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Kissed by Minerva

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Essay by Kamila Stullerova, Aberystwyth University

“*Kissed by Minerva: On Stanley Hoffmann’s Ethical Theory of International Politics.*”

Introduction

Stanley Hoffmann’s unique concern with the ethics of international relations is widely recognised.¹ Hoffmann was unique in his insistence on the normative function of theory at a time when IR, certainly in the United States, predominantly separated explanatory and normative theorising. Remarkably, he sought to identify the nexus of these two types of theorising, arguing that they were ultimately inseparable. This put him at odds with IR theorists as well as normative (international) political theorists. Examining Hoffmann’s engagement with Raymond Aron’s work, with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and his thinking partnership with the political theorist Judith Shklar, this essay shows Hoffmann as an IR theorist who transcended the confines of his own era. His work remains inspirational and, as I point up, there are reasons to think his influence will only grow.

Minerva is a lasting symbol in Stanley Hoffmann’s work.² References to the Roman goddess of wisdom provide an instantly recognisable symbol. But they are also an invitation to multi-dimensional interpretations. In the introduction to his book *Janus and Minerva*, Hoffmann reflected upon the primary meaning of this symbol: Wisdom was for him the ability to judge the right and wrong. He emphasised the importance of judgment in the study of international politics and defended his relentless insistence on the pursuit of what he called the “normative function.”³ He explained that it was Raymond Aron, his “mentor and friend,”⁴ who equated the normative function with wisdom and prompted the reference to Minerva.⁵ Other dimensions of this symbol, especially the one represented by Minerva’s owl – the Hegelian idea that knowledge comes to us only with hindsight – are also present in Hoffmann’s work. It is in this context of Minerva that Hoffmann referred to the temple of the two-faced Roman god Janus, the doors of which were closed in peace and open in the time of war.

Learning from Aron

To appreciate the place of ethics in Hoffmann’s work, we must first turn to his engagement with Raymond Aron. After all, he first mentioned Minerva in an essay about Aron’s originality. Hoffmann deemed Aron’s *Peace and War* unique for combining “empirical theorizing” and the normative function.⁶ His admiration for Aron’s approach is palpable. But, he also asked whether this ethics, as superior to its alternatives as it was, would be enough to stop war or even minimise its

¹ Peter A Gourevitch, and Robert O. Keohane. “STANLEY HOFFMANN 27 NOVEMBER 1928 - 13 SEPTEMBER 2015,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 161:1 (2017); Magnus Feldmann and Benoît Pelopidas, “Moderation as Courage: The Legacy of Stanley Hoffmann as a Scholar and Public Intellectual,” *The Tocqueville Review* 39:2 (2018): 77-91.

² Stanley Hoffmann, “Minerve at Janus,” *Critique* January and February 1963; Hoffmann, “Minerva and Janus,” *The State of War: Essays on the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (London: Pall Mall Press: 1965), 22-53; Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press: 1987).

³ Hoffmann, *Janus and Minerva*, xi.

⁴ Hoffmann, “A Retrospective on World Politics,” in Linda B. Miller and Michael Joseph Smith, *Ideas and Ideals: Essays on Politics in Honor of Stanley Hoffmann* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

⁵ Hoffmann, “Preface,” in *Janus and Minerva*, xi.

⁶ Hoffmann, “Minerva and Janus,” 52.

occurrence.⁷ He presented Aron's theory of international relations as framed by two questions: First, whether knowledge is to be had before an event happens; second, whether normative judgment of what is happening right now and policy-making advice are possible at all. After all, Hoffmann wrote, "[w]hoever has lived through an international crisis ... knows one truth instinctively: only after the event do events appear to have been "inevitable," only the benefit of hindsight puts them in that light."⁸

Aron's theory of international relations sought to incorporate knowledge of history as well as normative knowledge. It operated on four "levels of conceptualization":⁹ First, there was the theory "in the narrow sense," which defined the "basic concepts of the special order with which it deals" and described "this order's typical situations" – such as types of wars and peace. Second, there was the level of sociology, that is examination of the material and sociological determinants that shape the studied order, units and situations. In a Weberian manner, causal theses must be submitted to empirical research, so that propositions can be formulated "not as categorical laws but as probabilities." Thirdly, there is the level of history, which both applies the sociological level and "describe[s] the unique features of situations." The last level is that of "[p]raxiology – i.e., normative theory." This level "offers advice and prescription" and it is at this level that "philosophical problems to which theoretical, sociological, and historical analyses lead" are raised.¹⁰

