can be read as a form of associated struggle among ruling elites. In this context, mutual aid does not appear as popular solidarity from below, but as elite cooperation from above.

The Holy Alliance. After the defeat of Napoleon, the task of restructuring relations in Europe and establishing a stable system became central for the victorious monarchs of Europe. Kissinger (1994) suggests that although explicitly constructed around the idea of balancing power, the Holy Alliance system relied far less on material power alone than on legitimacy. The equilibrium represented not only a material one, but above all a moral balance grounded in a shared concept of justice. To maintain order and preserve the status quo, the conservative monarchs appear to have figured that to avoid hegemony and prevent revolutionary rupture they had to act in concert. Balance among the monarchies remained a crucial factor; however, the institutional framework also responded to the collective threat to the monarchical order posed by the currents of bourgeois liberalism unleashed by the French Revolution and aimed to ensure the survival of dynastic rule (Kissinger 1994, p. 78-79 & 83-84).

Tsygankov (2012) has pointed out the deficiencies of both offensive and defensive realist approaches in explaining the post-1815 settlement. Structural explanations, such as balancing, remain fundamentally insufficient for understanding an arrangement that inherently went beyond conflictual inter-state politics. Above all, the author suggests, ideas and morality mattered (Tsygankov 2012, p. 71-73). Set against this background, the account of anarchic relations derived from Kropotkin's thought offers a more nuanced explanatory framework. Faced with a common threat, the establishment of a normative order appears not merely as the outcome of balancing, but as a response to conditions that could only be answered through associated struggle. The notion of associated struggle for persistence acquires an even more distinct character in this case, as the existential challenge did not merely emanate from the relative distribution of capabilities, nor even from another state actor, but from the broader ideological environment embedded in a specific historical circumstance. Confronted with revolutionary currents, self-help and mutual distrust, although certainly representing one component of post-1815 politics, were not the only possible outcomes of an anarchic environment. Quite the contrary, from a Kropotkian perspective, the Holy Alliance can be read as a reactionary form of monarchical mutual aid.

Confronted with a hostile ideological environment, elite solidarity formed the foundation for the construction of a normative order based on intersubjective meaning and moral commitments. Behaviour was restrained not merely by material calculation, but by a shared conception of legitimacy, even with respect to dominant powers such as Russia, which a purely realist perspective can hardly explain (see Tsygankov 2012, p. 73). However, as the case of relations among the conservative monarchies and Great Britain illustrates, deficiencies in shared customs, social proximity and ideological commitment produced different arrangements characterized by varying degrees of solidarity. London refused to enter the Holy Alliance framework, as it neither shared the same commitment to conservative

authoritarian intervention nor wished to bind itself to a general principle of counter-revolutionary action; yet its participation in the Quadruple Alliance still reflected a more limited set of shared principles aimed at maintaining balance among the monarchies and preventing hegemonic tendencies (compare Kissinger 1994, p. 82-83 & 88). This circumstance illustrates that, in a Kropotkian conception of anarchy, cross-societal relations are characterized by different degrees of solidarity. The relations between Britain and the Holy Alliance were not fundamentally dissociated, but marked by a lesser depth of shared meaning, weaker normative internalization and more limited social proximity.

5.2. Two Traditions: Anarchy, Hierarchy and International Order

Anarchy in Kropotkin's work does not appear as an abstract, utopian or teleological endpoint of a supposed linear process of evolution. On the contrary, it constitutes the tendency of decentralized social organization that exists and has necessarily existed since the dawn of mankind. Anarchy is a mode of action, and a form of social arrangement without centralized authority. If anything, anarchy might be understood as the original mode of organization among primitive stateless societies.

However, Kropotkin strongly emphasizes that this condition of anarchic organization does not represent an eternal self-reproducing structure. Indeed, Kropotkin's account of the evolution of social relations is shaped by the constant conflict between the tendency of anarchic and hierarchic organization. While norms and tradition on a collective and customary basis serve the purpose of preventing submission, individual power accumulation remains possible at any given point. External pressures, such as conflict, may provide the foundation for certain groups within an anarchic society to acquire a dominant position. Set against this background, it remains pertinent to ask whether anarchy represents the sole ordering principle with respect to relations among states.

Two Traditions. In the previous section, I accepted the assumption that Kropotkin's concept of individual anarchic association may be applied in analogy to the functioning of relations among states. Underlying this assumption, however, is the idea that relations among states truly take place under the condition of anarchy. Based on Kropotkin's observations, there are several problems regarding this claim. In Kropotkin's work, anarchy and hierarchy certainly appear as two opposed tendencies of organization. However, this does not imply that their manifestation within a given social context takes the form of a rigid dichotomy. Much of his work in *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (see 2022 [1902], Chapters III-VIII), for instance, is dedicated precisely to establishing how communalistic and egalitarian practices (i.e. anarchic types of organization) have historically co-existed with frameworks of subordination and hierarchy.

Vertical and horizontal forms of organization, hence, should not be understood as mutually exclusive principles of which only one can be realized, but as a spectrum of historically shifting social relations. Systems of authority come and go. Hierarchy crumbles, empires fall, and people revert to organizing themselves on a customary basis. At the same time, individual power accumulates and aligns with other forces, thereby institutionalizing domination until it collapses and the process begins anew. In Kropotkin's work, these processes appear to be fundamentally embedded in historical dynamics and unfold over long periods of time throughout which the two opposed tendencies co-exist and struggle for primacy.

Accepting the domestic-international analogy, there are crucial similarities between a hypothetical state of nature among states and the anarchic forms of organization among individuals from Kropotkin's perspective. Above states, there is no permanent centralized force that has successfully managed to monopolize authority. Essentially, states are free to enter into agreements with each other through negotiation and arbitration; they are not fully or consistently subject to any enforceable higher system of law - except in limited forms of collective enforcement - and they continue to manage their resources under conditions of sovereign autonomy, albeit often under pressure from relations of financial domination. There is no centralized state in a Kropotkian sense established above societies of states that can dictate behavior and coerce obedience on a legalized and institutionalized basis.

However, if we deduce from Kropotkin's assumptions that totally centralized authority represents only the endpoint of the coercive tendency, authority can also manifest itself in less centralized forms. Thus, the absence of a world state as such does not exclude the accumulation of certain faculties of power and the development of relations based on hierarchy and subordination. Authority may be neither permanent nor unchallenged, but it can nevertheless manifest itself in societies. Integrating these quintessential assumptions into a modified conception of international anarchy poses a crucial question: Is the international realm truly anarchic?

Heterarchy. One major strain of criticism against mainstream conceptions of anarchy concerns the profound power asymmetries between different actors. While the system certainly remains formally anarchic, weaker actors have less freedom of choice and remain dependent on more powerful ones. This naturally poses the question whether relations among all actors - not only the most powerful ones - can truly be described as anarchic. Set against the background of Kropotkin's evolutionary conception of social organization, the short answer is: not entirely. While states may remain formally equal, some would be substantively "more equal" than others. This in turn would manifest in asymmetric social relations.

Nonetheless, given the fact that no state truly holds an institutionalized and universally recognized supreme position of authority, merely perceiving relations in

terms of hierarchy would be similarly fallacious. Based on Kropotkin's account of the organization of society, it makes most sense to understand international relations not as a rigid dichotomy of hierarchy and anarchy, but as a fluid system exhibiting features of both: that is, as a HETERARCHY. Heterarchy in this sense refers to a systemic structure in which relations between units are formally conducted horizontally, yet simultaneously co-exist with patterns of hierarchy, power and dependency dispersed in various foci of power that shape decision-making and determine the extent to which sovereign autonomy can actually be exercised.

Power. To unpack this assumption, it is crucial to first clarify how power is defined in Kropotkin's account and how this definition may translate into a constitutive variable shaping relations among states. In many structural realist frameworks - though not necessarily classical realist accounts - power is commonly defined in terms of material capabilities: in other words, economic and military might. While these faculties of hard power certainly constitute crucial dimensions in Kropotkin's work, the importance of what may be called soft power likewise represents a constitutive element in the establishment of relations of authority. Particularly, the monopoly on knowledge and jurisdiction, the capability to construct and disseminate narratives, as well as to reshape and appropriate institutions and norms, constitute an integral part of the institutionalization of power. While military power may coerce a weaker adversary into submission by brute force, the ability to shape ideology, to seize the ideological prerogative to decide what is right or just, and to define which forms of behavior should be subject to penalty, represents a crucial faculty of legitimizing authority. Extrapolating these assumptions to relations among states suggests that once a particular faculty of power becomes concentrated in one entity, the freedom of decision of other units within the society of states gradually diminishes.

Institutions. Particularly institutions that sanction and regulate social relations play a crucial role throughout Kropotkin's account of human organization. Throughout his body of thought, institutions follow two different logics: first, those that are the product of social interaction, and second those that are created by a specific actor for a specific purpose. While the latter certainly may contain similar principles as compared to the former, their different origin leads to different assumptions about their function and purpose. Hence, I suggest referring to these two types of institutions as (a) organic and (b) artificial. While the former encompasses institutions that emerge naturally through social interaction and intersubjective meaning, the latter refers to institutional organization that is deliberately constructed by one or more powerful actors or states, to solidify patterns of authority.

In a Kropotkian framework, organic institutions can further be classified into two subcategories. First, those aiming at avoiding and mitigating the damage of conflict; and second, those aiming at preventing subordination and maintaining the individual

sovereignty of each actor. Projecting Kropotkin's observations of relations within and between stateless societies on inter-state behavior, the first category could for example refer to customary provisions such as: demanding arbitration before hostilities, limiting the scope of retaliation following aggression or defining who may be a legitimate target in terms of conflict. The second category, on the other hand, could be interpreted as rules directed at maintaining individual autonomy, such as: principles of non-intervention or non-interference. While compliance with these rules would not be effectively enforced by any centralized authority, conduct would be sanctioned by collective pressure and ultimately stabilized through a common intersubjective understanding that complying with them is morally necessary.

Artificial institutions may contain similar provisions; the crucial difference lies in their origin and purpose. More specifically, this difference consists in the specific constructed provisions that mainly aim at privileging certain groups or actors within a seemingly similar framework. An artificial institution, hence, could similarly contain rules that sanction the conduct of warfare but likewise include norms and rules that transfer specific rights to certain actors. For instance, such institutions may include provisions on the prohibition of the use of force or the protection of civilians but likewise transfer rights to legitimate intervention or grant monopolies of interpretation or jurisdiction to certain powerful actors. Compliance would not be enforced collectively. On the contrary, authority would, if not formally then at least informally, rest with a specific entity or network of actors, or gravitate toward one specific actor.

Extrapolating these considerations to relations among states, it follows that some actors eventually possess the capacity to influence the parameters of international conduct. These types of heterarchic relations can be conceived along different vectors. Looking first at the dimension of hard power, it follows that political entities equipped with superior military means may acquire authority through the provision of security or coercion. However, this is not where the process ends. Similarly, soft power constitutes a crucial factor allowing more powerful actors to reshape narratives, customs and rules in their own interest within the international realm. Exercising their position of authority, powerful actors could hence exercise influence not only through material might but also through control of discourse or ideology. The same applies to institutions governing social relations. While institutions may naturally emerge from social interaction (i.e. organic) among individuals for the purpose of mutual protection, powerful actors may seize control over these social arrangements and construct or reconstruct them as they see fit (i.e. artificial).

Within the discipline of IR theory, the idea of a spectrum of anarchic and hierarchic organization is not novel and has been taken up by several contemporary scholars and critics. Donnelly (2017) uses the concept of heterarchy to suggest that authority in the international realm is not absent, but rather disaggregated and dispersed

across multiple privileged entities. Contrary to centralized hierarchic systems, authority is not monopolized by a single actor; nevertheless, relations among states may still exhibit patterns of hierarchy (Donnelly 2017, p. 255-256).

Lake (1996) reaches a similar conclusion from the narrower perspective of security relations, challenging the common conception of anarchy and hierarchy as a dyadic set of mutually exclusive opposites. Within security relations, i.e. security arrangements among states facing a common threat, the author explains that relations among actors may take various forms ranging from horizontal to vertical control. Within this context, Lake (1996) distinguishes between forms of relations on a continuum from *alliance* (cooperation among equals) to *empire* (relations in terms of master and vassal). Between those two extremes lies a broad range of semi-anarchic or semi-hierarchic relations such as the status of protectorates or the formation of informal empires (Lake 1996, p. 6-7).

The Warsaw Pact. The clearest contemporary example of such informal imperial relations, Lake (1996) suggests, is the Warsaw Pact (Lake 1996, p. 10). Nemeth (2026) strikes a similar note, arguing that the Warsaw Pact did not function as a security arrangement among equals but as a hierarchical alliance. Within the framework of the alliance, the superior power of the USSR equipped Moscow with the capacity to enforce discipline through political and economic leverage. Soon after its establishment, the alliance's institutional machinery was similarly constructed around Soviet interests. Key positions were staffed with officials from Moscow, agenda-setting followed Soviet terms, and implementation and enforcement were likewise controlled (Nemeth 2026, p. 2 & 16-17).

Kropotkin's perspective here offers a similar view to one that has already found its way into the study of International Relations theory. Against this backdrop, the Warsaw Pact provides a useful illustration for applying the insights derived from Kropotkin's work, particularly with respect to his understanding of institutions. An alliance among sovereign entities may emerge organically as the outcome of social interaction considering a common necessity to associate. In this sense, an alliance may be understood as an organic institution. However, given differences in capabilities, a powerful actor, in this case the USSR within the Warsaw Pact, may use the institution to construct and reshape it according to its immediate interest. Under these circumstances, subordinate actors become constrained in their actions and decisions. Relations in such "societies of states" depart from the framework elaborated in the previous section (i.e. societal arrangements based on intersubjective morality and communal solidarity), although they may initially have emerged from such arrangements. Rather, normative orders become subject to artificial reconstruction, stratifying society to such a degree that genuine anarchy becomes an insufficient analytical category.

Yet this circumstance should not produce the impression that layered societal relations among states necessarily equate to permanently centralized hierarchy. In other words, patterns of hierarchy do not imply full submission. For instance, Nemeth (2026) uses the case of Romania within the framework of the Warsaw Pact as an illustrative example of how autonomy can be exercised within hierarchical frameworks. Despite institutional entrenchment, Romania refused to accept or participate in obligatory mechanisms such as joint manoeuvres beyond its territory, without fully withdrawing from the institutional framework. Going beyond mere symbolic actions, Nemeth (2026) considers this an exercise of national sovereignty, pace hierarchical structures (Nemeth 2026, p. 18). Hierarchy, like anarchy, hence, remains insufficient to fully account for systemic structures as well as state behaviour. Drawing from the theoretical framework derived from Kropotkin, the above case therefore illustrates how international order may be understood as produced by the interplay of anarchic and hierarchic tendencies. Organic institutions may be reconstructed by dominant actors to suit their interest, yet this does not exclude the possibility of either resistance or continued voluntary participation. Hence, contrary to mainstream conceptions, anarchy alone offers a simplistic representation of reality. To grasp the international domain in its full nuance and intricacies, the concept of heterarchy must be applied.

