difficulties later historians have had in reaching a settled interpretation of the motives and intentions of Germany after 1933 (Robertson 1971; Overy 1989; Bell 1997; Boyce and Maiolo 2003).

As soon as the ink was dry on the signatures to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, British and French policy-makers had struggled to interpret German hopes and fears (Steiner 2005: 15–79). On the whole, French governments took a pessimistic interpretation. Sally Marks has argued that 'French policy in the five years after the Armistice was based upon fear and upon realization that France was not the victor of 1918 and might well become the loser' (2002: 31; see also Marks 2003). French leaders in the 1920s had not decided that another war with Germany was inevitable, but they wanted to hedge against the eventuality by retaining their relative strength while at the same time pursuing more cooperative arrangements (Jackson 2003: 88, 95). British policy-makers, on the other hand, attempted to a greater degree to enter into the counter-fear of those responsible for German security. Although there have been multiple interpretations of the causes of the controversial policy of appeasement (Parker 1993, 2000; Carley 1999; Dutton 2001; Imlay 2003; Self 2006), this might be viewed as an exercise in security dilemma sensibility, albeit towards an inappropriate regime after 1933. In the mid-1930s, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Cabinet were strongly of the belief that Hitler could be conciliated. Despite the increasingly threatening assessments of German military power provided by British military advisors, and Germany's revisionist policies towards the territorial settlement imposed in 1919, the Cabinet continued to believe (or wanted to believe) that Hitler's demands were not without justification; for some, this belief lasted to at least the Munich crisis of 1938, when Britain and France infamously acceded to Hitler's takeover of parts of Czechoslovakia (Lukes and Goldstein 1999; Murray 2003: 117–24). In the mid 1930s, both French and British politicians had been concerned about the costs of embarking on massive rearmament programmes and of the risk that in confronting Hitler in this way they would precipitate the very exacerbation of relations they wanted to avoid.

If in retrospect the strategy of appeasement appears naïve, it should be remembered that Winston Churchill was virtually alone among the British political classes in the mid-1930s in identifying Nazi Germany as a clear and present danger to the country's security (Taylor 1964: 17–8, 129; Murray 2003: 117). Unlike the ministers in the Chamberlain Government, Churchill did not see a dilemma; he saw certainty. But while this stand enormously inflated his credentials to become Prime Minister, and later contributed to his status as a hero, it is not proof that Churchill was necessarily more prescient in face of the facts; more likely, he had both a lower threat threshold than the appeasers, and a deeper

antipathy towards Germany. However one judges the interpretations made by individuals in these years, the very vigour of the subsequent debates underlines the extraordinary difficulty facing state leaders in their dilemmas of interpretation about the motives and intentions of former adversaries in stressed and changing conditions, with limited reliable information.

The debate about Hitler's motives and intentions continues. The flow of archival material feeds new controversies. Broadly, however, historians have been split between 'intentionalist' and 'functionalist' interpretations (Finney 2005: 7). The former believe that Hitler consciously planned the 'Final Solution' and an aggressive German foreign policy; the latter believe he stumbled into it, 'helped along by events and the decisions or solicitations of subordinates of whom he *wasn't in full control*' (Gross 1998: 17). Central to the functionalist interpretation has been the contribution of A. J. P. Taylor and his still controversial work, *The Origins of the Second World War* (1964, first published in 1961). According to Taylor, Hitler was both an opportunist and a leader who was as convinced that the British and French were preparing aggressive war against him – just as much as they thought he was preparing against them (1964: 12–13). If this verdict is valid, and Hitler's intentions were so uncertain that even he was not always sure what he would do next, then the interpretive predicament facing British and French policy-makers was as acute as it could ever be. Arguably, though, there was sufficient evidence of a significant change having taken place in Germany's intentions and capabilities after Hitler's accession in 1933 to have led to a decisive revision of the threat assessments of the Western democracies. The restoration of Germany's sovereign equality with other nations in Europe, following the humiliation of Versailles, gave way to the aim of seeking to dominate the international politics of Europe, and there was a commensurate military build-up by Nazi Germany. The record suggests that some regimes, some times, are beyond appeasement. This also means that there are times when security dilemma sensibility is misplaced. The intriguing question is whether a different security order in Europe after 1918 would have created an environment in which Nazism would not have flourished in Germany. Certainly, the argument can be made that had the French and British been more sensitive to Germany's security concerns at Versailles, there might have been less support in Germany for extreme nationalist leaders who believed that Germany's recovery from that war required the domination of Europe (Jervis 2003: 213; see also Steiner 2005: 63–70, 606–7).

