

From the realist and liberal state to state
fetishism in International Relations.
The case of Argentine international insertion
in the 1990s

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July 2014

Abstract

Both realist and liberal theories in International Relations rely on a more or less explicit theory of the state. For the realist tradition it can be characterized as a “coalition of coalitions” in Robert Gilpin words, or as the unity that can guarantee protection and security to those that live there, as John Herz would put it. For the liberal tradition, it can be understood as a collective unity of citizens, or as a collective and plural actor, from a Kantian point of view. In both these interpretations, the state ends up being treated as a “thing”, operating in the international arena, which accounts for a sum of things-like states. This thing (state) can be better understood if analyzed through the lens of the state fetishism developments, and thus grasped as a reification of social relations, accounting for the historical nature of the state in the international arena. Argentine contemporary analysts of international relations reproduce this treatment of the state as a thing, and in this article we intend to navigate from realist and liberal state theory to the fetishism of the state, and see how it operates in the Argentine 1990s international insertion analysis.

Keywords

Realism. Liberalism. Critical theory.

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“What if all these fantasies / come flailing around?”
 – R.E.M., *Losing My Religion* (1991)

1 Introduction

Realism and international liberalism, the mainstream theories of International Relations, take for granted the existence of states in the state system. It may sound obvious that the state system is composed of states, but both traditions don't take big steps forwards at the moment of conceptualizing *the state* as such.

As we have shown in a previous work (Jaquenod, 2013) these traditions understand the international system in a two-steps-reasoning. For the realist theory a path can be followeth from international society to the state –from the outside to the inside–, determining international state policy. That is, international power relations that although originate in internal characteristics of states operate as relational variables structured out of it, forming a sort of international *ranking* with power as the guiding principle. It is the struggle between states to get to the top of this *ranking* or at least don't lose positions (and therefore feel safe in an anarchic world) that conditions its foreign policy.

For the liberal authors it can be seen an inverse path, for state behavior would be structured from the hearth itself of the state, being conditioned its foreign conduct –from the inside to the outside–. Individual preferences determine statal preferences (as long as these states are governed by liberal principles, where the general will prevails over personal whims), which in turn guide the behavior of nations in the international society.

As we will develop in length in this article, both reasonings rely on a fetishized or reified conception of the state, where only turning it into a truly *fetish*, “a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx, 2008, 87) they can explain (or at least try) its way of acting in the international scene. The state is treated as a *thing*, reification of social relations, then men as representatives of this *things* appear in international society interacting with each other, “it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (Marx, 2008, 89).

In this article we will further develop this problem and the path from the realist and liberal state theory to state fetishism. As it is of central importance for this work, we will take the theory of fetishism and commodity fetishism as our starting point. From there we will move on to the problem

of state fetishism and how it appears on both realist and liberal theories of International Relations. Then we will focus on the Argentine case, particularly on those lectures from the realist and liberal perspectives, before our final conclusions.

2 From commodity fetishism...

According to Žižek (2012), in the dialectics of commodity-fetishism Marx gives us the *key* to the understanding of diverse phenomena in capitalism. In this dialectics man faces his own work as something objectively independent from him, as something that dominates him by laws beyond the human (Lukács, 2002). The purely fetishistic appearance of economic and social relations conceal its character of relations between men, transforming them into a second nature that surrounds man with fatal laws.

In the capitalist mode of production, what we see (what *appears to be*) are mercantile relations between people and social relations between things, “the mutual relations of the producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between products” (Marx, 2008, 88). *Things* are playing in commodity exchange a social role (connecting independent producers in the market), and as we will see below it seems as if they had the ability, the virtue of establishing productive relations (among people). As Heinrich (2008, 188) puts it,

In capitalist society, magical powers are attributed to “capital” and “ground”, similar to the fetishes of wood or cloth in supposedly primitive societies. Also in bourgeois society people live in an “enchanted” world, in which the “personalization of things” takes place: the subjects of the social process are not people, but the commodity, money and capital.

Capital, ground and other categories or notions of political economy express socio-economic forms that characterize productive relations between people and are mediated by things. Value, money and so on should be considered expressions of human relations tied to things and not as features of these things themselves (Rubin, 1990). What is really a structural effect is operating as an immediate property of one of its elements (Žižek, 2012), what derives from the role that commodities are playing in the production process (its price) appear as just another natural property of these *things*, as it would be its size, color and weight. It not only reflects men the social character of their own work as a natural social property of things, but also “the relation of the producers to the sum of their own labour is presented to them as a

social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour” (Marx, 2008, 88), independent of them, dominating them.

