

# Theory Gets Real, and the Case for a Normative Ethic: Rostow, Modernization Theory, and the Alliance for Progress

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This paper looks at the complex relationship that exists between ideology, international relations theories, and the world of practice. It focuses on the role of theoretical concepts in forming foreign policy, asks whether theoreticians and theories act as agents in the political arena, and if so, what the consequences of this agency are. The paper attempts to show that theoretical concepts have a political role to play in the field of foreign affairs, and that to some degree they shape the reality that they try to study. As such, they blur the dichotomist distinction between subject and object, and should not be considered outside observers, which is a necessary precondition to objectivity. This agency and lack of objectivity, I claim, endow theoreticians with moral responsibility, and obligate the founding of research on morality. In order to demonstrate my claims I focus on U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America under the Kennedy administration, the influence of Walt W. Rostow regarding that policy, and what can be termed the rise and fall of modernization theory.

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This article challenges the assertion by positivists that objectivity is possible in the social sciences, particularly in international relations. It does so by exploring the agency of theoreticians and theories in the political arena and the consequences of this agency. I argue that theoretical concepts play a political role in the field of foreign affairs, and that to some degree these concepts are themselves actors in the grand theater of international relations. As such, theoreticians should not be considered outside observers, which is a necessary precondition to objectivity; objectivity is defined as the detached and impartial search for external truth. The theoretical concepts in international relations and foreign policy transform the subject matter of their investigation as inquiry takes place, and blur the dichotomist distinction between subject and object. By concentrating on one case study, the article examines the political life cycle of a theory, namely, the way a theory is constructed in the academy, gains a hold in the corridors of political power, and finally withers away.

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Apart from the metatheoretical significance ascribed to the subject matter of theories' agency and objectivity, the topics examined in this paper might help to gain some understanding of the benefits and more so, of the shortcomings, of the recurring pattern in the United States of interweaving politics with academic research. It is all too common to find academicians and theoreticians in key administrative positions, overlooking the shaping and implementation of foreign policy. Important examples include Henry Kissinger, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and the subject of this paper, Walt Rostow. One might even find that the discussion offered here carries relevance regarding current U.S. policy and the Bush doctrine, when one considers the prominence of the "Clash of Civilizations" theory among neo-conservative circles surrounding the Bush administration. The article demonstrates the shortcomings of parsimonious, structured and patterned theories when they try to get real and operate in a complex and contextual social world. The intrinsic break between theory and reality dooms theoretically based policies to fail in the long run, unless they are pursued with modesty and with an eye to the complexity of the social world.

I come to grips with the vastness and complexity of the subject by focusing on U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America under the Kennedy administration and the influence of Walt W. Rostow (1916–2003) regarding that policy. U.S. policy regarding Latin America is important for two related reasons. The first concerns the U.S. perception of Latin America as geographically in its own "backyard" and as vital to the U.S. interests to be free of outside influence and involvement. The second reason, which in part relates to Latin America's "backyard" location, is that the United States largely saw Latin America as a laboratory for new American policies and projects, for example, initially for modernization projects, and later on, for Jimmy Carter's human rights endeavors.

There are two reasons for focusing here on the Kennedy administration: the first is that in the 1960s, the discipline of international relations came into its own in terms of academic maturity. Its antecedents lay in the interwar period, although back then, it was still strongly tied to its "parent" disciplines: international law, political science, history, and philosophy. After World War II, international relations scholars began to think more independently and to offer theories on their own field. By the 1960s, there was a significant number of theoreticians educated in the field, and the literature had reached a stage where it was varied, recognized, and respected in its own right. Secondly, by the 1960s, the pattern of the postwar world system and international relations had crystallized into something sufficiently solid for theoreticians to start framing specific recommendations for the U.S. foreign policy in various fields and regions, including Latin America.

The present paper examines the role of Rostow in the Kennedy administration and his concept and theory of modernization with special reference to the formation of the alliance for progress. In August 1961, the alliance for progress was established between the United States and the republics of Latin America with the purpose of promoting the economic and political development of America's backdoor neighborhood. In this context, Rostow represented a key though by no means singular figure in mediating between the theoretical and real worlds. As will be shown here, Rostow's mediation had an institutional and practical form, although it also functioned on a more abstract level in disseminating theoretical concepts into Kennedy administration discourse and policies.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first section develops the problematic of the common practice of differentiating dichotomously between object and subject, and is mainly based upon a conceptualization developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. The second section provides the background to the emergence of development studies, demonstrating the impact that the political system had on this

process, that is, it concentrates on the effect that the world of practice has on the world of theory. The third section concentrates on the other side of the coin, that is, how the world of theory (theoreticians and theoretical concepts) affects the world of practice. The fourth section discusses the problems that theoreticians and theoretical concepts face as both Agents and agents<sup>1</sup> respectively in the real world, which can lead to the collapse and hence the failure of the policies they help to form.

### Issues at Stake

The thorniest issue addressed by this article is the political agency of international relations theories and the possible implications of that agency on the objectivity of international relations theories. This article thus transcends the usual international relations theoretical debates on whether theories have ideological foundations. Most international relations scholars agree that theories do have certain ideological components. Ideology is being used here as a comprehensive though not necessarily consistent worldview of the preferred social, economical, and political organization of society. The debates argue the scope and necessity of an ideological base for constructing theories. At the one end of the spectrum, we find hardcore positivists who argue the need and attainableness of objectivity in the study and investigation of social science and its theories.<sup>2</sup> Although positivists do occasionally identify ideological considerations at the heart of certain theories, they ascribe it to the failings of inadequate theoreticians, usually from a different theoretical camp. Thus, ideology is seen as an unnecessary part of theory construction, even a hindrance to it.<sup>3</sup>

At the other extreme are the disciples of thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, who are usually labeled “postmodernist.” One must be cautious when attributing general features to postmodernism as it is far from a monolithic discipline, containing instead different areas of interest, such as poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, radical feminism, deconstructivism. Each of these areas focuses on different issues and reflects a different political agenda, which usually involves promoting the inclusion of minorities: women, indigenous people, etc. Acknowledging this, however, highlights a common epistemological claim among the different branches of postmodernism, namely the denial of an objective and universal foundation for the sciences. Science, so the postmodernist argument goes, is a social and political activity, and as such is contaminated by power-seeking and spurious ideologizing. In other words, what positivists consider essential, that is, an objective, universal and ideology-free foundation, postmodernists consider a sham, an ideological myth obscuring the true nature of science, a servant of the current exclusionist social status quo. Science is an ideologically based—and biased—political activity. We thus find terms such as “orientalist sociology (Levine 2000),” “orientalist empiricism (Ludden 1993),” “feminist epistemologies (Alcoff and Potter 1993),” all of which have the consequential propositions of standpoint theories and the like (Haraway 1988), resulting in further fragmentation of the sciences into different communities without a bridging foundation or the ability to understand the world in the same manner and communicate effectively with each other (for

<sup>1</sup> For my conceptual distinction between theoreticians’ full Agency and theories’ limited agency see below (p. 209).