Appeasement failed as a strategy (Parker 1993; Dutton 2001), yet the architects of the policy did prove Butterfield wrong by their attempt to exercise security dilemma sensibility. Their effort to appreciate the sense

of insecurity resulting from defeat in the First World War, the humiliation caused by the punitive Treaty of Versailles, and the fear induced by the tough attitudes adopted towards Germany by the victorious powers through the 1920s, was appropriate in their relations with Weimar Germany. The problem was that British policy-makers failed to change their interpretation as Germany's military and foreign policy became increasingly dominated by Nazi ambition. This experience proved, in the words of Robert Jervis, that 'empathy if misplaced' can lead to a disastrous outcome (2003: 213). But would a different response to the rise of Hitler have had a different outcome? Taylor was not sure. He argued: 'Men will long debate whether . . . war could have been averted by greater firmness or by greater conciliation; and no answer will be found to these hypothetical speculations. Maybe either would have succeeded, if consistently followed; the mixture of the two, practised by the British government, was the most likely to fail' (1964: 336). This is a useful reminder that the security dilemma is a two-level predicament: the challenge is not only to resolve the dilemma of interpretation accurately, but also to judge the correct dilemma of response, and then operationalize it effectively.

Such puzzles continue to be the stuff of historiography and the daily game of nations. In both contexts, a recurrent issue is the challenge of judging motives and intentions from words and actions. During the Cold War, for example, both superpowers wanted to keep their global competition short of nuclear war (on their mutual fear of this, see Lebow and Stein 1994). However, they both found it difficult to signal sufficient reassurance on this to the other side until the second half of the 1980s. As a result, their inability to 'signal type', in the language of some of today's security dilemma theorists (Glaser 1992, 1997; Kydd 1997a and b, 2000, 2005; Mitzen 2006) resulted in a series of intense nuclear crises and pervasive fear stretching over five decades. Some theorists believe that it is impossible for states that are peacefully motivated to signal type, and that uncertainty about their motives and intentions is therefore inevitable. This view was elaborated into a new theory of 'offensive realism' by John Mearsheimer.

John Mearsheimer and the certainty of uncertainty

In the decades after Herz and Butterfield made their original contributions, several theorists enriched our understanding of the concept, and these will be discussed later. However, we believe that John Mearsheimer and his theory of offensive realism dating from the late 1980s deserve

a prominent place in this chapter because offensive realism is the true inheritor of the original version of the concept (the combination of 'Hobbesian fear' and 'kill or perish'). The theory of offensive realism was most fully set out by Mearsheimer in his major work *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001). This survey of international history was wide-ranging and the lessons he drew had striking operational clarity in relation to the security dilemma, for he sought with one blow to deal with the issue central to this chapter: uncertainty. While accepting uncertainty in anarchy as the existential condition of world affairs, he sought to abolish it in practice by his operational prescriptions. He turned the certain uncertainty of international politics into the strategic predictability of offensive realism. He argued that the only rational approach for states under anarchy was to assume that those who can do harm, might do harm, and to prepare for this possibility by creating countervailing offensive military potential. His line of thought was straightforward: the record of the past is 'tragedy', the future will replicate the past, therefore rational state leaders have no alternative but to seek advantage where they can. Mearsheimer replaced any dilemma of interpretation with a rule of fatalism, and abolished any dilemma of response by a rule of offensive potential. Uncertainty is always certain for Mearsheimer, but it is not unresolvable if one responds to it offensively (turning potential dilemmas into actual strategic challenges).

As was the case with Herz and Butterfield, it is important to see Mearsheimer's contribution in relation to the climate within which he was writing. Like the pioneer theorists, his contribution was written in part in a contrarian spirit. In the early days of the Cold War, Herz had challenged the political realism then coming to dominate US thinking, while Butterfield was challenging those who saw international politics as simply a struggle between good and evil. Four decades later, at the Cold War's end, Mearsheimer was challenging the neo-realist orthodoxy then dominating the academic debate in International Relations, even though he himself was drawn to the very same structural interpretations of state behaviour. Mearsheimer coined the term 'offensive realism' to differentiate his theory from the version of realism (variously labelled 'structural' or 'neo' realism) associated with Kenneth Waltz, whose influential work, *Theory of International Politics*, had been published in 1979 (for a fascinating discussion by Mearsheimer of his differences with Waltz – who he praised as 'the king of thought' – see Mearsheimer 2006a: 109; see also 2006b: 231, 239–4). The points of contestation between Waltz and Mearsheimer have considerable significance for theorizing the security dilemma.