In the exchange process, independent producers are unified in the market and appear as owners of *things* and not as individuals occupying distinct positions in the productive process. These things (commodities) appear thus as intermediaries of social relations of exchange, an interaction among producers that is *only* carried out *through* these things. Productive social relations are then realized through things with individuals as *representatives* of things, things that not only conceal the social relations among persons but also organize them, realize them (Rubin, 1990). According to Heinrich (2008, 88),

The values of commodities are the expression of an enormously powerful social structure that individuals can not control. In a society that produces commodities, people are (and they are all), in fact, under the control of things; determining power relations are not personal, but “material”.

People do not control things, but are under the control of the things they produce. Or as Marx himself simply puts it, what mainly concerns a producer is how much of other product he will be able to get with his own, a quantity that once it attains a certain stability appears to result from its own nature. “These quantities vary continually, independently of will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them” (Marx, 2008, 91).

It is the failure to grasp the class nature of things that grants them autonomy, an appearance that “must be penetrated for their underlying essential base; a base that comprises contradictory social relations of production” (Hobson, 2007, 586). The understanding of the state as if it had ontological autonomy derives then from its understanding as a thing in the international arena, a thing governing the men and women that compose it, that is, its fetishization. From this understanding comes the tendency of falling into the trap of *bourgeois fetishism*.

This dialectics of the commodity-form is then the pure (distilled) version of the *key* mechanism for understanding other phenomena that seems to have little to do with political economy (Žižek, 2012), the independence of the really motor forms of history from the consciousness that men have of them and its transformation into external natural laws (Lukács, 2002).

3 ... to the state in International Relations

We will begin this section by performing a quick revision of realist and liberal international relations theories, so we can then focus on how they conceptualize the state in the international ground.

The realist tradition is hegemonic in this discipline, and understands state relations as power relations where, as there is no higher instance capable of settling disputes among them, the international arena turns into the stage of an always latent power struggle. The liberal tradition, in turn, is confident that the development of liberal principles facilitate the understanding between states making conflict increasingly difficult. Thus, the generalization of the type of republican government, free trade and international cooperation instances (the so called *Kantian influences*) will create incentives towards peaceful relations between nations.

For both the realist tradition and the internationalist liberal, the conceptualization of the state is central. Realism will understand it as a coalition of coalitions (Gilpin, 1981), or as that entity capable of ensuring security to its citizens against external threats, as it had previously done the castle or the fortified town (Herz, 1957). For liberal authors, the state will represent the interests of the individual unit, i.e., the collective unit of citizens, provided that republican liberty is respected (Kant, 2007; Marey, 2007).

The conception of the state of each of these traditions will impact heavily on how they understand its insertion in the international system, since all of them will consider it as the main actor in the international scene, although with nuances. Realists will do it directly while liberals will make it through the representation of individuals interests.

Hence, for the realist tradition, the state will be part of a hostile environment in which depends on itself for survival (a scenario that would respond to the hobbesian state of nature) so the evaluation of its relative power –that is, its *combined capabilities* (Waltz, 1995)– will locate it in a certain position of the international ranking of states. The location in this top expresses the relative safety with which that state counts, and therefore the need (or urge) to increase it or not. For liberal authors, in turn, the state as a collective unit of citizens will be expressing the sum of their individual interests. The development of peaceful relations between citizens of different states through trade will allow these to know each other better and then promote peaceful relations among states, so follows the importance of promoting individual liberties (Russett, 2010).

3.1 The state in the realist tradition

Realist authors assume that the world consists of a multitude of states that relate each other in order to satisfy their own interests. For Morgenthau, the state is characterized by being a rational actor, and therefore predictable (Barbe, 1987), although the authors of this tradition will not stop at specifically characterize and define the state in the abstract and use a *de facto* webberian definition in their analysis (Aron, 1995).

However, this attempt to dispense with an analysis of the state, on the surface at least, can not last long and some authors advance in rustic efforts to conceptualize it within their theoretical framework. This only serves to highlight the impossibility of conceiving national states as mere agents in the analysis of international relations, facing these authors the need to delve into its definition in order to try to *reinforce* and *strengthen* its (apparent) character of last unit of analysis.