5.3. Unpacking the State: Kropotkin as a Second-Image Theorizer

Reconstructing anarchy from a Kropotkian perspective has offered a conception in which anarchy comes to be conceived not merely in terms of self-help. While aspects of individual competition certainly amount to one paramount factor of relations among sovereign units, mutual aid based on the necessity to associate in order to respond to pressures emanating from the external environment is likewise a constitutive factor inducing behavior. Anarchy in this context has to be perceived as a fundamentally social domain, and relations among states must hence be conceived in terms of society. From social interaction, common practice, customs and norms emerge as elements of societal relations, yet at the same time the superior faculties of power with regard to certain actors may shape how relations among states are ultimately structured. Any system, hence, might exhibit patterns of anarchy co-existing with patterns of hierarchy, which profoundly determine how relations are ultimately conducted.

Although this conception on its own provides a substantial corrective to mainstream conceptions of anarchy within the discipline of International Relations Theory (particularly neo-realist assumptions), it leaves us uncertain as to why states behave in specific ways. Despite the general tendency to associate, power-seeking behavior likewise remains a crucial constitutive component. Relations across groups are more

receptive to conflict; yet fluid and multilayered forms of societal arrangement complicate the construction of a coherent pattern of international anarchy. Heterarchical relations further complicate the issue. The crucial takeaway, in a manner analogous to Wendt's argument (see 1992; 1999), is that anarchy - or heterarchy for that matter - does not follow a single logic.

Hence, to substantially explain state behavior, it follows that the third-image alone remains underdetermined. Dismissing the notion that structural constraints ultimately produce one pattern of behavior, one eternal logic of "anarchy," it becomes necessary to ask which other factors may influence state behavior. This leads us to critically dissect the anthropomorphized conception of the state and investigate how the internal structure and logic of the modern state may contribute to the understanding of state behavior.

At this point it is important to emphasize that the different logic of state behavior, however, does not necessarily imply that the previously developed account of relations in the absence of a common centralized authority is entirely invalid. I argue that it remains useful analytically to perceive anarchy - or a modified space of heterarchy - as a domain that necessitates both competition and cooperation and leads actors overall to form societies based on intersubjective meaning. Whereas it is useful to keep this framework as an underlying background condition, structural assumptions alone remain too underdetermined to account for specific types of behavior. States, after all, are entities not governed by the same logic as individuals. To account for specific patterns of behavior, it is, hence, necessary to investigate the intricacies of the state, its composition and functioning, its influential groups and policy processes to understand specific behavioral choices against the backdrop of structural necessity.

Reifying the State. So far, my investigation has rested on the assumption that interaction among states can be perceived analogously to the behavior of individuals within anarchic societies. As already hinted at the beginning of this chapter, there are several issues with respect to this assumption. While attempts to infer patterns of behavior from state-of-nature assumptions have been criticized from various perspectives (see Bull 1977, p. 57–62), I will limit myself in this chapter to a critique derived from Kropotkin's theoretical account. From this perspective, two problems are particularly relevant. Interpreting Kropotkin's work, the first crucial difference between a sovereign political entity and an individual lies in the physical capabilities: States are strong, individual humans are not. One major reason behind Kropotkin's assumption about the necessity of association lies in the fact that humans, although gifted with superior intelligence, are vulnerable and physically weak in relation to nature (Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 75). Being constantly exposed to "natural threats," association becomes necessary, for example for the purpose of hunting, or mutual

protection from predators. States on the other hand, if powerful enough, at least to some extent function as autarkic or self-sufficient actors. Hence, while individuals possess a distinct necessity to associate, not every political entity experiences sociability as a necessity.

Elite Networks. The second and probably most important difference from Kropotkin's perspective as well as for the further course of this section concerns the formation of interest or preferences. With regard to anarchic societies from Kropotkin's perspective, it may be maintained that societal organization derives from customary arrangements based on horizontal decision making, thus at least in principle reflecting the cumulative interest of a society as such. National interest in Kropotkin's work, however, is explicitly constructed based on a fundamentally different logic. While ideal-type stateless societies negotiate what is best or most appropriate for society as such, Kropotkin suggests that it would be fallacious to assume that the interests of a nation reflects the cumulative interest of its members. On the contrary, what comes to be considered as "national interest" in his perspective is largely contingent upon what lies in the vested interests of those who run it. Following from this, a state in the Kropotkian sense cannot be understood as a "neutral" commonwealth, a certain expression of the "popular will," or merely a unitary rational actor responding to structural pressures; rather, a state has to be perceived in terms of networks of privileged groups whose primary objective is the preservation of their own interest - above all their self-constructed internal system of domination.

An illustration of this argument is exemplified in his pamphlet *War or Peace?* (see Kropotkin 1896b). Here Kropotkin advances the argument that war throughout history always "came from above." To comprehend the underlying motivations, he continues, it is necessary to understand who profited from conflict and particularly for which reason. In this sense, war appears not as an expression of popular interest, but as an elite project emerging from the interaction of those groups whose position was strengthened by conflict. In feudal times, conflict aligned with the combined interest of a ruling elite network composed of the high aristocracy, the Church, and the military caste. According to Kropotkin, what was true for the feudal age certainly applied to the modern state as well. Speaking of the latter, Kropotkin suggests that the relationship between the state's political leadership and the financial elite was especially important to determine the decision with respect to war. Particularly with regard to the arms industry, Kropotkin locates a strong incentive to push for conflict for the sake of money, while political narratives largely serve as a pretext. The real motives for conflict, Kropotkin assumes, are closely connected to material profit.

Preparing the stage to generalize Kropotkin's assumption with regard to global politics carries the risk of falling into the trap of drawing anachronistic conclusions. While the principal motivation behind warfare or imperialism during Kropotkin's period of

writing might have been primarily linked to industrial interest, this does not mean that it represents a transhistorical reality. State composition fundamentally changes - from the feudal age to the era of the contemporary (post-)modern state - and so do its mechanisms of government as well as the role of influential groups and actors. Thus, the crucial point is not to directly adopt assumptions about economic preponderance, but to de-construct the state as a network of interacting foci of interest.

The crucial point here, I suggest, is ultimately that thinking in terms of the state vis-à-vis its stakeholders, particularly politically impactful groups, allows us to better understand the formation of foreign policy. The common notion of the state as a *unitary actor* responding only to structural pressures, hence, must be dismissed. National interest, hence, must be de-constructed and defined in terms of the interests of those who hold power. This requires asking a series of questions: Who is the state? Which groups influence their decision-making and interest formation? Which interests do these groups have, and who would profit from either transnational cooperation or conflict? Who benefits from a particular decision? Which particular interest comes to be translated into national interest? And who possesses the authority to define security or threat?

Contemporary Statism. Before investigating how these assumptions can illuminate contemporary international conduct, it is necessary to establish whether a direct application to the modern era is possible given the substantial development of societal organization since the death of Kropotkin. To properly understand Kropotkin's perspective, it is hence necessary to put his theories and arguments into historical context. Working during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kropotkin wrote at a time when the centralized nation-state had transformed into the principal mode of social organization throughout much of Europe. The modern nation-state constituted a unitary body subject to the rule of a central authority, mostly in the form of a monarchical sovereign, claiming a monopolization of coercion both internally as well as with regard to its external environment. Based on the ethno-centric view of the nation and the influence of nationalist ideology, "state" and "society" became interchangeable synonyms (Axtmann 2004, p. 260–261). Built on the underlying idea of power concentration, the concept of the "nation-state" came to represent a self-sufficient entity which with respect to its external environment had "[...] no [...] friends, only interests (Elazar 1996, p. 420)." Democratic processes and popular agency, today commonly associated with modern democratic states, were still in their infancy even by the late nineteenth century and only gained substantial significance after the Second World War (Buchstein & Jörke 2007, p. 191).

However, since then, the character of the nation-state, particularly after the two world wars, underwent a profound transformation. Particularly among Western states,

formerly coercive imperial powers transformed into liberal democracies that were entirely different in character. The development and institutionalization of political freedom, equality among the constituents of the nation, popular elections, and the separation of powers as means of limiting the authority of the centralized state altered governing mechanisms and decision-making processes (see Taheri & Afrough 2023, p. 19 & 40). Against the backdrop of these developments, Elazar (1996) identifies a “paradigm shift” in the character of states, which also affected their external relations. While the state modeled on the traditional nineteenth-century nation-state blueprint in the post-war era slowly began to transform into a more popular entity, Elazar (1996) observes a development towards a world characterized by “[...] diminished state sovereignty and increasingly constitutionalized interstate linkages of federal character (Elazar 1996, p. 417).”

The structure and composition of the state, therefore, have fundamentally transformed since the time Kropotkin developed his theoretical approach. Although he certainly presented his observations about statism as possessing a certain transhistorical continuity, it remains questionable whether his assumptions are still fully applicable to modern popular democracies. Given the increased agency of citizens, as well as the institutionalization of mass-democratic processes, it is unclear whether this statist logic can still apply to modern liberal states. Nevertheless, it would be equally problematic to dismiss the relevance of Kropotkin’s critique altogether, or to assume that his assumptions apply only to modern states that continue to resemble the traditional statist pattern.

Kropotkin strongly emphasizes the fallacy of assuming that “constitutional states” function fundamentally differently from states based on monarchical authority. While “popular states” in this sense may certainly be founded on different principles, the behavioral logic based on institutionalized and legalized hierarchy, he warned, would ultimately produce similar outcomes. Yet, this transformation certainly cannot be neglected either. Any application of Kropotkin’s theoretical account of the functioning of the state, hence, must be considered in light of the structural transformation of the modern state. The following section therefore turns to the question of how influential groups in the contemporary era continued to shape foreign policy despite the general decline of the traditional state model.

Interest Groups. Set against this background, the question remains how the notion of states as elite networks may help to illuminate contemporary international conduct. If we assume that state behaviour cannot be fully explained by reference to systemic pressure alone, it becomes necessary to examine the social composition of the state itself, while simultaneously considering the substantial transformation of state composition throughout the last century. Set against this background, instead of seeing states as unitary actors expressing a uniform national interest dictated by

the necessities of structural pressure, it appears as crucial analytically to deconstruct the state and deduce which groups may exert decisive political influence and possess an interest in shaping foreign policy in a specific direction. The analysis, moreover, should not only focus on those segments individually, but above all on their relationship with the political institutions that ultimately translate such interests into foreign policy.

Given the profound changes in state organization since the nineteenth century, especially the increasing role of the public sphere, the following discussion will modify the (potentially anachronistic) concept of “elite networks” into the broader notion of CONSTITUTIVE INTEREST GROUPS. Within this context, *constitutive interest groups* will be defined as any organization or group of people that possesses a shared collective interest as well as the capability to exert pressure on foreign policy formation. Such groups may include special interest groups or lobbies (e.g. companies, unions but also religious associations), the public sphere and social movements, think tanks, as well as media outlets (compare CFR 2023). Together, these actors form an intricate web of counter-balancing forces that shape and influence foreign policy; although their scope and degree of influence strongly depend on the internal organization of the state and vary across autocratic and democratic regimes (compare *ibid.*, para. 3).

The question, then, is which interest groups possess what kind of particular relevance with respect to international behavior. The historical relation of influential groups and political leadership has been thoroughly discussed in Chapters 4.4 and 4.5. Therefore, the following paragraphs aim to provide selected illustrations of influential groups in the making and breaking of foreign policy in the modern era. Given the complex nature of modern states, the presence of manifold interest groups alongside the public sphere, it remains impossible at this point to discuss their composition and interconnections in their entirety. In analogy to Kropotkin locating the financial class as a central force in the nineteenth century, the following section will focus on two particular aspects of dominant actors outside the formal apparatus of the state: the *military-industrial complex* as well as *Big Tech conglomerates*.

The Military-Industrial Complex. To demonstrate Kropotkin's assumptions about elite networks (i.e. interest groups) and their relevance for contemporary issues, the modern military-industrial complex provides an insightful analytical illustration. Despite profound developments since the end of the Cold War and the process of globalization (see Gibbs 2012), large arms manufacturers and military-procurement companies, Dunne & Sköns (2011) suggest, continue to occupy a considerably powerful position within states possessing large arms sectors. Their powerful position has been frequently associated with substantial influence on government decisions (Dunne & Sköns 2011, p. 5).

Indeed, recent research appears to confirm these assumptions. Focusing on case studies from recent history, Gibbs (2012) argues that large arms-procurement industries continue to enjoy significant political influence. Seeing these companies as powerful influence groups or "[...] clusters of intertwined interest groups [...]" (Gibbs 2012, p.96)," Gibbs (2012) suggests that these sectors exert considerable political influence, above all through direct lobbying activity. The author further suggests that, despite their humanitarian appearance, the influence of the military-industrial complex was visible in both the interventions in Kosovo and Libya. In both cases, large arms-procurement industries appear to have exerted their influence through security narratives, political pressure and strong advocacy (ibid., p. 96-104 & 108-111). Bolstered by substantial campaign donations in US elections, Wooten & Claypool (2022) likewise observe considerable pressure by large arms-procurement industries on legislative mechanisms (Wooten & Claypool 2022, p. 1). Emphasizing the co-dependency between policy makers and private industry, they suggest that political actors remain reliant on campaign money, while corporate actors remain dependent on favourable changes in policy (see ibid.).

Big Tech. Perhaps even more significant in the modern context than traditional arms-procurement companies, large ICT companies and firms specializing in artificial intelligence have risen to profoundly influential positions. Their influence operates not only through immense lobbying and political pressure (see Okumus 2022, p. 6), but also through the gradual occupation of critical state infrastructure. With respect to the United States, Späth (2025) argues that Big Tech conglomerates increasingly provide critical technologies to state agencies that have recently transformed into quintessential assets for intelligence operations, military planning and bureaucratic governance. Against this backdrop, Späth (2025) suggests that in recent years governing entities have developed profound patterns of dependency with private technology contractors for critical operational infrastructure. Increasingly, the author suggests, state functions are being transferred to "tech oligarchs," allowing them to exert a profound impact on international affairs, at times more directly than elected officials (Späth 2025, p. 12-13). Within this context, Späth (2025) provides tangible evidence of how such influence materialized during recent years. The author locates the recent U.S. questioning of the transatlantic partnership with Europe directly within the context of the EU's efforts to regulate and limit the operational scope of U.S.-based Big Tech and social media corporations. In this case, pressure from influential tech conglomerates appears to have translated into a hardline stance by the U.S. administration, in which security cooperation was leveraged in the interest of digital capital (ibid., p. 13-14).⁴

⁴ For a further illustration of the interplay between political authority and Big Tech cooperation, see Chapter VII of this thesis

In the light of these specific illustrations, it becomes evident that analyzing the relationship between governance and influential interest groups has not decreased in significance despite profound changes in state structure. Although it may appear anachronistic to refer to sovereign political entities as nothing but elite networks in the Kropotkin sense, it likewise remains crucial to investigate the various network components shaping and reshaping foreign policy. What matters, therefore, is not merely the identification of discrete actors in a reductionist sense, but the broader patterns of interaction emerging from their interplay. Instead of merely asking “Who wants what?”, it appears more fruitful to inquire how these actors relate to one another within webs of interdependence.

5.4. Association beyond Borders: Transnationalism and the State

Having dissected how the formation of state action can be conceived from Kropotkin’s perspective, it remains crucial to maintain that states as such do not represent the only constitutive actor, either domestically or internationally. So far, this chapter has primarily treated the functioning and logic of relations among states; however, looking back at Kropotkin’s distinction between the statist and the popular tendency, it is crucial to likewise account for the influence the latter can exert on the conduct of global politics. It certainly would be contrary to Kropotkin to limit the investigation of international relations to states alone, especially given that he decried the tendency among his contemporaries to only be capable of “[conceiving] society in terms of state centralization (Kropotkin 2025 [1898], p. 2).” From this perspective, international society must not be reduced to a society of states.

