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Evolution and Anarchism in International Relations: The Challenge of Kropotkin's Biological Ontology¹

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Abstract: This paper will utilize Peter Kropotkin's theory of Mutual Aid to reconsider ontology in IR. Mutual Aid Theory holds that the evolution of organisms is shaped by cooperation within a group of species against a variable ecology; thus giving rise to a sociality instinct (Kropotkin 1902). This is contrasted with the Malthusian assumption that evolution takes place at the individual level according to their intraspecific fitness. Mutual Aid Theory, applied to the realm of politics, overturns collective action problem-grounded theories that hold that the egoistic and competitive drive of humans must be overcome to promote cooperation. Thayer (2004) applied the orthodox individual-fitness interpretation of evolution in an attempt to shore up Realist arguments. I argue that such reductionist approaches to studying politics are archaic and not congruent with current scientific understanding. A critical realist approach, placing analytical priority on ontological investigations over epistemological/methodological commitments, is employed to assist in the criticism of orthodox reductionist ontologies. However, equally in line with Kropotkin's anarchist ideas, I argue that this critical realist approach also provokes ontologically-driven inquiries into post-sovereignty global politics and can inform the emancipatory intent of critical IR theory, along the basic anarchist ontological claim: society precedes the State.

Keywords: Ontology, Anarchism, Critical Realism, biology, evolution, emergence, emancipation

To reduce animal sociability to love and sympathy means to reduce its generality and its importance, just as human ethics based upon love and personal sympathy only have contributed to narrow the comprehension of the moral feeling as a whole...It is a feeling infinitely wider than love or personal sympathy—an instinct that has been slowly developed among animals and men in the course of an extremely long evolution, and which has taught

¹ This paper is a pre-publication version of an original, peer-reviewed paper that will be published in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*. It is available in audio format at: http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/Rethinking_Anarchy%3A_Anarchism_and_International_Relations.

² Profound thanks to Kevin McMillan, Mark Salter and Abolfazl Masoumi for their insights into the problematic areas of my research. All errors in this manuscript are my own.

animals and men alike the force they can borrow from the practice of mutual aid and support, and the joys they can find in social life.

Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902)

Introduction

Theory begins with ontological assumptions, and every theory must have them to make claims about the world. Anarchism as a social theory is no different; however, Anarchism uniquely stands out from other social theories with its explicit and near-universally agreed upon ontological claim—society precedes the State.³ The distinction Anarchism makes between society and the State is clear and offers profound implications for political theory. Anarchists view society as everything that is best about humanity, because it realizes “co-operation, mutual aid, sympathy, solidarity, initiative, and spontaneity”.⁴ In contrast, Anarchism sees the modern State for what it is: a relatively recent artificial social institution, transposed over and imposed on pre-existing societies.

The Russian anarchist⁵, Peter Kropotkin, also viewed the State as an imposition on society—it is “the greatest hindrance to the birth of a society based on equality and liberty”⁶; the historical project of the State was to “prevent the direct association among men[*sic*], to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming—all this in order to subject the masses to the will of minorities”.⁷ Thus, the explicit normative stance of Anarchism—often dismissed or vilified by state-centric theories—is grounded on the historically-derived ontological claim of society preceding the State. However, Kropotkin’s historically-oriented social theorizing would also be complemented by his biological theory by way of his appraisal of the interconnected and autopoietic essence of organic nature constituted through acts of mutual aid.

This paper treats Kropotkin’s natural and social theorizing as the basis for a prototype multidisciplinary social theory that feeds into an emergent understanding of social ontology. The direction that Kropotkin’s biological theory takes in informing

³ See, for example, Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1970); Pierre Clastre, *Society Against the State*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977); Emma Goldman, *Anarchism: and other essays*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969); Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role*, (London: Freedom Press, 1946); Gustav Landauer, *Revolution and Other Writings: A Political Reader*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010).

⁴ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 12.

⁵ I make a distinction in the capitalisation of the first letters of this word. ‘Anarchist’ refers to anything that relates to the political/social theory/movement of Anarchism, while ‘anarchist’ refers to the category of people who adhere to this theory/movement.

⁶ Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historic Role*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid*, Section X.

social theory is reinforced by modern developments in such fields as evolutionary biology, complexity theory, critical anthropology, animal ethology, and biosemiotics.⁸ The developments of interest to social theory in each of these fields surround the view that the atomistic ontology of reductionist approaches to both the natural and social sciences are increasingly giving way to holist ontological approaches reliant on the logic of self-organization and emergent complexity phenomena, where seemingly disparate parts are, sometimes inexplicably, better understood as integrated in a larger whole. This paper aims to introduce and interpret Kropotkin's natural and social philosophy as holistic in ontological character. The political shift Kropotkin can offer overturn many of the basic assumptions of IR theory and lead to a cascade of analytical consequences regarding anarchy and cooperation. Further, in line with Anarchist critiques of the State, the emancipatory project of Critical IR theory can especially benefit from the basic implications of a holist ontology, and this can be understood through the lens of the meta-theory of Critical Realism.

The neo-Kantian notions of emancipation-through-expanded-political-community that underlie the emancipatory agenda of Critical IR theory do not evenly correspond to the emancipatory intent of Anarchism.⁹ However, Kropotkin's anti-State arguments and holist ontology add to the potential of Critical IR theory's emancipatory impulse. In this article, I turn to the analytical dimension of Critical Realism—the pre-existence of social forms necessitates the conditions for intentional and transformative acts—in order to ground the possibilities for emancipatory change. In other words, praxis follows epistemology follows ontology. However, Kropotkin's ontology suggests that the pre-existence of social forms in the biological world allow for a more robust understanding of social forms in the social world.

In the past, however, the attempt to bridge these two realms has often proved to be reliant on shaky intellectual foundations. Practitioners of social science have sought credibility through their epistemological and methodological emulation of the natural sciences—we know this movement by the generic term positivism. Employing scientifically-based methodologies to test for and identify constant conjunctions by way of empirical regularities became the desired way of doing social science. However, contrasted with the diffusion of positivism, it becomes apparent that, since Darwin first speculated on the nature of our species in *The Descent of Man*, use of evolutionary science to better understand human behaviour has ebbed and flowed in

⁸ These fields overflow with theoretical and empirical contributions to buttress Kropotkin's social and biological theorizing. In critical anthropology, see, for example, Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Ibid, *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976); David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004); Ibid, *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2007). In animal ethology, see, for example, Frans de Waal, ed., *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). In biosemiotics, see, for example, Wendy Wheeler, *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006); Jesper Hoffmeyer, *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs*, (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008).

⁹ Notions of individual freedom in Anarchism supplant the imperative of expanding moral community.

the social sciences.¹⁰ This has been a result of the considerable difficulty faced by those who have attempted the precarious analytical jump from the natural world to the social.