Robert Gilpin will characterize it as a “coalition of coalitions” (1981, 19), favoring an analysis focused on its internal conformation against a threatening outside world. It is interesting to quote at length the genesis of the state posed by this author, for whom

in a world of scarce resources and conflict over the distribution of those resources, human beings confront one another ultimately as members of groups, and not as isolated individuals. *Homo sapiens* is a tribal species, and loyalty to the tribe for most of us ranks above all loyalties other than that of the family. In the modern world, we have given the name “nation-state” to these competing tribes and the name of “nationalism” to this form of loyalty. True, the name, size, and organization of the competing groups into which our species subdivides itself do alter over time –tribes, city-states, kingdoms, empires, and nation-states– due to changes in economic, demographic, and technological factors. Regrettably, however, the essential nature of intergroup conflict does not (Gilpin, 1984, 290).

The defining characteristic of the state would be its *impermeability*, able to guarantee to its citizens protection against external threats, taking the place that had previously had the castle or fortified town, as “that unit which affords protection and security to human beings has tended to become the basic political unit; people, in the long run, will recognize that authority, any authority, which posses the power of protection” (Herz, 1957, 474).

These attempts to characterize the state do nothing more than reinforcing it conceptually as an isolated unit, identifying it as the last and undifferentiated agent in international relations because, in international political

systems, all units would be formally equal (Waltz, 1988). This attempt to homogenize conceptually states will take structural realists to, in terms of their characteristics, “treat states as if they were black boxes: they are assumed to be alike, save for the fact that some states are more or less powerful than others” (Mearsheimer, 2010, 78).

3.2 The state in the liberal tradition

Kantian liberalism considers states as the main moral units, understanding them as collective units of citizens (Marey, 2007). Immanuel Kant understood the state as this comprised a society of men, and that “is not (as is the land on which it settles) a property (*patrimonium*). It is a society of men whom no one else has any right to command or to dispose except the state itself” (Kant, 2007, 41).

Thus, the state can be considered as a representative institution of coalitions of social actors (Moravcsik, 1997) or as a collective and plural actor, and the change in the state’s interests should be understood in the context of the evolution over time of the interests of individuals. So, state survival and harmony only occupies a subsidiary place to them (Zacher and Matthew, 1995).

State preferences would then reflect the preferences of domestic society, on the basis of which state officials define state preferences, which acts accordingly. State behavior reflects preferences patterns, acting as reasons for conflict, cooperation, or any significant foreign policy, constrained by the preferences imposed by other states (Moravcsik, 1997).

3.3 State fetishism in International Relations

As we have introduced above, these traditions develop two-steps reasonings connecting foreign policy with the international environment. For the realist tradition it is from the outside to the inside, where the international society explains each state particular insertion, whereas for the liberal tradition individual preferences determine state preferences and therefore its international insertion, from the inside to the outside.

These two-steps (or two-stages) reasonings are connected by the concepts of *power* and *preferences*. The first of them supposes a fetishized conceptualization of the state. It is treated as a *thing* –a *black box* as we have seen–, and in this way the historical nature of the state is completely lost sight of. Hence, realist authors allow themselves to analytically compare the interests of the states in the twentieth century with those of the Greek city-states from

the time of the Peloponesian War *circa* 400 BC.¹

This conceptualization of power, then, at sustaining relations among states as the latest entities in the international arena, functions as a category that ultimately ends up shedding all material support (in the sense of states combined capabilities) and jumping from a particular feature to other could refer to both psychological inclinations (as in the realist authors) as structural determinations (as in neorealists). Beyond the fact that power *could* lie in the possession of certain attributes that would be means, weapons in struggle or competition, in realist analytical terms the bases of this category jump from one justification to another (population, firepower, industrial capacity, possession of atomic weapons, level of economic development and even geography) only addressing the particular interests of the analyst (see for example Kennedy, 1989, 202-249). At first they locate each country in the *ranking* of major powers, and then they justify this inclusion and its power with *ad hoc* definitions.

