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Anthony D'Agostino. *The Rise of Global Powers: International Politics in the Era of the World Wars.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. viii + 559 pp. $29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-15424-6; $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-19586-7.

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From the start, it is clear that Anthony D'Agostino's *The Rise of Global Powers* is hunting for big game. "Does a system of great powers," he asks, "necessarily imply a struggle for world primacy? Do great states merely hold onto what is theirs, or do they reach for more?" (p. 1). These are no small issues, having occupied the attention of scholars from Thucydides and Machiavelli to Hans J. Morgenthau and John J. Mearsheimer.[1] With an eye to current debates surrounding the rise of China, India, and others, D'Agostino seeks fresh insight by examining the "mysteries of alignment" among the great powers in the first half of the twentieth century (p. 3).

The Rise of Global Powers brings a wide range of historical data to bear in a detailed reexamination of great power behavior. The work invites other scholars to revisit the period of the world wars to establish when states are prone to expand and why other states balance these efforts. These topics, central to scholarship during the Cold War, have increasingly dropped off the academic radar. D'Agostino's work rightly calls for a return to the basics, particularly in light of current policy discussions. That said, the work only partially succeeds in answering its underlying questions, and it is never wholly clear whether and why great powers struggle for dominance. This does not vitiate the value of the work, but does call for weighing the arguments at the heart of the volume.

The remainder of this review proceeds in several parts. I first attempt to summarize D'Agostino's central thesis and provide an overview of the history. Next, I highlight the main theoretical and empirical tensions within the work. As a political scientist, I am not wholly qualified to interrogate D'Agostino's historiography, and so will focus largely on the conceptual aspects of the project. I conclude by noting future areas of research that other scholars may wish to pursue on the basis of D'Agostino's volume.

The Rise of Global Powers argues that leading states–the great powers–are generally compelled to expand and grow their power. From the time of Christopher Columbus onward, the growing economic and military power of the European great powers pushed them to compete for territory, power, and influence "in the world outside for areas they scarcely knew from maps." Joined in the nineteenth century by the United States and Japan, European great power politics took on global dimensions as leading states looked to "transcend the status of merely continental powers and rise to the status of 'world powers"' (p. 11). This competition reached its apogee in the twentieth century. With most of the globe already developed or colonized by 1900, world politics became increasingly tense: great powers could no longer readily manage their rivalries in the traditional fashion by using territorial and economic "compensation" to accommodate those states losing out in the search for power (p. 6).

Aside from competition, expansion complicated international politics by undercutting state incentives to align and balance against rising threats. There were two components to this phenomenon. First, given global horizons, state interests in different parts of the world did not necessarily overlap. Great Britain and France, for example, could simultaneously be rivals in Africa and Asia, and potential allies in Europe. Due to these cross-cutting interests, balancing alliances against rising states formed slowly and hesitantly. Rising states could therefore hope to take advantage of dissension within potential balancing coalitions to find or create opportunities for expansion. Second, and relatedly, because states sought to grow their power at most times, they faced incentives to conserve most of their resources by buying off threats with moderate (but insufficient) economic or territorial concessions, rather than risking it all by directly balancing. Combined, balancing broke down as alignments waxed and waned in different regions at different times, thereby creating windows of opportunity for expanders to jump through. Critically, D'Agostino treats

the tendency to play states off one another, expand when possible, and align against competitors only as a last resort as evidence that balancing "is not so much a mechanism as an option, and usually a desperate one at that" (p. 492). In this, he argues against scholars who propose that balances of power, whether by design or default, tend to form and reform across time and space.[2]

The bulk of D'Agostino's work is devoted to showing how the process of expansion and alignment played out and interacted across the globe from circa 1895 to 1945. This effort takes the reader from "the scramble for concessions in the Far East" before the First World War, through the debates over how to manage a rising Germany before 1914, and to the turmoil of great power politics (including U.S. and Soviet policy) in the interwar period, and concludes with an analysis of great power politics during and immediately after World War Two (p. 48). Throughout, *The Rise of Global Powers* emphasizes the growth of state ambitions and horizons from a purely continental framework to something (as the title suggests) global in scope. In the process, world politics became as much about the maintenance of a rough balance of power among the leading states as an ideological contest between competing views of how economic and political life within and among the states should be organized.