The primary subject of direct critique by this article—Bradley Thayer—attempts this jump by applying his understanding of evolutionary theory to IR theory. However, he notes that the acceptance of this sociobiological model in the American social sciences is impeded by four factors: first, evolutionary methodology is not well diffused throughout the academy, second, ideologies such as liberalism tend to keep scientific approaches at bay, third, past abuses in the name of Social Darwinism have tainted the evolutionary approach; and fourth, generic erroneous anti-evolution arguments remain entrenched within academia.¹¹

The task of combating these impediments that Thayer sets before those interested in exploring natural explanations for social phenomena is daunting. Indeed, the effort that Thayer has put into explaining political phenomena through naturalism is reflective of the rejectionist tendencies of what Sterling-Folker has argued, is the ‘Lamarckian pre-theory’ of a liberal-minded American intellectual milieu.¹² It should come as no surprise that realism is the only area in IR theory where arguments on human nature, be it theological or evolutionary, unabashedly take a causal tone. Waltz understood the inherent difficulties of relying on ‘first-image’ explanations, in that they imply the immutability of human nature and preclude political change based on changing that nature.¹³ This was Waltz’s attempt to escape reductionism. However, even structural realist accounts still rely on psychological ‘first-image’ foundations for the structural mechanisms of their theory to operate as they do.¹⁴

The realist assumptions on human nature identified by Freyberg-Inan¹⁵ contain within them the ingredients for unalloyed reductionism. The universality and static nature of the essentialism characteristic of classical realism has already faced its most formidable *challenge* by way of Darwinian evolutionary theory.¹⁶ However, the reductionist view point is most decidedly set with realist claims regarding the asocial

¹⁰ For an IR-themed account see Duncan Bell, ‘Beware of false prophets: biology, human nature and the future of International Relations theory’, *International Affairs*, 82, 3, 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 3.

¹² Jennifer Sterling-Folker, ‘Lamarckian with a vengeance: human nature and American international relations theory’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9, 2006: 227-246.

¹³ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 41.

¹⁴ Annette Freyberg-Inan, ‘Rational paranoia and enlightened machismo: the strange psychological foundations of realism’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 9, 2006: 247-268.

¹⁵ Freyberg-Inan argues that human nature in realism is universally applicable to all humans, it remains static throughout time, and that it paints a pessimistic picture of social interactions, favouring conflict (2006: 250).

¹⁶ John Dupré has argued that it was exactly Darwin’s insight into the mutability of organic nature that began to combat essentialist arguments on human nature—it is the variability of organisms that drives natural selection. *Ibid.*, *Humans and Other Animals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 155.

nature of humans. Writing off humans as asocial and often competitive ignores much data to the contrary. This is where our ontological discussion must begin.

Reductionism—a necessary method in *mechanistic* conceptions of the natural world—favours prediction and parsimony in theory;¹⁷ however, it cannot help us to make the jump from the natural to the social world. The biological world is much more complex than the world of physics despite the fact that the biological world has *emerged* from the interaction of physical matter. In a similar way we should consider the social world as much more complex than the biological world precisely because it has *emerged* from our biology.

This is where Critical Realism makes its most potent contribution. In traversing the natural-social divide, Bhaskar has argued that a realist account of science employing a ‘causal criterion of ascribing reality’ would implore us to consider the nature of the object of study prior to ‘determining the form of its possible science.’¹⁸ In addition to this, the epistemological limitations of this naturalism would form around the stark lack of empirical regularities—this is owing to the fact that social forms only emerge from open systems.¹⁹ The corollary of this epistemological limitation is the discarding of D-N statistical models, inductivism, as well as Popperian falsificationism. This implies that social science theories are necessarily denied decisive testability, and replacement theories ‘must be explanatory and non-predictive.’ Bhaskar does not view this limitation as altogether vexing, as there are no ontological implications; yet, it does indelibly affect how we form our knowledge of the laws underpinning those theories.²⁰ Thus, Bhaskar instructs us that it is within epistemology that ontologically reductionist arguments can be identified.

To such a reductionist argument couched in naturalistic terms, I begin my argument by explicating the epistemological pitfalls in evolutionary theory surrounding the use of the ‘struggle for existence’ metaphor by Thomas Huxley and its interpretation by Kropotkin. This properly contextualizes the larger issue of ontological questions with which modern biology and, in turn, political theory must face in order to answer. Next, I will examine the role Critical Realism has to play in helping us assess and reconsider these ontological issues. The result of which is my proposed shift in political ontology towards a holist interpretation. This shift offers an ontological critique of Thayer’s application of evolutionary theory to IR theory and a re-understanding of international anarchy in Anarchist terms. I conclude by assessing what the ontological commitments of Anarchism could offer to better understand how the expansion of political community in Critical IR theory can lead to emancipation.

The Struggle for Existence

¹⁷ John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science*, (Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁸ Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 57.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 58.

Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) was a Russian geographer, zoologist and anarchist. His corpus of work is primarily political in nature, but his main scientific work was *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. This work established his Mutual Aid Theory and it arose in a little-known context of polarized opinions on the topic of natural selection, as described by Darwin in *On the Origins of Species*. An important epistemological lesson may be drawn from the case of the controversy over the driving force behind natural selection—the ‘struggle for existence’ metaphor. Having the strong Anarchist legacy that he did, one would be inclined to think that his scientific work would be inflected by his political ideals; however, Kropotkin’s Anarchist commitments were preceded by his observations of the natural world.²¹

Mutual Aid presents a counterargument to the interpretation of Darwin’s theory of natural selection as being driven by competition within a species (intraspecific competition). Kropotkin’s argument centered on dispelling this flawed account of natural selection, and it was specifically aimed at T.H. Huxley’s interpretation in his 1888 article *The Struggle For Existence in Human Society*. Kropotkin assailed the overemphasis on intraspecific competition in the natural world, and he drew parallels in his political writings to the similar overemphasis of war and domination in human history. Cooperation, which Kropotkin terms Mutual Aid, has a much more important role to play than competition in both the natural and social worlds.

To properly introduce Mutual Aid Theory, I will begin by first contextualizing it juxtaposed against the traditional interpretation of Darwin, which was found in the ‘struggle for existence’ metaphor. The interpretation of metaphor, by both scientists and their audiences, is inexorably influenced by political and social currents, inflecting scientific ideas with social ones. For Charles Darwin, the use of metaphor was crucial in both his understanding of the theory of natural selection and his communication of that theory to his British audience. His metaphor of choice was the ‘struggle for existence’ and the way it was interpreted by him, his audience and his successors was in a distinctly Malthusian sense. Commenting on the implications of Darwin’s choice of metaphor, Daniel Todes has written that “[s]uch rhetorical authority contributes to a metaphor’s cognitive function, enabling it to clarify certain points and obscure others, to encourage exploration of certain questions and distinctions, and to relegate others to relative unimportance”.²²

The Malthusian-inspired metaphor implied that natural selection was dominated by organism-to-organism competitive interactions in an overpopulated environment of scarcity. Darwin depicted the ‘face of nature’ as a crack in a surface packed tightly with wedges, where one wedge is pummelled another relents.²³ Indeed, the term ‘struggle’ was often used interchangeably with competition, and Darwin

²¹ Daniel Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

²² Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*, 7.