<sup>2</sup> See also Smith (1997:333). Smith’s writings on epistemological issues tended to deal with this aspect of the problem of objectivity. See for example 1995:28–30. But recently Smith (2004) has turned his attention to the role of academics in shaping the reality of world politics. See his presidential address to the International Studies Association, February 27, 2003, Portland OR.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, Betts (1992:28) the realist indicts the collective security theories as having evolved from teleological liberalism. Rosenberg (1990) on the other hand, who belongs to the neo-liberal paradigm of international relations, tends to criticize realism as being a conservative ideology that tries to legitimize state power and a policy of *realpolitik*.

antifoundationalist writings in international relations see Ashley 1989:285–288; Campbell 1992:158; see also Delamont 2003:27; Smith 1995:24–26, 28–30, 1996:30–31.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned above, this article explores a second, though related issue—the question of agency: in other words, theory as an agent in the world of politics and policies. In this article, “agency” is used slightly differently from the normal usage in international relations. The conventional wisdom defines agents as “purposeful actors whose actions help reproduce or transform the society in which they live” (Wendt 1987:337–338). Thus, agency is used to describe conscious entities (or an aggregation of conscious entities in the form of institutions, organizations, states, etc.). While the notion of ascribing agency to theoreticians may be debatable on theoretical grounds, it nevertheless falls within the definition and parameters of conventional international relations wisdom, since theoreticians are certainly conscious entities. However, ascribing agency to theories themselves might be considered logically impossible, since theories are nonconscious abstract entities. Therefore, one could legitimately question my proposal of ascribing agency to theories and demand that I substitute agency with another concept such as “mediator mechanism” or “intermediate,” pointing to theories as being a medium for carrying the influence of theoreticians into the world of politics.<sup>5</sup> This is plausible. Theories also function as intermediaries and so “mediator mechanism” could well serve as an acceptable compromise, helping both the purposes of this article and being consistent with accepted international relations conventions. However, the line of argumentation in this article leads me to reject this compromise. One argument that I would like to suggest is that theories have political life cycles in which they are constructed in academia, introduced into the political realm, which they affect, and finally, wither away (see also Daston 2000). Thus, theories attain autonomy from their theoreticians, affecting the political world in their own right. They thus deserve to be recognized as agents, independent of the agency of theoreticians. Now, in no way does this imply that theories have consciousness. Theories are indeed abstract entities lacking consciousness and their independent impact on the political world lacks the properties of intention and purpose. To reflect this, the article distinguishes the purposeful, intentional “Agency” of theoreticians, written with a capital “A,” from the limited agency of theories which lack these properties, and is written with lower case “a.”<sup>6</sup>

Having made this conceptual clarification, let us return to the second debate, that of the agency of theories. On the one hand, the academic world is seen as an ivory tower wherein the issues of society and politics are addressed in abstruse language, where knowledge is gained for knowledge’s sake and where theories are constructed which explain the world, without having to run it.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, not few are the academicians and theoreticians that seek to engage their theories in forming policies. Their basic argument is that it is a sterile pursuit to continue accumulating knowledge without applying it productively. One needs only remember the ethos of the enlightenment or recall the vast literature of policy sciences (to mention only some examples: Lerner and Laswell 1951; Crawford and

<sup>4</sup> This anti-foundationalism in fact constitutes the real radicalism of postmodernism, and sets its areas of interest apart from other postpositivistic schools of thought. See, for example, Emanuel Adler’s (1997:328–329) search for a universal scientific foundation of constructivism in the form of pragmatism.

<sup>5</sup> Following William Robinson’s (2003:4–5) third level of analysis, namely *structural-conjunctural* analysis, which he defines as focusing “on the point of convergence of structure and agency, on consciousness and forms of knowledge as reflection on social structure and consequent social action as the medium between structure and agency.”

<sup>6</sup> It is not unnecessary to point out that there is no semantic requirement of consciousness when agent is defined as “any natural force acting upon matter, any substance that the presence of which produces phenomena” (Oxford Dictionary 1989:428; see also Webster’s Dictionary 1993:40).

<sup>7</sup> A typical view is presented by Waltz (1996). See Halliday and Rosenberg (1998:385). For an innovative critique concerning the gap between politics and political research see Shenhav (2004:81–83).

Biderman 1969; George 1976; Smoke 1976). Meanwhile sociologists and social science historians carry out ever more studies that show the role of academicians in the world of politics, and likewise, the role of the world of politics in shaping academic disciplines (Chomsky 1969; Packenham 1973; Gendzier 1985; Hall 1989; Shafer 1988; Sikkink 1991; Adler and Haas 1992; Latham 2000; Pearce 2001). This prolific field of research indicates the agency of theories and sometimes the impact of politics in shaping theory and at the same time blurs what, according to positivism, has to be a dichotomous distinction between academy and politics.

This debate, which had seemed tame in the discipline of international relations, might now be the focus of a new wave of a heated debate following Steve Smith's presidential address to the International Studies Association on February 2003. In his address Smith (2004: 500) claimed that "International Relations has been one voice singing into existence the world that made September 11 possible." Smith's main thrust was the need to connect research and ethics because of the theories' influence on world political reality. In this article I wish to concretize Smith's abstract argumentation.

The present article follows the above line of argument, put forward by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989) in his work *Truth and Method*:

There is one thing common to all contemporary criticism of historical objectivism or positivism, namely the insight that the so-called subject of knowledge has the same mode of being as the object, so that object and subject belong to the same historical movement. The subject-object antithesis is legitimate where the object, the *rex externa*, is the absolute other of the *rex cogitans*, but historical knowledge cannot be appropriately described by this concept of object and objectivity. (Gadamer 1989:528)

With an eye to Gadamer's claim, I would like to present the role that Rostow played in the Kennedy administration, namely his introduction of his theoretical work into the world of politics and the complex task of foreign policy shaping. I wish to use this example to demonstrate the interdependence between researcher and researched, of the relationship between the scholar as the locus of supposedly objective knowledge and the subject of his scholarship: social and political reality. In other words, while describing the role of theories in government, the main focus of this article is not to discuss one more case of theoretician-turned-practitioner, but to evaluate some of the features of this phenomenon from a metatheoretical perspective, and thus enrich our understanding of the nature of theory in international relations. Put differently, through this analysis of Rostow's activities during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and by tracing the rise and fall of the theory and policy of modernization, my aim is to challenge the assertions of international relations theories regarding the possibility of objectivity in the social sciences.

Rostow's case is especially germane to our inquiry not because it is a typical case (to claim this, we would need to examine many more case studies), but because it is a Weberian ideal type of theory that gets real.<sup>8</sup> By focusing on Rostow's role in the

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<sup>8</sup> While we cannot say whether Rostow's case was indeed typical, two arguments may be made to defend the claim that it was neither isolated nor rare, pointing to its being a Weberian ideal type. (1) The United States offers many examples of theoreticians-turned-practitioners, who have attempted to implement their theories, or in other words, to make their theories real. To the names mentioned in the introduction can be added the recent appointment of Stephen Krasner as Director of Policy Planning at the State Department on February 2005. We should wait and see what role Krasner will play in formulating U.S. policies, and what theoretical insights he will bring to his office. (2) It is not just that the phenomenon of theoreticians-turned-practitioners is fairly common, it is far from being the extreme case of how theories affect the world of politics. There are cases—very rare indeed—when theories have gripped the public's (and policy elites') imagination and become accepted public conventions affecting the general understanding of the international environment and national interest, thus becoming powerful shapers of political behavior. Two such cases can be pointed out: the realist theories of the balance of power at the height of the Cold War and the theories of democratic peace following the end of the Cold War.

American administration, the article highlights the agency of theory in international relations, the effectiveness and weaknesses of theories in the world of practice, and finally it shows what we can learn from these regarding the objectivity of theories, and the moral significance of theories of international relations.

### **Politics and the Clustering of Theories**

Before we begin to examine the influence of theories on political practice, I would like first to look at the impact of political practice on theory construction. Apart from the obvious fact that theories by their very nature and purpose adhere to reality with its events, processes and dynamics, sometimes the political agenda can influence the theoretical agenda more directly. In other words, it is not just a correspondence to reality that shapes theories, but also a correspondence to the interests of the powerful. First, governments funds are one of the main sources of research grants, and second, official positions may enable theoreticians to gain a foothold in the corridors of power. Thus, some events and processes may receive higher priority from the academic world because of the agenda of the political world. A case in point is the progression of development theories in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

Two important factors aided this process. The first was the wave of decolonization that swept the third world, producing a host of new and independent countries that were generally impoverished and without viable economic, social, or political infrastructures. The second was the Cold War, which led the United States and Soviet Union to both court these emerging countries, both jostling to recruit as many as they could to their own sphere. In the halls of academia this constellation of factors raised questions of how to develop these new states, both as an intellectual challenge and as a vital political question. The question was so important for the United States that the administration was willing to finance such studies.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the field of development studies attracted large numbers of researchers and emerged as a prominent academic field. Thus, not only did the novelty of the development process attract researchers to the subject, but also the opportunities that went with it. In what can be understood as almost oligopsonistic logic, political institutions have been having a say in the academic agenda. They can therefore be perceived as customers interested in “buying” theories (along with their accompanying explanations and recommendations). Because of the relatively small number of clients and their abundant resources such as financing and even power share—see Henry Kissinger—political institutions have had a certain ability to set the agenda of the sellers,<sup>11</sup> that is, the theoreticians.