The Rise of Global Powers advances an ambitious thesis and covers an impressive amount of historical terrain. At the same time, several of the work's core arguments are contestable theoretically and empirically. First, and as noted earlier, underlying D'Agostino's work is the proposition that great powers are prone to expand and seek primacy. Although an intuitively straightforward argument, it is not always clear from the analysis why great powers are compelled to maximize their power. At times, expansion is presented as a rational effort by the great powers to provide security for themselves in a highly competitive international environment. This is starkest early in the book when D'Agostino argues that "in the course of the scramble for concessions [in Asia], the European great powers came to realize that … they could survive only by moving up a notch to the status of world powers" (p. 6). At other times, however, the work presents power-maximizing behavior as more idiosyncratic. Thus readers are elsewhere told that the pre-1914 expansion was driven by "the fears of leading statesmen" who "perceived the very existence of their states to be under threat from Satanic revolutionary forces" and were influenced "by the ideology of Social Darwinism" (p. 32). Why states are coolly calculating actors focused on ensuring their security at Time A, and yet a-strategic blunderers at Time B is never explored.

This discrepancy is important. Understanding whether, when, and why the great powers want to grow their power is a core lacunae in the field of international relations. Political scientists in particular have spent a long time debating whether and when great powers expand because of fear, greed, ideology, or strategic necessity.[3] These questions are also, as D'Agostino notes, central to ongoing debates surrounding the rise of such great powers as China and India. Yet, because *The Rise of Global Powers* never clarifies why states are prone to expansion, whether this behavior made strategic sense (either at the time or retrospectively), and when states tend to calculate when expansion will pay, the work does not fully hit its intended mark. Without these answers, readers are unable to judge whether great powers are inherently prone to expansion (such that modern politics are moving toward a pre-1914 equilibrium), or whether rapacious expansion is a particular element of pre-1945 world politics. It also suggests that the security dilemma may have played a larger role in world politics than the author allows. If this is the case, however, then the book's central thesis is more contestable and the implications for current policy debates far less stark.[4] Further analysis of why states pursue power might have buttressed the book's central claims and analytic thrust.

Reinforcing the ambiguity of great power behavior is the related issue of whether power maximization ever stops. Carried to its logical conclusion, power maximization and expansion should cease only if a state becomes a global hegemon and secures international primacy.[5] *The Rise of Global Power*, however, suggests that there are "sated" powers content with the international status quo, disinterested in further expansion, and focused on maintaining what they presently control. According to D'Agostino, Britain seems to be one such state before the First World War; France appears to be another in the interwar period.[6] Whether either enjoyed international primacy is debatable–at best, they may have been regional hegemons. Still, this implies an important but unexplored limit to the expansion tendency. One wants answers to a series of questions: Why do states become sated powers? What are the hallmarks of a sated power? Do sated nations stop attempting to grow their power for once and for all, or do they simply become more circumspect in their efforts? Answers would help explain why states with significant investment in the international status quo nevertheless risked their very survival in two world wars. As it is, *The Rise of Global Powers* implies that states are given to expansion up to an unspecified point, after which they become sated powers. Playing up this

implication would have refined the work's thesis and historical narrative.

The tension between power maximization and satiation is particularly acute in the description of the early interwar period. The volume pays significant attention to the seeming fallout between Britain, France, and the United States in the aftermath of the First World War. In D'Agostino's rendering, Britain and France opposed the growth of American influence and the introduction of Wilsonian diplomacy into European politics. Balancing against the United States helped set the stage for the United States' interwar estrangement from Europe and a nascent Anglo-American rivalry for naval and economic power. At the same time, Franco-British cooperation ceased as each state sought to balance the other: Britain looked to revive Germany as a counterweight to France, while France looked to a bloc of Eastern European states to sustain its hegemony in Europe and prevent a German resurgence.

