

The Security Dilemma

Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics

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Introduction: What is the Security Dilemma?

Any serious school or theory of International Relations must have a conception of the security dilemma. This is because the security dilemma gets to the very heart of politics among nations: the existential condition of uncertainty in human affairs. It is in this condition that sovereign states interact, and in which they have to provide for their own security, ultimately with military force. This is the focus of our puzzle: those weapons that states can use for their own *self*-protection, potentially or actually *threaten harm* to others. Weapons are the material reality that set up the security dilemma, because they are inherently ambiguous symbols. The psychological reality derives from one set of decision-makers trying to get into the minds of others, and understanding their motives and intentions (future as well as present) with regard to the weapons they possess. These material and psychological realities have to be accounted for whenever one traverses the terrain of war and peace; they sustain the pervasiveness of fear, underlie the problems of cooperation and check the promise of trust. Mapping this landscape more comprehensively than ever before is the aim of this book

The quintessential dilemma

The challenge faced by one set of decision-makers when trying to read the minds of the decision-makers of other states takes place in an international political cockpit in which the cost of getting it wrong could mean national disaster. A failure of insight might result in anything from a loss of prestige to military defeat and the end of national sovereignty. In such circumstances, it has been a norm of statecraft that decision-makers should err on the side of caution about the motives and intentions of other governments.¹ Given the stakes involved, the existence of weapons in the hands of one state can provoke at least uncertainty and possibly real fear in others *even when those weapons are not intended to be used except for self-protection (following an attack, or in the event of a threat of an attack)*. If uncertainty and fear may exist at the best of times, when weapons held by states are only intended for self-protection, can there ever be any hope that humans

will be able to live together in a more peaceful world? This has led us to describe the security dilemma as the *quintessential dilemma* in international politics (Wheeler and Booth 1992: 29).

Of course, states sometimes do intend each other harm, and that possibility has to be factored into any analysis; disentangling motives and intentions is the most vexing problem facing analysts of the security dilemma, as well as governments. When does 'legitimate self-defence' become 'predatory behaviour'? When does 'enhancing the status quo' slip into being a 'revisionist' policy? When does a 'normal' state, maximizing its power, become a 'greedy' state? The study of the security dilemma is beset with all the semantic, historical, political and epistemological difficulties involved in trying to answer such questions. This should give us all pause for thought. Everybody knows that historians find it difficult to agree about the behaviour of particular states despite all the information in their possession and the benefit of hindsight. This means that students of the security dilemma should have some sympathy for decision-makers and military planners in the past, charged with the fate of nations, who had to make momentous decisions about the motives and intentions of others, without the luxury of the information and hindsight enjoyed by the rest of us.

According to most security dilemma theorists, permanent insecurity between nations and states is the inescapable lot of living in a condition of anarchy. Anarchy is used here in a technical sense, meaning the absence of a political authority in international politics above that of the sovereign state. Under anarchy, the last word rests with governments whose primary responsibility is to promote the interests, and especially the security interests, of their own state. This view of interstate anarchy is what Stanley Hoffmann called (after Hobbes and Rousseau) 'a state of war'; he defined it as 'a competition of units in the kind of state of nature that knows no restraints other than those which the changing necessities of the game and the shallow conveniences of the players impose' (1965: vii). Interstate anarchy, from this viewpoint, is a world of uncertainty, weapons and fear.

A fatalist logic about this baleful 'human condition' and the inevitability of security dilemmas has dominated international political theory and the corridors of power over the past two and a half millennia, but there have been alternative perspectives. Some have broadly accepted a pessimistic view of global politics, but have adopted a different perspective on the security dilemma, arguing that it can be mitigated, for longer or shorter periods, through the construction of an international society or international regimes. From this perspective, uncertainty and fear can be managed through the building of international institutions and the development of cooperative norms of behaviour. Insecurity can be mitigated, they say, but it cannot be eliminated: power politics will

out. Other theorists have questioned the way in which the notion of a so-called human condition has been reified, and have argued that traditional insecurities can be transcended by the extension of moral and political community globally. Here, reform, transformation and trust are seen as having the potential to reshape world politics, including marginalizing and eventually transcending security competition. The routes to this destination, as we shall see, have been remarkably varied, from the extreme centralizing advocacy of world government supporters to the radical decentralization advanced by anarchists.

In the chapters that follow, we examine the dynamics of the security dilemma in the light of these different viewpoints, and illustrate the issues with numerous historical examples. We also look at the ways in which the idea of the security dilemma is relevant for world politics in the twenty-first century. Some observers stress the threat of terror globally – whether from state or non-state actors – and the way it intensifies feelings of fear, the logic of anarchy and the theme of tragedy in world politics. Others point to different dynamics. Proponents of globalization for example emphasize the triumph of capitalism, the power of markets, the new significance of economic competition over traditional military rivalry, and the emergence of corporations as the new rulers of the world. The rise of 'security communities' is seen by yet others as the key development, with Europe and the North Atlantic region more generally pointing to the prospect of war becoming irrelevant even in a context that is still recognizably one of separate nation-states. Other observers still draw attention to the rise of significant non-state actors, whether it is the highly sectarian affiliates of al-Qaeda or the vanguard of human community represented by progressive global civil society organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. In the course of examining these complex debates we will clarify the confusions surrounding the concept of the security dilemma, provide an exegesis of the most significant thinking about it, offer a range of historical and contemporary illustrations of security dilemmas, and attempt to open up the mainstream understanding of what the security dilemma is, how it works and what are its implications. By the end of the book, we hope to have expanded the way in which those interested in the great issues of war and peace think about the theory and practice of the security dilemma, be they in universities, government or the public sphere.

Dilemmas within a dilemma

In logic a 'lemma' is a proposition that is assumed to be valid. A dilemma therefore occurs when two related lemmas force a choice. According to

The American Heritage Dictionary (1978), the nature of a 'dilemma' is the presence of a difficult choice. The word derives from the Greek term for an 'ambiguous proposition'. A dilemma is a 'situation that requires one to choose between two equally balanced alternatives'. Expressed less technically, a dilemma is a particularly vexing predicament.²

What puts the lemmas into the security dilemma are two apparently inescapable predicaments in international politics. The first is the inability of the decision-makers in one state ever to get fully into the minds of their counterparts in other states, and so understand their motives and intentions with confidence. This is a version of what philosophers call 'the problem of Other Minds' (Hollis and Smith 1990: 171–6, 185–9, 192). The second is the inherent ambiguity of weapons. The policy-planners of one state can never predict with complete certainty when and how weapons might be employed by other states. Together, these predicaments (the other minds problem and the inherent ambiguity of weapons) confront governments on matters of security with two challenging questions. What are *they* planning? And, in the absence of certain knowledge about such plans, how should *we* respond?

From these prefatory points, and building upon and clarifying the insights of the pioneer theorists of the security dilemma, John Herz and Herbert Butterfield, our definition is as follows:

The security dilemma is a two-level strategic predicament in relations between states and other actors, with each level consisting of two related lemmas (or propositions that can be assumed to be valid) which force decision-makers to choose between them. The first and basic level consists of a dilemma of interpretation about the motives, intentions and capabilities of others; the second and derivative level consists of a dilemma of response about the most rational way of responding.

First level: a dilemma of interpretation is the predicament facing decision-makers when they are confronted, on matters affecting security, with a choice between two significant and usually (but not always) undesirable alternatives about the military policies and political postures of other entities. This dilemma of interpretation is the result of the perceived need to make a decision in the existential condition of unresolvable uncertainty about the motives, intentions and capabilities of others. Those responsible have to decide whether perceived military developments are for defensive or self-protection purposes only (to enhance security in an uncertain world) or whether they are for offensive purposes (to seek to change the status quo to their advantage).

