

*The Democratic Imperative of Theoreticians*

Piki Ish-Shalom, Ph.D.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Paper Prepared for the Sixth

Pan-European Conference on International Relations, University of Turin,

Italy

12-15 September 2007

Nowadays, it is not rare to hear IR scholars sneering at the democratic-peace thesis and blaming it and its proponents for the Iraq War. And to make matters worse, the problems of the war are taken to be the ultimate theoretical refutation of the thesis and to all practical—and theoretical—intents democratic-peace theories are now seen by many as defunct. However, although my purpose here is not to take sides in the theoretical debate on the validity of the thesis, I can safely argue—to paraphrase Mark Twain—that the reports of the thesis' demise are greatly exaggerated. The point is that this fashionable scholarly sneer has opened the door to a discussion of the theoreticians' responsibilities for the real-life ramifications of their theories. Two kinds of responsibilities are mainly discussed here: The first is the political responsibility ensuing in a democratic imperative. The second is scholarly responsibility ensuing in a theoretical imperative. Each for their different reasons, the two responsibilities burden theoreticians with the imperative to show greater concern and involvement in the political destinies of their theories and participate more actively in the public deliberations that shape policies.<sup>1</sup>

Although it may be argued that theory can benefit society and policy-making, the way theorization is conducted today causes two forms of political harm. The first harm is caused by the political manipulation of theory by interested parties who exploit its rhetorical capital to forestall disagreement, political opposition, and public deliberation, and ultimately degrade public reason. The second harm is due to the rigidly dogmatic policy blueprints that theories generate; policies which are vulnerable to failure due to the intricate, multifaceted nature of social reality. Both forms of political harm stem from a structural duality of accessibility and incomprehensibility overlaid with the claim and prestige of objectivity. Because of this structural duality, the subtle minutia of theorizing are lost when theory migrates to the public and political spheres, causing distorted understandings of theory that are both politicized and simplified. The above responsibilities and imperatives burden theoreticians with the obligation to examine this structural duality and devise a scheme to avert the two harms. Although the political actors who politicize and trivialize theories and use, misuse, and abuse theory's distorted understandings are the direct producers of these harms, the process of politicization and trivialization is made possible in the first place by the way theoreticians theorize. Hence, while the political actors bear the moral responsibility for the harms, the theoreticians—

as the process enablers—are allocated with the political responsibility and democratic imperative to disable the structural duality and preclude harm. To disable the structural duality and discharge the democratic imperative, theoreticians ought to renounce the claim of objectivity and adopt an active stance in the public and political spheres, where theories are distorted and policies sometimes informed by those distorted understandings.

### ***The Flawed Link between Theory and Policy***

West Point, June 1 2002: under the black cloud of the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 terror attacks, President Bush (2002a) launched what came to be known as the Bush Doctrine. The doctrine prescribes four principles: preemptive action, unipolarity backed by military superiority, unilateral action, and a commitment to spreading freedom and democracy. The most comprehensive presentation and justification of the doctrine came in the 2002 *National Security Strategy* (White House 2002), which expounded these four tenets. The Iraq War, launched by the United States on March 19 2003, was a planned and deliberated realization of the doctrine, carrying to the extreme the logic of unsurpassed unilateral preemptive military action. The war was also conducted under the banner of democracy-promotion. The next section explores the theoretical origins of this fourth tenet of promoting freedom and democracy.

Soon after the war began, Max Boot (2003, 27), a leading neoconservative pundit, eulogized the *National Security Strategy*:

Echoing one of President Bush's speeches, it [the *National Security Strategy*] says, "Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birth right of every person—in every civilization." The strategy is so emphatic because the administration embraces the theory of a "democratic peace"—the notion that liberal democracies are unlikely to use weapons of mass destructions, sponsor terrorism, and undertake other activities that threaten their neighbors and the United States. Therefore, the United States has a vital stake in fostering the spread of representative government.

What Boot describes as a straight-forwarded process of embracing and implementing a theory is really a far more torturous process. But, he does point us in the right direction, namely, that democratic peace theory—or more accurately

democratic-peace thesis and its contingent theories—lies at the heart of the Bush Doctrine's emphasis on democracy promotion.