<sup>9</sup> Other cases explored by the literature are the evolution of American psychology during World War II and the Cold War (Herman 1995). The shaping of comparative politics reasoned with Cold War era's motivations (Mitchell 1991:79–81). The shaping of communication studies in the post-World War II era (Simpson 1994). Another troubled period for the American academy was McCarthyism, see for example Lazarsfeld and Thielens (1958), Schrecker (1986), and Diamond (1992).

<sup>10</sup> According to testimony given to the House of Representatives by Lt. General Dick Jr., who was head of the department of research in the army, the army itself allocated 8.2 million dollars to these studies in 1965. It planned to fund a further 8.3 million dollars in 1966. Bear in mind too that other branches of the armed forces also funded the study of development, as did other government branches. The money paid for research centers like the Center for Research in Social Sciences, the University of Chicago's Center for Social Organization Studies, and others. One of the better known, and more controversial research projects financed by the armed forces was the Camelot Project, which was designed to identify the social factors behind instability and revolution and suggest a policy to counter them.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning here President Eisenhower's farewell address in which he laments this development: “...The free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity...The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded” (1961). His warnings, however, did not help to curb this process.

a Mephistophelean bunch, we must immediately add that even though this tendency, this oligopsonistic logic, may play a role in shaping our research agenda, it does not necessarily effect its interpretations and conclusions.

This now leads us to the paper's main theme, which is the role of theoretical concepts in shaping foreign policy. However, before we turn to that, I would first like to outline the evolution of the subdiscipline of development studies.

The academic subject of development lacked a cohesive theory. In fact, it reflected a world of disparate ideas devoid of consensus even on the definition of its dependent variable (What is development? Is it primarily an economic matter? A political one? Perhaps a combination of the two?). There was even less agreement on how to achieve development; who its Agents of change should be, the time span of change, etc. Researchers entered the field with their own particular background in sociology, economics, etc., and even brought along their own ideology. Conceptually, development was too vast an intellectual structure to generalize about, but too important to be ignored. Often development researchers would reach the field by way of sociology's system and functional theories as constructed in the early 1950s by sociologists like Talcot Parsons and Marion J. Levy, Jr. System and functional theories allowed researchers to analyze different societies by examining their basic units and functions. The societies they reviewed were thought of as sharing common basic features, and thus suitable, not just for case study analysis but also for in depth scientific comparison (Parsons 1951; Levy 1952; Parsons 1971). Renowned political scientists Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba introduced these theories into development studies (see, e.g., Almond 1970). However, many of the disciples of social system analysis provided a conservative and elitist interpretation of development. These researchers, whose names include David E. Apter, Lucian W. Pye, and Robert L. Heilbroner, saw development more in economic terms or terms of political efficacy (Heilbroner 1963; Apter 1965; Pye 1966). Since they perceived democracy as an unnecessary side effect of development or even a hitch in its progress, it is hardly surprising that Heilbroner (1963:22–30, 145–164, 167–183) determined the necessity of centralist rule for development and addressing social tensions.

In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum lay the Marxist-leaning interpretation subscribed to by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). The commission, which was chaired by prominent Argentine economist, Raúl Prebisch, reflected a different theory of the factors inhibiting economic development, and in turn political development. While other theories saw these obstacles as belonging to the domestic arena, the ECLA ascribed them to the global structure and the terms and conditions of world trade and world production. The ECLA saw these conditions as responsible for the exploitation of underdeveloped countries, and concluded that liberalizing world trade would not solve their problems. The solution it was held lay in the opposite direction; in focusing on inward-directed industry, protectionism, and social reform, particularly of the agrarian kind (1971: XL–XLVIII).

### **Rostow, the Theory of Modernization, and the Kennedy Administration**

From this brief description we learn that even though a common agenda was established, it still did not produce a unified interpretation. While many researchers were attracted to the field by the career opportunities with the incumbent administration and its bureaucracy, they in fact continued to construct their theories according to their own ideological viewpoint. Thus, we find some development theories orienting toward liberalism, others tending toward conservatism, and still others toward Marxism. Accordingly, different administrations were in a position to choose which theory they wanted to “buy,” which theory they preferred to inform their foreign policy.

When Kennedy was elected, the theory his administration picked was the liberal interpretation of development: Rostow's theory of modernization.<sup>12</sup>

Kennedy was inaugurated on January 22, 1961, at a time of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union. One of his campaign issues, in contention with Republican candidate, Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, was the so-called "Missile Gap." The claim, later found to be far from correct, was that the United States had lost its nuclear missiles advantage to its dangerous adversary, the Soviet Union. Apart from blaming this on the Republican administration represented by Nixon, and apart from instilling fear in the American public, this issue also served to increase tensions between the two nuclear superpowers. These tensions mounted during the first two years of the Kennedy administration and peaked following several crises including the failed "Bay of Pigs" invasion of Cuba, the 1961 Berlin crisis, when the wall was built, and most disastrous of all—the Cuban missile crisis of October–November 1962.<sup>13</sup>

Even more important to our subject was the hemispheric relations that were on the brink of collapse. In the wake of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor" policy of 1933–1945, when the United States successfully established a positive sense of cooperation between the United States and Latin America, relations with the southern neighbors deteriorated badly over subsequent administrations. The unwillingness of U.S. governments to develop the equivalent of the Marshall Plan for Latin America, and the United States focus on the Cold War and anticommunist agenda, led to feelings of ill treatment by Washington among the governments and citizens of Latin America. Thus, hemispheric relations declined and when then Vice-President Nixon visited several Central American states in the spring of 1958, he faced disaffection and violent, even life-threatening demonstrations in Venezuela. In December 1958, a committee chaired by Milton Eisenhower, President Eisenhower's brother, delivered its report and recommendations, centering on the need to help Latin America through financial investment. About a month later, in January 1959, the Cuban revolution ousted American backed dictator, Batista, and Fidel Castro took over. That revolution raised U.S. awareness of the need for change. Following those hectic months, Washington established the Inter-American Development Bank, which it funded with an initial investment of 350 million dollars. Congress too approved a grant of 500 million dollars for the Social Progress Trust Fund, with the aim of using it as an investment and development fund for Latin America.

However, because of the shaky situation in the western hemisphere, a drastic change of spirit was needed in the region along with a determined American president to carry it out. Kennedy was indeed resolved on this score, and turned to the academic world for help.

#### *Rostow as Theoretician*

In the intellectual structure from which the development theories of the 1960s sprang, Rostow was a leading theoretician, and more importantly to us, a leading Agent in translating the intellectual structure into concrete policy. Thus, he served as the institutional link between academia and politics, theory and practice.

First, Kennedy appointed him Deputy Special Assistant to the President for Security Affairs (under McGeorge Bundy), and later, in December 1961, he was made chairman of the Policy Planning Council at the State Department, which deals with

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<sup>12</sup> Other liberal interpretations of development were advanced by scholars like Myron Weiner and Joseph LaPalombra (1966), who stressed the importance of parties and party systems in the modernization process and thus demonstrated the liberal interpretation of development.

<sup>13</sup> After which the tensions between the two superpowers were somewhat alleviated, and several test-ban agreements were signed.



longer-term policy planning for the United States. Under Lyndon B. Johnson, Rostow replaced Bundy, becoming Special Assistant to the President for Security Affairs. In this capacity, Rostow tried further to develop his conceptions regarding the preferred U.S. policy toward Latin America, and played a prominent role in its execution.

Rostow's ideas are presented in his many writings, two of which are important particularly for this paper. The first important book commissioned by the executive branch was co-written with Max F. Millikan (Rostow 1964:XI). The book, *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy* was the articulation of specific policy recommendations based on a somewhat abstract theory (1957). The second important book is *The Stages of Economic Growth*, whose subtitle—*A Non-Communist Manifesto*—points to Rostow's political agenda in it (1961). The book, which was written mainly from the perspective of an economic historian, established the theoretical foundation for the liberal interpretation of development and boosted Rostow's academic prestige. In his recommendations, as in the other aspects of his writing, Rostow sets out his version of the theory of development, in other words the theory of modernization. His ideational framework is somewhat materialist although he does try to introduce other elements into it, including people's awareness, especially the elites, of their ability to change their environment through their resources. However, one needs to note that the material existence of those resources and their availability is a precondition for awareness (1961:17–35).

