Attribution of blame as the past and present mode of orientation: the social sciences as a potential improvement

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> Menschen … die derart schuldlos von Schuld zu Schuld gegeneinander getrieben werden.
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> *Norbert Elias*

1 Attribution of blame as a form of orientation

Through the work of archaeologists and anthropologists we have come to know to some extent how people used to orient themselves before the development of systematic philosophy and the sciences. Though an enormous number and variety of different myths and cosmologies have developed in various parts of the world, they have some characteristic elements in common.[1] Most important for the purpose of this argument is the *personal* character of all their explanations or interpretations of interconnections between events. When attempting to make connections – trying to find what we now call a 'cause' – people in the simple societies of the past would always ask for a 'who' rather than for the 'how'. They look

> For a purposeful will committing an act … When the river does not rise, it has *refused* to rise. The river, or the gods, must be angry with the people who depend on the inundation.[2]

Why did people personify all lifeless objects (mountains, rivers, the heavenly bodies) and natural events (rainfall, thunderstorms, the change of the seasons) in such a manner? The world around them was bewildering and beyond their control. They were threatened at least as much by natural forces as by other people. The only way in which they could begin to

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[1] For a systematic description see Henri Frankfort a.o. *Before Philosophy: the Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, Chicago, 1946

[2] Ibid., Pelican Edition, 1961, p. 24.

orient themselves in the diffuse and strange world surrounding them was by analogy to how they saw and conceptualised themselves: their orientation schemes had to become both anthropocentric and anthropomorphic.[3] Not only did men interpret the world surrounding them in terms of the meaning which it had for them, they also endowed everything they observed with the same properties as they regarded themselves as having and which they also recognised in their beasts of prey and domesticated animals.

Thus the world around them became peopled with different kinds of – kindred or malicious – spirits, endowed with what we now call will, purpose and power. When they wanted to explain or influence some event - rainfall, the growing of plants, illness – they would always ask: who has to be blamed or praised for it? They were not yet able to make our present distinction between an event or object and the judgement made of it as 'good' or 'evil'. For that reason 'evil spirits are often no more than the evil itself conceived as substantial and equipped with will-power.'[4] This combination of reification and personification of good and evil later developed into the widespread Manichean orientation scheme in which the world is seen as the theatre of struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, personified as God and Devil, each with their human servants, such as witches, homosexuals, Jews, capitalists, plutocrats, communists, reds, and at present terrorists.

To see natural events and forces in terms of the wilful activities of spirits, did not only fulfil an orientating function, it was also an attempt to find a way to control such forces or events. We have come to call such attempts 'magic': attempts to influence the will and the power of spirits, whether good ('white' magic) or evil ('black' magic). The decline of belief in magic occurred relatively recently in Western Europe, according to Thomas in

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[3] There is still a widespread tendency to speak in generic terms about 'primitive' thought. The Frankforts (see footnote 1) for example, base their generalised description of what they call 'mythopoeic' thought on materials derived from the already highly developed civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. But even the most simple mythical–magical schemes of orientation already presuppose the development of concepts, which make it possible to distinguish between men's own identity and properties – as having a 'soul', 'will', 'purpose' and so on – and different aspects of the surrounding world. To understand how long and difficult a process even the development of anthropomorphic schemes of orientation must have been, Elias's thought-experiment of an initially conceptless human group may be helpful: 'How would men, biologically equipped as they are, experience the world if no knowledge, and especially no knowledge of concepts, had been handed down to them as a result of a long antecedent inter-generational process with its continuous exchange, confrontation and blending of experience and conceptualisation?' ('Essay on Time', part II, op. cit., p. 44). It may be doubted whether the Frankforts are right in stating that 'Primitive thought naturally recognised the relationship of cause and effect' (Frankfort, op. cit., p. 24). Our conception of causality is not an eternal *a priori* of human reason, as that passage suggests, but belongs to a particular phase in the development of concepts and knowledge. For that reason Elias prefers to speak of 'men's potential for synthesis, their capacity for making connections'.

[4] Frankfort, *Before Philosophy*, p. 26.

connection with the development of mechanical philosophy; the insistence that all truths be demonstrated, together with the influence of Aristotelian rationalism on Christian religion, led to the belief in an orderly world in which God's providence ruled according to natural laws.[5] But, more generally, the decline in belief in magic was connected with the development of technology and the sciences, with the increase of possibilities of controlling natural forces for human ends. Thomas describes magic as 'the employment of ineffective techniques to allay anxiety when effective ones were not available'.[6] The increase in the controllability of 'nature' reduced fears and uncertainties, so people could begin to see nature less and less in personal terms. Instead of asking 'who is to blame for this?' and 'what does it mean for us?' they could begin to ask 'how are these events – or results of experiments – connected with others?' Elias has conceptualised this process in terms of men's attitude towards nature becoming less involved and more detached:

> In most industrial societies, impersonal types of explanations of natural events and other concepts based on the idea of a relatively autonomous order, of a course of events independent of any specific group of observers, are used by people almost as a matter of course, though most of them are probably unaware of the long struggle involved in the elaboration and diffusion of these forms of thinking.[7]

People no longer saw nature in anthropomorphic or anthropocentric terms but more and more as having its own regularities, its own inherent structure. But did this also imply that they could begin to see the figurations that they form together in a similar more impersonal manner? That appears to be still much more difficult, particularly when it concerns international conflicts or tensions within societies with threatening implications. The smaller the degree of controllability of such problems, and the greater the uncertainty and fear, the stronger the tendency to attribute blame is likely to become.

In such cases the basic categories and questions of a mythical–magical way of thinking, though they have become more abstract, still to a large extent determine the manner in which people at present orient themselves. Rather than attempting to explain the inherent

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[5] See Keith Thomas, *Religion and tile Decline of Magic*, New York London, 1971.

[6] Ibid., p. 668.

[7] See further Elias, 'Problems of Involvement and Detachment' , op. cit., p. 229.

structure of development of human figurations, they will seek to either blame specific individuals or groups or to look for what I will call 'guilt-causes' in more abstract categories, which are often personified and endowed with consciousness, intent, will and purpose, in the same way as mountains or rivers used to be in former days. In short, their preoccupation is with attribution of blame or guilt rather than with understanding and explanation of the structure of development of human figurations.

I will first discuss a number of examples in order to show how important the search for persons, personified entities or causes to blame still is, and how it has affected the terms of debate between historians and social scientists in particular about international conflicts and problems. I will then attempt to demonstrate that the question 'who is to blame' cannot be answered in a manner acceptable to generally recognised requirements of scientific procedure. I will continue to discuss some further implications of thinking and speaking in terms of praise and blame for the social sciences. In a concluding section I will suggest a more adequate manner of evaluation and making judgements than by attribution of blame or praise. My examples deal with 'blame' rather than with 'praise', but 'praise' is of course implicit in in any attempt to attribute blame.

2   The War Guilt discussion after the First World War

In the treaty of Versailles, concluded on 28 June 1919 between the Allied Powers and Germany was included article 231:

> The allied and associated governments affirm, and Germany accepts, the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the allied and associated governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

The content of this article contributed considerably to the rise of National Socialism in Germany and to the chain of events that culminated in the Second World War. Though the allied powers were primarily concerned to lay down in the treaty the legal obligation of Germany for the payment of reparations, Article 231 was, understandably enough, interpreted in Germany as a statement about moral responsibility, about guilt and innocence with respect to the outbreak of the First World War. Understandably enough, when we can still read in the

1968 edition of a widely used British textbook of contemporary history:

> the imputation of war guilt, which represented no doubt the sincere conviction
> of the allies, and which still remains in the minds of many impartial persons
> [as] substantially if not literally true.[8]

During the Weimar Republic the 'lie about war guilt' (*Schuldlüge*), as Article 231 came to be called in Germany, and the problem of reparations not only damaged the relations between Germany and the former allied powers, but also played a very important role in domestic politics as one of the 'principal sources of grievances to the German people which stimulated extremist tendencies.'[9] For Hitler the hurt we-image of the German people was a most useful instrument to enlarge his following and to strengthen the power position of his party. In 1937 Hitler even enacted a solemn ceremony in which he withdrew Germany's signature from Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles.

The problem of war guilt was taken very seriously not only by public opinion, but also by the governments concerned. As an attempt to demonstrate that Germany did not bear the sole responsibility (*Alleinschuld*) the German government authorised the publication of documents from the archives of the German ministry of foreign affairs.
This collection (*Die Grosse Politiek der Europaische Kabinette*) contains diplomatic correspondence and memoranda covering the whole period from 1871 – the 'Unification' of Germany after the French declaration of war against Prussia – to 1914.[10] As counterweight to the German publications which attempted to exonerate Germany from the accusation of war guilt, the other powers involved in the war also issued collections of documents. Similar series of publications appeared consecutively in England, France, Austria – Germany's ally during thewar – and finally in the Soviet Union. In Germany so much intellectual energy was spent in refutation of the 'war guilt lie' that a journal specifically devoted to that question was founded: *Die Kriegsschuldfrage: Berliner Monatschrift fur Internationale Aufklärung* (1923–39).

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[8] I. M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs 1920–1939*, Oxford 1968? p. 32.

[9] Ibid., p. 33.

[10] The first volume appeared in 1922. Originally the intention was to publish only documents from the period just before the First World War. But in their introduction the editors state that they were forced to go back as far as 1871: 'primarily because in French publications we more and more see the inclination to derive German guilt for the World War from Bismark's supposed striving for European hegemony and even world rule'.

But with more material becoming available through the publication of these documents and with more and more historians attempting to answer the question of war guilt, it proved to be more and more difficult in fact to find such an answer. During the first few years after the war the discussion was primarily between those who considered the statement of Article 231 correct and the so-called 'revisionists' who were convinced of the 'innocence' of Germany and for that reason pleaded for a revision of Article 231. According to the revisionists the allied powers were much more to blame than Germany. One of the most famous revisionists, the American historian Harry Elmer Barnes, concluded his voluminous study of the origins of the First World War with the following words:

> In estimating the order of guilt of the various countries we may safely say that the only direct and immediate responsibility for the world war falls upon Serbia, France and Russia, with the guilt about equally distributed. Next in order – far below France and Russia – would come Austria, though she never desired a general European war. Finally, we should place Germany and England as tied for last place, both being opposed to war in the 1914 crisis.[11]

For Barnes attribution of guilt was apparently such a self-evident question, that he considered it possible to distribute shares of guilt in more or less quantitative terms.

The question of war guilt in historical research was gradually replaced by more detached questions such as: 'What were the conditions which made war possible?' and 'why did the 1914 crisis result in war though so many other crises between 1871 and 1914 were solved by negotiations?' But it did not disappear. Shortly before the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, German and French professors held two conferences in order to come to an agreement about an interpretation of the origins of the First World War, which could replace the one-sided perspectives that were still to be found in the textbooks used in schools in both countries. Their interpretation says in point 18:

> The documents do not permit attributing a premeditated desire for European war on the part of any government or people in 1914. Distrust was at a peak and ruling circles were dominated by the idea that war was inevitable. Each one accused the other of aggressive intentions; each accepted the risk of a war

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[11] Henry Elmer Barnes, *The Genesis of the World War*, New York, 1927, p. 662.

and saw its only hope of security in the alliance system and the development of armaments.[12]

In other words, since nobody premeditated or intentionally willed a war, nobody could be considered guilty.

Even though historians more and more replaced their attention from the direct diplomatic causes of the war to longer-term developments such as the separatist tendencies within Austria-Hungary; the weakening of the Turkish Empire on the Balkans; colonial rivalries; the dynamics of armament races and so on, the war guilt question could apparently be quite easily revived. In 1961 the German historian Fritz Fischer published a study about the aims of German foreign policy from 1900 to 1914 and the German war aims after 1914 with the title *Der Griff nach der Weltmacht*, translated in English under the more bland title *Germany's Aims in the First World War*.[13] According to Fischer Germany was an 'aggressive' power which aimed not only at economic expansion but also hoped to dominate the world. His book revived the discussion about German war guilt, even though Fischer himself denied that he had wanted to do this. Nevertheless, Fischer did not present a detached analysis of the conflict dynamics inherent in the figuration of European states of the time, but analysed only the motives and intentions of German policy makers. The German historian Gerhard Ritter has in a reply to Fischer clearly pointed out the limitation of such an analysis:

> It is hardly rewarding to argue with Fischer's concluding considerations concerning who was 'guilty', in which he seeks to support his thesis by the later retrospective views of Tisza, Czernin, Admiral von Müller, Ballin and Bethmann-Hollweg, which he interprets as either a kind of a confession of guilt, or as accusations by well-informed participants. He does not speak exactly of Germany's sole guilt, but says, cautiously and informally, that, 'the governments of the participating European powers in one way or another and in very different degrees shared in the responsibility for the outbreak of the World War'. Since in his exposition, however, there is not a syllable about the co-responsibility of the non-German powers, it seems to me as good as

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[12] 'Agreement on the Origins of the First World War', in Dwight E. Lee, *The Outbreak of the First World War: Who or What was Responsible?* Lexington, 1970, pp. 60–2.