The democratic-peace thesis' migration from academia to the public sphere was prompted and guided by a host of strategic, political, ideological, and cultural-identity reasons (Ish-Shalom 2006, 2007). The migration process began in the early 1990s when neoconservative pundits embraced the thesis, and throughout the 1990s it was adopted by the American policy elites, becoming a public convention. Public conventions are entirely different idea-entity from theories. A theory is a construction; a theoretical construction committed to the explication—according to strict methodological rules—of the patterned relations between different phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, a public convention is “general background knowledge about the world that is taken for granted, and shapes the commonsensical codes of thinking and behavior (Ish-Shalom 2006, 571).” To communicate their findings, theoreticians use the discursive genre of theoretical explanatory vernacular, that is meticulous claims of the relations between different phenomena, articulated to deliver the subtlest minutia of a theory's contentions as were established through strict and careful theorization. Public conventions on the other hand are circulated via the discursive genre of commonsensical descriptive vernacular, that is the loose expression of unreflective accounts that unfold the narratives in which the world is captured and figured out by the public commonsense. The former discursive genre functions as to convey theoretical discoveries and logic of explanation. The latter discursive genre functions as to affirm and reaffirm the commonsensical depiction of reality. The theoretical construction of democratic-peace seeks methodologically to verify and explain the relations between democracy and peace. The public convention of democratic-peace takes for granted the (theoretically wrong) assertion that democracies are peaceful polities.

This public convention was widespread among influential neoconservative public-intellectuals when President Bush sought a new strategic framework following September 11<sup>th</sup>. The attacks did much to destroy President Bush's earlier realistic convictions with which he campaigned in the 2000 presidential elections, advocating a restricted global role for the United States. Following the terror

attacks, the neoconservative public-intellectuals were sufficiently persuasive to win Bush over to an agenda of democracy promotion, thus transforming the public convention of the democratic-peace into a political conviction, in other words, into “specific knowledge engendering a strong, opinionated view that necessitates political action (Ish-Shalom 2006, 572).” Political convictions are conveyed through the discursive genre of political avowal vernacular, that is forceful declarations rhetorically uttered in slogan-like fashion to confirm and convey political stands. This discursive genre functions to justify and legitimize ideological beliefs and political actions. The political conviction arising from the democratic-peace thesis is that because democracies bring stability and peace promoting democracy is a vital interest, and democratization a matter of national security. The consequence of such thinking is the Bush Doctrine that resulted in the Iraq War and Bush’s (2004) rhetorical declarations of “freedom on the march.”

But freedom is not on the march. Democracy is not taking form in Iraq, which is gradually but surely sinking into civil war. In fact, the Bush policy has spawned a calamity. To understand how the political biography of the democratic-peace thesis has contributed to America’s failure in Iraq let us leave the level of descriptive history for that of critical hermeneutics.

Theory does not migrate intact to the public and political spheres. It receives public and political representations in the form of the above-mentioned idea-entities of public and political convictions. While the bottom lines of both theory and its public and political representations may resemble each other, there are some essential differences between them. What begins life as an academic theory is stripped of various essential requisites for sound theorizing and decked out in more publicly digestible features. To observe this process in action, let us examine Boot’s account of the democratic-peace thesis. Boot (2003, 27) describes the thesis as “the notion that liberal democracies are unlikely to use weapons of mass destructions, sponsor terrorism, and undertake other activities that threaten their neighbors and the United States.” However, anyone familiar with the thesis would find it hard to equate it with his portrayal. Nowhere in the thesis, which deals with institutionalized war, is terrorism and sponsorship of terrorism mentioned. Another

divergence in Boot's account is his confident use of the term "liberal democracy", when the theoretical debate over the type of democracy involved in the democratic peace (as well as the causes of it) is still unresolved. What Boot lacks is academic cautiousness and the rigor of self-questioning. His depiction of the thesis is too definitive and smacks of the political privilege of self-assuredness despite its non backing by reality or theory. Moreover, his declaration that democracies do not threaten their neighbors lacks theoretical substance in cases where neighboring countries are not democracies (see also Weede 2007: 221)—the democratic-peace thesis is quite explicit that it is valid only dyadically: between pairs of democracies. And to top all this, Boot does not limit himself to the abstract. He boldly concretizes an abstract and general thesis and relates it to United States interests. This is another example of Boot's free political interpretation of the thesis. The thesis in its abstract universal aspirations<sup>3</sup> is not forceful enough for political purposes, hence Boot grounds it concretely as an American-based assertion. Therefore, as we have seen, the democratic-peace thesis and the Boot version of it are two different kinds of ideal-entities delivered by different discursive genres.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Boot is quite assured in his presentation of the thesis. Even worse, his presentation might be accepted as quite reasonable by the layperson who—oddly from the theoretician point of view—accepts Boot's version of it. Thus we see that an interesting change has taken place. What the theoretician sees as a distortion of the democratic-peace theory the layperson now perceives as *the* theory. Moreover, when the layperson is courted with the democratic-peace thesis, she is courted with the transfigured version, a political representation of it. Boot uses the distorted account of the thesis to deliver a political message—using the discursive genre of political avowal vernacular—and judging from the results, he does quite a good job. Boot's version of the thesis indeed became a political conviction for large segments of the American policy elites and became one of the main pillars of the Bush Doctrine, positing the promotion of democracy, forcefully if needed. In the next section we examine what the process of politicizing theory actually entails.