Rostow (1961:4–12) terms this awareness and the recognition of the availability of the resources, a Newtonian conception—in a kind of homage to the mechanistic and optimistic materialism from which postseventeenth century liberalism emerged—a belief in the human capacity, through rationality, to control the environment, and to some extent human fate too. In short, here we have a fine example of liberal belief in progress through action.

Contrary to the Marxist approach that emphasizes the conflictual relations in society, Rostow emphasizes the possibility of cooperation between different groups and elites, even suggesting the possibility of social harmony. This, according to Rostow (1988 [1963]:77), would lead to economic growth, and consequently to political development, in other words, modernization. Similarly, he argues that at the heart of the problem of underdevelopment lies not the gap between developed and developing countries, but the gaps within the developing countries themselves. These gaps, he suggests, must be addressed by introducing parameters of social justice and better-balanced development policies (1964:134–135; 1988 [1966]:110). He argues that groups and elites should collaborate on distributing resources to communities, and further the development of society as a whole and not just the prosperity of a few. This in turn would present opportunities for a rising young, new leadership; opportunities for social mobility, for eradicating gaps between city and village, and for empowering local communities (Millikan and Rostow 1957:28–34). Thus, we see that at the heart of Rostow's modernization theory rests the liberal expectation of gain spillover from the economic elites to the whole society, because of the expansion of the market economy.

The process of modernization just described would cause the erosion of traditional political institutions, though not to chaos, as the more conservative variants of the development theories suggest. On the contrary, according to Rostow, this process would lead to and culminate in the most modern and positive political institution of them all: democracy. Modernization, with its attendant growth and prosperity will provide the foundation for a modern, democratic society by enabling education, which in turn promotes social and political skills. In this manner, the rational potential of the human race can reach fruition and bestow the control of the environment and human destiny we spoke of above. In addition to

the universalization of education, communication between communities and institutions would also grow. One result of this would be the establishment of a common language, which is a prerequisite for democracy, as the common political institution. A common language would also facilitate the exchange of ideas and information, and encourage the optimal application of human rationality.

Moreover, besides contributing to the establishment of democracy,<sup>14</sup> modernization helps democratization in a more direct though abstract way. Rostow (1988 [1966]:111–119) argues that modernity itself is democracy and that modernization springs from the people's sense of community and of being active Agents in shaping the common life. This is the feeling and condition which he calls Newtonian and claims is the crux of democracy—active participation in politics as the framework for common life.<sup>15</sup> Embedded here is the assumption that if managed correctly, the economic development of a state will lead to political development, that is, democracy. This is so because the two spheres—economics and political development—autonomous and distinct as they intrinsically are, are interlinked and reciprocally promote one another.

Using this ideational and abstract structure, Rostow constructed a historical model with five stages of growth:

1. Traditional, pre-Newtonian society—a society is unaware of the human ability to manipulate the environment and control fate and therefore has limited production capabilities.
2. “Preconditions for take-off”—gradual awakening of Newtonian awareness, albeit limited to certain small groups in society.
3. “Take-off”—Newtonian awareness grips society leading to rapid economic growth.
4. Maturity—almost limitless production, optimal utilization of technology and development of entrepreneurship capabilities.
5. Age of high mass consumption (last stage of growth) (1961:4–12)—same as the culture targeted for criticism by the Frankfurt school and accorded almost utopian status by the liberal school of thought.<sup>16</sup>

Rostow employed this theoretical (and normative) framework and historical model to develop his recommendations for foreign policy—especially in his book *A Proposal*. His first argument was that by facilitating the process of modernization, America could greatly further her own national interests and secure and enhance the American way of life. Rostow suggests that his ideas need to be understood within the context of the theoretical debate on the essence of national interest. He does not limit national interests to physical and military strength, but links them very much to the ideational and normative ground, especially in the Cold War, as the superpowers were vying for influence over the developing countries (Millikan and Rostow 1957:5, 130–133; Rostow 1961:103–105; 1964:20–21, 161–163). In order to triumph, he argues, the United States must be willing to supply capital needed by developing countries to surmount the obstacles besetting their development, and to generate an atmosphere of international growth and trade while encouraging policies designed to protect infant industries. Repeatedly, Rostow emphasizes the importance of social justice, which he believed was the only means by which a state could prevent large gaps from occurring between the different

<sup>14</sup> There are alternative ways of using technology and accumulated wealth for the benefit of society and to encourage democracy, for example through investment in health, nutrition, housing, and transportation (see Millikan and Rostow 1957:37–38; Rostow 1988 [1966]:115).

<sup>15</sup> Here and in other writings we find that Rostow's democratic theory is closely related to the participatory or deliberative theory of democracy. His variation of democratic theory is more in line with liberalism than conservatism.

<sup>16</sup> In the more policy-oriented book, *A Proposal*, Millikan and Rostow (1957:43–48) merged the final three stages into one, which they termed “self-sustained growth.”

sectors of a society, that could impede social cooperation—a necessary condition for national growth, development and modernization. Another point that Rostow stresses is that the United States—like any outside power—would need to play an important role in these processes. He pointed out that while the superpower can help facilitate growth, etc., the decisive role, efforts and responsibility lay with the developing states themselves. Modernization, he reiterated was synonymous with democracy and with active political participation, neither of which could be imposed from the outside or through the exertion of paternalistic pressure (Millikan and Rostow 1957:55–78; Rostow 1961:48–49; 1964:142–143).

*Rostow the Practitioner*

Rostow's theory is a clear liberal variant of the development theory. Liberalism was especially attractive to Kennedy, a democrat president who entered the White House in full swing on a liberal ticket<sup>17</sup> hoping to enhance deteriorating American relations with the developing world, especially with Latin America. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that Kennedy sought guidance on development from the halls of academic scholarship. With his liberal agenda and beliefs, no wonder either that he preferred a more liberal version of development and inclined toward its most prominent writer, Rostow and his theory of modernization. Thus, Rostow came into a position where he could directly and significantly influence the decisions and implementation of American foreign policy, foreign policy on Latin America included.

However, at this point we also see the first limitation of the role of theoreticians as Agents of foreign policy formation. In fact, their role, impact and Agency are contingent upon the decisions and agenda of the administration and its ideological beliefs. It was not Rostow who determined Kennedy's agenda or priorities; that agenda had already been set and what remained was to identify people to help execute it, that is, people with similar attitudes and opinions, with similar ideology. In this sense, theoreticians like Rostow are only partially influential. Moreover, they are not autonomous Agents. Their role in shaping policy is one way that ideologies can influence policies.

So how do theories function in the world of political administration? Can they truly influence foreign policy once their agency has been subjected to ideological scrutiny by the administration and had their autonomy clipped? The answer is yes. A president's general plan and the ideas for his administration's agenda and its priorities are far from fleshed out when he enters the White House. Once he starts maneuvering in the complex world of international relations he will need help from different sources to resolve the ambiguities in his ideas and translate them into concrete policy (see also Shafer 1988:11–12, 44–47, 49–66; Latham 2000:17, 19, 108, 152). This is the route by which theoreticians and their ideas enter the policy-making arena to play their part as Agents.

The present case study provides a variety of evidence for Rostow's impact. The first and most obvious concerns Rostow's efforts in his various posts to develop policies that accord with his theoretical recommendations. He did so under Kennedy and once again under Johnson when the alliance for progress faltered, disintegrated and almost came to a standstill. Even then, he still sought funding for Latin America based on his theoretical priorities, and one might add that his efforts garnered considerable success.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> During the election campaign and early in his term, skepticism was voiced within liberal circles concerning Kennedy's true concerns, aims and agenda, and he was accused of political opportunism. Much of this skepticism—though by no means all of it—was overturned during his administration because of his activities in the domestic arena, and to a lesser extent to his foreign policy.