[13] Fritz Fischer, *Der Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegsziel Politik des Kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914–1918*, Dusseldorf, 1961.

excluded that any reader will interpret this background of the war as something other than a renewal of the guilt clause of Versailles.[14]

There can be little doubt that Fischer's book and the discussion about it in Germany is related to what German intellectuals have called the problem of 'Bewaltigung der Vergangenheit', of how to cope with the German past. Germans have to bear this very difficult problem of both identification and orientation more than the people of most other European nations as a consequence of the specific character of the state formation processes in Germany.

But even if that problem were less serious, it is still the case that more than fifty years of historical research have not yielded any uncontrovertible answers to the question of war guilt.[15] The question must then arise whether it can be answered at all.

3   'Who is to blame for the Cold War?'

The term revisionism makes a reappearance in the 1960s. This time it is not a treaty clause to be revised but the interpretation of the origins of the Cold War, which was generally accepted in the united States and Western Europe and was often used to justify the foreign policies of the NATO countries. Whether the term revisionism was introduced as a conscious analogy with the discussion about the outbreak of the First World War or not, or whether there is any relationship with the pejorative meaning which the term revisionism has in the language of communist parties, I do not know.[16]

The generally accepted interpretation of the origins of the Cold War did contain a clear answer to the question 'who was to blame'. The policies of the West – the intervention in the civil war in Greece, the Marshall Plan, the creation of NATO, the policy with respect to the division of Germany, the interventions in Korea and Vietnam – these had all been necessary reactions to the aggressive policies and intentions of the Soviet Union which, primarily because it was 'communist', was considered to strive for world domination. The basic assumptions of this interpretation can be formulated in the form of a simple

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[14] Gerhart Ritter, ·'A New War Guilt Thesis?' in Lee, Ope cit., pp. 103-110.

[15] See Dwight E. Lee, op. cit., who ends his introduction with the question 'were there villains after all?'.

[16] According to Arthur Schlesinger Jr ('Origins of the Cold War', *Foreign Affairs*, 46: 1 (1967), pp. 22–54, 'revisionism' in American history writing is a term which indicates 'a readiness to challenge official explanations'. Every war in American history has, according to him, been followed by 'sceptical reassessment of supposedly sacred assumptions'. But (Schlesinger is arguing against the revisionists): 'as a whole, past exercises in revisionism have failed to stick'. In the other literature that I have consulted the term is used without any further justification.

syllogism:[17]

1. communist states are totalitarian.

2. totalitarian states are aggressive.

3. communist states are aggressive.[18]

The second statement was supported by drawing an analogy with the consequences of the agreement made between Hitler and Chamberlain in Munich in 1938.[19] The reasoning went as follows: A dictatorial state with aggressive expansionist intentions cannot be stopped early enough. To negotiate with those governments and giving in to certain of its demands (appeasement) is of no avail. Such a government considers that as a sign of weakness, as a proof that it raise its demands and reinforce them by demonstrations of military strength. The policy of communist states has world revolution as its ultimate aim. If they pursue in a particular period a very careful policy, that only shows that they feel they are not yet strong enough or that aggression would imply too many risks. In those periods they just bide their time. As Eugene Rostow has written:

Soviet expansionism has only been stopped by the American threat of reprisal with overwhelming force, but Soviet energy presses outward, patient and ingenious, flowin1 around obstacles, taking advantage of every opening.[20]

It is clear that in the logic of this orientation scheme only cooperation between Western

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[17] The Soviet-Union used a similar syllogism:

Capitalist states are imperialist.

Imperialist states are inherently aggressive.

Capitalist states are aggressive.

Both syllogisms served to reinforce the belief in the inherently evil character of the respective enemies.

[18] The strong internal consistency of this interpretation as applied to the origins of the war in Vietnam has been analysed in greater detail in G. van Benthem van den Bergh, *Vietnam en de Ideologie van het Westen*, Amsterdam, 1967.

[19] The Munich analogy was also used in the Soviet Union. B. W. Schaper (*Het Trauma van München*, Amsterdam, 1976, p. 187) cites Zjelanow, who declared in 1947 at the founding of the Kominform: 'In exactly the same manner as the Munchen policy freed the hands of the Nazi aggressors, any concessions made to the new course of the United States and the imperialist camp could make those who have inspired that policy more impudent and aggressive'.

[20] Eugene U. Rostow, *Peace in the Balance*, New York, 1972. Rostow was Assistant Secretary at the State Department during the Presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson.

countries could prevent communist states from realising their aggressive intentions. Containment of Soviet expansionism was seen as an absolute necessity.[21] If communist states still try to reach their aim with violent means, as in Korea or Vietnam, they should be 'taught a lesson' to leave their neighbours alone – that was the argument with which Dean Rusk as the American Secretary of State time and time again defended the American Vietnam policy. Only in the context of this orientation scheme can it be understood why President Johnson could defend American military intervention the Dominican Republic (1965) by showing on television a list of 'known communists', supposedly behind the revolt in that country.

Out of this logically consistent world view an interpretation of the origins and development of the Cold War also follows. The historian Van der Dunk has described that interpretation as follows:

> While the Allied Powers after the war had aimed at creating a new, peaceful and free world order based on the principle of the Atlantic Charter … the Soviet Union had sabotaged these plans for a better world. It had broken with wartime cooperation, had suppressed democratic development in the countries occupied by the Red Army and pursued an expansionist policy. The aim of its infamous conduct could only be to undermine Western positions as much as possible and make Europe ripe for submission. The West had naïvely hoped to continue the cooperation after the war, even though the problems had already begun before the ink on the German Act of Capitulation had dried. The United States continued its large-scale disarmament programme and appeared to be preparing for a complete withdrawal from Europe. Only gradually did the recognition spread on both sides of the ocean that the Kremlin would profit from that policy to work more successfully towards the realisation of its

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[21] The strategy of containment, based on the metaphor of constructing a dam against dangerous floods, became in 1947 the basis of American foreign policy. The term 'containment' was first used by George Kennan, who served from 1944 to 1947 as American Minister in Moscow. Following earlier telegrams to the State Department he published under the pseudonym X in the July issue of *Foreign Affairs* an article 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', which provided a first formulation of the orientation scheme described here. Ironically, Kennan later felt forced to write (in his *Memoirs 1925–1950*, New York, 1967), that he had been wrongly understood in Washington. He had only wanted to make a plea for economic support to Western-European governments – in particular France and Italy – to help remove the threat of a takeover by their communist parties. He had specifically not advocated the creation of NATO. Kennan's later statements make Schurmann's interpretation of his role plausible: 'The allegedly electrifying impact of his cable of February 1947, and later his 'Mr. X' article in *Foreign Affairs*, was hardly due to their analytical brilliance. The rising national security bureaucracy clustered around the White House needed a view of the world that would fit the policies they were beginning to develop. (Franz Schurmann, *The Logic of World Power*, New York, 1974, p. 92.)

imperialist aims. Therefore the West began to resist this new totalitarian threat

which was even more serious that that of National Socialism which had just

been defeated ... the Cold War was thus the result of this western answer to

the provocation of the Kremlin. That was the interpretation which came up

soon after the war and enjoyed uncontested domiance until the 1960s.[22]

The great majority of American and Western European historians and political scientists, and of course the politicians involved when writing their memoirs, ordered their material on the basis of this image.[23] As Van der Dunk says: 'The most important disagreements were about the question whether and how the West could have prevented the growth of Soviet power at an earlier time.[24] In an American textbook[25] which appeared in 1963 – after the Cuba crisis of 1962 and after the beginning of the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union – only one dissenting contribution was included, written in 1960 by Staughton Lynd, who would later become a well-known spokesman for the New Left. The question which the book poses – is the Cold War an ideological conflict or a power struggle? – is in most contributions discussed only in terms of the motives and intentions of the Soviet Union, with titles such as 'Russian Imperialism or Communist Aggression'; 'Communist Ideology: Key to Soviet Policy'; or 'National interests: Key to Soviet Politics'.

During the Cold War, American social science research into the development of the Soviet Union was also guided by such a perspective. In his essay 'Ten theories in search of reality: the prediction of Soviet behaviour', Daniel Bell discussed the most important theories about the development of the Soviet Union which were advanced after the Second World War by American sociologists, political scientists and psychiatrists. In his conclusion he

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[22] H.W. von der Dunk, 'Het Ontstaan van de Koude Oorlog en de Verschuiving van het Historisch Perspectief', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 85 (1970), pp. 19–48.

[23] An exception was D. F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins*, which was published in 1961. I.F. Stone's *The Hidden History of the Korean War*, an attempt to refute the conventional interpretation of the responsibility for the outbreak of the war in Korea, which appeared as early as 1952, remained unknown until the arrival of the revisionists. It was reprinted in 1969. In his introduction Stone draws an interesting parallel with the outbreak of the first World War: 'I believe that in Korea the big powers were the victims, among other things, of headstrong satellites itching for a showdown, which Washington, Moscow and Peking had long anticipated, but were alike anxious to avoid. There is a certain parallel here with Sarajevo ...'. In 1959 the historian William Appleman Williams published *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, which in its emphasis on the influence of economic expansionism on American foreign policy anticipates many arguments of the revisionists, though Williams does not explicitly deal with the origins of the Cold War.

[24] See the voluminous literature discussed by Van der Dunk.

[25] Norman A. Groebner (ed.), *The Cold War: Ideological Conflict or Power Struggle?* (Lexington, 1963).

noted that in none of these theories were external factors taken into account.[26] In other words, the policy and development of the United States and Western Europe were considered to have no impact whatsoever on the development of the Soviet Union. This implies in turn that Soviet policy is seen as exclusively determined by its internal development. And this again confirms the conviction that American foreign policy is nothing but a necessary reaction to Soviet policy – which is to blame for the Cold War.

Though the détente in Soviet–American relations which began after the compromise reached over Cuba in 1962 did create the conditions for a more detached view of the origins of the Cold War,[27] this did not spark off what came to be called the 'revisionist' literature. That only began to appear after the American intervention in Vietnam was more and more strongly opposed, particularly at the major American universities. When the United States began its regular bombings of North Vietnam in February 1965, the so-called teach-in movement spread over the major American universities. In these 'teach-ins' questions of responsibility for historical events became more and more important, as the American administration defended its Vietnam policy in terms of the orthodox interpretation described above. In the contest of arguments which then started, the ruling interpretation of the origins and development of the Cold War began to be increasingly at stake. To oppose American intervention in Vietnam forced people to examine critically the presuppositions on which American foreign policy was based and with which it justified. This connection between 'revisionism' and opposition to the American intervention in Vietnam – illustrated by the fact that a number of the most important revisionists, such as Oglesby, Lynd, Horowitz, and Kolko were at the same time spokesmen of the New Left and of the opposition against the war in Vietnam[28] – may explain why the discussion about the origins of the Cold War became dominated again by the question to whom, and to some extent also to what, guilt or responsibility should be attributed. The most pronounced revisionists, such as the Kolko and Horowitz, have elaborated an interpretation of the origins of the Cold War which is the mirror image of the view which they attack.[29] In the conventional interpretation, American

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[26] In Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp. 315–55.

[27] See for example Louis Halle, *The Cold War as History* (New York, 1966).