Societies of People. State conduct, under the circumstances explained in Chapter 5.3, may indeed part ways with the interaction of individuals in anarchic associations. However, this assumption does not necessarily imply that the logic of interaction among individuals within and across borders corresponds to a competitive self-help world. Kropotkin, after all, suggests that the Hobbesian struggle certainly does not constitute the natural condition of humanity as such; although, from his perspective, it might be a world produced by the logic of statist policy. Yet seeing the state as a “society atop society” and not as the only focus of association as such also offers another way to think of global politics. Although Kropotkin understands the state as an attempt to monopolize the associative capacities of people, this does not imply - even against the backdrop of centralized state networks - that intersubjective networks of relations among people simply disappear. In this light, it is analytically useful to think of global politics in the absence of a formal common superior on two levels: (1) first, relations within and across SOCIETIES OF STATES; and (2) second, relations within and across SOCIETIES OF PEOPLE.

Striking a similar note, Turner (1998) for instance, has turned to the works of Kropotkin to propose explanations for non-violent and cooperative international political conduct. Alongside states, people - or popular movements – the author suggests, likewise have the capacity to shape and constitute patterns of relations and international institutions. Although these might be appropriated and reconstructed by states, “civil society” in Kropotkin’s work nevertheless plays a foundational role in the formation of mutual relations. Looking back at Kropotkin’s understanding of societal relations and social organization as the outcome of a continuous struggle between the statist and popular tendency, global politics, by analogy, can be thought along similar lines. States are not the only, perhaps not even the most important, actors in shaping relations across borders or constructing social institutions.

The Kantian Fallacy. The tradition of understanding global politics not merely in terms of interstate relations, but in terms of world society or a common community of mankind, is certainly not novel. Returning to Hedley Bull’s (1977) work, the Kantian tradition appears as an important strand of international thought alongside the Hobbesian and Grotian traditions. Proponents of the “Kantian” tradition assume that the essential character of world politics does not lie primarily in conflictual relations among states, but above all in international social relations among individual people. According to the Kantian view, the interests of humanity are convergent, and clashes of interest reflect disputes among the ruling elites. International politics, above all, comes to be perceived as an ideological struggle between those who attempt to advance a universal community of mankind and those who categorically oppose it (Bull 1977, p. 24–25).

Indeed, this suggests substantial similarities between the assumptions of the “Kantian” tradition and Kropotkin’s conception of the dichotomy between elite conflict and popular solidarity. However, simply assuming the existence of an *a priori* universal community of mankind or generally convergent human interests would likewise appear simplistic from a Kropotkian perspective. Seeing regular man as inherently cooperative and elites as intrinsically conflictual would, for Kropotkin, constitute a flawed and one-sided account of human interaction. Indeed, according to Kropotkin (see 1888), if man were cooperative and “good” altogether, if all interests aligned naturally, there would be no power-seeking elites either (Kropotkin 1888, p. 1–3). The establishment of common rules and group identity is above all contingent upon social proximity and repeated interaction. Set against this background, any attempt to theorize conflict on the basis of naturally harmonious human interests would become paradoxical, ultimately leading the very distinction between popular solidarity and elite domination *ad absurdum*.

Hence, if social exchange provides the foundational baseline for establishing common norms and intersubjective meaning, then referring to an *a priori* existing

universal community of mankind appears paradoxical. Societies are established through social interaction; however, solidarity, as Kropotkin suggests, is not automatically extended to everyone. Although his work implies a tendency toward the continuous extension of solidarity, the community of mankind has hitherto existed only as an ideal, not yet as a realized social condition (see Kropotkin 2022 [1902], p. 245). It is certainly not impossible but demands a deliberate and continuous effort to be eventually realized. Hence, instead of locating the essence of global politics in an abstract universal community of mankind, it appears more useful to conceive civil society as an evolving field of social interaction, through which intersubjective meaning, common norms and shared institutions may gradually emerge.

Set against this background, I suggest that it is crucial to differentiate between the popular and statist vector of global politics. State centralization over time strengthens and loosens, empires rise and decline, and this historical movement repeatedly opens the stage for popular agency to shape global interaction. Particularly against the backdrop of increased globalization and transnational interconnectivity (compare Baumann & Stengel 2013) *societies of people*, alongside states, I suggest, must be treated as co-constitutive actors within the international sphere. The crucial question, therefore, becomes: How and to what extent may popular exchange shape global politics?

Foreshadowing the discussion in this thesis, Turner (1998) suggests that in light of the growing emergence of transnational networks the traditional state-centric paradigm of realism needs to be fundamentally reassessed. Drawing on Kropotkin's "mutual aid" ontology – as he calls it, the author proposes that contrary to conflictual or hostile inter-state conduct, peer interaction among people connected across borders is often characterized by voluntary and non-violent forms of association (Turner 1998, p. 25). While Turner (1998) maintains that relations among states certainly continue to play a crucial role both practically and theoretically, he considers it crucial to "[...] investigate how modes of global governance [derived] not only from state-hierarchies but also from the interaction of state-centred hierarchies and institutions with a public sphere of discourse and action [...] (ibid., p. 39)" as a constitutive element in world politics. Thus, while state conduct may still resemble the Hobbesian competition, the public sphere points toward forms of peaceful international governance (ibid., p. 25). To buttress Turner's (1998) observations and situate Kropotkin's political philosophy within a contemporary empirical context, the discussion may proceed by way of illustration.

The anti-apartheid movement. Particularly in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, the conduct of non-state actors, it has been argued, acquires crucial significance (see Charountaki 2018 or Baumann & Stengel 2013). To illustrate this point, the case of the transnational anti-apartheid movement offers valuable

insights into forms of transnational politics resonating with assumptions derived from Kropotkin's political account. Against the backdrop of racial segregation and discrimination, the post-war era witnessed the emergence of numerous solidarity groups and organizations at a distance from the state, which advocated for governments to boycott and sanction South Africa for its apartheid regime. Consisting of multilayered networks of activists, exiles, local solidarity groups and cross-border organizations, this solidarity was framed not merely in terms of national society but as a struggle for human rights across borders and even continents (Thörn 2006, p. 250 & 259).

While most approaches of IR focus mainly on inter-state conduct, Klotz (2002) suggests that the anti-apartheid movement provides tangible evidence of how bottom-up civil transnational movements can shape the normative foundations and political sentiments of wider publics. These movements, however, did not remain confined to civil society, but also diffused into political and bureaucratic establishments. This becomes visible in legislation passed despite the resistance of the Reagan administration in the US, or in unions refusing to import South African goods within the context of transnational popular pressure (Klotz 2002, p. 61-65). Although civil society in this context is not to be seen as the only actor for change, Klotz (2002) suggests that transnational networks served as crucial agents of transformation. By influencing the normative foundation of society and the political establishments, these movements succeeded in diffusing preferences into state leadership, thereby contributing to developments in global politics (ibid., p. 69).

Set against this background, Kropotkin's conception of the popular tendency acquires empirical character. The short example above has illustrated how *societies of people* may exert tangible influence on inter-state conduct. Alongside sovereign political entities, "people" must therefore likewise be treated as a co-constitutive component of international relations. Characterized not by social interaction based on subordination, hierarchy and coercion, societies of people in this context may be understood as a systemic counterweight to traditional state relations. Hence, civil transnationalism must be conceived as a co-existing facet alongside state internationalism.

Although the popular vector should not be considered as a replacement for the state as a central ontological category, the above illustration has demonstrated how popular movements, coined here as societies of people, can contribute to the reconstruction of the normative foundations of inter-state relations. Although popular agency remains limited by state centralization, the monopolization of global affairs and the continuing primacy of states, it represents a further layer necessary to provide a coherent picture of international conduct. What is most important within this

context is to see popular agency not as a separate force detached from state politics, but as operating in continuous interplay with the statist vector.

Good People, Bad States? *Prima facie*, the above discussion may appear to draw a sharp contrast between an inherently benign popular tendency and a conflictual statist vector. However, seeing transnational societies of people as purely benign would likewise produce a naive picture of international conduct detached from Kropotkin's "realistic" conception of human nature. The previous illustration has shown how transnational conduct may serve as a vehicle for global emancipation and the popular restructuring of normative orders; however, to interpret Kropotkin's argument in purely benevolent terms would be to reduce it to a form of political idealism. Turner (1998), indeed, acknowledges this circumstance by stressing that non-state actors operating across borders likewise include terrorist organizations, drug cartels or violent militias. Similarly, large industrial transnational corporations indicate that globalization does not necessarily operate for popular emancipation (Turner 1998, p. 28 & 34). Against this backdrop, transnational societies of people or non-state actors should not be understood merely as emancipatory forces, but likewise as actors that can shape world politics in coercive or violent ways. Keeping this circumstance in mind is crucial for developing a realistic image of interaction and of the possible political consequences of non-state societal arrangements. The distinction between the statist and popular vector should therefore not be understood as a normative dichotomy between evil states and good societies but rather serve as a further analytical category to distinguish between different forms of social organization shaping and reshaping order internationally.

5.5. The Discourse of Anarchy: A Kropotkian Intervention

Overall, Kropotkin's political philosophy provides a sound basis for a coherent reconceptualization of international anarchy based on a non-essentialist and multidimensional model of interaction. Although conceding the inherent flaws of human nature, Kropotkin rejects an inherent predisposition towards power-seeking behavior, selfishness or conflict. Thus, essentialist conceptions of human nature, commonly associated with classical realism and inducing necessarily conflictual behavior, must ultimately be rejected. His account of human nature therefore provides the foundation for a broader conception of behavior in anarchy. While anarchy may indeed be a structure that selects for certain behavior, as Waltz suggested, associated struggle likewise necessitates sociability as a second condition of permanence; hence anarchic structure does not merely select for self-help but likewise for cooperation. Contrary to neo-realist conceptions, cooperation is not merely the outcome of rational utility-maximizing but an inherent feature of anarchic association, which in turn leads to the establishment of social institutions,

norms and customs through repeated interaction. Based on this conception, we can redefine anarchy, pace realist accounts, as an inherently social space.

Set against this background, relations among states ultimately need to be thought of in terms of society. This naturally resonates with the English School, particularly the works of Hedley Bull, who, among other things, emphasized the societal nature of international relations under conditions of formal anarchy, just as Kropotkin highlighted, by analogy, the societal nature of primitive stateless associations. Like Bull, the account derived from Kropotkin allows us to envision the formation of societies among states. Kropotkian anarchic society describes a condition in which conduct is restricted and sanctioned by a common institutional framework, developed through prolonged interaction and gradually internalized as standards of morality. This interaction-based model, however, fundamentally implies that such societies are not universal but depend on social proximity. Hence, while conduct within societies may be shaped by in-group solidarity, relations between various co-existing societies may remain shaped by a predisposition towards conflict; yet this does not imply that society is absent, merely that it is restricted and developed to different degrees. Foreshadowing Wendt, anarchy does not ultimately follow a single logic. Depending on social proximity and external pressures, it may lead to the development of close social networks, cooperation, self-help or conflict.

Introducing the variable of power, defined more broadly than in the common conception of international relations, further modifies this Kropotkian conception of anarchy. Customary arrangements of anarchic organization and societies of states may organically emerge through the interaction of states, leading to association around shared group interests; yet this only represents an initial condition receptive to reconstruction. Anarchy hence may indeed be what states make of it in a Wendtian sense; but the crucial question is who possesses the influence, both materially and immaterially, to shape the conditions under which states operate. While remaining formally anarchic, patterns of hierarchy may nonetheless shape how anarchic association materializes. Closely related to Lake and Donnelly, the international sphere can therefore be conceived as a heterarchic structure, in which anarchy and hierarchy are not mutually exclusive but co-constitutive patterns of order. Kropotkin's conception of power, understood as encompassing both soft and hard faculties, allows us to capture this duality. To illustrate this, I suggest the concepts of organic and artificial institutions: organic institutions describe features of societal arrangements that result from anarchic interaction processes, while artificial institutions refer to arrangements subjected to deliberate reconstruction by more powerful actors.

However, as Chapter III illustrated, approaches that conceptualize international relations in societal or interaction-based terms often remain characterized by state-

centrism. From a Kropotkian perspective, this positioning of the state as the ontological center of international relations must be challenged. Whereas I suggested that there are good analytical reasons to accept the domestic-international analogy based on the conception of the state as a society atop society, Kropotkin's political philosophy likewise provides a comprehensive critique of the state as a unitary actor and of the assumption that anarchy induces the same behavior among all individuals. Although heterarchy remains the underlying condition, foreshadowing foreign policy analysis and disaggregated-state approaches, states appear as an intricate web of interest groups that may push them in one direction or another and thereby determine behavior against the backdrop of anarchy, or heterarchy for that matter. Hence, the notion of the state as a unitary actor must be modified towards the conception of the state as a meta-entity composed of an intricate network of interest groups.

Further developing the criticism of state-centrism and in analogy to the two co-existing tendencies of organization, the statist and popular, Kropotkin's account allows us to distinguish two co-constituting layers of international relations: societies of states and societies of people. While the latter are, in Kropotkin's account, more closely related to emancipatory, voluntary and non-coercive association, Turner (1998) pointed out that Kropotkin's account of human nature does not confirm a simplistic, essentialist conception. Taking this into account, rather than seeing international relations as "good people vs. bad states", the normative structure of the international sphere must be understood as shaped by the complex interplay of these two dimensions.

6. Complex Social Heterarchy:

The Contemporary Relevance of Kropotkin's Thought

“He that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom!”

- J. R. R. Tolkien , *The Fellowship of the Ring*

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, this thesis drew on Kropotkin's political philosophy to reconstruct the concept of anarchy and its associated assumptions about state behaviour. The account derived offered a rich counter-perspective to entrenched mainstream positions, challenging both the alleged logic and consequences of anarchy as well as their archetypical implications for inter-state relations. Despite International Relations drawing from a broad spectrum of political philosophy, anarchism as a theoretical source has been conspicuously neglected within the discipline. Given the central position that theoretical assumptions about anarchy occupy in International Relations, this under-examination represents a significant gap.

6.1. A Theoretical Pioneer: Why Kropotkin Still Matters!

Yet, since Kropotkin worked more than a century ago, one might question the contemporary relevance of his political work. Nevertheless, despite its age, his political philosophy occupies a strong counter-position to many entrenched contemporary assumptions. His thought opens the stage to reconstruct a concept of anarchy that goes beyond rationalist or positivist theories. Kropotkin's work offers a non-essentialist and anti-reductionist approach that rejects idealism while remaining grounded in an interdisciplinary method of scientific inquiry into society. What makes Kropotkin stand out above all is his ability to conceive the world and its mechanisms as a synthetic whole, composed of many separate and individual parts that interact in a symbiotic process of constant exchange and mutual shaping, through which emergent forms of social organization arise that are irreducible to any single logic.