<sup>18</sup> Evidence of his wide-ranging and continuous efforts appears in the National Security files for the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. These show efforts to convince Kennedy to dedicate more time in his addresses

Rostow's success in disseminating his ideas into the world of practice is evident also in the language that was used in the addresses and writings of administration officials. Circulating his theoretical ideas for years, Rostow succeeded in framing the discourse and arguments used by people such as Kennedy and his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. As I will show, Rostow discursively framed the outlook of the Kennedy administration.<sup>19</sup>

For example, in his presidential campaign, Kennedy stressed the importance of Latin American development, and from the start—in his inaugural address of January 20, 1961—committed American foreign policy to democratization and development generally, and particularly to Latin America.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty. To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge: to convert our good words into good deeds, in a new alliance for progress, to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty. (Kennedy 1962 [1961]:7–8)

Kennedy (1962 [1961]:15–33; 1964 [1962]:3–20; 1964 [1962]:154–155; 1964 [1963]:159–163) determinedly maintained this positive stance throughout his administration, as seen in his repeated pledges to support plans and projects, and his reports on the success of the alliance for progress. However, apart from his general interest in matters south of the border, which can be ascribed to his general commitment or to the impact of developmental studies overall, there are also clear signs of Rostowian interpretations and concepts in statements made by Kennedy. One such example is the special message that Kennedy delivered to congress on March 22, 1961 regarding foreign aid. Here the President explains his view of the processes taking place in Latin America, his emphasis on development, and even the causality he perceived in those processes. Kennedy argued that poverty and social chaos were the ruination of existing social and political structures, that they invited totalitarianism and were a danger to the security of the United States. Kennedy's (1962 [1961]:146–147) conclusion, and the one he tried to convince congress to accept, was that American interests lay in trying to support the Latin America republics' efforts to modernize and thereby reach a "stage of self-sustained growth." In fact, Rostow and Millikan had used the term "stage of self-sustained growth" to describe the last stage of modernization. Kennedy's plan for facilitating this process also echoes Rostow's recommendations. Kennedy argued that development may be encouraged by aid and assistance, but it mostly requires self-help. He explained that outside financing would not suffice and that the states themselves had to mobilize their resources, introduce land and tax reforms, and invest in education and social justice (1962 [1961]:155). In other speeches, Kennedy (1962 [1961]:163–168; 1962 [1961]:169–174) emphasized the need to reform social structures and patterns in order to achieve democratic progress. It is important to realize that Kennedy did not just advocate any progress, but the type of progress that leads to democracy, and has a stable and just social structure at its foundation.

Rostow's influence seems even more clearly reflected in the statements and writing of Secretary of State Rusk. Rusk stressed the importance of equality, freedom, justice, and rule by consent, declaring that these had been the values and

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to development issues, to enlist support from Secretary of State Dean Rusk and other cabinet members for more aid to Latin America, to convince Johnson to authorize more loans to Brazil and Chile, to broaden the mandate given to the Assistant Secretary of State and U.S. Coordinator of the Alliance For Progress, and even to convince Johnson to meet the foreign ministers of Latin American states in Washington DC (The John F. Kennedy National Security Files, 1987:reel 4, frame 109; The Lyndon B. Johnson National Security Files, 1992:reel 2, frames 905–908, 947–950, 956, 993–1000, reel 3, frames 156–164, 713, 737, 804).

<sup>19</sup> A study dealing mainly with this issue is Pearce (2001).

norms of the American nation since its birth. The United States, said Rusk (1963 [1962]:1–10), was committed to these values and to their spread throughout the world. He also noted that the power of the United States depended on promoting democracy. But again, in addition to the general importance that Rusk grants these values, we see ideas identical to those of Rostow, where they probably originated. For example, Rusk's (1963 [1962]:150) emphasis on awareness of the process of development: Rusk's argument is almost identical to that of Rostow, namely that the technological revolution has raised awareness of the possibility of change in the future and change in the environment, and can thus boost the possibility of combating and defeating the cycle of poverty. And if Rusk's (1963 [1962]:52; 1963 [1961]:318–319) emphasis on the importance of education with regard to development seems somewhat predictable, other pronouncements are less so and seem to be taken straight out of Rostow's book; for example, the importance of community and the need for a sense of community and civil understanding of responsibility to encourage development modernization (1963 [1961]:32–33; 1963 [1962]:153–154). The same can be said regarding Rusk's emphasis on social reform, institutional and structural change, and the role of both society and state in achieving social justice and preventing large gaps from appearing in society. According to Rusk (1963 [1961]:111; 1963 [1962]:115–116; 1963 [1962]:153–154), these factors are vital for a country to achieve truly functional democracy and political stability. Echoes of Rostow's thoughts are also evident in Rusk's (1963 [1961]:32–33; 1963 [1961]:111) emphasis on the principle of self-help.

These similarities testify to Rostow's influence on the Secretary of State's philosophy of modernization and the important contribution he made to Rusk's outlook and cognitive map with regard to American foreign policy.

The third indication of Rostow's influence and the one that is necessary (though not sufficient in itself) to determine whether Rostow was influential in shaping foreign policy emerges from an analysis of the Kennedy administration's actual foreign policy on Latin America. This analysis will show whether Rostow's recommendations were actually applied or if they were merely rhetorical instruments. However, the problem with analyzing this policy is that its nature and particularly its results tend to be ambiguous. Thus, even if we accept that Kennedy was committed to the aims of the alliance for progress, which I believe he was, we nevertheless discover that there were three factors running counter to that commitment. The first factor was that apart from being loyal to the notion of the alliance, Kennedy also backed the U.S. commitment to fight the communist insurrection (Shafer 1988; Rabe 1989:105–122; for harsher criticism see Walton 1972). Secondly, despite the great pains and considerable investment that went into promoting the alliance for progress objectives, several American projects and policies in fact clashed with the goal of democratization. The third factor is that American efforts in Latin America were only partly productive and there are some who regard the alliance for progress as a total failure (Levinson and de Onis 1970:7–16; Gil 1971:244. A positive assessment is offered by Schlesinger, who served as a Special Assistant to President Kennedy (1965:788–793, 1001–1002, 1030). Most of the assessments though are more mixed in nature (Reidy 1966:137–145; Needler 1977:47–54; Lowenthal 1990; Martin 1994:214–236; Smith 1994:65–95, 113–145).

As already noted, the end of the Eisenhower era witnessed a change in American foreign policy on Latin America following the outbreak of unrest in that region. The administration responded by allocating resources to Latin America and with the Act of Bogotá in 1960. However, a new spirit was needed, which Kennedy, with his high-profile commitment and pledge, brought to the equation. Following his election and a transitional period, Kennedy appointed a task force to study and recommend new policies for Latin America. Adolph Berle, a veteran of the Roosevelt administration, was head of this task force, which included several academics. The group report, which was published in January 1961, called for a

renewed commitment to the principals of freedom, the rights of men and legitimate, elected governments (United States Department of State 1996:2–4). The task force also argued, echoing development studies, that the realization of these principles would depend on economic and social well being for all.

Two months after Kennedy's inauguration the diplomatic corps representing the Latin American states was invited to the White House where the president reaffirmed the undertaking in his inaugural speech in which he committed the foreign policy of the United States to the principals of democracy, freedom, honor, economic development, and social justice (Kennedy in Levinson and de Onis 1970:333–339). However, less than a month after this address, Kennedy's reputation and credibility suffered a serious blow following the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Skepticism within the Latin American republics resumed its normally high levels, and Kennedy was hard pressed to recoup their trust. As part of this effort, he established the peace corps in March 1961 that proved highly effective on all counts, through the "grass roots" efforts of American volunteers working in remote communities. With the peace corps at full steam and a battery of aid, loans, meetings, and conferences the alliance for progress started to take shape.

The alliance for progress was officially launched in August 1961 at the Punta del Este Conference. Problems emerged at the conference concerning differences in participant expectations and a verbal altercation erupted between Che Guevara and American delegate, Secretary of Commerce, C. Douglas Dillon. Apart from these problems and certain ambiguities in the official conference documents (viz., The Declaration of the Peoples of America and the Charter of Punta del Este), the alliance goals were agreed to as economic growth and greater equity in the distribution of education, health, etc. ("Declaration to the Peoples of America" in Levinson and de Onis 1970:350–355). The alliance started out as the main vehicle for realizing U.S. policy on Latin America and both parties nursed high expectations.

#### *Theoretician as Practitioner*

If we examine the expressions of Rostow's efforts and ideas in the discourse of the President and the Secretary of State, and study American efforts to develop a new foreign policy committed to democracy, evidence emerges as to the input of theoretical concepts in shaping foreign policy and their role in its development.