Second level: a dilemma of response logically begins when the dilemma of interpretation has been settled. Decision-makers then need to determine how to react. Should they signal, by words and deeds,

that they will react in kind, for deterrent purposes? Or should they seek to signal reassurance? If the dilemma of response is based on misplaced suspicion regarding the motives and intentions of other actors, and decision-makers react in a militarily confrontational manner, then they risk creating a significant level of mutual hostility when none was originally intended by either party; if the response is based on misplaced trust, there is a risk they will be exposed to coercion by those with hostile intentions. When leaders resolve their dilemma of response in a manner that creates a spiral of mutual hostility, when neither wanted it, a situation has developed which we call the security paradox.

Readers should note that this definition of the security dilemma deliberately encompasses both state and non-state actors, though in Parts I and II we will be focusing mainly on states. Part III broadens the discussion, revealing different views about actors and dilemmas, and hence the most sensible strategies to pursue. What this conceptualization of the security dilemma does not encompass are those threats to human society that arise from unintended and non-specific risks such as climate change and pandemics. Rather, the book focuses on *the organized intent* – real or imagined – on the part of actors to inflict harm.

Central to our definition of the security dilemma is the complex interrelationship of both psychological and material dimensions. At the first level (the dilemma of interpretation), the issue is psychological, concerned with uncertainty and mistrust in the minds of decision-makers. The dilemma results not from the *actual* intentions and capabilities of a particular actor (as they might be known by a notional omniscient being), but rather from the existential condition of *unresolvable uncertainty* (Wheeler and Booth 1992: 30) in the minds of other humans who can never fully know what they want to know.³ Part of our task, then, is to try and access the perceptions and misperceptions of decision-makers (Jervis 1976 is still the key work) fearing that one day their state may be the target for the hostile actions of others.

Once a government has reached a decision on its dilemma of interpretation, its dilemma of response kicks in. One state's dilemma of response creates another's dilemma of interpretation. And so it goes on. Because the stakes on questions of national security are so high, a degree of mistrust towards others has traditionally been considered to be the most prudent strategy. This being the case, *even* conciliatory gestures are met with suspicion. If a particular government attempts to demonstrate that it is non-threatening – by offering greater transparency in its military posture, or promises of unexpected cooperation, for example – then these may only serve to incite suspicions on the part of others. *Beware Greeks*

bearing gifts is the old adage warning of this, recalling the treacherous 'gift' of the wooden horse of Troy.

Predicaments and paradoxes

A dilemma always involves a hard choice between two equally balanced alternatives. Some theorists of the security dilemma have argued that the nature of this dilemma is such that negative outcomes are unavoidable (for example Collins 1997: 20, 2000: 6–10). This is not our view. To be sure, there are always hard choices between contending propositions in any security dilemma, but the choice is not necessarily between negative possibilities, nor must the outcome necessarily be grim. It is not surprising that theorists and practitioners of International Relations are drawn to conceptualizations of the security dilemma that are limited to unpleasant choices and negative outcomes; after all, both statecraft and the subject are steeped in a history of violent conflict. Against such habits of thought – and this is central to the overall argument of the book – we claim that unpleasant choices and negative outcomes are not *essential* to the definition of a security dilemma.

A dilemma can sometimes offer positive as well as negative outcomes. This is easy to illustrate. An interviewing committee for a job, for example, may be faced by a dilemma when having to choose between two excellent candidates. Both may be deemed perfectly able to do the job, and so the outcome will not be negative for those who are confronted by the dilemma; they know that whatever choice they make they will end up with an excellent colleague. While security dilemmas in the international arena seem more often than not to present decision-makers only with choices between negative possibilities, positive outcomes are available in principle, and sometimes in practice.

The end of the Cold War illustrates this. Chapter 6 will show how, following some hesitation, President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher decided to explore the possibility that Mikhail Gorbachev, after he became leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, was serious about winding down the superpower confrontation. Gorbachev initiated a series of conciliatory moves to support his words of reassurance about the Soviet Union's peaceful intent. The Western leaders chose the more benign interpretation of Gorbachev's policy, and the outcome was the downward spiral of Cold War hostility. It was not a smooth ride, and for a period Reagan's successor, the first President Bush, adopted a more cautious interpretation of Kremlin policy. Even so, the momentum away from the Cold War was by then firmly established. This episode shows that dilemmas on matters of national security do not fatalistically offer only negative alternatives and grim outcomes.

There is nothing inevitable about a positive outcome of course. A Soviet leader other than Gorbachev might have responded to the situation the USSR faced in the mid 1980s in a radically different manner. The paranoid Stalin would surely have resolved his dilemmas of interpretation and response about US behaviour with a more confrontational posture. Equally, if Jimmy Carter had been in the White House when Gorbachev became leader in the Kremlin, the US response to Gorbachev's arms control initiatives would probably have been quicker and more positive than actually occurred under Reagan; the consequence of this greater responsiveness might have been substantial progress on nuclear disarmament while the diplomatic sun was still shining (with positive implications for nuclear non-proliferation down to the present day). This highlights the centrality of human agency as a critical variable in shaping whether security dilemmas result in a mistrustful spiral of deteriorating relations, or a virtuous circle of cooperation.

The scope for agency is one of the neglected dimensions of security dilemma theorizing, but it is a theme that we will open up as the book progresses.⁴ Central to the role of agency is the key attitudinal variable on the part of individual and group actors which we call *security dilemma sensibility*. Our definition is as follows:

Security dilemma sensibility is an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear.

While accepting that one can never have one hundred per cent certainty about another's motives and intentions (the other minds problem),⁵ it does not follow that actors will always fail in their attempts to know and act upon another's fears (effective security dilemma sensibility). That said, we want to make it clear that such sensibility is not a panacea for the achievement of reciprocal security between actors. Subsequent chapters will show that in particular relationships security dilemma sensibility might be misconceived, or impossible to operationalize, or might lead to mitigator practices that cannot be sustained. Nevertheless, we will show that the intention and capacity to perceive and respond to the fear of others empathetically, and to see one's own behaviour as contributing to this fear, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for embedding trust.

When policy-makers do not show security dilemma sensibility in conditions when they are motivated by fear and not malevolence, a spiral of mutual hostility might well develop. This is the *security paradox*

mentioned earlier. Just as there has been confusion bedeviling theorizing about the security dilemma as a result of false understandings of the nature of 'dilemmas', an additional layer of difficulty has arisen from the tendency of many analysts to confuse a 'paradox' with a 'dilemma'. This problem arises from the mistaking of one possible outcome of a security dilemma (the security paradox) with the two-level strategic predicament (interpretation and response) that defines the security dilemma proper. None of the purported definitions of the security dilemma listed below, from standard sources, *actually* tell us what the dilemma is in the phrase 'security dilemma'. Instead, as will be seen, they describe the security paradox (wherein policies calculated to promote security actually bring about the opposite):

- 'by initially trying to enhance its own security, State A sets in motion a process that results ironically in its feeling less secure' (Viotti and Kauppi 1987: 603).
- 'By striving to increase their own security – by following policies that enhance their military capabilities – states inadvertently make others feel less secure' (Evans and Newnham 1992: 296).
- 'what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure' (Posen 1993: 28).
- 'The core argument of the security dilemma is that, in the absence of a supranational authority that can enforce binding agreements, many of the steps pursued by states to bolster their security have the effect – often unintended and unforeseen – of making other states less secure' (Jervis 2001: 36).
- 'The security dilemma describes a condition in which efforts to improve national security have the effect of appearing to threaten other states thereby provoking military counter-moves. This in turn can lead to a net decrease in security for all states' (Griffiths and O'Callaghan 2002: 292).
- 'the situation in which one state improves its military capabilities, especially its defenses, and those improvements are seen by other states as threats; each state in an anarchic international system tries to increase its own level of protection leading to insecurity in others, often leading to an arms race' (Mingst 2004: 198, 322).
- 'the situation where one state's attempts to increase its security appear threatening to others and provoke an unnecessary conflict' (Montgomery 2006: 151).