Are these the acts of sated powers focused on maintaining what they have? Conversely, do they reflect an effort to maximize relative power by weakening others? The history supports both arguments as balancing can be seen as either defensively or offensively motivated. Other explanations are also possible. Might, for instance, the behavior reflect a search for security on the part of Britain, France, and the United States, but a search fraught with buck-passing and free-riding?[7] This latter explanation would view the discord between Britain, France, and the United States as part of a process aimed at fostering international stability, preventing German revisionism, and avoiding a second war–not mutual balancing. Again, the evidence can be interpreted in this manner. Disentangling the competing accounts calls for a more precise specification of the argument and discussion of the evidence that does (and does not) support the thesis.

Because the same evidence can support multiple interpretations of what states were balancing, D'Agostino's history raises a further question: when and why do states align against other actors? Other scholars have identified variables, such as the aggregate distribution of power, "fine grained" military power, "perceived threat," and ideology, as relevant drivers of balancing behavior.[8] To what extent were these factors at work in the period of the world wars–what drove alignment?

Despite its stated interest in the "mysteries of alignment," *The Rise of Global Powers* advances unclear answers to this question (p. 3). At times, the work suggests that alignments form against powerful states pure and simple. This is clearest in D'Agostino's discussion of the Anglo-American naval rivalry and collapse of what he sees as nascent Pan-European efforts to balance the United States before the Great Depression. At other points, however, alignment is presented in ideological terms–notably when the author asks "which side would the Atlantic democracies choose?" in the run-up to the Second World War–and at others as some combination of ideology, military power, and aggregate resources (p. 307). Each factor may play some role, and it is plausible that different variables drove alignment decisions at different times. Nevertheless, one wishes for additional discussion of which factors mattered more or less at different times and what the author sees as the dominant trend.

Such a discussion might help clarify what other scholars treat as the central alignment puzzle of the era, namely, why alignments were tight and inflexible before 1914, yet weak and lackadaisical before 1939.[9] As it is, treating the variables equally muddies the history. Despite the Anglo-American naval rivalry and some European efforts to counter American influence, it seems that the strongest alignments before 1939 formed against an economically and militarily powerful Germany in the heart of Europe that threatened the survival of other great powers. By extension, these should be the alignments against which others are judged. Emphasizing how other alignments of the period compared with those against Germany, why they looked the way they did, and what prompted the realization that state interests could be improved by balancing would have grounded the project conceptually and empirically.

Ultimately, the book's discussion of the alignment process plays out in a way that the author may not have intended. Although D'Agostino proposes that balancing and alignment were "not at all straightforward, never mechanistic, nor even always obviously logical," the reviewer is instead struck by the degree to which logical alignments repeatedly formed (p. 3). In the face of strong, proximate, and pressing threats to national security, powerful states repeatedly came together in coalitions with economic and military capabilities that stood a good chance–at least on paper–of containing the threat. If the minimal goal of alignment was to prevent one state from readily dominating a geographic region, the coalitions that formed before 1939 were logical. The delays and false starts in countering expansion, which the author takes as evidence that alignments were never straightforward, can be accounted for if security-minded states try to free-ride on the balancing behavior of others and will only commit themselves to balanc-

ing when they face a profound incentive to do so.[10] The frequency with which alignments came together, meanwhile, suggests something approaching "mechanistic" behavior among the great powers–if not automatic, then certainly not haphazard. At the end of the day, the history offered in *The Rise of Global Powers* suggests that alignment is actually close to mechanistic and strategic once one asks why states align in the first place and notes the frequency with which alliances formed against real threats to state survival.

Lastly, no review of D'Agostino's book is complete without highlighting what may prove to be the most provocative of all its claims, namely, how the period of intense rivalry among the great European powers came to end. If the era of the world wars was fraught with war among the great powers, the postwar period has been surprisingly free of conflict. For D'Agostino, this resulted from the Allied victory in World War Two and growth of Soviet and American power. By 1941, the United States and Soviet Union were the principle "revolutionary" powers dedicated to visions of international politics that did not emphasize expansion, imperial conquest, and war (p. 393). By 1945, having expanded to global proportions, the two became "sated powers that had already expanded enough, and that needed a stable international order" (p. 472). Détente and engagement thus replaced war and expansion as the basis of international politics.