[28] On this connection see Robert W. Tucker, The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy, Baltimore and London, 1971

[29] Gabriel Kolko, The Politics of War: the World and the United States, 1943–1945 (New York, 1968); Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: the World and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1972); David Horowitz, *From Yalta to Vietnam* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).

policy was always conceived as a necessary reaction to the aggressive conduct and intentions of the Soviet Union. In the revisionist version the policy of the Soviet Union (for example the prevention of free elections in Poland; the *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia; the Berlin blockade; the creation of the Warsaw Pact and so on) are consistently interpreted as a necessary reaction to the aggressive and expansionist policy of the United States. As an example, Brands mentions that Kolko takes every Russian pronouncement about its own peace offensives at face value but repeatedly says about the American government that it uses its official statements for a quite different purpose, as deviously indicating something very different from the real meaning and purpose of their statements.[30] The Kolo's books are wholly put to the service of giving an unequivocal answer to the question 'who was to blame?': the Cold War was part of the American attempt to create a world order in which there would be no obstacles for the penetration of American capitalism. Without worldwide expansion, American capitalism – which was not capable of enlarging its internal market through redistribution of income – would time and time again be subjected to economic crises. American policy in the Cold War and Vietnam is the consequence of a conscious strategy to make the world safe for the expansion of American capitalism. America, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, is therefore in Kolko's interpretation inevitably and inherently counterrevolutionary. In the same way as in the orthodox interpretation totalitarian and aggressive communism is the cause to which all evil is attributed, in Kolko's view it is expansionist capitalism, personified in the American government, that is the cause bearing all the guilt. For that reason Kolko also speaks of the innocence of the American people, deceived by the government in Washington and the big capitalist corporations. The Kolkos explicitly subscribe to a determinist point of view:

> A society's goals, in the last analysis, reflect its objective needs – economic, strategic and political – in the light of the requirements of its specific structure of power. Since this power structure in America has existed over many decades in the capitalist form, its demands are the common premises for the application of American power – one that theorists attribute to social consensus and sanction, but which in reality is always reflected in the class structure and class needs.

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[30] M. C. Brands, 'Koude Oorlog en Revisionisme', *Internationale Spectator*, May 1973, pp. 299–307.

That implies that it is irrelevant whor defends class interests within the state apparatus. 'The state invariably responds in nearly identical ways to similar challenges', and 'there is little intrinsic significance in the nature of the bureaucratic process and administrative elite.[31] Steel points out that this determinist view does not in the least imply that the Kolkos are inclined 'to absolve the makers of foreign policy, whose actions they so condemn'. On the contrary, they call into being 'a chamber of horrors in which infallible intellectual giants continuously conspire behind the curtains.'[32] In other words, for the Kolkos there is at the same time an impersonal cause, the capitalist system, which is to blame and specific people, decision makers in Washington, who are guilty.

The revisionists differ among themselves both about general interpretation of the origins of the Cold War, and about the explanation of specific events. They do not all emphasize economic determinism as much as Kolko, though they do agree in general terms in their answer to the question 'who is to blame?'

For the revisionists *the* cause that is to blame for the Cold War is the United States,.American policy and the American economic and/or political structure, even though their opinions differ with respect, for example, to the relative autonomy of what Barnet has called the 'national security bureaucracy' or of Cold War ideology which according to Christopher Lasch acquired 'a force and persuasiveness of its own, quite independent of the political and economic interests underlying it'.[33] In Kolko's view the national security bureaucracy has practically no autonomy, whereas he believes that Cold War ideology is consciously manipulated by the American government as a justification for its policy even though it fully realises how wrong it is.

Against this radical interpretation – radical in the sense that all explanations are reduced to one root or 'fundamental' cause which is to blame and which, if more widely known, might be eliminated, 'liberal' authors, such as Morgenthau, Kennan and Schlesinger argue that American decision makers were not malevolent but misguided.[34] According to them American policy was too much conceived in ideological terms, too much inclined to interpret the world in terms of a struggle between powers of good and evil. It was too

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[31] Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

[32] Ronald Steel, 'The Power and Old Glory', *New York Review of Books*, 31 May, 1973.

[33] Richard J. Barnet, *The Roots of War: the Men and Institutions behind U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1972); Christopher Lasch, Introduction to Gar Alperov!tz, *Cold War Essays* (New York, 1970), p. 15.

[34] For a more extended discussion of the differences between the 'liberal' and 'radical' interpretations, see Robert W. Tucker, *op. cit.*, esp. Ch. II, Conventional and Radical Critiques of American-Foreign Policy.

moralistic, and not ' realistic' enough. American expansionism is a fact but has to be attributed to the very favourable circumstances which obtained after the end of the Second World War. America's position was so favourable that it could even bear a confused and inconsistent policy. American policy in Europe was directed at the restoration of the balance of power: that was the significance of the policy of cohtainment which was later wrongly applied to Asia. The Vietnam War was the consequence of that unnecessary universalism or globalism: it became so serious because of an accidental constellation of circumstances in which the American leaders more and more became entangled. This so-called 'quagmire thesis' has been forcefully defended by the historian and former advisor of President Kennedy, Arthur Schlesinger, not only as an explanation for the origins of the war in Vietnam, but also as an interpretation of the development the Cold War.[35] It is again primarily directed to finding an answer the question of 'who is to blame?' Schlesinger wants to show that American decision makers had good motives. As Tucker in his summary of the liberal view writes:

> It may find our judgements wanting, but our motives cannot be gainsaid; if we have misused our power, it is not through the desire to exploit others. The failure of American foreign policy is the failure compounded of sentimentality and intellectual error – a policy of misplaced altruism ... somehow redeemable precisely because of its essentially disinterested character.[36]

These beneficial intentions of American foreign policy makers have, according to Schlesinger led to tragic results, because of ideological prejudice, intellectual mistakes and insufficient understanding of the opponent, especially in Vietnam.

Ellsberg has pointed out that elis interpretation has been forcefully defended particularly by former advisors of American presidents in an attempt to widen the 'circle of responsibility' from the centre in which the decisions were taken. As an example he cites Townsend Hoopes, former Assistant Secretary for the Air Force under President Johnson, who poses the

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[35] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Bitter Heritage* (New York, 1968); 'Eyeless in Indochina', *New York Review of Books*, 21 October 1971, pp. 23–32; and 'The Quagmire Papers', idem, 2 December 1971, pp. 41–2. For critiques of the 'Quagmire' interpretation see Daniel Ellsberg, 'The quagmire myth and the stalemate machine', *Public Policy*, XIX, No.2, pp. 217–75, and Ralph Stavins, Richard,J. Barnet and Marcus G. Raskin, *Washington Plans as Aggressive War* (New York, 1971). Also Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, eds, *Critical Essays on The Pentagon Papers*, Vol. V of the Senator Gravel Edition (Boston, 1972).

[36] Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

question as: 'How the entire nation has stumbled down the long slippery slope of self-delusion into the engulfing morass.'[37]

These examples may suffice to show how much the problem of attribution of blame has set the terms of the discussion, both about the war in Vietnam and about the origins of the Cold War. This has remained the case even among historians whom Steel has called post-revisionists. According to his definition of post-revisionism these historians do not simply dismiss the question 'who was to blame?', but try to give more subtle answers to it:

> They accept the main contention of the revisionists – that the United States
> bears a heavy share of blame for the Cold War – but deny that it was
> deliberately created for either political or economic reasons.[38]

In other words, the central problem for them remains the distribution of guilt among parties. To solve this problem, the 'post-revisionist' Gaddis reasons as follows: In the United States public opinion is a powerful factor which limits the possibilities of decision makers to pursue a rational policy with respect to the Soviet Union. The American government did consider the Soviet Union to constitute a threat to American security (this is denied by most revisionist authors who point to the enormous power surplus of the United States and the weakness of the Soviet Union immediately after the war) but President Truman thought it necessary for internal political reasons to exaggerate the threat. The American decisions which stimulated the beginning of the Cold War (the postponement of a second front during the war; the refusal to recognise Russian security needs in Europe; the termination of economic aid to the Soviet Union immediately after the war had ended in 1945; the decision to maintain the atom bomb monopoly by trying to have the Baruch plan accepted by the Soviet Union and so on) can best be explained as an attempt to maintain the support of American public opinion. In his conclusion Gaddis links this analysis to the question of responsibility in the following manner:

> If one must assign responsibility for the ~old War, the most meaningful way
> to proceed is to ask which side had the greater opportunity to accommodate
> itself, at least in part, to the other's position, given the range of alternatives as

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[37] Ellsberg, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

[38] Ronald Steel, 'The Good Old Days', *New York Review of Books*, 14 June 1973, p. 35.

they appeared at the time. Revisionists have argued that American policy makers possess/greater freedom of action, but their view ignores the constraints imposed by domestic politics. Little is known, even today, about how Stalin defined his options, but it does seem safe to say that the very nature of the Soviet system afforded him a larger selection of alternatives than were open to leaders of the United States. The Russian dictator was immune from pressure from Congress, public opinions, or the press.[39]

Gaddis thus introduces the margins of free choice that decision-makers have as an explicit criterion to assess responsibility. But his answer shows the difficulties of its application: is it indeed the case that democratically elected governments have smaller margins of choice than dictatorial governments? The revisionist historian Gardner, using the same criterion, arrives at opposite conclusion:

> Responsibility for the way in which the Cold War developed, at least, belongs more to the United States. At the end of the war it had much greater opportunity and far more options to influence the course of events than the Soviet Union, whose situation in victory was worse in some ways than that of the defeated countries.[40]

For Gardner the most powerful party in a conflict can more easily pursue a compromise policy. But after Yalta the United States did precisely the opposite. The Soviet Union had to take heavy losses, both in terms of manpower and economic capacity during the war. It had to secure for itself a stable sphere of influence in Eastern Europe to prevent the possibility of renewed attacks from Western Europe. America's position was much more secure. It had wider margins of choice and for that reason in Gardner's view bears the largest share of the blame for the Cold War.

One cannot deny that the debate about the responsibility for the Cold War has much widened the scope of available factual material. But the preoccupation with the problem of attributing blame has remained so strong that the questions historians have asked often bear

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[39] John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947* (New York, 1972), p. 360.

[40] Lloyd C. Gardner, *Architects of Illusion: Men and Ideas in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 1970), p. 317.

more resemblance to criminal proceedings than to scientific inquiry. Rather than attempt to understand the interweaving of Soviet and American policies in the context of the development of the worldwide figuration of interstate power relations and the domestic development of the big powers, it was asked: 'Who began the Cold War?'; Who 'acted' and who 'reacted'?; 'Who had freedom of choice and who could not do otherwise than he did?' Can a particular policy be attributed to someone in the sense that there was conscious will and intent to achieve evil results, for example to destroy Vietnam, as the Kolkos maintain? Or can one find extenuating circumstances as Schlesinger attempts to do? Even historians such as Gaddis who see the Cold War as resulting 'out of a complicated interaction of external and internal developments, inside both the United States and the Soviet Union' remain influenced by such questions:

> policy makers in both the United States and the Soviet Union were constantly weighing each others intentions, as they perceived them, and modifying their own courses of action accordingly. In addition, officials in both capitals brought to the task of policy formulation a variety of preconceptions, shaped by personality, ideology, political pressures, even ignorance and irrationality, all of which influenced their behaviour. Once this complex interaction of stimulus and response is taken into account, it becomes clear that neither side can bear sole responsibility for the onset of the Cold War.[41]

The question of 'who is to blame?' leads to a debate without end as long as there is no judge to pronounce a culprit guilty. Can the question be answered at all?

4   Guilt causes in development theory and peace research

Before examining whether attribution of blame is possible, I shall first analyse two current debates among social scientists. These discussions are concerned with attempts to theorise about two pressing problems of the contemporary world: poverty and inequality on a world scale, and the threat of atomic war. In these cases the question of 'what is to blame?' is more important than the question 'who is to blame?'. But the 'what' is but all too easily transformed into a 'who' when one is concerned with attribution rather than with explanation. The debate about the 'causes of underdevelopment of the Third World' bears some

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[41] Gaddis, *op. cit.*, p. 359–60.

resemblance to the discussion about the origins of the Cold War. In both cases the discussion started with an attack on the conception upon which policies of the American and Western European governments were based and with which they were justified. The central concept in American and Western European social science theorising about the Third World until about 1965 was 'modernisation'. Two definitions by prominent modernisation theorists, Eisenstadt and Moore, may be given:

> historically, modernisation is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian and African continents.[42]

> Modernisation is the total transformation of a traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and the associated social organisation that characterise the 'advanced', economically prosperous and relatively politically stable nations of the western world.[43]

As these definitions show, modernisation theory was implicitly rather ethnocentric and implied a considerable amount of wishful thinking. But more important are the implicit presuppositions to which most modernisation theorists subscribed:

> 1. Except in providing an example, the development of America and the United States and that of Third World countries are independent processes, unconnected with each other;

> 2. The conditions of modernisation are attributed to capacities which the developed countries possessed and/or efforts which they made but which the countries staying behind on the road to modernisation lacked or did not make;

> 3. All societies must – both in the sense of 'necessarily' and of I ought' – aim for the

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[42] S.N. Eisenstadt, *Modernization: Protest and Change* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 1.