Our criticism of these authors is not that their definitions do not make sense. It is, rather, that *they are describing a different concept to the one they purport to define*. There is no 'dilemma' in these definitions! By

mixing up dilemma and paradox – by making them almost synonymous – these definitions fail to get to the core of the idea of a two-level strategic predicament: dilemmas of interpretation and response. The definitions above describe one possible outcome of the second-level predicament, in which states seeking to enhance their own security do so in a way that makes things worse. They do not define a dilemma, they point to a potential **security paradox** (a word that is derived from the Greek concept meaning 'conflicting with expectation').⁶ By our earlier definition, the security dilemma is the need to choose (to interpret and to respond) in the existential condition of unresolvable uncertainty; sometimes, the outcome of these choices is that policies designed only to enhance security bring about mutual insecurity. We therefore define a security paradox as *a situation in which two or more actors, seeking only to improve their own security, provoke through their words or actions an increase in mutual tension, resulting in less security all round*. Actors do sometimes expect increases in mutual tension because of their words and actions, and this brings us to the important distinction between security dilemmas and strategic challenges.

Unlike a security dilemma, a **strategic challenge** is a situation in which the dilemma of interpretation has been settled. It occurs when one government identifies another state as a real threat (whether it is or not) and acts accordingly. There is no longer a dilemma of interpretation (*what is the other government planning to do?*). The challenge now is: *what is to be done?* If State A, for example, introduces weaponry that appears to be unequivocally 'offensive' in orientation, and revives historic claims on the territory of State B, it is not presenting the latter's decision-makers with a security dilemma; there is no unresolvable uncertainty about State A's intentions or the potential harm its capabilities can inflict. State B's policy-makers might not know how best to respond (should they engage in an arms race, or seek to organize a strategic alliance?) but these are *only* dilemmas of response; there is no dilemma of interpretation – the first and basic level of strategic predicament in our definition of a security dilemma.

The distinction between a security dilemma and a strategic challenge can be clarified by building upon an illustration used earlier. In the eyes of Soviet decision-makers in the early 1980s, the Reagan administration did not present the Soviet Union with a security dilemma. US words and actions strongly signalled a clear strategic challenge. However, when Gorbachev and his advisers accepted that their own military behaviour might be a major factor in stoking up US fear and hostility, the Kremlin began changing its diplomatic and military postures in order to create a new decision-making context. Mutual perceptions that the other posed a strategic challenge were tempered by the cultivation of security dilemma

sensibility in both the White House and the Kremlin, out of which positive interpretations and responses led to a period of experimental cooperation. The international scene was transformed. As a result, war between the United States and Russia today seems as improbable as peace between them did only yesterday.

The discussion so far has pointed to the difficulties of reading the minds of other decision-makers and the costs of getting it wrong. Yet making the effort, and taking some risk, is at the heart of security dilemma sensibility, and therefore of promoting cooperation. But policy-makers can never know for sure, and often history fails to give definitive answers, for what *history* tells us are the things over which historians agree or disagree, not what actually happened. The past (including the motives and intentions of actors) can never be objectively recreated: we can never *really* know.⁷ On certain key issues in the past, historians remain as divided in their interpretations as were contemporary observers. In some cases, the dilemmas of interpretation faced by contemporaries might be authoritatively resolved by the 'historical record' and the intersubjective understandings among historians, but in many situations there is no closure. International historians continually contest their field, their approaches and their interpretations (Finney 2005: 1–35). The frustration and fascination of studying international politics lies, in part, in the tension between the subject matter, which affects all our lives, and the fact that none of us will ever know as much as we would like. All we have are historians, and they live in and for disagreement.

Logics of insecurity

The inquiry we are undertaking into the meaning, significance and implications of the security dilemma is organized around three *a priori* logical positions. These are those of *the fatalist* (the idea that insecurity can never be escaped in international politics), *the mitigator* (the idea that insecurity can be ameliorated for a time, but not eliminated), and *the transcender* (the idea that human society on a global scale can become what it wants to be, and is not determined). We argue that these three positions exist as ideal types, even if no government ever bases its security policy exclusively on any one of them, or if no theorist consistently identifies with a particular logic over time (or even at the same time).

These three ideal types used for categorizing the theorizing about the security dilemma are not 'schools' or 'traditions' of thought in the sense understood by historians of political ideas (Booth 1993b). Some readers may want to categorize Part I as being about 'realists', Part II about 'the English school' and 'regime theorists', and Part III about

'idealists'. It would be a mistake to be so dogmatic, especially if our claim to be categorizing ideas and not individuals is taken seriously. It will become apparent that while the advocates of some schools of thought tend to identify with one of the *a priori* logics more than others, some if not most scholars are quite promiscuous theoretically speaking. One of the strengths of categorizing *ideas rather than people* is that it clarifies the way in which individuals may give voice, at different times and sometimes at the same time, to different logics. It would seem from the account that we give in the chapters that follow that the real world is too demanding (or tempting) for theoretical monogamy. In other words, whereas contradictions are not possible in logic between the three organizing theories of the book, they are normal in the theorizing of individuals about the complex world of International Relations. Having said that, theoretical constancy may not necessarily be the virtue in world politics that it is properly thought to be in other areas of life.

In the chapters that follow, we will use the words of real people to illustrate the three logics, but we will be wary about categorizing any individual as a card-carrying representative of any of the ideal types. The key point is that we can all imagine people – whether state leaders or journalists, International Relations specialists or members of the public – speaking, writing or arguing these ideal positions in specific situations. And this is crucial. It is central to our argument that these logics do not represent merely abstract ideas, but are shown to be related to practices that have actual or potential purchase on world affairs. The practices of theory are an important feature of the book for two main reasons. First, practice is primarily why we are interested in theory, because as citizens we want a better world. The study of practice is therefore helpful in thinking about normative choices. And second, as scholars, practice is the empirical test of human agency. In the fatalist logic, human agency is restricted to working within the constraints of necessity, defined narrowly. In mitigator logic, there is more scope for voluntarist behaviour, seeking to create space for cooperation out of what fatalist thinking regards as a deterministic system. And for those speaking the language of transcender logic, humans live in a self-constituted world in which the future is as open as was the past, though just as powerfully constrained by circumstances, capabilities and imagination.

Part I (Anarchy) examines fatalist logic on the security dilemma. Fate is the power or principle that predetermines what will happen. In mythology and drama it is not usually a happy or loving power or principle; nor is it for those who see the global drama of international politics in such terms. A fatalist is somebody who accepts and works within what are understood to be the confines of a predetermined life. In the case of what we are calling the fatalist logic regarding the security dilemma, this

means an understanding that because the search for security is primordial, the nature of relations between states and other entities is essentially competitive, sometimes violent, and always insecure. Fatalist logic, it should be noted, does not rule out a belief in human freedom. Instead, it implies 'determinism', the view that 'every event is the inevitable result of prior events that are its sufficient condition' (this discussion is based on Irwin 1999: 224–49, quotation at 229). While the dynamics of world politics are fated, it does not follow that how we act is predetermined, or that we cannot do anything about our situation. To accept that would be to give way to what the Stoics called the 'Lazy Argument'; as we shall see, one prominent strand of fatalist logic, that of offensive realism, believes in structural determinism, but is far from lazy when it comes to advocating prescriptions.

The ideas and practices discussed in Part I will be most familiar to students of academic International Relations, and certainly to practitioners of statecraft. Believing that insecurity is an inescapable feature of the interstate condition, the 'logic of anarchy' is to strive to maximize power, and particularly military power. Sovereign states are seen as the only political organizations that can offer security, and the growth or maintenance of state power is seen as the only sure way to achieve it. The operational priorities demanded by interstate anarchy have therefore been seen by mainstream theorists to have great historical continuity, with the accumulation of power being recognized as the primary interest of statecraft. Power in all its forms, but especially military power, fosters mistrust, and the outcome is a states system characterized by threats, crises and war; by winners and losers; and by danger and fear. The fatalist logic regarding the interstate condition has many sources. These include religious beliefs, social theories and psychoanalytical doctrines; for present purposes those deriving from the theory of political realism are of most relevance. The latter offers two main sets of explanations: those emphasizing the role of a flawed human nature, and those emphasizing the structural power of the anarchical system of sovereign states.