In Aron's IR, "the plurality of goals" and "multiplicity of determining factors" crucially restrain the normative level.¹¹ Philosophy, in turn, impacts the other three levels. It is at the level of normative theory that "history is being judged."¹² While lessons for future cannot be learnt from history, judging history helps philosophy to adjudicate between competing ethical orders applicable to international relations. This, in Hoffmann's view, led Aron to favour "the ethics of wisdom" over its alternatives.¹³ And it is precisely where Hoffmann criticised Aron. After having praised its virtues, Hoffmann alleged that Aron's ethics were too "narrow and fragile" to withstand the force of empirical reality.¹⁴ The role of ethics in Aron's work, Hoffman warned, was limited to adding "a greater dose of caution" to "politics as usual."¹⁵ In the world of nuclear weapons, with its "risky gamble of ... inoculation against the folly of war," this was not enough. In its stead, philosophers and politicians alike actively need to "bring about through prudence the coming of the postwar age."¹⁶

Learning from Rousseau

⁷ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 53.

⁸ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 31.

⁹ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 31-32.

¹⁰ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 31-32.

¹¹ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 32.

¹² Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 33.

¹³ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 43-44.

¹⁴ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 45-46.

¹⁵ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 52.

¹⁶ Hoffmann, "Minerva and Janus," 52.

Interpreting Rousseau, Hoffmann developed an idea that became the hallmark of his IR.¹⁷ This was the relevance of moral psychology to IR. Hoffmann found continual inspiration in political philosophy. He confessed that he “found the ideas of past political philosophers often more stimulating than the conceptualizations of contemporary political scientists” and advised students of international politics to “study as much history and political philosophy as [they] can absorb.”¹⁸ Political philosophy helped Hoffmann to transcend Aron’s ethics. Importantly, Hoffmann read major figures in the canon of political philosophy as being concerned both with the domestic and international dimensions of politics. He saw Rousseau as the most perceptive of the challenges which domestic political arrangements and concomitant loyalties pose to international affairs. Hoffmann was not satisfied with Rousseau’s way of navigating between the two dimensions,¹⁹ but this didn’t devalue what he was to learn from him.

Hoffmann stressed that Rousseau and Aron shared trust that the “areas of empirical or causal theory and of normative theory” are crucially interconnected.²⁰ But Rousseau also instructed Hoffmann to think about the exact nature of this tie, which Aron failed to appreciate. It is productive to use the term ‘moral psychology’ when articulating what Hoffmann took from Rousseau, even if we do not find this term in Hoffmann’s work. The way he read Rousseau – and then developed his own ideas about international relations and world politics – discloses a perspective similar to what Judith Shklar sought to capture with the concept of moral psychology. A life-long friend and Harvard colleague, in the early 1960s Shklar was also working on Rousseau, which culminated with the publication of her *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory*.²¹ The book’s chapter “Moral Psychology” examines Rousseau’s idea that organised social life eases some of people’s inner conflicts but only at the cost of creating other tensions. This process is also linked to the emergence of norms and values; values originate in the psychological processing of experience. That the two young instructors influenced each other’s scholarship is close to certain.

Hoffmann took seriously Rousseau’s argument about the international realm being profoundly affected by the moral psychology of domestic politics. Political theorists, including Shklar, never properly appreciated this dimension of Rousseau’s thought. Hoffmann, on the other hand, found Rousseau so central to IR that he co-authored a volume of Rousseau’s texts on international relations.²² He used Rousseau to argue that IR typically fails to engage the impact of individual factors – individual will, transformation of the self by membership in a political community, the psychology and sociology of domestic political values – on the international realm. Aron at least acknowledged some of them.²³ However, this awareness eventually led to a deep schism between Aron’s private political commitments, which Hoffmann described as “passionate[ly] liberal,” and his inability to criticise key players in international politics, as he only judged their actions from the perspective of the interests of the sovereign state they represented.²⁴ Hoffmann

¹⁷ Hoffmann, “Rousseau on War and Peace,” in *The State of War: Essays on the Theory and Practice of International Politics* (London: Pall Mall Press: 1965), 54-86.

¹⁸ Hoffmann, “A Retrospective on World Politics.”

¹⁹ Hoffmann, “Rousseau,” 55.

²⁰ Hoffmann, “Rousseau,” 54.

²¹ Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

²² Hoffmann and David P. Fidler, eds., *Rousseau on International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

²³ Hoffmann, “Minerva and Janus,” 42.

²⁴ Hoffmann, “Raymond Aron and the Theory of International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 29:1 (1985), 21.

wanted to do better. He sought to escape Aron's Hegelian contention that Minerva's owl flies only at dusk, that there is very little an IR theorist can do in terms of ethical international politics before tragic events run their course.