²³ *Ibid*, 9.

acknowledged that the dynamics of the struggle were within the same species by virtue of their like food sources, habitats and predators.

While the obviously dated Victorian terminology and biases against less technologically advanced peoples can be dismissed as being a blatant product of the era, there are more basic *political assumptions* in his writings that are still taken as axiomatic today. For example, his negative views on increasing populations: “It is impossible not bitterly to regret, but whether wisely is another question, the rate at which man tends to increase; for this leads in barbarous tribes to infanticide and many other evils, and in civilised nations to abject poverty, celibacy, and to the late marriages of the prudent”.²⁴ The political implications of this negative view on population expansion become much more explicit as Darwin correlates the effects of improved human material conditions with an increase of ‘undesirables’:

The advancement of the welfare of mankind is a most intricate problem; all ought to refrain from marriage who cannot avoid abject poverty for their children; for poverty is not only a great evil, but tends to its own increase by leading to recklessness in marriage. On the other hand, as Mr. Galton has remarked, if the prudent avoid marriage, whilst the reckless marry, the inferior members will tend to supplant the better members of society. Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher he must remain subject to a severe struggle.²⁵

However, the idea of the ‘struggle for existence’ taking the form of intraspecific competition did not sit well with Darwin’s Russian audience. There was a tradition in Russian scientific thought to acknowledge that life was difficult, that a struggle was needed to overcome its obstacles, and that organisms would draw on all resources, which included *themselves* to surmount the difficulties.²⁶ This view was less an explicit political stance than a ‘commonsensical’ one, considering that Karl F. Kessler and many other scientists who embraced the Mutual Aid tradition were either centrists or conservative. David Livingstone comments that the production and consumption of science varies considerably across time and space; thus, a myriad of factors come into play in our formulation, understanding, and application of scientific ideas.²⁷

Kropotkin was the most famous scientist to adopt and argue for the Mutual Aid tradition. His interest in science and natural observation led him to undertake an expedition to Siberia—the opportunity he required to make the observations on which Mutual Aid Theory are based. Mutual Aid Theory first took shape in a number of

²⁴ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 180.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 403.

²⁶ Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*, 105.

²⁷ David Livingstone, ‘Science, site and speech: scientific knowledge and the spaces of rhetoric’, *History of the Human Sciences* 20, 2, 2007.

articles Kropotkin penned, but were later consolidated into its more well-known book format. The articles railed against Huxley's interpretation of Darwinian natural selection being nothing higher than a gladiator show. In his theory, Kropotkin placed greater emphasis on the intraspecific cooperation of organisms, rather than the Malthusian-inspired intraspecific competition paradigm put forward by Darwin's successors. Kropotkin gave greater importance to the direct action of the environment on organisms to produce a natural selective force. It was in the face of these harsh conditions that Mutual Aid arose as an adaptive strategy.

The importance of Huxley's interpretation to biology was in the role he played to disseminate Darwin's ideas on natural selection—he was known by his contemporaries as 'Darwin's Bulldog'. Darwin was known to be hesitant in sharing his ideas—and even hesitated to publish his theory of natural selection for 20 years before finally being prompted to put it to print by Alfred Russel Wallace's co-discovery of natural selection. Therefore, Darwin's role in purging both theological and teleological (for example Lamarck's transmutationist theory of evolution) assumptions from explanations for natural processes was articulated through Huxley. However, Huxley easily translated this natural worldview into a social worldview—he thought of society as being specific to humans, comprised of self-interested individuals, and constructed to protect individuals from themselves. However, in the context of evolution, Huxley also held that society would inevitably collapse and the natural brutality would resume, thereby strengthening the human gene pool.²⁸

Huxley's use of the Malthusian metaphor necessarily fostered a view of nature as brutal—'red in tooth and claw'. It was this view that played the most crucial role in supporting an argument for intraspecific competition. Huxley viewed the Malthusian catastrophes as 'species friendly'—which is to say that a catastrophic depopulating event such as a disease or natural disaster benefits a species by returning populations to numbers more in balance with their environment. This had the paradoxical effect of reducing intraspecific conflict by way of a sparser population, but also indirectly feeding intraspecific competition by weeding out the weak. Huxley even argued that these natural checks should not be abated—complex human organization, which can mitigate these Malthusian catastrophes (presumably by social assistance) can also serve to produce "developed checks" in the form of poverty, warfare etc.²⁹

In this orthodox Malthusian-inspired interpretation the competition for dwindling resources was the corollary of a burgeoning population, and this logic led to the species-friendly view of the inevitable Malthusian catastrophes—the weak died out and the strong survived. However, Kropotkin viewed Malthusian catastrophes as species-hostile due to the decimation of organism numbers. Further, under these

²⁸ Assuming brutality to serve better ends, as counter-intuitive as it may be in our day-to-day experiences, chimes a familiar chord with the basic doctrine of economic neo-liberalism and political realism in IR. It is self-interested competition that strengthens the economy and the state. This premise, held by Waltz among other IR realists and neo-classical economists, naturalises competitive behaviour by assuming it to be rewarded, and problematises cooperative inclinations by assuming them to be punished.

²⁹ Michael Glassman, 'Mutual Aid Theory and Human Development: Sociability as Primary', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30, 4, 2000.

circumstances intraspecific competition would be counterintuitive considering that it would only amplify the existing hostile conditions and drive species numbers even lower. Kropotkin posited that migration allowed organisms to escape such harsh ecologies, especially dwindling food resources. Migratory habits in species resulted in the selection of genotypes that favoured the pre-conditions required for such migration—namely, sociability, which engendered trust among individuals of the same species.

Despite viewing these natural checks as hostile to species development, Kropotkin also argued that the inevitable nature of natural checks selected against those species that lacked the sociability to overcome them.³⁰ Even should some individuals survive natural checks through competing intraspecifically, those individuals will have survived merely one onslaught because of certain traits that have permitted it to do so; however, those traits may not allow it to overcome subsequent adversity which requires different traits.

Thus, in contrast to the orthodox emphasis on the importance of individual-oriented traits like speed or strength, which best serve to aid in the survival of a lone organism in a certain situation, Kropotkin argued that sociability is an evolutionary panacea—communities of organisms could handle many more varieties of situations. For example, the erratic and dynamic variability of ecologies seemed to contradict theories reliant on the slow process of genetic variation. Therefore, carrying Kropotkin's argument to its logical ends would entail adopting the position that *any* trait that favoured sociability over individuality would be selected for—this includes intelligence (when it serves the purpose of mitigating conflict and conceiving of more efficient forms of cooperation) as well as traits that might be characterized in some scientific circles as redundant and even self-defeating, such as empathy and kindness. Yet, the highly social nature of humans could account for humans being the preponderant mammal in the complex web of life.

