

Classical Realism

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✓ Reader's guide

Classical realism represents an approach to International Relations that harks back to fifth-century BCE Greek historian Thucydides and his account of the Peloponnesian War. It recognizes the central role of power in politics of all kinds, but also the limitations of power and the ways in which it can readily be made self-defeating. It stresses sensitivity to ethical dilemmas and the practical implications and the need to base influence, wherever possible, on shared interests and persuasion. In the pages that follow, I examine the core assumptions of classical realism through the texts of ancient and modern writers, contrast their ideas with neorealism and other variants of modern realism, and analyse the Anglo-American intervention in Iraq in terms of the tenets of classical realism.

Introduction

There is widespread recognition that the realist tradition reached its nadir in neorealism (also referred to as structural realism; for a discussion of structural realism, see Chapter 4). In his unsuccessful effort to transform realism into a scientific theory, Kenneth Waltz, father of neorealism, denuded the realism of its complexity and subtlety, appreciation of agency, and understanding that power is most readily transformed into influence when it is both masked and embedded in a generally accepted system of norms. Neorealism is a parody of science. Its key terms like power and polarity are loosely and haphazardly formulated and its scope conditions are left undefined. It relies on a process akin to natural selection to shape the behaviour of units in a world where successful strategies are not necessarily passed on to successive leaders and where the culling of less successful units rarely occurs. It more closely resembles an unfalsifiable ideology than it does a scientific theory.

Like most ideologies, neorealism is unfalsifiable, and its rise and fall has had little to do with conceptual and empirical advances. Its appeal lay in its apparent parsimony and superficial resemblance to science; something that says more about its adherents than it does about the theory. Its decline was hastened by the end of the Cold War, which appeared to many as a critical test case for a theory that sought primarily to explain the stability of the bipolar world. The end of the Cold War and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union also turned scholarly and public attention to a new range of political problems to which neorealism was irrelevant. For a contrasting view of the merits of neo- or structural realism, see Chapter 4 by John Mearsheimer.

The decline of neorealism has encouraged many realists to return to their roots. In doing so, they read with renewed interest the works of great nineteenth- and twentieth-century realists like Max Weber, E. H. Carr, and Hans Morgenthau in search of conceptions and insights relevant to contemporary international relations. Weber and Morgenthau in turn were deeply indebted to the Greeks – to the tragic playwrights and Thucydides – as is the broader tradition of classical realism.

Classical realism can be said to have displayed a fundamental unity of thought across a span of nearly 2,500 years. The writings of its principal adherents – Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz, and Hans J. Morgenthau – are concerned with questions of order, justice, and change at the domestic, regional, and international levels. Classical realists have holistic understandings of politics that stress the similarities, not the differences, between domestic and international politics, and the role of ethics and community in promoting stability in both domains. In keeping with their tragic orientation, they recognize that communal bonds are fragile and easily undermined by the unrestrained pursuit of unilateral advantage by individuals, factions, and states. When this happens, time-honoured mechanisms of conflict management like alliances and the balance of power may not only fail to preserve the peace but may make domestic and international violence more likely. Like Greek tragedians, classical realists tend to regard history as cyclical, in the sense that efforts to build order and escape from fear-driven worlds, while they may succeed for a considerable period of time, ultimately succumb to the destabilizing effects of actors who believe they are too powerful to be constrained by law and custom.

This chapter explores the thought of two of the most important classical realist writers on international affairs: Thucydides (460–c.390 BCE.), a fifth-century Athenian general and author of an account of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, and their respective allies; and Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–79), a German-born lawyer who migrated to the USA as a refugee during the Second World War, taught for many years at the University of Chicago, and was arguably the most influential postwar theorist of international relations.¹ I will show the many similarities in their writings, at least some of which derive from the tragic view of life and politics they both shared.

The importance of community for classical realists directs our attention to the ever present tensions between the interests of the community and those of its members, whether individuals or states. The first section explores the classical realist reflections on community. Thucydides and Morgenthau believe that the tensions between individuals and communities could be reconciled in part at a deeper level of understanding. This is because a well functioning community is essential to the intelligent formation and pursuit of individual interests. The principles of justice on which all viable communities are based also allow the efficient translation of power into influence. Membership in a community imposes limits on the ends and means of power. And failure to subordinate goals to the requirements of justice leads to self-defeating policies of overexpansion. Classical realists understand that great powers are often their own worst enemies because success and the hubris it engenders encourage actors to see themselves outside of and above their community, and this in turn blinds them to the need for self-restraint.

The second section of the chapter explores change and transformation. Classical realists think of political systems in terms of their principles of order, and the ways in which they help to shape the identities of actors and the discourses they use to frame their interests. For Thucydides and Morgenthau, changes in identities and discourses are often the result of modernization, and hegemonic war is more often a consequence than a cause of such a transformation. This different understanding of cause and effect has important implications for the kinds of strategies classical realists envisage as efficacious in maintaining or restoring order. They put more weight on values and ideas than they do on power.

The third section of the chapter shows the similarities in their understanding of the nature and purpose of theory. Thucydides constructed no theories in the modern sense of the term, but he is widely regarded as the first theorist of international relations. Morgenthau is explicitly theoretical. They are united in their belief that theoretical knowledge is not an end in itself, but a starting point for actors to work their way through contemporary problems and, in the process, come to deeper forms of understanding.

The fourth section of the chapter is a case study of the war in Iraq. It offers a classical realist analysis of Anglo-American intervention to overthrow Saddam Hussein. I argue that it is characterized by three features – really pathologies – that are well described by classical realism but to which modern realists are largely oblivious. The first has to do with the inability to formulate interests intelligently and coherently outside of a language of justice. The second is hubris, and how it can readily lead to tragic outcomes that are the very opposite of those intended. The third has to do with the choice of means, and the generally negative consequences of choosing those at odds with the values of the community.

I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of tragedy. Thucydides should be considered the fourth great tragedian of fifth-century Athens. His account of the Peloponnesian

War (431–404 BCE) is constructed in the form and style of a tragedy. Morgenthau wrote no tragedies, but his thinking, like many educated Germans of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was deeply steeped in a tragic understanding of life and politics. It lay at the core of his theory, and the strategies he thought appropriate to reconstituting political order.

Classical realism on order and stability

Community, order, and stability

Most realists have a straightforward answer to the problem of order: effective central authority. Governments that defend borders, enforce laws, and protect citizens make domestic politics more peaceful and qualitatively different from international politics. The international arena remains an anarchical, self-help system, a 'brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other' (Mearsheimer 1994–5). Survival depends on a state's material capabilities and its alliances with other states (Waltz 1979: 103–4). Thucydides and Morgenthau are not insensitive to the consequences of anarchy, but do not make this kind of generic distinction between international and domestic politics. For classical realists, *all* politics is an expression of the same human drives and subject to the same pathologies. They see more variation in order and stability *within* domestic and international systems than they do between them, and explain it with reference to the cohesiveness of society, domestic or international, and the channels into which it directs human drives.

Thucydides devotes equal attention to internal developments in Athens and external developments in the diverse theatres of war. He describes parallel developments in both realms and encourages us to understand them as the outcomes of similar and reinforcing processes. His city-states run the gamut from highly ordered and consensual to those racked by the anarchy and civil war. These differences have nothing to do with the presence or absence of a Leviathan, but with the cohesiveness of the community (*homonoia*). When communal bonds are strong, as in Periclean Athens, and in Greece more generally before the Peloponnesian War, *nomos* (laws, rules, norms, conventions) restrain actors, whether individuals or city-states. When community breaks down, as in Corcyra in the 420s, so does order. Thucydides would have agreed with Aristotle's observation that law 'has no power to compel obedience beside the force of habit' (*Politics*: 1269a20).

Morgenthau's understanding of the relationship between domestic and international politics mirrors that of Thucydides. At the outset of his famous text, *Politics among Nations*, he introduces a sharp distinction between international and domestic politics which he then systematically undermines. *All* politics, he insists, is a struggle for power that is 'inseparable from social life itself' (1948a: 17–18). In many countries, laws, institutions, and norms direct the struggle for power into ritualized and socially acceptable channels. In the international arena, the struggle cannot so readily be tamed. The character of international relations nevertheless displays remarkable variation across historical epochs. In the eighteenth century, Europe was 'one great republic' with common standards of 'politeness and cultivation' and a common 'system of arts, and laws, and manners' (1948a: 159–66). Although Morgenthau did not make the analogy in print, he often spoke

of the parallel between international relations in the eighteenth century and pre-Peloponnesian-War Greece. In both epochs, 'fear and shame' and 'some common sense of honor and justice' induced leaders to moderate their ambitions (1948a: 270–84). The sense of community was ruptured by the French Revolution, and only superficially restored in its aftermath. It broke down altogether in the twentieth century when the principal powers became divided by ideology as well as by interests. In the 1930s, four major powers – Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, and Italy – rejected the very premises of the international order. The Soviet Union continued to do so in the postwar era, reducing international politics 'to the primitive spectacle of two giants eyeing each other with watchful suspicion' (1948a: 285).

Morgenthau recognized the same variation in domestic politics. In strong societies like Britain and the USA, norms and institutions muted the struggle for power but, in weak societies like Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, they broke down. Politics in these latter countries was every bit as violent and unconstrained as in any epoch of international relations. For Morgenthau, as for Thucydides, communities and the identities and norms they help to create and sustain are the most critical determinants of order, at home and abroad.

Balance of power

Contemporary realists consider military capability and alliances the very foundation of security. The Greeks were by no means insensitive to the value of alliances. Aristotle observed that 'When people are friends, they have no need for justice, but when they are just they need friends as well' (*Nicomachean Ethics*: 1155a24–6). Thucydides, and classical realists more generally, recognize that military power and alliances are double-edged swords; they are as likely to provoke as to prevent conflict.

Book One of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* leaves no doubt that Athenian efforts to obtain a favourable balance of power were an instrumental cause of war. The alliance with Corcyra (present-day Corfu) led to a violent encounter with the Corinthian fleet and raised the prospect of a wider war with Sparta. Athens then took preemptory action against Megara and Potidaea, and made war difficult to prevent. Sparta's alliance with Corinth dragged it in turn into a war with Athens that many Spartans would have preferred to avoid. Nowhere in his text does Thucydides provide a single example of an alliance that deterred war, and by the logic of the balance of power some of them should have. His narrative of the Mytilenean Debate and Melian Dialogue suggest several reasons for this unrelieved pattern of deterrence failure. Chief among them is the pursuit of unrealistic goals which encourage wishful thinking in the form of downplaying risks and exaggerating the likelihood of success. In the case of Sparta, this led to an almost total failure by the Spartan war party to appreciate Athenian invulnerability to invasion (1.86–8).

Deterrence was also defeated by the breakdown of community and the conventions it sustained. Athenians increasingly succumbed to the impulses of self-aggrandizement (*pleonexia*). In the Sicilian debate, the sensible and cautious Nicias tries to educate Athenians about the size and population of Sicily, the military readiness of its largest city, Syracuse, and warns of the dangers of sailing against an island so far away when there are

undefeated enemies close to home. Alcibiades dismisses these risks out of hand and appeals to the greed of his audience. Recognizing that direct arguments against the expedition will not succeed, Nicias now tries to dissuade the assembly by insisting on a much larger force and more extensive provisions than were originally planned. To his surprise, the more he demands, the more eager the assembly becomes to support the expedition, convinced that a force of such magnitude will be invincible. Carried away by the prospect of gain, Athenians became immune to the voice of reason, and committed the second fateful misjudgement – the alliance with Corcyra being the first – that ultimately led to the defeat of Athens (6.10–26).

For Morgenthau, the universality of the power drive meant that the balance of power was 'a general social phenomenon to be found on all levels of social interaction' (1958: 49, 81). Individuals, groups, and states inevitably combined to protect themselves from predators. At the international level, the balance of power had contradictory implications for peace. It might deter war if status quo powers outgun imperialist challengers and demonstrate their resolve to go to war in defence of the status quo. But balancing could also intensify tensions and make war more likely because of the impossibility of assessing with any certainty the motives, capability, and resolve of other states. Leaders understandably aim to achieve a margin of safety, and when multiple states or opposing alliances act this way, they ratchet up international tensions. In this situation, rising powers may be tempted to go to war when they think they have an advantage, and status quo powers to launch preventive wars against rising challengers. Even when the balance of power failed to prevent war, Morgenthau reasoned, it might still limit its consequences and preserve the existence of states, small and large, that constitute the political system. He credited the balance with having served these ends for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1948a: 155–9, 162–6, 172; 1958: 80).

For Morgenthau, the success of the balance of power for the better part of two centuries was less a function of the distribution of capabilities than it was of the existence and strength of international society that bound together the most important actors in the system. When that society broke down, as it did from the first partition of Poland through the Napoleonic Wars, the balance of power no longer functioned to preserve the peace or existence of the members of the system (1948a: 160–6). International society was even weaker in the twentieth century, and its decline was an underlying cause of both world wars. Morgenthau worried that its continuing absence in the immediate postwar period had removed all constraints on superpower competition. By the 1970s, he had become more optimistic about the prospects for peace. Détente, explicit recognition of the territorial status quo in Europe, a corresponding decline in ideological confrontation, the emergence of Japan, China, and West Germany as possible third forces, and the effects of Vietnam on US power had made both superpowers more cautious and tolerant of the status quo (1972: preface). But perhaps most importantly, their daily contacts, negotiations, and occasional agreements had gone some way towards normalizing their relations and creating the basis for a renewed sense of international community.

Thucydides and Morgenthau understood politics as a struggle for power and unilateral advantage. The differences between domestic politics and international relations were differences of degree, not of kind. Military capability and alliances were necessary safeguards in the rough-and-tumble world of international relations, but could not be

counted on to preserve the peace or the independence of actors. Order, domestic and international, ultimately rested on the strength of the community. When states and their rulers were bound by a common culture, conventions, and personal ties, competition for power was restrained in its ends and its means. Under such conditions, a balance of power might prevent some wars and limit the severity of others. In the absence of community, military capability and alliances were no guarantee of security, and could provoke wars they were intended to prevent. States like Athens, and leaders like Napoleon and Hitler, could not be deterred. As Morgenthau recognized, the balance of power works best when needed least.

Interest and justice

Contemporary realists define interest in terms of power. For the most part, they equate power with material capabilities. According to Kenneth Waltz (1979:153) 'the political clout of nations correlates closely with their economic power and their military might'. Many contemporary realists also believe in the primacy of self-interest over moral principle, and regard considerations of justice as inappropriate, if not dangerous foundations on which to base foreign policies. At best, appeals to justice can serve to justify or mask policies motivated by more concrete material interests. Classical realists consider capabilities to be only one source of power and do not equate power with influence. Influence for them is a *psychological* relationship and, like all relationships, based on ties that transcend momentary interests. Justice enters the picture because it is the foundation of relationships and of the sense of community on which influence and security ultimately depend.

The first level of Thucydides' history depicts the tension between interest and justice and how it becomes more acute in response to the exigencies of war. It also reveals how interest and justice are inseparable and mutually constitutive at a deeper level. In his funeral oration, Pericles describes Athens as a democracy (*dēmokratia*), but Thucydides (2.37.1) considered the constitutional reforms of 462–461 to have created a mixed form of government (*xunkrasis*). Behind the facade of democracy, he tells us, lay the rule of one man – Pericles (2.37.1, 2.65.9–10). The democratic ideology, with which he publicly associated himself, moderated class tensions and reconciled the *dēmos* to the economic and political advantages of the elite. When the gap between ideology and practice was exposed by the behaviour of post-Periclean demagogues, class conflict became more acute and politics more vicious, leading to the violent overthrow of democracy by the regime of the Thirty in 404 and its equally violent restoration a year later. Justice, or at least a belief in justice, was the foundation for community.

Athenian imperialism underwent a similar evolution. The empire was successful when power was exercised in accord with the social conventions governing Greek speech and behaviour. Post-Periclean Athens consistently chose power over principle, lost its *hēgemonia*, alienated allies, and weakened its power base. In 425, during the Mytilenean Debate, Cleon tells the assembly to recognize that their empire (*archē*) is a despotism (*turannisis*) based on military power and the fear it inspires (Thucydides 3.37.2). In 416, the Athenian commissioners in the Melian Dialogue divide people into those who rule (*archē*) and those who are subjects (*hupōkooi*) (5.95). To intimidate allies and adversaries alike, they

acknowledge their need to expand. Runaway imperialism of this kind stretched their resources to breaking point. Interest defined outside of the language of justice is irrational and self-defeating.

Thucydides' parallel accounts of Athenian domestic politics and foreign policy indicate his belief that coercion is a grossly inefficient and ultimately self-defeating basis of influence. The sophist Gorgias (c. 430) personified *logos* (words) as a 'great potentate, who with the tiniest and least visible body achieves the most divine works' (Diels and Kranz 1956: frg. 82, B11). Employed in tandem with persuasion, it 'shapes the soul as it wishes'. Thucydides leads us to the same conclusion. Persuasion (*peithō*) can maintain the position of the 'first citizen' (*stratēgos*) of Athens *vis-à-vis* the masses and that of the hegemon *vis-à-vis* its empire and effectively mask the exercise of power. To persuade, leaders and hegemons must live up to the expectations of their own ideology. For Athens, this meant providing benefits to citizens and allies, and upholding the principles of order on which the polis and its empire were based.

Perhaps the most frequently quoted line from *Politics among Nations* is the assertion in its opening pages that 'the concept of interest defined in terms of power' sets politics apart 'as an autonomous sphere of action' and in turn makes a theory of politics possible (1960: 5). Morgenthau goes on to subvert this formulation to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between interest and power. These contradictions can be reconciled if we recognize that Morgenthau distinguished between the realms of theory and practice. The former aspired to create an abstract, rational ideal based on the underlying and unchanging dynamics of international politics. Such a theory represented the crudest of templates. Policy, and its analysis, were concrete, not always rational, and had to take into account many considerations outside the sphere of politics.

The contrast between theory and practice is equally apparent in Morgenthau's conceptualization of power. He thought of it as an intangible quality with many diverse components, which he catalogues at some length. But, in the real world, the strategies and tactics leaders use to transform the raw attributes of power into political influence were just as important as the attributes themselves. Because influence is a psychological relationship, leaders need to know not only what buttons are at their disposal but which ones to push in any circumstance. There were no absolute measures of state power, because it was always relative and situation-specific. Levers of influence that A could use against B might be totally ineffectual against C. The successful exercise of power required a sophisticated understanding of the goals, strengths, and weaknesses of allies, adversaries, and third parties. But, above all, it demanded psychological sensitivity to the others' needs for self-esteem.

People seek domination but most often end up subordinate to others (Morgenthau 1947: 145). They try to repress this unpleasant truth, and those who exercise power effectively employ justifications and ideologies that facilitate this process. Whenever possible, they attempt to convince those who must submit to their will that they are acting in their interests or those of the wider community (Morgenthau 1958:59). 'What is required for mastery of international politics,' Morgenthau insisted, 'is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman' (1948a: 172).

Like Thucydides, Morgenthau understood that adherence to ethical norms was just as much in the interest of those who wielded power as it was for those over whom it was

exercised. He made this point in his critique of US intervention in Indochina, where he argued that intervention would fail and erode the USA's influence in the world because the ends and means of US policy violated the morality of the age. There was a certain irony to Morgenthau's opposition. Two decades earlier, he had written *Politics among Nations*, in large part to disabuse an influential segment of the US elite of its naive belief that ethics was an appropriate guide for foreign policy and that international conflicts could be resolved through the application of law. Intervention in Indochina indicated to him that US policy-makers had 'over learned' the lesson; they had embraced Realpolitik and moved to the other end of the continuum. Morgenthau was adamant that morality, defined in terms of the conventions of the epoch, imposes limits on the ends that power seeks and the means employed to achieve them (1947: 151–68).

For classical realists – and Machiavelli counts as one in this regard – justice is important for two different but related sets of reasons. It is the key to influence because it determines how others understand and respond to you. Policy that is constrained by accepted ethical principles and generally supportive of them provides a powerful aura of legitimacy and helps to reconcile less powerful actors to their subordinate status. Influence can also be bought through bribes or compelled by force, but influence obtained this way is expensive to maintain, tenuous in effect, and usually short-lived. By contrast, a demonstrable commitment to justice can create and maintain the kind of community that allows actors to translate power into influence in efficient ways.

Justice is important in a second fundamental way. It provides the conceptual scaffolding on which actors can intelligently construct interests. Above all else, a commitment to justice is a powerful source of self-restraint, and restraint is necessary in direct proportion to one's power. Weak states must generally behave cautiously because of external constraints. Powerful states are not similarly bound, and the past successes that made them powerful breed hubris, encourage their leaders to make inflated estimates of their ability to control events, and seduce them into embracing risky ventures. As in Greek tragedies, these miscalculations often lead to catastrophe, as they did for Athens, Napoleon, and Hitler. Internal restraint and external influence are thus closely related. Self-restraint that prompts behaviour in accord with the acknowledged principles of justice both earns and sustains the *hēgemonia* that makes efficient influence possible.

Classical realism and change

Change and modernization

Modern realists differentiate systems on the basis of their polarity (uni-, bi-, and multipolar). System change occurs when the number of poles changes. This is often the result of hegemonic wars, brought on in turn by shifts in the balance of material capabilities. Rising powers may go to war to remake the system in their interests, and status quo powers to forestall such change. For some realists, this cycle is timeless and independent of technology and learning. Others believe that nuclear weapons have revolutionized international relations by making war too destructive to be rational. In their view, this accounts for

the otherwise anomalous peaceful transformation from bi- to multipolarity at the end of the Cold War (Mearsheimer 1990; Waltz 1993; Wohlforth 1994–5).

For classical realists, transformation is a broader concept, and one they associate with processes that we have come to describe as modernization. It brings about shifts in identities and discourses and, with them, changing conceptions of security.

Thucydides' language (1.15) encourages his readers to draw an analogy between individual pursuit of wealth and Athenian pursuit of power. The empire is based on the power of money. It generates revenue to build and maintain the largest navy in Greece. Athens is so powerful relative to other city-states that it can dominate them by force. Tyrants, for Greeks, were rulers without any constitutional basis who dispensed with reciprocity and took what they wanted. Gyges of Lydia was the first known tyrant and, not coincidentally, Lydia was thought to be the first city to have introduced money. Like a tyrant, Athens no longer needed to legitimize its rule or provide the kind of benefits that normally held alliances or city-states together. Wealth encouraged the 'orientalization' of Athens, a perspective common to Herodotus and Thucydides. It led to a deep shift in Athenian values, superficially manifested in an increasing reliance on force. This pattern of behaviour was a reflection of changing goals; the goal of honour (*timē*) increasingly gave way to that of acquisition. And *hēgemonia* – rule based on the consent of others – was replaced by control (*archē*) exercised through threats and bribes.

Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War is rich in irony. Athens, the tyrant, has jettisoned the traditional bonds and obligations of reciprocity in expectation of greater freedom and rewards only to become trapped by a new set of more onerous obligations. As Pericles recognizes in his funeral oration, Athens had maintained its *hēgemonia* by demonstrating *charis* to its allies. 'In generosity,' he told the assembly, 'we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring not by receiving favours' (2.40.4). The post-Periclean empire must maintain its *archē* by constantly demonstrating its power and will to use it. It must keep expanding, a requirement beyond the capabilities of any state. Athenians would discover this bitter truth with their crushing defeat in Sicily.

Morgenthau's understanding of modernization is not dissimilar. It led to a misplaced faith in reason and undermined the values and norms that had restrained individual and state behaviour. Morgenthau drew more directly on Hegel and Freud. In his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) and *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel warned of the dangers of homogenization of society arising from equality and universal participation in society. It would sunder traditional communities and individual ties to them without providing an alternative source of identity. Hegel wrote on the eve of the industrial revolution and did not envisage the modern industrial state with its large bureaucracies and modern means of communication. These developments, Morgenthau argued, allowed the power of the state to feed on itself through a process of psychological transference that made it the most exalted object of loyalty. Libidinal impulses, repressed by the society, were mobilized by the state for its own ends. By transferring these impulses to the nation, citizens achieved vicarious satisfaction of aspirations they otherwise could not attain or had to repress. Elimination of the Kulaks, forced collectivization, Stalin's purges, the Second World War, and the Holocaust were all expressions of the transference of private impulses onto the state and the absence of any limits on the state's exercise of power. Writing in the aftermath of the great upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century, Morgenthau

recognized that communal identity was far from an unalloyed blessing: it allowed people to fulfil their potential as human beings, but also risked turning them into 'social men' like Eichmann who lose their humanity in the course of implementing the directives of the state.²

The intellectual transformation Morgenthau attributes to the Enlightenment bears striking similarities to the proto-Enlightenment of fifth-century Greece. In both epochs, the self-definition of human beings, widespread belief in the power of reason, and the triumph of secular over religious values had far-reaching political implications. The biggest difference between the two periods was in the area of technology; the modern Enlightenment made possible the industrial revolution and machine-age warfare. Nuclear weapons are an outgrowth of this process and, for Morgenthau, 'the only real revolution which has occurred in the structure of international relations since the beginning of history'. War between nuclear powers was no longer an extension of politics by other means but mutual suicide (1958: 76; 1960: 326).

Restoring order

Thucydides and Morgenthau wrote in the aftermath of destructive wars that undermined the communities and conventions that had sustained order at home and abroad. None of them thought it feasible to restore the old way of life, aspects of which had become highly problematic even before the onset of war. They searched instead for some combination of the old and the new that could accommodate the benefits of modernity while limiting its destructive potential.

Thucydides wanted his readers to recognize the need for a synthetic order that would combine the best of the old and the new, and avoid, as far as possible, their respective pitfalls. The best of the new was its spirit of equality, and the opportunity it offered to all citizens to serve their polis. The best of the old was its emphasis on excellence and virtue (*aretē*), which encouraged members of the elite to suppress their appetite for wealth and power, and even their instinct for survival, in pursuit of valour, good judgement, and public service. The Athenians displayed *aretē* at Marathon and Salamis where they risked their lives for the freedom of Greece (2.20, 25, 41, 43, 4.81.2). By the end of the fifth century, *aretē* had progressed through three stages of meaning: from its original Homeric sense of fighting skill, to skill at anything, to moral goodness. Thucydides uses all three meanings, and has Pericles (2.34.5) introduce a fourth in his funeral oration where *aretē* now describes the reputation a state can develop by generous behaviour towards its allies. Thucydides offers an idealized view of Periclean Athens as an example of the kind of synthesis he envisages. It is the very model of a mixed government (*xunkrasis*) that allowed the capable to rule and the masses to participate in government in meaningful ways. It successfully muted tensions between the rich and the poor and the well-born and men of talent, and stood in sharp contrast to the acute class tensions and near stasis of *fin de siècle* Athens.

Thucydides may have hoped that inter-city relations could be reconstituted on similar foundations. The same kinds of inequalities prevailed between poleis as within them. If the power of tyrants could give way to aristocracy and mixed democracy, and the drive for power and wealth be constrained by the restoration of community, the same might be done for

inter-polis relations. Powerful states might once again see it in their interest to wield influence on the basis of *hēgemonia*. Power imbalances could be 'equalized' through the principle of proportionality; the more powerful states receiving honour in degree to the advantages they provided for less powerful poleis. His history was intended to educate the wealthy and powerful to the baneful consequences of acting like tyrants, on the individual or state level, and the practical benefits, indeed the necessity, of maintaining the appearance, if not the substance, of the older forms of reciprocity in the political arena.

Thucydides is a stern sceptic and rationalist, but one who supports religion because he considered it to be a principal pillar of morality and conventions. In his view, the radical sophists had done a disservice to Athens by arguing that laws and conventions (*nomos*) are arbitrary justifications for various forms of inequality. Thucydides wrote for a small, intellectually sophisticated elite, who, like himself, were unlikely to accept *nomos* as god given. He appeals to them with a more sophisticated defence of *nomos* that does not require rooting it in man's nature (*phusis*). By demonstrating the destructive consequences of the breakdown of *nomos* and the conventions it upheld, he makes the case for its necessity and the wisdom of those in authority to act *as if* they believed it derived from nature. For Thucydides, language and conventions are arbitrary but essential. His history, like a tragedy, provides an 'outside perspective' for elites to generate a commitment to work 'inside' to restore what is useful, if not essential, to justice and order.