Writing mostly around the turn of the nineteenth century, Kropotkin worked during an era when the social sciences only gradually began to coalesce as an institutionalized scholarly

pursuit (Wittrock 2001, p. 3723). Nevertheless, much of his analysis appears reminiscent of modern challenges to contemporary IR. Much like the proponents of the English School (see Brown 2001, p. 2), Kropotkin steers a middle course between pessimistic realist approaches and utopian vision, allowing us to conceive anarchy as a form of organization compatible with many forms of social relations (compare Buzan 2014, p. 27). Evoking similar ideas to modern sociological institutional approaches (see e.g. Hall & Taylor 1996), Kropotkin likewise strongly emphasized the importance of social institutions as well as their emergence and development. Echoing the sentiment of Lake (1996) and Donnelly (2017), societal arrangements in Kropotkin's work seldom appear as a dyadic binary of mutually exclusive structures of hierarchy or anarchy. Instead, Kropotkin draws a conceptually rich image of dynamic relations standing in constant flux between horizontal and vertical modes of organization. Moreover, challenging the ontological centrality of the state as a unitary rational actor, Kropotkin's political philosophy likewise resonates with modern approaches that disaggregate the components of governance (see i.a. Baumann & Stengel 2013) or foreground civil transnational interaction (see i.a. Turner 1998).

Hence, despite its supposed "antiquity," Kropotkin's body of thought provides a strong supplement to contemporary discourse and offers a rich yet underexamined philosophical foundation. Perhaps the most crucial insight for a reconceptualization based on Kropotkin's political philosophy is that these different theoretical insights should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Instead, they represent a synthetic whole, each constituting a different component of an accumulated outcome. Kropotkin's work largely draws an image of a multidimensional conception of social relations which cannot be reduced to a simple mechanical notion of causality in one particular sphere of investigation. To properly place Kropotkin's political philosophy within the contemporary context, the following section will bring his thought into dialogue with a set of crucial insights derived from an emerging approach: *complex systems theory*.

6.2. Complex Systems Theory: An Appropriate Meta-Framework

The previous section demonstrated that Kropotkin's political philosophy provides a rich multidisciplinary conceptual framework that intersects with crucial topics of contemporary discourse. To translate Kropotkin's political philosophy into contemporary theoretical discourse, Cudworth and Hobden (2010) advance complex systems theory as an appropriate overarching paradigm. Set against the background of Kropotkin's process-oriented, non-essentialist and anti-reductionist approach, COMPLEX SYSTEMS THEORY⁵ offers a valuable meta-framework for organizing his thought

⁵ For clarification: In this thesis, notwithstanding important conceptual nuances, the terms "*complex systems theory*" and "*complexity theory*" are used synonymously.

in a coherent manner. Before applying this framework to Kropotkin, the following section provides a brief overview of its crucial tenets.

Complex Systems Theory. A useful starting point is to consider the theoretical boundaries of complex systems theory and clarify the essential features of a complex system. Rather than constituting a coherent or unitary discipline, complex systems theory represents an emerging field of diverse theoretical approaches. As a set of interconnected and complementary analytical and conceptual tools, it should therefore not be conceived as a single theory to be adopted wholesale, but rather as a diverse conceptual toolbox. These tools, Bousquet & Curtis (2011) suggest, offer a solid foundation for challenging reductionist approaches that theorize “[...] whole systems as no more than the sum of their parts (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 45).” But what then constitutes a complex system?

Mitchell & Newman (2001) explain that complex systems theory investigates organizations or groups composed of many interacting units. These separate units are commonly referred to as “components” or “agents,” whose interaction leads to “[...] large-scale behaviours which are not easily predicted from knowledge only of the behaviour of the individual agents (Mitchell & Newman, 2001, p. 1).” Contrary to dominant neo-realist conceptions of structure, which treat units as self-contained entities largely unaffected by interaction (Cudworth & Hobden 2010, p. 411), complex systems theory emphasizes the role of multifaceted networks of agents, open to their environment while operating across multiple scales (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 51).

To formulate patterns of interaction within such intricate systems, complex systems theory provides an extensive conceptual framework. Among its manifold analytical categories, Bousquet & Curtis (2011) identify four crucial analytical components of complexity theory as particularly vital for the reinterpretation of debates within IR Theory: “[...] NON-LINEARITY, OPEN SYSTEMS, SELF-ORGANIZATION and EMERGENCE (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 46).” Cudworth & Hobden (2010) add the closely related notion of “CO-EVOLUTION (Cudworth & Hobden 2010, p. 403).” Based on Orsini et al.’s (2019) observation, essential insights from network analysis additionally serve as a valuable supplement (compare Orsini et al. 2019, p. 1021). To prepare for my final theoretical integration, the following section will briefly summarize their essential elements.

Non-Linearity. Non-linear systems commonly refer to structures that are characterized by the non-proportional relation of cause and effect. Within non-linear systems effects are disproportionate to causes, meaning that even a small input can produce a large effect and vice versa (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 46). The sum of the whole, hence, cannot be determined by examining any individual element or interaction by itself and then accumulating the parts (Scartozzi 2018, p. 118). This circumstance renders complex systems particularly resistant to analysis and moves

their interpretation away from a quantitative calculation towards a qualitative investigation. Feedback loops constitute key phenomena closely related to non-linearity. Positive feedback means new input is amplified into change, while negative feedback on the other hand serves to counter disturbance and solidify stability (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 46).

Intricate networks, Orsini et al. (2019) contend, represent an ideal manifestation of non-linearity. Within comprehensive networks multiple agents pull the system in different directions simultaneously. Outcomes result not from distinct causal mechanisms but from the convoluted interplay of synchronous interaction. Applying these insights to international relations requires dismissing the traditional metaphor of the international as a chess board but embracing a web of interrelated agents. Drawing from network analysis, Orsini et al. (2019) conceptualize network agents as interdependent in their behaviour, constantly exchanging material and immaterial resources with one another. Prolonged and repeated interaction leads to the creation of structures that constrain the behaviour of each separate unit (Orsini et al. 2019, p. 1021). Complex systems thereby may create complex patterns of behaviour that are periodically stable but likewise prone to change and sudden interruption (Condoirelli 2016, p. 423).

Self-organization. Commonly associated with the distinct concept of complex adaptive systems (CAS), self-organization represents another central conceptual category of complex systems theory (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 47). Referring to the tendency of complex systems to produce order in the absence of a formal orderer, the concept constitutes perhaps the most important analytical component in relation to Kropotkin's political thought. Within complex systems theory, self-organization is to be understood as an interactive process of generating ordered relations without external intervention. Patterns of ordered behavior in complex systems emerge from the interaction of the autonomous individual parts (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 47; Cudworth & Hobden 2010, p. 406). Irrespective of authority, ordered structures emerge through multiple and repeated engagement of autonomous agents (Orsini et al. 2019, p. 1010). The ordering process proceeds spontaneously and may not converge towards a specific predetermined equilibrium in a linear manner. Although such structural conditions may remain stable over certain periods, they are likewise constantly subject to non-static, volatile, and unpredictable dynamics (Condoirelli 2016, p. 423).

Emergence. Closely related to the notion of self-organization is the concept of emergence, which likewise constitutes a cardinal element of complex systems (Orsini et al. 2019, p. 1010). In general, emergence refers to the phenomenon whereby global patterns of behaviour arise from local-level interactions (Scartozzi 2018, p.

118). Systemic features hence emerge bottom-up rather than top-down. While interactions on the most basic level may follow simple rules, the fact that a large number of agents act simultaneously in a myriad of different networks and patterns gives rise to complexity (Waldrop 1993, p. 86).

The essential defining element of emergent behaviour, however, lies in the fact that global-level attributes exhibit features that do not occur within each individual unit. Although attributes at the global level are shaped by the interaction of individual components of the system at the local level, the resulting outcome cannot be explained by the sum of each individual interaction. The agents' individual properties and interactions form the basis for emergent global-level behavioural patterns, but the systemic whole transcends them. The system as a whole, hence, is shaped by features that would remain invisible to reductionist unit observation (Scartozzi 2018, p. 118). Inherent to emergent behaviour is the element of surprise and unpredictability. Outcomes emerging from non-linear interaction are often unexpected and largely irreproducible (Condorelli 2016, p. 429).

Openness. Despite their tendency to produce order within themselves, complex systems remain receptive to their environment. Hence, whereas system features may be explained to a certain degree by reference to factors within the system itself, understanding complex systems likewise requires accounting for their interaction with other systems (Cudworth & Hobden 2010, p. 411). By and large, open systems are hence characterized by "[...] porous and shifting [boundaries], and exchange information and energy with their environment (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 47)." Because they remain open towards structures and processes on various levels, complex systems complicate the identification of distinct connections and couplings, further impeding predictions (Orsini et al. 2019, p. 1010).

Closely related to the concept of openness is the process of **co-evolution**. Open systems interact and exchange information with their environment. Hence, changes in one systemic structure likewise affect developments in coupled systems. Therefore, complex systems co-evolve with their surroundings. This opens up the possibility of introducing the variables of evolution, contingency and time into the analysis of systems (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 47). Particularly with regard to their application to social systems, context and external conditions therefore matter. Societal arrangements seen as complex systems are not entities fixed by an eternal logic, but intrinsically historical entities driven by both their internal condition and external pressures (Condorelli 2016, p. 435). Applying this logic to international systems, complex global structures too need to be defined in terms of historical circumstances and evolution. This stands in strong opposition to common realist

approaches that attribute an eternal consistency to the international realm (Bousquet & Curtis 2011, p. 51).

6.3. Complex Social Heterarchy: A Dynamic Model of International Order

The previous section briefly outlined the crucial analytical tools offered by contemporary complex systems approaches. Set against the background of Kropotkin's anti-essentialist and anti-reductionist understanding of social interaction, his political thought aligns closely with complexity approaches. Having introduced their cardinal tenets, the following section now places the findings from Chapter V under the umbrella of complexity as a meta-framework. In doing so, it develops *COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY* as the final theoretical framework through which anarchy can be reconceptualized on the basis of a contemporary interpretation of Kropotkin's anarchist thought.

Kropotkin & Complexity Theory. At the outset, the concept of self-organization potentially provides the most crucial point of connection between Kropotkin's political philosophy and contemporary approaches to complex systems. The capacity to order relations without external authority lies at the heart of both Kropotkin's work and complex systems theory. Order is seen to emerge spontaneously and in decentralized form as an inevitable result of social interaction. In the light of Kropotkin's assumption about the necessity of sociability, social organization comes to be seen as an evolutionary necessity. In order to survive, social relations must be ordered and constrained to provide the foundation for species success.

The principle of systemic self-organization grounded in Kropotkin's evolutionary ontology is closely linked to the necessity of sociability. In any scenario, humans necessarily associate; and associated interaction eventually leads to the development and formation of societal relations through repeated interaction. From such interaction, norms, customs and institutions emerge, which later develop into a common sense of justice before they are finally internalized as a mutual intersubjective notion of morality. Constraints in behaviour are seen not as externally imposed or deliberately constructed. Nor are they primarily maintained through fear of punishment; rather, they are maintained by the belief that what is done is to a certain extent morally obligatory. Anarchy, above all, is order. However, while societal order may be stable as common morality is internalized, it nevertheless remains sensitive to external pressures and internal reconfiguration. Not being carved in stone, it is constantly open to gradual evolution or sudden disruption.

By and large, however, close social proximity and repeated interaction, hence, form the baseline for societal order based on shared intersubjective morality. Yet essential social proximity also implies that not all actors across an entire system are part of one and the same society. On the contrary, the multiplicity of groups suggests the co-existence of various different societies, which in turn interact with each other in a more limited and distant manner. While solidarity within societies remains strong and based on internalized morality, relations between societies are characterized by limited social engagement and hence less comprehensive social organization. Relations across societies hence function differently than relations within societies. Nevertheless, this does not imply that similar processes are impossible across components with limited interaction. The crucial point is that mutual customs, norms, or institutions remain limited in scope as well as restricted in their degree of internalization.

Simultaneously, self-organization in this context should not be perceived merely as a horizontal - or in normative terms - emancipatory process. Although the initial structure primarily facilitates a horizontal organization that operates independently of patterns of authority, repeated societal interaction likewise gradually promotes the accumulation of separate faculties of power among individuals. Contrary to a social contract (i.e. deliberate submission), vertical structures of organization hence first appear through power asymmetries, which facilitate the reconfiguration of societal relations. Patterns of authority translate into privileged positions through tactical alignment (i.e. elite self-organization), gradually crystallizing into permanent structures of domination. Self-organization therefore must not merely be conceived in terms of anarchic order among sovereign units, but likewise as a structure that allows for the development of hierarchical patterns. Set against the background of self-organization, these conditions are not to be understood as mutually exclusive but as co-constitutive; their interaction produces a heterarchic systemic configuration.

Returning to the international realm, conceiving it as a complex system against the background of Kropotkin's assumptions suggests that order is self-organized through repeated social interaction. In the absence of a common authority, prolonged interplay provides the baseline for establishing order in terms of societal relations. Against this backdrop, it is useful to distinguish between relations among members of the same society and dynamic relations with their broader environment based on social proximity and the degree of internalization. Within societies, conduct is sanctioned by a common conception of right or wrong, by a common commitment to certain practices, close cooperation, or collective sanction against deviation from the societal consensus. Within a society of states, members would associate themselves with the broader interest of the community and restrain their behaviour to ensure

compliance. Across societies, networks of rules or customs would be limited but not necessarily non-existent. Systemic self-organization among distant entities would not entirely disappear beyond the boundaries of established societies but materialize in a more restrictive manner.

However, envisioning the international system as a purely horizontal realm of social interaction among genuinely sovereign entities would likewise represent a simplistic conception of the *status quo*. Despite the absence of a centralized permanent authority, patterns of hierarchy too gradually evolve through the interaction of sovereign units. Institutions and voluntary arrangements - such as international law or alliance frameworks - may emerge from horizontal self-organization; however, as power accumulates, both in soft and hard forms, such institutional frameworks become subject to deliberate reconstruction by more powerful actors. Ideological authority or material superiority, as shown in the illustration of the Warsaw Pact, may allow dominant actors to assert their influence and limit the freedom of choice and action of subordinate entities. The dominant actors within international society hence influence the internal affairs of subordinate states and translate this into hierarchical arrangements regarding external relations.

Having established that order may emerge through self-organization, the concept of non-linearity clarifies why such order does not follow a predetermined path. Unlike mechanistic frameworks, results from social interaction in Kropotkin's account cannot be reduced to a singular proportional logic of cause and effect. Outcomes are above all to be seen as undetermined; every specific input may lead to a range of qualitatively different outputs. Given the simultaneous existence of a general tendency toward associative co-existence with an almost equally important tendency to self-assertion, specific environmental pressures or stimuli may lead to drastically different reconfigurations in social arrangements.

The interpretation of self-assertion itself in Kropotkin's broader political philosophy serves as a cardinal illustration. While on the one hand self-assertion serves as the foundation for the establishment of vertical social organization, on the other hand, it likewise operates as the crucial vehicle for social change and societal transformation. Contrary to linear causal mechanisms, outcomes are embedded within the broader social and historical context and remain intrinsically connected to systemic responses. The concept of feedback loops further helps to illustrate this circumstance. Set against the background of a constant struggle between anarchic and hierarchic modes of organization, patterns of hierarchy evolve through the reconfiguration of social relations. The accumulation of power in turn may produce resistance, which has the capacity either to undermine domination or trigger further repression, effectively reinforcing the initial process.

Applied to international relations, the concept of non-linearity based on Kropotkin's thought allows us to reconstruct anarchy as a *non-deterministic structure*. Contrary to simplistic causal explanations, the absence of a higher point of authority, hence, must not necessarily result in self-help structures among sovereign entities. Yet, simultaneously, despite a general imperative to associate, anarchic structures do not automatically result in harmonious or cooperative relations. Both, in theory, are possible. However, anarchy in general represents a field of interaction, in which the continuous struggle of these tendencies simultaneously pushes the system in both directions. Developments in either direction may become amplified or feedback into countervailing responses.