[43] Wilbert E. Moore, *Social Change*, 1963, p. 89.

same end stage of development as supposedly reached in the West and go through essentially the same stages of development.

In this conception – perhaps spelled out most explicitly in W.W. Rostow's 'non-communist manifesto', *The Stages of Economic Growth*, the problems of the Third World are a matter of 'staying behind', of particular 'obstacles' in the process of modernisation which depending on the particular social science discipline were considered to be primarily of an economic, social-cultural, political or psychological nature. These obstacles were all considered to be factors internal to the societies staying poor, such as for example: a dual economy; lack of capital and technology; insufficient n ation-building; political instability and corruption; lack of entrepreneurial capacities and achievement motivation and so on. This kind of selection of causal obstacles to which the staying behind of the Third World could be attributed, both justified Western development policy and made shifting fashions in development policy possible:

> The shifts of emphasis were mainly conditioned, on the one hand by failures of policies based on the one or the other explanatory view, on the other hand by the social disciplines of the student of development problems and questions. In this way, economic, social, political and even psychological factors have been brought up with alternating stress giving rise to various fashions in development theory and phases in development strategy.[44]

The selection of causes to blame in modernisation theory had the advantage for the West that it squarely put the blame with the Third World countries themselves. The 'advanced' countries of Western Europe and the United States were in a sense removed from the process and made into benevolent donor countries. Development assistance policy on the basis of the diagnosis of modernisation theory had the added advantage that it was directed to the creation of a westernised bureaucratic and, it was hoped, entrepreneurial class, the support of which would help to curb dangerous revolutionary tendencies and would prevent the increase of influence from the Soviet-Union.[45]   If 'modernization' went wrong, communism was still

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[44] G. van Benthem van den Bergh, J. F. Glastra van Loon and E. V. W. Vercruijsse, *Science and the Development of Society* (mimeo, Nuffic, The Hague, 1972), p. 14–15. See also Henry Bernstein, 'Modernization theory and the sociological study of development', *Journal of Development Studies*, 7: 2 (1971), pp. 141–60.

[45] For the theoretical underpinning of this argument, see Edward Shils, *Political Development in the New States*, (The Hague, 1965).

there to blame.

After 1960 modernisation theories began to lose influence. The large number of military coups in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the war in Vietnam, and the apparent lack of success of development assistance policies all contributed to its discrediting. We then see, as in revisionism, a reversal of the answer to the question 'what is to blame?' In modernisation theory, only causes internal to Third World societies were considered; in the new 'radical' interpretation, the emphasis was placed on the development of one-sided relations of dependence between the developed or metropolitan capitalist and the underdeveloped peripheral capitalist countries that were seen as inherent in the development of capitalism. In the words of André Gunder Frank, who has most explicitly defended this interpretation:

> underdevelopment … is the necessary product of four centuries of capitalist development and of the internal contradictions of capitalism itself. These contradictions are the expropriation of economic surplus from the many and its appropriation by the few, the polarisation of the capitalist system into metropolitan centre and peripheral satellite, and the continuity of the fundamental structure of the capitalist system throughout the history of its expansion and transformation, due to the persistence or re-creation of these contradictions everywhere and at all times. My thesis is that these capitalist contradictions and the historical development of the capitalist system have generated underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated, by generating economic development in the metropolitan centres which appropriated that surplus – and further that this process still continues.[46]

Such dependency or imperialism theories about the development of the Third World – though there are many different versions and considerable disagreements among them[47] - are based

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[46] André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Undervelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1969). Frank's book was written as a polemic against the Latin American communist parties.

[47] See for example: R. J. Rhodes (ed.), *Imperialism and Underdevelopment* (New York, 1970); Dieter Senghaas, (ed.), *Imperialismus und Strukturelle Gewalt: Analysen Uber Alhanqige Reproduktien* (Frankfurt am Main, 1972); and R. Owen and R. B. Sutcliffe, *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972). For a critical analysis see Benjamin Cohen, *The Question of Imperialism, the Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence* (New York, 1973).

on presuppositions which are the opposite of modernisation theories:

1. 'Development' and 'underdevelopment' are causally connected processes.

2. The causes of development and underdevelopment are not to be found in particular attributes of societies, cultures or political systems of Third World countries but in the development of the world capitalist system.

3. As far as Third World countries move into the same direction as Western Europe and the United States, that is because they are dominated by and dependent upon Western Europe and the United States.

Where one should search for the causes or 'underdevelopment' is most clearly expressed in phrases such as 'the development of underdevelopment' and 'the now developed countries were never underdeveloped. though they may have been undeveloped',[48] or in a book title such as *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.[49]

The term underdevelopment itself, used in this manner, reflects a primary concern with attribution of blame. As Blok has remarked:

If we agree with Elias that the concept of development applies to the long-term process of structured and directional changes … the term underdevelopment, as well as the phrase 'development of underdevelopment' has to be rejected as misleading and senseless. They are misleading because they suggest the unilinear development of all societies. They are senseless since they ignore the fact that development, for better or for worse, is an inherent attribute of any society'.[50]

The current usage of the term 'underdevelopment' makes it possible not to specify the 'for better or for worse' but to attribute overall responsibility for everything that has happened in

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[48] André Gunder Frank, 'The Development of Underdevelopment', *Monthly Review*, 8: 4 (1966), p. 18.

[49] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London and Dar es Salaam, 1972).

[50] Anton Blok, 'Reflections on City–Hinterland Relations in Mediterranean Europe', *Sociologische Gids*, 19: 2, pp. 116–25.

the Third World to external agents or to personified abstractions such as capitalism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and the like.

But attribution of blame serves a second function: there is also a connection between the identification of guilt causes and the particular remedy advocated for 'underdevelopment'. From 'imperialism' theories it follows that the 'system' of one-sided dependency relations has to be changed, if not eliminated – and that supposedly requires 'capitalism' to be replaced by 'socialism'. In dependency and imperialism theory. external causes are blamed for 'underdevelopment', in modernisation theory internal causes. Because the two approaches to the problems of the Third World so clearly select different fundamental or root causes for what they want to explain, they have even been identified as being two different 'paradigms.[51] It might be more to the point, however, to see them as two different partisan schemes of orientation. On the continuum between theory' and 'ideology', both are closest to the pole of ideology.

There can be little doubt, however, that the dependency and imperialism analyses have contributed many valuable insights into the development of Third World countries. In taking account of the development of interdependencies at the world level they are certainly more adequate than modernisation theories. But in their concern with attributing blame and searching for guilt causes they take into account but a limited number of interconnections and neglect or even are blind to others.[52]

A comparable debate has occurred in the community of scholars identifying themselves as 'peace researchers'. Until the middle of the 1960s the main concern of peace researchers was the prevention of war in the sense of armed conflicts between states. The main preoccupation was with the prevention of atomic war between the superpowers and with problems of disarmament and arms control. Most of their research was directed to short-term problems – to devising 'peace' strategies and to analyse the ideological presuppositions that justified the continuing arms races and the Cold War. But the development of the war in Vietnam induced a younger generation of peace researchers to a shift in perspective. They became less interested in East–West relations and more preoccupied with problems of

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[51] Aidan Foster-Carter, 'From Rostow to Gunder Frank: conflicting paradigms in the analysis of underdevelopment, World Development, 4:3 (1976). The dependency and imperialism school is not identical with Marxism, though the majority of its authors would identify themselves as such. Johan Galtung's 'A structural theory of imperialism' (*Journal of Peace Research*, 1971, pp. 81–117), which is decidedly non-Marxist, has also been very influential in peace research discussions.

[52] See George Lichtheim, *Imperialism* (London, 1971); Cohen, *op. cit*., and G. van Benthem van den Bergh, 'Theory or Taxonomy: some critical notes on Johan Galtung's structural theory of imperialism, *Journal for Peace Research*, 1 (1972), pp. 77–85.

oppression, poverty, and 'liberation movements' in the Third World. They identified themselves by making a distinction between 'critical' and 'orthodox' peace research.[53] In the orthodox conception conflicts between states were the central object of research: peace research was supposed to distinguish itself from 'international relations' as a branch of political science mainly by explicitly basing itself on the value 'peace' and by not identifying itself with one or other of the twoparties in the Cold War.[54] But according to the critical peace researchers it was not sufficient to see 'peace' as the absence of direct physical violence between the superpowers. One should also take into account the 'structural', indirect violence in the relations between the superpowers and their satellites, and particularly within the countries of the Third World. The crucial concept in peace research, 'violence', came to be defined by Johan Galtung as 'the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could be and what is.[55] This is again a good example of thinking in terms of guilt-causes: on the basis of such a definition one should search for the cause that is to blame for an undesirable, 'bad' state of affairs, which supposedly can be changed for the better by eliminating that particular 'cause'.

Because of the shift of attention from East–West problems to the problems of the Third World, 'critical' peace research has merged with the dependency and imperialism analyses of underdevelopment. It thus shared in the more general trend towards Marxism that could be observed amongst 'critical' and 'radical' scholars and intellectuals at the end of the 1960s. Preoccupation with looking for guilt-causes tends to contribute to polarisation of thought, in which the representatives of the two poles do not realise that they form a 'community of arguments' based on shared assumptions. In this case these are in the first place the overriding importance given to 'economics' or 'the basis' and in the second place the shared preoccupation with attributing blame. Such shared assumptions prevent opponents in a debate from seeing themselves as the 'frozen clinch' figuration, which they have become.[56]

It may by now suffice to give one more example of the relation between attribution of blame and the search for guilt-causes, taken from a programmatic article by a well-known German peace researcher, Ekkehart Krippendorf. He very explicitly discusses the relationship

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[53] See for example Proceedings of the International Peace Research Association, Third Conference, Vol. I, Assen, 1969; H.W. Tromp (ed.), *Kritische Polemologie: studies over politiek, vrede en geweld* (Assen, 1973).

[54] See Johan Galtung, 'Peace Research and politics', *Internationale Spectator*, 1967, pp. 1573–1603.

[55] Johan Galtung, 'Violence, peace and peace research', *Journal of Peace Research*, 3 (1969).

between identification of guilt-causes and the discovery of a remedy:

> Only if the seeming consensus over the reality of the international system is
> expanded and deepened to a consensus over the structural genesis of the
> system as well, will peace research be able to free itself from the helplessness
> and paralysis which at present condemns it to the empirically precise analysis
> of one war-like conflict after another, deducing it from distortions of mutual
> perceptions or unfortunate incompatibilities. Then and only then, as we will
> try to show, can peace research imply a praxis of qualitative change instead of
> a mere curing of symptoms.[57]

He then goes on to show that the causes of all the miseries of the world can be found in the
'industrial revolution', which in his conception is a euphemism for the development of the
'capitalist mode of production'. But Krippendorf does not only provide an answer to the
question 'what is to blame?', he also knows *who* is to blame:

> profit maximisation was the motive – by no means unconscious – of those
> who financed the adventurous discoverers of the fifteenth, sixteenth and
> seventeenth centuries, those who founded colonies, who created race
> problems in all corners of the world with their slave trade, who sought and
> defended more direct trade routes, who built fleets, created nation-states and
> nationalism, who calculated with wars and world wars to secure and increase
> what had been accomplished and could even earn money on the preparations,
> through the armaments industry. Profit maximisation was and is the vehicle of
> progress in the capitalist mode of production.[58]

The development of capitalism and of nation-states is represented here as if everything has
been quite consciously planned and willed by the bourgeoisie, thus making the attribution of
guilt not only possible but also beyond doubt. In such an orientation scheme we find a by

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[56] See Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (London: Hutchinson, 1978) , p. 30.