For Morgenthau, the absence of external constraints on state power was *the* defining characteristic of international politics at mid-century. The old normative order was in ruins and too feeble to restrain great powers (1958: 60; 1947: 168). Against this background, the Soviet Union and the USA were locked into an escalating conflict, made more ominous by the unrivalled destructive potential of nuclear weapons. The principal threat to peace was nevertheless political: Moscow and Washington were 'imbued with the crusading spirit of the new moral force of nationalistic universalism', and confronted each other with 'inflexible opposition' (1948a: 430). The balance of power was a feeble instrument in these circumstances, and deterrence was more likely to exacerbate tensions than to alleviate them. Bipolarity could help to preserve the peace by reducing uncertainty – or push the superpowers towards war because of the putative advantage of launching a first strike. Restraint was needed more than anything else, and Morgenthau worried that neither superpower had leaders with the requisite moral courage to resist mounting pressures to engage in risky and confrontational foreign policies.

Realism in the context of the Cold War was a plea for statesmen and, above all, US and Soviet leaders, to recognize the need to coexist in a world of opposing interests and conflict. Their security could never be guaranteed, only approximated through a fragile balance of power and mutual compromises that might resolve, or at least defuse, the arms race and the escalatory potential of the various regional conflicts in which they had become entangled. Morgenthau insisted that restraint and partial accommodation were the most practical *short-term* strategies for preserving the peace (1948: 169; 1958: 80). A more enduring solution to the problem of war required a fundamental transformation of the international system that made it more like well ordered domestic societies. By 1958, the man who twenty years earlier had heaped scorn on the aspirations of internationalists, would insist that the well-being of the human race now required 'a principle of political organization transcending the nation-state' (1958: 75–6).

Morgenthau's commitment to some form of supranational authority deepened in the 1970s. Beyond the threat of nuclear holocaust, humanity was also threatened by the population explosion, world hunger, and environmental degradation. He had no faith in the ability of nation-states to ameliorate any of these problems. But if leaders and peoples were so zealous about safeguarding their sovereignty, what hope was there of moving them towards acceptance of a new order? Progress would occur only when enough national leaders became convinced that it was in their respective national interests. The series of steps Europeans had taken towards integration illustrated the apparent paradox that 'what is historically conditioned in the idea of the national interest can be overcome only through the promotion in concert of the national interest of a number of nations' (1958: 73).

Thucydides and Morgenthau grappled with successive phases of modernization and their social, political, and military consequences. They understood these consequences, and modernization itself, as an expression of evolving identities and discourses. Human beings were never entrapped by their culture or institutions, but were constantly reproducing, changing, and reinventing them. The central problem for Thucydides and Morgenthau was that old procedures were being abandoned or not working, and being replaced by new and dangerous practices that had entered without much warning. They recognized that stable domestic orders, and the security they might enable, could be restored only by some synthesis that blended the old with the new. This synthesis had to harness the power of reason, but make allowance for the disruptive passions that often motivated individuals, classes, and political units. It had to build community, but could not ignore powerful centrifugal forces, especially self-interest at the individual, group, and national levels, that modernization had encouraged and legitimated. The biggest challenge of all was to construct the new order through the willing agency of representatives of the old order in cooperation with the newly empowered agents of modernity.

Given the nature of the challenge, it is not surprising that classical realists were better at diagnosis than treatment, to use Thucydides' medical metaphor. Thucydides was the most sophisticated of the two thinkers. Perhaps by design, he offered no explicit synthesis, but contented himself with identifying an earlier synthesis – Periclean Athens – that might serve as a model, or at least a starting point, for thinking about the future. Morgenthau addressed the problem of order at two levels: he sought stop-gap political measures to buy time for leaders to grasp the need to transcend the state system. Their works remain possessions for all time, not only because of their insights into war, politics, and human nature, but because of something they may never consciously recognize: unresolved tensions that indicate the necessity but, also, the great difficulty of reconciling tradition and modernity by conscious, rational designs.

Classical realism on the nature of theory

Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*: 141a–b) thought it unlikely that human investigations could ever produce *epistēmē*, which he defined as knowledge of essential natures reached through deduction from first principles. Thucydides does not directly engage questions of

epistemology, but one can readily infer that he shared this understanding of the limits of social inquiry. One of his recurrent themes is the extent to which human behaviour is context dependent; similar external challenges provoke a range of responses from different political cultures. As those cultures evolve, so do their foreign policies, a progression I documented in the case of Athens. There is also variation within culture. Thucydides' accounts of the Spartan decision to go to war, the plague in Athens, the Mytilenian Debate, and *stasis* in Corcyra all reveal that individuals respond differently to the same or similar situation.

Morgenthau explicitly denies the possibility of general laws and of predictions based on more limited kinds of generalization. Morgenthau conceived of the social world as 'a chaos of contingencies', but 'not devoid of a measure of rationality'. The social world could be reduced to a limited set of social choices of uncertain outcome because of the irrationality of actors and the inherent complexity of the social world. The best a theory can do 'is to state the likely consequences of choosing one alternative as over against another and the conditions under which one alternative is more likely to occur or to be successful than the other' (1966: 77).

Theōrie, *theōrein*, and *theōrōs* are all post-Homeric words having to do with seeing and visiting. The noun (*theōrōs*) meant 'witness' or 'spectator'. A *theōrōs* was dispatched to Delphi by his polis to bring back a full account of the words of the oracle. He might also be sent to religious and athletic festivals, and it is here that the word picked up its connotation of spectator. Over time, the role of the *theōrōs* became more active; a *theōrōs* was expected not only to describe what he had seen but to explain its meaning. Thucydides comes closest to the model of the *theōrōs*; he provides readers with a description of events that has interpretations of their meaning embedded in it. Morgenthau conducts independent theoretical inquiries in which brief historical accounts, more properly described as examples, are used for purposes of illustration. But, in the best tradition of the Greeks, he aspires to develop a framework that actors can use to work their way through contemporary problems. Morgenthau insisted that 'All lasting contributions to political science, from Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine to the *Federalist*, Marx and Calhoun, have been responses to such challenges arising from political reality. They have not been self-sufficient theoretical developments pursuing theoretical concerns for their own sake' (1966: 77). Great political thinkers, confronted with problems that could not be solved with the tools at hand, developed new ways of thinking to use past experience to illuminate the present. Beyond this, Thucydides and Morgenthau sought to stimulate the kind of reflection that leads to wisdom and, with it, appreciation of the need for self-restraint (*sophrosun*). For both classical realists history was the vehicle for tragedy and the teacher of wisdom.

Case study: classical realist analysis of Iraq



Anglo-American intervention in Iraq is not a subject that can be addressed easily in a short case study. Its origins, implementation, and consequences all warrant lengthy analysis, and are likely to be the subject of considerable controversy for decades to come. My goal here

is something different: to use classical realism to devise a framework for analysing the case. In doing so, I characterize intervention as a tragedy in the Greek sense of the term, and concentrate on the USA because all the key decisions were made in Washington.

One of the principal themes of tragedy and classical realism is that people who act outside a community and, hence, outside a language of justice, are incapable of formulating interests in an intelligent and coherent manner. They are moved by passions and hope, not by reason and careful calculation. Thucydides, as we have seen, portrays the Athenian invasion of Sicily in this light. His paired speeches of Alcibiades and Nicias reveal the emotional nature of the decision and how poorly connected it was to any strategic logic or estimation of the likely costs. Bush engaged in no public debate, nor would he be able to, but accounts of the inner workings of his administration reveal similar dynamics at work (Hersh 2004; Mann 2004; Woodward 2004; Daalder and Lindsay 2005).

Our tragedy begins with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. American neoconservatives hailed what they called the 'unipolar moment', and revelled in the unrivalled power of the USA. Mistaking power for influence, they felt no reason why their country should be bound by treaties, agreements, and norms that constrained its pursuit of its interests. The move towards unilateralism began with the Clinton administration but accelerated under Bush (Lebow 2003: 310–23). One of the most striking features of US unilateralism is how often it was manifest in pursuit of goals that could not reasonably be said to be in the USA's interest. Good examples are opposition to the International Criminal Court and European negotiations with Iran, from both of which, in the judgement of most American analysts, the USA had much to gain.

US power: hubris and nemesis

In Greek tragedies, success and power are the principal causes of hubris. US intoxication with power and disregard, even contempt, for the USA's traditional allies and the wider international community led the Bush administration to hubris. This is most evident in its policy towards Iraq. There was evidence that sanctions against Saddam Hussein were working, albeit at considerable humanitarian cost, but the administration was not satisfied with mere containment. Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Under-Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice sought removal of Saddam, and made no attempt to hide their objective. Their conversations with other officials and the media indicate that they were deeply offended by the survival of the Saddam regime, and expected that his overthrow by force would allow Washington to remake the map of the Middle East and dramatically increase its influence world-wide. They assumed that Iraqis would welcome American 'liberators' with open arms, accept their émigré puppet Ahmed Chalabi as their new ruler, and at one fell swoop gain significant leverage over Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Palestinians. They further expected that a successful high-tech military campaign that removed Saddam by 'shock and awe' with few American casualties would intimidate North Korea and encourage widespread bandwagoning, making other countries more intent on currying favour with Washington.

The available evidence indicates that this circle of self-styled 'Vulcans' rarely, if ever, consulted with acknowledged Middle East experts in the State Department or the Central

Intelligence Agency (CIA); ignored reports and estimates that ran counter to their expectations; and put great pressure on the CIA and other organizations within the US intelligence community to confirm their views. This has been well documented with regard to 'evidence' that Saddam had, or was developing, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

Trust in hope rather than reason also characterized military planning. Donald Rumsfeld insisted on invading on the cheap, and ordered the Joint Chiefs of Staff to jettison their war plan calling for 400,000 troops and to produce one requiring no more than 125,000. Contrary to wishes of field commander General Tommy Franks, he also insisted the army begin withdrawing forces thirty days after the fall of Baghdad. The CIA contributed to the rosy picture the administration had formed. It advised that principal opposition would come not from Saddam's Red Guard, but from paramilitary forces with money and ample diverse weapons caches. The National Intelligence Council's (NIC) thirty-eight-page assessment of postwar Iraq mentioned internal opposition only once *en passant* in conclusion. It did warn, however, that there would be trouble if the Americans were perceived as occupiers. The CIA's regional officers worried about insurrection, but George Tenet, Director of Central Intelligence who was keen to please the President, made sure their fears were not reported in the NIC estimate.

Giving in to pressure from Rumsfeld, the CIA exaggerated the effectiveness of Iraq's infrastructure. The air force and navy were accordingly instructed not to target the electrical grid, but the system collapsed anyway. Getting the lights back on and rebuilding hospitals, schools, and sewage facilities became a major struggle for which the occupying forces were initially unprepared. Rumsfeld and his planners thought the bureaucracy would remain intact and could merely be reformed, as was true in the occupations of Germany and Japan! The White House, Secretary of Defence, and military were working with inadequate intelligence because Iraq had long been treated as a 'Tier 2' threat, in contrast to Iran and North Korea. The USA had no more than a handful of agents on the ground, and relied on refugees, foreign intelligence, and excellent photo intelligence. Intelligence supplied by Chalabi and refugees associated with him was given credence by Rumsfeld and Rice despite repeated warnings from the CIA and State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research that it was exaggerated or entirely fabricated (Phillips 2005: 68–73). State Department planning for the occupation, a task force that drew in seventy-five experts on all aspects of the Arab world, was terminated by Rumsfeld on the grounds that they were not fully committed to transforming Iraq (Woodward 2004: 282–4). The Pentagon's occupation plans, based on Rumsfeld's most optimistic scenario, were designed only to secure the oil ministry and oil fields, and secondarily to search for WMD. None of the latter was ever found.

Inadequate plans and occupation forces alienated many Iraqis and allowed those who were disgruntled to loot arsenals and seize weapons, ammunition, and explosives that they would later use against US occupation forces and US-trained police. In the resulting chaos, looting took the place of shopping. US proconsul Jake Garner, relying on advice provided by Chalabi and other refugees, was totally detached from the local scene. His replacement, Paul Bremer, disbanded the Iraqi army of 400,000, unwisely let them keep their guns, and many promptly joined the insurgency (Diamond 2004: 9–22; Phillips 2005: 198–9). There was no effective dialogue with local forces until well after the insurrection was underway,

and house-to-house searches, and other measures designed to nip the insurgency in the bud, only intensified it. US generals would repeatedly claim over the next two years that the insurgents were losing, and would even cite increases in the number of their attacks as evidence. By January 2006, when this chapter was written, the Bush administration was in a quagmire, not unlike Vietnam. None of the options open to it were promising, the US public had increasingly turned against the war and the President's popularity had reached an all-time low in the polls. The Bush administration's experience in Iraq drives home what is perhaps the most important insight of classical realism: that great powers are their own worst enemies.

Conclusion: the tragic vision

The chorus in *Antigone* praises human beings as the most inventive of all creatures who reshape the goddess earth with their ploughs, yoke horses, and bulls, snare birds and fish in the twisted mesh of their nets, and make paths through the turbulent seas with their ships. But they destroy what they create, kill what they love most, and seem incapable of living in harmony with themselves and their surroundings. The juxtaposition of man's achievements and transgressions is a central theme of Greek tragedy and classical realism. Like the chorus in *Antigone*, Thucydides and Morgenthau recognized the extraordinary ability of human beings to harness nature for their own ends, and their propensity to destroy through war and civil violence what took them generations to build. Their writings explore the requirements of stable orders, but they remained pessimistic about the ability of the powerful to exercise self-restraint. Like Aeschylus, they saw a close connection between progress and conflict. They understood that violent challenges to the domestic and international orders are most likely in periods of political, economic, social, and intellectual ferment.

Thucydides was a friend of Sophocles and Euripides, and the only classical realist who wrote what might be called a tragedy. In the late eighteenth century, German intellectuals turned to tragedy as a model for reconstituting ethics and philosophy. Morgenthau was deeply influenced by this latter development. He was intimately familiar with the corpus of ancient and modern literature and philosophy. His intellectual circle included his colleague and fellow émigré Hannah Arendt, who had studied with Heidegger, wrote about tragedy, and applied its lessons to contemporary politics, as did American-born theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.

Morgenthau came to understand tragedy, he wrote to his British colleague Michael Oakeshott, as 'a quality of existence, not a creation of art' (1948b). His postwar writings, beginning with *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, repeatedly invoke tragedy and its understanding of human beings as the framework for understanding contemporary international relations. The principal theme at which he hammers away is the misplaced faith in the powers of reason that have been encouraged by the Enlightenment. But he is equally wary of emotion freed from the restraints of reason and community. 'The *hybris* of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, the want of moderation in Alexander, Napoleon, and Hitler

are instances of such an extreme and exceptional situation' (1947: 135). Although he never used the Greek word *sophrosunē* (prudence and self-restraint) his German and English writings and correspondence make frequent use of its equivalents: *Urteilkraft* (sound judgement) and prudence. He offers them, as did the Greeks, as the antidotes to hubris. Tragedy, and its emphasis on the limits of human understanding, also shaped his approach to theory. Like politics, it had to set realistic goals, and recognize the extent to which its vision was shaped and constrained by its political and social setting. Political leaders and theorists alike would do well to dwell on this lesson of history.



QUESTIONS

1. What are the principal ways in which classical realists differ from neo- or structural realists?
2. How do classical realists conceive of influence? What is its relation to power?
3. Has our understanding of international politics progressed at all beyond that of Thucydides?
4. In what ways does Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War bridge realism and constructivism?
5. To what extent do Thucydides and Morgenthau attribute the decline and downfall of great powers to their own policy choices versus foreign threats?
6. What other writers on political and international affairs might be considered classical realists? What about Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Carl von Clausewitz, John Herz, and E. H. Carr?
7. When Thucydides and Morgenthau write about ethics, do they have in mind a particular ethical code?
8. How would classical realist analyses of the Cold War (including its beginning and end) differ from a neo- or structural realist account?
9. To what extent can ethical precepts guide foreign policy in a world where there are fundamental disagreements about what is ethical?
10. Describe the respective understandings Thucydides and Morgenthau had of theory. In what ways were they similar and different? How do they differ from the neopositivist understanding of theory that underlies most so-called 'mainstream' theory building in the social sciences?
11. Analyse the respective understanding Thucydides and Morgenthau have of the ability of the balance of power and deterrence to preserve the peace.
12. How would classical realists characterize the similarities and differences between US intervention in Vietnam and Iraq, and between both of those and Soviet intervention in Afghanistan?



FURTHER READING

- Frost, Mervyn, Mayall, James, Rengger, Nicholas, and Lebow, Richard Ned (2003, 2005), Two Symposia on 'Tragedy, Ethics and International Relations', *International Relations* 17/4: 480–503 and 19/4: 324–36. A useful debate on the relevance of tragedy to contemporary International Relations.

4

Structural Realism

JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER

- Herz, John (1950), 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma', *World Politics* 2/12: 157–80. A discussion of the prospects of international transformation by one of the great classical realists and originator of the concept of the security dilemma.
- Lebow, Richard Ned (2003), *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Develops the concept of classical realism and uses it to critique modern realism and its belief that foreign policies should not be based on ethical considerations.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. (1947), *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (London: Latimer House). A classical realist critique of behaviouralism.
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- Reus-Smit, Christian (1999), *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press). Explores the links between ethics, politics, and identity.
- Thucydides (1996), *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, edited by Robert B. Strassler (New York: Free Press). The original text of classical realism.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- Columbia International Affairs Online (CIAO). Access through subscriber university URLs. The best up-to-date website for articles and documents on foreign affairs and international relations.
www.ciaonet.org/
- Text of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.
<http://classics.mit.edu/Thucydides/pelopwar.html>



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/



Chapter contents

- Introduction
- Why do states want power?
- How much power is enough?
- What causes great power war?
- Case study
- Conclusion



Reader's guide

This chapter examines a body of realist theories that argue states care deeply about the balance of power and compete among themselves either to gain power at the expense of others or at least to make sure they do not lose power. They do so because the structure of the international system leaves them little choice if they want to survive. This competition for power makes for a dangerous world where states sometimes fight each other. There are, however, important differences among structural realists. In particular, defensive realists argue that structural factors limit how much power states can gain, which works to ameliorate security competition. Offensive realists, on the other hand, maintain that the system's structure encourages states to maximize their share of world power, to include pursuing hegemony, which tends to intensify security competition. The subsequent analysis revolves around four questions. Why do states want power? How much power do they want? What causes war? Can China rise peacefully (the thematic of the case study)?

Introduction

Realists believe that power is the currency of international politics. Great powers, the main actors in the realists' account, pay careful attention to how much economic and military power they have relative to each other. It is important not only to have a substantial amount of power, but also to make sure that no other state sharply shifts the balance of power in its favour. For realists, international politics is synonymous with power politics.

There are, however, substantial differences among realists. The most basic divide is reflected in the answer to the simple but important question: why do states want power? For classical realists like Hans Morgenthau (1948a), the answer is human nature. Virtually everyone is born with a will to power hardwired into them, which effectively means that great powers are led by individuals who are bent on having their state dominate its rivals. Nothing can be done to alter that drive to be all-powerful. A more detailed treatment of classical realism can be found in Chapter 3.

For structural realists, human nature has little to do with why states want power. Instead, it is the structure or architecture of the international system that forces states to pursue power. In a system where there is no higher authority that sits above the great powers, and where there is no guarantee that one will not attack another, it makes eminently good sense for each state to be powerful enough to protect itself in the event it is attacked. In essence, great powers are trapped in an iron cage where they have little choice but to compete with each other for power if they hope to survive.

Structural realist theories ignore cultural differences among states as well as differences in regime type, mainly because the international system creates the same basic incentives for all great powers. Whether a state is democratic or autocratic matters relatively little for how it acts towards other states. Nor does it matter much who is in charge of conducting a state's foreign policy. Structural realists treat states as if they were black boxes: they are assumed to be alike, save for the fact that some states are more or less powerful than others.

There is a significant divide between structural realists, which is reflected in the answer to a second question that concerns realists: how much power is enough? Defensive realists like Kenneth Waltz (1979) maintain that it is unwise for states to try to maximize their share of world power, because the system will punish them if they attempt to gain too much power. The pursuit of hegemony, they argue, is especially foolhardy. Offensive realists like John Mearsheimer (2001) take the opposite view; they maintain that it makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, to pursue hegemony. The argument is not that conquest or domination is good in itself, but instead that having overwhelming power is the best way to ensure one's own survival. For classical realists, power is an end in itself; for structural realists, power is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival.

Power is based on the material capabilities that a state controls. The balance of power is mainly a function of the tangible military assets that states possess, such as armoured divisions and nuclear weapons. However, states have a second kind of power, latent power, which refers to the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power. Latent power is based on a state's wealth and the size of its overall population. Great

powers need money, technology, and personnel to build military forces and to fight wars, and a state's latent power refers to the raw potential it can draw on when competing with rival states. It should be clear from this discussion that war is not the only way that states can gain power. They can also do so by increasing the size of their population and their share of global wealth, as China has done over the past few decades.

Let us now consider in greater detail the structural realists' explanation for why states pursue power, and then explore why defensive and offensive realists differ about how much power states want. The focus will then shift to examining different structural realist explanations about the causes of great power war. Finally, I will illuminate these theoretical issues with a case study that assesses whether China can rise peacefully.

Why do states want power?

There is a simple structural realist explanation for why states compete among themselves for power. It is based on five straightforward assumptions about the international system. None of these assumptions alone says that states should attempt to gain power at each other's expense. But when they are married together, they depict a world of ceaseless security competition.

The first assumption is that great powers are the main actors in world politics and they operate in an anarchic system. This is not to say that the system is characterized by chaos or disorder. Anarchy is an ordering principle; it simply means that there is no centralized authority or ultimate arbiter that stands above states. The opposite of anarchy is hierarchy, which is the ordering principle of domestic politics.

The second assumption is that all states possess some offensive military capability. Each state, in other words, has the power to inflict some harm on its neighbour. Of course, that capability varies among states and for any state it can change over time.

The third assumption is that states can never be certain about the intentions of other states. States ultimately want to know whether other states are determined to use force to alter the balance of power (revisionist states), or whether they are satisfied enough with it that they have no interest in using force to change it (status quo states). The problem, however, is that it is almost impossible to discern another state's intentions with a high degree of certainty. Unlike military capabilities, intentions cannot be empirically verified. Intentions are in the minds of decision-makers and they are especially difficult to discern.

One might respond that policy-makers disclose their intentions in speeches and policy documents, which can be assessed. The problem with that argument is policy-makers sometimes lie about or conceal their true intentions. But even if one could determine another state's intentions today, there is no way to determine its future intentions. It is impossible to know who will be running foreign policy in any state five or ten years from now, much less whether they will have aggressive intentions. This is not to say that states can be certain that their neighbours have or will have revisionist goals. Instead, the argument is that policy-makers can never be certain whether they are dealing with a revisionist or status quo state.

The fourth assumption is that the main goal of states is survival. States seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order. They can pursue other goals like prosperity and protecting human rights, but those aims must always take a back seat to survival, because if a state does not survive, it cannot pursue those other goals.

The fifth assumption is that states are rational actors, which is to say they are capable of coming up with sound strategies that maximize their prospects for survival. This is not to deny that they miscalculate from time to time. Because states operate with imperfect information in a complicated world, they sometimes make serious mistakes.

Again, none of these assumptions by themselves says that states will or should compete with each other for power. For sure, the third assumption leaves open the possibility that there is a revisionist state in the system. By itself, however, it says nothing about why all states pursue power. It is only when all the assumptions are combined together that circumstances arise where states not only become preoccupied with the balance of power, but acquire powerful incentives to gain power at each other's expense.

To begin with, great powers fear each other. There is little trust among them. They worry about the intentions of other states, in large part because they are so hard to divine. Their greatest fear is that another state might have the capability as well as the motive to attack them. This danger is compounded by the fact that states operate in an anarchic system, which means that there is no nightwatchman who can rescue them if they are threatened by another country. When a state dials the emergency services for help, there is nobody in the international system to answer the call.

The level of fear between states varies from case to case, but it can never be reduced to an inconsequential level. The stakes are simply too great to allow that to happen. International politics is a potentially deadly business where there is the ever-present possibility of war, which often means mass killing on and off the battlefield, and which might even lead to a state's destruction.

Great powers also understand that they operate in a self-help world. They have to rely on themselves to ensure their survival, because other states are potential threats and because there is no higher authority they can turn to if they are attacked. This is not to deny that states can form alliances, which are often useful for dealing with dangerous adversaries. In the final analysis, however, states have no choice but to put their own interests ahead of the interests of other states as well as the so-called international community.

Fearful of other states, and knowing that they operate in a self-help world, states quickly realize that the best way to survive is to be especially powerful. The reasoning here is straightforward: the more powerful a state is relative to its competitors, the less likely it is that it will be attacked. No country in the Western Hemisphere, for example, would dare strike the USA, because it is so powerful relative to its neighbours.

This simple logic drives great powers to look for opportunities to shift the balance of power in their favour. At the very least, states want to make sure that no other state gains power at their expense. Of course, each state in the system understands this logic, which leads to an unremitting competition for power. In essence, the structure of the system forces every great power – even those that would otherwise be satisfied with the status quo – to think and act when appropriate like a revisionist state.

One might think that peace must be possible if all of the major powers are content with the status quo. The problem, however, is that it is impossible for states to be sure about each other's intentions, especially future intentions. A neighbour might look and sound like a status quo power, but in reality is a revisionist state. Or it might be a status quo state today, but change its stripes tomorrow. In an anarchic system, where there is no ultimate arbiter, states that want to survive have little choice but to assume the worst about the intentions of other states and to compete for power with them. This is the tragedy of great power politics.

The structural imperatives described above are reflected in the famous concept of the security dilemma (Herz 1950; see also Glaser 1997). The essence of that dilemma is that most steps a great power takes to enhance its own security decrease the security of other states. For example, any country that improves its position in the global balance of power does so at the expense of other states, which lose relative power. In this zero-sum world, it is difficult for a state to improve its prospects for survival without threatening the survival of other states. Of course, the threatened states then do whatever is necessary to ensure their survival, which, in turn, threatens other states, all of which leads to perpetual security competition.

How much power is enough?

There is disagreement among structural realists about how much power states should aim to control. Offensive realists argue that states should always be looking for opportunities to gain more power and should do so whenever it seems feasible. States should maximize power, and their ultimate goal should be hegemony, because that is the best way to guarantee survival.

While defensive realists recognize that the international system creates strong incentives to gain additional increments of power, they maintain that it is strategically foolish to pursue hegemony. That would amount to overexpansion of the worst kind. States, by their account, should not maximize power, but should instead strive for what Kenneth Waltz calls an 'appropriate amount of power' (1979: 40). This restraint is largely the result of three factors.

Defensive realists emphasize that if any state becomes too powerful, balancing will occur. Specifically, the other great powers will build up their militaries and form a balancing coalition that will leave the aspiring hegemon at least less secure, and maybe even destroy it. This is what happened to Napoleonic France (1792–1815), Imperial Germany (1900–18), and Nazi Germany (1933–45) when they made a run at dominating Europe. Each aspiring hegemon was decisively defeated by an alliance that included all, or almost all, of the other great powers. Otto von Bismarck's genius, according to the defensive realists, was that he understood that too much power was bad for Germany, because it would cause its neighbours to balance against it. So, he wisely put the brakes on German expansion after winning stunning victories in the Austro-Prussian (1866) and Franco-Prussian (1870–1) Wars.

Some defensive realists argue that there is an offence–defence balance, which indicates how easy or difficult it is to conquer territory or defeat a defender in battle. In other words, it tells you whether or not offence pays. Defensive realists maintain that the offence–defence balance is usually heavily weighted in the defender's favour, and thus any state that attempts to gain large amounts of additional power is likely to end up fighting a series of losing wars. Accordingly, states will recognize the futility of offence and concentrate instead on maintaining their position in the balance of power. If they do go on the offensive, their aims will be limited.

Defensive realists further argue that, even when conquest is feasible, it does not pay: the costs outweigh the benefits. Because of nationalism, it is especially difficult, sometimes impossible, for the conqueror to subdue the conquered. The ideology of nationalism, which is pervasive and potent, is all about self-determination, which virtually guarantees that occupied populations will rise up against the occupier. Moreover, it is difficult for foreigners to exploit modern industrial economies, mainly because information technologies require openness and freedom, which are rarely found in occupations.

In sum, not only is conquest difficult but, even in those rare instances where great powers conquer another state, they get few benefits and lots of trouble. According to defensive realism, these basic facts about life in the international system should be apparent to all states and should limit their appetite for more power. Otherwise, they run the risk of threatening their own survival. If all states recognize this logic – and they should if they are rational actors – security competition should not be particularly intense, and there should be few great power wars and certainly no central wars (conflicts involving all or almost all the great powers).