Kropotkin argued that the strength of the social instinct can overcome individually-oriented instincts, such as self-preservation. He observed individual animals engaging in reckless behaviour in the face of danger for what appeared to be the sake of the herd. This led organisms that engaged in Mutual Aid to benefit with increased fitness, less individual energy expenditure in rearing offspring, more successful migration and greater intelligence.³¹ Glassman synthesizes three general principles for the intraspecific cooperation argued by Kropotkin: first, organisms struggle against their environment and not necessarily against other individual organisms, second, species which engage in cooperation to overcome their ecology are successful, and third, egoism becomes detrimental³² when cooperation is so crucial to survival.³³

³⁰ Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (1902).

³¹ Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought*.

³² It should be noted that the implication that egoism hurts us rather than helps us grinds down to the core realist theoretical assumptions which rest on the pursuit of self-interest.

³³ Glassman, 'Mutual Aid Theory and Human Development: Sociability as Primary', 392.

This alternative theory is not alone in dethroning the orthodox reading of natural selection; the complexity science revolution has also added to a more sophisticated understanding of evolution. Michod argues for an emergent reading of evolution which holds that cooperation achieved through a dynamic mechanism of natural selection leads the units of selection (biological entities, including genes) to be subject to increasingly more complex rules as the unit complexity increases.³⁴ Fitness at a lower level of organic complexity is traded for fitness at a higher level through the cooperation of individuals at the lower level. Therefore, the effects of natural selection are, by their very nature, what Critical Realists would call an open-system and in continual flux; its parameters and method of function cannot be tidily accounted for with mathematical models or meta-theories which describe the preconditions for fitness. This prompts a re-conceptualizing of “new levels of individuality”.³⁵

However, cooperation is also a term that often goes unproblematized.³⁶ Cooperation, seen on individualistic terms, is taken to benefit both individuals. This view holds that the equal reciprocation between organisms to increase fitness is an epiphenomenon of the egoistic interests of individuals—this is represented in evolutionary explanations for altruism which have spawned individual- or gene-based explanations such as W. D. Hamilton’s ‘inclusive fitness’, R. Axelrod’s ‘tit-for-tat’, R. Trivers’s ‘reciprocal altruism’³⁷, and J. B. S. Haldane’s ‘kin selection’.

In contrast, Group Selection Theory³⁸ recognizes a behavioural continuity among less-complicated organisms (such as eukaryotic cells) combining to form more-complicated organisms (such as humans) and complicated organisms combining to form increasingly-complicated superorganisms—this is the phenomenon known as eusociality.³⁹ In this understanding, the concept of cooperation as the convergence of self-interest for the betterment of both organisms gives way to the concept of cooperation as the integration of individual organisms into a new and larger organism. Equally of interest is Lynn Margulis’s theory of symbiosis, where cellular evolution was characterized through the integration of discrete non-nuclear microorganisms (prokaryotes) into other microorganisms as organelles (such as mitochondria and

³⁴ Richard Michod, *Darwinian Dynamics: Evolutionary Transitions in Fitness and Individuality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

³⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁶ Richard Ashley touches upon this very topic in “Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique”, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 17, 2, (1988): 236, where “theorists of the anarchy problematique understand co-operation as an instrumental relation.”

³⁷ Robert Trivers, ‘The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism’, *Quarterly Review of Biology* 46-1, (1971).

³⁸ Elliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³⁹ Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980).

chloroplasts) to form the first complex nuclear cells (eukaryotes).⁴⁰ This counters the traditional mutation and environmental adaptation theory-driven approaches to the rise of multi-cellular organisms. As multi-cellular organisms grew increasingly more complex, speciation among them arose producing categories (species) of ‘individual’ organisms which further cooperated to expedite survival. This theoretical approach calls into question the unit-level analysis supported by Huxley’s paradigm—the error of biologists is stopping their analysis at the individual level. This process prompts us to question why we have arbitrarily chosen to limit our expressions of ontology in both the natural and social sciences to that of the individual organism when cooperative acts occur on a daily basis at the societal level to produce a higher order of complexity, thereby producing a new referent on which selective pressures act.

In the realm of the social sciences, the reductive enterprise has become entrenched by way of the persistent study of the individual. The rise of Neo-Darwinism and its controversial offspring –Evolutionary Psychology—have worked to reinforce this atomized view in both social/political theory and practice: they have supported arguments for a relentless form of individualism found in classical social contract theory and neo-liberal economic theory.⁴¹ Kropotkin located the source of this individualism—the State. He elaborated on the consequences of unproblematically accepting the State as a ‘natural’ entity⁴² and the centralisation of social tendencies within it:

The absorption of all social functions by the State necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers the citizens were evidently relieved from their obligations to each other...The result is, that the theory which maintains that men[sic] can, and must, seek their own happiness in a disregard of other people’s wants is now triumphant all round in law, in science, in religion.⁴³

Considering the potential political ramifications alluded to by Kropotkin, recognition is sorely in need that the most appropriate departure point for intellectual endeavours is the situating of theory and, by corollary, practice around an explicit ontological

⁴⁰ Lynn Margulis, *Origin of Eukaryotic Cells: Evidence and Research Implications for a Theory of the Origin and Evolution of Microbial, Plant, and Animal Cells on the Precambrian Earth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

⁴¹ See critiques of the reductionist tendencies of the Neo-Darwinian synthesis and Evolutionary Psychology by, respectively, Mary Midgley, *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom and Morality*, (London: Routledge, 1994); Ibid, *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears*, (London: Routledge, 2002); Susan McKinnon, *Neo-Liberal Genetics: The Myths and Moral Tales of Evolutionary Psychology*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2005).

⁴² Relevant to this discussion is the recent treatment the State has received by IR theorists, such as Alexander Wendt, regarding its status as a person, actor and even superorganism. See Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, “Forum Introduction: Is the state a person? Why should we care?”, *Review of International Studies*, 30, 2, (2004).

⁴³ Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, 179.

thematic. To acknowledge the consequences of ontology for theory and practice is not only sound scientific method, but also intellectually honest. This includes explaining a theory's ontological inclinations to allow for a thorough-going critique of the derivative epistemological and methodological choices the theorist has selected. Roy Bhaskar's Critical Realism has highlighted the importance of ontological questions, and constructivist IR theorists have begun the move to take account of the importance of ontology for describing politics via the agent-structure debate.⁴⁴ Although I do not directly engage with the agent-structure debate in IR, I will argue that Critical Realism is instructive for both meta-theoretical matters of ontology and for a model of social possibilities it can provide.