Fear Beyond Borders

The book *Duties beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Relations* (1981) is widely recognised as Hoffmann's most extensive examination of "the proper place for ethical and normative considerations in world politics."²⁵ In the book, which was dedicated to Shklar, Hoffmann sought to salvage Aron's approach that married empirically informed explanatory IR with normative theory. This is apparent also in the oft cited statement that his "main concern" was to demonstrate the possibilities to reconcile "what is usually referred to as the realistic approach to international politics, with the demands of morality."²⁶ Hoffmann sought to avoid the trap of empirically *un*-informed international political theory which saw world affairs as individual politics writ large. He aspired to account for openings and closures that moral psychology of domestic politics presented to world politics. The book's biggest challenge was to rein in the numerous moral perspectives linked to multiple dimensions of empirical analysis. But Hoffmann met this challenge only in his subsequent work.

Following Aron's IR theory, even if not his too narrow ethics, *Duties beyond Borders* produced an empirically informed typology of ethical agents in world politics. Following Rousseau, the typology included both domestic and international political actors, both individuals and collective bodies. Apart from cautioning them against hubris, statesmen were obliged to develop long-term thinking, working against the short-termist forces in modern bureaucratic states.²⁷ Hoffmann assigned special responsibilities to intellectuals, the media, and educational systems "in the open parts of the world."²⁸ Their roles were to dismantle prejudice and national self-righteousness, to enlighten the public about the outside world and to emphasise the links between ethical and other issues.²⁹ It is obvious that Hoffmann was not expecting any ultimate harmony from these diverse ethical initiatives and moral psychologies.

The quest for going "beyond of what we have now" is unequivocally present in Hoffmann's "reformist" international ethics.³⁰ Moderation and piecemeal change instantly come to mind when reading his measured ethical aspirations for world politics. But he didn't identify with either, arguing that more "direction," more resolute moral orientation was needed.³¹ In *Duties beyond Borders* this quest amounted to a number of principles, accompanied by several caveats and additional points.³² As interesting as these individual objectives were, this iteration of Hoffmann's world ethics did not

²⁵ Christopher C. Joyner, "Review: Duties beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics. By Stanley Hoffmann (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981. Pp. xvi+ 252. 9.95, paper.)," *American Political Science Review* 77:4 (1983), 1094.

²⁶ Hoffmann, *Duties beyond borders: On the limits and possibilities of ethical international politics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), xi.

²⁷ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 231.

²⁸ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 225.

²⁹ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 226-227.

³⁰ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 191, 196.

³¹ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 199.

³² Hoffmann, *Duties*, 209-221.

succeed in providing the direction and coherence he was aspiring for. With hindsight, however, one principle stands out: “The primary goal,” he wrote, “should be minimizing the risk of war. When there is a choice between alternative policies, all of which carry risk, one should choose the course that seems the least likely to lead to war.”³³

Hoffmann finally succeeded in synthesising what he had learnt from studying Aron and Rousseau in the post-Cold War era. Most notably, essays in the book *Chaos and Violence: What Globalization, Failed States, and Terrorism Mean for U.S. Foreign Policy*³⁴ formulated the moral orientation Hoffmann had been seeking to articulate. The prerequisite of it was the fear he had experienced as a child-migrant in Western Europe in 1939-40 who was looking for safety from persecution and war. Hoffmann often mentioned this period in his life.³⁵ The autumn of his life led him to reflect on the meaning of moral orientation beyond his subjective experience. He linked his experience to thoughts on fear from the perspectives of political philosophy and world politics.³⁶ Here, he expanded Shklar’s (primarily domestic) principle of fear as the worst evil.³⁷ What she sought to “diminish or, if at all possible, eliminate was the fear of systematic cruelty” in politics.³⁸ Faithful to his precept that theory’s domestic-to-international expansion cannot be that of scale only and that moral psychologies of political statehood and sovereignty matter, he focused especially on fears arising from the existence of states – to their own citizens, to other states, groups and individuals, such as migrants.

For both ethical and pragmatic reasons, fear must be recognised as salient at all levels of world politics. Fearful people often behave fatuously; knowingly inflicting fear upon others increases the risk of hubris and political myopia.³⁹ Hoffmann’s recognition of fear as the worst evil did not produce a prescription that could be directly institutionalised and operationalised. However, as a moral orientation, it should allow diverse agents in world politics, such as those delineated in *Duties Beyond Borders*, to prescribe and pursue moral action in concrete situations, and even to identify those situations as ethically relevant in the first place. The knowledge of history (in the broadest sense) helps us to anticipate the most likely situations where this principle might be applicable.