The writings of the fifth century BCE Greek historian, Thucydides, can be seen as one of the earliest expressions of fatalist logic in his account of the Peloponnesian Wars (431–404 BCE). Many have interpreted his account as a story of fear, aggression, escalation and amoral behaviour in a structurally determined system of states. For many, his narrative describes in broad outline the pattern of world politics through the intervening centuries, while some of his ideas have been the precursor of the notion of the security dilemma. In particular, Thucydides is identified with the way in which he described the structural dynamic of insecurity leading to mistrust ('What made war inevitable was the growth

of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta'), and by the way his account of the misnamed 'Melian dialogue' (it was a *diktat*) led to the famous or infamous words he gave to the Athenian ambassadors: 'The strong do what they have the power to do, the weak accept what they have to accept' (Thucydides 1972: 49, 400–8, quotation at 402). As a result of such interpretations and descriptions, Thucydides is invariably seen as the first major figure of the realist tradition (Jervis 1988: 317), though exactly what kind of realist he was has been much open to question (Holsti 1985 16–17; Smith 1986: 4–9; Manicas 1989; Doyle 1990: 223–37; Welch 2003).

A variety of readings of Thucydides is possible. His ideas were more complex than captured by the word fatalist. Indeed, in his account of the Peloponnesian Wars, we see worked into a single narrative of international history – we believe for the first time – the themes of fear, cooperation and trust in relation to security dilemma dynamics (Thucydides 1972: 265–78).⁸ This underlines the value of categorizing ideas rather than individuals, as can also be seen in the work of the seventeenth-century English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, whose name has been claimed as synonymous with realism by the International Relations mainstream (for alternative interpretations of Hobbes, see Hoffmann 1965: 61; Macpherson 1968: 38–9; Hoffmann and Fidler 1991: xlv; Tuck 1999: 109–40; Malcolm 2002; Williams 2005: 19–52).

Hobbes was accorded a central place in the history of security dilemma theorizing by Butterfield, who as will be discussed in Chapter 1, coined the term 'Hobbesian fear' as a synonym for the unresolvable uncertainty at the heart of international conflict. For Hobbes, the 'state of nature' was a state of war – a phrase which did not mean permanent fighting, but only 'the known predisposition thereto'. Hedley Bull has argued that 'we are entitled to infer that all of what Hobbes says about the life of individual men in the state of nature may be read as a description of the condition of states in relation to one another' (1981: 720–1). The influence of Thucydides, who was translated by the young Hobbes, may have been important in shaping the latter's view that fear is the prime mover of conflict and war. For Hobbes, no one in a state of nature can have guarantees for his or her safety, and so each is forced to rely on his or her strength to survive. Hobbes tells us that in the state of nature individuals face a 'perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death'. Hobbes here, according to Richard Tuck, was not implying that individuals would 'harm other men for the sake of harming them', instead 'they wish for power over them... but power only to secure their own preservation' (1992 – see also Tuck 1999: 126–39). Here, we see in the work of Hobbes important fatalist themes, such as structural imperatives,

insecurity, fear, the drive for security, the accumulation of power and mistrust.⁹

The theme of mistrust, which is at the heart of the security dilemma, has been prominently associated in the discipline of International Relations with Rousseau's parable of the 'stag hunt'. It is interesting to speculate why this minor passage (one paragraph of his *Origins of Inequality*) has become so discussed (Rousseau 1973: 78). The explanation begins with the influential work of Kenneth Waltz. Given Waltz's own predilections, it is not surprising that his attention was grabbed by the parable and so gave it prominence in his classic book, *Man, the State and War* (1959: 167–71, 183–6, 192), nor is it surprising, given the predilections of the discipline, that Waltz's discussion became such a reference point. For Waltz, the parable is the 'basis' for Rousseau's explanation of conflict in International Relations (1959: 167).

The parable is an account of hunters cooperating to catch a deer. Each is aware that success depends upon each staying at his post, but Rousseau tells us that if a deer was to be captured, each hunter had to agree that 'he must abide faithfully by his post: but if a hare happened to come within the reach of any of them, it is not to be doubted that he pursued it without scruple' (Rousseau 1973: 87). The hunter who defected might be able therefore to put real food on the table of his family, leaving his fellows with only food for thought about relative gains and the folly of trusting others. Waltz claims that the story 'is simple; the implications are tremendous'. In particular, for Waltz it meant that 'In cooperative action, even where all agree on the goal and have an equal interest in the project, one cannot rely on others' (1959: 168). In other words, when faced by a security dilemma, assume the worst. Waltz claimed that Rousseau did not praise or condemn the act of the hunter who chooses to defect, because it is rational behaviour to do so in a setting of anarchy. He read the analogy as illustrating the problems of cooperation between rational egoistical actors who come to the stag hunt with fixed identities and interests. The parable is fascinating for students of the security dilemma because it opens up questions of structure, mistrust, relative and absolute gains, insecurity, needs, norms, defection from agreements – the very drivers and dynamics associated with the unresolvable uncertainty in human relations. In Chapters 8 and 9, we will offer different readings of the stag hunt to the narrow one of Waltz that has been widely endorsed in the discipline.

Part II (Society) moderates the fatalist logic by looking to the development of practices that could mitigate the security dilemma. The states system is and will remain anarchical in the technical sense, but in (at least) the medium term it need not be synonymous with violent conflict; on the contrary, anarchy informed by the processes, institutions and norms of

society will bring a degree of predictable order, which in turn will bring a degree of security to the political units concerned. If conflict between powerful states, and the domination of the powerless by the powerful, are the story of international history from the fatalist perspective, mitigator voices have looked towards dialogue (primarily the institution of diplomacy) or the construction of norms (embodied in international regimes) as ways of dampening the dynamics of insecurity. Mitigator logic accepts that human nature may be flawed, and that the anarchical international system cannot be escaped, but its proponents nevertheless argue that the most dangerous features of the struggle between nations and states – such as arms racing, crises and war – can be ameliorated. While, conceptually, it is possible to differentiate between the fatalist and mitigator logics, in practice there is much commonality. Few fatalists in the contemporary international system embrace the parsimonious logic of offensive realism (see Chapter 1) when it comes to actual policy prescriptions; for the most part, it is a case of scratch a fatalist and find a mitigator. On the other hand, the mitigator disposition is strongly influenced by fatalist assumptions, and above all there is a widespread expectation that the competitive logic of anarchy will nevertheless overturn the aspirations of the institutions of international society. War will find a way.

As with fatalist thinking, there is a long and powerful mitigator tradition in world politics. Indeed (and remembering that we are classifying ideas and not people), we can see it in the work of Thucydides with Michael Doyle's argument that Thucydides believed that great statecraft (including the politics of moderation and justice) consisted of finding ways to reduce conflict (1990: 228); in K. J. Holsti's view of Hobbes acknowledging several means of 'muting international conflict', including natural law (1985: 20); in C. B. Macpherson's view that a society that is characterized by the universal competition for power cannot last (1968: 38–9); and in Fidler's view of Rousseau as an 'anguished moralist' who sought to escape from war though doubted the extent to which it would be possible (1992 – see also Hoffmann and Fidler 1991; Fidler 1996). The strongest expression of mitigator logic was expressed by a group of theorists, usually with a legal or theological background, who wrote from the seventeenth century, and whose work developed in parallel with the development of the Westphalian states system. They were primarily concerned to clarify the rights and duties of states in their mutual interrelationships in order to develop a mutually beneficial society. The most prominent of these was Hugo Grotius, often labelled 'the father of international law'. For 'Grotians', security is paramount, but it comes not from the prescriptions of fatalist logic but the construction of a society of states. Order refers to a situation in which the goals of

the actors are predictably maintained through shared norms and values manifest in common institutions. Grotius himself believed that international law, a reflection of natural law, was in the best interests of all states.