The Importance of Critical Realism

Critical Realism is not a theory of IR, nor is it a social theory;⁴⁵ it is a philosophy, because it produces "second-order, conceptual or meta-theoretical claims".⁴⁶ Critical Realism takes a staunch position against both empirical realism⁴⁷ and positivism, because they paint a picture of an atomistic world with no *necessary*⁴⁸ underlying relations. The application of Critical Realism (CR) to social/political theory, specifically IR theory, are, as Jonathan Joseph has argued, in the "[u]nobservable structures and generative mechanisms" that it posits.⁴⁹ In Joseph's evaluation, CR does Marxism a 'great service' by defending against the "inter-subjective praxis" interpretations, which are flawed on account of the epistemic fallacy⁵⁰ and the anthropic error.⁵¹ CR provides Marxism (or other political theories, such as

⁴⁴ See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations*.

⁴⁵ See 'Forum: Scientific and Critical Realism in International Relations', specifically Jonathan Joseph, 'Philosophy in International Relations: A Scientific Realist Approach', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 35, 2, (2007).

⁴⁶ Joseph, 'Philosophy in International Relations: A Scientific Realist Approach', 346.

⁴⁷ Empirical realism claims that objects of study can be described in whole by our experience of them.

⁴⁸ They are *necessary*, insofar, as the Critical Realist assertion obtains that their "enduring structures and mechanisms" exist independently of our experiences of them (Wight, 2006: 248).

⁴⁹ Joseph, 'Philosophy in International Relations: A Scientific Realist Approach', 346.

⁵⁰ The epistemic fallacy is the fallacy that our knowledge of an object exhausts its objective properties, and results in a 'derealisation of reality' and the 'epistemologisation of being' (Bhaskar, 1986: 253).

⁵¹ I assume Joseph is referring to the ontic fallacy here. The ontic fallacy occurs, almost always in conjunction with the epistemic fallacy, when the facts attained through our perception of the object of study are projected back out to represent the object while ignoring the social processes of knowledge production. This results in a 'desocialisation of science' and the 'ontologisation of knowledge' (Bhaskar, 1986: 253).

Anarchism) “an explicitly structural social ontology” so that the forms and processes of social relations, themselves, can be examined.⁵²

In applying a CR approach to ontology in the social sciences, Wight states that we must adopt the view that societies are irreducible to people (social forms are required for any social act), since social forms pre-exist, they are autonomous and may be studied as objects, and the causal powers of social forms establish their reality.⁵³ In addition, Wendy Wheeler notes that science is taking a turn in the late 20th and early 21st centuries away from the ‘Age of Reduction’ and towards the ‘Age of Emergence’, where holistic methods to understanding reality are growing in usefulness.⁵⁴ This ontological shift recognizes the limits of observation in modern methodological frameworks and is particularly critical of reducing the unit of selection, in evolutionary theory, to the deterministic genetic level as well as reducing the unit of analysis, in political theory, to the fragmented individual level.

In relation to the move away from positivist approaches in the social sciences encouraged by CR, Wight writes;

The *raison d'être* of the social sciences consists in the move from the specification of manifest phenomena of social life, as conceptualised in the experience of the social agents concerned, to the uncovering of the social relations that necessitate and regulate such experiences and phenomena. This gives social science a critical impulse insofar as the agents, whose activities are necessarily for the reproduction of these relations, may be unaware of the social relations which (in part) explain their activities. It is through the capacity of social science to illuminate such relations that it may come to play an emancipatory role.⁵⁵

Wight argues that the pursuit of knowledge should not be defined and demarcated into a specific scientific method, but channelled in a necessarily fallibilist manner to understand ontology as entirely distinct from the methods we use to come to understand it, for any “discourse on epistemology or methodology is bound to be more or less arbitrary without the prior specification of an object of inquiry”.⁵⁶

In attempting to settle ontological questions depth realism is required. This assumes that entities/mechanisms exist independently of our capacity to know them;

⁵² Jonathan Joseph, ‘Marxism, the Dialectic of Freedom and Emancipation’ in Dean, Kathryn, Jonathan Joseph, John Michael Roberts and Colin Wight, *Realism, Philosophy and Social Science*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 101.

⁵³ Colin Wight, ‘Social Action without Human Activity’, *Review of International Studies*, 30, 2, (2004), 46.

⁵⁴ Wendy Wheeler, *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2006).

⁵⁵ Wight, ‘Social Action without Human Activity’, 50-51.

⁵⁶ Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations*, 25.

thus, appearances do not exhaust reality.⁵⁷ Realist-based inquiries into social forms are described by three key factors: the first is the irreducible nature of societies to individuals (social forms are required for any social act); the second factor is the autonomous nature of these pre-existing social forms—this allows them to be studied as objects; and the third factor is the ability to rely on causal powers to establish the reality of social forms.⁵⁸ Wight continues, “these can be seen as arguments for the *reality* of social forms that are not explainable solely in terms of individuals.”⁵⁹

However, an argument for the third factor of the realist approach—reality determined through causal force—requires an account of the nature of causality. Kurki emphasizes the importance of an accurate understanding of causation in Critical (Scientific) Realist terms. She enumerates four basic CR assumptions on causation: the first is that causes are ontologically real and omnipresent, the second is that causes are often unobservable and this hinders an empiricist-based approach to causal analysis, the third assumption is that causes work in a complex manner, rather than the parsimonious ‘if A, then B’ manner, and the fourth, social causes come in many forms—from norms to discourse, reasons to social structures—thus positioning interpretation in an integral position within social scientific analysis.⁶⁰ This CR stance on causation also implies that empirically-grounded positivist approaches to understanding causality in a linear and often repetitive fashion are unhelpful to understanding patterns in the social realm. Rather, Kurki argues, it is the CR position that seeks to provide an account of the underlying causal powers, which can explain why those patterns may exist.

Kurki calls for ‘deep ontological’ inquiry into unobservable structures that form the foundation of social patterns.⁶¹ Using this deep ontological inquiry to science implies hypothesizing about the potential existence of unobserved entities, and using a large repertoire of “metaphors, analogies, similes, models and conjectures” to “infer from the known the unknown” all the while conceiving of ontologies which are not readily observable, apparent or even intuitive.⁶²

It is within these realist terms that I can reference and specify my own position. I suggest that Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid Theory offers a convincing biological argument to the existence of a deep structural sociality that repositions the ontological primary of analysis away from the individual and to a species level. The observable effects of this deep structural sociality include the spontaneous and non-coerced association of individuals engaging in mutual aid practices. This deep structural sociality, made intellectually accessible to us through the adoption of the Critical Realist approach, is descriptively inherent in both Kropotkin’s natural and social

⁵⁷ Ibid, 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 46. [emphasis in original]

⁶⁰ Kurki, ‘Critical Realism and Causal Analysis in International Relations’, 364.

⁶¹ Ibid, 365.

⁶² Wight, *Agents, Structures and International Relations*, 46.

theorizing. The ontological foundation it offers can and should be utilized widely to critique mainstream reductionist approaches to political and social issues.