Liberal authors would supposedly save this issue by presenting a version where the state does not appear as the last entity in the analysis, but its actions would be related to the wishes of the people that comprise it. The state appears as mediating its citizens interests and preferences, an idea supported only by a romantic and *naïve* conception of the functioning of democracy and democratic states, negating its class composition. Here we can anticipate that where the labour mechanisms govern human freedom, the existence of classes contradicts freedom itself (Marcuse, 1997), and in this class society the bourgeoisie exercises the economic control, and with it, the political and cultural (Korsch, 2004). Nevertheless, as we will see in the last part of this work, their confidence in the development of liberal principles as promoters of peace leaves them attached to these developments themselves, apart from the individuals that seem to be on the basis of their analysis. Peace is understood not after the individuals desires, but after the expansion of free trade and democracy, which govern the state action and cast aside the wishes of the people that comprise it.

The realist and neorealist concept of power involves, as said, a reified state: a state that appears as a *thing*, i.e. reification of social relations (of domination, we may now add) around which it is constituted. In capitalist society, men relate each other in many ways, being the vertical (and antagonistic) relationship between capital and labour the main of them, at least

¹A precious illustration of this ahistorical conception of international relations is Gilpin's suspicion that "if somehow [the ancient Greek historian] Thucydides were placed in our midst, he would (following an appropriate short course in geography, economics, and modern technology) have little trouble in understanding the power struggle of our age" (1981, 211).

in analytical terms. This antagonism is constitutive of capitalist society, and takes different *forms* (or modes of existence). In the state, one of these *forms*, this antagonistic relationship between capital and labour appears *reified, solidified*, and as such *launched* into the international space. The rulers, such as country presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors, appear as representatives of these countries, acting in their behalf. Thus men (rulers in this case) assume the representation of those *things* while agents interacting with other agents of the same nature.

To understand the *state form* in capitalist society, and how these states relate to each other, then, is central to locate them historically and conceptually in the capitalist mode of production. Realist and neorealists authors abstract from any historical anchorage at characterizing the state as a mere political organization (city-states, kingdoms, empires, nation-states) whose differences are merely economic, demographic and technological factors – as Robert Gilpin does –, or in the extreme case as black boxes whose only difference seems to be that some are more powerful than others –as John Mearsheimer does–, were it can clearly be seen the operation of *reification* of the state. This distinction not only functions between rival states of the same historical period, but to compare international orders through periods covering different historical periods. For the liberal tradition all antagonism between capital and labour goes away, appearing the state as an entity composed of different actors who fit their interests in dispute, taking the notion of *citizenship* a central role in the legal equalization of these different actors, obscuring all class conflict.

The state appears then *fetishized*. This *fetishization* passes through two logical moments. At first, the state appears as a thing, reification or solidification of social relations. The contradiction between capital and labor is cleaved into economic competition (the commodity as a thing) and political struggle (around the state as object). Then governments, emerged from the *popular will*, appear interacting among themselves as representatives of this states-like-things, just as capitalist and workers relate each other as representatives of things: labor and capital.

In this scheme, the social relations between men (antagonism between capital and labor which solidifies in the state) assumes the *fantastic* form of relations between things (the relationships between the various states in the world market or the international arena) that dominate these men, that rule over them. To understand the nature of social relations within capitalism is key to analyze this process (Burnham, 2002). Class relations dominated by the production relations and the processes of capitalist accumulation must then be taken as the starting point for a *critical* state theory (Picciotto, 1991) and of the theory of international relations.

4 The case of Argentine international insertion in the 1990s

The Argentine international insertion during the 90s was analyzed in detail from the different interpretations of international relations. This period was emblematic because it meant a sharp turn with the historical national foreign policy, allowing and inspiring discussions among analysts from the different schools of the discipline. Besides those from realism and liberalism studied above, contributions from the *pugian* autonomism, the so called *sociohistorical* school and the theory of imperialism were especially important.

The explanation based on the realist conceptualization –known as the *peripheral realism*– locates Argentina in the international arena after an evaluation of its *power*, and from this location it will support a proposal for a particular type of insertion. The authors that start from liberal considerations, however, depart from the demands of the *people* to explain the particular mode of insertion of Argentina during the decade.

It is important to stress the strong normative character of these traditions and, relatedly, the fact that many of its principal authors, in addition to their academic work, held important hierarchical roles in the design and implementation of the different strategies of Argentine international insertion. Such is the case of both chancellors of Carlos Menem government (Domingo Cavallo and Guido di Tella, the former then holding the position of minister of economy), and other officers and advisers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Carlos Escudé and Andrés Cisneros. The nature of theoretical rivals of this traditions did not prevent them, however, to have major agreements on normative aspects.