### ***The Harms Produced by the Politicization and Trivialization of Theory***

Four essential requisites for sound theorizing are stripped away from theory when it migrates to the public and political spheres. First, there is the academic culture of cautiousness, self-criticism, and self-reflection. This culture guarantees that the academic endeavor is an open project of purging prejudices and obstacles in the path of establishing truth. Second, theory is explicated in terms of conditionality. One of the theoretician's tasks is to set the limits of a theory's applicability; under what conditions and parameters theory is valid. In the democratic-peace thesis example, the assertion is only dyadic: it is valid for pairs of consolidated democracies only. Third, theory is a probabilistic assertion rather than the manifestation of natural law. Jack Levy (1989, 270) infamously declared democratic peace to be "as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations." Yet even Levy, it is important to note, did not declare it a law, only a semi-law. Fourth, and more broadly, theoreticians are bound by the logic rules of inference that dictate what can be validly deduced from a theory.

These four features are essential requisites for sound theorizing. However, as they involve technicalities and subtleties they do not fare well in the public and political spheres. The four requisites and the discursive genre of theoretical explanatory vernacular conveying them are so esoteric as to be jargonistic and perplexing to the public. This has two politically relevant consequences, each causing a harm requiring remedy. The first is that the process of translating theory into public representation is highly vulnerable to political manipulation by interested politicians. The key factor in the vulnerability of theory is the rhetorical capital that able politicians can skillfully stage-manage to forestall potential opposition and debate capable of generating public reason. The second is that political attempts at deriving policy blueprints from the requisiteless versions of theory—its public and political representations—may well produce rigid policies. I will explore these two political consequences and harms, beginning with the vulnerability of theory to political manipulation due to its rhetorical capital. Later, I will discuss the theoreticians' responsibilities for the resulting harms and how they should discharge these responsibilities.

Rhetorical capital is the aggregate of the persuasive resources inherent in entities, in our case the persuasive resources inherent in theories. This concept helps us to understand the features of theories amenable for use in the political effort of persuasion, in other words, the features that make theories attractive to politicians for use in argumentation. The poor public faring of the four requisites of theorization points the way to such a feature.

As noted earlier, theory has a structural duality of accessibility and incomprehensibility overlaid with the claim and prestige of objectivity. At least potentially, theories are accessible to the wider public, which can learn about them and their contentions. The public essentially has access to the contentions of theory, and in the case of the democratic-peace thesis, has been exposed to the theoretical contention that democracies do not fight each other.

However, we must not overlook the distinction between theory and theorization. Theorization is incomprehensible to an untrained public. With its four requisites, it is overburdened with technicalities, subtleties and jargon, rendering it beyond the grasp of the average layperson, even the typical college-educated citizen. This being the case, in order to convert a theoretical discourse into a more comprehensible public discourse, a translation mechanism is required. However, as we saw in the analysis above of the four theorization requisites, this translation can involve not only simplifying complex assertions; it can also involve altering their essence. This is why changing theoretical assertions to convey them to the public can involve using the discursive genre of political avowal vernacular and stripping theoretical constructs from such requisites as cautiousness and terms of conditionality. The problem is that these changes open the way not to a benign public simplification of theory, but rather to a political malign trivialization. Thus, what was a probabilistic and cautious line of reasoning becomes an absolutist and totalistic declaration—in other words, a political conviction.

The claim of objectivity implies several distinct, sometimes opposing, presuppositions. A typical presupposition, common among positivists (yet opposed, for example, by Weberians) is that detachment should and does exist between researchers and researched and that any violations of it will impede science and

undermine the scientific credentials of the researchers.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the main reasons for the widespread downplay of the nexus between theory and policy, a nexus which violates detachment and conflicts with the philosophical foundation of positivism. Moreover, because of the detachment presupposition, the translation of theory into publicly comprehensible assertions is either mostly ignored or regarded as a lowly chore unbecoming to theoreticians. Thus, the task of translation is unfortunately left to interested agents such as politicians and ideologues. They, in turn, can manipulate the theory, especially as the four requisites do not travel well and may be discarded in the migration. Politicians seeking to manipulate a theory to their own political ends have only to counteract the requisites of cautiousness, conditionality, probability, and the rules of inference. The result will be the malign trivialization of a theory using political avowal vernacular phrased in absolute and totalistic terms in order to legitimize and rationalize an ideologically preferred policy.

Objectivity provides another asset of persuasion. Because the public might suspect ideologically-driven policies as flawed sectarian ones, the status of theories as objective, non-partisan, and non-ideological makes them valuable to those politicians who wish to legitimize their (sometimes subjective, partisan, ideological) policies. By offering theoretical support for their policies, politicians can present them as non-sectarian policies aimed at the well being of all rather than the interests of few—the most rational and correct policies that deserve not to be opposed.