The first way that theoreticians and theoretical concepts help in shaping (and thereby influencing) foreign policy is by providing coherence. As we have noted, the president most likely enters the White House with a general agenda, and an indeterminate set of broad-spectrum ideas. Among other things, these are the product of his understanding of the world and ideological beliefs and it is the role of the theoretical concepts (with the theoreticians as their articulators) to translate these vague ideas into concrete perspective and policy. When the theoretician takes executive office—as Rostow did—they are in a position to sharpen generalized presidential directives into clearly defined instructions.

Theories also have a more subtle and profound effect on longer term planning.<sup>20</sup> When deliberating long-term issues, policy makers require a causal explanation of the processes they wish to effect. Without this, they cannot feasibly plan policies that can achieve the required outcome. They need to understand the variables and causes of a process, which is precisely where theories enter the frame. Theories provide policy makers with reasoned explanations of how to achieve a given change, and thereby enable focused policies to be developed. The various development theories are a perfect example of that. These theories offered the executive

<sup>20</sup> This was especially so with Rostow because of his role as chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council. However, he did not need an institutional position to have the kind of effect that he did.

branch an inherent logic and set of explanations for guiding development in the underdeveloped world. Kennedy chose the logic and justification of Rostow's modernization theory from the various development theories of his day in order to advance the democratization process in Latin America. As noted earlier, he chose Rostow because they both shared a similar ideological viewpoint.

The third way that theories function in the real world is that they legitimize policy goals and means (and delegitimize alternative policies). At times, such legitimation carries more impact than at others, especially during times of change or when debatable policies are at stake. When these two conditions coincide, the legitimating role of the theory becomes doubly important. Such was the constellation when Kennedy took power, bent on driving U.S. foreign policy toward the goal of democratization. While the turmoil in Latin America was clear enough, it was less clear that the solution required a "softer" U.S. touch in the "backyard" South American states. At the height of the Cold War, a tough stance toward South American states that veered to the left might have been a more commonsense solution. This could have been achieved by bolstering any conservative elites and military regimes seeking to maintain stability and order,<sup>21</sup> rather than by adopting the "soft" liberal approach of promoting social justice and democratization. The later might have caused instability, which the communists would then have exploited to increase their influence in Latin America. The same might have happened if a policy seemed to ignore the interests of the United States and its citizens for a more altruistic policy, or if U.S. government focus shifted from domestic to regional or international policy. These factors were all present in Kennedy's change in policy toward Latin America; the new approach was considered "softer" and altruistic. To counter these fears, Kennedy could, and in his public addresses, did, use Rostow's explanations and justification of modernization theory. With the appearance of scientific objectivism and reputation, Kennedy sought to convince the American public and American legislators of the importance and effectiveness of his policies and their congruence with overall U.S. interests and especially with the United States in the throes of a Cold War.

Thus, Kennedy did not try to argue the normative and liberal rectitude of his policies, but their scientific and objective legitimacy. In this sense, theories can be ascribed a certain political capital, which also grants them the role of agents in the political world, that is, in foreign policy and international relations.

However, and as noted above, not all went according to plan, and we must recognize the failures of the alliance for progress and its disintegration in order to understand more about the limitations of the Agency role of theoreticians and agency role of theoretical concepts.

### **The Disintegration and the Collapse of the Alliance for Progress**

Despite the deep commitment of the Kennedy administration to the alliance for progress, the administration nevertheless took various steps that conflicted with the aims of the alliance and the spirit of democracy. For Latin America, the 1960s represented a golden age of military and conservative coups d'état triggered by disappointment with the governance of the New Left democratic parties. Ten days after the Punta del Este conference, Brazilian President Jânio Quadros resigned, sparking a period of instability that ended two years later in a military coup in July 1964. The months following the conference witnessed similar coups in Argentina and Peru. During the eight years of the alliance existence, Latin America saw sixteen coups in all. Kennedy, and Johnson even more, based his approach to the new regimes and his willingness to recognize them on their ability to maintain

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<sup>21</sup> As we shall see, Kennedy did not abandon these considerations or policies, even when he acted to facilitate democratization.

order and stability, not their commitment to democratic principles or alliance aims. The indeterminacy and inconsistency of U.S. policy did not contribute to political stability<sup>22</sup> or democratization in Latin America. In other words, judging from the main criteria of the alliance, namely achieving stable democracies in Latin America, the alliance had failed, at least in the short term. Moreover, even in terms of its secondary aims of economic growth, social reform, education and health the organization had performed quite badly.

*What Went Wrong?*

Explanations for the alliance's poor results abound, and they include the unwillingness of many recipient states to put enough effort into the project; unwillingness to promote social reform, mainly because of elite fears that reform and Kennedy's ideas would encourage the radical left; a relative weakness of the middle classes and unrealistic expectations leading to bitterness and disappointment. Other explanations turn to the United States that had its own share of difficulties, such as lack of experience with a plan of this sort, an inflexible bureaucracy, and an irresponsive congress.<sup>23</sup> Another very important obstacle may be added to these, namely the ambivalence of Kennedy's priorities, his indeterminacy in deciding whether to side with the democratic forces, despite their being leftist and destabilizing, or to align with the authoritarian forces.<sup>24</sup>

These problems can be explained as a consequence of the Kennedy administration—as well as the theory of modernization—both overlooking two very important and related variables and conditions: (1) The lack of political will to implement the policy in Latin America in parts of the American political system, and (2) The cultural and social differences between the United States and Latin American societies. Introducing the recommended U.S. policies called for all members of the alliance to show a strong political will, to invest effort, and more so, to change their traditional social and political structure. However, the beneficiaries of the existing structures in Latin America were the very elites responsible for implementing the changes and reforms, which meant that they could oppose and resist the process of political and social change. In brief, what they wanted was economic development without the political price tag of social reform. At least some of the elites' fears are understandable and even predictable when we consider the cultural difference between the United States and the more traditional, conservative and elitist Latin America. However, these cultural factors did not feature in modernization theory, and thus unsurprisingly were absent also from the Kennedy administration's calculations.

The American congress also resisted Kennedy's policies for the reason discussed above, namely that they were too "soft" and altruistic.<sup>25</sup> If the presence or absence of political will in Latin America relates to cultural and social issues, the absence of

<sup>22</sup> In 1962, the United States recognized the new military government of Argentina, but refused to recognize that of Peru until civil government was reestablished. In 1963, the United States recognized the new governments of Guatemala and Ecuador, but refused to recognize that of the Dominican Republic. In British Guinea, the Kennedy administration tried to oust Prime Minister Jagan who was elected in a free and fair election, but held Marxist views.

<sup>23</sup> Kennedy asked Congress to approve an aid budget of three billion dollars annually for three years. Congress reduced the amount by six hundred million dollars per year. It also devised an annual approval mechanism that made it difficult for policy makers in the recipient countries to plan long-term projects.

<sup>24</sup> To this can be added the fact that Rostow too suffered from this dualism. On a couple of occasions he supported a militaristic position, which weakened his efforts toward democratization. This was particularly so in the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. One might argue that the positions he held in the administration had a "hawkish" impact on his views, although without fully undermining his previous commitment (see The John F. Kennedy National Security Files: reel 4, frames 897, 950, 984, 993, reel 5, frames 43, 224–237, 277–280; Schlesinger, Jr. 1965:341, 545–550).

<sup>25</sup> One can recognize the shared reasons for the lack of political will in Latin America and the United States to implement the measures needed by the Alliance for Progress: fear of Communism and its spread in the continent.



political will in the American political system relates to American domestic considerations,<sup>26</sup> which are also missing from the conceptualization of modernization theory.

Modernization theory deals with the requisite conditions for generating development, not with the conditions needed to garner political support for those changes. Moreover, as a theory of international politics and international economics it is not even expected to deal with the conditions of this political support. Thus, and I will question this point of view below, one can say that the collapse of the alliance for progress was not the failure of the theory of modernization, but the failure of its execution. The political system was supposedly responsible for ensuring the right domestic conditions for carrying out modernization theory's suggestions based on the theory's analysis of existing conditions, and for determining which changes are needed to achieve the desired results. Regardless of whether or not the theory is to blame, ultimately, these deficient variables all contributed to the breakdown of Kennedy's policies on Latin America.