Learning from Hoffmann

As Jacques Hymans illuminates in his introduction to this symposium, Hoffmann’s genre of choice was the essay and his methodology was that of close reading. Neither was dominant in his own time, nor is it in ours. Yet, we are now more open to learning from Hoffmann than were his contemporaries. The domestic-international connection is not a hard sell today for empirical scholars, as we have long since left behind the neo-neo debate. But learning from Hoffmann goes

³³ Hoffmann, *Duties*, 218.

³⁴ Stanley Hoffmann, *Chaos and Violence: What Globalization, Failed States, and Terrorism Mean for US Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

³⁵ Hoffmann, “A Retrospective”; Stanley Hoffmann, “Thoughts on Fear in Global Society,” in *Chaos and Violence*, 31-41.

³⁶ Hoffmann, “Thoughts on Fear.”

³⁷ Judith N. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” in Stanley Hoffmann, ed., *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

³⁸ Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” 12, cited in Hoffmann, “Thoughts on Fear,” 37.

³⁹ Kamila Stullerova, “The Knowledge of Suffering: On Judith Shklar’s ‘Putting Cruelty First,’” *Contemporary Political Theory* 13:1 (2014): 38.

further. The domestic-international connection cannot be appreciated without acknowledging its ethical dimension. Some of contemporary IR is open to this as well.

Fatigued by positivist separation of explanation and ethics and the ever more navel-gazing post-positivist scholarship, many in my generation turned to revisiting the earlier periods in IR's history. There, we have discovered approaches that resonate with our longing for meaningful academic engagement with world affairs, for cultivating political judgment and addressing the empirical and moral complexity of the twenty-first century world politics. This resulted in the renewed interest in Classical Realism, especially in figures like Hans Morgenthau,⁴⁰ E.H. Carr,⁴¹ and John Herz,⁴² but also other approaches such as that of Karl Deutsch.⁴³ As I found out, Hoffmann's own engagement with some of these authors adds a new layer of critical understanding, which has been missing from the recent, more reconstructive, and oft almost adulatory, scholarship.⁴⁴

As I argued in "The Germans and the Frenchmen: Hoffmann's and Aron's Critiques of Morgenthau," Hoffmann's critique pierced to the heart of the ethical dimension of Classical Realism.⁴⁵ Unlike his contemporaries, who dismissed Morgenthau as nothing but a political philosopher,⁴⁶ Hoffmann valued Morgenthau; he recognised in American Classical Realism similarities to Aron's, and his own, IR. But he found problematic how Morgenthau sequestered power and his normative pursuit.⁴⁷ Morgenthau's ethics of responsibility failed to rein in power, as he – for otherwise valid reasons – insisted on the separation of different spheres of human activity, without realising that "occasional intertwining of politics, law and culture" is ethically desirable, and that the opposite is dangerous.⁴⁸ The root of the problem was Classical Realists' failure to account for the complex relationship between domestic and international politics, an issue

⁴⁰ Vibeke Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and the Politics of Patriotic Dissent* (place of publication: Springer, 2008); Oliver Jütersonke, *Morgenthau, law and realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Felix Rösch, *Power, knowledge, and dissent in Morgenthau's worldview* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁴¹ Seán Molloy, "Hans J. Morgenthau versus E. H. Carr: Conflicting Conceptions of Ethics in International Relations," in Duncan Bell, ed., *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 83-104; Milan Babík, "Realism as Critical Theory: The International Thought of E.H. Carr," *International Studies Review* 15:4 (2013): 491-514.

⁴² Jana Puglierin, *John H. Herz. Leben und Denken zwischen Idealismus und Realismus, Deutschland und Amerika*, Vol. 42 (Duncker & Humblot, 2011); Casper Sylvest, "John H. Herz and the Resurrection of Classical Realism," *International Relations* 22:4 (2008): 441-455.

⁴³ Jan Ruzicka, "A Transformative Social Scientist: Karl Deutsch and the Discipline of International Relations," *International Relations* 28:3 (2014): 277-287.

⁴⁴ Kamila Stullerova, "Embracing Ontological Doubt: The Role of 'Reality' in Political Realism," *Journal of International Political Theory* 13:1 (2017): 59-80.

⁴⁵ Kamila Stullerova, "The Germans and the Frenchmen: Hoffmann's and Aron's Critiques of Morgenthau," in Alexander Reichwein and Felix Rösch, eds., *Realism: A Distinctively 20th Century European Tradition* (place of publication: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 117-132.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 37.

⁴⁷ See also Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, "Stanley Hoffmann's Critique of Hans Morgenthau's Political Realism," *The Tocqueville Review* 39:2 (2018): 63-76.