Offensive realists do not buy these arguments. They understand that threatened states usually balance against dangerous foes, but they maintain that balancing is often inefficient, especially when it comes to forming balancing coalitions, and that this inefficiency provides opportunities for a clever aggressor to take advantage of its adversaries. Furthermore, threatened states sometimes opt for buck-passing rather than joining a balancing coalition. In other words, they attempt to get other states to assume the burden of checking a powerful opponent while they remain on the sidelines. This kind of behaviour, which is commonplace among great powers, also creates opportunities for aggression.

Offensive realists also take issue with the claim that the defender has a significant advantage over the attacker, and thus offence hardly ever pays. Indeed, the historical record shows that the side that initiates war wins more often than not. And while it may be difficult to gain hegemony, the USA did accomplish this feat in the Western Hemisphere during the nineteenth century. Also, Imperial Germany came close to achieving hegemony in Europe during the First World War.

Both defensive and offensive realists agree, however, that nuclear weapons have little utility for offensive purposes, except where only one side in a conflict has them. The reason is simple: if both sides have a survivable retaliatory capability, neither gains an advantage from striking first. Moreover, both camps agree that conventional war between nuclear-armed states is possible but not likely, because of the danger of escalation to the nuclear level.

Finally, while offensive realists acknowledge that sometimes conquest does not pay, they also point out that sometimes it does. Conquerors can exploit a vanquished state's economy

for gain, even in the information age. Indeed, Peter Liberman argues that information technologies have an 'Orwellian' dimension, which facilitates repression in important ways (1996: 126). While nationalism surely has the potential to make occupation a nasty undertaking, occupied states are sometimes relatively easy to govern, as was the case in France under the Nazis (1940–4). Moreover, a victorious state need not occupy a defeated state to gain an advantage over it. The victor might annex a slice of the defeated state's territory, break it into two or more smaller states, or simply disarm it and prevent it from rearming.

For all of these reasons, offensive realists expect great powers to be constantly looking for opportunities to gain advantage over each other, with the ultimate prize being hegemony. The security competition in this world will tend to be intense and there are likely to be great power wars. Moreover, the grave danger of central war will arise whenever there is a potential hegemon on the scene.

The past behaviour of the great powers has been more in accordance with the predictions of offensive rather than defensive realism. During the first half of the twentieth century, there were two world wars in which three great powers attempted and failed to gain regional hegemony: Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany. The second half of that century was dominated by the Cold War, in which the USA and the Soviet Union engaged in an intense security competition that came close to blows in the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).

Many defensive realists acknowledge that the great powers often behave in ways that contradict their theory. They maintain, however, that those states were not behaving rationally, and thus it is not surprising that Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany were destroyed in those wars they foolishly started. States that maximize power, they argue, do not enhance their prospects for survival; they undermine it.

This is certainly a legitimate line of argument but, once defensive realists acknowledge that states often act in strategically foolish ways, they need to explain when states act according to the dictates of their structural realist theory and when they do not. Thus, Waltz famously argues that his theory of international politics needs to be supplemented by a separate theory of foreign policy that can explain misguided state behaviour. However, that additional theory, which invariably emphasizes domestic political considerations, is not a structural realist theory.

The theories of defensive realists such as Barry Posen, Jack Snyder, and Stephen Van Evera conform closely to this simple Waltzian template. Each argues that structural logic can explain a reasonable amount of state behaviour, but a substantial amount of it cannot be explained by structural realism. Therefore, an alternative theory is needed to explain those instances where great powers act in non-strategic ways. To that end, Posen (1984) relies on organizational theory, Snyder (1991) on domestic regime type, and Van Evera (1999) on militarism. Each is proposing a theory of foreign policy, to use Waltz's language. In essence, defensive realists have to go beyond structural realism to explain how states act in the international system. They must combine domestic-level and system-level theories to explain how the world works.

Offensive realists, on the other hand, tend to rely exclusively on structural arguments to explain international politics. They do not need a distinct theory of foreign policy, mainly because the world looks a lot like the offensive realists say it should. This means, however, that they must make the case that it made strategic sense for Germany to pursue hegemony

in Europe between 1900 and 1945, and for Japan to do the same in Asia between 1931 and 1945. Of course, offensive realists recognize that states occasionally act in strategically foolish ways, and that those cases contradict their theory. Defensive realists, as emphasized, have a fall-back position that is not available to offensive realists: they can explain cases of non-strategic behaviour with a separate theory of foreign policy.

What causes great power war?

Structural realists recognize that states can go to war for any number of reasons, which makes it impossible to come up with a simple theory that points to a single factor as the main cause of war. There is no question that states sometimes start wars to gain power over a rival state and enhance their security. But security is not always the principal driving force behind a state's decision for war. Ideology or economic considerations are sometimes paramount. For example, nationalism was the main reason Bismarck launched wars against Denmark (1864), Austria (1866), and France (1870–1). The Prussian leader wanted to create a unified Germany.

Wars motivated largely by non-security considerations are consistent with structural realism as long as the aggressor does not purposely act in ways that would harm its position in the balance of power. Actually, victory in war almost always improves a state's relative power position, regardless of the reason for initiating the conflict. The German state that emerged after 1870 was much more powerful than the Prussian state Bismarck took control of in 1862.

Although isolating a particular cause of all wars is not a fruitful enterprise, structural realists maintain that the likelihood of war is affected by the architecture of the international system. Some realists argue that the key variable is the number of great powers or poles in the system, while others focus on the distribution of power among the major states. A third approach looks at how changes in the distribution of power affect the likelihood of war. Finally, some realists claim that variations in the offence–defence balance have the greatest influence on the prospects for war.

The polarity of the system

A longstanding debate among realists is whether bipolarity (two great powers) is more or less war-prone than multipolarity (three or more great powers). It is generally agreed that the state system was multipolar from its inception in 1648 until the Second World War ended in 1945. It was only bipolar during the Cold War, which began right after the Second World War and ran until 1989.

It is tempting to argue that it is clear from twentieth-century European history that bipolarity is more peaceful than multipolarity. After all, there were two world wars in the first half of that century, when Europe was multipolar, while there was no shooting war between the USA and the Soviet Union during the latter half of that century, when the system was bipolar.

This line of argument looks much less persuasive, however, when the timeline includes the nineteenth century. There was no war between any European great powers from 1815 to 1853, and again from 1871 to 1914. Those lengthy periods of relative stability, which occurred in multipolar Europe, compare favourably with the 'long peace' of the Cold War. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether bipolarity or multipolarity is more prone to great power war by looking at modern European history.

Proponents of these rival perspectives, however, do not rely on history alone to make their case; they also employ theoretical arguments. Realists who think bipolarity is less war-prone offer three supporting arguments. First, they maintain that there is more opportunity for great powers to fight each other in multipolarity. There are only two great powers in bipolarity, which means there is only one great power versus great power dyad. In multipolarity, by contrast, there are three potential conflict dyads when there are three great powers, and even more as the number of great powers increases.

Second, there tends to be greater equality between the great powers in bipolarity because, the more great powers there are in the system, the more likely it is that wealth and population, the principal building blocks of military power, will be distributed unevenly among the great powers. And, when there are power imbalances, the stronger often have opportunities to take advantage of the weaker. Furthermore, it is possible in a multipolar system for two or more great powers to gang up on a third great power. Such behaviour is impossible, by definition, in bipolarity.

Third, there is greater potential for miscalculation in multipolarity, and miscalculation often contributes to the outbreak of war. Specifically, there is more clarity about potential threats in bipolarity, because there is only one other great power. Those two states invariably focus on each other, reducing the likelihood that they will misgauge each other's capabilities or intentions. In contrast, there are a handful of great powers in multipolarity and they usually operate in a fluid environment, where identifying friends from foes as well as their relative strength is more difficult.

Balancing is also said to be more efficient in bipolar systems, because each great power has no choice but to directly confront the other. After all, there are no other great powers that can do the balancing or can be part of a balancing coalition and, although lesser powers can be useful allies, they cannot decide the overall balance of power. In multipolarity, however, threatened states will often be tempted to pass the buck to other threatened states. Although buck-passing is an attractive strategy, it can lead to circumstances where aggressors think they can isolate and defeat an adversary. Of course, threatened states can choose not to pass the buck and instead form a balancing coalition against the threatening state. But putting together alliances is often an uncertain process. An aggressor might conclude that it can gain its objectives before the opposing coalition is fully formed. These dynamics are absent from the simple world of bipolarity, where the two rivals have only each other to think about.

Not all realists, however, accept the claim that bipolarity facilitates peace. Some argue that multipolarity is less war-prone. In this view, the more great powers there are in the system, the better the prospects for peace. This optimism is based on two considerations. First, deterrence is much easier in multipolarity, because there are more states that can join together to confront an especially aggressive state with overwhelming force. In bipolarity, there are no other balancing partners. Balancing in multipolarity might be

inefficient sometimes, but eventually the coalition forms and the aggressor is defeated, as Napoleonic France, Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany all learned the hard way.

Second, there is much less hostility among the great powers in multipolarity, because the amount of attention they pay to each other is less than in bipolarity. In a world with only two great powers, each concentrates its attention on the other. But, in multipolarity, states cannot afford to be overly concerned with any one of their neighbours. They have to spread around their attention to all the great powers. Plus, the many interactions among the various states in a multipolar system create numerous cross-cutting cleavages that mitigate conflict. Complexity, in short, dampens the prospects for great power war.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union many realists argue that unipolarity has arrived (Wohlforth 1999). The USA, in other words, is the sole great power. It has achieved global hegemony, a feat no other country has ever accomplished. Other realists, however, argue that the post-Cold War system is multipolar, not unipolar. The USA, they maintain, is by far the most powerful state on earth, but there are other great powers, such as China and Russia.

What are the consequences for international stability if the international system is unipolar? Such a world is likely to be more peaceful than either a bipolar or multipolar world. Most importantly, there can be neither security competition nor war between great powers in unipolarity, because it includes just one great power. Furthermore, the minor powers are likely to go out of their way to avoid fighting the sole pole. Think about the Western Hemisphere, where the USA clearly enjoys hegemony. No state in that region would willingly start a war with the USA for fear of being easily and decisively defeated. This same logic would apply to all regions of the world if the USA was a global hegemon.

There are two caveats to this line of argument. If the hegemon feels secure in the absence of other great powers and pulls most of its military forces back to its own region, security competition and maybe even war is likely to break out in the regions it abandons. After all, the sole pole will no longer be present in those places to maintain order. On the other hand, the hegemon might think that its superior position creates a window of opportunity for it to use its awesome military power to reorder the politics of distant regions. A global hegemon engaged in large-scale social engineering at the end of a rifle barrel will not facilitate world peace. Still, there cannot be war between great powers in unipolarity.

Balanced or imbalanced power

Rather than look to the number of great powers to explain the outbreak of war, some realists argue that the key explanatory variable is how much power each of them controls. Power can be distributed more or less evenly among the great powers. Although the power ratios among all the great powers affect the prospects for peace, the key ratio is that between the two most powerful countries in the system. If there is a lopsided gap, the number one state is a preponderant power, simply because it is so much more powerful than all the others.¹ However, if the gap between numbers one and two is small, there is said to be a rough balance of power, even though power might not be distributed equally among all the great powers. The key point is that there is no marked difference in power between the two leading states.

Some realists maintain that the presence of an especially powerful state facilitates peace. A preponderant power, so the argument goes, is likely to feel secure because it is so powerful relative to its competitors; therefore, it will have little need to use force to improve its position in the balance of power. Moreover, none of the other great powers is likely to pick a fight with the leading power, because they would almost certainly lose. However, war among the lesser great powers is still possible, because the balance of power between any two of them will at least sometimes be roughly equal, thus allowing for the possibility that one might defeat the other. But, even then, if the preponderant power believes that such wars might upset a favourable international order, it should have the wherewithal to stop them, or at least make them unusual events.

The historical case that proponents of this perspective emphasize is the period between Napoleon's defeat in 1815 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. There were only five wars between the great powers during these hundred years (1853–6, 1859, 1866, 1870–1, 1904–5), and none was a central war like the two conflicts that bracket the period. This lengthy period of relative peace – sometimes called the *Pax Britannica* – is said to be the consequence of Britain's commanding position in the international system. Conversely, the reason there were central wars before and after this period is that Napoleonic France and Imperial Germany, respectively, were roughly equal in power to Britain.

Other realists take the opposite view and argue that preponderance increases the chance of war. Indeed, central wars are likely when there is an especially powerful country in the system. A preponderant power, according to this perspective, is a potential hegemon. It has the wherewithal to make a run at dominating the system, which is the best guarantee of survival in international anarchy. Therefore, it will not be satisfied with the status quo, but instead will look for opportunities to gain hegemony. When there is rough equality among the great powers, no state can make a serious run at hegemony, ruling out deadly central wars. Great power wars are still possible, but the fact that power tends to be rather evenly distributed reduces the incentives for picking fights with other great powers.

Proponents of this viewpoint argue that the Napoleonic Wars were largely due to the fact that France was a potential hegemon by the late eighteenth century. The two world wars happened because Germany was twice in a position during the first half of the twentieth century to make a run at European hegemony. The long period of relative peace from 1815 to 1914 was not due to the *Pax Britannica*, because Britain was not a preponderant power. After all, no balancing coalition ever formed against Britain, which was hardly feared by Europe's continental powers. The reason there were lengthy periods of peace in Europe during these hundred years is that there was a rough balance of power in multipolar Europe. Unbalanced multipolarity, not balanced multipolarity, increases the risks of great power war.

Power shifts and war

Other realists maintain that focusing on static indicators like the number of great powers or how much power each controls is wrongheaded. They claim that instead the focus should be on the dynamics of the balance of power, especially on significant changes that take place in the distribution of power (Copeland 2000). Probably the best known argument in this school of thought is that a preponderant power confronted with a rising

challenger creates an especially dangerous situation, because a central war usually results. The dominant state, knowing its days at the pinnacle of power are numbered, has strong incentives to launch a preventive war against the challenger to halt its rise. Of course, the declining state has to act while it still enjoys a decided power advantage over its growing rival. Some scholars argue that the rising power is likely to initiate the war in this scenario. But that makes little sense, because time is on the side of the ascending power, which does not need a war to catch up with and overtake the leading state.

The origins of the two world wars are said to illustrate this line of argument. Germany was the dominant power in Europe before both conflicts, but each time it faced a rising challenger to its east: Russia before 1914 and the Soviet Union before 1939. To forestall decline and maintain its commanding position in the European balance of power, Germany launched preventive wars in 1914 and 1939, both of which turned into devastating central wars.

The offence–defence balance

As noted, some defensive realists argue that there is an offence–defence balance which almost always favours the defence, and thus works to dampen security competition. As such, that balance is a force for peace. Some defensive realists, however, allow for significant variation in the balance between defence and offence, and argue that offensive advantage is likely to result in war, while defence dominance facilitates peace. For example, the Second World War occurred because the tank and the dive bomber, when incorporated into a blitzkrieg doctrine, markedly shifted the offence–defence balance in the offence's favour. On the other hand, there was no shooting war between the USA and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, because the coming of nuclear weapons sharply shifted the balance in the defence's favour.

In sum, a variety of structural arguments attempt to explain when great power war is more or less likely. Each has a different underlying causal logic and each looks at the historical record in a different way.



Case study: can China rise peacefully?

The Chinese economy has been growing at an impressive pace since the early 1980s, and many experts expect it to continue expanding at a similar rate over the next few decades. If so, China, with its huge population, will eventually have the wherewithal to build an especially formidable military. China is almost certain to become a military powerhouse, but what China will do with its military muscle, and how the USA and China's Asian neighbours will react to its rise, remain open questions.

There is no single structural realist answer to these questions. Some realist theories predict that China's ascent will lead to serious instability, while others provide reasons to think that a powerful China can have relatively peaceful relations with its neighbours as well as the USA. Let us consider some of these different perspectives, starting with offensive

realism, which predicts that a rising China and the USA will engage in an intense security competition with considerable potential for war.

The rise of China according to offensive realism

The ultimate goal of the great powers, according to offensive realism, is to gain hegemony, because that is the best guarantor of survival. In practice, it is almost impossible for any country to achieve global hegemony, because it is too hard to project and sustain power around the planet and onto the territory of distant great powers. The best outcome that a state can hope for is to be a regional hegemon, which means dominating one's own geographical area. The USA's 'Founding Fathers' and their successors understood this basic logic and they worked assiduously to make the USA the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. It finally achieved regional hegemony in 1898. While the USA has grown even more powerful since then, and is today the most powerful state in the system, it is not a global hegemon.

States that gain regional hegemony have a further aim: they seek to prevent great powers in other geographical regions from duplicating their feat. Regional hegemons do not want peer competitors. Instead, they want to keep other regions divided among several major states, who will then compete with each other and not be in a position to focus on them. Thus, after achieving regional dominance, the USA has gone to great lengths to prevent other great powers from controlling Asia and Europe. There were four great powers in the twentieth century that had the capability to make a run at regional hegemony: Imperial Germany (1900–18), Imperial Japan (1931–45), Nazi Germany (1933–45), and the Soviet Union (1945–89). In each case, the USA played a key role in defeating and dismantling those aspiring hegemons. In short, the ideal situation for any great power is to be the only regional hegemon in the world.

If offensive realism is correct, we should expect a rising China to imitate the USA and attempt to become a regional hegemon in Asia. China will seek to maximize the power gap between itself and its neighbours, especially Japan and Russia. China will want to make sure that it is so powerful that no state in Asia has the wherewithal to threaten it. An increasingly powerful China is also likely to try to push US military forces out of Asia, much the way the USA pushed the European great powers out of the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth century. China can be expected to come up with its own version of the Monroe Doctrine.

From China's perspective, these policy goals make good strategic sense. Beijing should want a militarily weak Japan and Russia as its neighbours, just as the USA prefers a militarily weak Canada and Mexico on its borders. All Chinese remember what happened in the last century when Japan was powerful and China was weak. Furthermore, why would a powerful China accept US military forces operating in its backyard? US policy-makers, after all, become incensed when other great powers send their military forces into the Western Hemisphere. They are invariably seen as a potential threat to US security. The same logic should apply to China.

It is clear from the historical record how US policy-makers will react if China attempts to dominate Asia. The USA does not tolerate peer competitors, as it demonstrated in the twentieth century, it is determined to remain the only regional hegemon. Therefore,

the USA will work hard to contain China and ultimately to weaken it to the point where it is no longer a threat to control the commanding heights in Asia. In essence, the USA is likely to behave towards China much the way it behaved towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

China's neighbours are also sure to fear its rise, and they too will do whatever they can to prevent it from achieving regional hegemony. In fact, there is already evidence that countries like India, Japan, and Russia, as well as smaller powers like Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam, are worried about China's ascendancy and are looking for ways to contain it. In the end, they will join a US-led balancing coalition to check China's rise, much the way Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and even China, joined forces with the USA to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The rise of China according to defensive realism

In contrast to offensive realism, defensive realism offers a more optimistic story about China's rise. For sure, defensive realists recognize that the international system creates strong incentives for states to want additional increments of power to ensure their survival. A mighty China will be no exception; it will look for opportunities to shift the balance of power in its favour. Moreover, both the USA and China's neighbors will have to balance against China to keep it in check. Security competition will not disappear altogether from Asia as China grows more powerful. Defensive realists are not starry-eyed idealists.

Nevertheless, defensive realism provides reason to think that the security competition surrounding China's rise will not be intense, and that China should be able to coexist peacefully with both its neighbours and the USA. For starters, it does not make strategic sense for great powers to pursue hegemony, because their rivals will form a balancing coalition and thwart – maybe even crush – them. It is much smarter for China's leaders to act like Bismarck, who never tried to dominate Europe, but still made Germany great, rather than Kaiser Wilhelm or Adolf Hitler, who both made a run at hegemony and led Germany to ruin. This is not to deny that China will attempt to gain power in Asia. But structure dictates that it will have limited aims; it will not be so foolish as to try to maximize its share of world power. A powerful China with a limited appetite should be reasonably easy to contain and to engage in cooperative endeavors.

The presence of nuclear weapons is another cause for optimism. It is difficult for any great power to expand when confronted by other powers with nuclear weapons. India, Russia, and the USA all have nuclear arsenals, and Japan could quickly go nuclear if it felt threatened by China. These countries, which are likely to form the core of an anti-China balancing coalition, will not be easy for China to push around as long as they have nuclear weapons. In fact, China is likely to act cautiously towards them for fear of triggering a conflict that might escalate to the nuclear level. In short, nuclear weapons will be a force for peace if China continues its rise.

Finally, it is hard to see what China gains by conquering other Asian countries. China's economy has been growing at an impressive pace without foreign adventures, proving that conquest is unnecessary for accumulating great wealth. Moreover, if China starts conquering and occupying countries, it is likely to run into fierce resistance

from the populations which fall under its control. The US experience in Iraq should be a warning to China that the benefits of expansion in the age of nationalism are outweighed by the costs.

Although these considerations indicate that China's rise should be relatively peaceful, defensive realists allow for the possibility that domestic political considerations might cause Beijing to act in strategically foolish ways. After all, they recognize that Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, and Nazi Germany made ill-advised runs at hegemony. But they maintain that the behaviour of those great powers was motivated by domestic political pathologies, not sound strategic logic. While that may be true, it leaves open the possibility that China might follow a similar path, in which case its rise will not be peaceful.

There are other structural realist perspectives for assessing whether or not China's rise will be peaceful. If the world is unipolar, as some structural realists argue, then the growth of Chinese power will eventually put an end to unipolarity. When it does, the world will be a more dangerous place, since there cannot be war between great powers in unipolarity, while there certainly can be if both China and the USA are great powers. Furthermore, if Japan acquires nuclear weapons, Russia gets its house in order, and India continues its rise, there would be a handful of great powers in the system, which would further increase the potential for great power conflict.

Of course, one might argue that China's ascendancy will lead to bipolarity, which is a relatively peaceful architecture, even if it is not as pacific as unipolarity. After all, there was no shooting war between the superpowers during the Cold War. Indeed, the security competition between them was not especially intense after the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was more dangerous before then, mainly because the USA and the Soviet Union had to come to grips with the nuclear revolution and also learn the rules of the road for dealing with each other under bipolarity, which was then a new and unfamiliar structure. China and the USA, however, would have the benefit of all that learning that took place during the Cold War, and could deal with each other from the start much the way that Moscow and Washington dealt with each other after 1962.

Not all structural realists accept the argument that bipolarity is more prone to peace than multipolarity. For them, a return to bipolarity would be a cause for pessimism. However, if the rise of China was accompanied by the emergence of other great powers, the ensuing multipolarity would give these realists more cause for optimism.

Finally, for structural realists who believe that preponderance produces peace, the rise of China is ominous news. They argue that US power has had a pacifying effect on international politics. No other great power, and certainly no minor power, would dare pick a fight with the USA as long as it sits at the pinnacle of world power. But that situation would obviously change if China reached the point where it was almost as powerful as the USA. Preponderance would disappear, and without it the world would be a much more dangerous place. Indeed, these realists would argue that the USA would have strong incentives to launch a preventive war against China to forestall decline.

In sum, there is no consensus among structural realists about whether China can rise peacefully. This diversity of views is not surprising since these same realists disagree among themselves about how much power states should want as well as what causes war.

The only important point of agreement among them is that the structure of the international system forces great powers to compete among themselves for power.

Conclusion

It was commonplace during the 1990s for pundits and scholars to proclaim that the world was rapidly becoming more peaceful and that realism was dead. International politics was said to have been transformed with the end of the Cold War. Globalization of the economic sort was supposedly tying the state in knots; some even predicted its imminent demise. Others argued that Western elites were for the first time thinking and talking about international politics in more cooperative and hopeful terms, and that the globalization of knowledge was facilitating the spread of that new approach.

Many argued that democracy was spreading across the globe and, because democracies do not fight each other, we had reached the 'the end of history' (classical liberalism is discussed in Chapter 5). Still others claimed that international institutions were finally developing the capacity to cause the major powers to act according to the rule of law, not the dictates of realism.

In the wake of September 11, that optimism has faded, if not disappeared altogether, and realism has made a stunning comeback. Its resurrection is due in part to the fact that almost every realist opposed the Iraq War, which has turned into a strategic disaster for the USA and UK. But, more importantly, there is little reason to think that globalization or international institutions have crippled the state. Indeed, the state appears to have a bright future, mainly because nationalism, which glorifies the state, remains a powerful political ideology. Even in Western Europe, where there has been unprecedented economic integration, the state is alive and well.

Furthermore, military power is still a critical element in world politics. The USA and the UK, the world's two great liberal democracies, have fought five wars together since the Cold War ended in 1989. Both Iran and North Korea remind us that nuclear proliferation remains a major problem, and it is not difficult to posit plausible scenarios where India and Pakistan end up in a shooting war that involves nuclear weapons. It is also possible, although not likely, that China and the USA could get dragged into a war over Taiwan, or even North Korea. Regarding China's rise, even the optimists acknowledge that there is potential for serious trouble if the politics surrounding that profound shift in global power are handled badly.

In essence, the world remains a dangerous place, although the level of threat varies from place to place and time to time. States still worry about their survival, which means that they have little choice but to pay attention to the balance of power. International politics is still synonymous with power politics, as it has been for all of recorded history. Therefore, it behoves students of International Relations to think long and hard about the concept of power, and to develop their own views on why states pursue power, how much power is enough, and when security competition is likely to lead to war. Thinking smartly about these matters is essential for developing clever strategies, which is the only way states can mitigate the dangers of international anarchy.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do states in international anarchy fear each other?
2. Is there a reliable way to determine the intentions of states?
3. Is China's rise likely to look like Germany's rise between 1900 and 1945?
4. Does it make sense for states to pursue hegemony?
5. Why was the Cold War not a hot war?
6. Does it make sense to assume that states are rational?
7. Is balancing a reliable deterrent against aggressive states?
8. What is the security dilemma and is there a solution to it?
9. Is the USA a global hegemon?
10. Is unipolarity more peaceful than bipolarity or multipolarity?
11. Is realism relevant in contemporary Europe?
12. What is the tragedy of great power politics?

FURTHER READING

- **Brown, M. E., Coté Jr, O. R., Lynn-Jones, S. M., and Miller, S. E. (2004) (eds), *Offense, Defense, and War* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press).** Contains key articles by structural realists, including Robert Jervis's seminal article, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, 1978.
- **Copeland, D. C. (2000), *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press).** Sophisticated brief for the claim that major wars are caused by sharp changes in the balance of power.
- **Dickinson, G. L. (1916), *The European Anarchy* (New York: Macmillan Company).** Short, but brilliant book which introduced the concept of international anarchy.
- **Dunne, T. and Schmidt B. (2004), 'Realism', in J. Baylis and S. Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press).** An accessible chapter which charts the major debates within and about realism.
- **Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton).** The most comprehensive statement of offensive realism.
- **Posen, B. R. (1984), *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press).** A smart book that explains the limits of structural realism for explaining military doctrine.
- **Schmidt, B. C. (1988), *The Political Discourse of Anarchy* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press).** A history of the early years of the discipline of International Relations which shows the dominance of realism.
- **Snyder, J. (1991), *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and the International Ambition* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press).** Excellent case studies on how the great powers behaved in the twentieth century from a defensive realist perspective.
- **Van Evera, S. (1999), *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press).** An important study which argues that the offence-defence balance explains much of international history.

5

Liberalism

DIANA PANKE AND THOMAS RISSE

- Walt, S. M. (1987), *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press). Influential work on the prevalence of balancing behaviour in international politics.
- Waltz, K. N. (1979), *Theory of International Politics* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley). Seminal book that lays out the fundamentals of structural realism but with a defensive realist bent.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- Interviews with Robert Jervis, John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt, and Kenneth Waltz.
<http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/conversations/alpha.html>
 - Introduction to realism.
www.geocities.com/virtualwarcollege/ir_realism.htm
 - Coalition for a Realistic Foreign Policy attempts to push US foreign policy in a realist direction.
www.realisticforeignpolicy.org/
- Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

Chapter contents

- Introduction
- Varieties of liberal approaches
- Case study
- Conclusion

Reader's guide

This chapter provides an overview of liberal theories of International Relations (IR). It identifies the importance of domestic politics and politics for the international behaviour of states as the common core of all liberal theories. While their intellectual roots can be traced back at least to Immanuel Kant's writings, 'second image' approaches – as they have also been called – have mushroomed in the discipline from the 1970s on. To make sense of the variety of liberal second image theories in contemporary IR, this chapter categorizes them according to two dimensions: We distinguish between liberal theories that focus either on domestic actors or on domestic structures, and those that follow either rationalist or constructivist meta-theoretical assumptions. We illustrate their empirical usefulness with regard to the Second Iraq War of 2003: How do the various liberal theories explain why the USA went to war against Saddam Hussein, while Germany opted for peace?