Rationalizing the Iraq War through a political representation of the democratic-peace thesis is a paradigmatic case of how rhetorical capital of theory can be mobilized politically. By presenting a politicized form of the democratic-peace thesis, neoconservative pundits and administration officials could portray the war as a surefire policy for achieving regional stability and a democratic zone of peace. Thus, they presented the Iraq War as a national project with no ideological considerations that could secure a vital national interest (Bush 2006; Rice 2005). In this fashion, the perversion of theory combined with the language of security to forestall dissent and potential opposition. What is more, the theory-backed

rationalization for war also pervaded the Democratic Party establishment. For example, on October 30 2003, five months into the Iraq War, the Progressive Policy Institute (2003) affiliated with the Democratic Party published a policy paper reaffirming Bush's strategy of promoting democracy for the sake of American security (though it also criticized him for squandering it tactically):

Democrats believe that America should use its unparalleled power to defend our country and to shape a world in which the values of liberal democracy increasingly hold sway. History amply demonstrates that true peace and security depend not only on relations between states but also between state and society. Rulers who abuse their own people are more likely to threaten other countries, to support and spawn terrorism, to violate treaties, and otherwise flout norms of civilized conduct. British Prime Minister Tony Blair put it succinctly in his July 2003 address to Congress: "The spread of freedom is the best security for the free. It is our last line of defense and our first line of attack."

The Iraq War, which might have been opposed for being subjective, partisan, and ideological, was portrayed as part of a scientifically objective, non-partisan, and non-ideological policy, which allowed its backers to disarm and dissuade potential adversaries to achieve an almost national consensus. However, democracy thrives on disagreement; in a vibrant democracy disagreement produces public deliberation, which has the potential of generating public reason. Democratically speaking, forestalling disagreement, opposition, and deliberation, causes political harm. Utilizing the rhetorical capital of the democratic-peace thesis is one such occasion when American democracy was undermined by thwarting the democratic process of deliberation and degrading public reason.

It is precisely the structural duality of accessibility and incomprehensibility overlaid with the claim and prestige of objectivity that served the neoconservatives in their campaign of rationalizing and legitimating the Iraq War. The status of the democratic-peace thesis as both public convention and political conviction was the result of its being at once accessible and incomprehensible: Being widely acknowledged, but being so in its political requisiteless representation. Moreover,

the political status of the thesis facilitated its discussion through the use of political avowal vernacular, that allowed its assertion in the kind of forceful slogan-like declarations exemplified by Boot. Democratization, so the story went, is a matter of vital national interest and has been objectively proved by science to bring stability and peace (see for example Kaplan and Kristol 2003). Moreover, no eminent democratic-peace theoreticians came forward to publicly criticize the neoconservatives and the Bush administration for their rhetorical misuse of the thesis. When Bruce Russett (2005) criticized its rhetorical misuse he did so in the—publicly obscured—academic journal *International Political Perspectives*.<sup>6</sup> Politicizing and trivializing the democratic-peace thesis thus went unchecked by theoreticians, resulting in the political harm of degrading public reason.

Another political harm caused by the esoteric nature of theorization concerns the rigidity of the policy blueprints inferred from the requisiteless version of theory. As discussed earlier, when theory migrates from academia it is stripped of the four requisites of theorization and discursively transformed into a different idea-entity. It is simplified and at times trivialized and politicized into a political conviction that is discursively conveyed by a political avowal vernacular, the ultimate result being Boot's absolutist account of the thesis with its high level of self-assurance and lack of all sense of cautiousness and self-criticism. The account is also totalistic in that it ignores the conditionality of the democratic-peace theory and its probabilistic nature. According to the political representation of the democratic-peace theory, democracies are less belligerent than non-democracies, and by definition do not employ terrorism or weapons of mass destruction. The politicized form of the democratic-peace thesis also ignores the finding that states that are in the process of consolidating democratically can be more aggressive than non-democratic states (Mansfield and Snyder 2005). This is the kind of finding that complicates the absolutist and totalistic nature of political convictions and weakens the rhetorical forcefulness of the political avowal vernacular, which is why they are ignored by ideologues like Boot. Politics, it seems, does not try to purge prejudices as academia supposedly does, rather it utilizes prejudices to serve its purposes and erect obstacles to thwart opponents.

The outcome is not just a distorted absolutist and totalistic account of a theory since ideologues and politicians also infer policy blueprints from the distorted accounts. And just as the accounts are absolutists and totalistic so are the inferred policy blueprints dogmatic and rigid. Boot thus, infers the following from his account of democratic-peace theory, “Therefore, the United States has a vital stake in fostering the spread of representative government.” There is no flexibility in his proposed blueprints: the stakes are vital, and the United States must act, forcefully if needed. President Bush is no less convinced and dogmatic than Boot, having clearly understood the lessons of the requisiteless version of democratic-peace theory. In his September 7 2006 address, he thus firmly acknowledges the lessons of history:

“We know from history that free nations are peaceful nations. We know that democracies do not attack each other, and that young people growing up in a free and hopeful society are less likely to fall under the sway of radicalism. And so we're taking the side of democratic leaders and reformers across the Middle East...We will replace violent dictatorships with peaceful democracies. We'll make America, the Middle East, and the world more secure.