As Orsini et al. (2019) suggest, network analysis may provide a valuable theoretical framework to further undergird non-linearity assumptions associated with a complex systems approach. Agents in complex systems appear as independent sovereign units but through prolonged and continuous interaction they create patterns of behaviour and stability. Agents adapt to the conditions, while simultaneously being shaped by the conditions they operate in. Periodic forms of "harmony" or "equilibria" emerge in these kinds of configurations but are subject to constant evolution and change. Relations that are not constantly reconfigured in response to a changing environment risk systemic disruption.

This logic, derived from contemporary approaches to complexity theory, appears as a foundational element in Kropotkin's philosophical work. Kropotkin assumes a certain harmony in nature, while treating cataclysms as exceptions of natural configurations: "If everything and every living creature finds itself more or less adapted to the conditions under which it lives, [...]" he suggests, "[...] it is because they are products of this very condition (Kropotkin 1896, p. 6)." Harmony is assumed to be established through the interplay of construction and destruction, which from time to time creates a certain equilibrium. However, such stable conditions remain fragile and temporary in nature. Not being produced by any divine will or the result of laws imposed by any single active force, harmony finds itself in constant flux, subject to continuous change. If a system finds itself in a condition of harmony, perhaps paradoxically, Kropotkin asserts that it needs to be constantly modified in order to maintain that equilibrium (ibid., p. 7).

Complementing the non-linear conception of international anarchy with the assumption of complex temporary equilibria permits us to further modify the concept. Prolonged and repeated interaction among the various forces pulling the system along various vectors, from time to time, may result in periodic stable arrangements. Such a temporary equilibrium, however, necessarily must remain subject to constant change and rearrangement in order to adapt to changing

conditions and be maintained. Whether this equilibrium is based on relations among sovereign equals or on hierarchical structures dominated by powerful actors remains secondary at this point. Having arrived at a point of systemic stability, actors within the framework, hence, must constantly reconfigure their external (as well as internal) relations in order to maintain a *status quo*. The breakdown of systemic stability or, in the taxonomy of IR, a balance of power, would therefore not result from change as such, but from a lack thereof. Overarching systemic reconfiguration may result from the actors' inability to adapt, as was the case in Kropotkin's account of the submission of the peaceful barbarians, caused by their habits of indolence and routine (Kropotkin 1886, p. 7).

Projecting these insights onto the discourse of international affairs permits us to reconceive the international realm as inherently dynamic. Rather than focusing primarily on stability and balance, the center of attention must shift to factors of change, mobility and adaptation. The causes of systemic disruption, in this sense, cannot be resolved merely by asking "what happened?", but must also be approached by asking "what failed to happen?" Conceiving movement as the intrinsic feature of a constantly evolving structure draws attention to maladaptation: systemic breakdown emerges not simply from change itself, but from the inability of actors and institutions to adjust to system-wide transformation.

To understand how patterns of behavior in non-linear structures come into being, the concept of emergence provides a crucial conceptual intervention. Interaction among independent actors, in Kropotkin's account, forms the baseline for the development of system-level customary properties that cannot simply be reduced to individual acts or intentions. Take, for example, the development of morality in a primitive stateless society. On its own, every single individual responds to environmental pressures compelling them to compete and associate with their fellow peers. On its own, each separate individual may possess impulses, tendencies or interests. Through prolonged interaction, proximity and collective survival, individuals develop shared practices and patterns of behavior, which later transform into a mutual sense of justice and eventually become internalized as a common sense of morality. Hence, morality does not exist *ex ante* in each individual (given Kropotkin's strong rejection of original morality, this would constitute a fundamental paradox); rather, it emerges from the associated whole as repeated interaction generates shared expectations, obligations and restraints. A closer look at the restraints imposed by identification with the wider community shows that individuals may even be compelled to act against their immediate self-interest or purely self-assertive impulses. Morality is therefore emergent because it is not the property of any isolated individual, but a systemic feature of association itself.

Likewise, the state - or hierarchical organization in general - in Kropotkin's account may be conceived as an emergent structure. Arising from local patterns of interaction, individual power accumulation allows specific individuals or segments of society to ascend to dominant positions. However, only through tactical alignment can authority be established permanently. Here again, the ultimate structure - a permanent authority, the state - exhibits features that are not reducible to the properties of any individual influential segment. Constituting a society atop society, its norms and arrangements, its networks of mutual insurance, emerge and develop a distinct self-reproducing logic. The state, in this sense, is an emergent entity that transcends the sum of power relations from which it arose.

Applying this logic to the discourse of international relations permits us to conceive global arrangements as emergent properties. Interaction among sovereign entities facilitates the development of shared customary norms, common practice and institutional frameworks - such as diplomatic conduct, rules of conflict, the legitimate use of force, the retention of a balance of power, collective sanction or alliances, just to name a few. These arrangements are not properties of any separate unit but emerge as novel components on the systemic level. Invisible in unit-level interaction, these faculties only emerge as system-level properties. Seeing these emergent properties first as organic institutions - as I have referred to them - with a self-reproducing logic, from Kropotkin's perspective they gradually acquire morally obligatory status. Constraints may be imposed even on powerful actors, yet institutions remain sensitive to external pressure. Over time they may lose their original meaning through consecutive processes of reconstruction by dominant actors. An organic institution such as "rules for the legitimate use of force" emerges through interaction, taking different forms depending on historical context - in the contemporary system, for instance, taking the shape of "self-defense." From this point, power asymmetries allow dominant actors, through artificial reconstruction, to turn it into a tool serving individual interests. For instance, wielding a monopoly over interpretation, dominant actors may define cases that justify exemption, define cases for intervention, and interpret when a certain threshold is met.

So far, this analysis has focused on how self-organizing order within the international realm can be conceived based on non-linear emergent behavior. In other words, it has examined how structural organization can be explained by reference to internal systemic interaction itself. Yet, as Chapter V has illustrated and the insights from complex systems theory confirm, a coherent picture requires placing the international realm in relation to co-existing systems. Contrary to common mainstream conceptions that theorize "the international" as a self-sustaining entity detached from historical conditions and the individual properties of its components,

an open-system perspective foregrounds three dimensions vital for understanding systemic development: (1) the composition of its units; (2) its co-existence with non-state transnational systems; and (3) the broader historical environment at any given point. Against this backdrop, the notion of co-evolution provides a further valuable conceptual category to account for systemic change and emerging patterns of behavior.

Contrary to common assumptions of the state as a unitary actor possessing a uniform set of interests, it is necessary to conceptualize the state as an intricate web of interest groups, whose ultimate pattern of behavior emerges from the interplay of these multifaceted forces. Seeing the state itself as a complex system further helps to explain why state conduct cannot be derived from the international structure alone. What appears as uniform national interest must likewise be reconstructed as an emergent result of various intricate interactions of politically relevant interest groups, elites, and, in contemporary systems, the broader population as well. Developments within the international system are hence closely related to the development of their constitutive elements. Co-evolution in this context provides the foundation for explaining how system-level interaction affects unit-level composition and *vice versa*. Conflict, for instance, could give rise and legitimacy to strong military classes, which in turn gain stronger influence in shaping preference formation and subsequently translate their particular interests into relations within the system.

Second, association and interaction within and across borders must be understood not merely in terms of relations between sovereign political entities or between states and their populations. While repeated interaction may produce self-organization among states through common practice and shared meaning, the same must be applicable to societies of people. Particularly amidst accelerating global interconnection, the restricting force of geographical remoteness becomes increasingly diminished. The illustration of the anti-apartheid movement has shown how such transnational movements can impact the normative formation of state preferences, which in turn translate into the transformation of systemic interaction. In this sense, popular transnational association forms a co-existing field of interaction that both shapes and is shaped by the society of states. In this context, however, it is likewise crucial not to associate transnational popular agency solely with emancipatory interaction.

Lastly, it is crucial to account for broader environmental or historical conditions. For instance, Kropotkin mentions the advent of capitalism and global trade as a foundational constitutive process reshaping not only the internal composition of the modern state, but likewise its preferences and behavior. Medieval feuds gave way to industrial competition, and economic preponderance on world markets turned into

the principal motive of inter-state conflict. This can be traced back to profound changes in the internal composition of the state, where financial classes gradually emerged in the late medieval era and consolidated their position within the political elite. The point here is not about capitalism as such, but about how the international system responds to technological, economic and ideological change. Such global developments are not neutral external conditions that leave the model of interaction among sovereign entities unaffected, as realist conceptions often assume. On the contrary, broader environmental changes constitute crucial elements in the development of the constitutive factors of international order.

Applying the insights from open systems to the international realm allows us to move beyond the notion of a separate, self-contained international domain. On the contrary, the "international" set against this backdrop must ultimately be thought in reference to the "domestic," the "individual" as well as the broader historical component. Notwithstanding the systemic tendency to self-organization, the interplay of domestic networks, transnational linkages and "environmental" context constitutes the baseline for interaction in a global meta-system; accounting for these interconnections is of pivotal importance. Special attention must be paid to the co-evolution of these different systemic levels. Sensitive to change in other domains, separate systems develop reciprocally, which in turn triggers transformation in every sphere that feeds back into the initial system. Consider, as one of many possible illustrations, conflict between two sovereign entities: it not only causes reconfiguration of international structure as such, but may also lead to resentment among the population, later feeding back into the composition of the state, producing forces that vow to undo these changes, which in turn feeds back into systemic relations, perpetuating hostility. Hence, instead of breaking international relations down to one of these components, they need to be addressed as a synthetic whole.

Complex Social Heterarchy. Against this background, the preceding analysis can now be drawn together into a final conceptual framework. Synthesizing the insights from Kropotkin's political philosophy from Chapters IV and V under the umbrella of the analytical categories derived from complex systems theory allows us to draw a coherent and dynamic concept of systemic structure. Set against this background, I propose the concept of COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY (abbreviated as CSH) as an appropriate framework for conceptualizing the international realm. Within this context, *social heterarchy* defines the structural foundation as a system organized through repeated social interaction centered around multiple vectors of power, which, in the absence of formal centralized authority, nevertheless, generates patterns of vertical influence. Meanwhile, *complexity* defines and explains the

underlying mechanisms and processes through which interaction and organization take shape.

The system is SOCIAL because, pace traditional realist conceptions, order emerges naturally and necessarily through repeated interaction also in the absence of centralized foci of authority. Unlike mechanistic equilibria of strength, complex social heterarchy describes relations in societal terms, where behavioral restraint is ultimately based on intersubjective conceptions of morality. The international realm is, hence, not merely a domain of self-help, although inter-unit competition represents one constitutive tendency, but a relational field where actors are constantly shaped and reshaped by their associative engagement.

The system is also HETERARCHIC because, despite emerging from an initial state of primary anarchy, patterns of authority gradually arise, although they do not take the form of a fully institutionalized configuration. Power asymmetries allow dominant actors to translate institutional dominance, ideological authority or material capabilities into the ability to restructure conditions under which their subordinate counterparts operate. Yet, simultaneously, the absence of formalized central authority allows anarchic association, resistance and self-organization to coexist at any time, albeit to a degree determined by historical and systemic conditions.

Finally, the system is likewise COMPLEX because its constitutive mechanisms and processes cannot be reduced to reductionist conceptions of individual autonomous units. Systemic configurations appear spontaneously through non-linear and emergent interaction of an intricate web of interacting agents. Despite its inherent tendency to self-organize, the international realm likewise must be thought in reference to co-existing systems as well as with regard to the intricacies of their constitutive components. Constantly exchanging information and energy with its surroundings, systemic developments must be set against the context of state composition, popular transnational networks and, finally, the broader historical context.

COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY, hence, offers a multidimensional and interdisciplinary move beyond dyadic binaries of anarchy and hierarchy, state and society, structure and agency or cooperation and conflict. While not denying the importance of sovereign political entities, power and coercion, it situates these faculties within a wider social field of necessary association, interest networks and transnational movements. Instead of seeing these faculties as mutually exclusive, *CSH* provides a conceptual umbrella to envision them as co-evolving constitutive elements of a broader synthetic whole. Against reductionist conceptions, it hence offers an anti-essentialist and dynamic conception of an evolving systemic structure.

7. Where Are We Now?

Reflections on the Reconfiguration of Global Order

“Let us however make sure we understand one another — what order are we talking about?”

- Petr Kropotkin, *On Order*

HAVING ESTABLISHED COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY as a dynamic and multilayered conception of the structural nature of the international system, the following part inquires how CSH can contribute to the contemporary discourse on “international order.” The paragraphs below will begin by investigating dominant academic narratives shaping the discourse on the international order and explain how the insights from CSH relate to widespread assumptions, such as “the end of the liberal international order,” “the rise of multipolarity” or “the return of geopolitics.” Setting these narratives into dialogue with the complexity model grounded in Kropotkin’s thought permits us to arrive at a nuanced and dynamic conception of the global order. Consequently, this chapter aims not only to develop a coherent picture of the contemporary status quo but also to investigate the processes that facilitated systemic reconfiguration. In other words, the following analysis will not merely treat the question of where we are now, but also seek to resolve the puzzle of “How did we get there?”

On Order. Before delving into the subject matter, it is crucial to first define what is meant by international or global order. Although this question may appear straightforward, the answer is in fact profoundly intricate. Duncombe & Dunne (2018) argue that the concept of the international order - despite being omnipresent in contemporary discourse – represents a rather vague and ambiguous term, clearly lacking a common definition (Duncombe & Dunne 2018, p. 26). At the most basic level, Lake et al. (2021) explain, order refers to any structured pattern of relations that may emerge either (a) spontaneously (as in Waltz’s account of balancing) or (b) constitute deliberately constructed and enforced rule-based arrangements (Lake et al. 2021, p. 228). “International,” in this context, suggests that such order concerns the relations among states; however, this does not necessarily imply that every unit in the international system is part of the order as such (Mearsheimer 2019, p. 10).

Hence, although carrying a strong connotation of universality, international order does not imply universal application.

Beyond realist conceptions, the concept of international order often carries a strong constitutive normativity (Barnett 2021, p. 4; Homolar & Turner 2024, p. 206), often being used synonymously for structured patterns of interaction based on a common commitment to shared rules, laws and institutions (Barnett 2021, p. 4), directed at a specific social purpose. Developing the concept further, the notion of world order or global order, in this context, represents a broader analytical category expanding its scope to the wider international sphere (Duncombe & Dunne 2018, p. 26; Kacowicz 2023, p. 340). Hence, while international order may be limited to a certain group of states, world order by contrast implies a broader claim to universality.

Certain aspects of these definitions clearly resonate with the analytical assumptions derived from CSH; yet, synthesizing the insights of complex social heterarchy allows us to construct a more nuanced and dynamic concept of order. From the perspective of complex social heterarchy, order should above all be conceived as the result of interaction-based societal arrangements. Similarly to common definitions, it retains a strong connotation of normative order, based on intersubjective meaning, norms and institutions. However, set against the emphasis on societal association, the term "international order" appears somewhat misplaced within CSH taxonomy. Rather than speaking of an abstract concept of order, CSH renders the phenomenon more tangible in terms of society, that is, social arrangements in which a certain degree of order is implicit. "International" in this sense refers to arrangements among a limited number of states. Global order, by contrast, would refer to a more encompassing structure of relations among societies. As order can emerge only as the result of repeated engagement, notions of universality remain theoretically conceivable, yet practically intricate, since they depend on a common consensus regarding relations among societies that are, in practice, often limited in scope and reach.