Introduction

All classical liberal theories of International Relations rest on the core assumption that domestic actors or structures strongly influence the foreign-policy identities and interests of states as well as their actual behaviour in international relations. In theorizing identities, interests, and behaviour from the ‘inside-out’, liberal approaches consider domestic properties (actors, institutions, practices) as crucial explanatory variables (also referred to as ‘independent variables’). In the terminology of Waltz’s ‘three images’, or ‘levels of analysis’, through which to theorize international politics (Waltz 1959: 12f.), we argue that liberal theories of IR tend to be second image approaches. By second image, we mean explanations for international outcomes that are located at the level of the state. This is significantly different to third-image approaches to liberalism which focus on the impact of regimes and international organizations on unit-level behaviour. (This strand is known as neoliberalism and is dealt with in Chapter 6.)

The most prominent contribution of classical liberalism to International Relations theory is probably the proposition that democratic states keep the peace among each other. This proposition goes at least back to the eighteenth century and to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant who explicated the foundations of liberal thinking in 1795:

“ If the consent of citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared . . . nothing is more natural than they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war. Among the latter would be: having to fight, having to pay the costs of war from their own resources, having painfully to repair the devastation war leaves behind, and, to fill up the measure of evils, load themselves with a heavy national debt that would embitter peace itself that can never be liquidated on account of constant wars in the future. ”

Kant 1795: 94–5

In linking the decision of waging war or maintaining peace to domestic structures instead of pressures emanating from the international level itself, Kant laid the foundations for what is now called the democratic peace. In liberal republics, elected decision-makers are held responsible for all decisions (including foreign policy) by their constituencies. Assuming that citizens are cost- and risk-averse, the shadow of electoral sanctions would prevent republican governments from going to war too easily. Yet, the number of democracies was very limited until the middle of the twentieth century. So was the number of international organizations, on which the second causal mechanisms of the hypothesis on perpetual peace rest (Kant 1795; see also Russett and Oneal 2001). Last but not least, the ideas of liberal economic theory according to which trade and economic interdependence contribute to peace (see e.g. Angell 1913) were put to rest by the First World War which was fought among economically interdependent states. Against this background, and especially after the failure of the League of Nations in the inter-war period, liberal approaches on peace among democracies or among liberal economies were regarded as utopian. Scholars such as E. H. Carr labelled and denounced them as ‘idealist’ contrasting them to realism as the proper way to theorize about the international system (Carr 1946).

The end of the Second World War and the ensuing wave of democratization could have brought back Kant’s ideas on peace among democratic republics. Indeed, foreign-policy analysis had always included second-image assumptions and James N. Rosenau’s work in particular adopted many of their themes (see e.g. Rosenau 1967; Rosenau 1969; overview in Carlsnaes 2002). Yet, in the wake of the Cold War, international politics was overwhelmingly conceptualized as responding to the pressures of the anarchic international system and the power rivalries between the Communist East and the Capitalist West. Realist balance of power theories of international relations were in vogue once again (see e.g. Waltz 1979).

This changed with the *détente* period of the 1970s and with the rise of the European Community as a supranational organization of liberal states. Scholars empirically explored and theorized the emergence of international cooperation in international organizations and regimes ‘after hegemony’ (Keohane 1984; Keohane and Nye 1977) as well as the increasing importance of non-state actors on the international level (Keohane and Nye 1971, 1974; see also Risse-Kappen 1995a). This period was also conducive to a renaissance of liberal thinking. Kant’s basic argument fitted well to the perceived change of international reality in the 1970s: economic interdependence increased; international cooperation and international organizations spread; and democratization continued. Since all three developments facilitate perpetual peace according to Kant’s hypothesis (Kant 1795; see Russett and Oneal 2001), democratic peace approaches became integral parts of various research programmes (e.g. Czempel 1986b). In 1982 already, Jack Levy called the ‘democratic peace’ proposition the only ‘law’ we have found so far in international relations (Levy 1982; see also Doyle 1983).

In addition, the renewed interest in international cooperation, which gave rise to regime analysis (Krasner 1983; Keohane 1989; see also Chapter 6 by Lisa Martin) soon abandoned the idea of states as unitary actors and facilitated the opening up of ‘black box’ states assumed by the realists (see Chapter 4 by Mearsheimer for a structural realist ‘black box’ view of states). Robert Putnam’s two-level game metaphor in particular reintroduced a research programme into the field which brought domestic politics back into the study of international negotiations (see Putnam 1988; Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993; Moravcsik 1993a; Moravcsik 1997). While democratic peace approaches refer to domestic structures as independent variables, negotiation theories and foreign-policy analysis put emphasis on domestic actors and processes of national interest formation.

Varieties of liberal approaches

There is no such thing as a single theory of ‘classical liberalism’ in International Relations as a discipline. Rather, there is a multitude of liberal approaches. All second-image theories share the core assumption that the crucial variables in explaining the behaviour of states at the international level relate to the domestic level. Yet, there are more differences than similarities. Some approaches regard domestic actors, or the dynamics of their interactions in the societal, economic, and political spheres, as the most important explanatory factors,

while others focus on political constitutions, on dominant ideologies, or on economic systems as domestic structures. There are also different dependent variables in second-image approaches: foreign-policy decisions of single states and dynamics of interactions between states. Taken together, we suggest that liberal theories can be distinguished alongside two dimensions (see Figure 5.1): theories of action and interaction, on the one hand, and the choice between structures and agents as ontological prior, on the other hand.

The first dimension distinguishes between rationalist and constructivist approaches. Rationalism and constructivism are no substantial theories of international relations (Adler 2002; Risse 2003b; see also Chapters 1 and 9). Rather they are meta-theories, resting on different assumptions on the nature and constitution of actors (Wendt 1999). At its core, rationalism is based on methodological individualism according to which the actor is prior to and can be studied independently of social structures. Actors' substantial interests are conceptualized as exogenously defined and fixed during interactions and it is presumed that human beings act according to a strategic rationality (Tsebelis 1990; Zangl and Zürn 1994). They calculate ends and means and act to maximize (or optimize) their given interests. Preferences over strategies of how substantial interests are best pursued can change, when new ideas on external constraints alter means–ends calculations. In line with these assumptions, institutions are regulative in nature. As opportunity structures, they do not shape actors' identities or interests but influence strategic choices and enable, sanction, or prevent certain actions.

Social constructivism, by contrast, is based on the ontological assumption that intersubjective meaning is constitutive for intentional action (Wendt 1987). The actor is not the ontological prior, but agent and structure are mutually constitutive (Wendt 1987, 1999). Intersubjective meanings influence and are constitutive for the selection and development of actors' substantial policy interests. They are created and change through, for example, communicative action. The possibility of changing intersubjective meaning, in turn, requires that substantial policy interests and identities are conceptualized as endogenous. They are not taken as given, but can change in the process of action and interaction itself. Unlike rationalism, constructivism regards institutions not as regulative but as constitutive in nature. Accordingly, institutions influence actors' identities and policy interests.

The second dimension for distinguishing different types of liberal approaches relates to the relevance attributed to different domestic features. While some liberal theories are actor-centred and emphasize domestic politics, others put stronger emphasis on domestic structures (the polity). Actor-centred approaches theorize the relevance of *domestic politics* for the foreign policy of states. In this perspective, states are not treated as unitary actors with interests determined by the structure of the international system (e.g. neorealism: security). Rather, state interests can vary across time and policy, because they are shaped by the interests, beliefs, or identities of domestic groups. Accordingly, actor-centred liberal theories analyse interest and ideational constellations of domestic groups and the processes through which they influence substantial policy interests of national decision-makers. In pluralist regimes, interests or beliefs of domestic actors are most often conflictual. Hence, different societal interest groups (such as business associations, trade unions, grass-root organizations, or domestic NGOs) compete for influence over the positions a state represents on the international level. This includes various lobbying processes such as arguing and framing ('constructivist mechanisms') or bargaining

Figure 5.1 The variety of liberal approaches

	Rationalism	Constructivism
Actor-centred ('domestic politics matters')	Liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993b, 1998) Utilitarian liberalism (Freund and Rittberger 2001) Two-level games (Putnam 1988; Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993)	Actor centred constructivism (Checkel 1998; Sikkink 1993) Ideational liberalism (Moravcsik 1997) ¹
Structure-centred ('domestic polity matters')	Rationalist democratic peace and interdependence theories (Rummel 1983; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Russett 1993; ² Russett and Oneal 2001)	Constructivist democratic peace theories (Czempiel 1986a; Doyle 1983; Russett 1993; Risse-Kappen 1995b)

('rationalist mechanisms'). In sum, actor-centred liberal theories endogenize interests and beliefs of national foreign-policy-makers by highlighting interest and ideational constellations within the respective state.

Unlike actor-centred approaches, structure-centred theories focus not on domestic politics but on the *domestic polity*. The basic assumption is that the conduct of a state in interaction with other states is not guided by the structure of the international system, but strongly influenced by domestic structures, i.e. their social, economic, and political institutions. States are regarded as the most important actors in international affairs. Yet, they are not like-units behaving similarly in responding to international pressures and opportunities. Rather, states are differentiated by properties of their polity which influence state behaviour in their interaction with others. We can distinguish three structural dimensions. Besides the political structure (regime types such as democracy versus autocracy; type of democracy), domestic polities encompass economic and social structures. Economic structures are types of economic systems (e.g. capitalism versus command economy) and domestic social structures are commonly shared convictions on truth, rightfulness, or appropriateness (e.g. the commitment to human rights, different ideologies, identities).

The two dimensions are orthogonal to each other. Assumptions about rationalist or constructivist theories of action are independent from emphasizing domestic actors or structures as the major explanatory factors. Combining both dimensions generates a two-by-two matrix (see Figure 5.1).

Upper-left box: actor-centred rationalist liberalism

Liberal theories in the upper-left box are based on a rationalist theory of action and presume domestic politics as crucial for endogenizing, or 'internalizing', foreign policy

interests. The basic claim of these approaches is that domestic actors influence how states define their foreign-policy interests and how they behave in the international arena (Moravcsik 1993b: 480–5; see also Milner 1997, 1998; Freund and Rittberger 2001; Putnam 1988). Theorizing proceeds in two steps: (1) the formation of states' interests, and (b) the behaviour of states on the international level. Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism and Putnam's two-level game approach constitute prime examples of this approach.

In a first step, rationalist and actor-centred liberal approaches theorize in a bottom-up perspective how policy interests and 'win sets' of national actors (i.e. the extent to which an international agreement will be accepted by domestic constituencies) are shaped by domestic groups as strategic rational actors. Liberal approaches of International Relations assume that there is no basic distinction between domestic and foreign policy, whereby the latter would become the realm of 'high politics' left to the discretion of national leaders. Whenever the interests of societal actors are at stake, which is when they expect concrete benefits or costs, societal actors have incentives for self-organization and for influencing and shaping the interests of states. In pluralist systems societal actors compete with each other for access to and influence on national decision-makers. Domestic groups draw on existing channels of access and lobby politicians, in order to capture the state as agent for their particular interests (Moravcsik 1997: 519). Such aggregation processes require that national decision-makers are responsive to societal demands. In democracies, decision-makers have an incentive to be responsive to interest group lobbying. Since politicians are dependent on getting re-elected, they aim at avoiding electoral sanctions through responding to the demands of their constituencies. In the absence of competing societal groups and free elections, i.e. democratic political systems, liberal theory is less able to explain the domestic origins of state interests and preferences. At least, one would have to focus on the ruling groups in autocratic regimes in order to theorize foreign-policy interests 'from the inside out'.

In a second step, rationalist and actor-centred liberalism brings constraints of the international level back in. After interest formation, states turn to the international level. Here, state negotiators are faced with external constraints, since other states are likely to pursue different interests. Such constraints influence means–ends calculations of states as strategic rational actors and facilitate behavioural adaptations (e.g. changes in negotiation strategies such as coalition building, issue linkage, side payments, package deals). Some variants of liberalism assume that transaction costs are low, transparency is high, and information on the interests of others is more or less complete (Moravcsik 1997).

Others, such as the two-level game model (Putnam 1988), assume that the transparency of state interests is restricted, that the level of information is low, and that getting additional information is expensive. This creates a dual 'veil of uncertainty' for international negotiations. First, national decision-makers are not familiar with the domestic politics of other states and do not know their margin of manoeuvre ('win-sets' in Putnam's model). Since each government must rely on the information signalled regarding win-sets of others, there is uncertainty over which concessions, demands, and compromises might be truly acceptable to others. Every government can cheat and signal false information on the restriction of its win-set ('tying hands-strategy', see Putnam 1988; Evans 1993). In referring to a particular domestic interest constellation, national actors might refuse

unfavourable demands or concessions and push for compromises that more strongly reflect their win-sets. The second aspect of the veil of uncertainty relates to the assumption of incongruent interests of domestic actors and state actors. Especially if the transparency of international negotiations is low and domestic groups are excluded, incongruence matters. International negotiations empower state actors to the disadvantage of domestic actors. In cases in which international negotiations take place behind closed doors, domestic actors must rely on the information regarding possible compromises that is disseminated by their governments. Governments can use information asymmetry in order to pursue their own interests. They can justify negotiation outcomes in pointing to the distribution of other states' interest and bargaining dynamics. Thus, state actors can play a strategy of 'cutting slack' (Putnam 1988; see also Moravcsik 1993a) in order to increase their win-set *vis-à-vis* domestic interests.

In a nutshell, in two-level bargaining state actors can benefit from the 'strength of weakness' resulting either from domestic or from international constraints in order to strategically optimize interests.

Upper-right box: actor-centred constructivist liberalism

The upper right box of Figure 5.1 consists of actor-centred constructivist approaches. Unlike their rationalist counterparts, constructivist theories emphasize not only the importance of ideas, norms, and worldviews for actors' identities and interests, but also that decision-makers' perceptions, identities, and interests are shaped in domestic processes of social learning and norm diffusion (Diani 1996; Fischer 2003; Kodré and Müller 2003; Surel 2000). Social learning is the mechanism by which actors acquire new substantial policy interests (Checkel 1999: 548). In rationalist liberal accounts, domestic actors shape state interests via bargaining dynamics. Domestic groups can highlight potential electoral sanctions if national decision-makers are not responsive to their demands. In constructivist accounts, domestic actors and state actors participate in processes of mutual persuasion and arguing (see Risse 2000), while electoral sanctions and other threats are less relevant. In interactions between domestic groups and political actors, different perceptions of problems, ideas on solutions, and policy interests compete with each. Accordingly, constructivist liberal approaches focus on which argument of which societal group will ultimately be convincing and shape the outcome of social learning processes and national policy interests. In particular, they emphasize norm-entrepreneurs such as advocacy coalitions (Keck and Sikkink 1998) who engage in moral persuasion, but also knowledge-brokers and 'epistemic communities' (Haas 1992) who have privileged access to authoritative knowledge and use this authority to push forward certain political agendas.

In answering the question who wins the argumentative competition, actor-centred constructivist liberalism inquires into the conditions facilitating successful persuasion. In general, there are two different possibilities of approaching this question. First, one could analyse conditions under which agents are open for social learning (Risse 2000; Deitelhoff and Müller 2005; Elster 1992). The novelty and uncertainty of the environment might be conducive for learning, for example (Checkel 1999: 550; Elster 1992). In a rapidly changing environment, political decision-makers would have fewer prior beliefs and clearly defined

substantial policy interests than in an environment that is largely settled. Second, the emphasis could be on which type of arguments and which type of ideas might be persuasive in different contexts. For example, constructivist studies on 'framing' highlight that social learning is facilitated when arguments resonate well with existing ideas, interests, and identities (Rein and Schön 1993: 161; Payne 2001: 39; Snow and Benford 1992: 138).

Lower-left box: rationalist democratic peace and interdependence theories

Democratic peace theories have probably become the most significant and also most politically influential version of liberalism in International Relations. The starting point is a dual empirical puzzle. First, democracies rarely go to war against each other (Russett 1993; Russett and Oneal 2001; Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 1991; overview in Levy 2002). Second, democracies are not *per se* more peaceful than any other regime type, because they are frequently involved in wars with authoritarian regimes. Moreover, democracies tend to win the wars which they are fighting (Lake 1992). Thus, empirically speaking, the 'democratic peace' refers to a zone of peace among democracies which was more or less predicted by Immanuel Kant back in 1795 (Kant 1795/1983).

Yet, the empirical finding is one thing, a causal theory of the democratic peace is quite a different endeavour, since it has to deal with the dual puzzle and, thus, has to link the domestic with the international level. Rationalist democratic peace theories start from polity variables and highlight how a democratic constitution prevents rational decision-makers from going to war (at least against other democracies). There are two causal pathways on how governments are constrained by the democratic institutions.

First, the institution of free and fair elections prevents democratic governments from going to war against other democracies. Already Kant assumed that rational citizens privilege welfare and are generally cost-sensitive and risk-averse. He argued that they oppose wars not least because they ultimately bear the costs of wars (see quote on p. 90). Dissatisfied citizens might then impose electoral sanctions upon its governments. In order to avoid electoral losses, governments as strategic rational actors seek to satisfy citizens' demands. As a consequence, strategic rational governmental decision-makers avoid starting wars (Kant 1795; Owen 1996; Doyle 1983).

Second, power-dividing institutions prevent democracies from waging war (Morgan and Campbell 1991: 190–1; see Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992 in particular). In this line of argumentation, rationalist democratic peace approaches highlight institutional and functional horizontal systems of checks and balances. The basic assumption is that regimes go to war, if they manage to build a domestic winning coalition. In authoritarian regimes, control mechanisms between the executive, the legislative, and the judicative branch are lacking. There are also no strong opposition parties offering alternative policies to the electorate and they do not systematically grant societal groups access to political arenas. Compared with authoritarian regimes, democracies require broader winning coalitions. Constructing winning coalitions under democratic institutional constraints is time-consuming. This prevents democracies from aggressive foreign-policy responses in international affairs and from going to war (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992; Morgan

and Campbell 1991). When faced with other democracies that are equally constrained by their institutional set-up, they can observe these constraints because of the openness and publicity of democratic systems. This facilitates the democratic peace.

There are two problems with these explanations, though (see Müller 2002). First, the 'rational citizens in democracies' account is ultimately based on the cost-sensitivity of citizens. What about 'cheap wars' that can be fought by democracies because of profound power asymmetries? How do we explain the democratic peace when two democracies with vastly asymmetric power resources face each other (say, the USA and Canada)? Second, the 'democratic constraints' explanation fails to account for cases in which democracies were rather fast in deciding to go to war, particularly against authoritarian systems (e.g. several US military interventions during the Cold War).

More recently, scholars have taken up again arguments by Adam Smith and others formulated in the nineteenth century, namely that economic interdependence also leads to peace. The basic argument concerns the proposition that states that are interconnected through a high level of trade, capital flows, and foreign direct investment are also unlikely to go to war against each other, because war would disrupt interdependence and, thus, mutually beneficial welfare gains. While this argument has been dismissed because of the First World War which had been fought among economically interdependent states, it has gained some ground more recently (see Russett and Oneal 2001). But it remains controversial. At least, the findings pertaining to economic interdependence and peace do not seem to be as robust as the data on the democratic peace. There are also some indications that economic interdependence adds to peace among democracies rather than constituting a stand-alone finding (Barbieri 2002).

Lower-right box: constructivist democratic peace theories

Just like their rationalist counterparts, constructivist democratic peace theories seek to explain the dual puzzle of mutually peaceful, but generally warlike democracies. The basic argument of this branch of approaches is that democracies do not fight each other, because they perceive each other as friendly rather than hostile.

One set of arguments rests on the assumption that democratic norms facilitate peaceful conflict resolution in the domestic realm. Democratic regimes act from the presumption that other democracies are as peaceful as them. At the same time, democracies assume that autocratic regimes are as aggressive on the international level as they are towards their own citizens (Doyle 1986; Russett 1993: 31). As a consequence, democracies are thought to be aggressive against authoritarian systems but peaceful among themselves.

A second approach takes the above line of argumentation a step further. It adds a causal mechanism of how the perception of friends and foes develops and how it becomes institutionalized. The starting point is Wendt's observation that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt 1992). Accordingly, democracies do not just know that like-minded regimes are more peaceful than others – they learn it over time. A democratic polity matters, because public debate and democratic decision-making induce streams of communication (domestically and on the international level). Democracies recognize common norms and shared ideas on the appropriateness of peaceful conflict resolution (Risse-Kappen 1995b: 508). This facilitates a pattern of cooperative interaction, which in the longer run furthers

the development of a common identity of democracies as 'part of us' (in-group) and as distinct from authoritarian regimes as 'them' (Risse-Kappen 1995b: 504–7; see also Owen 1997 on the significance of mutual perceptions as peaceful). These mechanisms of democratic norms leading to peaceful conflict resolution on the domestic level, and streams of communication and publicity on both domestic and international levels leading to a mutual perception as peaceful, are all absent when democracies face autocratic regimes. The latter are then constructed as 'out-group' leading to a vicious circle of hostile perceptions that are self-reinforcing.

The constructivist variant of democratic peace theory might also be able to explain a more recent empirical finding that challenges overly optimistic assumptions about a peaceful world order if only all states were democratic. Scholars working on democratic peace have always pointed out that it pertains only to stable democracies that have been around for a while (e.g. Russett 1993; Ray 1995). Mansfield and Snyder have shown recently that the democratic peace proposition does not hold in cases of democratic transitions. Many democratizing states actually fight wars, and the likelihood of militarized disputes increases rather than decreases when countries in transition to democracy are involved (Mansfield and Snyder 2002). Constructivist democratic peace theory offers an explanation for this finding. Since social learning takes time, newly democratizing states have not yet developed the mechanisms to perceive their neighbours as equally peaceful, and the neighbours might not yet be able to recognize the democratic character of democratizing states.



Case study: the Iraq War 2003 – probing liberal hypotheses

This section develops propositions taken from each of the four liberalisms described above. It then illustrates these propositions empirically with regard to one case, namely the US (and UK) decision in 2003 to wage war against Iraq, and the German opposition against the war (for a classical realist view on Iraq, see Chapter 3). Before we start, a short description of the case is in order.

The context of the war³

In 2003, the USA – together with the UK and other selected partners – invaded Iraq and replaced the authoritarian regime of Saddam Hussein by an occupation regime that was supposed to introduce democratic rule to the country. The USA had been in a long conflict with Saddam Hussein, dating back to the autumn of 1990 when Iraq had invaded Kuwait. At the time, and supported by the international community, another US-led coalition had driven Iraq out of Kuwait, thus restoring the status quo. Iraq had been placed under strict UN sanctions. These included intrusive inspections of its military and industrial facilities, which were found to have produced (nuclear) weapons of mass destruction. In 1998, Iraq threw the international inspectors out of the country. In 2002 and in the

aftermath of 9/11, the USA pushed for another UN Security Council resolution in order to force Iraq to accept inspections once again – or else! Such a resolution was passed in the autumn of 2002, and Iraq complied. At the time, there was no consensus in the UN Security Council on what would follow. The USA, the UK, and others argued that force should be used in order to punish further non-compliance by the Iraqi regime. France, Russia, China, and Germany (as a non-permanent member of the Security Council at the time) were opposed. The Iraq case led to a major conflict between allies such as the USA and the UK, on the one hand, and France and Germany, on the other, who led the coalition against President George W. Bush's foreign policy. In the end, the USA and the UK decided to go ahead without a further legitimation by the UN, and invaded and conquered Iraq. How can we explain the different decisions by the USA and the UK (in favour of the war), on the one hand, and by France and Germany (against it), on the other? We use this case in the following, concentrating on the USA and Germany to illustrate empirically the four types of liberal approaches to International Relations introduced above.

Liberalism I: actor-centred and rationalist

As argued above, actor-centred rationalist liberalism theorizes international relations including foreign-policy decisions from the bottom up assuming instrumentally rational domestic actors that raise demands to their governments. Utilitarian liberalism argues, therefore, that actors pursue given material interests including (domestic) power maximization, but also economic gains (Freund and Rittberger 2001). Thus, political leaders seek power and want to remain in power, while societal actors pursue – above all – economic interests. Moravcsik has called the latter 'commercial liberalism' (Moravcsik 1997). Whenever domestic actors expect economic advantages or disadvantages resulting from domestic or international developments, they aim to shape their respective states' foreign-policy interests accordingly. Responsive governments pursue foreign policy in accordance with the economic interests of domestic actors.

Actor-centred rationalist liberalism would explain the decision by the USA to go to war against Iraq as well as the opposition of the German government as follows. As to the US, 'commercial liberalism' would probably argue that there was a strong domestic coalition in favour of the war composed of US conservatives in the Republican party, backed by business interests and the US military-industrial complex. In the aftermath of 9/11, the USA has, once again, become a national security state as a result of which the power of business interests related to the military vastly increased. But there were also strong business interests in gaining access to oil and other resources in Iraq and to lessen US dependence on Saudi oil. As to Germany, one would point to the strong opposition against the war in public opinion. Moreover, Chancellor Schröder was facing general elections in Germany at the time and exploited the anti-war opposition for electoral reasons. From this perspective, it was almost impossible to compromise at the international level (second step), in this case the UN Security Council. The domestic win-sets of the two opposing coalitions were simply too far apart and there was no 'zone of possible agreement' (see Putnam 1988). As a result, the USA and its allies went to war without international backing.

At first glance, this account goes a long way to explain the US decision to wage war against Iraq as well as the German opposition to it. There are two critical points to be

made, though. First, it remains unclear whether, in fact, there was such a strong business coalition in favour of the war in the USA. While the oil industry, for example, is interested in gaining access to Middle East oil reserves, there is a sense in which the industry is agnostic about where the reserves are located. Moreover, to blame the military-industrial complex for the war against Iraq overlooks the substantial political and ideological interests in favour of the war. Second, it might well be that Chancellor Schröder exploited the opposition to the war for electoral purposes. However, this does not explain why there was such a strong resistance against waging war on Iraq on the European continent. In both cases, the explanation remains incomplete, unless we bring in ideational and ideological factors.

Liberalism II: actor-centred and constructivist

Actor-centred constructivism highlights the argumentative competition of various domestic actors in shaping national interests. Societal ideas are not just aggregated by states. In principle, social learning is a two-way street, because neither governmental *nor* societal interests are treated as given, but emerge out of the processes of societal interaction and communication. The liberal branch of actor-centred constructivism primarily focuses on how the perceptions, interests, and identities of national decision-makers are socially constructed and shaped by argumentative interactions with and among domestic groups. In addition, 'ideational liberalism' assumes that societal identities and values are essential in shaping states' interests regarding borders or issues related to citizenship (Moravcsik 1997: 525). In exchange for acting according to domestic identity-based interests and creating legitimate institutions, society supports the government (Moravcsik 1997: 525). Actor-centred constructivist liberalism assumes that domestic norm-entrepreneurs and knowledge-brokers promote normative and causal ideas. Especially under conditions of uncertainty their arguments are likely to shape state interests.

If we apply this argument to the Iraqi case, we would focus on the ideational and normative reasons for the decision to go to war against Iraq as well as for the opposition against it. With regard to the USA, there was a strong 'neo-conservative' group with access to the highest level of decision-makers in the US administration. This group held strong ideological views combining a liberal agenda of democracy promotion worldwide with support for unilateralism and the use of US (military) power to further these 'liberal' goals (for details see e.g. Mead 2001; Risse 2003a). In particular, the neo-conservatives – among them Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense at the time – were convinced that lack of democracy and authoritarianism were at the root of the problems which the USA faced in the Middle East. They also thought that the USA should reduce its economic and political dependence on Saudi Arab oil. Finally, they accused the administration of President Bush Senior for not having 'finished the job' of getting rid of Saddam Hussein and his brutal regime back in 1991. Thus, we can use ideational liberalism in order to explain their motives and beliefs.

Moreover, this group can be regarded as norm-entrepreneurs, as odd as this might sound to European ears. But they did act as an 'advocacy group' for Iraqi regime change inside the US administration. They had access to the highest levels in Washington, including Vice-President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and President George W. Bush

himself. 9/11 provided a 'window of opportunity' for the neo-conservative group. The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and their aftermath created the type of uncertainty that is necessary to make arguments carry the day (see above). As Woodward has shown in detail (Woodward 2004), the 'neo-cons' wasted no time, and immediately started lobbying for the use of force against Iraq. Their arguments resonated well with the President, since they combined a liberal agenda with strong moral and even religious beliefs. Moreover, President Bush did not need much persuasion to regard Saddam Hussein as an almost personal enemy of the Bush family. In sum, actor-centred and constructivist liberalism offers a plausible account for both the ideological beliefs of the neo-cons, but also of the process of persuasion inside the US administration that ultimately led to the decision to attack Iraq.