4.1 *Peripheral realism*, Argentina and the game of power in the 1990s

As we saw above, the realist interpretation is based on an analysis of power in an essentially anarchic world. For the Argentine case, it was especially important the critical adaptation of Carlos Escudé to the classical postulates. He discusses the idea of the mere international anarchy, introducing a certain hierarchy, dividing countries in those who rule (the powerful) and those that reveal or obey (the weak), updating the realist concepts to the latter under the proposal of a *peripheral realism*.

Under this scheme, once identified Argentina as a dependent country, vulnerable, impoverished, indebted and little strategic to the interests of the central countries (clearly a peripheral country), its foreign policy should be

adapted to three main principles: (i) to eliminate political confrontations with the great powers, reducing them to what *really* matters, (ii) to conduct political calculations based on risks of possible costs, and (iii) to reconceptualize autonomy in terms of the state capacity of confrontation and its relative costs. (Escudé, 1991) For Argentina, it meant that it should accept its role among those who had to obey, with no pretensions of command.

Under these premises, then, a more cooperative and less confrontational profile against the United States arose in relation to previous administrations. This profile was based “on the recognition on our part that we need to get along with all people on earth, and especially with those states on whose good or bad will may depend the future of the Argentine people” (di Tella, 1991a). Argentina should join the winning side of the Cold War, playing the role of a partner of the United States and not of *economic satellite*.

For di Tella, a more cooperative, stable and mature relationship with the United States would not necessarily entail automatic benefits but lets us much closer to the possibility of achieving them (di Tella, 1991b), and so then, the spirit behind Argentina’s foreign policy should be understood as “to eliminate the political obstacles that excessive external confrontations of the past had stood between Argentina and the achievement of its economic objectives” (di Tella, 1991c). The definition of national interest should then focus on *economic development* and the role of this foreign policy would be that of facilitating the external economic development of the country (Escudé, 1992).

In short, the realist account starts with the location of Argentina in the international arena. In this *ranking*, or *totem of states*, as very graphically Escudé puts it (Escudé, 2012), its position would indicate the mode of its international insertion. Based on the consideration about the power held by the country (little or none), and therefore the role assumed in the international system, Argentina should assume its subordinate insertion in the international arena, and given its position in the same ranking of states, the United States would be the potential partner that more benefits could have to offer to Argentina.

The alignment with the United States, then would boost the reception of investments and facilitate the negotiations with international credit organizations and the entry into the *Plan Brady*. Within the vernacular realist explanatory framework, was precisely this strategical policy of alignment with the United States that allowed and led to the arrival of foreign investment, renegotiation of external debt on favorable terms, and framed the possibilities of commercial blocks developments.

4.2 *Peripheral neo-idealism, Argentina and the Kantian influences in the 1990s*

As we have previously seen, the liberal tradition in International Relations emphasizes on incentives produced by democratic progress, free trade and international cooperation when promoting peaceful relations between countries. For the present case, these facts would strengthen each other enabling the entry of Argentina into the *Western club*, or First World, that “select group of advanced countries, with consolidated democratic political institutions, high levels of economic development and relatively modern and well-organized state apparatuses” (de la Balze, 1998, 107).

Against Escudé’s peripheral realism proposal, Roberto Russell will present the *peripheral neo-idealism*, which assigns great importance to the type of political regime. It makes of democracy a necessary condition for sub-regional peace, it highlights the value of inter-state cooperation, it reverses the realist agenda hierarchies, and it rejects the realist ethical presumption supported by the belief that humankind is hopelessly doomed to repeat the past. It will emphasize on the superiority of state behavior adjusted to *principles* regulated by international law, which, at illustrating the political practice and protecting the national security of weaker countries would act as a backstop against external threats (Russell, 1992).

In this outline, the Kantian influences of democracy, free trade and international cooperation would be more relevant than ever during the 90s, in which “humanity, nevertheless, walks timidly (though not linearly, of course) towards the utopia of Kant” (Russell, 1992, 36).

The new foreign policy agenda introduced by the Menem administration hovered then around the axis of the integral adoption of universally accepted hegemonic values (i.e., a confluence of democratic consolidation and trade liberalization) from which resulted the prestige, credibility and reliability (Bernal-Meza, 2002). This alignment meant adherence to multilateral and bilateral policies of Washington, subscription to the American conception of collective security and acceptance of the goal of hegemonic integration, since “the world is now primarily the United States” (de la Torre, 1992, 163).