Implicit in much of the thinking within mitigator logic has been the special importance of the great powers (Wight 1966; 1991; Bull 1977; Wheeler and Dunne 1998; Jackson 2000; Bain 2003; Simpson 2004; Clark 2005). This became very explicit among the theorists of the balance of power and of the European Concert in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the key writers were Friedrich von Gentz, David Hume and Emerich Vattel. Gentz believed the balance of power to be a safeguard of the independence of states (1992: 395; Little 1996); Hume believed it to be based on 'common sense and obvious reasoning', an indication of a commitment to common rather than unilateral security (1992: 386–9); and Vattel, a Swiss jurist, writing a half century before the Concert system became formalized, saw emerging in modern Europe 'a kind of republic, of which the members – each independent, but all linked together by the ties of common interest – unite for the maintenance of order and liberty' (1992: 393; Hurrell 1996). In such ideas, which in the second half of the twentieth century strangely came to be called the English school, international society became virtually synonymous with great power cooperation.

In Part III (Community) we move far beyond the traditional agenda of International Relations. The transcender logic argues that systemic insecurity, including that deriving from the security dilemma, can be escaped if human society reforms or re-invents the structures and processes within which it lives, globally. The transcender logic assumes that this is not the best of all possible worlds. In radical opposition to the other logics, the various transcender voices reject 'false necessities' (Unger 1987) and ask, on behalf of the potential community of humankind: 'Must we live like this?' Their answer is a collective 'No', but their understanding of the problem, and how it might be escaped, is deeply divided. The problem in the interstate condition is not seen to be a fixed and regressive 'human nature' or an anarchic states system, but rather the way in which human societies have internalized regressive ideas about human nature, human history and the human condition (Allott 1998: 323–37). Humans created a world politics of suspicion and division, but a more harmonious route was always an option. Humanity could have done much better in the past, and could do so in the future.

The insecurities with which we have become familiar through history are neither the natural nor necessary outcomes of human nature or the nature of international life, but rather are the unfortunate products of a 'yesterday . . . [that] deformed us' (Samuel Beckett, *Proust*, quoted by

Allott 1998: 323). Human society on a global scale, as well as locally, need not replicate the mistakes of history, and in this regard there is a long tradition of thinking about peace, international governance, religious tolerance, cosmopolitan solidarities, and so on. These point in a radically different direction to the conflictual logic of Hobbesian anarchy. What is more, transcender voices argue that there is empirical support for hope, evident in situations where historic enmities have been replaced by non-violent and friendly relationships. The future remains to be written according to transcender logic; it need not be the prisoner of its regressive inheritance, though that past is indeed a heavy shackle around our collective necks. In contemplating that future, however, transcender voices have been highly discordant about the structures and processes that promise a better world.

The character and sources within transcender logic are multiple, depending on the theorist's choice of cause, referent, and goal. In the course of evolution, humans constructed through patriarchy, capitalism, the Westphalian system, nationalism and other powerful ideas and structures, a world politics of division and suspicion. Better alternatives were always possible. Consequently, human society could do much better according to transcender logic, for human societies have the capacity to reject the oppressive insecurities that have dominated the global political condition by making appropriate political, economic and social changes. Among the many and diverse strands of historically significant transcender thinking have been proponents of global citizenship such as the Stoics in ancient Greece; architects of blueprints for world peace such as Emeric Crucé, Abbé de Saint-Pierre and the Duc de Sully; and advocates of pacifism such as Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi (Suganami 1989; Archibugi 1992; Heater 1996, 2002; Dower and Williams 2002; Dower 2003).

The most influential work of transcender logic in the discipline of International Relations has been Immanuel Kant's essay *Perpetual Peace* (Reiss 1970: 93–130 – see also Hurrell 1990; Williams and Booth 1996). Kant's perspective was cosmopolitan ('a violation of rights in one place is felt throughout the world') and pragmatic. He argued that political work towards perpetual peace depended upon: first, the adoption of republican constitutions at home; second, the creation of a federated pacific union; and third, the adoption of the principle of universal hospitality. Running through all this was his belief in the harmony of morality and politics: 'All politics must bend the knee before right, although politics may hope in return to arrive, however slowly, at a stage of lasting brilliance' (Reiss 1970: 125).

Transcender logic believes that we live in a humanely constituted world, in which it is possible to go beyond the established categories of thinking about politics and construct a different world politics, a

new human order, which goes beyond the limit of human experience so far. We cannot know what is possible until we try, and the necessities of existing thought are false ones. The transcendent ideas that we examine have many fundamental differences of analysis and prescription, but they all share two common features. First, the belief that the spread of security is associated with the embedding of moral and political community. And second, the transcendent project is universal if it is to succeed. In solving human problems we have to begin with the global, consonant with Kant's view that the problems of political theory cannot be solved until the problems of international theory have been solved (Reiss 1970: 47–51).

In summary: fatalist logic argues that humans must continue to suffer the security dilemma as one of the necessitous conditions of politics on a global scale; mitigator logic argues that human society can ameliorate security dilemmas for a time, but not eliminate security competition; and transcendent logic argues that human society on a global scale can construct a radically new world order, and in so doing escape the dangers of the past, such as the security dilemma.

The concluding Part of the book shows that the security dilemma is increasingly relevant to thinking about fear, cooperation and trust in the twenty-first century. Indeed, we argue that *the security dilemma is an idea whose time has come*. We will show that it has become globalized in today's colliding worlds and changing contexts. Above all, we will argue that if the present century is not to be even more violent than the one that preceded it, we should return to the universal perspective and normative outlook which John Herz – who coined the term 'security dilemma' – saw as the only way of ameliorating the competition for security and power in world politics. In 2003, over half a century after he first wrote about the concept, Herz called for a 'radical turn in attitudes and policies' in order to avoid 'the mortal dangers to human survival' that presently confront us (2003: 416). It is 'up to intellectuals... to create awareness', he said. This book is a contribution to that goal.

Part I

Anarchy

Part I focuses on fatalist logic about the security dilemma in the context of anarchy and the politics of fear and ambition. The three chapters that follow examine the core themes of uncertainty as the existential condition of world politics, weapons as essential for groups to achieve self-protection, and the pervasiveness of fear. Chapter 1 discusses the contribution of the pioneer theorists of the security dilemma in the 1950s, John Herz and Herbert Butterfield. They, above all, placed uncertainty at the centre of theorizing international conflict. The chapter then assesses the evolution of fatalist logic into its most pristine form, namely, the theory of offensive realism associated with John Mearsheimer in the 1990s and beyond. Chapter 2 focuses on the most visible materiality of uncertainty in international politics – the existence of weapons and military forces – and models of the security dilemma first developed by Robert Jervis. The chapter discusses the ambiguous symbolism of weapons arising from the difficulty (fatalist logic believes the impossibility) of distinguishing 'offensive' and 'defensive' motives and intentions from the weaponry that others possess, and the problem that governments have of seeing how their actions might contribute to the fears of others. If, as fatalist logic claims, even peacefully inclined states cannot effectively communicate their motives and intentions, then unresolvable uncertainty must be the starting point for relationships. International Relations therefore, in Herz's words, are a 'kill or perish' environment. Fear, which is the basic emotion animating the security dilemma, has been badly neglected in the field of International Relations. In seeking to address this neglect, Chapter 3 explores different dimensions of this emotion in relation to security dilemma dynamics between states and ethnic groups. By exploring the interrelationship between uncertainty, weapons and fear, Part I brings out the power and pervasiveness of fatalist thinking about the significance of the security dilemma.