As for the Europeans, constructivist liberalism fills the gap in the actor-centred rationalist account presented above. Among the German public, for example, an aversion to war is deeply embedded in the national culture and the country's collective identity. As a result, German foreign policy has been characterized frequently as that of a 'civilian power' (Harnisch and Maull 2001). While the use of force is not excluded (cf. the German participation in the military interventions in the Balkans in the late 1990s as well as in Afghanistan in 2001), unilateralism is anathema and almost constitutes a national taboo. To override this deeply embedded sentiment, the German government would have had to mount a major campaign of persuasion against a huge opposition in public opinion – in an election year! No wonder that Chancellor Schröder quickly decided to exploit the anti-war sentiment for his political purposes (see above).

Liberalism III: rationalist democratic peace theories

As argued above, there are two branches of rationalist democratic peace theory, which we can quickly recapitulate here. One emphasizes democratic elections as a potential domestic sanctioning mechanism; the other highlights power sharing and dispersing institutions, and their impact on the size of winning coalitions necessary for waging war. The first line of reasoning states that the causal mechanism, which prevents democratizers from going to war too often, rests on the democratic institution of free and fair elections. Citizens are assumed to be cost-sensitive and risk-averse. Since they would bear the costs of wars, they oppose them and prefer a peaceful foreign policy. Democratic elections hold democratic governments accountable for their policy. Therefore, elections generate incentive-structures for governmental actors inducing greater responsiveness towards their citizens' demands. Due to a cost-averse and peace-minded constituency, strategic rational democratic governments avoid wars in order to circumvent electoral ex-post sanctions (Kant 1795).

The second line of reasoning focuses on the constraining effects of democratic institutions and the system of 'checks and balances' between the various branches of government that democracies have instituted (see above). As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to form the winning coalitions necessary to wage war in democratic political systems.

If we apply democratic peace theory in general and its rationalist version in particular to the Iraqi case, we face a number of hurdles. First, like all structural theories, democratic peace theory in general is indeterminate with regard to explaining specific foreign-policy

decisions. It accounts for one strong finding – that democracies almost never wage war against each other – but it is rather weak when it comes to explaining specific foreign-policy decisions. Since Iraq under Saddam Hussein was an authoritarian regime, democratic peace theory only predicts that the prohibition against war does not hold in this case. Whether or not democracies then fight a war of aggression against autocratic regimes, is beyond the scope of ‘dyadic’ democratic peace theory (focused on understanding whether democratic states are less violent towards other democratic states).

Second, if we assume for a moment that the rationalist version of the democratic peace argument holds on the ‘monadic’ level (democratic states are less violent towards all other states) and, hence, can explain individual decisions to go to war out of the institutional characteristics of democratic systems, we are faced with some further problems. The German ‘no’ against the war would be consistent with both the Kantian electoral argument and with the ‘institutional constraints’ hypothesis. As argued above, German public opinion was strongly opposed to the war against Iraq, and the electoral sanctioning mechanism was, of course, very salient in 2002 when the government faced national elections. However, if the German case is consistent with the rationalist version of democratic peace theory on the monadic level, the US decision certainly is not. At least, we would have to explain how the George W. Bush administration managed to overcome all domestic hurdles against invading Iraq. If the US government faced any constraints before going to war, it was at the UN Security Council, not in the domestic arena. Congress in fact had given a *carte blanche* to the administration already in the autumn of 2002 and public opinion was essentially split on the issue. Thus, if the electoral sanction and the institutional constraints mechanisms are supposed to put a brake on decisions by democracies to go to war in each and every case (on the monadic level), these brakes were absent here. Rationalist democratic peace theory offers little guidance here and is not of much help.⁴

Liberalism IV: constructivist democratic peace theories

Constructivist democratic peace theories highlight how polity variables facilitate processes of communication, mutual learning, and identity creation. Since the causal mechanism of how polity translates into dyadic state behaviour is elaborated in Risse’s version of constructivist democratic peace theories, we focus on this approach in greater detail (Risse-Kappen 1995b; see also Owen 1997; Müller 2002; Wendt 1999). The basic argument is that democracies learn through experience that similar polities abstain from violent conflict resolution. Democratic values and features such as transparency of decision-making, free elections, a political opposition with alternative policy-programmes, and a free press allows democracies to observe each other in greater detail. Through observing communicative streams, democracies can convince themselves of each other’s capabilities and willingness of peaceful conflict resolution in domestic affairs.

None of these mechanisms of mutual observation and communication is present when liberal democracies deal with authoritarian regimes. As a result, they are perceived as members of the ‘out-group’, since they do not share the polity characteristics of democracies that gave rise to mutual learning processes in the first place. Consequently, democracies are more sceptical in interactions with authoritarian regimes. Perceptions of authoritarian regimes as potentially violent can facilitate alliance formation within the

democratic ‘in-group’ and even aggressive foreign policies of democracies towards authoritarian states. If the mutual perception of peacefulness among democracies serves as a ‘virtuous circle’ and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when democratic systems deal with each other, a ‘vicious circle’ can develop when they face autocratic regimes. ‘Othering’ including the construction of enemy images might occur that helps democratic leaders to overcome potential opposition against war-making and the institutional constraints against the use of force built into democratic polities.

If we apply this line of reasoning to the Iraq case, the above disclaimer concerning the weakness of structural theories to explain single foreign-policy cases applies, too. However, since constructivist democratic peace theory is based on a structurationist ontology, it emphasizes the mutual constitution of agency and structure. Social structures do not fall from heaven, but they are reproduced, activated, and also changed by the daily practices of social actors (see Giddens 1984; Wendt 1987). Thus, it is easier to relate this argument to our particular case than applying rationalist democratic peace theory.

With regard to the US decision to invade Iraq, the constructivist version of democratic peace theory offers an account that adds to the points made above in the sections on actor-centred liberalism. What we need to explain in this case is how President George W. Bush’s administration managed to overcome the electoral sanctions mechanisms and institutional constraints built into democratic polities as a brake on decisions to go to war. Saddam Hussein is almost a showcase for the ‘othering’ mechanism mentioned above leading to a vicious circle that removes the democratic restraints on war-making. The Iraqi leader had already been constructed as *the* enemy of the USA and of the free world in general back in 1990 when he had invaded Kuwait. It was George Bush Senior who had used the ultimate analogy to construct an enemy in post-Second World War democratic systems, by comparing Hussein to Hitler. Since Hussein had used chemical weapons (‘gas’) against Iran, the Kurds, and his own people, the Auschwitz analogy could be used, too. Public opinion in the USA largely shared that view of Saddam Hussein as thoroughly evil. When 9/11 occurred, US President Bush immediately framed the meaning of the event as ‘war’. As a result, the US public perceived the country at war against terrorism. The final link in the social construction of enmity was the (false) claim that Hussein’s Iraq was somehow linked to transnational terrorism (constituting part of the ‘axis of evil’). If Hussein is Hitler, if he is linked to Al Qaeda, and if the USA is at war against terrorism, the constraints on a liberal democracy to wage war against such an enemy are all removed.

In contrast, none of these social constructions was available to policy-makers in Germany even if they had supported US policy. First, the Hussein = Hitler analogy never worked in the collective psyche of German public opinion. Post-Second World War democratic Germany had been built on the ‘never again Nazism, never again war’ supposition. Hitler and Auschwitz had been constructed as the ultimate evil that would be diminished as evil when compared to other evils. While Hussein was certainly regarded as one of the world’s remaining tyrants (and a particularly bad one), comparing him to Hitler would have meant that Hitler and Auschwitz would not have been uniquely evil events, but could be compared to other crimes against humanity. Second, the post-9/11 framing of ‘war against terrorism’ did not resonate well in Germany. Given German experiences with its own domestic terrorism of the 1970s (the Red Army Faction), the frame available for Al Qaeda was one of fighting terrorism as a (particularly vicious) crime. In other words,

fighting terrorism was constructed as an issue of domestic security rather than international security (for details see Katzenstein 2003). The 'securitization' of terrorism, therefore, had its limits.

Thus, German policy-makers (even if they had wanted to) could not frame war against Iraq the same way as the Bush administration was able to. Moreover, the US President's construction of 'counter-terrorism as warfighting' and Hussein = Hitler served only to strengthen opposition against the war in Germany. In sum, constructivist democratic peace theory can not only explain the variation in outcomes between the US decision and the German opposition, it also adds important elements to the more actor-centred

account mentioned above by emphasizing discursive structures and constructions available to decision-makers.

Figure 5.2 summarizes the four theoretical arguments used above and the application to the empirical case.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced four variants of liberal theories of International Relations according to two dimensions. Actor-centred liberalism focuses on domestic actors and explains how their identities and interests shape foreign policies of states as well as international outcomes. Structure-centred liberalism emphasizes institutional features of, in particular, liberal states, in order to explain international behaviour. The most significant variant of such liberalism is democratic peace theory. Both actor- and structure-centred liberalisms can be further sub-divided according to their underlying ontologies, namely rationalism and constructivism. Rationalist liberalism explains behaviour on the basis of given interests of instrumentally rational actors that seek to maximize or optimize their utilities. Constructivist liberalism endogenizes identities and interests and also emphasizes mechanisms such as discursive constructions, framing, and arguing leading to social learning that results in shaping the interests of actors.

After introducing the four variants of liberal theories, we deduced their most important propositions suitable to empirical testing. We illustrated their usefulness with regard to an empirical case, namely the US decision to invade Iraq in 2003 as well as the German opposition to the war. We found that three of the four theories offer plausible accounts of these decisions that complement each other. Actor-centred rationalism highlights the power of domestic interest groups and provides a good starting point in explaining the differences between the USA and Germany. Yet, it overstates the coherence and power of economic interests and neglects the role of normative ideas and identities. Actor-centred constructivism nicely complements its rationalist counterpart. It shows how narratives were developed and how they were used to influence foreign-policy decisions in Germany and in the USA. Unlike actor-centred approaches, structure-centred democratic peace theories are best suited to explain patterns of war and peace rather than single foreign-policy decisions. If democratic peace theory is applied to the Iraq War, the rationalist variant cannot explain why the USA as a democracy waged war. The constructivist branch, by contrast, highlights the role of collective identities and historical memories in constructing in- and out-groups. It complements the actor-centred explanations in highlighting the interplay of framings and collective identities. The USA framed the war as a war against terrorism and constructed Hussein as enmity, while this frame did not resonate well with the German identity.

Liberal theories of International Relations are second-image accounts that theorize international politics from the bottom up. This chapter illustrated that these approaches provide fruitful explanations of International Relations. The variety of liberal approaches indicates that classical liberalism widely attracts attention and has constantly been refined.

Figure 5.2 Theoretical propositions and empirical applications

Variant of liberal theory	Independent variables	Propositions	Empirical case scorecard: US choice for war German opposition
1. Actor-centred rationalist	Domestic power interests; economic interests	If economic and political interests of significant domestic actors regard war more beneficial than peace, governments most likely wage war.	USA: yes, but insufficient Germany: yes, but insufficient
2. Actor-centred constructivist	Normative ideas; arguing; norm entrepreneurs; and advocacy groups	If arguments of moral authorities support war and resonate well with prior beliefs of decision-makers, social learning facilitates decisions to go to war.	USA: yes, complements 1 Germany: yes, complements 1
3. Rationalist democratic peace theories	Electoral sanctions; institutional constraints	Risk-averse citizens will oppose costs of war and punish belligerent policy-makers. Institutional constraints impede domestic winning coalitions to go to war.	Problems with applicability because of structural focus: USA: no Germany: yes
4. Constructivist democratic peace theories	Mutual observation and communication leading to 'virtuous circle' among democracies and 'vicious' circle' with regard to authoritarian regimes	The more democratic polities regard other countries as part of the 'out-group', the more the democratic restraints on war-making fail.	Applicable because of structurationist ontology: USA: yes, complements 1 and 2 Germany: yes, complements 1 and 2

Recently, two upshots have become prominent. The first concerns transnational relations and politics, defined as cross-boundary relations in which societal (non-state) actors such as multinational companies or civil society organizations are involved (see Keohane and Nye 1971; review in Risse 2002). While focusing on transnational relations had led to the study of interdependence in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Keohane and Nye 1977), the most recent scholarly developments in this area concern the study of globalization processes, but also of transnational social movements and advocacy groups (see e.g. Held *et al.* 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Second, back in 1978, Peter Gourevitch proposed to study second image reversed processes, i.e. the impact of international structures and processes on domestic institutions and processes (Gourevitch 1978). Second image reversed studies have become rather prominent recently in work on Europeanization, i.e. the domestic effects of European integration (see e.g. Cowles, Caporaso, and Risse 2001; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Börzel 1999). Moreover, globalization has also led to a renewed interest in the effects of global processes on the domestic fabric of political systems (see e.g. Milner and Keohane 1996; Rieger and Leibfried 2003; Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). Given the usefulness of the liberal second image theorizing examined in this chapter, and the increasing interest in globalization and second image reversed inquiry, liberal international theory focused on the examination of the nature of states and domestic politics, and their interaction with international processes, is set to remain central in International Relations theorizing and research.



QUESTIONS

1. What is the defining core characteristic of liberal approaches to IR? Why is there no such thing as a single theory of 'classical liberalism'?
2. How did historical developments influence the evolution and prominence of liberal theories?
3. What is the difference between 'classical' liberal approaches and neoliberalism?
4. What is the common core of democratic peace approaches? What are the differences between rationalist and constructivist democratic peace theories?
5. What is the major criticism democratic peace theories pose to structural theories of IR (e.g. neorealist approaches)?
6. Why is the 'dual finding' of democratic peace puzzling? How can it be explained? Which democratic peace approach fits best?
7. What are the defining characteristics of two-level game approaches, and why are they in the same box as commercial liberalism?
8. Which two-level game hypothesis could explain the German position on the second Iraq War?
9. How would ideational liberalism explain the war in Iraq? Which foreign policy of which states can it explain best?
10. How would commercial liberalism and actor-centred constructivism explain the democratization of Eastern European and of Latin American states? Which theory offers a better account and why?



FURTHER READING

- Brown, M. E., Lynn-Jones, S. M., and Miller, S. E. (1996) (eds), *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press). This reader brings together contemporary democratic peace research combining theoretical approaches and empirical illustrations.
- Bueno de Mesquita, B. and Lalman, D. (1992), *War and Reason* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press). This book is a comprehensive work on rationalist democratic peace theory.
- Checkel, J. T. (2001) 'Why Comply? Social Learning and European Identity Change', *International Organization*, 55/3: 553–88. An important example of actor-centred constructivism, that explains how processes of social learning shape interests and identities.
- Doyle, M. (1997) *Ways of War and Peace* (London: Norton). This book explains constructivist democratic peace theory and highlights how constructivist explanations add value to their rationalist counterparts.
- Kant, I. (1795/1983) 'To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in *Immanuel Kant. Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, edited by T. Humphrey (Indianapolis IN: Hackett Publishing, 107–43). The earliest defence of the idea that democracies are less war-prone, a claim that has been popularized by many contemporary second-image liberal thinkers.
- Moravcsik, A. (1997), 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics', *International Organization*, 51/4: 513–53. This work provides a good overview of actor-centred rationalist approaches and develops liberal intergovernmentalism, a theory very prominent in European integration research.
- Putnam, R. (1988), 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics. The Logic of Two-level Games', *International Organization*, 42/2: 427–60. This article is the classical and most prominent work on two-level games.
- Risse-Kappen, T. (1995) 'Democratic Peace – Warlike Democracies? A Social Constructivist Interpretation of the Liberal Argument' in *European Journal of International Relations* (special issue), edited by Niels Petter Gleditsch and Thomas Risse-Kappen: 489–515. This article highlights explanatory gaps of rationalist democratic peace approaches and develops a constructivist variant of democratic peace theory.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- Correlates of War project. Provides several databases on inter- and intra-state wars. The project is hosted by several institutions, which collect and disseminate issue-specific data. The periods of the data covered vary among the single projects. Using the databases is free of charge.
www.correlatesofwar.org
- Index of International Governmental Organizations. The Northwestern University offers an extensive list of international governmental organizations (IGOs) including web links.
www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/resource/internat/igo.html
- Freedom House database on domestic regime types. Contains information on the degree to which regimes are democratic.
www.freedomhouse.org

6

Neoliberalism

LISA L. MARTIN

● Domestic Veto Player Index. The website of George Tsebelis (University of Carolina) provides free access to the veto player index. This index measures the composition of government in advanced industrial states. Besides the number of parties in government, the database contains information on the ideological position of the parties.

www.polisci.ucla.edu/tsebelis/

● The Comparative Political Data Set: pluralism and corporatism. This dataset is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and contains institutional and political data, including degrees of pluralism and corporatism for twenty-three democracies. It covers the period between 1960 and 2003.

www.ipw.unibe.ch/mitarbeiter/ru_armingeon/CPD_Set_en.asp

● Database on national elections in democratic countries (Lijphardt archive). Collects election results for twenty-six democracies until 2003. It contains information on more than 350 national legislative elections.

<http://dodgson.ucsd.edu/lij/>



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/



Chapter contents

- Introduction
- The development of neoliberal theory
- Rules versus power
- Principal-agent approaches
- Case study
- Conclusion



Reader's guide

This chapter presents the neoliberal approach to the study of international relations, some challenges to it, and how neoliberal theorists have responded. I focus on two significant themes in relation to the role played by international organizations. First, an understanding of how international organizations work requires that we specify the fundamental strategic problems they address. These problems include balancing potential gains from cooperation with short-term temptations to defect from agreements and encouraging beneficial exchange while limiting moral hazard dilemmas. International organizations also constantly balance political and economic interests. A second major theme, therefore, is the balance between rule-based interaction and the unconstrained exercise of economic and political power. I illustrate the approach with a case study on the International Monetary Fund's use of conditionality.

Introduction

Neoliberalism is a theoretical approach to International Relations that draws on concepts of rationality and contracting, and focuses our attention upon the central role of institutions and organizations in international politics.¹ The international political and economic environment is highly institutionalized, and international organizations (IOs) play an important role in the international distribution of wealth and power. Neoliberalism is a prominent approach to studying IOs and patterns of international cooperation more generally. This chapter presents the neoliberal framework while also noting some challenges to it, and the kinds of responses these have provoked among neoliberals.

Two major themes are discussed below. First, to understand the causes and consequences of IOs we must begin by specifying the fundamental strategic problems they address. In some issue-areas, for example international trade, states face large potential gains from reducing barriers to exchange, but also constant political pressures to renege on liberalizing agreements. Thus, IOs that address such issues confront dilemmas at the bargaining, monitoring, and enforcement stages. For other IOs, such as the international financial institutions, the basic problem is to encourage beneficial exchanges while avoiding moral hazard problems. As a result, these organizations constantly balance political and economic interests, and much research has treated IOs as principals of their state agents. A second major theme, therefore, is the balance between rule-based interaction and the unconstrained exercise of economic and political power.

I begin the chapter by providing some background on the development of neoliberalism. This discussion shows how neoliberalism developed out of older intellectual paradigms in the study of International Relations. Then I turn to focus on the rules versus power struggle, then the application of principal-agent approaches. The final section provides a case study of International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionality, showing how the neoliberal approach can be applied.

The development of neoliberal theory

Intellectual background

The roots of neoliberalism can be traced to the early 1980s. Prior to this time, the study of international institutions and IOs was quite policy-oriented and descriptive, lacking an overarching analytical framework (Martin and Simmons 1998). This lack of a theoretical foundation meant that, although individual studies generated strong insights, they did not cumulate to create a coherent picture of, or debate about, the role of IOs in the world economy. This situation changed with the publication of an edited volume called *International Regimes* (Krasner 1983) and of Robert O. Keohane's book *After Hegemony* (1984). These books cast international institutions in a new light and suggested a

novel explanatory framework for studying them and patterns of international behaviour more generally.

The puzzle that motivated this research began with two observations: that international economic cooperation in the 1970s was stable in spite of substantial shifts in the distribution of international economic power, and that organizations such as the Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) were prominent features of the economic landscape. Keohane and others argued that these two observations were connected to one another, and that the existence of institutions and IOs explained the persistence of economic cooperation. In intellectual terms, neoliberals reacted to two well established theoretical traditions: neo- or structural realism and transnationalism. Neorealists (Waltz 1979) saw the international distribution of power as the dominant explanatory factor driving patterns of international cooperation (see Chapter 4). Those concentrating on transnational relations (Keohane and Nye 1971) rejected the neorealist assumption that states were the sole important actors on the international stage, suggesting that actors such as nongovernmental organizations might also have systematic effects on patterns of international behaviour. Neoliberals accepted a central empirical observation of the transnational school, that levels of international cooperation were much higher than could be explained by neorealist theory. However, they undertook to answer this empirical challenge by conceding to neorealism the claim that states were in fact the dominant actors, and that states made decisions in a rational and strategic manner. In effect, neoliberals were able to make intellectual progress by adding a focus on institutions onto the neorealist framework (for other liberal approaches in IR, see Chapter 5).

The fundamental logic of neoliberalism is summarized in Keohane 1982.² In order for states to cooperate, they must overcome a range of collective-action problems, many of which are rooted in transaction costs. No external enforcement exists in the international system, so any agreements must be self-enforcing. This means that states must find ways to avoid temptations to cheat, for example by reneging on agreements to encourage trade by erecting protectionist barriers. Avoiding such temptations requires high-quality information about the actions and preferences of other states, and about the likely consequences of cheating on agreements. In addition, states must coordinate their actions, for example agreeing on common technological and public-health standards. IOs provide forums in which states can mitigate collective-action problems that threaten stable patterns of cooperation. IOs can perform monitoring functions, providing assurance that others are living up to the terms of their commitments. They are forums for negotiating to resolve coordination problems, and to learn about the preferences and constraints facing other governments. They create structures for enforcement and dispute resolution, although actual enforcement powers typically remain in the hands of member states.

Through these functions, IOs become a valuable foundation for international cooperation. Thus patterns of cooperation can be more resilient in the face of underlying shifts in power and interests. The initial work applying this neoliberal or contractual view of institutions concentrated on international regimes, defined as sets of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures (Krasner 1982). One advantage of examining regimes, as compared to the earlier focus on individual IOs, is that this shift allowed researchers to consider informal institutions as well as formalized bodies. While in more recent years much attention has shifted back to formal IOs, such as the Human Rights

Commission or the World Trade Organization, there is an implied relationship between the informal norms which sustain cooperation in the global economy and the work on individual organizations today.

The neoliberal perspective relies on the assumption of rationality. That is, a core assumption of neoliberal theory is that states calculate the costs and benefits of different courses of action and choose the course of action that gives them the highest net pay-off. The assumption of rationality is a powerful one, allowing theorists to develop clear models and predictions about patterns of behaviour. It is also flexible enough to allow for substantial variation in the considerations that go into state decisions. For example, rational decision-making can encompass very different sorts of preferences: some states might put great weight on economic benefits, while others are driven more by security concerns. It also allows actors to put different weights on immediate versus long-term pay-offs, depending on their circumstances. The rationality assumption leads us to focus on strategizing, as actors take into account how their actions will lead to reactions by others, and recognize that their ultimate pay-off will depend on the interaction of multiple state strategies.

There are certainly limits to the reliance on rationality as a core assumption, and these limits have given rise to alternative theoretical perspectives such as constructivism. The assumption of rationality does not tell us what state preferences are. Specifying the content of preferences typically requires a specific complementary model (which may focus on material benefits or other sources of costs and benefits). At times extremely complex situations may mean that pure strategizing does not accurately characterize the process of decision-making; then alternative models such as those relying on bounded rationality may be superior. If actions are not driven by calculation of expected costs and benefits, but instead by role-playing or affective considerations, the rationality assumption will be a poor guide to actual behaviour. These alternative core assumptions are discussed in other chapters in this volume, particularly Chapter 9 on constructivism.

Critiques of neoliberalism

While neoliberal research on international regimes represented a major step forward in the analysis of international institutions, it was subject to criticism from a number of alternative perspectives. Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie (1986) worried that neoliberal regime analysis was moving too far from the analysis of specific IOs, thus missing some important internal organizational dynamics. Stephan Haggard and Beth Simmons (1987) surveyed a number of weaknesses from the perspective of those undertaking positive empirical research on regimes. Because the concept of regimes was broadly defined and regimes are difficult to observe independent of their effects, much effort went into determining whether or not regimes actually existed in various issue areas, and whether changes in patterns of behaviour reflected changes *within* regimes or *of* regimes. It is not clear that these descriptive debates about changes *within* versus *of* added a great deal to our understanding of the causes and consequences of institutions in the international environment.

Another weakness in the neoliberal literature is its state-centric focus, reflecting a neglect of domestic politics. In their desire to respond directly to neorealists, neoliberals

accepted their assumptions that states were the dominant actors in international politics and that domestic politics did not have systematic effects on patterns of international cooperation. Amending this assumption to introduce domestic politics in a rigorous manner has been one of the challenges facing neoliberal theorists in recent years.

In another critique, Giulio Gallarotti (1991) argued that IOs systematically failed in their attempts to manage difficult problems in international relations. The inability of IOs to resolve serious conflict, in his analysis, reflected not just random mistakes, but a systematic pattern of failure. IOs could even have perverse effects, exacerbating conflict rather than mitigating it. For these reasons, Gallarotti argued against relying too heavily in formal IOs to manage international relations.

One of the most telling critiques of the neoliberal regimes literature came, perhaps paradoxically, from the editor of the *Regimes* volume, Stephen Krasner (1991). He charged that the work on regimes was too focused on market failures: instances where all could potentially benefit from mutual cooperation, but where collective-action problems such as high transaction costs prohibited states from reaching the 'Pareto frontier', the set of arrangements from which it is not possible to make any one actor better off without harming others. In his survey of efforts to cooperate in the field of communication, Krasner found that states had little trouble reaching the Pareto frontier. Instead, they found themselves trapped by distributional conflict, having to choose among bargains that benefited some while harming others. Thus the most significant problem plaguing efforts at international cooperation was not providing a good contractual environment to overcome transaction-costs problems such as informational limitations, but a coordination problem. Krasner's insight has led to a revision of early work on regimes, which claimed that coordination problems would be relatively easy to solve (Stein 1982). A new focus on how institutions might help in resolving coordination problems has added depth to our understanding of the functions of IOs (Morrow 1994; Oatley and Nabors 1998).

Neoliberal responses

In the 1990s, the neoliberal theory of international institutions became deeper and richer, partly in response to such critiques. Keohane (1990) brought the concept of **multilateralism** back into the study of institutions. He defined multilateralism simply, as cooperation among three or more states. This work served to redirect attention to variation among types of institutions, a highly productive move for the field.

Another debate arose regarding the problem of compliance with the rules of IOs and with international agreements more generally. A managerial school, representing primarily the views of legal scholars, argued that states generally wanted to comply with international rules, and that variation in compliance was therefore not a compelling puzzle (Chayes and Chayes 1993). Neoliberals responded by noting that the managerial argument was plagued by selection bias: if states almost always complied with the rules, it was likely because they would only accept rules that demanded minimal changes in their patterns of behaviour. The appropriate question, therefore, was not so much compliance as how different structures of rules would promote far-reaching changes in behaviour that left states open to exploitation, or 'deep cooperation' (Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom 1996). Interestingly, both the managerial and neoliberal schools agreed on the conclusion that

variation in patterns of compliance was not a terribly important or interesting question, although they came to this conclusion by different paths. The managerial school argued that little variation in compliance could be observed because states are obliged to comply. The neoliberal analysis of compliance argued that minimal observed variation in compliance simply reflected the fact that states are unlikely to make commitments on which they intend to renege. Nevertheless, empirical research on variation in compliance has continued, leading to some intriguing findings (Brown Weiss and Jacobson 1998; Simmons 2000).

Other theoretical developments within neoliberalism focus on the form and design of IOs. One body of work asks why IOs are becoming more 'legalized': they more often incorporate legalistic features such as third-party dispute settlement (Goldstein *et al.* 2000). Researchers have begun to explore the advantages and possible disadvantages of legalization for promoting international cooperation. Another body of work focuses on design principles for IOs. Starting from the assumption that IOs are designed to resolve collective-action problems, analysts have derived a number of hypotheses about the form of IOs (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001). For example, if states design an IO to reduce the transaction costs of monitoring members' behaviour, we would expect the organization to have relatively centralized monitoring capacities. Using logic like this, dimensions of IOs such as their centralization and autonomy from member states can be explained.