Contemporary Narratives. Against the background of profound systemic reconfiguration (Duncombe & Dunne 2018, p. 25), the recent discourse on contemporary international order has centered around several recurring narratives. The first one addressed in this chapter concerns the assumption that the liberal international order has come to an end. The Liberal International Order (LIO) refers to the US-led institutional order established among the democratic nations in the post-war period. It is often assumed to have long provided a global framework of stability based on the principles of economic cooperation, multilateralism and democratic governance (Ikenberry 2018, p. 7). While this institutional framework is said to have structured relations among states since the end of World War II, the recent rise of non-conforming great powers, the global diffusion of illiberal political forces and

above all the retreat of Washington from its position as the liberal hegemon have led observers to diagnose its demise (Duncombe & Dunne 2018, p. 25).

Under these conditions, the emergence of competing geopolitical centers led scholars to further diagnose a shift away from post-Cold War American unipolarity towards an emerging multipolar world (Peters 2023, p. 1653). The ascent of challengers competent to enter into competition with the United States militarily and, in the case of China, also economically (Mearsheimer 2019, p. 8 & 42), is often associated with profound transformation in the nature of international conduct. Against this backdrop, researchers suggest an amplification of global power struggle, leading the international sphere to be once again characterized by competition and conflict; some have advanced the argument that the world is witnessing a “return of geopolitics.” According to this narrative, reality once again appears to confirm that world politics is, after all, shaped by *raison d'état*; accepting this eternal fact in turn includes the return of thinking in terms of traditional spheres of influence, zero-sum interaction and settlement of disputes through military force (Melville 2018, p. 97-98).

The End of the Liberal International Order? The first point of intervention for CSH into the discourse concerns the LIO's often implied universality.⁶ In other words: how international is or was the liberal international order? Ikenberry (2018) argues that, although initially built within its own political bloc, the end of the Cold War effectively globalized the principles of the LIO. While originally encompassing only the Western bloc and other select industrialized nations such as Japan, it soon spread across all continents and diffused deep into the former Soviet bloc (Ikenberry 2018, p. 7 & 9-10).

Setting these assumptions against the background of CSH immediately raises a fundamental objection. Grounding relational patterns on a model based on social interaction, emphasizing repeated engagement as the foundation of durable intersubjective meaning, it appears questionable whether a regional order growing from inside a political sphere can claim global character at will. Indeed, international order and certainly world order in this context may invoke a misleading connotation. While the end of the Cold War certainly unlocked the gates to wider institutional participation, CSH fundamentally challenges the assumption that opening an institutional framework means that new participants likewise acquire the same degree of intersubjective meaning. It appears more analytically valuable to conceive of the liberal international order as a regional society – which I will hereafter refer to

⁶ Indeed, Ikenberry (2018b) as well as Duncombe and Dunne (2018) at times refer to a liberal “*world order*,” which indicates a broader more universal scope.

as the TRANSATLANTIC SOCIETY⁷ – with substantial international ambitions in the post-Cold War era.

In a similar vein, Ikenberry (2018) likewise concedes that following its globalization relations within the LIO varied in depth among the original and new members. Throughout the Cold War, the LIO for its members functioned as a full-fledged security community bound together by a shared sense of social purpose. However, the swift internationalization after 1989 eroded its strong normative foundations (Ikenberry 2018, p. 10 & 18). From the perspective of CSH, this is to a certain degree expected. If patterns of relations are understood in social-interactional terms, then universalism is theoretically possible, but practically intricate. It can emerge only through a gradual process of social inclusion, and certainly not as an immediate consequence of systemic disruption. While institutional participation is not excluded, it does not imply that its customs and norms were immediately internalized.

Introducing the variable of external reconfiguration allows us to further theorize on the distinction between organic and artificially reconstructed social institutional frameworks. Drawing on CSH's conception of power asymmetries as the permissive condition for artificial reconstruction of normative orders, it becomes possible to further analyse the evolution of the Transatlantic Society and situate its assumed erosion in the wider context of its globalization process. Conceiving the LIO as a society among states that initially emerged organically, CSH likewise informs an inquiry into its artificial reconstruction. Rather than conceiving it as a neutral commonwealth, it is therefore necessary to inquire how it was reformulated through mechanisms of heterarchic organization.

Echoing these mechanisms, Homolar & Turner (2024) suggest that Washington's hegemonic position allowed the United States to infuse the institutional order with a legitimizing narrative based on supporting western-centric conceptions of international order. Relatedly, recent decades witnessed the emergence of the notion of a "rules-based order (RBO)" closely related to post-Cold War liberal internationalism. Serving as a narrative anchor, the authors further suggest that the LIO was effectively rebranded as the RBO, which came to represent a tool to provide legitimacy for the status quo. Although using a novel terminology, the RBO reproduces the LIO's positioning within the political discourse as the foundation of prosperity and peace in the post-war era (Homolar & Turner 2024, p. 206-207 & 219).

However, while relations among members of the Transatlantic Society may have been understood synonymously with liberal internationalism, critics, particularly non-Western scholars, suggest that the RBO became a discursive tool for reshaping

⁷ Hereafter, I will apply the term "Transatlantic Society" as a concept based on CSH and as an analytical equivalent to what the literature commonly describes as the "liberal international order (LIO)" and its associated "rules-based international order (RBO)."

multilateral frameworks according to the interests of the Global North. Rather than representing multilateral internationalism practiced within the Western bloc, they suggest that the LIO transitioned into the RBO. In doing so, it gradually evolved into an alternative to international law, reframing international norms through a hegemonic interpretation by the United States and its allies (Dugard 2023, p. 226). Blurring the distinction between legal norms and unwritten rules, He (2023) argues from a Chinese perspective that the RBO functions as a narrative tool to reconstruct obligations in a fluid and arbitrary manner (He 2023, p. 1010-1011). While built on the legitimacy and narrative of the LIO (see Homolar & Turner 2024), the RBO increasingly came to express the geopolitical interest of the western bloc in the post-Cold War era (compare Zollinger-Fujii, 2021, p. 5).

From the perspective of CSH, such developments can be conceived in terms of heterarchic configuration. Although order may initially have grown through repeated interaction, institutional configuration is likewise subject to substantial restructuring through deliberate intervention. In other words, an organic institution may transform into an increasingly artificial construct. With regard to the Transatlantic Society, a naturally grown institutional framework may, through the process of its internationalization, become reconfigured to reflect the interest of powerful actors. Introducing the variable of power, the order increasingly altered its initial character beyond “anarchic” interaction, as patterns of hierarchy redevelop. What is particularly interesting from the perspective of CSH is, however, not only the observation of how this transformation emerges, but also how heterarchic reconstruction as an input feeds back into the system and how the system responds through restructuring.

To put it differently, what makes such heterarchical structures analytically significant is not only the observation of their structure and functioning but, most importantly, the processes they set into motion. CSH allows us to conceive of heterarchic restructuring as an input for non-linear rearrangement of the international system. Such artificial input may lead to divergent and potentially contradictory outcomes. The concept of feedback loops here serves as a pivotal analytical category to make sense of system-level reconfigurations.

Observing the development of the Transatlantic Society against the background of non-linear configuration, the systemic processes exhibit illustrations of both positive and negative feedback loops, simultaneously pulling the system in opposite directions. In this context, (a) negative feedback loops, referring to the stabilization of equilibrium through input, illustrate how increased expansion of the LIO or associated RBO facilitates closer association and stability of order. This, for instance, resonates with observations of Homolar & Turner (2024), who suggest that among self-identified members of a rules-based international order, violations of self-formulated rules and

norms elsewhere may reinforce the shared sense of purpose, facilitate increased solidarity and lead to overall closer association (Homolar & Turner 2024, p. 220).

At the same time, this process may have the opposite effect. In this context, (b) positive feedback, meaning that input induces change, captures what Börzel & Zürn (2021) observed. The authors suggest that the increased intrusiveness of the LIO subsequent to its globalization, alongside the expansion of its political agenda beyond traditional multilateralism, resulted in increased contestation and gradual resentment by non-Western actors. In this context, the authors point particularly at the visibility of crisis events such as the interventions in Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011), which resulted in increased opposition to the broader notion of liberal internationalism and its institutions among the actors outside the thick transatlantic layer (i.e. the initial close society), for they perceived it as securing mostly Western core-group interests (Börzel & Zürn 2021, p. 288 & 294-296).

Hence, once set in motion, heterarchic systems modelled through CSH do not simply reproduce themselves. Rather, reconfiguration leads to non-linear modification in various directions. Input may produce closer association but likewise reinforce resistance or generate counterreaction and eventually lead to profound reconfiguration of societal arrangements. Assuming self-organization, multiple actors pulling in different directions subsequently shift the system towards a new equilibrium. This circumstance will become evident in the next part, which investigates the broader impact of normative contestation on the systemic reconfiguration of the Transatlantic Society.

A Multipolar World? Set against this background, CSH illuminates how contestation of heterarchic order can trigger fundamental modification in systemic equilibrium. In the case of contestation of the LIO or RBO, Börzel & Zürn (2021) associate this process with the emergence of revisionism in Russia and increased opposition from an ascending China (Börzel & Zürn 2021, p. 283). These illiberal actors subsequently came to play a foundational role in the reconfiguration of the system. While Mearsheimer (2019) assumes realist-informed material considerations behind this normative rejection and the resulting pursuit of an alternative international order (Mearsheimer 2019, p. 43), CSH allows us to draw a more nuanced picture beyond mere material capabilities.

CSH permits us to perceive opposition to US dominance as a form of associated struggle based on a shared perception of common external systemic pressure - whether the pressure is real or likewise constructed by a challenger exercising power over narratives remains secondary at this point. The analytical significance here lies in the resulting social interaction which further translates into intersubjective meaning eventually ensuing in new societal arrangements featuring distinct emerging properties. Reflecting these conditions, it is often assumed that we are witnessing the

formation of a new international order, a new international society in CSH terms, among a certain group of non-Western states under China's leadership (Kacowicz 2023, p. 346). In practical terms, this is reflected in the contestation of "rules-based" internationalism by actors of the Political South. Within this context, Schirm (2023) suggests an "[...] institutional build-up of an alternative Southern World Order (Schirm 2023, p. 55)." While the "Political West" continues to represent a system emphasizing democracy, market economy, universal human rights and accountability to norms that may legitimize intervention, the contestation of these norms gave rise to a counter-movement with an identifiable group interest. That interest is based on the prioritization of "[...] national autonomy, sovereignty, non-intervention in internal affairs and state-permeated economies (ibid., p. 68)."

Reflecting on present developments, Kacowicz (2023) argues that the current reconfiguration is best conceived not as a hegemonic transition between a universal liberal or authoritarian world order, but rather as a systemic restructuring towards two co-existing entities (Kacowicz 2023, p. 346). Similarly, rather than thinking of contesting global orders, CSH understands this as two separate societies of states centered around different and potentially opposing patterns of norms and behavior. With regard to contemporary developments, I suggest two societal arrangements as particularly significant: (1) First, the TRANSATLANTIC SOCIETY resting on a common consensus on rules-based internationalism; and (2) second the NEO-WESTPHALIAN SOCIETY⁸ rooted in principles of "traditional" interstate conduct such as sovereignty, balance of power, spheres of influence and non-interference.

In contemporary discourse this transformation is reflected through the conception of a shift towards systemic multipolarity (see Peters 2023, p. 1653). While realists commonly conceive this multipolar rearrangement above all in material terms, as a world of multiple military-economic centers (Mearsheimer 2019, p. 8), CSH allows us to interpret the transition in terms of societal rearrangements. Rather than merely describing multiple centers of hard power, CSH permits us to conceive multipolarity in terms of a new systemic formation of multiple societies of states, each structured around distinct sets of intersubjective meaning, social institutions and internal stratification.

The latter property, internal stratification, is particularly important both with respect to the recent discourse as well as the theoretical framework of CSH. Indeed, some scholars understand multipolarity as a discursive tool of China, utilized to mold international association to reflect Beijing's interest in the international sphere (Bekkevold 2023, para. 13-16). Hence, while the idea of multipolarity itself may appear as an emergent property arising from repeated interaction grounded in

⁸ I developed the concept of NEO-WESTPHALIAN SOCIETY in analogy to Stephen Hopgood's chapter the "Neo-Westphalian World" (see Hopgood 2013, *The Endtimes of Human Rights*).

collective contestation of Western dominated rules-based narratives, it likewise may become subject to artificial reconstruction based on power over discourse.

Keeping Up with the Americans. Having redefined multipolarity in terms of multi-society formation, the question then turns back to the internal position of the former hegemonic centre itself. Previously, I have defined the post-Cold War period in terms of a systemic shift towards a multi-societal structure encompassing (a) the Transatlantic Society co-existing with (b) the emerging Neo-Westphalian Society; however, against the backdrop of recent political transformation occurring in the United States, it becomes questionable whether this classification today can still plausibly be considered appropriate. In the light of fundamental domestic reconfiguration and the resulting diametrical changes in foreign policy, one must ask: where among these societal agglomerations does Washington stand?

Washington's resignation from its former position as liberal hegemon and its gradual abandonment of liberal values, with respect to domestic and foreign policy, raise the question of whether a Transatlantic Society based on close relations, institutional frameworks and shared conceptions of norms still persists. A debate arises on whether the consensus of the so-called "free world" has truly come to an end or whether it is merely undergoing a phase of profound reconfiguration. From a perspective of CSH this is difficult to predict, particularly given the intricate network of interaction that may reconfigure societal arrangements in a post-Trump era. Yet, the more immediate analytical question is whether CSH can account for this change. In other words, can CSH explain Trumpian foreign policy emphasizing neo-Westphalian sovereignty-first doctrine (Gandawa et al. 2026, p. 2002) and even sharing explicit commitments to a multipolar world (compare SecState M. Rubio quoted in Parsi 2025, para. 2).

Some scholars interpret the recent developments as a confirmation of realist assumptions of world politics, above all their emphasis on the enduring primacy of national interest, power and security (see Godwin & Kia 2025, p. 258). However, from the standpoint of CSH, this interpretation has to be considered incomplete. So far this chapter only considered the international sphere as a self-organizing system in reference to itself based on the systemic logic of social heterarchy alongside CSH's complexity mechanisms. The period of pivotal reconfiguration of world order was thus interpreted through perceived external pressure facilitating the association of states around opposing sets of intersubjective norms, moving the world towards a new social equilibrium. However, in Chapter VI I likewise emphasized that merely focusing on intra-systemic developments inevitably captures only one component of a larger process. Hence, to proceed with the discussion, I suggest it is vital to draw from an analytical category not yet discussed: systemic openness.

Despite the tendency of complex systems to self-organize, CSH understands development in systemic configuration as a matter of referencing other systems as well as the broader systemic context. Against the backdrop of the theoretical approach developed in chapter V and VI, three broader layers need to be considered: (a) wider historical context, (b) transnational societies of people; and (c) compositions of the system's constitutive agents. These layers in turn need to be conceived as co-constitutive structures, where developments in one feed back into the others. Systems thus co-evolve and constantly exchange information, which may accelerate or slow down change.

Lake (2026) theorizes the erosion of the LIO in a way that closely resembles this feedback mechanism. The author suggests that the very success of the LIO contributed to dynamics which eventually led to its decline. Lake (2026) suggests that increased globalization fueled by the liberal project ultimately entailed domestic consequences (e.g. trade liberalization facilitated increased inequality) which translated into political realignment towards populist forces and reinforced already existing opposition to the normative structure (Lake 2026, p. 6). This set the stage for populist forces to move to power and reconfigure state composition, thereby transforming state preferences. The crucial point here is that they not only contest the established order but likewise associate globally to promote alternative orders (compare Wajner et al. 2024, p. 1026).