Chapter 1

Uncertainty

Where there are human relations there is the existential condition of uncertainty, and in International Relations that uncertainty gives rise to the security dilemma. Since the beginning of the academic study of politics among nations, theorists have searched to identify a single dynamic determining state behaviour (for example, 'anarchy' or 'ideas'). John Herz and Herbert Butterfield focused on **uncertainty**. In the early 1950s, separately, they offered new insights into the significance of uncertainty in relations between states, and in so doing became the pioneer theorists of the concept of the security dilemma. This chapter compares their ideas and discusses key issues of contention between them – issues that continue to trouble theorists today. The chapter then moves from the pioneer theorists to discuss the work of John Mearsheimer, whose theory of 'offensive realism', through the 1990s and beyond also takes as its starting point the existential condition of uncertainty and the resulting significance of the security dilemma.

John Herz and the invention of the security dilemma

The term 'security dilemma' first appeared in an article by John Herz entitled 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma' in the journal *World Politics* in 1950. Herz had studied law in Weimar Germany, and then International Relations in Geneva, before leaving Europe for the United States in 1938, where he made his home. There he contributed significantly and imaginatively to the emerging discipline of International Relations (a short autobiographical reflection is Herz 1989 – see also Stirk 2005; Hacke and Puglierin 2007). Herz had begun working on the concept of the security dilemma in the late 1930s, but nothing appeared in print until his 1950 article; this was followed a year later in an expanded form in his book *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (1951).¹ Simultaneously, as we will see later, the British historian Herbert Butterfield was thinking, independently, about the same phenomenon.

Fear animated Herz's argument. Because humans have the capacity to inflict pain and death on each other, this created 'mutual suspicion and a mutual dilemma: the dilemma of "kill or perish", of attacking first or running the risk of being destroyed' (Herz 1951: 3). Herz was emphatic that it was the 'uncertainty and anxiety' about the intentions of others that 'places man in this basic dilemma, and makes the "homo homini lupus" a primary fact of the social life of man' (1951: 3).² Faced with chronic fear, individuals strive for security against each other; in seeking protection, however (and here the subtlety of the argument begins), they find themselves faced with another inescapable fact of existence, namely their dependence on others for the enjoyment of the basic 'necessities of life'. This dependence on others, for both material and social well-being, 'creates the paradoxical situation that man is at the same time foe and friend to his fellow man, and that social co-operation and social struggle seem to go hand in hand, and to be equally necessary' (Herz 1951: 3). Here, in one sentence, we see the three themes of our book: fear, cooperation, but also implicitly trust, which is necessary to sustain cooperation.

It was in the dualistic character of human social life (fear and dependence) that the security dilemma had its origins according to Herz. The line of reasoning is as follows: individuals overcome personal insecurity by forming groups; these groups help in the provision of the necessities of life, including collective protection against threats by others; mistrust and uncertainty develops between groups because they all act in a similar fashion; insecurity dynamics spiral between groups as their fear leads them to seek the physical power to protect themselves; this increase in power for self-protection also increases the power to harm others, and so these other groups feel a growing sense of danger. The outcome is growing insecurity for all, though some may be less insecure than others. Herz, in a key passage, described how the security dilemma could lead to what we label the security paradox:

Wherever... anarchic society has existed... there has arisen what may be called the 'security dilemma' of men, or groups, or their leaders. Groups or individuals living in such a constellation must be, and usually are, *concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated* by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and *compels them to prepare for the worst*. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and *the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on*. (1950: 157, emphasis added)

This passage highlights the two strategic predicaments identified in our earlier definition of the security dilemma: the dilemma of interpretation and the dilemma of response. Herz was emphatic that because of the condition of what we call *unresolvable uncertainty* in anarchy, groups have no choice but to 'prepare for the worst', even when they do not harbour hostile intentions against each other. Consequently, those committed to the status quo, knowing that their survival depended on their success in a struggle for power, would feel compelled to behave aggressively. *In extremis*, Herz said that this might lead them to launch preventive wars in the hope that it would avoid them being attacked first (Herz 1959a: 243). Herz, in these ideas, foreshadowed the school of offensive realism, as will be seen later.

Herz was not confident that international cooperation in the 'anarchic society' could overcome the predicament of 'kill or perish'.³ In a book published later he gloomily asked: 'how could [groups or states] trust in the continuance of good intentions in the case of collective entities with leaders and policies forever changing?' (Herz 1959a: 235). Overcoming the problem of future uncertainty is the major challenge facing students of the security dilemma, and this is a key theme running through our book. As a result of the absence of trust, Herz's conceptualization of the security dilemma predicted that collectivities would resolve their dilemma of interpretation by choosing to engage in the struggle for power. They would prepare for the worst, believing that running the risk of being coerced or attacked by leaving themselves open (as a result of preparing for the best) is less acceptable than incurring the costs and dangers of engaging in a struggle for power. In other words, embracing the risks of a security paradox is preferable to suffering the costs of being caught out as a security dreamer. History shows that there have been rare individuals who might 'answer the demands arising from the power dilemma with a clear and ambiguous "No!"', but Herz thought that those who preached such a doctrine of self-sacrifice – some religious leaders and all pacifists – removed themselves from the group likely to become leaders of states (1951: 16). Even states whose leaders might have benign intentions towards the world must assume 'the worst' argued Herz (1959a: 235).

In Herz's conceptualization, therefore, the security dilemma had a fatalistic inevitability about it. His reflections about the states system led him to the conclusion that there was 'apparently no escape from this vicious circle' of the security dilemma; he believed it a necessary consequence of social life (1951: 3). Particular groups may be able to escape the dilemma, but such an escape is not universally possible: 'ultimately, somewhere, the conflicts caused by the security dilemma are bound to emerge among political units of power' (1951: 15). He

maintained that the desire for security was universal, and as such the security dilemma was eternal 'as long as... even one competitor for power and security' exists (1951: 239).

Although Herz's work has led some to see him as belonging to the realist school of theorists, his approach was, and remained, significantly different. He sought in the early 1950s to distinguish his ideas from the theory of political realism then developing in the United States, where the major figures were Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans J. Morgenthau (Herz 1959a: 232, especially n. 1). Over 50 years later, Herz emphasized that he could not agree with Morgenthau and others who saw 'innate human aggressiveness' (*animus dominandi* was Morgenthau's term) as the root cause of human conflict and international expansionism (Herz 2003: 412). Morgenthau, like Herz, had been a student of law in Weimar Germany, and an exile from the Nazis; both had found refuge in the United States. As a result of his extensive and influential writing, Morgenthau emerged as the iconic theorist of political realism during the Cold War. In particular, his book *Politics among Nations* became the staple reading for International Relations students for three decades (Booth 2005b: 352 asks whether he was an icon for the right reasons). Like Niebuhr, Morgenthau explained the basic causal dynamic of International Relations in terms of a flawed human nature. As he famously put it: 'politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau 1964: 4). He believed that human beings were driven by the need for security but that they were also impelled by a lust for power: 'International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power' (Morgenthau 1964: 27). And this lust for power, he believed, was without limit: 'For while man's vital needs are capable of satisfaction, his lust for power would be satisfied only if the last man became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him, that is, if he became like God' (Morgenthau 1946: 165). These views were closely aligned to those of Niebuhr, who was 'the father of us all' according to the realist statesman-scholar George Kennan, and 'the most profound thinker of the modern realist school' by one of the most astute students of realism, Michael J. Smith (1986: 99). For Niebuhr, human conflict was rooted in the 'blindness and self-deception which constitutes the mystery of sin' (1938: 105).

Niebuhr, deriving his politics from his Christianity, held that the basic security problems of humans lay in their failure to accept limits. Humans, he said, desired to play God and would not accept their status as mere mortals. In relation to international politics, this failure to accept limits was played out in the significant distinction he made between the 'will-to-live' (the legitimate need for security) and the 'will-to-power' (the desire

for security beyond the limits of human 'finiteness', a manifestation of the 'pride' which Christianity regards as sin in its quintessential form). Moving onto the terrain of the security dilemma, he argued that power is sought to guarantee security, but its accumulation 'tempts [its possessors] to destroy and oppress other life' (Niebuhr 1938: 102–3).