Overall, these developments suggest that one of the first questions to be asked when studying a particular organization is about the problems it was designed to address. An understanding of these issues then leads to predictions about the form and functioning of the organization, and about its effects on political outcomes. In practice, application of this neoliberal framework has directed attention to the relative influence of rules versus power in institutionalized settings, and to the role of IOs as agents. The next two sections elaborate these two perspectives.

Rules versus power

Bargaining

In general terms, the story of the institutionalization of international relations can be described as a continuing struggle between attempts to negotiate and enforce consistent norms and rules, and the desire of powerful states to exert their influence over outcomes. Whether we consider the process of bargaining, of dispute resolution, or the use of institutional loopholes, what we see is a struggle over the terms of political and scholarly debate. As the works discussed in this section suggest, while there are large potential benefits to be gained from consistently enforced rules evidence suggests that many political outcomes continue to be heavily influenced by power politics.

As the neoliberal framework described above suggests, the first step in analysing an IO is to identify the fundamental problems it needs to address. Many political issues, such as international trade, present a classic strategic problem and can be modelled as a Prisoners' Dilemma (PD). Using trade as an example, we know that impediments to trade are costly,

decreasing the aggregate welfare of states by increasing costs to consumers, depriving exporters of markets, and generally distorting the allocation of economic resources. Thus, decreasing impediments to trade offers aggregate welfare benefits for states. Jointly moving away from a situation of high levels of protection for domestic producers is a mutually beneficial move for states as aggregate entities. However, this does not mean that every individual within these states will benefit from freer trade. In particular, domestic producers who will be forced into increased competition from imports will not benefit from trade liberalization, and will lobby their government for continued protection (Grossman and Helpman 1994). Thus, governments face continual pressure to renege on the terms of trade agreements, providing protection for injured domestic actors. Similar considerations apply when we look at other issues, such as environmental negotiations, regulation of financial relations, or alliance politics.

IOs that address PD situations thus have to face two fundamental problems. First, they must structure and facilitate international bargaining. By creating a framework in which negotiators can agree on the specifics of politics, institutions can do much to enhance international cooperation. Second, they must set up mechanisms to encourage states to live up to the terms of these agreements – I will focus on this problem in the next section.

Consider first an example of the bargaining problem. Kyle Bagwell and Robert Staiger (1999) offer a general economic theory of the structure of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which structures the global trade regime, based on an analysis of the bargaining problem. Their analysis provides a good example of how a neoliberal analyst would approach bargaining problems. The authors begin from the observation that the only feasible and self-enforcing bargains on international trade are those that preserve the existing terms of trade: if deals change the terms of trade, at least one of the parties to the bargain will refuse to live up to it.³ The structure of the WTO is thus designed to promote liberalization – reduction in barriers to exchange – while maintaining existing terms of trade.

From a neoliberal perspective, a major question about bargaining is whether the institutional structure itself influences the outcomes. Compared to unstructured, ad hoc bargaining, does the WTO structure lead to outcomes that protect the interests of smaller states, for example? Does it encourage greater liberalization? Both could well be true. The fact that small states are engaged in various ways in each negotiating round, and have to approve the final agreement, could give rise to more respect for their interests. One advantage of multilateral, structured negotiations is that they enhance the scope for mutually beneficial deals, compared to bilateral bargaining.

These neoliberal hypotheses have been subjected to empirical investigation. On the outcomes of bargaining, Richard Steinberg (2002) finds that the WTO structure (and its forerunner, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) has not demonstrably promoted the interests of developing countries. He argues that each bargaining round begins with a law-based process designed to give account to the interests of all participants. However, the conclusion of a round involves tough deal-cutting, and has generally been dominated by powerful states. Thus, the USA and European Union (EU) have dominated the agenda, in spite of the attempt to use rules to craft a more equitable consensus. A contrasting view is presented by Christina Davis (2003) who finds substantial support for the proposition that multilateral bargaining leads to greater liberalization than a bilateral setting.

Concentrating on agriculture – one of the toughest trade issues – she demonstrates that trade conflict between the USA and EU or Japan is resolved in a manner that promotes liberalization when bargaining takes place in a multilateral setting. Davis attributes this outcome to the potential for issue-linkage as well as legal framing and reputation.

Enforcement

The other major problem to be resolved by an IO addressing a PD is to assure that states will uphold the agreements they reach. Because of the constant political pressure to deviate from the terms of cooperative agreements, governments are tempted to renege or simply fail to fully implement the measures agreed on. As the neoliberal framework suggests, we are unlikely to see institutions directly empowered to enforce agreements in order to overcome these temptations. However, they can nevertheless play a substantial role in facilitating decentralized enforcement. We see institutions developing strong monitoring and dispute-resolution mechanisms, and standards for punishment of those who defect from agreements, in response to these challenges.

On the one hand, information must be widely available about whether states are living up to the terms of their commitments. Here, institutions face a relatively easy challenge if many private (and public) actors are highly motivated to monitor what other governments are doing. This is often the case in trade for example, because if an exporter is finding it more difficult than expected to sell to a particular country or is losing market share, this actor has high incentives to discover any violations of international agreements by competitors. In addition, the structure of punishment procedures creates incentives for producers for the domestic market to uncover violations as well. Thus, the rather ingenious but simple punishment scheme typically used in trade agreements facilitates ‘fire-alarm’ monitoring mechanisms; little direct oversight by the organization itself would appear necessary (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984).

However, in other issues observation of compliance is more difficult, as private actors may not be able to play this fire-alarm role. In such cases, governments must play a more intrusive monitoring role. This is most prominently true in areas like arms-control agreements, which include extensive provisions for government monitoring. In addition, governments have become adept at non-obvious forms of renegeing from agreements. As a result, we see that as the trade regime has developed over time it has gained enhanced monitoring capacities, now undertaking regular systematic reviews of members’ practices.⁴

Both economists and political scientists have focused on dispute-resolution mechanisms of IOs. Economists, like lawyers, typically ask whether a dispute-resolution mechanism is optimal from the perspective of global welfare (Bütler and Hauser 2000; Hudec 1993; Jackson 1998). They also ask whether, as structured, it is effective in reaching this goal. Studies of the WTO, the most widely studied dispute-resolution mechanism, generally find that, while the WTO mechanisms are not fully optimal, over time the development of these mechanisms has been moving in the right direction. Rules that allowed the blatant exercise of state power, such as the ability to veto panel decisions, have been phased out. It has become easier for states without extensive legal and administrative capacities to initiate the dispute process. Overall, as the system has become more

institutionalized and legalized, in normative terms it has come closer to meeting the demands of economic efficiency. However, the evidence on whether these new rules are in fact operating as intended remains quite mixed.

Political scientists, in contrast to the normative focus of economists, tend to focus on the distributional effects of dispute-resolution mechanisms, for example whether they tend to favour larger or smaller states. This leads them to consider questions such as which states bring complaints more often and against whom. They also focus on the patterns of settlement, asking which cases are resolved early and which go through the full process, and attempt to make judgements about which states most often prevail in these disputes. Marc Busch (2000) has focused on the formation of dispute-settlement panels in the WTO, asking which cases actually escalate to the panel stage as opposed to being settled at an earlier stage. This question is fundamental, because the evidence shows that the threat of future legal proceedings tends to generate larger levels of concessions if disputes are settled early; states are threatened as much by the process itself as by the actual decision (Reinhardt 2001). However, Busch finds that changes in procedures have not substantially altered panelling outcomes. Busch and Reinhardt (2003) similarly find that improved WTO procedures have not, in fact, allowed poor countries to achieve better outcomes. Instead, wealthier countries have tended to do better, suggesting that the capacity to litigate is an important component of success. Overall, the theoretical and empirical studies of the GATT/WTO suggest that the demands of politics and power continue to strongly influence international trade outcomes, in spite of higher levels of institutionalization over time.

Institutional design and effects

Issues of institutional design and its effects have dominated studies of bargaining and dispute resolution. One specific issue of institutional design, across both global and regional institutions, is the conditions under which states can ‘legally’ evade IO rules, at least on a temporary basis. Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom (1996) developed a general model of international cooperation in the face of domestic political uncertainty that provides great insight into this problem. When governments negotiate agreements, they know they will face political pressure to renege on these agreements. However, they do not know with certainty how intense these pressures will be or from which sectors they will come, because these pressures are subject to exogenous shocks and shifting patterns of political mobilization. If unexpectedly intense demands to renege emerge, governments may find that they are better off acceding to these demands and withdrawing entirely from deals. However, if they were instead allowed the option of temporarily backing out of their commitments in the face of unusually high political pressures, the regime could survive and make all better off than if these ‘pressure valves’ did not exist. Thus, the authors argue that a certain level of ‘optimal imperfection’ should be observed in agreements that have this political structure.

From a neoliberal perspective, this analysis suggests that the design of escape clauses and related loopholes is of vital importance to the success of many IOs. Scholars have picked up on this idea and developed arguments about the appropriate design of such loopholes. Rosendorff and Milner (2001) show that escape clauses enhance the durability

and stability of trade institutions in the face of domestic political uncertainty. However, to prevent the abuse of these clauses, states must bear a cost for using them. This 'self-enforcing penalty' appears to be reflected in various dimensions of the WTO, for example, requiring offsetting concessions for the use of escape clauses. Barbara Koremenos (2001) considers the flexibility built into agreements in more general terms. She sees the fundamental problem as one of assuring a certain distribution of gains across states, rather than a response to unexpected domestic pressures. This sort of uncertainty explains the incidence of renegotiation provisions in many agreements, among other institutional features.

In many ways, the design and functioning of IOs reflects the basic strategic dilemmas they face. Promoting beneficial exchanges requires that institutions structure bargaining, monitor compliance with commitments, and provide enforcement mechanisms. We also see that the ongoing struggle between rule-based interaction and the exercise of power plays out continually. While rules attempt to constrain the processes of bargaining and dispute resolution, the best empirical studies confirm that the actual functioning of institutions reflects continuing realities of power politics. I next turn to consider another major theme of the recent neoliberal literature, the application of principal-agent approaches.

Principal-agent approaches

Consideration of the fundamental strategic problems that IOs confront has led many analysts to use a principal-agent framework to study them. Scholars ask about the relative freedom of manoeuvre available to IOs, given patterns of state interests. This problem is played out in an ongoing battle between rules that attempt to constrain state behavior and the continual exercise of state power.

A common strategic problem that IOs confront is to provide assistance to allow states to overcome short-term problems, while not providing an 'easy out' that will allow states to avoid adopting responsible policies. An example of this dynamic may be seen in peacekeeping, where the immediate advantages of having peacekeepers on the scene to reduce levels of violence are obvious, but at the same time the presence of peacekeepers may allow the conflicting parties to put off tough negotiations for a settlement. The tension between providing assistance and encouraging moral hazard is prominent in financial interactions. In any financial transaction, institutions need to walk a fine line between encouraging the provision of funding that will be beneficial for both the borrower and the lender and encouraging moral hazard. Consider the typical case addressed by the IMF. A country has fallen into a financial crisis, either through poor policy or exogenous shocks. The government finds itself unable to make good on its commitments to make payments on its outstanding debt, and the value of its currency is collapsing. If the roots of the crisis will pass, the provision of temporary financing will both benefit the country that receives the financing and lenders, who will be likely to recover more of their assets once the crisis has passed. However, a government that knows that it will be bailed out of such crises is likely to behave more recklessly, adopting inappropriate policies and overborrowing. This is the moral hazard dilemma.

IOs can address the moral hazard problem by imposing conditions on their assistance, attempting to force states to adopt more responsible policies. How this logic works in the IMF case will be explored more fully in the next section. Conditionality itself is contentious and subject to the battle between rules and power described above. This basic strategic problem – potential benefits from assistance, but a moral hazard problem – has led many scholars to use a principal-agent framework to study IOs. This approach is appropriate and useful because it allows us to ask about the likelihood that an IO will err on one side or the other. Will it follow the demands of powerful states and provide 'too much' assistance, thus exacerbating the moral hazard problem? Will it be autonomous enough to find an optimal path between moral hazard and assistance? Or will it be autonomous, but driven by its own bureaucratic logic?

In a principal-agent framework, the members of an IO, especially the most powerful states, are treated as the principals that use the IO to implement their preferred policies. IOs, as agents, have their own interests. Usually these are assumed to be relatively 'technocratic' interests, not as driven by politics as those of member states. The question is then the extent to which IOs can pursue their own agenda, as opposed to responding to the specific demands of their principals. The ongoing tug-of-war between rules and power describes the dynamics of most IOs. The general principal-agent literature gives rise to a number of propositions that can be applied to IOs. For example, greater divergence of interest among principals tends to increase agent autonomy; and greater agent expertise or access to information also tends to increase their autonomy.

Applications

Many applications of a principal-agent approach attempt to trace patterns of member-state influence on IOs. Strom Thacker has argued that the IMF's patterns of lending respond to the geopolitical interests of the USA, its dominant member (Thacker 1999). The 'public choice' school has studied the IMF as a self-interested organization attempting to assert itself in the face of constant political demands from its powerful member-states. This work, like Thacker's, illustrates that these states are often able to exert substantial influence over the IMF's activities. Thus, while the IMF is an agent with some autonomy, it has a hard time escaping its political confines. Dreher and Vaubel (2004) apply this analysis to examine the evolution of conditionality over time, asking about the content and number of conditions imposed. They demonstrate that the IMF can usefully be studied as a bureaucracy with its own internal rules and interests. In this sense, they posit that it has more autonomy than others have recognized. They reason that an autonomous IMF should impose stringent conditionality on states that have a poor record of living up to past commitments, and find evidence to support this argument. Overall, the evidence suggests that the IMF is an agent constrained by the political interests of its principals, but one that is able to exert autonomy under certain conditions.

Other scholars, working within the same general principal-agent framework, focus on the delegation of authority to IOs. They ask why states would choose to allow IOs what appears to be a substantial degree of autonomy. Some analysts find that delegation has not undermined the interests of the most powerful member-states, as delegation is itself a strategy for promoting these interests. For example, Daniel Nielson and Michael Tierney

(2003) demonstrate that the World Bank's environmental policies correlate highly with measures of the environmental interests of the USA. (For a discussion of environmental issues and theories from a green theory perspective in IR, see Chapter 13.) On the other hand, Erica Gould (2003) is more sceptical about the ability of member-states to maintain control over IO actions once they delegate authority. She argues that the IMF, in its use of conditionality, often responds to private financial actors rather than state interests.

Some argue that the autonomy of the IMF, which wishes to loan large amounts of money, causes conditions not to be enforced and undermines programmes (Vaubel 1986). Randall Stone (2004), however, has presented persuasive evidence that the fundamental problem is the reverse: that the Fund's principals frequently intervene to promote leniency towards favoured states. This persistent influence of political pressures means that the conditions the IMF so painstakingly negotiates are rarely imposed with any consistency or credibility. Thus, the problem with IMF programmes is not that they are poorly designed or based on an inappropriate economic ideology. It is that even well designed programmes are not enforced. Thus, we find that the struggle between political influence and rule-based behaviour defines the impact of the IMF on the world economy.

The neoliberal perspective has given rise to insights about the design of the IOs, particularly focusing on issues of delegation and influence. Some have critiqued this view of the IOs, arguing that it underestimates the autonomy of their staff. Through the exercise of authority that is perceived as legitimate, especially if it has the veneer of science, IOs may in fact be able to pursue agendas that have little relationship to the interests of either major donors or borrowers (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). This is likely to be especially true in areas that require high levels of technical expertise, such as financial, health, or environmental issues. This line of analysis presents a potentially strong threat to the entire neoliberal framework, as it conceives of a very different relationship between states and institutions. For example, it suggests that we should spend much more time analysing processes of socialization within institutions (see Johnston 2001).

the IMF must typically commit to reduce public spending, increase collection of taxes, liberalize their international economic relations, and even improve other areas of governance. Even if they are economically justified, there are occasions on which the major creditor states would prefer looser conditions for purely political reasons. For example, it is widely understood that the USA opposed the imposition of tough conditions on Russia in the early 1990s, wishing to assure Russia's political stability. In addition, states that are home to private creditors with substantial exposure in the crisis country are likely to prefer looser conditions and flows of capital.

To illustrate how one would apply a neoliberal approach, assume a simple one-dimensional space over which member-states make decisions. In the case of the IMF, we could think of this continuum as ranging from loose conditions on drawings to rigorous conditions. States' preferred outcomes will array themselves along this continuum. I assume that the IMF staff also has a preference on this spectrum. States' preferences will be influenced by both economic and political factors. They will be concerned about the economic consequences of programmes for the international financial system, but also about their political relationship with borrowers. As the IMF staff are not directly responsible to any particular member-state, being made up of international civil servants, I assume their preferences are driven primarily by economic considerations.

In order to generate some explanatory leverage from this set-up, assume that the staff have a right to make a proposal and that it is approved by majority vote. In the IMF case, the states are represented by executive directors who make up the Executive Board (EB). One important question is whether states can amend staff proposals, or whether they are presented with a take-it-or-leave-it offer. Technically speaking, the Board has the right to do whatever it wants, and so could amend proposals. But, in practice, amendments would be controversial and cumbersome, subject to charges of political interference. Because conditions have been agreed in prior negotiations with the borrowing country, attempts to amend would mean sending the staff back for renegotiation. These considerations mean that, in practice, the Board almost never considers amending staff proposals. It therefore seems a reasonable simplification to assume that proposals to the Board are essentially take-it-or-leave-it offers (Gold 1984: 392; Garritsen De Vries 1985: 987).

Given this decision-making framework, on any individual programme the staff can have substantial influence over the content finally approved. The staff can propose the programme closest to their own preference that is able to muster majority support. States will only veto a staff proposal if a majority finds the status quo – i.e. no programme – more to its liking than the proposal.

This simple set-up leads to some propositions about staff autonomy, understood as the staff's ability to influence the content of programmes. First, we can observe that staff influence is likely to grow when the status quo is strongly disliked by most states. In this case, nearly any proposal will be able to gain a majority, so the staff can present something close to their ideal point. This observation could lead us to suggest, for example, that in times of crisis that threaten the international financial system, IMF staff will have substantial influence, as executive directors will be anxious to move away from the status quo. On the other hand, when dealing with relatively minor borrowing countries, or with chronic problems that do not pose any immediate threat to the international system, executive directors are more willing to live with the status quo. In this case, the staff will have to be more attentive to the executive directors' preferences, effectively limiting its autonomy.



Case study: IMF conditionality

The IMF was created at the end of the Second World War at the Bretton Woods conference. Initially, the main purpose of the IMF was to oversee the functioning of a fixed exchange-rate regime. In order to make this regime work, the IMF was to organize short-term support for members that were facing balance-of-payments crises. Over time, the exchange-rate regime fell apart. However, by then the IMF had proven itself valuable at providing relief for states facing balance-of-payments crises, and has continued to play the central role in these situations. This section will briefly illustrate how one would apply the neoliberal framework to the use of IMF conditionality, showing how the balance between rules and power, and the application of a principal-agent approach, lead to important insights.

While initially some IMF members opposed the use of conditionality in its lending, arguing that the organization's role was to provide funding as needed, the major creditors (especially the USA) have insisted on imposing conditions. The number and types of conditions has expanded substantially over the years. Governments wishing to conclude a programme with

A second observation is that the distribution of preferences among states will have implications for staff influence. When state preferences diverge, stretching along the entire policy continuum, there is more likely to be a wide range of proposals that could gain majority approval. This gives the staff room for manoeuvre, as they can choose the proposal within this space that comes closest to their ideal point. In contrast, when state preferences converge, the staff will have less flexibility. Now a smaller set of proposals is likely to gain approval, constraining the staff to make a proposal within this smaller space. Staff autonomy will therefore be greater when there is disagreement among states about the desired policy (the degree of conditionality in the IMF case). Such disagreement allows the staff to play states off against one another.

The propositions that follow from a simple neoliberal perspective help us to understand the evolution of IMF conditionality over time. The initial decision to attach conditions to IMF drawings in itself conferred some autonomy on staff and management. As the exact content of conditions would inevitably be subject to staff input, any use of conditionality provides it with authority. Therefore, understanding the Fund's early decisions to use conditionality and the procedures it developed to set conditions illuminates important aspects of the agency issue. These early decisions are also important because the procedures have changed surprisingly little over the last fifty years, in spite of massive change in the content of conditions, the scale of lending, and the variety of countries involved.

The Articles of Agreement negotiated by John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White at Bretton Woods left the issue of conditionality intentionally vague. The positions of Keynes and White, and the politicians they represented, were predictable as Britain was certain to have to draw on Fund resources, while the USA would be the major source of these resources. The debate between automaticity, favoured by Keynes, and conditionality, favoured by White, played out over the first few years of the Fund, and was settled in the USA's favour by 1952.

The early signals indicated that automaticity would prevail (Robichek 1984: 67). Keynes was anxious to avoid giving the Fund the 'wide discretionary and policing powers' that he believed the USA wanted (Dell 1981: 1). His preferences were shared by virtually the entire membership other than the USA. Internal Fund memos and congressional hearings affirm that the USA wanted the Fund to be able to limit access to its resources. The USA settled for the requirement that governments make representations as to their intentions for using resources (Dam 1982: 117).

The USA opened the door to conditionality by assuring that the Articles of Agreement required that Fund resources could be used only for purposes consistent with the Fund's principles. If the EB could question members' representations, 'then there was the possibility that it might be able to exercise some discretion under cover of an assessment of need' (Dam 1982: 117). By 1947, the Executive Board decided that it had the right to challenge a member's representation about the purposes to which it would put Fund resources. This wedge allowed the principle of conditionality to develop.

However, the first managing director, Camille Gutt, expressed views consistent with automaticity (Dell 1981: 8), while the USA continued to insist on the Board's right to scrutinize requests for drawings. Between 1949 and 1951, drawings from the Fund nearly came to a halt, due to a combination of Marshall Fund aid substituting for IMF resources and deadlock about mechanisms for using them. No drawings occurred during 1950, and the entire amount drawn from October 1949 until September 1951 was only \$76.8 million,

while repayments of earlier drawings to the Fund during this period were \$67.7 million (Garritsen De Vries and Horsefield 1969: 276).

During this period, the Executive Board as well as the staff and management paid a great deal of attention to developing procedures that would allow an increase in drawings. The concept of automaticity disappeared during these discussions. New managing director, Ivar Rooth, presented a plan in November 1951, known as the 'Rooth Plan', that finally broke the deadlock between those who wanted more staff autonomy and those who wanted direct executive director oversight. This plan became the basis of stand-by arrangements, the current tool for extending IMF financing. After extensive discussions and some modifications by a staff working party, the Rooth Plan was approved in February 1952. The basic idea of the plan was that drawings of greater resources would result in greater stringency of conditions. Members would agree with the Fund on a plan to assure policy changes and repayment of the drawing within a specified time before the executive board would approve the stand-by arrangement.

The development of the principle of conditionality went hand-in-hand with a shift in responsibility from the Board to the staff. In the first two years of the Fund, the executive directors played an active role in negotiations, heading field missions (Archives S1720, Meeting 170, 20 May 1947). The Board initially attempted to maintain tight constraints on staff autonomy. At times, executive directors questioned staff judgements on particular policy issues, such as advice to Iran on its exchange rate, or to Colombia on fiscal issues. Such questions continually raised the issue of staff autonomy, and executive directors attempted to delegate enough authority to the staff to allow them to do their jobs, but to maintain control.

The practice of directors participating in missions stopped in 1948 but, from 1948 until the early 1950s, the Board continued to keep a tight rein on staff missions. The 'composition of each staff mission was subject to Board approval, and the Board outlined detailed instructions for them' (Garritsen De Vries and Horsefield 1969: 11). Furthermore, members routinely discussed their prospective requests for drawings directly with the US executive director prior to submitting a formal request. This practice ended by 1956. Susan Strange sees this as an 'important shift of responsibility from the United States to the Fund' (1973: 279). Board oversight of staff missions also became less stringent. As staff members conducted missions, they had to make a number of immediate decisions that were only subject to review afterwards, indicating their agenda-setting function. As a result, Fund historian, Keith Horsefield, concluded that 'in later years the influence of the staff tended to grow' (Garritsen De Vries and Horsefield 1969: 471).

Horsefield draws attention to the conflict of interest among executive directors that the neoliberal framework suggests should give rise to staff autonomy. He argues that 'the principle reason for the strengthening of the staff's position was that it had opportunities for exercising initiative, and took them' (Garritsen De Vries and Horsefield 1969: 472). For example, the staff sent an important report on international reserves and liquidity to Fund members without Board review. Horsefield identifies 'a clash of views amongst Executive Directors, . . . which might have made it impossible to present an agreed Board report' as the permissive condition for this exercise of staff autonomy (Garritsen De Vries and Horsefield 1969: 472).

This brief discussion can provide only a taste of how one would go about applying a neoliberal perspective to the study of a particular institution. It first requires specification

of the underlying pattern of interests and attention to how those interests interact in an institutionalized setting. We can draw inferences from this simple analysis, in this case about variation in the level of institutional autonomy from member-state interests. The early years of IMF conditionality suggest that this perspective provides substantial insight. There are, of course, alternative approaches to understanding the use and evolution of IMF conditionality. Those who concentrate on the IMF as a bureaucracy would consider how bureaucrats at the IMF could use conditionality to enhance their power, legitimacy (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), or monetary payoffs (Vaubel 1986). This approach, unlike neoliberalism, has a hard time explaining variation in IMF autonomy over time. A neorealist might see IMF conditionality as merely an unmediated response to the wishes of the USA. This approach underestimates the influence of other states, including developing countries, on IMF autonomy. Overall, the evidence suggests that neoliberalism provides a more powerful account of the pattern of behaviour that we observe over time and across cases.

Conclusion

The international polity and economy are highly institutionalized. The neoliberal approach to international politics provides a powerful explanation of this pattern and of the consequences of institutionalization. Neoliberals adopt a contractual view that sees institutions as solutions to collective-action problems. Thus, the neoliberal study of IOs begins by identifying the underlying strategic problems they address. These problems involve overcoming obstacles to bargaining, monitoring compliance with commitments, and enforcing agreements. At times, the fundamental problem is to provide flows of needed assistance while avoiding moral hazard problems. This tension sets up IOs as agents of their state principals who frequently have conflicting interests. Thus, the neoliberal approach with its emphasis on principals and agents has been a powerful tool.

The neoliberal study of IOs consistently shows that their dynamics, design, and effects reflect an ongoing struggle between the exercise of power and the rule of law. While some authors find more evidence for the weight of one side in this battle than the other, careful empirical research reveals that neither side triumphs. IOs will continue to have a major influence on the global creation and distribution of wealth and power. The neoliberal approach is a powerful way to understand the dynamics of IOs and of international conflict and cooperation more generally.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the implications of treating states as the units of analysis, as neoliberals do?
2. What are the advantages of assuming rational state behaviour, as neorealists do? What costs are incurred with employing the rationality assumption?

3. What are the primary observable implications of neoliberalism for the activities of international organizations?
4. What are the primary observable implications of neoliberalism for patterns of cooperation among states?
5. What are the challenges of applying principal-agent models developed in other contexts to relations between international organizations and their member-states?
6. What are the intellectual roots of neoliberalism?
7. For what substantive issues is neoliberalism an appropriate approach? Is it more applicable, for example, to security or economic issues?
8. Do neoliberals deal adequately with the role of power or coercion in international politics?
9. What role does information play in a neoliberal analysis?
10. What are the primary theoretical challenges to neoliberalism?
11. What are the primary empirical challenges to neoliberalism?
12. With which empirical methods is neoliberalism consistent? Is it inconsistent with any particular empirical methods (e.g. statistical analysis, process tracing, comparative case studies, discourse analysis)?



