Psychopathology and **World Politics**

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Preface

It is a question worth looking into whether modern psychology and psychiatry have provided us with the conceptual tools which would enable us to construct ... a ... pathology of international politics. (Morgenthau, 1973 [1948], p. 6)

Most of those who analyze or practice contemporary world politics do so as proponents of Enlightenment modernism, that is, as Enlightenment rationalists. Even when they are not party to this particular way of thinking, they cannot avoid its global effects and the success it has had in terms of globalizing particular ways in which world affairs should work.

This meta-discourse arose in 17th-century Europe in the form of a concerted effort to prioritize the human capacity for reason. The result was a scientific revolution and a growing body of reliable knowledge about the natural universe. The result was an industrial revolution that placed advanced military power at the disposal of a handful of regimes that subsequently used it to build global empires. After two huge wars, these empires fell apart. They did leave behind, however, European ways not only of ordering world affairs but also of creating material wealth and crafting societies and selves.

The pursuit of pure reason is not possible. Only someone endowed with divine luminous wisdom could sustain the objectivity and detachment such a way of knowing requires.

Analysts and practitioners may aspire to such a pursuit, but in practice they make assumptions about human nature and human nurturing practices. Each aspirant subsequently sees his or her part-view of the world as the only true view, though the difference between them betrays their specificity.

The pursuit of human reason as an end in itself has also by now come to result in a range of auto-critiques. There are post-modernists, for example, who turn the priority placed upon reason back upon itself in order to ask what the reasons are for prioritizing reason. There are post-structuralists who question the neutrality of language as a way of communicating what modernists learn as well as the integrity of the modernist identity in this regard. There are romantics who back off from reasoning to seek the truths that emotion makes possible. There are phenomenologists who bracket-off reasoning in the attempt to describe things-in-themselves while intuiting the primary categories of the mind and how they intend the world that the mind thinks it is attending to. And there are sacralists who endorse the spiritual perspective that rationalists eschew as metaphysics at best or as superstition at worst.

Amongst these auto-critiques is one not listed above, namely, the psychopathological one. What is distinctive about this auto-critique is the way rationalists turn their ability to reason back upon the brain as the organ where reasoning occurs as well as upon the mind as an emergent property of a properly functioning brain.

This work highlights this auto-critique. It explores those occasions when the brain/mind ceases to function properly and the effects this has on world affairs.

What is to be done, for example, when a leader ceases to act in a seemingly sane fashion and yet still commands the loyalty of those who maintain him or her in office? What is to be done when a leader's advisers seem rational but are clearly not, for example, when they accept the prospect of large-scale nuclear war, or industrially induced global warming, without actively decrying the enormity of the human costs involved? Indeed, what is to be done when whole societies seemingly go insane?

This is to raise more questions than a single study can adequately answer. Indeed, the full extent of this approach has yet to be ascertained. The study of psychopathology is a very large one and only a start can be made here, not only on describing psychopathology itself but also on ascertaining its relevance to world affairs.

This does not preclude articulating this perspective, but it cannot be more than a beginning. It is hoped that what follows will prompt others to consider more closely what deserves to be a burgeoning field.

Nor does this preclude others arguing that the study of psychopathology and world politics presents important problems. How, for example, do particular levels of analysis relate to each other? How do individuals relate to communities or collectivities?

Like the question of the range of issues this auto-critique raises, this does not mean that no attempt should be made to address these problems. It is hoped that what follows prompts others to consider these concerns, too.

What follows delineates two strategically-chosen case studies. It describes in general terms what psychopathology might be and its relationship to world affairs. It looks at denial and at “speaking the truth” as a potentially therapeutic antidote, highlighting the contemporary discourse about nuclear weapons. It then looks at delusion, at what being “in touch” with reality might entail, and how this sense might be deployed with regard to a so-called “failed state” like the Solomon Islands. These two case studies demonstrate that a discussion of psychopathology and world politics can go beyond generalities. They suggest that it is possible to have hypotheses to do with conflict, for example, that include conscious as well as unconscious dimensions. So: what follows begins by discussing psychopathology in general and how it applies to world affairs in particular, that is, it looks at how an understanding of the unconscious dimension to the brain/mind helps foster an understanding of how world politics works. It then looks at denial, what it means to talk of truth in this context, and how truth-telling affects disavowal. It ends by looking at delusion, what it means to talk about reality in this context, and how reality affects the limits delusion sets to an individual or social sense of what knowing involves.

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About the Author

Ralph Pettman is professor of international relations at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He has a PhD in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science. His previous appointments include teaching and research posts at the Australian National University, the University of Tokyo, Princeton University, the University of Sydney, Cambridge University, the New School for Social Research, the Frankfurt Peace Research Institute and Sciences Po, Paris. He has held a number of administrative positions, most notably with Australia's foreign aid bureau, its human rights commission and its broadcasting commission. His most recent books include *World Affairs: An Analytical Overview* (World Scientific, 2010); *Intending the World: A Phenomenology of International Affairs* (Melbourne University Press, 2008); *Reason, Culture, Religion: The Metaphysics of World Politics* (St. Martin's, 2004); and *Commonsense Constructivism, or the Making of World Affairs* (M. E. Sharpe, 2000).

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This is my last scholarly monograph. As I look back on a lengthy academic career, I do wonder what all the scribbling was about. Admittedly it had its rewards. This was particularly the case when tough mental puzzles responded to sustained intellectual scrutiny. It is now time to go for a walk in the world, however, not so much to get anywhere in particular but for its own sake.