Waltz argued that two assumptions only were necessary to generate security competition. First, that the system is anarchic, and, second,

that it is populated by units seeking to survive (Waltz 1979: 121). He described the international realm as a self-help system and security as 'the highest end' (ibid.: 126). In these circumstances, 'states have to live with their security dilemma' (ibid.: 187). Surprisingly, only one paragraph in his *Theory* book discussed the security dilemma. There, he cited Herz's contribution, and described the dilemma in terms of states, 'unsure of one another's intentions', arming 'for the sake of security and in doing so [setting] a vicious circle in motion' (ibid.: 186). Waltz's second assumption then came into play. States seek survival, he said, but he thought they defined this in terms of protecting what they had rather than in maximizing power: 'The first concern of states', he wrote, 'is not to maximize power but to maintain their positions in the system' (ibid.: 126).[8] This position came to be labelled 'defensive realism' because of what Randall Schweller called the 'status-quo bias' in Waltz's theory (1996).[9] Given Waltz's expectation that hegemonic ambitions would trigger balancing coalitions, he argued that states refrain from seeking a level of power that would lead others to join forces against them. Moreover, if states did seek hegemony, others would balance rather than bandwagon with the strong because this 'is the behaviour induced by [a] system' populated by units who seek power as a means to security and not a goal in itself (Waltz 1979: 126). Thus, his theory posited that a modicum of order would be the rational outcome of security competition in a system characterized by international anarchy, the determination of states to survive and an unequal distribution of power among the state units. The conditions that create security competition for Waltz are also the conditions that promote a degree of security in practice.

Mearsheimer agreed with Waltz that the crucial preconditions for security competition are international anarchy and states wishing to survive, but he added an equally significant assumption that led him to reach very different conclusions about the prospects for security in anarchy. Mearsheimer argued that security competition will only exist if it is assumed that states can never be certain of the intentions of others. 'Without that assumption', he claimed, the Waltzian train never gets out of the station' (2006b: 231, compare Schweller 1996: 117). Waltz, too, recognized the problem posed by uncertainty about intentions, arguing that what causes security competition is not 'the character and the immediate intention of either party', but rather 'the condition of insecurity', by which he meant 'the uncertainty of each about the other's future intentions and actions'. It is this that 'works against their co-operation' (1979: 105). Waltz's theoretical train had the right fuel in the engine, but we agree with Mearsheimer that Waltz did not *explicitly* identify the assumption of uncertainty as essential to his theory (see also Glaser 2006: 241–2).

By contrast, uncertainty must actively be in play to generate security competition for offensive realism. What is more, offensive realism does not require the imputing of any malign intent to other states – a point frequently overlooked by its critics. All that is required to get Mearsheimer's train out of the station is recognition that 'intentions are impossible to divine with 100 per cent certainty', and the assumption that since 'intentions can change quickly, so a state's intentions can be benign one day and hostile the next' (Mearsheimer 2001: 31; see also 2006b: 231–2). It is this proposition that supports the claim that offensive realism is fully consistent with Herz's original conception of the security dilemma (Mearsheimer 2001: 36).[10] Because of unavoidable uncertainty about intentions, Mearsheimer produced a theory that predicted that powerful states, feeling insecure, will act offensively in order to ensure their survival. Furthermore, he argued that no great power, *contra* Waltz, will be satisfied with its relative position, unless it is the reigning hegemon, and will then seek to preserve its position. Mearsheimer argued that great powers have no choice but to strive 'to be the most powerful state in the system' (2001: 33). In the world of offensive realism, according to Mearsheimer, even states which do not want to engage in militarized security competition, find themselves compelled to behave as if they were hostile or revisionist states, because accumulating more power is the only way to survive in an anarchical system. States that fail to act according to this imperative imperil their survival in a dangerous and uncertain world (Mearsheimer 2001: 4–8, 32–6). For Mearsheimer, the security dilemma is what drives the dynamics of the structural forces in international politics. His prescriptions are then clear: the dilemma of interpretation must be resolved fatalistically by assuming the worst about the intentions of those that can do harm, and the dilemma of response must always be resolved by choosing the offensive option. In the offensive realist's world, there is no room for the unresolvable, except in the abstract: the way to cope with existential uncertainty at the level of interpretation is to impose operational certainty at the level of response. This is the case even though 'the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decrease the security of other states' (Mearsheimer 2001: 35–6).