Privileging the ontological individual as the primary unit of analysis leads to many of the base assumptions of politics. Namely, that the egoistic drive of humans must be *overcome*⁶³ (either by force or through institutions where self-interests can align) to promote cooperation. Further, this egoistic drive has been naturalised through the state-of-nature arguments explicit within Hobbesian social contract theory. Biological theory, being both *informed by* and *informing* political theory as I have argued above, is now under considerable scrutiny to find tangible explanatory links to policy issues.⁶⁴ However, it is the reductionist tendencies of political theory that thwart attempts to understand the social world through its biological foundations. I argue below that escaping from the pitfalls of this individualistic ontology requires us to make a shift in our ontological assumptions. It is the shift to a holist ontology which reformulates some of the political concepts intrinsic to the analysis of International Relations, and helps provide a basis for the emancipatory potential of Critical IR theory.

Shifting Political Ontology

The application of evolutionary theory to International Relations was most notably done by Robert Axelrod when he collaborated with W. D. Hamilton to write the article “The Evolution of Cooperation” (1981), where selfish individuals cooperate through modelling on the ‘Tit-for-Tat’ paradigm. However, the premise behind these various cooperative strategies is that of a self-serving logic—organisms act on an individual level to, ultimately, further their own interests.

Finding ways to cooperate in the face of the collective action problem seems to be at the heart of the liberal enterprise in the same way that finding ways to stabilize power relations seems to be at the core of Realism. However, these two normative commitments have their own—often tacit—ontological assumptions. It is these embedded ontological assumptions that have established individualism as the reference point for understanding social and political interactions. Thus, this ontological orientation has deterministically led to the same analytical premises for concepts key to IR theory, such as anarchy. Equally, some scholars have sought to naturalize the individual (either conceived of in human or statist terms) as the sole referent for understanding the nature of social/political interaction.

It may seem counterintuitive to attempt to analyze *social* interactions based on the study of an *individual* ontology; however, this is done regularly and

⁶³ Marshall Sahlins’s *The Western Illusion of Human Nature: With Reflections on the Long History of Hierarchy, Equality, and the Sublimation of Anarchy in the West, and Comparative Notes on Other Conceptions of the Human Condition*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2008) offers an especially scathing critique of the Western notion of selfishness and cruelty being intrinsic qualities of human nature that must be repressed for progress to occur.

⁶⁴ For an overview see Albert Somit and Steven Peterson, ‘Review Article: Biopolitics After Three Decades—A Balance Sheet’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 28, (1998): 559-571; Roger Masters, ‘Human Nature, Biology, and Justice’, *International Political Science Review*, 15, no. 4 (1994).

unproblematically—such is the depth of the penetration of individualistic thinking. Ontological individualism shepherds our analytics into well-worn pastures of limited possibilities. Reconsidering what we take to be ‘real’ results in a cascade of analytical consequences. A specific example of this is Thayer’s attempt to explain Realism in biological and anthropological terms. In doing so, he naturalizes this individualistic approach to international politics through a reductionist application of evolutionary theory.

He makes his case for the jump from the natural to the social along epistemological grounds by way of addressing the issue of causal explanation. Causal explanation is reliant on the balancing of social scientific inquiry between proximate and ultimate causes, where ultimate causes explain proximate ones. Thayer asserts that his inquiry into evolutionary theory can ‘offer an ultimate causal understanding’ into issues such as war, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and the spread of disease.⁶⁵ His argument for evolutionary ultimate causes to war and ethnic conflict rely on his insistence on the adaptive *value* of traits such as ethnocentrism and xenophobia. These adaptations have taken place because of the traits of egoism and domination, evolved in and inherent to humans.⁶⁶ It is through this that he undertakes the task of reinvigorating the two theoretical foundations for classical Realism—Niebuhr’s theological assumption of evil within humans and the Hobbes/Morgenthau metaphysical assumption that humans possess an inherent *animus dominandi*—which lost influence with the rise of Waltz’s structuralism.⁶⁷

Thayer’s justification for applying evolutionary theory to Realism is to provide a verifiable theoretical framework to reinvigorate the tradition.⁶⁸ To explain egoism, Thayer invokes Dawkins’ ‘selfish gene’ theory, which reduces the level of analysis to the gene as a self-interested replicator.⁶⁹ Domination is explained through the biological production of ‘dominance hierarchies’ in ‘competitive situations’ where particular individuals in groups achieve greater access to resources; and, the ‘ubiquity’ of this model of social organization in the animal kingdom suggests a generalisable principle of hierarchy that may contribute to an organism’s level of fitness.⁷⁰ This, he argues, accounts for human allegiance to the state, ideology and institutions^{71 72}.

⁶⁵ Bradley Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁷ Thayer, ‘Bringing in Darwin: Evolutionary Theory, Realism, and International Politics’, 125.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁷¹ This principle of hierarchy Thayer attempts to naturalise is in direct opposition to the dynamic social forms based on individual liberty which Anarchism espouses.

⁷² Thayer, ‘Bringing in Darwin: Evolutionary Theory, Realism, and International Politics’, 136.

Thayer offers three characteristics of evolutionary theory that provide a “better foundation for realism than the theological or metaphysical arguments advanced by Niebuhr or Morgenthau”: firstly, it meets Hempel’s criteria for Deductive-Nomological models of science and also holds true to Popper’s principle of falsification, secondly, it is widely accepted by the scientific community as a valid explanation for human evolution, and thirdly, it supports the offensive realist position that, in the ‘competitive environment’ of international anarchy, states naturally seek to dominate one another.⁷³

These three characteristics of his epistemological ‘foundation’ for realism can be criticized within the scope of the argument I have presented above⁷⁴; however, in keeping with the ontological thematic presented above it is more instructive to highlight that his epistemological claims pre-determine his ontological primary to be at the individual—or even gene—level. It should come as no surprise that, true to his realist theoretical orientation, Thayer freely abstracts his individualistic ontology up to the state level and can posit that interactions among states existing in conditions of ‘anarchy’ lead to conflict. It is in this notion of predetermined behaviour in ‘anarchy’ that concerns me most.

Anarchy is a widely misconstrued term. It is often analogized with ‘chaos’ in lay parlance⁷⁵, and the implications from this semantic treatment connote a natural state of conflict. IR theorists, such as Waltz, rarely make the same mistake of analogizing ‘anarchy’ with ‘chaos’; however, the ontological assumptions they use analyze the phenomenon of anarchy in the international system come to the same connotative conclusions that ‘anarchy’ leads to ‘disorder’. Ashley argues that the concept of anarchy has been given ‘foundational truth’ status in International Relations, despite the nature of its arbitrary construction; the discourse *and ontology* of the anarchy problematique is “always in the process of being imposed.”⁷⁶ Yet, it is in line with this imposed political construction that the dichotomy of inside/outside and domestic/international arises, where it is incumbent upon the sovereign to maintain order against the naturalized disorder outside of territorial boundaries.⁷⁷

Yet, Helen Milner is unconvinced of the central importance of the concept of anarchy in understanding international politics.⁷⁸ Her arguments surround the ambiguity of the term, and its tendency to reinforce the division between international

⁷³ Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict*, 74.