[57] Ekkehart Krippendorf, 'Peace research and the industrial revolution', *Journal for Peace Research*, 2 (1973),
p. 186.

[58] Ibid., p. 192

now typical combination of an impersonal cause – capitalism – which is to blame and a particular human group – the bourgeoisie – which is the 'who' that is to blame.[59]

Why is the tendency to think in such mythical–magical terms still so strong? Thomas's description – paraphrasing Malinowski – of the function of magic in simple societies may still be to the point:

> The control offered by such magical rites is necessarily illusory … But it has valuable side-effects. It lessens anxiety, relieves pent-up frustration and makes the practitioner feel that he is doing something positive towards the solution of the problem.[60]

To avoid misunderstanding, the attribution of blame is not the only aim of the types of development and peace research which I have discussed. I would therefore not deny that the search for guilt-causes may yield important factual material. But as Elias has written:

> Research in all human sciences still tends to oscillate between two levels of consciousness and two forms of approach, the one more akin, one might say, to a simple geocentric, the other more to a heliocentric approach. And the constant upsurge of the former in connection with acute social and political tensions effectively bars in most social sciences the steady continuity of research which has become so marked a characteristic of many natural sciences. … For the time being, social scientists are liable to be caught in a dilemma. They work and live in a world in which almost everywhere groups, small and great, including their own groups, are engaged in a struggle for position and often enough for survival, some trying to rise and better

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[59] It cannot be said that this manner of thinking agrees with Marx's own view of the nature of his analysis of the development of capitalism. In his introduction to *Capital*, vol. I, Marx writes explicitly: 'here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.' On the other hand there is the perceptive observation in Raddatz's biography of Marx. Following Karl Jaspers's characterisation of Marx's thought as that of a lawyer rather than that of a scientist, Raddatz remarks that Marx waged 'a lawsuit against history'. He also suggests that this may be the reason why *Capital* remained unfinished: 'He [Marx] must find the proofs for the outrages committed by history, all the proofs; as long as one was missing he could neither prosecute nor pronounce judgment' (Fritz J. Raddatz, *Karl Marx: een politieke biografie*, Baarn, 1976, German edition, Hamburg, 1975, p. 280.).

[60] Keith Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 647.

themselves in the teeth at strong opposition, some who have risen before
trying to hold what they have and some going clown. Under these conditions
the members of such groups can hardly help being deeply affected in their
thinking that social events by the constant threats arising from these tensions
to the way of life or to their standards of life and perhaps of their life. As
members of such groups scientific specialists engaged in the study of society
share with others these vicissitudes.[61]

That the attribution of blame is still an important concern of social scientists, particularly if
the objects of their research are international conflicts or the problems resulting from
worldwide interdependencies, is a function of the situation Elias has described. But as
became clear from the examples that I have discussed, many social scientists are convinced
that attribution of blame not only serves useful functions but is also cognitively possible. I
will now argue that this is not the case.

5   Can the question 'who is to blame?' be answered?

Though we attribute blame and responsibility in ordinary life as a matter of course, and
though this probably serves indispensable functions – people being interdependent as they are
– there is in fact no satisfactory foundation for the knowledge about causes or
interconnections on which such attribution is based. That this is the case will become clearer
if we examine the grounds upon which guilt is being attributed in criminal proceedings.[62]
Categories such as intent, neglect, conscious ('free') will, accountability, extenuating
circumstances, *force majeure*, and so on, which are used explicitly or implicitly whenever
problems of guilt or responsibility in social life are being discussed – as we have seen in the
discussions about the first World War and the Cold War – form the basic language of and are
most systematically discussed in criminal law. Has a satisfactory solution for the cognitive

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[61] Elias, 'Problems of Involvement and Detachment', *op.cit.*, p. 235–6.

[62] I use 'guilt' here as the equivalent of *Schuld* in German and Dutch, which in these languages is the broadest
concept of a number of synonymous terms such as blame, responsibility, culpability and so on. In Dutch or
German one speaks of the s*chuldvraag* or *Schuldfrage*. But in the English language no equivalent term exists. It
must be translated by the question 'who is to blame?' One cannot say 'capitalism is guilty' in the same way as
one can say in Dutch 'de schuld ligt bij het kapitalisme'. There are also differences in the nuances of meaning
that the words belonging to the guilt family have in different languages, particularly in their specialised usage in
jurisprudence. In some countries Latin terms have been preserved such as *mens rea* in English and *culpa* in
Dutch criminal law. But such nuances of meaning are not important for my argument, as the problem of
attribution arises no matter which one of the concepts may be used.

problem of quilt attribution been developed in criminal law? As far as I have been able to discover it has not.

The possibility of attributing guilt – however defined – is at present considered to be a necessary condition for punishment. How else to justify the human suffering implied in the sanctions meted out by judges? If someone is being punished for a misdeed it implies that this action has to be attributed to him as an individual. If there can be 'no punishment without guilt' as the Dutch Supreme Court (Hoge Raad) established in 1916, it is necessary first to answer the question of whether it is possible to isolate a particular human action from a chain of events. That action then becomes the 'true' or 'real' cause of the event, which constitutes the violation of a legal norm. Before one can attribute guilt it is first necessary to ascribe the action to a particular individual, to identify an 'offender'. If such individual action had not occurred, there would not be a penal offence. One must, for example, first establish whether someone has been killed because the wind made a roof-tile fall on his head or because someone struck him with a club. But that one can identify a perpetrator of a deed does not make him automatically into a culprit; that a deed can be ascribed to someone does not mean that one can attribute guilt or blame to him or her. What is required for this? Dutch criminal law recognizes two main forms of guilt: 'intent' and 'negligence' (culpa).

Because it is difficult to distinguish the two categories sharply without introducing sub-categories, it is perhaps best to think in terms of two poles of a continuum.[63] At one end there are actions considered to be committed 'knowingly and willingly': a person consciously wants to achieve a certain result and knows exactly what the consequences or his or her actions are. At the other end there are actions perpetrated without the purpose of achieving consequences which in fact arise, and without any thought about the possibility that such consequences could occur. In order to attribute blame/guilt in the latter case, it is necessary to assume that the person committing the action *should* have known the consequences and *should* therefore have refrained from the action. (In both cases 'action' may also include 'non-action' – such as a railway employee who has not closed the gates of a level crossing when he should have.) It may be clear that on the basis of such criteria a large number of forms and degrees of guilt can be distinguished.

But how satisfactory are the 'will' and 'knowledge' criteria for answering the question of 'who is to blame?' If we consider the way in which they are applied it becomes clear that they oblige us to introduce, as a cause, what is in fact a norm transformed into an

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[63] See A.A.G. Peters, *Opzet en schuld in het strafrecht* (Deventer, 1966), p. 6–7.

attribute. To ask the question 'who is to blame' makes it necessary to reify 'good' and 'evil' or other evaluative criteria into causes.

Why is that the case? In the discussion about the origins of the Cold War, the margins of choice that decision makers were supposed to have were introduced as a criterion. If there are no margins at all, if people act completely under compulsion, then they cannot 'willingly and knowingly' choose a particular course of action. But the real criterion for attributing blame is not whether the situation within which one has to act provides margins of choice or not, but whether within the margins available a 'good' or a 'bad' action is being chosen. That in turn has to lead to the further question whether there is a 'good' or a 'bad' will that has caused the action.

But if we then start to seek further for the 'causes' of that will, an endless regression begins. How did someone in fact see his own margins of choice? Could he know the consequences of this or that particular choice? And even if he did, why did he take the 'wrong' course of action? Whether it is seen as case of intent or negligence, how should someone's 'will' be explained: as being caused by traumatic experience in youth; by an unconscious tendency towards self destruction; or by whatever kind of personality disorder one may think of? In criminal proceedings such questions are indeed raised. A judge can declare on the advice of a psychiatrist that a person cannot, or can only to a limited degree, be held responsible for his actions, if considered to be mentally ill or seriously disturbed.[64] To declare people unfit for attribution [of guilt] implies that one cannot apply any ethical judgement to them: the will which brought a 'mentally ill' or 'mad' person to his action is not a will in the ethical sense, because it is caused by a 'disease' or 'illness'. In Dutch criminal law children under the. age of eighteen are considered not yet fit for attribution [or to be judged guilty]: they are not 'punished' but 'educated' (though children and people held to be mentally ill may themselves experience educational or therapeutic 'measures' as punishment). In the case of adults who do not obtain a psychiatrist's certificate of non-imputability a judge can also take 'extenuating circumstances' into account in determining the degree of criminal responsibility and the sanction to be applied. This relationship between severity of punishment and degree of guilt shows that in this manner of thinking punishment is seen – implicitly or explicitly – as a form of retribution.

This way of thinking about degrees of fitness for 'attribution' or the imputation of

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[64] In Dutch the word 'attribute' is used for this purpose: a person can be completely or partly 'fit for attribution' (*toerekeningsvatbaar*) or not at all.

guilt is in other words based on the assumption that it is possible on the one hand to accept 'causes' that determine the will of a person for which he is not responsible, and on the other hand that there is a quantity of evil in him that determines the will and thus the quantity of pure guilt which the judge takes into consideration in order to determine the severity of the sanction. One is then forbidden to continue to ask any further questions. From the perspective of the attribution of guilt, to explain becomes to apologise: 'in that manner you completely explain evil away.'[65] As the judge said in Samuel Butler's Erewhon:[66]

> I am not here to enter upon curious metaphysical questions as to the origin of this or that – questions to which there would be no end were their introduction tolerated, and which would result in throwing the only guilt on the tissues of the primordial cell'.[67]

This relationship between explanation and the attribution of guilt is expressed very clearly in the consequences of psychiatric advice to consider a person as 'partially responsible' (*verminderd toerekeningsvatbaar*; 'diminished responsibility' in English) in Dutch criminal procedure. In such a case the offender is first sent to jail and afterwards sent for therapy to a mental hospital. The therapy is to eliminate 'external' causes, the punishment is for retribution of guilt, conceived as a quantity of evil as the 'internal' cause. Frenkel can therefore say:

> If one surveys European criminal law, one can only conclude that there are two groups of criminals: a category that should not be punished as they committed the crime because they were 'crazy' or 'ill' and the main group who deserve punishment, because they were 'bad'.[68]

The problem of the attribution of guilt is not, of course, in any way satisfactorily solved by

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[65] For an example of this mode of reasoning, see D. P. D. Fabius, *Schuld en straf* (Leiden, 1900).

[66] In Butler's satire the criminal courts deal with sick people, whereas delinquents are treated by 'straighteners' as 'morally ill' people. Treatment in the latter case may be painful, but the sick person is supported by the sympathy of his family and friends. But there is no pity or kind consideration for the serious crime of tuberculosis, brought before the judge making the pronouncement quoted in the text.

[67] Cited in F. E. Frenkel, 'Schuld en ziekte: gnostiek of diagnostiek?', *De Gids* 9–10 (1973).

[68] In a number of articles Frenkel has explored the wider ramifications of the problem of guilt, both in criminal law and in society at large. See F.E. Frenkel, 'Spiegel der deugd', *Randstad*, 6 (1963), pp. 145–58; 'Sex crime and its socio-historical background', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25: 3 (1964), pp. 333–52; 'Schuld en ziekte: gnostiek of diagnostiek', *op cit*.; 'Tijd en schuld', *De Gids*, 1–2 (1975), pp. 123–8. My argument in this

reifying normative criteria into causes in such a manner. These criminal law constructions in fact throw up a boundary line beyond which explanation is not allowed to go: 'Explain whatever you want, but leave good and evil as causes alone'.

In his study of the role and functions of guilt in criminal law Peters therefore comes to the conclusion:

> The largest part of the literature about guilt does not deal with any real problems and is not much more than a bookcase full of Homes and Gardens magazines, of which the main aim seems to be the comfortable administration of justice.[69]

According to him, the conception of guilt as substantialisinf evil is needed to make it possible for the judge to punish people without having to bother about considerations of efficacy. However, the primary aim of criminal law is to prevent crime. How best to do this? According to Peters:

> Attribution of guilt ... is unscientific hocus-pocus. What is needed is a scientifically valid concept of guilt, which does not place obstacles in the way of a criminal policy, which is reasonable and accepted and morally acceptable.[70]

If one wants to 'resocialise an offender in modern society' or 'prevent wrongdoing in the future', it is usually senseless to blame an individual and confront him or her as a delinquent with his or her 'abnormality' or 'badness':

> It is necessary for practical reasons to identify an individual as perpetrator of this deed, but it is wrong and inhuman to imprison him in this identification and define him in these terms.[71]

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section is to a large extent based on his work.