The dogmatism, rigidity, and self-confidence manifested in Bush and Boot's declarations contributed to the disasters that the American policy in Iraq produced. They blinded the neo-conservatives and the Bush administration that followed them from recognizing the complexities, foreseeable difficulties,<sup>7</sup> and needs of the post-war reconstruction effort. The United States that stepped into Iraq was blindfolded by a set of convictions that originated, among other things, in a rigid reading of theory.

The dogmatism and rigidity stemming from this reading are not coincidental but simply the product of an intrinsic feature of theory's political representation. After all, political representation is the representation of a representation. Theory is a parsimonious explanatory scheme of a highly multifaceted and contextual reality. As a preliminary step towards constructing an explanatory scheme, theory casts a patterned and sparing picture on the complexity of reality. In other words, theory is a representation of reality. Only thus can the theoretician construct a parsimonious

explanatory scheme. Thus, we can describe theory as a theoretical representation of reality. As long as the four requisites function the theoretician is well aware to treat her theoretical representation cautiously and modestly. The theoretician conscious of the representational nature of her theory will be aware that it does not purport to be an exact duplication of reality and that reality is far more complex, multifarious, and contextual than theory portrays. She might also be aware that as a representation of reality, theory is best at capturing the past and present and that although there are some sophisticated statistical tools for identifying patterns of change, future change is hardly predictable. The theoretician attentive to the factors of complexity, time, and the unpredictability of future transformations will heed the need for pragmatism and flexibility while applying theory to reality. Theoreticians will also be adamant about stating the need to shape policies pragmatically and execute them flexibly for it is only when theories are accompanied by pragmatism and flexibility that they can help generate reasoned and reasonable policies.

However, what happens in practice is that the political representation of theory, that is the political representation of the theoretical representation, is stripped of the controlling requisites. It loses that inbuilt modesty and cautiousness with which theory analyzes and explains the world (or at least the ideality of inbuilt modesty and cautiousness), such that dogmatism replaces pragmatism, and rigidity, flexibility. Rather than produce flexible policy guidelines attuned to the multifaceted contextual nature of the world, the deduction of policy recommendations from theory's political representations produces rigid dogmatic blueprints that attempt to cast themselves on reality. As in the case of the neoconservative grand strategy of forceful democratization, the result can be unreasoned and unreasonable policies.

### ***The Responsibilities and Imperatives***

The United States, it seems, is bogged down in Iraq. And as the origins of this quagmire lie partly with theory, we can appropriately question theoreticians' responsibility for it. More broadly, we should examine the theoretician's responsibilities for the real-world ramifications of her theory. In his recent book, A

*Pact with the Devil* Tony Smith (2007) apparently blames the democratic-peace theoreticians for helping to bring about the Iraq War. He seemingly ascribes them with moral responsibility for its concomitant blame and praise. Smith (51) claims that these liberal theoreticians willfully cooperated with the neoconservatives, offering them the theories and ideas that produced the Bush Doctrine. He (91) asserts that their theories were "a loaded gun put into the hand of whoever would pick it up," and that "Together they [the neoconservatives and the neoliberals, democratic-peace theoreticians included] would march to conquer Baghdad (176)." Overlooking the process of politicization and trivialization that the thesis underwent independently of the theoreticians' actions and intentions, Smith erroneously concludes that the theoreticians are to blame for the Iraq War as they consciously and purposefully signed a pact with the devil.

However, in terms of allocating blame, no moral responsibility can be ascribed to theoreticians. The democratic-peace theory got real behind the theoreticians' back, so to speak. Its migration was initiated by ideologues and translated by politicians, who en route trivialized and politicized it. And to make matters worse, these trivialized and politicized representations were a complete reversal of the thesis's intent. While the thesis identified a force for peace (Babst 1964), its political representation argued for war. So, clearly, in terms of apportioning blame, one can hardly blame the theorist who lacked both intent and control over the theory's destiny.

But moral responsibility is not the only kind of responsibility relevant here. Another form of responsibility is social responsibility in the sense of task responsibility (Goodin 1998, 148) or remedial responsibility (Miller 2004). This is the responsibility ascribed to someone well placed to identify and remedy a social problem. Thus, even if theoreticians are not to blame for the Iraq War, they are certainly the people most capable of reflecting upon their theory's politicization and trivialization. The process that resulted in their theory's vulnerability to rhetorical misuse and policy blueprints that were doomed to failure owing to rigidity and dogmatism. These two political phenomena—rhetorical misuse of theory and rigid policy blueprints—degrade public reason and produce unreasoned and

unreasonable policies and consequently, political harms. Task-responsibility charges theoreticians to determine whether something inherent to their theory and method of theorizing might act as a core enabler for harmful politicization and trivialization. If something inherent in theory and theorization is indeed found as a core enabler, it obliges the theoretician to try and amend it. As the discussion above shows, it is the structural duality of accessibility and incomprehensibility overlaid with the claim and prestige of objectivity that enables the harms. It is this duality which enables the stripping of the requisites of sound theorization that facilitates theory's trivialization and politicization en route to unreasoned and unreasonable policies.