Offensive realist theory depends crucially upon the assumption that states can never successfully signal positive intentions to each other (not made explicit in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, but see Mearsheimer 2006b: 232–4). This argument is crucial to the theory because Mearsheimer emphasized that great powers always possess some military power capable of harming others, whilst at the same

time denying that it is possible 'in practice... to distinguish defence from offence' (2006b: 234). He never expressed the potential for harm more starkly than when he said 'great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability... States are potentially dangerous to each other... even if there were no weapons, the individuals in those states could still use their feet and hands to attack the population of another state. After all, for every neck, there are two hands to choke it' (Mearsheimer 2001: 30–1). In brief, offensive realism argues that states always have the capability to inflict harm on each other, but never the ability to signal that they do not intend to do so. This as we will discuss in Parts II and III is too fatalistic a view of the prospects for international cooperation according to mitigator, and especially transcender thinking about international insecurity.

Uncertainty: past, present and future

This chapter has underlined several key themes we highlighted in the Introduction. In particular, we claimed that theorizing the security dilemma involves contentious questions of historical interpretation and continuing attention to semantic clarification. The motives of governments can be elusive and complex, as detailed historical analyses reveal, and Jervis is one of the few contemporary analysts of the security dilemma who has drawn attention to both this and the semantic problems involved (2001: 38–9; see also Schweller 1998: 83–91). He has pointed to what he considered the ambiguity in the 'basic concept of security', and also the 'problematic' character of the terms commonly used to characterize 'states and the sources of their conduct' (specifically problematizing 'aggressive', 'status quo', 'security-seeking', 'risk-acceptant' and 'risk-averse'). He also drew attention to the values inherent in some of these terms, reminding us of E. H. Carr's warning that the tendency in the West to accord 'status quo powers' with moral superiority is not warranted (Carr 1946; see also Buzan 1991: 300). Jervis did not offer any easy answers to the semantic problems, only a warning to take care.

Jervis's warning was well directed, and careful readers of this book will note that we avoid some of the more common usages employed in the discussion of the security dilemma, except in quotations or where the context makes the meaning of such terms unambiguous. Security dilemma theorizing has suffered from fuzzy semantics. We gave some examples in the Introduction (notably the confusion between paradox and dilemma). Others are revealed in the following questions. Which state, within its power and opportunity, is not 'greedy'? (Glaser 1994/1995) How would we know that any state is a 'nonsecurity' seeker (Kydd 1997b, 2000, 2005), given the complexity of motives and the possibility that risky actions are the result of miscalculation rather than motive? Which state could authentically be described as 'benign' (Butterfield 1951), given the basically selfish *raison d'être* of states, to look after the interests of one group over all others? Does the adjective 'predatory' (Schweller 1996) add anything to help overcome the ambiguities surrounding traditional terms such as 'aggressive' or 'revisionist'? How is analytical rigour improved when states classified as 'status quo' powers are simultaneously identified as having an 'expansionist policy' (Collins 2004: 33). These semantic uncertainties, added to the historiographical challenges involved, all have important implications for the issues that divide theorists of the security dilemma.

Like Butterfield, Herz had been convinced in his earliest writings that a fatalist logic about the security dilemma was justified. The basic assumption of Herz's argument in his 1951 book was that the uncertainty generated by anarchy prevented governments from signalling effectively to others that their peaceful intentions could be trusted. He had influentially argued that states could not take actions to make themselves secure without making others insecure (the security paradox in our formulation). Similarly, Butterfield maintained that the 'irreducible dilemma' was not only the result of the anarchical interstate structure, but at the deepest level was the result of the limited capacity of humans to get into each other's minds.