[69] Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

[70] Ibid., p. 249.

[71] Ibid., p. 246.

For that reason Peters no longer wants to use the term guilt as a substantive, as referring to the property of an individual, but as a verb, to 'attribute'. In that way, the main question becomes that of the freedom of choice and responsibility of the judge, who – according to Peters – has to take enlightened advice from social scientists into account about the efficiency of the range of measures to prevent crime and re-socialise offenders.

> attention is being directed away from the individual who often serves as scapegoat for the system, to the system itself: by committing a crime an individual does not only comment upon himself, but also upon society.[72]

The judge should therefore have the competence *not* to attribute guilt an individual: 'In the independent judge, the community has an institution which is at liberty to criticize the system of which it forms a part'.[73] Peters does not say so explicitly, but his conception implies that blame or guilt can either be attributed to an individual or to society – whether the one or the other is a matter for the judge to decide. But this conception implies that 'society' is being personified. Peters does not further specify the grounds on which attribution to either society or the individual offender can be made. He simply declares guilt to be an 'operational' concept:

> whenever a sanction is applied after a norm has been broken attribution takes place. The basis for attributing is guilt, which can only consist in the necessity of the action it has to justify.[74]

This 'operational' definition may be just as arbitrary as the conception of 'guilt' as evil will. Criminal law developed as one of the aspects of state-formation processes. It originated as one of the instruments through which state institutions established and maintained their monopoly of the legitimate use of means of violence and through which

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[72] Ibid., p. 246. There is a similar tendency in criminology: 'Criminology is primarily a science of others than offenders. In this sense I invert criminology. The history of criminology is not so much a history of offenders, as a history of the reactions of those in power'. (G. P. Hoefnagels, *The Other Side of Criminology: an Inversion of the Concept of Crime* (Deventer, 1973), p. 11).

[73] But Peters does not want to leave the solution for the problem of attribution to the responsibility of individual judges or courts only. He wants to introduce the possibility of appeal in which the grounds for attributing may be contested. The instance of appeal should be a judicial council 'which is systematically informed about the newest results of criminological and penological research and of which, for example, university professors or other experts could be members' (Ibid., p. 264). But what if such experts behaved as some psychiatrists in the SovietUnion do? *Quis costodiet ipsos custodes?*

[74] Ibid., p. 264.

property rights were guaranteed. Only in a later phase did criminal law come to serve the enforcement of the many rules which became necessary in more and more complex societies, such as, for example, traffic law or regulations for building and physical planning. But the 'necessity' which Peters introduces has often been defined in practice from the perspective of central state institutions and ruling establishments. In that respect the 'operational' criterion for the attribution of guilt developed in the Soviet-Union is not without interest. Soviet criminal law is explicitly based on the prevention of 'socially dangerous' actions, yet it has more and more emphasised personal guilt. In his study of the role of guilt in Soviet criminal law, Feldbrugge remarks that 'guilt in Soviet criminal law in the attitude of a person who by his deed shows that he wants to oppose or defy the will of the Soviet state. This makes him also morally guilty'.[75]

Thus to see 'guilt' in operational terms and criminal law as a form of social engineering therefore depends on who makes the decisions about 'necessity'. If this occurs in a state with few or no 'checks and balances' or institutionalised safeguards for the rights of individual citizens, to maintain the concept of guilt may even increase the arbitrariness of criminal law.[76] What Peters has in fact done is not to develop a 'scientifically valid conception of guilt' but to recognise openly that the problem of guilt attribution can only be solved by a decision to define someone's 'will' as good or evil (whether of an individual or the state) and prohibit further questioning.

This brief discussion of the role of guilt in criminal law has demonstrated that one cannot answer the question of 'who is to blame' if one respects the elementary requirements of scientific procedure. No matter which way one turns, whether one attributes to individuals or to a personified 'system' it remains necessary to substantiate and personify evil as the cause that is to blame. Attribution of guilt or blame and explanation of interconnections between events are therefore at odds with each other.

To avoid misunderstanding: we cannot do without the notion that people can be held and should feel responsible for their actions. But when we realise that the question 'who is to blame' cannot be answered, the assessment of 'responsibility' becomes a matter of dialogue and questioning, directed more to the improvement of the living conditions of people and the

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[75] F. J. M. Feldbrugge, *Schuld in het Sowjet Strafrecht* (Utrecht-Nijmegen 1959).

[76] 'Legality' and 'legal security' may be part of a structure of checks and balances. For that reason Peters in a more recent publication stresses the importance of law as a 'relatively autonomous social institution', through which protection of individuals against the state can be institutionalised (A. A. G. Peters, *Het Rechtskarakter van het Strafrecht*, November 1972). He has thus to a large extent reversed his earlier stress on 'efficacy' and 'necessity'.

relations between them than to pinning down individuals in their 'will' or 'character', into their 'good' or 'evil' as attributes.[77]

The question 'who is to blame' cannot be answered either, if the 'who' is not an individual as in criminal law, but a state, class, organization or any other human group. The same infinite regress must occur, as we have seen in the discussion about the origins of the First World War and the Cold War. One can only attribute blame or guilt if one decides to stop questioning and then reifies the evil will or character of a particular group – contemporary examples are terrorists, the state, multi-national corporations or the military–industrial complex into the cause that is to blame.

6   Further implications: attribution and explanation as conflicting activities

To attribute – to think in terms of guilt and blame – implies that one has to isolate the action(s) of one identifiable entity, whether individual, group or reified and at the same time personified 'cause' – from a complex sequence of events. This need to isolate has implications for our whole manner of thinking about 'causes'. In the common-sense conception of causation, the question is either 'who is to blame' or 'what is to blame?' One looks for factors or causes to which a particular state of affairs can be attributed.

The meanings of the Latin concept *causa* have their origin in legal practice.[78] In legal proceedings – whether dealing with criminal law or the law of contract – the question whether a particular event can be attributed to a specific human action or should be considered as a coincidence, as an accidental conjunction of circumstances (here again one should see these as poles on a continuum) needs to be answered for the judge or court to come to its decision. In fact, criminal law and contract law only became separate branches of the law in connection with the development of the central monopolies of the state: the separation between 'public' and 'private' domains and the extension and specialisation of state functions and institutions. In international law, which is less highly developed, this separation is much less clear. Article 231 was included in the Treaty of Versailles in order to

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[77] This may also imply the need to abolish criminal law as a specific category of punitive measures directed against individuals, justified in the last instance because they are 'bad'. That does not imply the abolition of 'painful' measures against people who commit 'crimes', but such measures (which need to be subject to various kinds of control procedures) have to be directed to the future rather than aimed at retribution for past evil. That there are many practical problems implied in such a perspective – as long as the vast majority of people orient themselves in terms of blame, guilt, revenge and retribution – cannot be denied.

[78] See K. Kuypers, 'Verklaren en OOrzakelijkheid'.,*Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift van Wijsbegeerte en Psychologie*, 54: 1.

provide the legal basis for demanding reparations from Germany. What thus can be considered as an aspect of the 'private' law of contract and obligation between states became linked with the 'public' law of war guilt and war 'crime'.

The structure of reasoning in terms of attribution is made quite clear in a study of legal causality by Hart and Honoré.[79] They begin from the distinction between a 'normal' and an 'abnormal' course of events. The deviation from the normal course of events is to be explained because particular circumstances are abnormal. In these circumstances the 'cause' is to be found. Zwart has raised the objection that in this conception only rare events have 'causes' and regularly occurring events have not.[80] According to him it is a subjective, normatively determined conception of causality. But there is no need for complicated epistemological arguments once it is clear that legal causality as discussed by Hart and Honoré is simply a form of attribution of blame. They admit in so many words that their concern is with the problem of identifying causes to which the breaking of a norm can be attributed. As they themselves say:

> the assertion often made by the courts, especially in England, that it is the plain man's notions of causation (and not the philosopher's or the scientist's) with which the law is concerned, seems to us to be true. At least it is true that the plain man's causal notions function as a species of basic model in the light of which the courts see the issues before them, and to which they seek analogies, although the issues are often very different in kind and complexity from those which confront the plain man. These notions have very deep roots in all our thinking and in common ideas of when it is just or fair to punish or exact compensation.[81]

To attribute blame – whether in legal proceedings or for purposes of social orientation – is to find the 'real' or 'root' cause for an undesirable or 'unlawful' state of affairs or event. To quote again Hart and Honoré's description of what they consider to be the central concept in the causal language of both lawyers and historians:

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[79] H. L. A. Hart and A. M. Honoré, *Causation in the Law* (Oxford, 1959).

[80] P. J. Zwart, *Causaliteit* (Assen, 1967), pp. 110–13.

[81] Hart and Honoré, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

a contingency, usually a human intervention, which initiates a series of physical changes, which exemplify general connections between events: and its features are best seen in the simplest cases of all where a human being manipulates things in order to bring about intended change.[82]

When this mode of thinking about causes is taken over uncritically by social scientists, they will tend to look not so much for a single human intervention but for a more abstract cause to be isolated and identified as cause to blame. The influence of this common-sense conception of causation may explain why single-cause theories and either–or discussions are still so prevalent in the social sciences. But attribution and explanation are activities which do not bear each other well. Frenkel has illustrated the pitfalls of thinking in terms of the cause to blame with the example of the connection which was established between the use of the sedative Thalidomide by pregnant women and deformation of the foetus leading to the birth of the so-called Softenon babies. Thalidomide was considered to be 'the cause' of these deformations.[83] But, argues Frenkel, what if Thalidomide were the b est sadative available and were to be considered indispensable in the same way as narcosis, even though in some cases narcosis has lethal effects? What would have been done? Not all women who used Thalidomide during their pregnancy gave birth to deformed babies. A great deal of money and energy would probably have been invested in trying to discover the conditions which produced deformed children in some cases, but not in others. If that condition had been found – if it had, for example, been a slight deviation in hormone functions – and could have been treated successfully, then that condition would henceforth have been considered to be *the* cause of deformation of the foetus. Attribution here is the identification of *the* cause that makes a particular intervention possible – to prohibit the selling of Thalidomide or to treat a hormonal condition. But in the *explanation* it does not make much sense to speak of either one as *the* cause: when interconnected, they steer the growth of a foetus in an undesirable direction.

It is here again a normative judgement that determines whether a particular interconnection is identified and then labelled as the cause – the cause to blame – or not. It also illustrates the differences between attribution and explanation: if a decision to attribute has been taken, the attempt to continue the search for more adequate explanations may stop.

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[82] Ibid., p. 2.

[83] 'Schuld en Ziekte' *op. cit.*, p. 658.

An illuminating example of the implications of the conception of causality implied in the activity of attribution rather than explanation is Stretton's analysis of the reasons for the diversity of 'explanations' of nineteenth century imperialism, which have been produced respectively by politicians, historians, Marxists and economic sociologists.[84] Stretton discusses successively Chamberlain, von Bülow, Roosevelt, Turner, Hobson, Lenin, Schumpeter, Viner, Winslow, Fieldhouse and Langer, and demonstrates how in the case of each of these authors their selection of the chains of causes and effects is determined by their valuations of what they want to explain. He makes in this respect a distinction between 'interventionist' (whether radical or conservative) and 'liberal' principles of selection. The latter value society highly as it is, and merely want to relieve it of certain blemishes, which are not considered as inherent aspects of the present state of society. Stretton shows that such valuations determine the length of the causal chains, which are incorporated in different explanations. Radical reformers or revolutionaries are usually forced to go back quite far into history in order to find the causes to blame for the effects which they want to eliminate.[85] Stretton clarifies this process on the basis of typical 'left-radical' and typical 'conservative' explanations of the outbreak of the First World War. The 'left' explanations attempted to establish the inevitability of the connection between capitalism and war in order to persuade people that a socialist revolution – of which the effects were controversial – was not only most likely but should also be actively pursued:
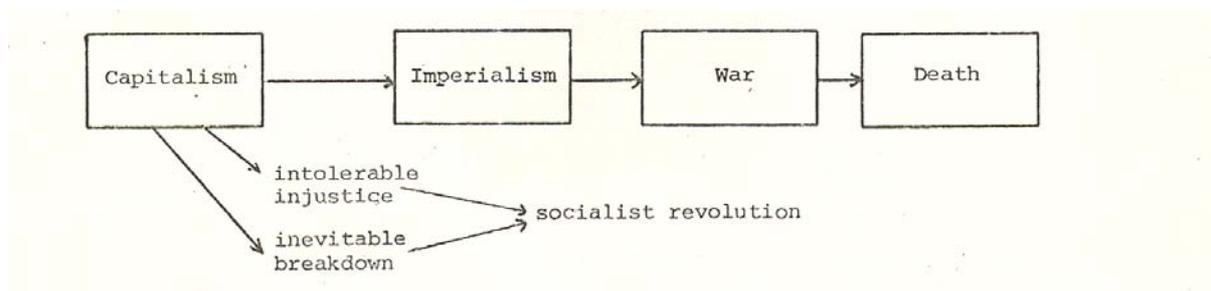

Some conservatives attempted to exculpate capitalism by blaming the inherently and

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[84] Hugh Stretton, *The Political Sciences: General Principles of Selection in Social Science and History* (London, 1969), esp. chs 3 and 4.