According to Andrés Cisneros (1998) it was the *people* themselves who claimed for the change that lead to the consolidation of internal democracy, economic openness and external realignment. The new cover letters of Argentina would be those of a country seeking integration in markets with stable and reliable relations with the developed world, in search of coincidences rather than conflicts, and assuming *international responsibilities coherent to their degree of development* (de la Torre, 1992).

All this was part of a broader Latin American process of *enlargement* of

democracy and free markets, in the form of the spread of liberal democracy, market reforms and free trade agreements. Thus, according to liberal authors, Argentina went on to have a series of shared interests with the United States that allowed it to develop a *special relationship* with its northern neighbor (de la Balze, 1998).

The liberal narrative about the Argentine international insertion during the 90s, starts then from the analysis of a number of factors within the country to explain its external positioning. Thus, the consolidation of democracy and trade openness not only enabled, but *defined* the integration into the Western Alliance. As Cisneros (Vice Chancellor of the di Tella administration in front of the San Martín Palace) explains, were the *demands of the people* that gave rise to the Argentine foreign repositioning. Here, within the liberal framework it is the process of democratic consolidation, trade liberalization and growing interdependence that explains the membership in the Western Alliance and the *special relationship* with the United States.

4.3 State fetishism in the 90s' Argentina

As we have previously stated, the commodity-fetishism was the key to analyze other phenomena that seem to have little to do with political economy. In this fetishism, the social relations that characterize the capitalism mode of production take the form of the action of objects that rule over men. Their own social production and their own social action appear as something alien to them, that rule over them and dominate them as if it were an external and everlasting natural law.

When we take a deep look into the realist and liberal conception of the state we can find this very same process of *fetishization*. As we have seen, the analysts from these traditions understand the state as a thing, as an object: a black box or a castle at best (apart from historical and demographic differences). In this way they get rid of not only its historical character, but mainly its class character, that is its role in the reproduction of the social relations of production in capitalism. But the state not only appears as a thing to these analysts, but as a thing or object ruling above the men and women that make it up. They have no longer the leading role in the development of their social action, but it is imposed from above by *the state* and its action in the international arena, as if it had ontological autonomy.

For the liberal and realist analysis of the Argentine international insertion during the 90s that we have introduced just above, it is clear how the action of the state in the international arena appears as something imposed to those that live there. In the case of the realist reading it is the ranking of states the responsible of this imposition. The correct understanding of the

Argentine location in this *totem of states* leaves little room for alternative courses of action, according to these authors. For the liberal interpretation, even though it seems to lay in the wishes of the people, this imposition derives from the development of the liberal principles of democracy, free trade and international cooperation –all of them understood in an evolutionary way– that constrains the state to act in certain ways.

The state appears then as a thing, driven by external factors alien to those men and women living there. An object “dependant for its prosperity, on a certain international insertion that would allow it to export its food production in the best possible conditions” (di Tella, 1991b). In the same way, for the liberal authors it is the Menem administration that have fulfilled its “historical mission of putting the country in its rightful place in the world” (Cavallo, 1996, 378).

5 Conclusion

In this work he have developed the problem of state fetishism in International Relations, taking the path from the state conceptualization in the realist and liberal classic theories to state fetishism. Then we presented the realist and liberal understanding of the international insertion of Argentina during the 1990s and tried (we hope that successfully) to address how this fetishization of the state occurs in empirical analysis.

At first, we presented the theory of fetishism and the dialectics of commodity-fetishism, the key to the understanding of diverse phenomena in capitalism that seem to have little to do with political economy. The purely fetishistic appearance of economic and social relations conceal its character of relations between men, transforming them into a second nature that surrounds man with fatal laws.

Then we introduced how the classical traditions in International Relations conceptualize the state in the international ground. The realist tradition will understand it as a coalition of coalitions, or as that entity capable of ensuring security to its citizens against external threats, as it had previously done the castle or the fortified town. For liberal authors, in turn, the state will represent the interests of the individual unit, i.e., the collective unit of citizens, provided that republican liberty is respected.

But to understand the *state form* in capitalist society, and how these states relate to each other, then, is central to locate them historically and conceptually in the capitalist mode of production. Realist and neorealists authors abstract from any historical anchorage at characterizing the state as a mere political organization (city-states, kingdoms, empires, nation-states)

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