⁴⁸ Stullerova, "The Germans," 126.

Hoffmann considered central to any international ethical intervention. Morgenthau did acknowledge that domestic politics operates differently from international politics. But this was not enough for him to formulate international ethics that would encompass the empirical concept of power, which he used to separate politics from other spheres of human activity.⁴⁹

In addition to IR, recent developments in Political Theory brought it noticeably closer to Hoffmann's areas of interest. This has been marked by the revival of 'realism'⁵⁰ and a growing interest in Shklar, the two often, though not always, intertwined. As the author of several essays on Shklar and the editor of her posthumous publications,⁵¹ Hoffmann played a vital role for Shklarian scholarship. He certainly was essential in my own effort to interpret Shklar as a political theorist fundamentally interested in world politics. Two extended conversations with him, as well as our correspondence, gave me confidence in tying together those loose ends in Shklar's work which indicated such a possibility, but which she never fully developed herself.⁵² Professor Hoffmann assured me that his fellow child-migrant was as much interested in world politics as he was. His succinct self-characteristics applied to her too: "It wasn't I who chose to study world politics. World politics forced themselves on me at a very early age."⁵³

The extent of Hoffmann's contribution to (International) Political Theory is yet to be fully addressed. Both the realist turn and the revival of Shklar has led some scholars to widen their horizon and work on "global political theory."⁵⁴ What global political theory has missed so far is coming to terms with Hoffmann's argument about international ethics being crucially, yet understandably, affected by moral psychologies of domestic politics. In my earlier work on Shklar's expanded political horizon, I partly alluded to this by identifying similar routes toward human rights in "culturally close or otherwise communicating societies," while ethically overcoming spatial or cultural boundaries necessitating other means, such as empathy based on recognition of suffering.⁵⁵ However, I too had thought that the challenge of global horizon is "one of extent, not quality."⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Hartmut Behr and Felix Rösch, "Introduction," in Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Concept of the Political* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3-64.

⁵⁰ Realism in Political Theory is distinct from IR realism.

⁵¹ Shklar, *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, Stanley Hoffmann, ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1998); Shklar, *Redeeming American Political Thought*, Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson, eds. (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁵² I would like to use this place to thank Bernie Yack and Peter Hall for kindly arranging my meetings with Professor Hoffmann in 2003 and 2013. Although I think the reason why he found an instant liking of me was the fact that my Ph.D. supervisor, Petr Lom, had been a particularly dear Ph.D. student of his. Hoffmann was, after all, my *Doctorgroßvater*. Lom was Shklar's Ph.D. student at the time she died, and Hoffmann took over the role.

⁵³ Hoffmann, "A Retrospective."

⁵⁴ Jonathan Floyd, "Should Global Political Theory get Real? An Introduction," *Journal of International Political Theory* 12:2 (2016): 93-95; Matt Sleat, "The Value of Global Justice: Realism and Moralism," *Journal of International Political Theory* 12:2 (2016): 169-184; Kamila Stullerova, "Cruelty and International Relations," in Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess, eds., *Between Utopia and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith N. Shklar* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019): 67-85; Stullerova, "Thoughts on War: The Other Pillar of Judith Shklar's Global Political Theory," *Global Intellectual History* (2020): 1-19.

⁵⁵ Kamila Stullerova, "Rethinking Human Rights," *International Politics* 50:5 (2013): 6.

⁵⁶ Stullerova, "Rethinking," 10.

Conclusion

While seeking wisdom as the normative function of his IR, Hoffmann demonstrated a great deal of wisdom in the more general sense. Most admirably it was his ability to understand the limits of the approaches he commended, as well as of his own approach. He knew that war and fear in world politics could never be fully eliminated; his theory of knowledge, his conception of world politics and his political philosophy didn't give the certainty it could be otherwise. After all, Minerva was not only the enemy of the god of war, Mars. She also presided over defensive wars.⁵⁷ Hoffmann's understanding of IR gave him a sense that the goal of minimising war and fear in world politics was both realistic and morally right. It is the best that could be had, as "[i]n the never-ending battle against fear, ignorance means doom; sharp light, transparency, and publicity mean hope for the victims, worries for the victimizers, and encouragement for oppositions that fight against state or private violence."⁵⁸ Having been subjected to one of the worst kinds of fear in world politics, Hoffmann sought to teach us that as humankind we do not need to experience all fears, and fight all wars, to be able to shut close the doors on the temple of Janus.

⁵⁷ H. A. Guerber, *Myths of Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Dover Publications, 1993 [1907]), 39.

⁵⁸ Hoffmann, "Thoughts on Fear," 41.