In contrast to Niebuhr and Morgenthau, Herz contended that the struggle for power was not rooted in an insatiable human appetite for power as an end in itself; rather, it was sought for protection in an environment where nobody could be assured of the good intentions of others. In other words, Herz's 'anarchic society' was the underlying cause of international conflict. He stated this boldly in his 1951 book: 'Whether man is "by nature" peaceful and co-operative, or aggressive and domineering, is not the question. The condition that concerns us here is not anthropological or biological, but a social one' (1951: 3).

These controversies were prominent on the agenda of all the major theorists of international politics in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. The classic text of the time was Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* (1959) which introduced his influential levels-of-analysis approach to categorizing theories about war.⁴ Robert Osgood and Robert Tucker, soon afterwards, argued that analysts should be careful about accepting the idea of a rigid division between human nature and structural explanations of international conflict. They contended that Herz's thesis about the security dilemma depended on certain key assumptions about human nature and could not be explained entirely with reference to what Herz called 'a fundamental social constellation' (Herz 1951: 3). The reasoning behind their contention was that the security dilemma presupposed certain 'universal and unvarying traits of human nature'; these were 'the fear of others and of the harm others may do... as well as man's ignorance of and incapacity to discern both the actual intentions of others and the unwanted consequences [of one's own actions]' (Osgood and Tucker 1967: 256). For Herz, they claimed, it was the idea that 'fear and the urge for survival rather than selfishness and the lust for power are the dominant traits of this nature' (*ibid.*: n. 11). In other words, they argued that the security dilemma relies upon a particular interpretation of human nature.

Another important contribution to this debate was made by the political philosopher Arnold Wolfers. In an essay entitled 'The Pole of Power and the Pole of Indifference', first published in 1949 (reprinted with minor changes in 1962: 147–65) he also attempted to explain why states 'behave as postulated or why they are compelled to so behave' (Wolfers 1962: 83). He pointed out the two main explanations offered by realist scholars. The first argues that 'men, as individuals and as nations, act

like beasts of prey, driven by an insatiable lust for power or *animus dominandi*. When this 'will to power . . . [is] transferred from small and frustrated individuals to the collectivity of the state', it takes on greater significance, and generates 'an all-round struggle for survival' (Wolfers 1962: 83–4). By contrast, he argued, a second explanation was given by those who viewed the accumulation of power not as any desire for power as such, but as the result of 'a general human craving for security'. Wolfers explained power-seeking as a response to the 'insecurity of an anarchical system of multiple sovereignty'; this placed actors 'under compulsion' to seek maximum power, 'even though this may run counter to their real desires'. Here, 'all actors find themselves compelled to do for the sake of security, what, in bringing about an all-round struggle for survival, leads to greater insecurity'. Wolfers called it 'a tragic irony' (1962: 84); it is what we describe as the security paradox. He also labelled it the 'vicious circle theory', making 'statesmen and people look less vicious than the *animus dominandi* theory', substituting 'tragedy for evil' and the 'mad Caesar' (pursuing ever more political power) for the 'hysterical Caesar' haunted by fear and pursuing the impossible goal of absolute security (ibid.).

Despite this early engagement with the concept of the security dilemma by some of the discipline's leading theorists, we agree with Barry Buzan that the concept did not at that time become the 'major breakthrough' it might have done (Buzan 1991: 4). For the most part, US academic literature made a cursory reference to Herz and then moved on; the most notable exception was the work of Robert Jervis, who came to shape significantly security dilemma theorizing from the 1970s onwards, and whose contribution we discuss in subsequent chapters. Among the earlier theorists, it was Wolfers who grasped the significance of the concept more than most. Soon after the concept had first appeared in print, he noted that what he called this 'vicious circle theory' was gaining adherents, and he referred specifically to Herz's work. The latter, he said, had been expounded with 'skill and vigor'. He also added that these ideas were close to those of Thomas Hobbes (Wolfers 1962: 84, n. 5). As we will now see, the conceptualization of the security dilemma by its other pioneer theorist, Herbert Butterfield, was even closer.

Herbert Butterfield and 'Hobbesian fear'

At the very beginning of the 1950s two major scholars working independently in different though related disciplines, and in different though closely allied countries, went into print addressing the condition of uncertainty in international politics. Herz, as just explained, called the

resultant predicament the 'security dilemma', and Herbert Butterfield called it the 'irreducible dilemma' (1951: 20); and where Herz talked about 'kill or perish', Butterfield used the phrase 'Hobbesian fear'.

Butterfield was one of Britain's most distinguished historians of the mid-twentieth century (Coll 1985; Dunne 1998). During the 1950s, his work seems to have had some impact in US intellectual circles (Dunne 1998: 71–3) but he is now virtually unknown among International Relations scholars in that country (important exceptions are Coll 1985 and Sharp 2003).⁵ Butterfield originally worked on the early nineteenth century and on Machiavelli's statecraft, but his interests broadened, became more theoretical, and were also drawn towards international politics. His well-known book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) was followed by *The Englishman and His History* (1944) and *Christianity and History* (1949); then followed *History and Human Relations* (1951), the contribution that is most relevant here. In this body of work we see Butterfield not only becoming interested in International Relations theory (a field in which he thought learning from experience was an imperative, but 'peculiarly difficult') but also exploring the nexus between his own particular religious outlook and the world of international politics (Dunne 1998: 71).

Like Herz, Butterfield emphasized the uncertainty that one set of individuals has about the real intentions of others – the other minds problem. As a result of this trap of mutual incomprehension, as Butterfield saw it, the interstate condition becomes one of tragedy. At its root is a set of psychological dynamics constituting the 'irreducible dilemma'. These, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, are more complex than Butterfield suggested, but his contribution to security dilemma theorizing was nevertheless groundbreaking. The following paragraph reveals how he thought a spiral of mistrust can develop between two actors even when neither has malign motives and intentions towards the other:

For you know that you yourself mean him no harm, and that you want nothing from him save guarantees for your own safety; and it is never possible for you to realize or remember properly that since he cannot see the inside of your mind, he can never have the same assurance of your intentions that you have. As this operates on both sides the Chinese puzzle is complete in all its interlockings – and neither party sees the nature of the predicament he is in, for each only imagines that the other party is being hostile and unreasonable. It is even possible for each to feel that the other is wilfully withholding the guarantees that would have enabled him to have a sense of security. (Butterfield 1951: 21)

Part of Butterfield's originality was in the way he showed how governments with peaceful intent conspired (through their failure to see themselves as others saw them) to provoke other governments to behave in ways that raised the level of mutual insecurity (Jervis 1976: 68–70; Wheeler and Booth 1992: 34, 1996; Collins 1997: 30–1; Roe 2005: 17). Like Herz, he recognized in his original conceptualization that the unresolvable uncertainty in the minds of the actors could generate greater insecurity, even though neither party wanted it: in other words that the security dilemma would inexorably lead to the security paradox.