Another major reason for the disintegration of the alliance was Kennedy's succession by Johnson. Despite Kennedy's ambiguity over Latin American policy, he nevertheless maintained his commitment to the alliance and its causes. He had initiated it and invested a large part of his credibility in it. Following Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, and his succession by Johnson, America's commitment to the alliance for progress weakened, waned, and finally died away. Neither Rostow's appointment as Special Assistant to the President for Security Affairs nor the administration's repeated announcements regarding the alliance<sup>27</sup> helped it retain its high priority on the administration agenda. America's principle foreign policy considerations were stemming communist expansion and the commercial interests of the private sector. The replacement of Edwin Martin by Thomas Mann as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs brought with it the "Mann doctrine," which gave priority to anticommunist measures and commercial interests as opposed to development, modernization and democratization.<sup>28</sup> Following this doctrine, the United States withdrew its aid to Peru in 1963 and began pressuring for favorable contracts for American oil companies. On the same basis, the United States recognized the military governments of the Dominican Republic and Honduras, and probably encouraged Brazil's military coup in July of that year. In 1965, with civil war threatening American interests in stability, Johnson dispatched the Marines to the Dominican Republic—for the third time during the twentieth century. Thus, Latin America became a casualty of the change in priorities of a new American president. Johnson's priorities were not only to combat communism, but also promote American domestic concerns as well. His main focus was American society, which appeared to be heading for internal conflict, and to this end he tried to reproduce Roosevelt's New Deal with his Great Society project. Apart from these considerations, American involvement in Vietnam escalated into a full-scale war during the five years of Johnson's tenure, with large numbers of soldiers killed, and a growing need for finance and administrative attention. The Vietnam War ultimately wrecked Johnson's plans, along with his chances of re-election, paving the way for Nixon, and the termination of the faltering alliance for progress by his administration.

<sup>26</sup> I am not going to treat here the interesting and important question of the political skills needed to mobilize support for one's own policy or the failings of the Kennedy administration in mobilizing this support. It is not in the scope of this paper (apart from the use Kennedy made of the modernization theory in trying to convince Congress).

<sup>27</sup> For examples, see the declarations of Rusk and Gordon "Support for a New Phase of the Alliance for Progress, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs," United States Congress. House Committee on Foreign Affairs (1967:3–20); "Nomination of Lincoln Gordon to be Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs," United States Congress. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (1966:1–2, 25–26).

<sup>28</sup> For the principles of the doctrine see his address of June 7, 1964—Mann in Needler (1977:145–153).

*Theory Confronts Reality*

Some of the reasons for the demise of the alliance for progress may be considered coincidental, and therefore a reflection of the complexity of world politics, processes and events.<sup>29</sup> These reasons, and above all Kennedy's assassination, his succession by Johnson, and the descent into the Vietnam War, were outside the scope of the modernization theory; as coincidental events, they could not be part of theories that by their nature deal with patterned processes. However, it was not just the coincidental that fell outside the realm of the modernization theory; the same may be said regarding issues that fell outside the theory because they were not in its scope, for example, the cultural and social differences between the United States and Latin America, and U.S. domestic politics.<sup>30</sup> Thus, although these variables had no bearing on modernization theory itself, they nevertheless undermined the usefulness of its recommendations as a policymaking guide. They were not part of those theories either as independent variables or as dependant variables nor were they part of the evaluation criteria used for validating the theories as theories. Thus once theories become involved in the complexities of the world either through theoreticians or through theoretical concepts, once they become participating agents, they cannot withstand the trial of complexity. Like so many other social processes, they become subject to an infinite number of variables, and to unavoidable disintegration.

Now this is an intrinsic quality of theories, and even more so, of the relationship between theory and reality. One of the requirements of theories is to be parsimonious. Social science theories are required to explain as much as possible using as little as possible. Thus, theories must suggest a small number of independent variables to explain a large number of dependent ones.

Because of this epistemological requirement, theories by nature will be at odds with the ontological complexity of the social world. This is an inherent contradiction owing to the disparity in nature between the realms of theory and reality. In other words, a lack of fit is inevitable and problems will invariably emerge when attempts are made to execute theoretical recommendations. In some spheres, the contrast is sharper and more pronounced, and usually the disintegration of the theory-based policies is more rapid (in international relations and foreign policy for example). However, in some spheres, like the economy, policy implosion will be less complete.

Because social science tends to be parsimonious in all disciplines, we can infer that the cause of the difference in the endurance of the policies is inherent differences in the social spheres involved. Thus, the economy has few dominant variables, mainly profit interest and the expectation of rationality. The political sphere, however, and especially international politics, contains hardly any dominant variables.<sup>31</sup> Thus, there will be a starker difference between parsimonious epistemology and complex ontology and policy disintegration will usually take place faster.

But even this qualification is limited. First, because even in the economy, the gap between the parsimonious theories and the complex reality nevertheless exists

<sup>29</sup> Or as Roy Bhaskar (1979:27, 57) prefers to designate it, human society is an "open system."

<sup>30</sup> This is the source of much criticism of development theories as a whole and of the modernization theory in particular. Criticism centers on the claim that development theories are reductionist, economist and ethnocentric; that they tried to explain the causes of development, or the reasons for democratization in terms of two or three factors; that they argued that economic progress will almost automatically bring political and social relief, and that in the case of modernization theory, the cure will take the form of democracy (see Silvert 1963:91-106; Willner 1964:468-482; Mazrui 1968:69-83; Somjee 1986).

<sup>31</sup> However, we must bear in mind that realist theories of international relations have tried to stress the dominance of the will to power and the ability of rationality, and therefore construct theories that deal with complexity in the same way as the theories of economics (see for example Morgenthau 1978:4-15).

although it is less wide than in politics. One only needs to remember, for example, the behavior of the stock market in times of crises in order to recognize the existence of the irrational in the economic sphere. Secondly, the different spheres in the social sciences are closely linked and one cannot limit theories to one sphere or another; politics affects the economy, and the economy influences politics.<sup>32</sup> Thus, even if the gap between theory and reality in the economic sphere is less than the gap between theory and reality in the political world, and hence the theoretical recommendations are supposedly more in accordance with the world of practice, we can nevertheless expect the effect of other variables to interfere with the economy and at some point cause theory-based recommendations to fail the test of reality and cause the failure of the recommended policy.

Before we reach the final thoughts of this section and the concluding section itself, we first must explicate a fundamental assumption of the paper, which is that the construction of a theory does not end at the table of the theoretician when she finishes writing it, nor in her published paper. At the risk of reifying an abstract entity, I attribute to a theory something akin to a political life cycle (see also Daston 2000). It is born out of a complex process of imagination and cognition, but then (in a more sociological reading of science), the theory is laid out in front of us to be read, taught, interpreted, criticized, and even implemented. That is to say, the process of theorization never ends with the publication of the theory, instead, it represents an endless effort to establish a community around it, a community that will adhere to it, work with it, and endeavor to broaden its scope—both within the theoretical realm, and outside of it, into the world of practice.<sup>33</sup> Hence, in the case of Rostow's modernization theory, as with other similar cases, one cannot claim that the theory was accurate but that the policy it recommended failed because of misinterpretation or bad execution of its recommendations. Even if a theory is considered accurate—although I would argue that a theory cannot possibly be accurate—it cannot be divorced from its application in the world of practice. In this sociological reading of the world of theory and academy, there is no clear separation between theory and implementation; theory invites implementation and has a role in it and once that is so, we cannot “blame” policy failure entirely on the world of practice. Sociologically speaking, theory and implementation are too close and the process of theory construction consists of writing it, publishing it, broadening its circle of readers, and trying to ensure that it has some influence. Thus, the construction of a theory<sup>34</sup> is too close to the experiment in its implementation, and the failure of recommended policies is the failing of both of these activities.

If we consider these last claims, we become aware of another crucial limitation of the role of theoretical concepts in foreign policy formation. It is not just that theoretical concepts are not autonomous and that they serve as vehicles for ideologies; once they enter the world of practice, no matter how accurate they appear according to academic criteria, no matter how objectively we conceive them, they are bound to be ephemeral; they are bound to fail because of the immanent contrast between their parsimonious epistemology and the complex ontology of reality. But having said that, it can also be said that theories do leave their mark on history, they try to explain reality, and at the same time have some impact upon it.

