We need new analytical tools to understand the turbulent times in which we live, and identify the directions in which international politics will evolve. This volume discusses how engaging with Emanuel Adler’s social theory of cognitive evolution could potentially achieve these objectives. Eminent scholars of International Relations (IR) explore various aspects of Adler’s theory, evaluating its potential contributions to the study of world orders and IR theory more generally. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of the social theory of cognitive evolution, such as power, morality, materiality, narratives and practices, and identifies new theoretical vistas that help break new ground in IR. In the concluding chapter, Adler responds, engaging in a rich dialogue with the contributors. This volume will appeal to scholars and advanced students of IR theory, especially evolutionary and constructivist approaches.

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Theorizing World Orders

Cognitive Evolution and Beyond

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This book is dedicated to Emanuel Adler for being Manolo and becoming who is is
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Preface

Between the three of us, we share hundreds of Emanuel Adler’s hours – we being the “Junta,” or “Troika,” or whatever name we ran by in the past three years or so – or we, the three devoted editors of this volume. So with all those hours there was only one thing that surprised us in the upcoming business of editing this book: Adler turns seventy. We do not even remember how we came across this crucial piece of information, but we did, and it led us to two further discoveries, two unsurprising discoveries, predictable even: (1) This is an occasion to celebrate, at least the academic equivalent of celebration, which means a conference, a festschrift; (2) People were enthusiastic about the opportunity to celebrate Adler, to celebrate with Manolo.

So here we were, gathering for a conference at the University of Toronto in May 2017. Between the ten of us, the shared Adler hours now probably added up to the thousands; we being the contributors to this volume (excluding the eleventh, being Adler himself): his students, colleagues, and mostly colleagues who were also his students (who, in every context other than academic, would here be called friends). And with those thousands of shared Adler hours, we found ourselves unsurprised yet again: Adler is an unending theoretical treasure trove, and what was supposed to be a mere ritualistic and amicable festschrift turned out to be a fully fledged academic and scholarly inspiring conference. Furthermore, Adler was just polishing his long-expected monograph on cognitive evolution, which turned out a year and a half later into his seminal *World Ordering: A Social Theory of Cognitive Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). We all found the draft a rich source for fruitful scholarly discussions, so much so that the idea of reconvening for a follow-up workshop came up naturally to all of us; there were just too many ideas, insights, themes, theories that were budding in each of the participants following the engagement with Adler and his book manuscript. On this occasion, as on so many others before, we all felt again how
Manolo has the gift of making us think for ourselves in, through, and against his own ideas and theories; or to put it in Adler’s theoretical terminology (see in the introduction): becoming our own scholarly selves. But there was always also a second face to that gift, and it is Manolo thinking for himself, becoming his own scholarly self, in, through, and against his students and colleagues. Yes, all of us, including Manolo, benefitted tremendously from what was supposed to be no more than an academic gathering with benefits.

As Adler put it himself, back in 1991, “the idea of ‘becoming’ considers everything to be in flux, as a permanent process of change and evolution, even that which appears to be static.” And in an intense intellectual flux – some might even say boiling – we have all been thanks to his mind-blowing opus magnum. So a date and place were set again, the times being pre-COVID, and it was relatively easy and tempting. In May 2018 we reconvened in Vienna for a series of dialogical discussions with Adler and his advanced manuscript. During this second workshop critical engagements and theoretical extensions were ripening into a stand-alone academic project, which you now read: Theorizing World Orders: Cognitive Evolution and Beyond. Each of the participants turning contributors took one of Adler’s themes or ideas, understanding how it shapes their own academic work as well as broader debates in the discipline, and yes, also how it could improve Adler’s own ideas and chart a path-breaking theoretical agenda for International Relations. To put it differently, with the help of Adler’s work, we were all opening new vistas, through which to understand the ever becoming of world orders. We hope you will find it inspiring as we did.

Jerusalem, Vienna and Montreal, January 2021
Note on the Cover Image

A sankofa, which means “reach back and get it” in the Akan language of Ghana, is an Asante Adinkra symbol composed of a bird with its head reaching backward to an egg. It expresses the need for us human beings to look back to the past in order to understand how we become what we are and continue to improve into the future. We respectfully borrow this symbol here not only as a tribute to African culture, but also because its meaning captures remarkably well the gist of Emanuel Adler’s lifelong scholarship and service to the International Relations community.