The 'irreducible dilemma' for Butterfield was the failure of individuals, groups and governments to realize 'the nature of the predicament' (1951: 21). The escape from the dilemma lay in governments understanding that others are behaving in what appears to be strategically hostile ways because they are fearful, not because they have aggressive or predatory intentions. The prospect of such an escape was closed off in Butterfield's thinking, however, because of the other minds problem. In a much quoted passage, he wrote: 'It is the peculiar characteristic of the situation I am describing – *the situation of what I should call Hobbesian fear* – that you yourself may vividly feel the terrible fear that you have of the other party, but you cannot enter into the other man's counter-fear, or even understand why he should be particularly nervous' (Butterfield 1951: 21. *Emphasis added*). Here Butterfield's argument confronts the proposition we advanced in the Introduction about the importance of security dilemma sensibility for decision-makers. Butterfield himself did not think that contemporary diplomats could acquire the requisite knowledge for security dilemma sensibility; this was only open to historians, in retrospect. In a fit of professional hubris, Butterfield claimed that historians alone could reconstruct the narratives of a conflict and appreciate the actual intentions of the decision-makers concerned: 'future historiography may expose the limitations of our [contemporary] vision' (1951: 15). However, he also warned against historians imposing their own mindsets, arguing that they had to guard against the danger of seeing international conflict as a Manichean struggle between right and wrong, and to resist the temptation of becoming locked into the morality of their own cause. The participants in the conflict might strike up positions of moral self-righteousness, and this might be fuelled by contemporary historians 'locked in the combative views of his own nation'. The pernicious effect of these ideological dynamics on both sides is that state leaders impute malevolent intentions to their perceived adversary, whilst believing that their own behaviour could not be seen as threatening (Butterfield 1951: 22). He believed that later historians, writing long after the conflict was over, would be in a position to see what contemporaries could not: 'the tragic element in human conflict' (*ibid.*: 17).⁶

Even so, Butterfield did not think historians omniscient. He accepted that the irreducible dilemma could drive state behaviour yet not be recognized by historians. He put it as follows: 'So far as the historian is concerned, here is the basic pattern for all narratives of human conflict, whatever other patterns may be superimposed upon it later' (Butterfield 1951: 20). Consistent with this general theory, he believed the irreducible dilemma to be the basis of the acute tensions of his own times, the increasingly dangerous Cold War. This, he said, was 'the hard nut that we still have to crack' (*ibid.*). Interestingly, this view implied that 'the nut' could indeed be cracked. Here we see Butterfield moving from speaking the language of fatalist logic to that of the mitigator or even transcender. Such jumps became prominent in his later writings as he moved towards an acceptance that diplomats could develop security dilemma sensibility (see Chapter 4). In common with some other theorists, Butterfield did not want to give way, completely, to the logic of fatalism.

Butterfield's initial fatalism about the irreducible dilemma depended crucially on assumptions about human nature, which in turn derived from his Christian pessimism. He was not a simple reductionist however; he was not a simple anything, though he was rather inconsistent. While some theorists attempted to explain international conflict in relation to *either* anarchy *or* human nature, Butterfield combined structural and human nature arguments. His beliefs about human nature placed him firmly in the second of the two camps identified by Wolfers, seeing the root of uncertainty not in the insatiable lust of humans for power, but rather in the 'dominion of fear'. Like Herz, in his original work on the concept, Butterfield thought that 'fear and suspicion are not merely factors in the story . . . they give a certain quality to human life in general' (1960: 85). While his theological predilections might have suggested a different interpretation, it was tragedy rather than evil which for Butterfield was the essence of the human political predicament.

In *History and Human Relations* Butterfield presented the interstate condition not as a story of wickedness and evil, but of mistrust. This was a particularly striking verdict in the immediate aftermath of Nazi German aggression, given all the human and nationalistic emotions that had been stirred up there. Butterfield believed that the greatest war in history 'could be produced without the intervention of any great criminals who might be out to do deliberate harm in the world. It could be produced between two Powers both of which were desperately anxious to avoid a conflict of any sort' (1951: 19–20). What is more, by failing to be aware of the predicament they were in, two states might 'feel that the other [was] wilfully withholding the guarantees that would have enabled [each] to have a sense of security'. Consequently, the 'resulting conflict is more likely to be hot with moral indignation – one self-righteousness

encountering another – than it would have been if the contest had lain between two hard-headed eighteenth-century masters of *realpolitik*' (Butterfield 1951: 21–2). Such dynamics (with structure, original sin, feelings and calculations all interacting) constituted for Butterfield the 'condition of absolute predicament or irreducible dilemma' which 'lies in the very geometry of human conflict' (1951: 20).

Together, the pioneer theorists not only set out the conceptual agenda for thinking about the security dilemma; they also showed themselves to be intellectual contrarians in an era of Cold War conformity. We have seen that Herz was seeking to distinguish himself from those Waltz came to call human nature pessimists in a United States where the ideology of political realism was increasingly prominent. For his part, Butterfield was seeking to distinguish himself from the tendency in post-Second World War historiography to conceive international conflict in terms of a story of good versus evil. As he put it, with characteristic brevity and insight: 'In historical perspective we learn to be a little more sorry for both parties than they knew how to be for one another' (Butterfield 1951: 17). This almost god-like perspective ran in parallel with an all-too-human fatalism about the inability of our species to live in global harmony and escape the dominion of fear and the trap of the security dilemma. In what he considered 'the last resort', Butterfield argued that Hobbesian fear is explained by 'man's universal sin' (1951: 22). He maintained that 'the predicament would not exist... if all the world were like St Francis of Assisi, and if human nature in general were not streaked with cupidities' (*ibid.*). But this was not the case. And in pointing to sin rather than anarchy as being the fundamental driver of international conflict, Butterfield seemed to be saying that there is no transcendence this side of heaven.

By 1951 many of the key conceptual issues relating to the security dilemma had therefore been raised by the pioneer theorists; a great deal was nevertheless left unresolved, including key issues dividing them. While their initial ideas about the security dilemma shared certain common themes, fissures soon became apparent and they remained unresolved. They have also divided later theorists.

Interpreting Nazi Germany

Two major epistemological questions separated Herz and Butterfield, and remain of critical interest to students of the security dilemma. First, can fear and ambition be clearly distinguished as drivers of state behaviour? Second, can policy-makers at the time, or even historians many years later, ever give a definitive answer to dilemmas of interpretation? The

answers to these questions affect the prospects both for effective security dilemma sensibility in the short term and the embedding of trust over the long term.

In *International Politics in the Atomic Age*, Herz (1959a) departed from the position he had laid out earlier in the decade, writing: 'To consider the dilemma the basis of *all* past and present conflict seems to me an exaggeration'. Now he claimed that there might be a discernable difference between what he called 'security policies' (designed to limit insecurity in an insecure world) and what he called 'policies motivated by interests that go beyond security proper' (Herz 1959a: 234, n. 5). This move had profound implications for Herz's original conception of the security dilemma, since he was now proposing that aggression might explain the behaviour of some states, and not simply the fear that comes from the 'kill or perish' dilemmas that he had earlier said dominated life in a dualistic social world. He went on to say that he had been unaware of Butterfield's contribution when he had originally claimed 'primary importance for the security dilemma', noting that his concept of the 'security dilemma' was identical with Butterfield's 'Hobbesian fear'. But Herz sought to distance himself from the position they both originally shared, what Butterfield had called the 'basic pattern for all narratives of human conflict, whatever other patterns may be superimposed upon it later' (1959a: 234).

Herz changed his theoretical stance as a result of his reassessment of recent history. Nazi Germany, he claimed, was a state whose behaviour could not solely be explained in terms of the pursuit of security. Looking back at Nazi behaviour leading to the outbreak of war in 1939, he wrote: 'It can hardly be maintained that it was a German security dilemma which lay at the heart of that conflict, but rather one man's, or one regime's, ambition to master the world' (Herz 1959a: 234, n. 5). In contrast to his earlier assumption about fear as the driver, he now claimed that it was possible to divine aggressive ambition behind the Nazi state's actions.⁷ What remained unclear at this point was whether Herz was arguing that we can only have reasonable certainty about motives and intentions in retrospect (a position that would have placed him closer to Butterfield) or was he maintaining that policy-makers at the time can actually have reliable knowledge of the motives and intentions of other actors from their words and actions? Whereas some uncertainty attended Herz's thinking, Butterfield had no doubts; he believed that it was not possible for policy-makers at the time to enter the minds of others, but he was confident that historians could deliver reliable knowledge. In the case of Nazi Germany, we can see the problems that both faced: on the one hand, the enormous challenges confronting policy-makers at the time wrestling with their dilemmas of interpretation, and on the other hand the great

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

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.