By the late 1950s Herz had moved away from his original emphasis on fear, questioning whether this emotion was the only motive driving intentions. He now added political ambition as a motive, based on his understanding of Nazi foreign policy. This move had significant implications, taking the argument far away from his and certainly Butterfield's first intuitions about the security dilemma. Not least, Herz's new position implied the possibility that governments were sometimes able to judge the peaceful or aggressive motives and intentions of others as a result of their words and actions. Moreover, he appreciated that knowledge of the security dilemma might enable policy-makers to construct strategies that mitigated dilemmas of interpretation and response. In an important passage that shows strong mitigator and even transcender elements in his thinking, he wrote:

> Both sides might even profit from the security dilemma itself, or, rather, from facing and understanding it. For, if it is true – as Butterfield has pointed out – that inability to put oneself into the other fellow's place and to realize his fears and distrust has always constituted one chief reason for the dilemma's poignancy, it would then follow that elucidation of this fact might by itself enable one to do

what so far has proved impossible – to put oneself into the other's place, to understand that he, too, may be motivated by one's own kind of fears, and thus to abate the fear. This would not resolve the dilemma entirely, of course, for one could never be entirely certain; but it might at least take some of the sting out of it and insert a wedge toward a more rational, less fear-ridden, less ideology-laden, and less emotion-beset attitude through a kind of psychoanalysis in the international field where lifting one factor into the realm of the conscious might become part of the healing process. (Herz 1959a: 249)

Having opened the door to the possibility of what we call of security dilemma sensibility, Herz's analysis of the 'atomic age' showed the obstacles to its effective operationalization.

One obstacle he identified was material, the other psychological. With regard to the former, Herz recognized that whilst nuclear weapons created a common superpower interest in survival, they simultaneously gave the security dilemma 'its utmost poignancy' since 'hardly any line can be drawn which would separate "defensive" measures and "security" policies from "offensive", "expansionist", and "beyond-security" action' (1959a: 241). In other words, the characteristics of the nuclear confrontation deepened the already difficult challenge of translating security dilemma sensibility into practical policies. The second obstacle to security dilemma sensibility is even broader than the ambiguities created by nuclear weapons, and that is the existential problem of future uncertainty. Herz argued that even if governments could enter into the counter-fear of others, and fashion strategies accordingly, they could have no long-term certainty that they would not, some day, have to face a state with leaders and policies committed to their destruction. Given this future uncertainty, Herz concluded in the language and logic of offensive realism that developed three decades later: 'How could [policy-makers] then, afford not to be prepared for "the worst"?' (1959a: 235). In these passages we see Herz wrestling with the tensions between the fatalist logic of offensive realism ('kill or perish'), the mitigator aspiration for security dilemma sensibility (entering the counter-fear), and transcender hopes of permanently escaping military competition.

The issue of future uncertainty has been a constant theme of offensive realism. According to Dale Copeland, it is the most 'intractable' of all the uncertainties facing decision-makers (Copeland 2000b: especially 200, and 2003: 428, 434–5).[11] Even if, he argued, there may be a level of satisfaction at a particular moment that a particular state is a 'security seeker', other states 'have reason to worry that [it] might change its spots some years later as a result of a change of leadership, a revolution or simply a change of heart resulting from an increase in its power' (Copeland 2000b: 200). Because states cannot be sure who tomorrow's enemy might be, they have to maximize their power at the expense of their potential adversaries to hedge against future threats. This is why, for offensive realists, the problem known as 'relative gains' is so important.[12]

It is worth returning, to conclude this chapter, to the pioneer theorists, for in their early agreements and disagreements, they contributed significantly to the richness of debates about the security dilemma down to the present day. Having elucidated their disagreements earlier, it is also important to underline what they shared when they first developed the idea. They agreed that the search for security is primordial; that uncertainty is endemic in the condition of human existence because the leaders of groups cannot enter into each other's minds; that the anarchical context impels groups to accumulate power in their struggle for security; and that the security dilemma has both psychological and material considerations.

When they invented the concept the pioneer theorists gave voice to the fatalist logic about international insecurity. Subsequently both looked for ways out of the predicament of the Cold War as the threat of nuclear weapons grew through the 1950s. Their shift, from a fatalist logic to opening up mitigator and transcender thinking, is not unfamiliar, as will be shown in Parts II and III. Unlike the policy advocacy of offensive realists, who have remained largely true to their theoretical assumptions, the pioneer theorists' policy advocacy was sometimes in tension with their fatalist starting point.

In the years between the invention of the concept of the security dilemma in the 1950s and the arrival of offensive realism in the late 1980s, Robert Jervis brought a significant degree of theoretical rigour to the foundations laid by Herz and Butterfield. He refined the concept and expanded theorizing into trying to understand (and cope with) the psychological dynamics of political relations under the condition of uncertainty. His ideas are central to the discussion in the following chapter, when we focus on the dangers that arise when the other minds problem meets the ambiguous symbolism of weapons.