FURTHER READING

- Downs, G. W., Locke, D. M., and Barsoom, P. N. (1996), 'Is the Good News about Compliance Good News about Cooperation?', *International Organization*, 50/3: 379–406. The authors explain the apparent high rate of compliance with international agreements by pointing out that rational states are unlikely to commit themselves to agreements that require large changes in state behaviour, thus challenging a more legalistic approach to compliance issues.
- Keohane, R. O. (1984), *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press). Keohane's book is the classic statement of the neoliberal approach.
- Koremenos, B., Lipson, C., and Snidal, D. (2001), 'The Rational Design of International Institutions', *International Organization*, 55/4: 761–99. This is the introductory chapter to a special issue of the journal that focuses on the design of international institutions and organizations from a contractual perspective.
- Krasner, S. D. (1983), *International Regimes* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press). This edited volume launched the neoliberal study of international regimes and institutions, although it also contains important contributions from scholars who do not adopt a neoliberal approach.
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- Martin, L. L. and Simmons, B. (1998), 'Theories and Empirical Studies of International Institutions', *International Organization*, 52/4: 729–57. A review article that surveys the study of international institutions and organizations from the 1940s until the 1990s.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- International Monetary Fund.
www.imf.org
- An introduction to the principal-agent problem.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal-agent_problem



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7

The English School

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✓ Reader's guide

The principal alternative to mainstream North American theorizations of International Relations (IR) is the English school. I begin with an account of what the English school is and how it emerged. Thereafter, the chapter provides a reconstruction of its methodology before embarking on a substantive discussion of its master-concept of international society. I argue that the social order established by states and embodied in the activities of practitioners must be understood alongside the dynamics of the system and world society. The interplay of these three concepts is the primary theoretical contribution of the English school. In the case-study section, I look at the issue of human rights as it has become central to the occupation of many contemporary English school theorists. Human rights represent a significant transformation in our understandings of justice in international relations: at the same time, they pose a challenge for international order as Hedley Bull, a leading English school theorist, predicted over two decades ago.

Introduction

Writing in the mid-1990s, I began a book on the history of the English school² with the claim that the discipline of IR had either ignored or misunderstood the writings of its leading figures (Dunne 1998). Stanley Hoffmann's widely cited historiography of the field up until the 1970s illustrated how the English school had been ignored. Hoffmann claimed there was no systematic study of the discipline outside the USA, 'only the occasional brilliant contribution such as that by Hedley Bull', but his work had been 'unconnected and unsupported' (Hoffmann 1977: 37). In making this claim, Hoffmann overlooked the systematic research programmes undertaken by the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics. While being ignored in the USA, the work of the English school was misunderstood by leading IR thinkers outside the school who viewed it as a straightforward variant of realism (Banks 1984).

Over a decade after *Inventing International Society* was published (Dunne 1998), the English school is no longer ignored: the inclusion of the English school in influential textbooks is one indicator, as is the number of discussions about it that have appeared in leading journals (including *Review of International Studies* 2001; *Millennium* 2005). Without overstating the impact of the English school on IR today, it is probably reasonable to claim that in Britain at least the English school has once more become the dominant theoretical voice. Beyond its heartland, there is significant interest in its work in continental Europe as well as the USA, Canada, Australia, China, and India. Contrary to what is implied by the name, the English school was never very English and is even less so today. Despite the resurgence of interest in English school theory, there remain many detractors who view the enterprise as being conceptually underdeveloped; still others who regard it as being overly complacent about the political and social conditions which afflict the vast majority of peoples in the world. Even if the English school is regarded as flawed, it is at least being taken seriously as a distinctive approach to IR – this was not the case during the successive great debates between the three dominant paradigms in the 1970s (realism, pluralism, and structuralism) followed by the debate between neorealism and its critics in the 1980s.

Those who identify with the English school today see it as occupying the middle ground in IR alongside constructivism: this location is preferable to the dominant mainstream theories of neorealism and neoliberalism and the more radical alternatives (such as critical theory and poststructuralism). They are drawn to an English school perspective because it offers a synthesis of different theories and concepts. In so doing, it avoids the either/or framing of realism (*versus*) idealism, as set out in the writings of many great figures during the 1930s and 1940s. It also avoids the explanatory (*versus*) interpretive dichotomy which generated so much heat during the 'fourth debate' in the 1990s. In place of these dichotomies, the English school purports to offer an account of IR which combines theory and history, morality and power, agency and structure.

One obvious consequence of this level of theoretical ambition is that the boundaries of the English school often appear to be unclear, which in part explains the ongoing debate about who belongs in the school and how it differs from other theoretical accounts of world politics. To shed light on these questions, it is helpful to consider some contextual

issues about what exactly defines the English school and who its principal contributors are. To begin with, it is useful to reflect on why it makes sense to speak of the English school as a distinct tradition of inquiry. First, there are the personal ties that grow when colleagues share institutional affiliations and belong to the same academic field – this is particularly relevant to the 1950s and 1960s when IR as a subject was in its infancy. Second, the main protagonists believed themselves to be part of a collective enterprise, and consciously sought to carry its debates forward. The emergence of a self-conscious research programme, with an open yet distinct agenda, can be seen in the writings of early post-1945 writers working in leading UK universities. Charles Manning developed a curriculum in which the idea of international society played a prominent role. In the 1950s, his colleague Martin Wight developed an approach to the subject that drew on 'three traditions' (Wight 1991) – one that was resigned to international relations being a state of war (realism), one that sought to reform its basic structure (the Grotian tradition), and one that strove to dismantle it (what Wight called 'revolutionism').

Beyond realism versus idealism

Many leading figures of the next generation attended to Wight's lectures on international theory (they were not published until two decades after his death). Wight's most famous protégé was Hedley Bull who was invited by Manning to join the staff in the IR Department at the London School of Economics in 1955. These lectures, Bull later wrote, exerted 'a profound impression on me' (Dunne 1998: 138). Like many other writers in the late 1950s, Bull was increasingly dissatisfied with the either/or choice between realism and idealism. He singled out E. H. Carr for severe criticism. His *Twenty Years' Crisis 1919–1939* (Carr 1946) was effective at undermining spurious claims to universality, such as free trade and national self-determination, yet at the same time it was flawed because Carr 'jettisons the idea of international society itself' (Dunne 1998: 143). Bull went on to conclude that this had to be the main idea out of which 'a new analysis of international relations should now begin.' In truth, it was already well underway.

The search for a new analysis of international relations was what drove Herbert Butterfield to set up the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics. The inaugural meeting was in January 1959 and the Committee persisted until the early 1980s – long after the parallel committee in the USA had broken up due to divisions between theorists and practitioners. Early discussions of the British Committee revolved around founding issues to do with the nature of IR theory, and the possibilities of establishing order given the condition of international anarchy. The best essays from this period were published in *Diplomatic Investigations*, including classic contributions from Butterfield and Wight on the balance of power, Bull on international law, and Bull and Wight on international society (Butterfield and Wight 1966). In the second phase of their research programme, the Committee looked at comparative states systems, leading eventually to Martin Wight's book *Systems of States* (1977) and Adam Watson's *Evolution of International Society* (1992). The third and final project of the Committee developed organically out of the second in that it focused on the emergence of European international society and the impact colonization and decolonization had on the rules and institutions of the newly globalized international society (Bull and Watson 1984).

By the time of Bull's death in 1984, the work inaugurated by the Committee and those sympathetic to it was increasingly seen as being out of step with the emergence of new theories and sub-disciplines (such as foreign-policy analysis and international political economy). Unsurprisingly, we find that in reflections on the 'state of the discipline' in the 1980s, the English school was nowhere to be seen (Banks 1984; Smith 1987); nor did it figure in early representations of the debate between neorealism and its critics. Yet within a decade, interest in the English school had begun to rekindle. Many influential textbooks began to include it as an alternative approach to the subject, placing it alongside realism, liberalism, and various critical approaches (Brown 1997; Der Derian 1994; Jackson and Sørensen 1999). Added to these, original contributions to the history and theory of international society have proliferated, all taking the English school as their point of departure (*inter alia*, Almeida 2000; Armstrong 1993; Buzan and Little 2000; Clark 2005; Gonzalez-Palaez 2005; Jackson 2000; Keene 2002; Korman 1996; Neumann 1996; Osiander 1994; Welsh 1995; Wheeler 2000).

This sense of a resurgent paradigm was prompted in part by the recognition that it represented a distinct position that was inhospitable to the rationalist assumptions underpinning both neorealism and neoliberalism. Moreover, in terms of substantive research questions, the English school had long focused on the kind of cultural questions and normative contestations that were rising to the top of the international agenda in the 1990s. Such momentum prompted Barry Buzan – along with Richard Little – to seek to invigorate English school theorizing by pulling the diverse strands together and forging a coherent research programme. This new phase was marked by the publication of Buzan's agenda-setting paper 'The English School: An Under-exploited Resource in IR' in 2001 (Buzan 2001: 471–88) and culminated in two major new theoretical works (Buzan 2004; Linklater and Saganami 2006).

The previous paragraphs have provided some historical and sociological context for the emergence of the English school. What follows will be a focused analysis of their key claims. A good place to begin the remainder of the chapter is to reflect on Kenneth Waltz's dismissal of the contribution made by writers such as Martin Wight and Hedley Bull. Waltz intimated that their work was valuable but it was not really theory, at least not in a sense that would be recognized by philosophers of science (Waltz 1998). Underlying Waltz's argument is his particularly positivist view of what counts as theory, an issue dealt with comprehensively in Chapter 1 of this volume. Nevertheless, if the English school is to appeal more widely it needs a rigorous account of exactly what it means by 'theory' and how knowledge is generated. What follows is an initial discussion on methodology, followed by an analysis of the school's conception of how the world political system ought to be understood in terms of the dynamic interplay of system, society, and community (or world society).

The interpretive mode of inquiry

The most infamous intervention into 'methodology' was Hedley Bull's 1996 paper in *World Politics* called 'the case for a classical approach'. As has often been remarked, it was more a case *against* the rigid application of scientific methods which he felt would not

generate knowledge of any significance. By contrast, a classical approach was defined as 'that approach to theorizing that derives from philosophy, history and law, and that is characterized by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgement' (Bull 2000: 255). One irony with regard to Bull's position in the article is that he had previously spent a good deal of time berating his colleagues in the British Committee for their disinterest in the new wave of scientific writing being developed in the USA in the early 1960s.

Bull's case for a classical approach was obscured by the polemical style he chose to adopt. Some years later, he wrote a much more considered account of what an interpretive methodology ought to involve (2000). His claims in this piece (written in 1972) serve as a good guide to the English school view of the field of International Relations and how to study it:

1. The subject matter of IR. Bull argued that the appropriate frame for IR was not 'inter-state relations' or the interactions of any other 'units'. Rather, IR was about establishing a body of general propositions about 'the global political system' by which he meant states and also regions, institutions, NGOs, transnational and subnational groups, individuals, and the wider community of human kind. In tracing the connections between these actors, and the patterns generated by their interactions, Bull placed a high premium on the role of IR theory to define concepts and theorize relations between them. This emphasis upon concepts constitutes a particular kind of theorizing, one which is designed to illuminate complex changes in world order. Such an interpretive understanding of theory is at odds with the positivist pursuit of the formulation of 'testable hypotheses' (King, Keohane, Verba 1994).
2. The importance of historical understanding. Academic knowledge needs to have historical depth. Bull gives a pertinent example: it is insufficient simply to know the facts about the strategic superiority of the USA over its competitors; what is preferable is to understand how and why the USA regards itself as an exceptional power. Institutions of international society, such as law and the balance of power, must also be understood in historical context. It matters, for example, whether human rights are as seen by a child of the Enlightenment, or whether they are believed to be a twentieth-century interpretation of the natural rights tradition. These different historical understandings are vital to the diplomacy of human rights and the rationale for promoting rights beyond borders.
3. There is no escape from values. It is important to be aware of one's values and for these to be subjected to critical scrutiny. Values will inform the selection of topics to be studied, and the writings and statements of academics will in turn have an impact on the political process. Despite denying the possibility of separating facts about the world and our values, academicians ought to aim at a position of detachment. By this, Bull was targeting those who were obsessed with policy relevance: he believed that the pursuit of political influence was likely to significantly diminish the prospects of generating research that would be of interest to practitioners. In the other camp, the pursuit of political causes is likely to undermine the integrity of the subject and the wider academic enterprise.
4. IR is fundamentally a normative enterprise. Values matter not just in terms of the relationship between the researcher and their subject but are central to the subject of IR, properly studied. The central problem in world politics was, according to Bull, how to

construct a form of international society that was both orderly and just. His answer to the Weberian question 'What shall we do, and how shall we live?' was not to enter the realm of 'ideal theory' with fictional assumptions and make-believe states (Rawls 2005). Unlike moral philosophers, Bull believed that the IR theorist doing normative inquiry needed to stay close to state practice. What mattered were not normative ideas *per se* but the ideas that practitioners believed in and sought to implement (Wight 1991). This involves elaborating the context within which actors takes decisions as well as understanding that in politics values are often irreconcilable and that terrible choices have to be made.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the English school's commitment to an interpretive mode of inquiry rendered it marginal to developments inside the North American heartland of IR. Such a position of marginality was further underscored by the fact that the English school was silent during the normative and interpretive assault on positivism that began in the mid-1980s (despite having opposed positivism for over three decades). At the vanguard of this movement were Gramscian critical theorists, feminists, poststructuralists, and constructivists. Of these, constructivism emerged as a mainstream alternative to neorealism and neoliberalism. Constructivism enabled IR to cling onto its claim to have a distinctive subject matter – broadly around the interaction of sovereign actors and institutions – without buying in to neorealism's obsession with material power and immovable international structures. As noted above, constructivists began to appreciate the overlaps between their approach to IR and that of the older English school (Finnemore 1996: 17; Wendt 1999: 31). For a much more extensive discussion of constructivism, see Chapter 9.

Were writers such as Manning, Wight, and Bull constructivists before their time? Read Manning's *Nature of International Society* (Manning 1962), or indeed Bull's *Anarchical Society*, and it is apparent that there is a degree of convergence with conventional constructivists such as John Ruggie and Alexander Wendt (Dunne 1998). Both regard the inter-state order as a fundamentally social sphere which constitutes states as agents and socializes them into following its rules and conventions. And both view norms and institutions as expressions of shared knowledge and shared values. Despite these overlaps, one could argue that as the two research programmes have evolved significant differences have emerged. Take the example of the basic 'unit' of analysis. Wendt believes that states are the key actors and they are 'like people too' (1999: 215–24). While English school scholars sometimes attribute agency to states as a form of shorthand, they believe that the real agents in international society are the diplomats and leaders who think and act on behalf of the state and its institutions.

Knowledge of how diplomats and leaders understand 'their' world can be enhanced by being attentive to the language they use and the justifications they employ. Two important inferences can be drawn from this relationship between language and social action. First, an action will be constrained 'to the degree that it cannot be legitimated' (Skinner 2002: 156). Second, the range of possible forms of innovative action is limited by the prevailing morality of international society. Actors 'cannot hope to stretch' the application of existing rules and meanings 'indefinitely' (2002: 156).³ International law provides a testing ground for these interpretive insights. What ostensibly appears to be an act of aggression is invariably justified as an act of self defence. Whether this is condoned or not depends on

how much 'stretch' is being demanded of the normative vocabulary. When Israel described its attack on Iraq's nuclear reactor in terms of self-defence, this was not accepted by the majority of states in international society. Yet the UN accepted the US government's argument that the use of force against the Taliban government in 2001–2 was acceptable given the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11 2001. The key difference was a change in the normative context of international relations such that the stretch to self-defence was thought to be that much smaller after 9/11. As has already been demonstrated by new thinking in the English school, identifying and tracking the constraining power of rules and norms is a fruitful direction for an interpretive methodology (Wheeler 2000).

Reading exchanges between Waltz and his critics in the 1980s, one could be forgiven for thinking that the scientific revolution in IR is a relatively recent occurrence. Yet, as early as the late 1950s, the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics was deeply sceptical that such methods could ever generate knowledge about world politics. Almost five decades later, the English school continues to offer an alternative way of studying IR which is rooted in the history of current and past states systems, and guided by moral questions about the adequacy of the current inter-state order. The more recent challenge posed by constructivism has brought a greater conceptual clarity to many implicit assumptions in English school theorizing. For instance, the work of Wendt provides a sophisticated account of how actors are constituted by normative structures while at the same time allowing for a certain degree of material determination of the system. Such a combination of ideas and material forces is also evident in Bull's thinking, albeit in his case it is more a matter of common sense than meta-theoretical application. Such overlaps offer mutual gains. The collective works of the English school have a great deal to say about the intersection of history, morality, and agency. What actors say, how they learn or adapt, under what conditions they act rationally, whether (and how do we know) they are speaking truthfully, and what possibilities they had to act differently. These questions can be answered using an interpretive methodology that borrows from constructivism although is not entirely reducible to it.

International society

Having reflected on the issue of the English school's approach, the main body of the chapter will delve deeper into the idea that states form an international society, a claim that has been said to distinguish it from other theories of IR. Following Barry Buzan's recent work (2004), I now hold the view that the school must not only provide a powerful account of how and why states form a society; it must also show how this domain relates to world society. While Buzan has brought world society back into the English school's ontology, he continued to consign the system to the margins: as argued below, it is time to bring the system back in.

What is the status of the categories system, society, and world society? As Bull reminded us, these are 'elements' that exist 'out there' in world politics but can be known to us only through interpretive designs. The sociologist Max Weber referred to these schemas as

ideal-types. In order to show the relationship between capitalism and Christianity, Weber argued, it was first necessary to distil them into a conceptual form that made it possible to speak about certain values and institutions being shared by different peoples or successive generations. So it is with system, society, and world society. All are bundles of properties that highlight certain important features while minimizing that which is thought to be less relevant. By seeking to clarify the concepts which reveal patterns in world history, the English school is working with a very different notion of 'theory' to that which is found in the dominant American approaches. Rather than 'operationalizing' concepts and formulating 'testable' hypotheses, the emphasis upon contending concepts is driven by a search for defining properties which mark the boundaries of different historical and normative orders.

Before proceeding, it is important to consider one objection to representing English school theory as a conversation between three overlapping domains: while classical English school theorists alluded to 'three traditions' (Wight) or 'three elements' (Bull), they nevertheless privileged the domain of international society in their account. Therefore, to treat the three as being of equal significance is to misunderstand the distinctive character of English school thought. I do not doubt that one of the intellectual drivers propelling the English school into existence was a rejection of realism and idealism in favour of a middle way that recognizes institutions can moderate the dreaded dangers that are associated with life in the international anarchy. I also recognize that many publications by English school advocates in the 1990s continued to privilege the societal domain, in part due to the desire to show that the English school was not just a polite form of realism as many in the 1980s had assumed. Neither of these points undermines the claim set out in this chapter that the most persuasive case in defence of the English school is that it is potentially more illuminating than mainstream alternatives because it seeks to provide a synthetic account of global politics that avoids the series of false dichotomies thrown up by the alternatives such as power versus norms, materialism versus idealism, anarchy versus hierarchy, reasons versus causes. To do so, we need not only to think about international society as the defining marker of the English school, but also to include the other two ideal types to illustrate its boundaries and constraints. After discussing the properties and types of international society, the chapter will discuss how this domain is subjected to downward pressure generated by the system and upward pressure generated by transnational forces in world society.

International society: definition, properties, variations

According to Bull's classical definition, international society comes into being when 'a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, forms a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions' (1977: 13).⁴ The discussion which follows scrutinizes each component of this definition.

The first key element of international society is the unique character of the membership which is confined to sovereign states. What is significant here is that actors both claim sovereignty and recognize one another's right to the same prerogatives (Wight 1977). Clearly the act of mutual recognition indicates the presence of a social practice: recognition

is fundamental to an identity relationship. Recognition is the first step in the construction of an international society. If we were to doubt for a moment the social nature of the process of recognition, then this would quickly be dispelled by those peoples in history who at some time have been or continue to be denied membership of the society of states. The history of the expansion of international society (Bull and Watson 1984) is a story of a shifting boundary of inclusion and exclusion. China was denied sovereign statehood until January 1942 when Western states finally renounced the unequal treaties. Why was this the case? Membership became defined, particularly in the nineteenth century, by a 'standard of civilization' which set conditions for internal governance that corresponded with European values and beliefs. What we see here is how important cultural differentiation has been to the European experience of international society. China was not recognized as a legitimate member of international society and, therefore, was denied equal membership. If the West and China did not recognize each other as equal members, then how should we characterize their relations? Here we see how the system-society dynamic can usefully capture historical boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. There was a great deal of 'interaction' between China and the West during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but this was driven by strategic and economic logics. Crucially, neither side believed themselves to be part of the same shared values and institutions: China, for example, long resisted the presence of European diplomats on its soil along with their claim to extra-territorial jurisdiction which has been a longstanding rule among European powers. In the absence of accepting the rules and institutions of European international society, it makes sense to argue that from the Treaty of Nanking in 1843 to 1942 China was part of the states system but was not a member of international society (Gong 1984).

Once it has been established who is entitled to claim the identity of a rightful member of international society, the next consideration involves thinking about what it means for a state to 'act'. Here the English school encounters criticism from empiricists who argue that collective constructs cannot have agency. What does it mean to attribute agency to collectivities like states? One straightforward answer is that states act through the medium of their representatives or office-holders. Every state employs officials who act externally on its behalf, from the lowly consulate dealing with 'nationals' who have lost their passports to the 'head of state'. In a narrowly empirical sense, therefore, this diplomatic and foreign-policy elite are the real agents of international society. This is the original sense in which the term 'international society' came into existence in the eighteenth century: in 1736, Antoine Pécquet argued that the corps of ministers formed an 'independent society' bound by a 'community of privileges'. If we are looking for the real agents of international society, then it is to the diplomatic culture that we should turn, that realm of 'ideas and beliefs held in common by official representatives of states' (Der Derian 2003).

While sovereign states are the primary members of international society, it is important to note that they are not strictly the only members. Historical anomalies have always existed, including the diplomatic network belonging to the Catholic church and the qualified sovereign powers that were granted to non-state actors such as the rights to make war and annex territory which were transferred to the great trading companies of the imperial era. One might also argue that influential international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are members in so far as they give advice to institutions such as the UN and on occasions participate in the drafting of significant multilateral treaties. The

other important anomaly with the membership of international society is the fact that sovereign rights are often constrained for economic or security reasons. Robert Jackson, a leading writer in the English school, pointed to the fact that post-colonial states are 'quasi' sovereigns in that they are recognized by international society but are unable to maintain an effective government internally (Jackson 1990). A related development is the temporary suspension of sovereign prerogatives by an international institution or occupying authority, a practice that follows from a period of civil conflict or external military intervention. In the colonial period this was often described as trusteeship (Bain 2003); in contemporary international society it goes under the less politically sensitive label of a 'transitional authority'.

While the element of mutual recognition is highly significant for English school understandings of international society, it is not a sufficient condition for its existence. The actors must have some minimal common interests such as trade, freedom of travel, or simply the need for stability. Here we see how aspects of the system impinge on the possibilities for a society to develop. The higher the levels of economic interdependence, the more likely it is that states will develop institutions for realizing coming interests and purposes. The independence of sovereign states, however, remains an important limiting factor in the realization of common goals. For this reason, the purposes states agreed upon for most of the Westphalian era have had a fairly minimal character centred upon the survival of the system and the endurance of the dominant units within it. The condition of general war is an example of the breakdown of order, but Bull was quick to point out that even during the Second World War certain laws of war were respected and, perhaps more significantly, the period of total war triggered an attempt to construct a new order based largely on the same rules and institutions that had operated in the pre-war era. It was this that led him to claim that 'the element of society had always existed' in the modern states system. Such a claim prompts disquiet among IR scholars trained in sophisticated social science methods. If 'society' explains the existence of order, how can it be a permanent presence in the world political system? One answer, which the English school needs to develop more fully, is to provide clearer benchmarks which enable an evaluation of how much 'society' is present in the inter-state order.

Types of international society

This criticism of the tendency in English school writings to treat international society as an unchanging entity is rebutted in part by the attempt to set out different kinds of international society. At the more minimal end of the spectrum of international societies, we find an institutional arrangement that is restricted solely to the maintenance of order. In a culturally diverse world, where members-states have different traditions and political systems, the only collective venture they could all agree on was the maintenance of international order. Without order, the stability of the system would be thrown into doubt and with it the survival of the units. Yet, the extent to which states formed an international society was limited and constrained by the fact of anarchy. For this reason, international society was not to be equated with a harmonious order but, rather, a tolerable order that was better than a realist would expect but much worse than a cosmopolitan desires (Linklater 1995: 95)

In a pluralist international society, the institutional framework is geared towards the liberty of states and the maintenance of order among them. The rules are complied with because, like rules of the road, fidelity to them is relatively cost free but the collective benefits are enormous. A good example is the elaborate rules to do with ambassadorial and diplomatic privileges. Acceptance that representatives of states are not subject to the laws of their host country is a principle that has received widespread compliance for many centuries. This is one instance among many where the rules of coexistence have come to dominate state practice. Pluralist rules and norms 'provide a structure of coexistence, built on the mutual recognition of states as independent and legally equal members of society, on the unavoidable reliance on self-preservation and self-help, and on freedom to promote their own ends subject to minimal constraints' (Alderson and Hurrell 2000: 7). To fully comprehend the pluralist order, one needs only to be reminded that great powers, limited war, and the balance of power, were thought by the English school to be 'institutions'. By this term, Bull and his colleagues were pointing to the practices which helped to sustain order, practices which evolved over many centuries. For example, if the balance of power was essential to preserve the liberty of states (an argument the English school shared with classical realists, see Chapter 3), then status quo powers must be prepared to intervene forcefully to check the growing power of a state that threatened the general balance.

To what extent are pluralist rules and institutions adequate for our contemporary world? This is a question that has provoked widely differing responses within the English school. On one side, traditionalists like Robert Jackson believe that a pluralist international society is a practical institutional adaptation to human diversity: the great advantage of a society based on the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention is that such an arrangement is most likely to achieve the moral value of freedom (Jackson 2000).

Critics of pluralism charge that it is failing to deliver on its promise. The persistence of inter-state wars throughout the twentieth century suggest that sovereignty norms were not sufficient to deter predatory states. Moreover, the rule of non-intervention that was central to pluralism was enabling statist elites to violently abuse their own citizens with impunity. For these reasons, both Bull and Vincent were drawn to a different account of international society in which universal values such as human rights set limits on the exercise of state sovereignty. The guiding thought here, and one that is captured by the term solidarism, is that the ties that bind individuals to the great society of humankind are deeper than the pluralist rules and institutions which separate them.

What does a solidarist international society entail? Bull originally defined it as the collective enforcement of international rules *and* the guardianship of human rights. It differs from cosmopolitanism in that the latter is agnostic as to the institutional arrangement for delivering universal values: some cosmopolitans believe a world government is best and others would want to abandon formal political hierarchies altogether. By contrast, solidarism is an *extension* of an international society not its transformation. Like pluralism, it is defined by shared values and institutions and is held together by binding legal rules. Where it differs is in the content of the values and the character of the rules and institutions. In terms of values, in a solidarist international society individuals are entitled to basic rights. This in turn demands that sovereignty norms are modified such that there is a duty on the members of international society to intervene forcibly to protect those rights. At this point, Bull was hesitant about what was implied by solidarism. He believed

that there was a danger that the enforcement of human rights principles risked undermining international order. Until there was a greater consensus on the meaning and priority to be accorded to rights claims, attempts to enforce them – what he described as ‘premature global solidarism’ – would do more harm than good.

It is only in the last few years that international society has legitimized armed intervention on humanitarian grounds. According to the Commission on State Sovereignty’s report *The Responsibility to Protect*, states have not only a duty of care to their citizens, they also have a responsibility to come to the aid of other peoples suffering a humanitarian emergency. As Wheeler convincingly shows, this is a significant change from the Cold War period when states could not appeal to humanitarian principles as an acceptable rationale for intervention (2000). Even though intervention for the protection of human rights has been accepted as a just cause, the danger of ‘premature global solidarism’ is evident in the US-led war against Iraq in 2003. In the absence of a consensus on whether constitutional democracy is the right form of government for non-Western states, the result of the war is likely to be the progressive weakening of United Nations use-of-force prohibitions. What is to be done if coalitions of willing Arab states decide to selectively enforce UN Security Council resolutions without proper authority? In this hypothetical case, an indignant response from Western states to the effect that Arab countries ought to respect the non-intervention principle will seem terribly hollow.

International society: between system and world society

Bull and Wight recognized that a sophisticated analysis of world politics required a systemic component. Yet their discussion of Hobbesian dynamics in the ‘system’ is inconsistent and unpersuasive. In my view, this vital element of the English school’s theorization of world politics ought to be refined rather than discarded as some have claimed (see Buzan 2004). Bull defined the system as being an arena where there was interaction between communities but no shared rules or institutions. In order for a system to come into being, there has to be sufficient intensity of interactions to make ‘the behaviour of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other’ (Bull 1977: 10).

The concept of a system plays three important roles in the English school’s theory of world politics. First, as discussed above, the system–society distinction provides a normative benchmark for addressing the question how far international society extends (Wight 1991: 6). Second, by looking at the formation of the system it is possible to discern mechanisms which shape and shove international and world societies. Third, the category of the system can usefully be used to capture the basic material forces in world politics – flows of information and trade, levels of destructive capability, capacities of actors to affect their environment. Let me examine each of these briefly in turn.