The question remains how theoreticians should discharge their task responsibility. As the task responsibility conflates with the theoretical and political responsibilities I will now move to explore in detail the later two sorts of responsibilities.

Tony Smith is not alone in questioning theoreticians' responsibilities following the Iraq War. The 2007 annual convention of the *International Studies Association* was organized under the heavy cloud of suspicion that the democratic-peace thesis was responsible—even blamed—for the Iraq War. The convention theme was "Politics, Policy and Responsible Scholarship," and one of the many questions in the call for papers was "Do we scholars bear responsibility for how our ideas are understood and used outside our immediate social and academic context?" (International Studies Association 2007). One of the central panels "The Study of War: Data Collection, Theory Building and Responsible Scholarship", convened by Lothar Brock, dealt explicitly with the responsibility of democratic-peace theoreticians for the Iraq War. During the panel, Bruce Russett, one of the leading democratic-peace theoreticians, responded to the issue of responsibility by stressing that the only responsibility of theoreticians is theoretical responsibility, namely theorization along strict methodological lines. I dispute this opinion and argue that theoreticians do bear other sorts of responsibilities and that, moreover, even theoretical—or as I call it, scholarly—responsibility charges them with more extensive obligations than simple adherence to strict methodological rules. As the case of the democratic-peace theory demonstrates, scholarly responsibility charges theoreticians with the

theoretical imperative to guard their theories against political misuses, or in other words, against the manipulation of theories for political goals that oppose the theory's intent and content.

To substantiate my claim I would like once again to consider Smith's book. Smith mostly presents a political indictment of the neoliberal intellectuals in the 1990s who advanced liberal internationalist ideas to legitimate interventionism. Prominent among these were the democratic-peace theoreticians and Smith targets Russett personally along with (more awkwardly) John Rawls and Andrew Moravcsik. The book is a paradigmatic example of the hazards posed to theories by their political misuse. Smith does not satisfy himself by erroneously blaming Russett and others for the Iraq War. He also refutes the theoretical and scientific status of the democratic-peace thesis. He (xiii, 108) calls it "a pseudo-scientific account of world affairs." More troubling still is his (95) misreading of the thesis, which he understands as follows, "Their [the democratic-peace theoreticians] essential claim was that a world order dominated by liberal democracies would by its very character necessarily be one of peace. By the same token, democratic peace implied that non-democratic states were inherently aggressive and would likely be hostile to the liberal world for the very freedom it enjoyed." Evident here, especially in the second part of the quotation, is a misreading of the democratic-peace theory not unlike the politicized misinterpretation explored above. Though this may be due to the political nature of the book, which renders it prone to political biases, we cannot dispense with Smith simply by holding up the political nature of his book. As much as Smith's purpose is political, he is also a respected, sophisticated, and well-read IR scholar.

How can we explain Smith's misreading of the thesis? In my opinion, he fell into the intellectual trap of reading backwards the theory. Smith was not sensitive enough to the politicization and trivialization the thesis underwent prior to its "realization" by Bush in the Iraq War. Reading many political texts, Smith grew to identify the thesis with its political representation and the political avowal vernacular used discursively to rationalize the Bush Doctrine. Being engrossed as

he was in rebuffing the doctrine, he meshed together the two distinct ideal-entities and discursive genres and criticized the thesis for what it is not.

Smith is a paradigmatic example of the current trend that has manifested itself in the ISA annual convention as well. It seems that by abandoning their theories to their political destiny, the democratic-peace theoreticians have opened the door to a renewed theoretical attack on the validity of their theories; an attack which is proving to be as intensive as the criticism leveled against the thesis in its early days. It is too early to judge the outcome of the new attack on the thesis. Will this trend increase and will it undermine the current broad acceptance of the thesis. The future of the attack is dependent to a large extent on the political destinies of the Bush administration and America's fortunes in Iraq. What is clear from above account is that letting theory be politicized and trivialized carries implications regarding the academic and theoretic legitimacy of it. Theoreticians who wish to save themselves from this erroneous (but humanly understandable) outcome should be more aware of the possible political destinies of their theory. It is, in other words, a theoretical imperative to guard against the politicization and trivialization of one's theory.