Within this context, the inception of new technologies likewise produces new configurations of domestic interaction. Set against this background, Fuchs (2026) explains how the alignment of immediate interests of influential tech-corporations with the political agenda of populist forces further accelerated institutional retreat (Fuchs 2026, p. 2 & 36). Particularly patterns of co-dependence⁹ in this context may entail reconfiguration of state composition and accumulated domestic interests, which then translate into reformation of national interest and system-level patterns of behavior.

In light of this, CSH offers an analytical toolkit to investigate how these forces operate and theorize how intricate interplay among manifold agents and layers – Globalization, Technology, popular resentment, elite interests and transnational networks – co-evolve. This complex interaction adds another layer to a coherent understanding of Washington's retreat from its position as liberal hegemon. However, the discussion above captures only one facet of a wider complex multi-dimensional interaction and the co-evolution of domains. This process may likewise feature potential counter-reactions, including also forms of non-coercive, voluntary association pursuing emancipatory objectives beyond borders. Since the outcome

⁹ see Chapter 5.3. of this thesis for further reference

remains the result of an intricate multidimensional interaction, I have to concede that there is insufficient space here to give a full account of all these developments.

The Revival of Realpolitik? Set against this background, the erosion of the Transatlantic Society, the rise of multipolarity, and the retreat of the USA from its role as the liberal hegemon, contemporary discourse has frequently diagnosed this systemic transformation to represent a “Return to Geopolitics.” What is meant by this is the increasing abandonment of multilateralism and its replacement by “traditional” approaches of power-politics, in which force again plays a fundamental role (Melville 2018, p. 97). From the perspective of CSH, this may be held partially true, in the sense that a stronger disposition to rely on coercive mechanisms is indeed observable. However, CSH nonetheless contends that it solely reflects one component of interaction, and not a system-wide property.

CSH emphasizes how non-linear interaction grounded in heterarchical organization can produce both cooperation and conflict. Within the context of a “multi-societal world” increased polarization and contradictory sets of behavior patterns rooted in different conceptions of norms shape the broader dynamics of international order. In other words, relations across societies may indeed be characterized increasingly by conflict or competition. In this sense, such interaction may come to resemble realist assumptions of self-help systems operating according to zero-sum logic.

However, between actors within society sharing a set of internalized morality, common practices and a collective identification group, cooperation remains a normal mode of action. The Russo-Ukrainian war serves as a cardinal illustration of both logics operating at the same time and reinforcing patterns of behavior in a non-linear manner. To be sure, relations between liberal and neo-Westphalian societies have become increasingly tense. However, contrary to a “Return of Geopolitics” on the system-level, relations among European actors exhibit exactly the opposite effect. Within Europe as such Handler (2022) asserts, one can instead observe an expansion of solidarity, a reinforcement of social bonds, and even an acceleration in the development of a shared group identity (Handler 2022, p. 10). Hence, while the common normative denominator of global institutions increasingly fragments between societies, relations within these societies may, on the contrary, exhibit increasing levels of societal cohesion. Drawing on CSH, modern global order is hence best understood as a differentiated multi-societal reconfiguration rather than a simple “return to geopolitics.” Against this backdrop, coercive competition across societies coexists with intensified intra-societal cohesion.

8. Conclusion

TO CONCLUDE, this thesis has provided a coherent reconceptualization of international anarchy grounded in the anarchist political philosophy of Petr Alekseyevich Kropotkin. While anarchy today represents the conceptual nucleus of contemporary mainstream IR, its meaning, associated implications and ontological primacy remain deeply contested. Yet despite the discipline's extensive engagement with political-philosophical sources, anarchism has rarely been utilized as a serious theoretical source to reconsider paradigmatic assumptions. On this basis, I advanced Kropotkin's political thought as a powerful counter-position to dominant contemporary approaches. Grounding his political analysis in an anti-essentialist, anti-reductionist and multidisciplinary investigation of human association, Kropotkin's work provides a pivotal foundation for moving beyond simplistic notions of international anarchy.

Without reverting to deterministic assumptions, Kropotkin's work made it possible for this thesis to reconsider anarchy neither as an inherently benign nor an inherently conflictual condition, but above all as an intrinsically social domain. Based on the structural necessity of association derived from Kropotkin, this thesis advanced the argument that sustained interaction inevitably leads to the formation of societal arrangements grounded in repeated engagement, social cohesion and intersubjective meaning. International anarchy is therefore not characterized by actors colliding along isolated trajectories but rather represents an intricate web of social actors mutually shaping and constraining each other's behaviour. While conflict and competition remain an intrinsic feature of anarchic relations, cooperation constitutes an equally structural necessity. Pace deterministic accounts, anarchy in this sense does not follow a singular eternal logic.

Yet, following Kropotkin's account of power and social reconfiguration, this thesis likewise questioned whether the concept of anarchy is analytically sufficient to theorize the international domain. Following from this, I advanced the position that

while the international domain remains formally anarchic, power asymmetries nevertheless give rise to patterns of hierarchical reorganization. Such patterns subsequently allow powerful actors to reconfigure social structures in their own interest, while simultaneously constraining the room for manoeuvre of weaker powers. Within this context, this thesis advanced the notion of heterarchy as a systemic condition capturing the spectrum between anarchic and hierarchical structures as a more appropriate description of the international domain.

While the conception of the state as a "society atop society" allows for partial analogy between individual and international modes of association, Kropotkin's thought nonetheless compels a reconsideration of the state as a unitary actor. Seeing sovereign political entities as an intricate web of competing influential agents, this thesis maintained, represents a crucial foundation for deconstructing foreign policy along the lines of its constitutive components. In a related vein, this thesis contested the ontological primacy of the state as such, introducing the vector of popular association across borders, that is, societies of people, as a co-constitutive mechanism alongside traditional statist paradigms.

Taken on their own, the insights derived from Kropotkin's thought constitute not only a profound challenge to dominant, often structural realist, paradigms, but likewise resonate with modern sociological approaches. In particular, the conception of anarchic society finds a strong echo in the English School, while his interaction-based account of norm formation and intersubjective meaning resonates equally with contemporary constructivist approaches. Despite writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Kropotkin's thought still constitutes a pivotal philosophical foundation worthy of serious engagement within contemporary discourse. Setting Kropotkin's thought in dialogue with modern complex systems theory further allowed this thesis to fully translate Kropotkin's assumptions into a twenty-first-century framework. Resonating particularly well with his anti-essentialist, non-reductionist and process-oriented evolutionary conception of nature, I advanced complex systems theory as a theoretical anchor from which to build the analytical toolkit needed to investigate non-linear emergent properties in self-organizing systems in the spirit of Kropotkin's thought.

Under the umbrella of complex systems theory, this thesis advanced the concept of COMPLEX SOCIAL HETERARCHY (CSH) as an appropriate alternative analytical category for reconstructing international anarchy as an interaction-based normative order. Applied to the contemporary discourse on global order, CSH allowed this thesis to conceptualize system-level reconfiguration as a dynamic process grounded in shifting societal arrangements and changing patterns of association. Pace realist conceptions of international anarchy, CSH provides the conceptual underpinning to conceive global order as a product of interaction among cohesive societies of states

and as open to their broader systemic environment. While the common normative denominator of global institutions increasingly fragments between societies, cohesion within some of these societies has intensified, suggesting a differentiated multi-societal reconfiguration rather than a system-wide return to geopolitics.

Hence, the central contribution of this thesis lies in moving conceptions of international anarchy beyond dominant static models of self-help. In doing so, this thesis has reconceptualized international order as a dynamic process of order formation grounded in social, heterarchic and complex interaction.

Suggestions for further research. Given the notable similarities between the conceptual framework derived from Kropotkin and the sociological approaches associated with the English School of IR, further research could place both traditions more explicitly into dialogue (see i.a. Bull 1977; Buzan 2001; Buzan 2014). Despite offering rich and multidisciplinary approaches to international order, both traditions have remained comparatively underexploited within mainstream contemporary IR theory, as Buzan suggests with regard to the English School and Prichard with regard to anarchist political theory (Buzan 2001, p. 471; Prichard 2012, p. 100). Another promising avenue could consist in setting CSH into dialogue with recently emerging approaches of Quantum Social Science (see i.a. Der Derian & Wendt 2022). By similarly focusing on complex, networked configurations and emergent patterns of behaviour (ibid., p. 9), such approaches may contribute to the further refinement of CSH as an analytical category.

Set against the theoretical character of this thesis, further research could also strengthen the concept of CSH through systematic application to historical and contemporary case studies, thereby testing its explanatory reach and clarifying its theoretical limitations. Finally, as this thesis has primarily shifted attention to the analytical component of Kropotkin's work, incorporating his strong normative account could provide another valuable direction for future inquiry. Particularly evident in works such as *The Conquest of Bread* (see Kropotkin 1892), Kropotkin's post-statist vision of voluntary association among free communes and federations opens the possibility of developing CSH beyond its analytical function towards a normative framework for theorizing non-coercive and non-violent forms of international conduct.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Markus Kornprobst for supervising this thesis, for his guidance throughout the writing process, and for taking the time to support the development of my argument. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to my dear friends and colleagues from the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, whose ideas, questions and intellectual conversations have inspired and challenged my thinking. Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful girlfriend and my parents for their enduring support, patience and encouragement, which accompanied me throughout the writing process and helped me bring this thesis to completion.

References

- Adams, M. S. (2012). Uniformity is death: Human nature, variety, and conflict in Kropotkin's anarchism. In: Paul, J. (ed.). *Governing Diversities: Democracy, Diversity and Human Nature*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Cambridge Scholars.
- Antunes, S. & Camisao, I. (2017). 1. Realism. In: McGlinchey, S., Walters, R. & Scheinpflug, C. (eds.): *International Relations Theory*. E-International Relations Publishing.
- Art, R. J. & Jervis, R. (2013). *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*. 11th Edition. Pearson Education Inc.
- Axtmann, R. (2004). The State of the State: The Model of the Modern State and Its Contemporary Transformation. *International Political Science Review*, 25(3).
- Bakunin, M. (2005). *Statism and Anarchy* (ed. and transl. Shatz, M. S.). Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, M. (2021). International Progress, International Order, and the Liberal International Order. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 14(1).
- Baumann, R., & Stengel, F. A. (2013). Foreign policy analysis, globalisation and non-state actors: State-centric after all? *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 17(4).
- Bekkevold, J. I. (2023). No, the world is not multipolar. *Foreign Policy*, September 22. Retrieved from: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/22/multipolar-world-bipolar-power-geopolitics-business-strategy-china-united-states-india/>
- Bellamy, A. J. (2007). The English School. In: Griffiths, M (ed.). *International Relations Theory for the twenty-first century: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Börzel, T. A., & Zürn, M. (2021). Contestations of the liberal international order. *International Organization*, 75(2).
- Boucher, D. (2018). *Appropriating Hobbes: Legacies in Political, Legal, and International Thought*. Oxford University Press.
- Boulle, P. (1991 [1963]). *Planet of The Apes*. Ballantine Books. New York.
- Bousquet, A., & Curtis, S. (2011). Beyond models and metaphors: Complexity theory, systems thinking and international relations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 24(1).

- Brown, C. (2001). World society and the English School: an “international society” perspective on world society [online]. London: LSE Research Online
- Buchstein, H. & Jörke, D. (2007). Redescribing Democracy. *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 11(1).
- Bueno de Mesquita, B. B., & Smith, A. (2012). Domestic explanations of international relations. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15(1).
- Bull, H. (1977). *The Anarchical Society*. Columbia University Press.
- Buzan, B. & Little, R. (1994). The Idea of “International System”: Theory Meets History. *international Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, 15(3).
- Buzan, B. (2001). The English School: An Underexploited Resource in IR. *Review of International Studies*, 27(3).
- Buzan, B. (2014). *An introduction to the English School of International Relations*. Polity Press.
- Calis, S. H. & Söker, C. (2024). Anarchist Theory in Contemporary International Relations: A Critical Analysis. *Journal of Gazi Academic View*, 35.
- Charountaki, M. (2018). State and non-state interactions in international relations: An alternative theoretical outlook. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(4).
- Christoyannopoulos, A. (2022). An Anarcho-Pacifist Reading of International Relations: A Normative Critique of International Politics from the Confluence of Pacifism and Anarchism. *International Studies Quarterly*, 66.
- Clarkson, J. (2024). The Rousseauian roots of neorealism. *Review of International Studies*.
- Condorelli, R. (2016). Complex systems theory: Some considerations for sociology. *Open Journal of Applied Sciences*, 6(7).
- Copeland, D. C. (2000). Review: The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay. *International Security*, 25(2).
- Corry, O. (2010). Pictorial theories of global politics: Why anarchy has retained its paradigmatic position. Working paper, SGIR Stockholm September 2010.
- Council on Foreign Relations (2023) How Do Forces Outside Government Influence Policymaking? CFR Education: Global Matters, 19 May. Retrieved from: <https://education.cfr.org/learn/learning-journey/us-foreign-policy/how-do-forces-outside-government-influence-policymaking>
- Cudworth, E. & Hobden, S. (2010). Anarchy and Anarchism: Towards a Theory of Complex International Systems. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 39(2).
- Der Derian, J. & Wendt, A. (2022). *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Donnelly, J. (2000). *Realism and International Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Donnelly, J. (2015). The discourse of anarchy in IR. *International Theory*, 7(3).
- Donnelly, J. (2017). Beyond hierarchy. In: Zarakol, A. (ed.), *Hierarchies in World Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

- Dornan, M. (2011). Realist and Constructivist Approaches to Anarchy. E-International Relations. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/08/29/realist-and-constructivist-approaches-to-anarchy/>
- Dowding, K. (2011). Encyclopedia of Power. SAGE Publications.
- Dugard, J. (2023). The choice before us: International law or a "rules-based international order"? Leiden Journal of International Law, 36(2).
- Duncombe, C., & Dunne, T. (2018). After liberal world order. International Affairs, 94(1).
- Dunne, J. P., & Sköns, E. (2011). The changing military industrial complex. Working Papers 1104, Department of Accounting, Economics and Finance, Bristol Business School, University of the West of England, Bristol.
- Elazar, D. J. (1996). From Statism to Federalism – A Paradigm Shift. International Political Science Review, 17(4).
- Falk, R. (1978). Anarchism and World Order. Nomos, 19.
- Falk, R. (2010). Anarchism without 'Anarchism': Searching for Progressive Politics in the Early 21st Century. Millennium: Journal of International Studies. 39(2).
- Forde, S. (1995). International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism. International Studies Quarterly, 39.
- Fuchs, C. (2026). Digital fascism and digital capitalism. Philosophy and Social Criticism, 0(0).
- Gandawa, G. (2026). The Donroe Doctrine and the U.S. withdrawal from 66 international organisations. IJAPL, 1(2).
- Garst, D. (1989). Thucydides and Neorealism. International Studies Quarterly, 33(1).
- Gibbs, D. N. (2012). The military-industrial complex in a globalized context. In R. W. Cox (Ed.), Corporate power and globalization in US foreign policy. Routledge/Taylor & Francis.
- Godwin, O., & Kia, B. (2025). Realism theory of international relations and American foreign policy under Donald Trump. The Mangrove Journal of History and International Diplomacy, 1(2).
- Goodwin, A. (2010). Evolution and Anarchism in International Relations: The Challenge of Kropotkin's Biological Ontology. Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 39 (2).
- Guzzini, S., & Leander, A. (2006). Constructivism and International Relations: Alexander Wendt and his critics. Routledge.
- Hall, P. A., & Taylor, R. C. R. (1996). Political science and the three new institutionalisms. Political Studies, 44(5).
- Handler, H. (2022). Crisis-tested Europe: Solidarity with Ukraine spurs European identity. SUERF Policy Note, No. 268.
- Havercroft, J. & Prichard, A. (2017). Anarchy and International Relations theory: A reconsideration. Journal of International Political Theory, 13(3).
- He, Q. (2023). The order of law-based vs. rules-based. Advances in Space Research, 73(1).
- Hobbes, T. (1992). Leviathan (ed. Tuck, R). Cambridge University Press.