<sup>32</sup> This can also be seen from Rostow's academic career, which hovered between economic history, foreign policy research and international relations theory. One field led him to another, and vice versa.

<sup>33</sup> By this, I do not mean that every theoretician hopes to change the world. However, once a theory is published, the theoretician that constructed it has no control over its destiny. It is there to be read by others, and some of those readers may themselves hope to change the world.

<sup>34</sup> At least a successful theory: we can say that an unknown theory, just like an unpublished one, is a failed one.

### Conclusions

This exploration of Rostow's modernization theory and its role in Kennedy's administration points to a complex series of relationships between ideology, theory, and practice.

- A. The first relationship involves the influence of political practice on academic efforts to construct theories. Sometimes, academic theorizing will be dependent upon political needs. If the political system is considered a potential customer for theories, and if that system is willing to fund academic inquiry, academics will be more inclined to advance theories that reflect the interests of the political system. An oligopsonistic logic operates in the academic process of identifying a new field of exploration. In the area of development studies at least, one important factor responsible for encouraging this academic subdiscipline was the Cold War, the interest it sparked in the political system vis-à-vis the developing world, and the willingness of the political system to spend huge sums on that work. The availability of resources, plus in some cases, the possibility of gaining a foothold in the corridors of power, attracted many theoreticians to the subject of development, leading to the growth of the subdiscipline.
- B. The second relationship between ideology, theory, and practice is that between ideology and theory. We find evidence of this relationship in the diversity of development theories that sprouted up when development theories were in their heyday. It also suggests that whereas the political attractiveness of the subject causes the development field to flourish, what mostly affects theory content is the ideological commitment of the theoreticians. As E. H. Carr (1964:5) wrote, "Political thought is itself a form of political action. Political science is the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be." The relationship between ideology and theory is caused by the complexity of the social and political environment. Ideological commitment is something that can help us cope with this complexity and explain reality in theoretical terms, that is with as few variables as possible. Individuals see the world through the prism of their ideological assumptions. This helps them when deciding what is more or less important, and what is very unimportant. In terms of the field of development, we have seen here how ideological assumptions and views have helped theoreticians to construct their theories. Thus we find conservative development theories, liberal development theories, and Marxists development theories, all of which have struggled to attain prominence in the academic world, and no less so, in the world of practice.
- C. That this is so brings us to the third type of relationship between ideology, theory, and practice, the influence of theory on the world of practice. On the one hand, the relationship between ideology and theory opens up to theoreticians, and more subtly to theoretical concepts, the possibility of influencing policy makers through ideological resemblance. On the other hand, this relationship represents the first restriction on the Agency of theoreticians, who are not autonomous Agents, but a sophisticated and indirect part of the influence ideologies have on shaping foreign policy.

Theoreticians exert influence in three important ways:

- (1) By articulating general ideas into more concrete and operative ones.
- (2) By suggesting causal explanations that are vital when formulating long-term plans.
- (3) By offering arguments that are supposedly scientific and objective in order to legitimize debatable new policies (and delegitimize rejected policies).

However, once theories enter the complex world of politics they are affected by this complexity. They fall prey to the complexity of the world of practice, and so are

destined to be ephemeral. Despite their short lives, however, theories do have some impact on the real world. This means that theories have political consequences, and therefore that theoreticians have moral responsibilities. Thus, the validity of a theory cannot be judged solely according to academic criteria or based on the few factors they have dealt with parsimoniously. We also need to appreciate the normative and ideological content of a theory, and to no less extent, its efficacy in providing foreign policy guidelines. These three criteria are of critical importance: the first two allow us to judge the morality of the theory-generated policy, and the third to judge how practical the policy will be, and its chances of enduring. For example, the theory and policy it produces should be flexible enough to maximally address the complexity of the social and political world. It is worth stressing here that while theory is limited as a policy guide, it nevertheless provides a viable tool for confronting the complexities of political reality by offering informed knowledge of processes and causes. At the same time, however, we should be suspicious if theory is presented as the ultimate locus of wisdom, an infallible policy mentor. The rise and fall of modernization theory demonstrates the consequences of theoretical pretentiousness coupled with a lack of humility.

Related to the above is another important conclusion concerning the capacity of international relations theory for objectivity. The Kennedy administration case examined here shows that when a theory is applied to political practice—that is to the subject of its research—a blurring of the dichotomous distinction between object and subject, researcher and research, can ensue. As Gadamer reminds us, this distinction is a vital precondition for objectivity. Thus, Smith is right in attributing real and moral consequences to the way we theorize this social and political world in which we—the theoreticians—are not outside observers, but active inhabitants. We thus learn from this case to exercise caution when attributing objectivity to international relations theories. Moreover, we must show still greater caution when politicians or theoreticians present a policy as the most scientific and objectively grounded basis for dealing with the realities and complexities of world politics. It may just be an exercise in manipulating the public into naïve followers.

But what are the consequences of pointing out the impossibility of objectivity? Is this merely another exercise in postmodernist antifoundationalist rejection of the notions of true and false and a celebration of the fragmentation of the sciences? While I am emphatic that the criticism of postmodernist thinkers regarding the exclusions and inequalities in the current social order is just, I am more cautious about the possible consequences of moral and epistemic relativism based on antifoundationalist fragmentation. Dismissing objectivity as a plausible foundation without providing a proper alternative is simply a dead end. If we want a way out of this relativist radicalism, we must rethink the relationship between morality and research and between ethics and the social sciences as a vocation.

After acknowledging the impossibility of objectivity, we must seek a proper substitute for the ethic of objectivity: the ethic that has accompanied us since the birth of the modern positivist social sciences in the nineteenth century. It seems clear now that objectivity is not viable and cannot act as the universal foundation for scholastic endeavors. My proposal is to replace the ethic of objectivity with a normative ethic. Following the Kantian tradition, I understand *morality* and the *normative ethic* to be systematic assertions of right and wrong that are universally applicable. Therefore, I claim, they have the potential to serve as the foundation of science. I understand *ethics* to be systematic rules of right and wrong conduct that are restricted in their application, for example, professional ethics such as the academic ethic of objectivity. Above I suggested that we need to introduce morality into the process of evaluating theories, since theories have political consequences and I also suggested that theoreticians have a moral responsibility for the consequences of their theoretical creations. In line with these two arguments, I also wish to suggest that a more suitable academic ethic would be a normative one, one that embraces the universal

moral claims of right and wrong. A normative ethic of this nature would also be better placed to recognize the ideological agenda of theoreticians and the political consequences of theory construction. The claims here lead to the conclusion that morality is indeed the proper ethic of social science vocation and that it is a more suitable foundation for the social sciences than the naïve belief in objective positivism. The universality of morality can provide the foundation and mediate the fragmentation caused by postmodernism. In other words, a normative ethic could serve science as the foundation for a pluralistic cooperative search for true and false (correspondence to truth), facilitated by notions of right and wrong (correspondence to right).

As it stands now, our professional ethic of objectivity supersedes our moral commitment as human beings. Introducing morality as the proper academic ethic will reconcile our ethical commitment as researchers and our moral and normative commitment as human beings, and more so, as active inhabitants of this social and political world.

One should not accept these remarks as final, simply as an opening for further debate and exploration. There are three reasons for this: first, these are only preliminary remarks that require much more theoretical investigation, elaboration and refinement. Most crucial, of course, is to learn how to reconcile correspondence to truth with correspondence to right. Second, even if we accept the remarks as valid, we still need to examine their methodological consequences. What is the right method for conducting rigorous social science that is committed to morality? Third, accepting morality as the proper common foundation leads to yet more questions, such as the existence of a universal morality, and if this exists, to questions regarding its content and justification. The first of these questions turns meaningless by the Kantian understanding of morality as universal by definition. Yet, even by adhering to the Kantian understanding—as I did above—the exact content of the universal moral assertions of right and wrong remains contested, and the question regarding its justification lingers unresolved. There are no generally accepted answers to these immense questions. However, this should not deter us from seeking them, especially since the alternative ethic of objectivity is baseless.

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