But how can theoreticians discharge the theoretical imperative or, for that matter, task-responsibility? Ought they to try to prevent theory from migrating outside academia: stop theory getting real? By introducing the notion of democratic imperative as a derivative of the political responsibility of theoreticians, I would argue that even if this were possible, it is impermissible to act in such a way. Theory is an intellectual accomplishment, rich in informative knowledge, about the unfolding of human conduct and social relations. It can be very helpful in shaping policies, which, after all, are public tools for coping with the complexities of the social world. This beneficial potentiality ascribes theoreticians, as the constructors of theory *and* as citizens of their polity, with a political responsibility to participate in the political process of policy-shaping. The participation of theoreticians as contributors of theoretical insights would enrich policy-shaping, endowing it with rational qualities that would result in reasonable policies equipped to cope with the complexities of reality. In a democracy, where policies are formed publicly and where they consider citizens' inputs, this responsibility takes the shape of a

democratic imperative, a civic commitment to contribute to the democratic process of deliberation.

Although democratic imperative is ascribed to all citizens in a democracy,<sup>8</sup> two factors make it all the more necessary for theoreticians to uphold. The first is the informative insights with which theories abound, which commit theoreticians to serving in the role of public-intellectuals, or better still, theoretician-citizens (in contrast to Plato's philosopher-king). But as shown by the second factor—the process of politicization and trivialization that theory sometimes undergoes—to serve as theoretician-citizens may not always be enough for theoreticians. Even though theoreticians may potentially be able to contribute beneficially to the democratic process of policy-shaping, because their theories are sometimes hijacked by politicians and ideologues and politicized and trivialized, at times at least, their contribution may in fact be detrimental to reason and policy-shaping. Thus it is with the democratic-peace thesis; rather than contributing reason to American policy-making it led to rigidity and dogmatism and the Iraq War. This lesson teaches that theoreticians ought to serve as theoretician-citizens *and* to guard against the politicization and trivialization of their theory by ideologues and politicians; that their theory will not be politically hijacked and influence policy-making independently and contrary of their own intentions.

Yet, these two democratic imperatives run counter to the positivist commitment to objectivity. The significance of positivism and its conflict with the democratic and theoretic imperatives raise the question of necessity. Does discharging the theoreticians' democratic and theoretic imperatives actually necessitate forsaking objectivity? The above analyses on the sources of harms both pointed to the salient role of theory's politicization and trivialization in producing the political harms. Moreover, we saw how the structural duality of accessibility and incomprehensibility overlaid with the claim and prestige of objectivity is the enabler of the politicization and trivialization process by which the four requisites of sound theorization are stripped from theory. So how can we disable the enabler? To answer that question, we must examine each of the components of structural duality, the enabler.

First, there is accessibility. Accessibility is an indispensable feature of the democratic nature by which theorization occurs. It is the result of the democratic free flow of ideas and information. Moreover, theory ought to be accessible to the wider public. Accessibility is sanctioned by the public financing of academia and by the beneficial contribution theory can bring to policy-making. Second, there is the incomprehensibility of theory. Incomprehensibility is an unavoidable aspect of the encounter between theorizing and the public. Theorizing is intrinsically compound and technical and the untrained layperson will forever find it hard to comprehend its intricate minutia. Theorizing will always be esoteric to the wide public, which brings us to the third component, namely the claim and prestige of objectivity.

As argued above, clinging to objectivity leads the theoreticians to try to detach themselves from the political squabbles involved in translating theory into political representation. That detachment allows politically interested entrepreneurs to hijack the process and politicize and trivialize theory. If the theoreticians felt morally obligated to forsake objectivity and involve themselves in the process required by the democratic imperative, they will be in a better position to facilitate the translation of theory by simplifying it rather than allowing its trivialization. Though they would be unable to assure strict compliance with all four requisites of theorizing, they could guard against the expression of theory in the political avowal vernacular phrased in absolute and total terms. By participating as theoretician-citizens and by being involved in the migration of their theories into the real world, theoreticians could guarantee that their theoretical insights would be understood flexibly and executed pragmatically. They could warn against rhetorical misuse and the political dogmatic misapplication of their theories. Positivism notwithstanding, by forsaking objectivity theoreticians could avoid the political harms described above; they could enable theory to fulfill its full potential of benefiting decision-making by enriching public deliberation with theoretical insights that generate public reason and advance reasoned and reasonable policies.<sup>9</sup>

---

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> A third kind of responsibility, social task-responsibility will be discussed briefly.

<sup>2</sup> Most theories are attempts at establishing and explicating the *causal* patterned relations between phenomena, yet causality is not a necessary element of theory as it can try to establish and explicate *constitutional* patterned relations.

<sup>3</sup> Although the thesis is routinely accused of being American ethnocentric. E.g., Oren 1996; Tsygankov 2003

<sup>4</sup> Boot is an exemplary case of advocating a political representation of the democratic-peace thesis, yet he is not alone in that. See for example Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol's (2003: 104) declaration of the democratic peace as "a truth of international politics," and Carl Gershman (1990) "Such governments [democracies] are more likely than dictatorships to enjoy political stability and to establish peaceful relations with their neighbors."