⁷⁴ I will leave a comprehensive critique of Thayer’s epistemology based on Kropotkin’s Mutual Aid Theory for another time, however.

⁷⁵ Such as within *Webster’s Dictionary*.

⁷⁶ Richard K. Ashley, ‘Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique’, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 17, 2, (1988), 229.

⁷⁷ R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁷⁸ Helen Milner, ‘The assumption of anarchy in international relations theory: a critique’, *Review of International Studies*, 17, (1991), pp. 67-85.

and domestic politics. This division is analytically unhelpful on heuristic grounds, insofar as it paints International Relations as a *sui generis* field “where international politics is seen as unique...one is less likely to use the hypotheses, concepts, and questions about politics developed elsewhere”.⁷⁹ Instead, Milner posits anarchy to be a lack of perceived legitimacy in a centralized authority which regulate the relations among political entities—a definition that can be applied domestically and internationally.

However, Milner also stresses the value of the concept of interdependence in understanding relations among states. “Strategic interdependence”, as she argues, serves to secure for an actor what he or she wants through cooperation with others.⁸⁰ There are no preconditions of equality among the actors; thus, it is conceptually independent from her definition of anarchy. Indeed, power relations operate separately from interdependence and “one cannot determine the extent of [actor] interdependence from the degree of hierarchy/anarchy present in their relationship”.⁸¹ Interdependence is so integral in understanding political relations, however, that Milner notes that the contributors to *Cooperation Under Anarchy* implicitly use the notion of strategic interdependence in iterated PD games despite their lack of acknowledgement of its fundamental nature to the actors represented in their models.⁸²

While Milner acknowledges the crucial nature of including notions of interdependence in political analysis, she stops short of problematising the root and logical consequences of interdependence. Thus, interdependence becomes unquestioned in the same way as the assumptive causal force of anarchy necessitating conflict. In addition, Milner’s interpretation of the form interdependence takes, namely the ‘strategic interdependence’ of cooperation among actors predicated on their respective individual benefits, takes the individual unit as its core ontological assumption.

However, to probe the root cause of such integral interdependence is to begin to form an understanding of the imperative nature of sociality and the ontological implications of this imperative social interaction. Where interdependence is as important to understanding politics as hierarchical relationships, then ontology becomes the primary question of political analysis at both the domestic and international levels.

However, there has been a stunning silence of anarchist voices in helping to interpret what ‘anarchy’ in IR is really about. Anarchism is a social philosophy above all, and anarchy, as it is conceived of in Anarchism, is typified by free association.⁸³ In stark contrast, the ‘anarchy’ in IR is not free association—it is humans brought

⁷⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 163.

⁸¹ Ibid, 163.

⁸² Ibid, 165.

⁸³ Adam Goodwin, ‘Anarchism and its Critique of Marxism’, *Social Anarchism: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, 42, (2008-2009).

together under mutually incommensurable and irreconcilable legal and authoritative frameworks known as states. As already noted, in Anarchist philosophy it is near universally accepted that society precedes the state, but the free associations of society occur on a day-to-day basis despite the looming presence of the state—morally, economically and militarily—in the lives of humans.

This should encourage us to consider the larger sociological implications that result from coercive legal frameworks at the state level. Namely, it is through the codification and blanket application of specific modalities of cooperation that forces individuals to cooperate in a restricted manner. Thus, Anarchism applied to IR begins its critique by problematising the State. Reading into the ontological assumptions of Kropotkin’s style of Anarchism, both through his scientific and political writings, provides us another way to consider how social interactions have taken place in our evolutionary past(s) and how they might occur today.

Adopting this holistic ontology also provides social possibilities. The holistic ontology assumes that social interaction is both inevitable and necessary; thus, this provides a palette on which an infinite number of social forms may be tried and tested. It is from our cognizance of the processes of social forms that we can change them. Based on this ontology, MAT then encourages us to shift our analytical focus from questions of how to achieve cooperation to questions of what is the *best way* to cooperate. This transition from ontology, to epistemology and ultimately to praxeology occurs sequentially.

The three questions of ontology, epistemology and praxeology have surfaced frequently in Critical IR theory. Andrew Linklater identifies these three questions as “central to the Western theory and practice of [IR]”⁸⁴, while Ken Booth sees the answers given by critical security theory to the three major questions— “what is real in security studies? what is reliable knowledge? and how might we act?”—as challenging “the pre-defined answers of orthodox international politics”.⁸⁵ Linklater has argued that “praxeological inquiry invariably begins by asking whether states in the context of anarchy have the freedom of choice to bring new social and political relations into being,”⁸⁶ and answering these questions regarding “the systems of inclusion and exclusion in world politics” contributes “to the next stage of international relations theory”.⁸⁷ This next stage is expanding political community and identity beyond the exclusionary character of the Westphalian State, and hopes were placed in a neo-Kantian cosmopolitan morality expressed through foreign policy. However, emancipation grounded in the expansion of political community cannot be located within the confines of state policy. Continuing the Anarchist argument below,

⁸⁴ Andrew Linklater, *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 31.

⁸⁵ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29.

⁸⁶ Andrew Linklater, “The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View”, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 21, 1, (1992), 96.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 97.

I suggest that Critical IR theory has more to gain from the abandonment of the State than its embrace.

Concluding Against the State

The reductive, individual-based approach to studying social relations occludes study of the specific forms and processes of these relations. Critical Realism helps us understand these relations by way of their reproduction through human agency; this is the precondition to emancipation because it takes into account the ‘duality of structure’—“society is both ever-present *condition* and continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency”.⁸⁸ This is an intuitive concept for one who accepts the ontological foundation of Anarchism—both historically and naturally—that society precedes the State. Kropotkin’s biological ontology offers CR what Bhaskar requires—emergence. As Bhaskar has written (numerous times), “Emancipation depends upon explanation depends upon emergence. Given the phenomena of emergence, an emancipatory politics...depends upon a realist science. But, if and only if emergence is real, the development of both science and politics are up to us”.⁸⁹ Thus, if we accept that the object exists prior to being observed, so society existed prior to being *observed*⁹⁰ by the State (or social and political scientists, for that matter). In basing our ontology on that simple claim, the transformative potential of social agents and the descriptive accuracy of political analysis in assessing social transformation align.⁹¹ Herein lies the emancipatory compass.