[85] This is also illustrated in development studies. In order to explain the persistence of poverty and oppression in the Third World there has been a marked shift from present-oriented to longer-term, 'historical' studies. That the quest was partly inspired by wanting to identify guilt-causes is demonstrated by the fact that many of these studies try to trace the origins and development of capitalism. See for example Krippendorf, *op. cit.*, and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974).

unchanging 'bad' characteristics of human nature.
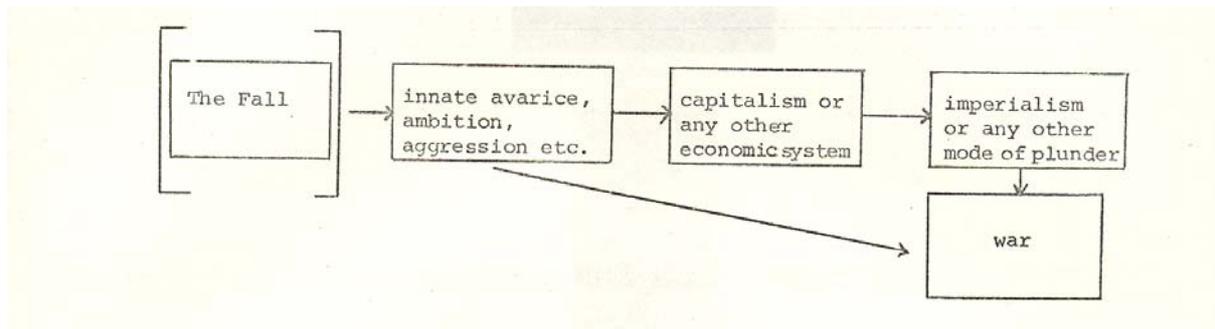
But it was also possible to attempt to explain war by looking for some avoidable mistakes of government or diplomacy, thus preserving

> the innocence of capitalism by attaching war to a much shorter chain of causes
> … These reasons prompted some of the many explanations of World War I
> which confined themselves to the diplomacy of July 1914 or at least to
> questions of the national and personal guilt of particular governments.[86]

Stretton not only shows the difference in length of causal chains selected between the radical (Marxist) and the liberal or conservative explanations, but also shows the influence of opposing valuations as expressed in the description of a number of other 'effects' of capitalism:[87]

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[86] Stretton, *op. cit*., p. 57.

[87] Ibid., p. 58.
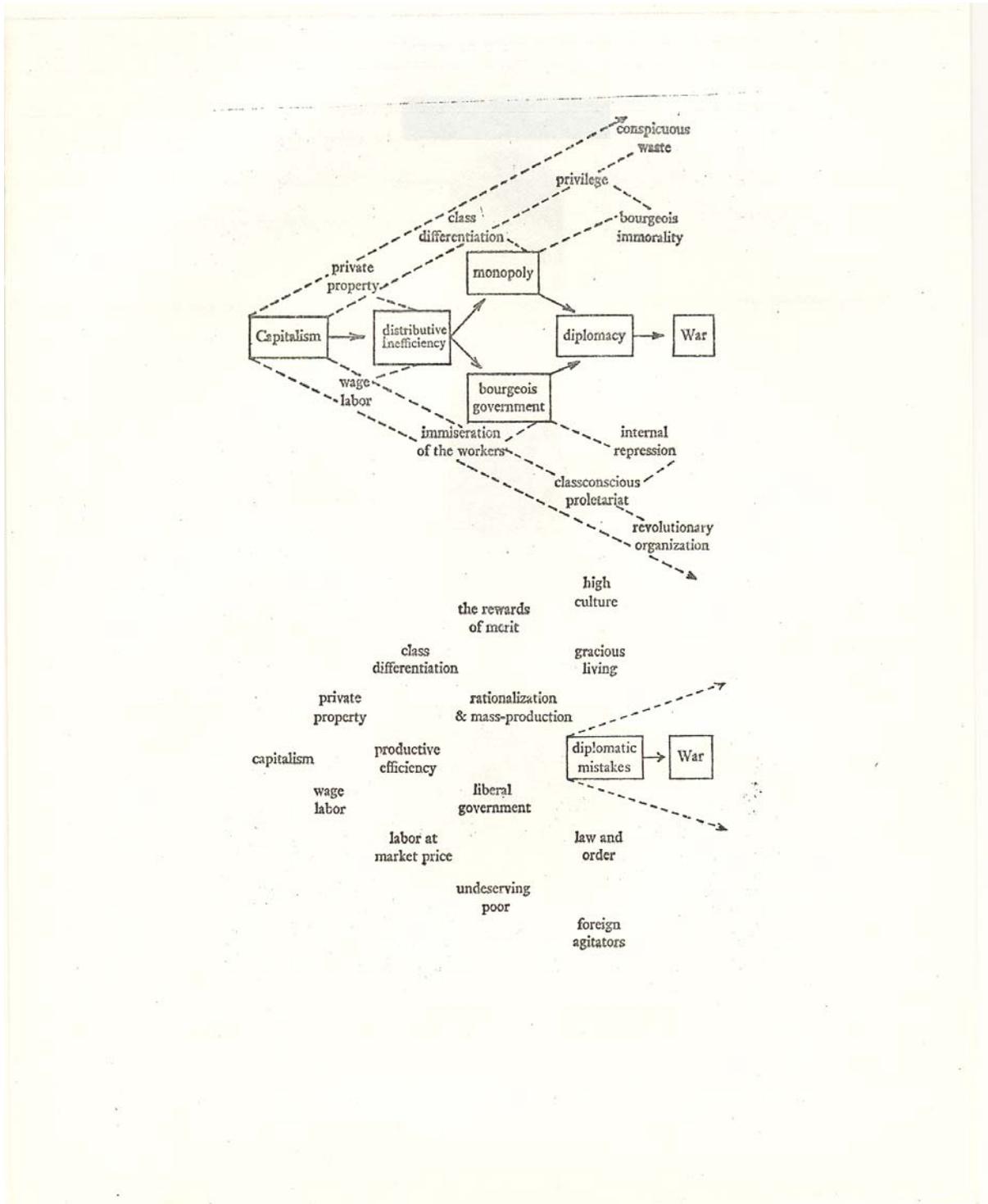
Stretton's analysis of such 'explanations' of 'imperialism' shows quite clearly that the primary concern was in fact not explanation at all. It was an attempt to identify those causes, to which negatively valued events or situations could be attributed in the expectation that the elimination of these causes would lead to a more desirable future state of affairs.[88] For

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[88] Stretton argues that in the social sciences there is no other way: there are no autonomous scientific criteria or principles to select causes. For that reason all social sciences are *political* sciences. Social scientists need to

Hobson that was a capitalist economy without imperialism. In his view to cure capitalism of imperialism would at the same time secure stability and social justice. His explanation

> was intended to account for a larger range of evils, it brought hitherto scattered reformers into an alliance of purposes, it concentrated their fire upon scapegoats, and it showed how the moderate action needed to bring domestic prosperity and social justice would also bring justice and peace between nations.[89]

Lenin, on the contrary, attempted in his 'explanation' of 'imperialism' (written in 1916) to demonstrate the inherent, unbreakable causal relationship between capitalism and imperialism, which would also be extended in the future, if the correct counter-strategy were not followed: during the war millions of workers and peasants had been armed, which could and should be organised to overthrow their national ruling classes. According to Stretton, Lenin's explanation of imperialism was primarily a tool in his fight against 'opportunists' who saw 'peace' as the primary aim instead of preparing for revolution. Lenin's theory thus identified not only capitalism as *the* cause of imperialism and war, contrary to Kautsky's view that imperialism was a choice available to rather than a necessary consequence of capitalism, but also served to identify the 'opportunists' as those who were and would be to blame for the failure of the socialist movement – if the strategy advocated by Lenin were not followed.

These examples again show the influence of the commonsense conception of causation on what are offered as scientific explanations. In Stretton's visualisation of what he calls 'chains of causes and effects' it is one cause, 'capitalism' which itself does not change and which is represented as an entity which produces effects in a sequence of one-way connections. It is not a coincidence, that a similar causal chain – which Stretton takes seriously – can begin with 'the Fall of Man'.

The reader of my argument will be able to identify in most political discussions of today a concern with attribution prevailing over the attempt to find better explanations –

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improve their valuations and 'must be persuaded to stop indoctrinating its recruits with the peculiarly stupid ideals of generality, objectivity and cumulation' (ibid., p. 262). That Stretton does not see the possibility of synthesis – which is cumulative, general and, if one wants to use that term, 'objective' – is due to his conception of causation and the image of social reality connected to it.

[89] Ibid., p. 10l.

witness for example, the recent debates about the 'causes' of terrorism. The reasons for this are obvious. Politics is a matter of winning or losing, a struggle which makes it very difficult for the involved participants not to see their fight as a zero-sum game and to accept a more detached view of their predicament. In his essay 'Problems of Involvement and Detachment' Elias analyses in more detail difficulties for social scientists resulting from their being part of the development of a world figuration full of strife, exploitation and oppression.[90]

What I have tried to show in this chapter in greater detail than Elias has done is what the consequences and implications are of orientation in terms of attribution of blame not as an activity of the past, of the 'primitive' or 'savage' mind, but of the presennt. Magical–mythical thinking is still very much with us and still determines to a very large extent the common sense conceptions of causation, tied up as it is with the common sense conceptions of blame and guilt, praise and merit. Examples can easily be found in newspapers, radio and television, and the speeches of politicians.

In order to improve the orientation of people in general, it is necessary that social scientists become more aware of their own ties to the past. They are, for one thing, forced to use ordinary language, which has developed in conjunction with orientation schemes of former ages. There is a great need for a critical and developmental analysis of language, as exemplified in Elias's introduction to *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, in which he analyses the development of the meanings and social significance of 'culture' and 'civilisation' in France and in Germany, and in his demonstration in *Was ist Soziologie?* of the difficulties which the subject–predicate structure of Indo-European languages implies for conceptualisation of movement and process.

Here I have tried to examine how the way in which we think about causation – not in philosophy or the natural sciences, but in ordinary life and in the social sciences – is much more determined by attempts to attribute blame than by attempts to explain or understand.