<sup>5</sup> For an unsuccessful Weber-inspired attempt at changing the course of events that led the United States into Iraq see Jackson and Kaufman 2007.

<sup>6</sup> An exception is John M. Owen IV (2005) who criticized the Bush administration's misuse of the thesis in the more publicly oriented *Foreign Affairs*.

<sup>7</sup> See for example the warnings issued by *The Project for the Future of Iraq* initiated by the State Department (2001) and ignored by the administration.

<sup>8</sup> Though a leeway ought to be secured within the framework of democratic imperative to individuals to enjoy "the freedom not to get involved in politics (Pollak 2007, 94)."

<sup>9</sup> I believe a more radical understanding of renouncing objectivity is appropriate, namely committing theory to moral considerations. However, I cannot defend it here.

### **References**

Babst, Dean V. (1964) "Elective Governments – A Force for Peace," *The Wisconsin Sociologist* 3 (1): 9-14.

Boot, Max (2003) "What Next? The Bush Foreign Policy Agenda beyond Iraq," *The Weekly Standard*, May 5, pp. 27-33.

Bush, George W. (2006) "President Bush Discusses Progress in the Global War on Terror," September 7, Cobb Galleria Centre, Atlanta, Georgia. Available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060907-2.html>>.

Bush, George W. (2004) "Remarks by President Bush and Senator Kerry in the Third 2004 Presidential Debate," October 14, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. Available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/10/20041014-1.html>>.

Bush, George W. 2002b. "President Bush Calls for New Palestinian Leadership." <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020624-3.html>.

---

Bush, George W. (2002a), "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," June 1, West Point, New York. Available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>>.

Gershman, Carl (1990), "Freedom remains the Touchstone," *The National Interest* 19: 83-86.

Goodin, Robert E. (1998) "Social Responsibility as a Collective Social Responsibility." In *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility: For and Against*, ed. David Schmidtz, and Robert E. Goodin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 97-194.

International Studies Association (2007)  
<http://www.isanet.org/chicago2007/callforpapers.pdf>

Ish-Shalom, Piki. 2005. *The Democratic-Peace Thesis in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Uses and Abuses*, Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Ish-Shalom, Piki (2006). "Theory as a Hermeneutical Mechanism: The Democratic Peace and the Politics of Democratization," *European Journal of International Relations* 12(4): 565-98.

Ish-Shalom, Piki (2007). "'The Civilization of Clashes': A Critique of the Neoconservative Reading of the Democratic-peace thesis," *Political Science Quarterly*.

Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus and Stuart J. Kaufman (2007). "Security Scholars for a Sensible Foreign Policy: A Study in Weberian Activism," *perspectives on Politics* 5 (1): 95-103.

Kaplan, Lawrence F., and William Kristol (2003). *The War Over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission*. San Francisco: Encounter Books.

Levy, Jack S. (1989) 'The Causes of War: A Review of Theories and Evidence', in Philip E. Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern and Charles Tilly *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War. Vol. I*, pp. 209 – 233. New York: Oxford UP.

Mansfield Edward D. and Jack Snyder. 2005. *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Miller, David (2004) "Holding Nations Responsible," *Ethics* 114(2): 240-268.

Pollak, Johannes (2007), "Contested Meanings of Representation," *Comparative European Politics* 5 (1): 87-103.

---

Progressive Policy Institute (2003), *Progressive Internationalism: A Democratic National Security Strategy*,

[http://www.ppionline.org/documents/Progressive\\_Internationalism\\_1003.pdf](http://www.ppionline.org/documents/Progressive_Internationalism_1003.pdf)

Oren, Ido (1996) 'The Subjectivity of the "Democratic-peace": Changing U.S. Perceptions of Imperial Germany', in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds) *Debating the Democratic-peace: An International Security Reader*, pp. 263 – 300. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press.

Owen, John M. IV (2005), "Iraq and the Democratic Peace," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2005.

Rice, Condoleezza (2005), "The Promise of Democratic Peace: Why Promoting Freedom is the Only Realistic Path to Security," *Washington Post*, December 11.

Russett, Bruce (2005), "Bushwacking the Democratic Peace," *International Studies Perspectives* 6: 395-408.

Smith, Tony (2007). *A Pact with the Devil: Washington's Bid for World Supremacy and the Betrayal of the American Promise*, New York: Routledge.

The State Department (2001), *The Project for the Future of Iraq*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/FOI%20Overview.pdf>

Tsygankov, Andrei P. (2003) "The Irony of Western Ideas in a Multicultural World: Russians' Intellectual Engagement with the "End of History" and "Clash of Civilizations"," *International Studies Review*, 5, 1: 53-76.

Weede, Erich (April 2007), "Capitalism, democracy and the War in Iraq," *Global Society* 21: 2, 219-227.

White House (2002) *The National Security of the United States*. September 17. Available from <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>.