There is much to commend the idea that powerful states have less reason to grow their power through war than weaker states. Nevertheless, one wonders about the accuracy of his description of the post-1945 settlement. On one level, nuclear weapons receive surprisingly little attention in this framework despite their transformative effects on strategic calculations. More important, although *The Rise of Global Powers* rightly notes the absence of great power war since 1945, a case can be made that American and Soviet actions after 1945 were hardly paradigms of sated behavior. American brinksmanship during its period of nuclear dominance, Soviet expansion in the third world, and the United States' efforts to encourage the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and USSR itself in 1989-91 all raise questions as to whether the emergence of the United States and USSR was really as revolutionary and transformative as D'Agostino's work claims.[11] The post-1945 world seems to share many similarities to the world that D'Agostino describes before 1945; the major difference is the pursuit of state goals by means short of war. This difference itself might be due to American and Soviet satisfaction with the status quo, but it may have just as much to do with the stabilizing effects of nuclear weapons and bipolarity, the prospect of a destructive World War Three, or something else altogether.[12] *The Rise of Global Powers* offers a powerful argument, but it is not fully persuasive.

Still, the preceding discussion should not detract from what is an interesting and provocative piece of scholarship. D'Agostino's work successfully pushes scholars to reengage with the many historical and theoretical puzzles surrounding great power politics in the 1895-1945 period. To what extent did balancing and alignment proceed in a manner similar to the nineteenth century? Were great powers driven to expand similarly at all times?- What can we learn from the diplomacy of the period, and how does this period compare to those immediately preceding the wars? Why was it that the United States and USSR emerged as the two superpowers after 1945, and how did they manage to keep the peace for the next forty-five years? *The Rise of Global Powers* provides a theoretical and historical basis for other scholars to explore such a rich research agenda. This is no small feat. Ultimately, *The Rise of Global Powers* may become an influential work for scholars interested in the diplomacy of the twentieth century on its own merits, as well as researchers interested in the theoretical implications of modern international history.

Notes

[1]. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner and M. I. Finley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972); Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince, and Other Works*, trans. Allan H. Gilbert (Chicago: Packard, 1941); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001). See also Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle*, trans. Charles Fullman (New York: Knopf, 1962); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

[2]. See, for instance, Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. For debates on the balancing tendency, see Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962); Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006); and Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (July 1, 1994): 108-148.

[3]. Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,

1999); and Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics.*

[4]. This mirrors the ongoing debate between "offensive" and "defensive" realists in political science. For overviews of the debate, see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (December 1, 2000): 128-161; and Stephen G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 445-477.

[5]. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* has the fullest theoretical treatment.

[6]. D'Agostino does not explicitly use the term to describe either Britain or France, but implies the situation by his description of French and British motives. It also seems confirmed later in the book when he remarks that "appeasement was … a logical attempt by the sated powers to compromise with the Have Not imperialists at the expense of areas outside Western Europe" (p. 468). Given that Britain and France were the leading appeasers, logic suggests that D'Agostino considers them sated states during the interwar period.

[7]. Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 137-168.

[8]. For these arguments, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Van Evera, *Causes of War*; Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security* 35, no. 1 (May 11, 2012): 7-43; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[9]. Christensen and Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks"; Thomas J. Christensen, "Perceptions and Alliances in Europe, 1865-1940," *International Organization* 51, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 65-97; and Schweller, *Unanswered Threats.*

[10]. On this point, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances.*

[11]. See, inter alia, Marc Trachtenberg, ed., *The Development of American Strategic Thought* (New York: Garland, 1987); Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mary E. Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mary E. Sarotte, "Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to 'Bribe the Soviets Out' and Move NATO In," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (July 1, 2010): 110-137; James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995); and V. M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[12]. Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* 93, no. 3 (July 1, 1964): 881-909; and John E. Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

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