As a last question in this section, it therefore remains to examine how adequate it is to think of social reality – as Stretton takes for granted-in terms of endless chains of causes and effects' or 'the seamless web of history'? Stretton presents the following visualisation of social reality, in which causes have been selected in order to explain event(s) E:

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[90] Norbert Elias, 'Problems of involvement and detachment' (1956), in *Involvement and Detachment* (Dulin: UCD Press, 2007 [Collected Works, vol. 8]), pp. 68–104.
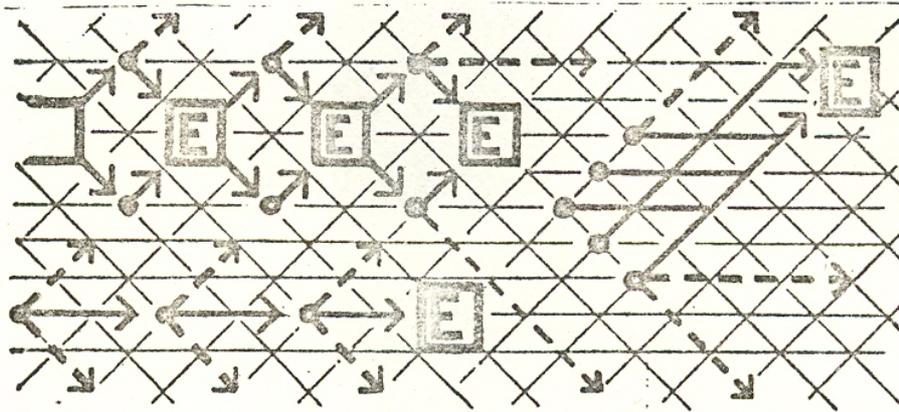
Such a causal web looks prima facie quite plausible, but if we examine this image in terms of Elias's 'model of models',[91] it becomes clear that it is a model that corresponds to the one end of the continuum Elias distinguishes: it is a heap or agglomeration of 'causes' and 'effects'. What does this imply? The social world is seen as a heap of 'variables' or 'factors', one or more of which may be selected and isolated as causes to blame or praise. This implied image may clarify Blumer's observation that in the social sciences anything goes as a variable:

> There seems to be little limit to what may be chosen or designated as a variable. One may select something as simple as a sex distribution or as complex as a depression; something as specific as a birth rate or as vague as social cohesion; something as evident as residential change or as imputed as a collective unconsciousness; something as immediately given as a rate of newspaper circulation to something as elaborately fabricated as an index of anomie.[92]

The image of a heap of variables as potential causes (independent variables) and effects (dependent variables) works well if one investigates regularities in connections between constituent parts or elements, which can be isolated from their larger units without drastically affecting the properties either of the parts or the whole. The more it is possible to isolate parts or elements, the more is it also possible to identify a particular 'cause' as being to blame for-a particular 'effect'. But when we deal with organisms or with human figurations, with

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1969), p. 128.

biological evolution or social development, to find the cause to blame becomes impossible. In human societies it then makes little difference, whether such 'causes' are individuals or states, parties or classes or again more abstract, reified and personified entities such as capitalism, communism, terrorism or at an even higher level of abstraction 'nature' or 'history'. In dealing with human figurations and social development therefore also becomes necessary to conceptualise interconnections in a manner different from that in terms of sequences of 'causes' and 'effects'. That is more easily said than done, given the development of ordinary language, with which social scientists have to work and in which they must express the results of their investigations, the more so if they see it as their task to improve men's orientation.

For that reason synthesis in the social sciences requires a critical and developmental examination of the available vocabulary, both in terms of the interconnections between the meanings of terms used and in terms of their usefulness for the design of explanatory models of the development of human figurations.

7 Towards a more adequate manner of making judgments

In the type of orientation which I have called 'attribution of blame', identification of *the* cause' and judgment – blaming or praising that cause – are merged. That is one of the most important reasons why that kind of orientation is still so prevalent, even in the contemporary industrial state-societies where the social sciences have a reasonable degree of autonomy. Apart from the present-day fragmentation and confusion in the social sciences, there is the problem that the social sciences have not been able to find a satisfactory solution for bridging the Kantian gap between the 'is' and the 'ought', between 'facts' and 'norms', between explanation and evaluation. Making judgments is still widely regarded as a 'subjective' activity, at best determined by 'culture', 'ideology' or 'philosophy', but not supportable or justifiable by reference to the results of scientific enquiry. Scientists can at best help in providing an assessment of the consequences of alternative judgments – whether political, legal or moral. But they cannot in the conventional view provide a rational basis for the choice between different possible judgments themselves.

Why has the Kantian gap between 'is' and 'ought', between *reine Vernunft* and *praktische Vernunft* entrenched itself in the conventional view of the relations between 'politics' and 'science' (of which the Marxist view of the relation between 'theory' and 'practice' is but the mirror image)? I would submit that behind this view lies a static conception of both knowledge (elevated into 'Reason' as an eternal attribute of human

beings, or at least of philosophers) and values, whether moral, legal or political (reduced and elevated into the eternally valid 'golden rule' or 'categorical imperative'[93]). The problem of the gap between the 'is' and the 'ought' can be transcended – in the sense of being understood to be a static conceptual polarity – by looking at both knowledge and values or norms in terms of a developmental perspective.[94] It then becomes clear that there is, for example, an interconnection between the knowledge acquired about 'race', racial discrimination and prejudice and the development of norms about how human beings of different ethnic origin should behave towards each other. We cannot, of course, treat the one as the cause of the other: they must be seen as aspects of the overall process of social development. How the development of norms and knowledge are interconnected in specific cases is a matter of empirical investigation. But to see norms and knowledge in terms of a gap between 'is' and 'ought' becomes impossible as soon as we shift from a static view to a developmental perspective.

A developmental perspective also implies that 'good' and 'bad' are categories with a changing content. But their content changes not in an arbitrary way, for example with the 'spirit of the times' or as an unstructured sequence of 'fashions'. The development of norms and values is connected on the one hand with the changing power balance between and within societies[95] and on the other hand with the development of knowledge. It is quite clear that criminology, psychiatry, sexology and the sociology of deviance are influencing the development of norms and laws pertaining homosexuality and other forms of 'deviant' sexual conduct. How precisely is again a matter for empirical investigation.

Similarly, the investigation of the relations between the development of the advanced industrial societies of Europe and America and the development of agrarian societies in Africa, Latin-America and Asia has a bearing on the norms which guide political attitudes

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[93] In Langemeijers's formulation: People have to act in such a manner that they are able to want the principle underlying their actions to be at the same time the basic rule of a general law, applicable to everybody. See G. E. Langemeijer, *Inleiding tot de Studie van de Wijsbegeerte des Rechts* (Zwolle, 1956), esp. part I, p. 86–96 and part II, p. 169–90.

[94] For an attempt to break through the Kantian categories by combining the anthropological views of Helmuth Plessner with the philosophy of Charles Peirce, which is developed into an improved version of *Verstehende* sociology, see J. F. Glastra van Loon, *Norm en Handeling* (Haarlem 1956). Van Loon, however, is concerned more with the necessity of understanding people's norms in order to explain people's activities (*handelingen*) than with the relations between the development of norms and the development of knowledge. But he does conclude that 'The social sciences are much more directly dependent [than the natural sciences] on the historical development of the social relationships which they investigate' (p. 272).

[95] See Norbert Elias's analysis of the development of etiquette and ceremonial in French court society as functions of changing power balances, in *The Court Society* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2006 [Collected Works, vol. 2]), esp. chs 5–7.

and government policies.

The gap between 'is' and 'ought' in fact does not exist, but philosophers and social scientists still believe it does and thereby prevent themselves from playing a more constructive role in the development of more adequate means of orientation.

The conventional view of making judgments combines the is–ought dichotomy with thinking in terms of the first pole in Elias's continuum of models. It sees societies as a heap or agglomeration of individuals, each with a number of properties. Judgments are made by identifying one action of an individual as *the* cause of the breaking of a norm. Norms are seen as given – or as deterlnined by a human or divine legislature.

Human beings are seen as closed entities, endowed with fixed properties such as 'character', 'will', and degree of being 'good' or 'evil'. This *homo clausus* view, as Elias has called it, implies a clear separation between 'inside' ('man's inner world') and 'outside' ('man's environment'), as expressed most explicitly in the behaviourist programme.[96] People are 'actors', who from time to time can enter into relations with each other. In such a view individual 'motives' and 'intentions' are separated from the social 'background' or 'environment' as 'factors' influencing a person's conduct. The anthropology implied in criminal law corresponds with what Elias has described as the *homo clausus*, billiard-ball conception of the world human beings form together:

> The image evoked by these conventions of speaking and thinking is that of a
> high wall surrounding the single individual, from which mysterious little
> dwarfs - the 'environmental influences' - throw small rubber balls at the
> individual, which leave on him some imprints. That is the way in which terms
> like 'social factors' and others of this kind are commonly employed. It is, as
> one can see, the perspective of a human being who experiences himself alone
> at the centre of things, while everything else lies outside, separated from him
> by an invisible wall, and who imputes as a matter of course the same
> experience to all other individuals. From this basic experience of oneself as a
> somewhat lonely and isolated person, as the centre of all others, one arrives at
> the general concept of 'the individual' in the singular as the centre of the
> human world. This individual-centred perspective of the human universe is in

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[96] Norbert Elias: 'Sociology and Psychiatry' (1969), in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009 [Collected Works, vol. 16]), pp. 159–79. For a formal refutation of behaviourism see Gerard de Vries, *Sociale Orde, Regels en de Sociologie* (Meppel-Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 39–43.

many ways the contemporary counterpart of the former geocentric perspective of the natural universe.[97]

The *homo clausus* conception leads to thinking in terms of a dichotomy between 'individual' and 'society', as if these were two different objects or realities, which exist independently from each other. In discussions about criminal law this polarity appears when the question is asked whether crimes should be attributed to individual culprits or rather to the evil of 'society' or the 'system'.

The legal procedure of making judgments is based on the separation of 'society' and 'individual'. The 'judge' or 'court' are not considered to form part of the development of the human figurations, within which their judgments are made. No questions are asked about the structure of the human figurations and their development within which the crime in question has occurred. The judge has an accused individual before him and can only ask the question whether that individual is guilty or not. He may take 'external' or 'environmental' factors into account, but his task is to assess 'internal' attributes of the individual before him. He must give the accused either a certificate of guilt or a certificate of mental illness. A judge or court cannot pronounce judgment on the quality and development of *relations* between people.

But if one begins to see human beings not in the singular but in the plural, as a network of interconnected human figurations (families, communities, schools, factories, bureaucracies, political parties, states, etc.) a different manner of making judgments must follow. Human beings as individuals are dependent upon each other: 'Unintended human interdependencies lie at the root of every intentional interaction'.[98]

Human beings fulfil different functions for each other. As individuals they change with the figurations they form together: they can become more or less 'civilized' in Elias's sense, more or less concerned with their own 'self', more or less interested in material possessions and so on. For that reason it is difficult to speak of human needs: these are not given as unchanging properties of human beings, but change with the figurations they form. For a long time, aristocrats had a 'need' to fight, to duel with each other. But in the course of the development of Western Europe that specific fighting need disappeared.

As individuals human beings are part of different figurations. They are 'open' entities

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[97] Elias, ibid., p. 22.

[98] Elias, *What is Sociology?*, p. 94–5.

with a largely unfulfilled capacity for relations of different kinds with other people. People may be both constrained and stimulated within the figurations they form together. 'Crime' can be seen as one of the ways in which people cope with constraints or with possibilities (such as embezzlement). And, again, activities designated as 'crimes' also change with social development.

In the figurational view there is no clear separation between 'inside' and 'outside': individuals can best be compared to the nodes within a network of relations.[99]

Their 'personality' can usefully be seen as the temporary result of the development of such a singular node. To make a judgment about a person from a figurational perspective can therefore never be reduced to his or her 'internal' attributes. Anyone who makes a judgment must be able to see him or herself as part of the figuration to which the person judged belongs – if that is impossible, the judgment can have no value, as judges in colonial courts could and often in fact did experience. The same problem of the judge standing outside the figuration to which the accused belongs is responsible for what is at present conceptualised as 'class justice'.

To judge an individual requires understanding of the interconnections between the development of 'personality' and the figurations to which a person belongs. Judgments may have diifferent functions: to confront individuals with the consequences of their activities, to influence their conduct in the future and to influence the development of the figurations to which they belong. But to form judgements about human figurations is as important as, if not more important than, judging human beings.

The practical implications of the figurational perspective in criminal law, education or politics are far-reaching. It is impossible to discuss them here. I do not want to do more than open a door to a more adequate manner of making judgments than the conventional view based on the dichotomy between individual and society and deeply ingrained in criminal law and moral thought.

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[99] A similar view can be found in the philosophical anthropology of Helmuth Plessner, who speaks of the 'excentric' position of the 'I': it is possible to localize one's 'I' within one's body. An 'infinite regression' is possible: I can speak about myself thinking about myself speaking about myself and so on. Plessner's reasoning is thus a clear refutation of the *homo clausus* conception. (Helmuth Plessner: *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1928).