- Homolar, A., & Turner, O. (2024). Narrative alliances: The discursive foundations of international order. *International Affairs*, 100(1).
- Hopf, T. (1998). The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory. *International Security*, 23 (1).
- Hopgood, S. (2013). The Neo-Westphalian World. In: Hopgood (ed.): The endtimes of human rights. Cornell University Press.
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The end of liberal international order? *International Affairs*, 94(1).
- Ikenberry, G. J. (2018b). Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 32(1).
- Kaarbo, J. (2015). A foreign policy analysis perspective on the domestic politics turn in IR theory. *International Studies Review*, 17(2).
- Kacowicz, A. M. (2023). The Relevance of 'International Society' in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities in a Potential Post-Liberal Order. *Anuario Mexicano De Asuntos Globales* (2022).
- Kashyap, S. (2022). Tracing Hobbes in Realist International Relations Theory. *E-International Relations*. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/95679>
- Kazmi, Z. (2012). *Polite Anarchy in International Relations Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Keohane, R. O. (1983). Theory of world politics: Structural realism and beyond. In A. W. Finifter (Ed.), *Political science: The state of the discipline*. American Political Science Association.
- Kissane, D. (2011). *Beyond Anarchy: The Complex and Chaotic Dynamics of International Politics*. ibidem.
- Kissinger (1994). *Diplomacy*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Klotz, A. (2002). Transnational activism and global transformation: The anti-apartheid and abolitionist experiences. *European Journal of International Relations*, 8(1).
- Korab-Karpowicz, J. (2017). Political Realism in International Relations. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Metaphysics Research Lab. Center for the Study of Language and Information.
- Korvela, P.-E. (2018). Farewell to Anarchy: The Myth of International Anarchy and Birth of Anarchophilia in International Relations. *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, 21(1).
- Koschut, S. (2014). Regional order and peaceful change: Security communities as a via media in international relations theory. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 49(4).
- Kropotkin, P. (1886). Law and Authority. The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-Kropotkin-law-and-authority>
- Kropotkin, P. (1887). The Scientific Basis of Anarchism. Marxist Internet Archive. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/Kropotkin-peter/1887/scibasis.htm>
- Kropotkin, P. (1888). Are We Good Enough? The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-Kropotkin-are-we-good-enough>
- Kropotkin, P. (1892). The Conquest of Bread. The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-the-conquest-of-bread>

- Kropotkin, P. (1896). The New Era. The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-Kropotkin-the-new-era>.
- Kropotkin, P. (1896b). War or Peace? The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-Kropotkin-war-or-peace>
- Kropotkin, P. (1897). Anarchist Morality. Marxist Internet Archives. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/kropotkin-peter/1897/morality.htm>
- Kropotkin, P. (1898). Anarchism: its philosophy and ideal. The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-anarchism-its-philosophy-and-ideal>
- Kropotkin, P. (1908). Modern Science and Anarchism. Mother Earth Publishing Association, New York.
- Kropotkin, P. (1910). Anarchism. The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910. Marxist Internet Archive. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/Kropotkin-peter/1910/britannica.htm>
- Kropotkin, P. (1914). War! Anarchy Archives. Retrieved (as pdf) from: http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/kropotkin/War%21/war%21.html
- Kropotkin, P. (1924). Ethics: Origin and Development (transl. Friedland, L. S. & Piroshnikoff, J. R.). Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press.
- Kropotkin, P. (1924b). Ethics: Origin and Development (transl. Friedland, L. S. & Piroshnikoff, J. R.). Amazon, Seattle.
- Kropotkin, P. (2018). The Modern State. In: McKay, I. (ed.) Peter Kropotkin: Modern Science and Anarchism. AK Press.
- Kropotkin, P. (2022 [1902]). Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (1902). Sofia Publisher.
- Kropotkin, P. (2025 [1898]). The State: Its Historic Role (transl. Thomson, D.). Caterthun Press.
- Kropotkin, P. (n.d.). On Order. The Anarchist Library. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-Kropotkin-on-order>
- Lake, D. A. (1996). Anarchy, hierarchy, and the variety of international relations. International Organization, 50(1).
- Lake, D. A. (2026). The end of the liberal international order? The Chinese Journal of International Politics, 19(1).
- Lake, D. A., Martin, L. L., & Risse, T. (2021). Challenges to the liberal order. International Organization, 75(2).
- Lawler, P. (2024). International Relations Theories. 1st Edition. Oxford University Press.
- Lechner, S. P. (2017). Anarchy in International Relations. In: Marlin-Bennet, R. (ed.) Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies. Oxford University Press
- Lechner, S. P. (2017b). Why anarchy still matters for International Relations: On theories and things. Journal of International Political Theory, 13(3).
- Lenin, V. I. (1963 [1907]). Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. In Selected works (Vol. 1, pp. 667-766). Progress Publishers. Marxist Internet Archive.

- Leung, J. (2012). Machiavelli and International Relations Theory. *Glendon Journal of International Studies*, 1.
- Lomia, E. (2020). Political Realism in International Relations: Classical Realism, Neo-realism, and Neo-Classical Realism. *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research*, 7(3).
- Lukasavage, A. (2020). Democratic peace theory. EBSCO Research Starters: Political Science. EBSCO. Retrieved from <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/political-science/democratic-peace-theory>
- Machiavelli, N. (1998). *The Prince*. Niccolò Machiavelli (transl. Mansfield, H. C.). Second Edition. The University of Chicago Press.
- Makhno, N. (1930s [1997]) My Visit to The Kremlin. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/makhno-nestor/works/1930/my-visit-to-the-kremlin.html>
- Marx, K. (1852). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Marxist Archive. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>
- Mattern, J. B., & Zarakol, A. (2016). Hierarchies in World Politics. *International Organization*, 70(3).
- Maximoff, G. P. (1964). *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*. The Free Press.
- McConaughy, M., Musgrave, P., & Nexon, D. H. (2018). Beyond anarchy: Logics of political organization, hierarchy, and international structure. *International Theory*, 10(2).
- Meade, R. & Walton, M. (2025). *Theory Reconstruction: An Approach to Conceptual Innovation in Political Science*. Perspectives on Politics. Cambridge University Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). Bound to fail. *International Security*, 43(4).
- Melville, A. (2018). "Fortress-Russia." In: Bergesen, A. J. & Suter, C. (Eds.). *The return of Geopolitics*. World Society Foundation, Zurich, Switzerland.
- Meredith, J. (1992). Theory Building through Conceptual Methods. *International Journal of Operation & Production Management*, 13.
- Milner, H. V. (1991). The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique. *Review of International Studies*, 17(1).
- Mitchell, M., & Newman, M. (2001). *Complex systems theory and evolution*. Santa Fe Institute, 1399 Hyde Park Road, Santa Fe, NM 87501. Retrieved from: <https://melaniemitchell.me/PapersContent/EncyclopediaOfEvolution2002.pdf>
- Morgenthau (2013). *Politics Among Nations*, Sixth Edition. In: Art, R. J. & Jervis, R. (ed.) *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues*, Eleventh Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Nemeth, B. (2026). Coercion, consensus, and capability: The Warsaw Pact and the institutional limits of NATO and EU defence coordination, *Journal of Strategic Studies*.
- Neumann, I. B. (2006). *The English School on Diplomacy*. Discussion Papers in Diplomacy. Mawby, S. (ed.). Clingendael. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/english-school-diplomacy>
- Newman, S. (2012). *Crowned Anarchy: Postanarchism and International Relations Theory*. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 40(2).

- Nietzsche, F. W. (2002). Also Sprach Zarathustra. Blackmask Online. Retrieved From: <http://www.public-library.uk/ebooks/06/85.pdf>
- Noland, A. (1970). Proudhon's Sociology of War. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 29(3).
- Ogunbanjo, M'B. (2021). Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism in Global Politics: Towards Assessing the Intellectual Siblings. Kampala International University. *KIU Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2).
- Okumus, S. (2022) The Rising Political Power of Silicon Valley. Fiker Institute, April 2022.
- Orsini, A., Le Prestre, P., Haas, P. M., Brosig, M., Pattberg, P., Widerberg, O., Gomez-Mera, L., Morin, J.-F., Harrison, N. E., Geyer, R., & Chandler, D. (2019). Forum: Complex systems and international governance. *International Studies Review*, 22(4).
- Ovid (n.d.) *Metamorphoses*, Book I, Verses 89-162. Perseus Digital Library. Retrieved from: <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0029%3Abook%3D1%3Acard%3D89>
- Parsi, T. (2025, February 3). What Rubio said about multipolarity should get more attention. Responsible Statecraft. Retrieved from: <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/marco-rubio/>
- Peters, M. A. (2023). The emerging multipolar world order: A preliminary analysis, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 55(14).
- Pfefferle, T. (2014). The Neo-Neo Debate in International Relations Theory. *E-International Relations*. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/01/09/the-neo-neo-debate-in-international-relations-theory-progress-or-regression/>
- Polansky, D. (2016). Drawing Out the Leviathan: Kenneth Waltz, Hobbes, and the Neorealist Theory of the State. *International Studies Review*, 18.
- Powell, R. (1994). Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate. *International Organization*, 48(2).
- Prichard, A. (2007). Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International Political Theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809--1865). *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 35(3).
- Prichard, A. (2010). Introduction: Anarchism and World Politics. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. 39(2).
- Prichard, A. (2011). What can the absence of anarchism tell us about the history and purpose of International Relations? *Review of International Studies*. 37.
- Prichard, A. (2012). Anarchy, Anarchism and International Relations. In: Kinna, R. (2012). *The Continuum Companion to Anarchism*.
- Prichard, A. (2013). *Justice, Order and Anarchy: The International political theory of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Prichard, A. (2014). Zaheer Kazmi, *Polite Anarchy in International Relations*. *Anarchist Studies*, 22(1).
- Prichard, A. (2025). 4. Anarchy. In: Jahn, B. & Schindler, S. (2025). *Elgar Encyclopedia of International Relations*.
- Proudhon, P.-J. (1876). *What is Property?* Benj. R. Tucker, Princeton.

- Rossdale, C. (2010). Anarchy is What Anarchists Make of it: Reclaiming the Concept of Agency in IR and Security Studies. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39(2).
- Sandberg, O. (2023). "Everything Changes in Nature": Kropotkin's Process Philosophy. *Anarchist Studies*, 31(2).
- Scartozzi, C. (2018). A new taxonomy for international relations: Rethinking the international system as a complex adaptive system. *Journal on Policy and Complex Systems*, 4(1).
- Schirm, S. A. (2023). Alternative World Orders? Russia's Ukraine War and the Domestic Politics of the BRICS, *The International Spectator*, 58(3).
- Schmidt, B. (1998). *The political discourse of anarchy: a disciplinary history of international relations*. State University of New York Press.
- Schmidt, B. C. (2007). Realism and facets of power in international relations. In: Berenskoetter, F. & Williams, M. J. (ed.). *Power in World Politics*. Routledge, London.
- Schörning, N. (2014). Neorealism. In: Schindler, S. & Spindler, M. (ed.) *Theories of International Relations*. Routledge.
- Slomp, G. (2016). The Origins of Realism Revisited. In: Hayden, P. (2016). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations*. Ashgate.
- Sørensen, G. (1992). Kant and processes of democratization: Consequences for neorealist thought. *Journal of Peace Research*, 29(4).
- Späth, J. (2025) The Rise of Techno-Authoritarianism and its Impact on US Foreign Policy. Policy Brief No. 15, March 2025. Austrian Institute for International Affairs / Plattform für Nachhaltige Entwicklung.
- Spykman, N. J. (1942) *America's strategy in World Politics. The United States and the Balance of Power*. Institute of International Studies, Yale University.
- Taheri, M. H. & Afrough, E. (2023). From Classical Democracy to Liberal Democracy: Definitions, Types and Paradigms, *Kom*, 12(2).
- Tajik, O., Golzar, J. & Noor, S. (2024). Purposive Sampling. *International Journal of Education and Language Studies*, 2(2).
- Thörn, H. (2006). The emergence of a global civil society: The case of anti-apartheid. *Journal of Civil Society*, 2(3)
- Thucydides (1972). *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Werner, R. (ed.). Penguin Books.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. (n.d. [1954]). *The Fellowship of The Ring*. HarperCollins e-books.
- Tritle, L. A. (2006). Thucydides and Power Politics. In *Brill's Companions to Classical Studies* 469-491. Brill Academic Publishers.
- Tsygankov, A. P. (2012). *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, S. (1998). Global Civil Society, Anarchy and Governance: Assessing an Emerging Paradigm. *Journal of Peace Research*, 35(1)

- Wajner, D. F., Destradi, S., & Zürn, M. (2024). The effects of global populism: assessing the populist impact on international affairs. *International Affairs*, 100(5).
- Waldrop, M. M. (1993). *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Walt, S. M. (2002) The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition. In: Katznelson, I & Milner, H. V. (ed.). *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*. Columbia University.
- Waltz (2001 [1959]). *Man, the State, and War*. Columbia University Press.
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of International Politics*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Waltz, K. N. (1991). Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory. *Journal of International Affairs*, 44(1).
- Waltz, K. N. (2014). Anarchic orders and balances of power. In: Elman, C. & Jensen, M. A. (ed.) *Realism Reader*. Routledge.
- Weiss, T. G. (1975). The Tradition of Philosophical Anarchism and Future Directions in World Policy. *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol 12(1).
- Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what States Make of It: Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization*, 46(2).
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wicaksono, A., Suyastri, C. & Sundari, R. (2022). Understanding Political Realism: A Review of the Thoughts of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Morgenthau. *Journal of Government and Political Issues*, 2(2).
- Wight, M. (1991). *The Three Traditions of International Theory*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Williams, M. C. (1996). Hobbes and International Relations: A Reconsideration. *International Organization*, 50(2).
- Wittrock, B. (2001). Disciplines, History of, in the Social Sciences, In: Smelser, N. J. & Baltes, P. B. (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Pergamon.
- Wolff, J. (1996). *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Wooten, S. & Claypool, R. (2022). Military-industrial complex clinches nearly 450,000% return on investment. Public Citizen. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.citizen.org/article/military-industrial-complex-contributions-report/>
- Zauzah, N. Z. (2024). Analyzing Alexander Wendt's Statements regarding "Anarchy is what the state makes it." *SIYAR Journal*, 4(1).
- Zollinger-Fujii, W. M. (2021). "My Order, My Rules": China and the American-Rules-Based Order in Historical Perspective. *E-International Relations*. Retrieved (as pdf) from: <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/12/28/my-order-my-rules-china-and-the-american-rules-based-order-in-historical-perspective/>