The State for Kropotkin was merely another form of political organization, or, in philosophical terms, social relations. In the process of de-reifying and studying the relations which constitute the modern state, as CR instructs us, anarchists explicitly adopt the ontological shift that Anarchist thinkers, like Godwin, Proudhon and Bakunin, have been offering through meticulous historical studies and shrewd critical insight. And, Kropotkin buttressed this shift with MAT to establish the biological roots of this social ontological perspective. It is my suggestion that the beneficiaries of this ontological approach to emancipation can be most readily located in Critical IR theory.

⁸⁸ Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, 92.

⁸⁹ Roy Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation*, (London: Verso, 1986), 104.

⁹⁰ See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁹¹ Joseph, ‘Marxism, the Dialectic of Freedom and Emancipation’, 103.

Critical IR theory, especially Critical Security Studies (CSS), is preoccupied with the ideal of emancipation⁹². It is through the uncovering of “social constraints and cultural understandings” that critical theory is inherently emancipatory.⁹³ However, critical theory in IR has not followed a unified approach. Commenting on this disunity, Wyn Jones has noted that it should be considered as “a *constellation* of rather distinctive approaches, all seeking to illuminate a central theme, that of emancipation”.⁹⁴

The ‘emancipatory project’, as Linklater has termed it, has been under continuous attack by poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers in IR for the universalising metanarrative of progress it imposes. However, Linklater is not satisfied with the rejection of universalisms and the adoption of a purely relativist perspective where ‘anything goes’; rather, he insists there is a “thinner notion of progress that refers to the expanding circle of human sympathy”.⁹⁵ It is in this ‘thinner notion’ of progress that he would later derive the importance of the ‘no harm’ principle in global politics to build a global moral community.⁹⁶

Yet as Wyn Jones has asserted the ‘emancipatory project’ is bound by neither a common epistemology nor ontology.⁹⁷ In CSS, Booth has acknowledged that the ontology of security for utopian realists necessarily takes on a “holistic character and non-statist approach”.⁹⁸ This is the closest that we can come to Kropotkin’s biological ontology as it can be understood through Anarchism. We approach even closer to classical Anarchism in following Booth’s definition of emancipation as “the freeing of people...from those physical and human constraints which stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do”.⁹⁹ Divergent from this view, however, is

⁹² See Ken Booth, ‘Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice’, *International Affairs* Vol. 67, No. 3 (Jul., 1991); Ibid, ‘Security and emancipation’, *Review of International Studies* (1991). 17; Ibid, ed., *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Ibid, *Theory of World Security*; Chris Brown ‘Turtles all the way down: Anti-Foundationalism, Critical Theory and International Relations’, *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 23, 2, (1994); Andrew Linklater, ‘The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Point of View’ *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 21, 1, (1992); Andrew Linklater, *The transformation of political community: ethical foundation of the Post-Westphalian era* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998); Ibid, *Critical Theory and world politics: citizenship, sovereignty and humanity* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Ibid, ‘Political Community and Human Security’ in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, edited by Ken Booth, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005); Ibid, ‘Towards a sociology of global morals with an ‘emancipatory intent’’, *Review of International Studies* (2007), 33; *Critical Theory and World Politics*, ed. Richard Wyn Jones (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishing, 2001).

⁹³ Linklater, *Critical theory and world politics: citizenship, sovereignty and humanity*.

⁹⁴ Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*, 4.

⁹⁵ Linklater, *The transformation of political community: ethical foundation of the Post-Westphalian era*, 76.

⁹⁶ Ibid, ‘Cosmopolitan Political Communities in International Relations’.

⁹⁷ Wyn Jones, *Critical Theory and World Politics*, 9.

⁹⁸ Booth, ‘Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice’, 317.

⁹⁹ Ken Booth, ‘Security and emancipation’, *Review of International Studies*, 17, (1991), 319.

Linklater's vision of emancipation through a transformation of political community. The reinvention of political community is found in the 'moral possibilities' of a 'post-exclusionary state' predicated on the state surrendering a plethora of monopoly powers.¹⁰⁰ However, when contrasted with Anarchist understandings of the State, this approach to emancipation rings of statist and reductionist tendencies towards reformism.

Kropotkin's understanding of biologically-grounded social ontology and the antithetical role of the State to human development can inform Critical IR theory as to where it should place its ontological foundations.¹⁰¹ The adoption of Kropotkin's ontology would help critical theory to overcome the theoretical incoherence of its emancipatory agenda, while also steering it away from these reformist inclinations. Kropotkin's Anarchist ontology presented above is premised on the pre-existence of society before the State. The Anarchist rejection of the State is in response to the perception that the State looms over society—in Kropotkin's words:

The State's functionary took possession of every link of what formerly was an organic whole. Under that fatal policy and the wars it engendered, whole regions, once populous and wealthy, were laid bare; rich cities became insignificant boroughs; the very roads which connected them with other cities became impracticable. Industry, art, and knowledge fell into decay. Political education, science, and law were rendered subservient to the idea of State centralization. It was taught in the Universities and from the pulpit that the institutions in which men formerly used to embody their needs of mutual support could not be tolerated in a properly organized State; that the State alone could represent the bonds of union between its subjects; the federalism and 'particularism' were the enemies of progress, and the State was the only proper initiator of further development.¹⁰²

Kropotkin argued that the development of the state, which arrogated to itself the role of facilitator to cooperation, imposed its own methods of cooperation—regardless of the suitability to circumstances. There was another implication of centralizing cooperative tendencies within the state structure; Kropotkin argues that there grew out of this a dependence on authority. This dependence had the atomizing effect of "the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded individualism".¹⁰³ In sum, the state was a contingent social relation that created boundaries, restrictions, regulations and ideologies antithetical to the preconditions to and conditions of sociality.

The critique of the interpretation of the 'struggle for existence' metaphor offered by Kropotkin's Mutual Aid Theory marks the epistemological point where we

¹⁰⁰ Linklater, *The transformation of political community: ethical foundation of the Post-Westphalian era*, 177.

¹⁰¹ Booth, *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, 181.

¹⁰² Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, 178.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 135.

are prompted by Critical Realism to explore the metaphor's ontological underpinnings. Further, the paramount positioning of sociality within MAT opens the door to the possibility of a holist biological ontology. The meta-theoretical approach to conceive of this holist biological ontology and the transformative potential of the relations which exist within it are highlighted by Critical Realism. Illuminating the contingent nature of these relations within the context of their necessity in a holist ontology underlies the emancipatory impulse of this approach. At the same time, key assumptions in International Relations Theory, such as anarchy and cooperation, take different meanings when reductionism in analysis is challenged by holism. I have argued that this holist ontology can serve as a coherent reference point for the concept of the expansion of political community that Critical IR theory espouses. However, accepting this holist approach also implies accepting Kropotkin's normative argument against the State and its atomizing tendencies. Thus, the challenge of Kropotkin's biological ontology not only manifests itself in its critique of reductionist conventions in political analysis, but also in the praxis of radical anti-state politics. The subversive nature of this challenge is the starting point for what Anarchism has to offer IR.