This view of an international system – or more accurately an inter-state system – shares a great deal with the use of systems theory in realist thought, both classical (Chapter 3) and

structural (Chapter 4). What sets them apart is that the English school was interested in the system primarily for what it tells us about the history of international society. If one takes Bull’s developmental insight into the relationship between system and society, then it is clear that the existence of a society presupposes the existence of a system. This can open up into an intriguing series of discussions as to when a system becomes a society. What level and type of interactions are required in order for the units to treat each other as ends in themselves? And under what circumstances might a society lapse back into a systemic order in which actions impact upon one another but there is no mutual recognition or acceptance of a common framework of rules and institutions? In the British Committee’s writings on decolonization, the emphasis is placed on the gradual inclusion of the non-Western world into a globalized society of sovereign states. It is also important to realize that systemic interactions remain a possible future arrangement if the dominant actors in international society cease to comply with the rules and act in ways which undermine the international security. The hypothetical case of a major nuclear confrontation could become a reality only if the great powers acted in ways that were catastrophic for international society. As a result, the society collapses back into the system.

The idea of a states system is also useful to identify the current boundaries between members and those states who find themselves shunned by international society. It is in the dark recesses of the states system that pariah states and failed states find themselves. This does not mean pariahs are outside the framework of the rules and institutions entirely, only that their actions are subjected to far greater scrutiny. Actors in the states system can have structured interactions with members of international society – they may even comply with treaties and other rules – but these interactions remain systemic unless the parties grant each other mutual respect and inclusion into international society.

Thinking about the systemic domain also alerts us to the downward pressure exerted by the distribution of material power. In Bull’s work we can find two important instances where the system impinges upon the society. First, he notes how general war is ‘a basic determinant of the shape the system assumes at any one time’ (1977: 187). Even in the Cold War, where the massive nuclear arsenals of the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were not unleashed, the presence of these weapons was a crucial constraint on the two superpowers’ room for manoeuvre. If the Soviet Union had had only conventional weapons, would the USA and its allies have tolerated the ‘fall’ of central European countries into the Soviet sphere of influence? Closely related to the phenomena of general war and destructive capacities as basic determinants of the system, one can find in the English school the view that there is a logic of balancing in the states system. Under conditions of anarchy, where there is no over-arching power to disarm the units and police the rules, it is in the interests of all states to prevent the emergence of a dominant or hegemonic power (Watson 1992). Those who take the balance of power seriously point to repeated instances in modern history where states with hegemonic ambition have been repelled by an alliance of powers seeking to prevent a change in the ordering principle of the system. Even if this tendency requires states to ‘act’ in order to uphold the balance of power, it can still be persuasively argued that the survival of the states system *demands* balancing behaviour from states such that it becomes an inbuilt feature of the system. This is contrasted with the institution of the balance of power in international society which is not mechanical but is rather the

outcome of a deliberate policy of pursuing a strategy of self-preservation in the absence of world government (Wight 1978: 184).

Looking through the systemic lens shows not only the ordering of the units; it also directs our attention to the levels of technology, the distribution of material power, and the interaction capacity of the units. Together, these factors tell us a great deal about the ability of units to act and particularly their 'reach'. (Are actors local, regional, or global?) Levels of technology can be thought of as attributes of the units; an obvious case in point is whether a state has nuclear weapons technology or not. However, it is also useful to think about technology in systemic terms, particularly in areas such as communication, transportation, and levels of destructive capacity. Compare, for example, a states system in which the dominant mode of transportation is a horse-drawn wagon, as opposed to a system in which individuals and goods can be transported by supersonic jets, high-speed rail, and ships the size of several football fields placed end-to-end. As these technologies spread, 'they change the quality and character of what might be called the *interaction capacity* of the system as a whole' (Buzan *et al.* 1993).

What make these attributes 'systemic'? They are systemic in that for the most part they fall outside the institutional arrangement developed by states to regulate order and promote justice. By way of illustration, take the example of the place of Britain in the world from the early 1940s to the beginning of the Cold War. Throughout the war, Britain was one of the 'big three' great powers who were the architects of the postwar order. By 1948, the country was increasingly a policy-taker on the world stage and not a policy-maker despite the fact that its diplomatic network remained global, its language remained dominant, and its values ascendant. None of these soft power advantages were enough to configure the system in multipolar terms. Without wanting to imply over-determination, it is nevertheless useful to invoke the system to characterize those factors that appear immovable from the perspective of the actors, such as their geographic location, population base, and technological/economic capacity. Of course they are not immovable over the long term – even geographical 'distance' can change over time, as globalization has demonstrated in recent decades.

The third element in the English school triad is world society. This concept runs in parallel to international society albeit with one key difference – it refers to the shared interests and values 'linking all parts of the human community' (Bull 1977: 279). Vincent's definition of world society is something of a menu of all those entities whose moral concerns traditionally lay outside international society: the claim of individuals to human rights; the claim of indigenous peoples to autonomy; the needs of transnational corporations to penetrate the shell of the sovereign states; and the claim to retrospective justice by those who speak on behalf of the former colonial powers. It is undeniable that human rights are at the centre of the classical English school's conception of world society. An account of the development of human rights is presented in the case study. For now, it is important to give a brief account of how the cosmopolitan culture of late modernity is shaping a new institutional arrangement in world society.

One indicator of an evolving world society is the emergence of international humanitarian law. The UN Charter represented an important stage in this evolution, thus indicating the dynamic interplay between the inter-state and the world society domains. Justice, rights, fundamental freedoms, were all given prominence in the

Charter; subsequently, universal norms of racial equality, the prohibition on torture, and the right to development have been added (among others). Various changes in international criminal law have significantly restricted the circumstances in which state leaders can claim immunity from humanitarian crimes committed while they were in office. Similarly, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court adds another layer of international jurisdiction in which agents of states can be held accountable for alleged war crimes. Taken as a whole, one authority on the English school argued that they 'may be interpreted as involving a clear shift from an international society to a world society' (Armstrong 1999: 549). Such a claim, however, understates the extent to which the development of world society institutions is dependent on the ideational and material support of core states in international society.

World society is not just about the growing importance of transnational values grounded in liberal notions of rights and justice. Transnational identities can be based upon ideas of hatred and intolerance. Among a significant body of world public opinion, the strongest identification is to the faith and not to the state. This generates countervailing ideologies of liberation on the part of fundamentalist Christians and holy war on the part of Muslim extremists. In English school thinking, such dynamics can usefully be considered in the context of earlier 'revolts' against Western dominance that were apparent during the struggle for decolonization.

Case study: human rights⁵



The extension of international law from the exclusive rights of sovereign states towards recognizing the rights of all individuals by virtue of their common humanity is one of the most significant normative shifts in the history of world politics. To put it into the conceptual vocabulary used earlier, human rights are the most obvious indicator of a move beyond a pluralist international society and its exclusive interest in the pursuit of order and the limitation of justice claims to demands by sovereign states to be treated equally. Yet, as this case study suggests, for much of the post-1945 period human rights have been as much a source of division as a marker of the emergence of a solidarist international society. During the springtime of liberalism in the 1990s, human rights established an institutional presence that matched its rhetorical power: the winter of the post-9/11 era has illustrated that systemic and societal forces have reversed many previous gains as governments alter the priority accorded to national security over individual liberty. Before unpacking this argument further, let us remind ourselves of the journey human rights have taken in the modern era.

On 10 December 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the main advocates, said that it had 'set up a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations' (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999: 1). The UDHR should be seen as a normatively ambitious document that was brought into being because of the realization of the horrendous destructive capacity of modern states. The document sought to establish a standard of civilized conduct which applied to all governments, irrespective of their ideology or the ethnicity of their citizens. It contains thirty articles, including basic rights (such as the right to life) and more

aspirational rights (such as the right to rest and leisure). Despite the normative revolution signalled by the claim that all individuals should have rights by virtue of their common humanity, the institutionalization of human rights principles has been a long and incomplete journey.

Human rights advocates had to wait a further three decades before such principles began to significantly constrain the behaviour of states. In the intervening period, the siren call for states to live up to respecting universal rights was muted by two factors: first, the priority accorded to national security by the leading protagonists (and their allies) during the Cold War; and, second, the fact that states did no multilateral monitoring of their human rights practices. In other words, right at the outset, human rights were overshadowed by systemic factors to do with great power rivalry and the preference by members of international society to view human rights as standards and not as enforceable commitments.

Several factors converged in the mid-1970s which together signalled a step-change in the power of the human rights regime. These can be grouped into the following themes (examined in turn below): the growing legalization of human rights norms; the emergence of human rights international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); and the increased priority accorded to human rights in the foreign policies of key Western states. In terms of legalization, in 1976 the two international human rights covenants came into force. With no little historical irony, the Czechoslovak parliament ratified the two covenants in the knowledge that this would mean the treaty had enough support for the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to come into effect. Over and above the internationalization of what Jack Donnelly calls 'an international bill of rights', other institutional changes had an important impact. The UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) became more active, in part helped by its expanded membership and the inclusion of states committed to make a difference. While the work of the Commission is largely that of information gathering and sharing, its role raises the status of human rights in the UN system. The appointment of a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 1993 took the profile to an even higher level.

Liberal states and INGOs as change agents

The 1970s also saw the emergence of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) committed to deepening state compliance with human rights law. Dismissed by Soviet diplomats in 1969 as 'weeds in the field' (Foot 2000: 38), INGO activity was beginning to have a significant impact on state-society relations in all corners of the globe. Amnesty International (AI) is a good example. Its mission is to cajole governments into complying with human rights standards, such as freedom from torture and the preservation of human dignity. Originally set up around a clutch of activists in 1961, it had over 150,000 members in more than 100 countries by 1977 (it now has 1.8 million members). INGOs like Amnesty perform two vital functions. They act as information networks with a capacity to communicate evidence of human rights violations to their membership and the global media. If INGOs are believed to be authoritative and independent, as Amnesty is, then this information is taken seriously both by UN bodies entrusted with monitoring human rights and by other actors in global civil society. In 1977, Amnesty won the Nobel Peace Prize and, seven years later, it was highly influential in the drafting of the 1984

Convention Against Torture. The second key role of human rights INGOs in world politics is one of criticizing governments for failing to uphold the standards they sign up to. INGOs make up the most important institution in world society.

Of the three dynamics for change, probably the most significant was the intrusion of human rights into the diplomacy of Western states. In the USA, Congress was increasingly minded to pass legislation linking aid and trade to human rights. And when Jimmy Carter became President, the cause of human rights found a passionate advocate, in sharp contrast to the Nixon-Kissinger era when they were thought to complicate the achievement of more important goals in the economic and security domains. In Western Europe, Norway and the Netherlands were becoming more activist in promoting human rights in their own foreign policy. Within the European Community (EC) and, after 1993, the European Union (EU), respect for human rights had always been a condition for membership. Individuals in EC states could also bring cases against their governments, indicating a much higher level of institutionalization than is the case in the UN system.

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 illustrates each type of agency at work. This treaty was the culmination of three years of negotiation among thirty-five states involved in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The Eastern Bloc countries were desperate to normalize relations with the rest of Europe and have the postwar division of Europe recognized in an international treaty. The West Europeans were pushing hard for shared commitments to fundamental human rights: while this was resisted by communist states, they eventually yielded in order to realize their gains in other issue-areas. The Final Act set out ten 'guiding principles for relations among European states', including 'respect for human rights and other fundamental freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief'.⁶ While the communist elites chose to emphasize other articles in the final declaration which underscored the principle of non-intervention in their internal affairs, activists inside their societies began a period of intense mobilization which did untold damage to the stability of communist rule. Within a year of the Helsinki Final Act, the normative context had become inhospitable to the status quo in Eastern Europe – the opposite of what the communist governments had hoped for when they called for a security conference (Thomas 1999: 214). Human rights had exposed, in the words of R. J. Vincent, 'the internal regimes of all the members of international society to the legitimate appraisal of their peers' (1986: 152).

Countervailing forces in the human rights regime

By the mid- to late 1990s, there was a process of 'norm cascade' underway as the influence of international human rights norm diffused rapidly (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999: 21). The cascade is complete when the norms acquire a common-sense quality such that they become unchallenged (even if they are not unbroken). The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights was an important signifier of the unchallenged status of the standard, as was the signing of the ICCPR by China in 1998. These tipping points illustrate the progressive socialization of states into a framework where their internal behaviour is subject to the scrutiny of other states as well as international public opinion. As the example of the Helsinki process illustrates, the effect of the diplomacy of human rights reinforced by civil society actors and transnational networks was to delegitimize the communist system. Such

a process provides a powerful counter to hard-headed realists who believe that human rights are 'just talk'.

The embedding of human rights principles and the development of institutions in world society such as Amnesty, CARE, Oxfam, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and countless others, represents a significant change in our moral sensibilities. This, however, must be checked by the realization that the diplomacy of human rights in the inter-state order presents defenders of solidarism with a number of awkward challenges. The ongoing structural human rights violations in China suggest that its motivation for participating in the regime is primarily strategic – there is little to suggest the state believes in the ideas or the treaties. Perhaps more shocking for advocates of human rights is their marginalization in the liberal heartland by those states who see themselves fighting a global war on terror. The most graphic representation of the retreat of human rights is the haunting images of naked Iraqi prisoners, first aired on CBS news in April 2004.

The official reaction of the Bush administration to the Abu Ghraib scandal was that these incidents were committed by 'a few bad apples'. Such complacency ought to be countered by the argument that the USA has, since 9/11, systematically sought to reinterpret key articles of the international bill of rights, specifically in relation to the treatment of prisoners. The US Secretary of Defense called for stronger interrogation techniques to be used against so-called high-value detainees. Far from refraining from cruel and degrading treatment, the US administration raised the bar for what counts as torture such that it was equated with the infliction of lasting pain commensurate with 'serious physical injury such as death or organ failure' (Bybee 2002).

The context of the threat posed by Islamist suicide bombers prompted voices inside the liberal establishment to question whether certain human rights commitments were in tension with national security. In relation to the convention banning torture, both Michael Ignatieff and Alan Dershowitz have argued that 'mental' torture might be permissible in clearly prescribed circumstances. While liberal intellectuals slug it out, governments around the world are quickly curtailing the rights of terror suspects – often so widely defined as to include political opposition movements. The general relegation of human rights down the agenda of core states reminds us that compliance to human-rights norms is contingent and reversible: human wrongs – such as torture in the name of anti-terrorism – can 'cascade' throughout global politics just as quickly as human rights-enhancing norms can be diffused. As Ken Booth has powerfully argued, there is a growing disjuncture between the development of a human rights culture in world society as against the unwillingness of statist elites in international society to act as protectors of a universal community of humankind (Booth 1995).

Conclusion

The case study has illustrated a dimension of international relations that has been of growing importance during the late modern period. By way of an overall conclusion to the chapter, the following paragraphs situate human rights more directly in the frames of

system, society, and world society. The claim here is that the three ideal types provide clarity with respect to the sources of agency pushing for change and the impact this has on the rule structure. As intimated in the opening section of the chapter, a revived classical approach enables the discussion of normative questions without abandoning the quest to explain 'how it all hangs together' (Searle 1995: xi).

In relation to human rights, an English school analysis reminds us that even during the high-water mark of colonialism, the rights of individuals were never entirely distinguished. Hence the attraction of historical figures such as Hugo Grotius who believed that the law of nations was a subset of the law of nature in which the right to liberty and self-defence were universal. In the post-Enlightenment period, changes inside core states, such as the abolitionist movement in Britain in the early nineteenth century, affected change internationally in so far as the hegemonic power used its naval supremacy to end the trade in slaves. Arguably what prevented the evolution of an effective human rights regime prior to the mid-1970s were systemic factors: the condition of general war from 1914 to 1945; great power rivalry until the period of détente; and the absence of institutions in world society with the capacity to lobby and cajole states into rule-compliance.

The retreat of human rights after 9/11 also has a systemic quality that makes the challenge more than simply the product of neo-conservative ideology. Here we are driven back to the thought that there is a centripetal momentum to power such that it concentrates around a single source. Once the centralization reaches a tipping point, the conditions exist to challenge the pluralist rules and institutions upon which the post-Westphalian order has been built. This line of thought goes to the heart of debates about the role of the USA (and its allies in the West) in building a world order in its own image. Arguably this is a greater threat to international society than the destabilizing potential posed by decolonization, a concern that consistently reappeared in the later work of the British Committee. Aside from the emergence of an unbalanced power with global economic and military reach, the other significant systemic logic is that of 'new terrorism'. The willingness of coordinated networks of Islamists to use violence against Western targets undermines international society's claim to monopolize violence and regulate its use.

Running these two tendencies together – the appearance of an imperial power seeking to wage pre-emptive war and a non-state actor wielding violence outside the framework of the laws of war – we might conclude that Bull was right to be concerned that the element of international society was in drastic decline. Set against this, just as the bell has tolled for the state many times before, it is possible that the element of society is resilient enough to resist the power of US hegemony and the challenge of transnational nihilists. Whichever pathways history proceeds down, the categories of system, society, and world society will retain their relevance as explanatory tools and normative benchmarks.



QUESTIONS

1. What are the core elements of the English school's approach to IR? How, if at all, does it differ from realism?

2. Are English school writers correct in pointing to the gradual diffusion of human rights norms throughout the system? Answer the question with reference to dominant actors in both international society and world society.
3. What is the relationship between order in international society and justice claims advanced by actors in world society?
4. Do you agree with Hedley Bull's comment that 'international society has always been present' in the world political system?
5. Does the English school have an implicit theory of progress in human history?
6. When journalists report on gross human rights violations, they often claim that the international community ought to 'do something'. How would an English school theorist respond to this plea?
7. Is the USA, under the Bush presidency, part of the system but outside international society? Do these categories help or hinder an account of the USA's role in world affairs after 9/11?
8. Was R. J. Vincent right to argue that how a government treats its populations has become the subject of legitimate scrutiny? Answer with reference to the 'Responsibility to Protect' document (listed under Important Websites).
9. Analyse Prime Minister Blair's speech 'Doctrine of International Community'? Does this suggest that international rules matter for state leaders?
10. Use the concepts of system, society, and world society (or community) to illustrate the evolution of human rights. What explanatory power do these concepts have?
11. Do you agree with Bull that international order will be undermined by solidarism?
12. Does Hedley Bull's later work signify a shift away from pluralism towards solidarism? Would he be a solidarist today?



FURTHER READING

- Bull, H. (1977/1995), *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan). Probably the best single work by a member of the English school. It is a defence of international society while at the same time recognizing that other historical orders have existed, and future orders are not only perceptible they may also be normatively more desirable.
- Bull, H. and Watson, A. (1984) (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). A collection of essays representing the last phase of the British Committee's work. Contributors trace the system/society boundary through various case studies: underpinning the work is a question about whether the rules and institutions of European international society can be sustained in a deeply divided world.
- Buzan, B. (2004), *From International to World Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Starts out as a bold reworking of the 'world society' category; in the process, reworks international society too.
- Butterfield, H. and Wight, M. (1966) (eds), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Relations* (London: Allen & Unwin). A collection of British Committee essays, including classics by Martin Wight on 'Western Values' and Hedley Bull on 'Society and Anarchy'.
- Clark, I. (2005), *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). A book of historical and sociological depth which puts legitimacy back at the centre of the English school's understanding of international society.

■ Linklater, A. (2001), 'The English School', in S. Burchill, A. Linklater, et al. *Theories of International Relations* (London: Macmillan), 93–118. The best chapter on the English school written for upper-level undergraduates and postgraduate students.

■ Vincent, R. J. (1986), *Human Rights in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Vincent shows how the post-1945 world has given us a different vocabulary for thinking about the relationship between the rights of states and the rights of individuals. He makes a persuasive argument in defence of the inviolability of basic rights.

■ Wheeler, N. J. (2000), *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Looking at a series of Cold War and post-Cold War case studies, Wheeler shows how a new norm of humanitarian intervention emerged after 1989. In this and other work, the author sets out criteria for evaluating when interventions are legitimate.

■ Wight, M. (1991), *International Theory: The Three Traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs). Lectures delivered at the London School of Economics in the 1950s. Wight shows how the history of IR can be 'read' as a debate between realist, rationalist, and revolutionist positions.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- The English school website. This website was pioneered by Barry Buzan and has subsequently been taken on by Jason Ralph. The site is a documentation centre, including an excellent bibliography and a collection of reading lists written by leading figures in the English school. It also has information on English school papers presented at national and international conferences. www.leeds.ac.uk/polis/englishschool/default.htm
- Responsibility to Protect. The document produced by the independent International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (established by the Government of Canada in September 2000). After twelve months of deliberation, it was submitted to the UN Secretary-General and the UN General Assembly. www.iciss.ca/menu-en.asp
- Amnesty International (AI). A worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights. It claims to be independent of ideology, religion, government, or economic interest. <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/aboutai-index-eng>
- 'Doctrine of International Community', Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech to the Economic Club of Chicago on 28 April 1999. Readers interested in the English school will find this speech engaging as it sets up a tension between Westphalian conceptions of rules and institutions with late-twentieth century ideas about the primacy of inalienable human rights. For all its flaws, the speech illustrates the clear connections between how leaders and practitioners view the world, and the lenses offered to us by the English school. www.number10.gov.uk



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

→ Chapter contents

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- Historical materialism and the purposes of critical theory
- Western Marxism and critical theory
- Contemporary critical analysis of global power
- Case study
- Conclusion

✓ Reader's guide

In discussions of world politics, it is not uncommon for Marxism to be dismissed out of hand as being preoccupied with economics rather than politics, and concerning itself with domestic rather than international social relations. In this chapter I will suggest to the contrary that Marxist theory aims at a critical understanding of capitalism as an historically particular way of organizing social life, and that this form of social organization entails political, cultural, and economic aspects which need to be understood as a dynamic ensemble of social relations not necessarily contained within the territorial boundaries of nation-states. Viewed in this way, Marxism can yield insights into the complex social relationships – on scales from the workplace and the household to the global – through which human beings produce and reproduce their social relations, the natural world, and themselves. The case-study section delves deeper into the insights that can be gained from Marxism in understanding the so-called 'War on Terror'.

Introduction

Marxism and critical theory¹ may be fundamentally distinguished from both the liberal and the realist traditions. Liberalism generally constructs its view of social reality in terms of individuals pursuing their private self-interest. These individuals may be led by self-interest into a social contract to create a government which will protect their lives, liberty, and property (John Locke), or to specialize and exchange with one another so as to create the germ of a market-mediated social division of labour (Adam Smith). With such contractual theories, liberalism purports to have resolved the problem of social order and cooperation among self-interested individuals. But the question of relations among these contractually constituted political communities remains problematic. Accordingly, the modern structural realist theory of International Relations has defined its field of inquiry in terms of a fundamental distinction between 'international' and 'domestic' politics (evident in Chapter 4). While the latter is held to be governed by a sovereign authority and hence allows for the authoritative resolution of disputes, the former is distinguished by the absence of these. In such an insecure 'anarchic' environment, sovereign states encounter one another with diffidence, suspicion, and, potentially, hostility. On this view, the 'high politics' of national security and power struggle necessarily dominate the horizon. Neoliberalism has sought to reintegrate into this state-centric world the liberal concern with contractual relations of cooperation, suggesting that international interdependence can create a demand for more cooperative forms of interaction which are facilitated by regimes and international organizations (as set out by Lisa Martin in Chapter 6). Thus can the 'low politics' of interdependence and routinized cooperation tame the 'high politics' of power struggle.

Viewed from the perspective of Marxism and critical theory, both liberalism and realism (and their neo variants) are profoundly limited, and limiting, for each takes as its premise a world of preconstituted social actors (whether self-interested individuals or security-seeking states) and is therefore unable to understand the social processes through which these kinds of actors have been historically constructed, and implicitly denies the possibilities for alternative possible worlds which may be latent within those processes of social self-production. In addition to the analytical blinders which this entails, the presuppositions of liberalism and realism are exposed as embodying political commitments which are profoundly conservative in effect. In order to recover the analytical and political possibilities denied by liberalism and realism, Marxism and critical theory have sought to illuminate processes of social self-production and the possibilities they may entail.

Marxism constitutes a huge and varied tradition of scholarship and practical political activity which is probably impossible to catalogue adequately. Therefore, rather than attempting to map this extensive and varied terrain, I will instead sketch out a particular interpretation which I believe builds upon the strengths of the dialectical social philosophy developed by Karl Marx, and shows how those strengths can yield insights into the politics of global production as well as the production of global politics. I will relate this tradition of dialectical theory to strains of thought sometimes characterized as 'Western Marxism' (to distinguish them from the official state Marxisms of the twentieth-century 'East') – including the critical theory associated with the so-called Frankfurt school, and the political theory of Antonio Gramsci. The Western Marxist encounter serves to

highlight the many ways in which humans are socially self-productive, and suggests important critical insights which include the cultural and political, as well as the economic, aspects of that process. These conceptual tools, then, enable a much richer and politically nuanced interpretation of the politics of globalizing capitalism, and the role of imperial power within that process.

Historical materialism and the purposes of critical theory

While it may not be possible to provide a simple or straightforward definition of Marxism which would comfortably encompass all its different variants and divergent strains, one fundamental commonality is the desire to provide a critical interpretation of capitalism, understood as an historically produced – and therefore mutable – form of social life, rather than as the ineluctable expression of some essential human nature. To the extent that the ways in which we live our lives, the kinds of persons that we are, and our social relations, are all seen as historical social products, the critical question arises as to whether, and how, we might organize ourselves differently. Given the historically specific social context in which we find ourselves, are there tensions or possibilities for change which might enable us to produce a different, conceivably more equitable and democratic, future possible world? Before any such questions can be posed, however, it is necessary to exert some critical leverage on the prevailing view that social life in commodity-based society is a necessary outgrowth of the natural characteristics of individual human beings.

Contrary to Adam Smith's world of self-interested individuals, naturally predisposed to do a deal, Marx posited a *relational* and *process-oriented* view of human beings. On this view, humans are what they are not because it is hard-wired into them to be self-interested individuals, but by virtue of the relations through which they live their lives. In particular, he suggested that humans live their lives at the intersection of a three-sided relation encompassing the natural world, social relations and institutions, and human persons. These relations are understood as *organic*: each element of the relation is what it is by virtue of its place in the relation, and none can be understood in abstraction from that context. Insofar as humans are material beings, we must engage in some kind of productive interchange with the natural world in order to secure our survival. Insofar as we are social beings, this productive activity will be socially organized, necessarily involving thinking, talking, and planning together. And in the process of this socially productive activity, Marx believed, humans continuously remake their world (both its natural and social aspects) and themselves. If contemporary humans appear to act as self-interested individuals, then, it is a result not of our essential nature but of the particular ways we have produced our social lives and ourselves. On this view, humans may be collectively capable of recreating their world, their work and themselves in new and better ways, but only if we think critically about, and act practically to change, those historically peculiar social relations which encourage us to think and act as socially disempowered, narrowly self-interested individuals.

The meaning of dialectic: social relations in process

This view of human social life as *relations in process* forms the core of Marx's famous dialectical understanding of history: humans are historical beings, simultaneously the producers and the products of historical processes. In one of his more justly famous aphorisms, Marx summarized his view of history in the following terms: 'Men [*sic*] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past' (2000: 329).²

This process is sometimes described as a dialectic of agents and structures. Agents are social actors, situated in the context of relatively enduring social relations or structures, often embodied in institutions. Structures generate the possibility of certain kinds of social identity and corresponding forms of action (i.e. roles which actors may play in the context of those structures), but the structures are not themselves determinative or automatic. They require human agents continuously to re-enact their structural roles. Actors or agents may enact structural roles in ways which reproduce, alter, or potentially even transform social structures in which they are embedded. 'This interplay between individual actions and the institutions that form the framework for individual action is what Marx means by dialectic' (Schmitt 1997: 50).

This dialectical, or process-oriented approach has important implications for the way in which we study social life. As Marx himself put it, 'as soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists' (2000: 181). On this view, causal explanations which posit objective 'laws' of social life may be misleading insofar as they distract us from the ways in which our world has been produced by historically situated human social agents. For if we understand history as an open-ended process of social self-production under historically specific circumstances, then we are led to inquire about the historical context of social relations in which social action takes place, to ask about the historical processes which generated that kind of social context, and to look for structured tensions in those historically specific forms of life, tensions which could open up possibilities for historically situated actors to produce social change. Further, we are encouraged to ask how our own social situation in the present relates to that of those whom we are studying. Might our own inquiries have implications for the ways in which contemporary people know and (re-)produce our own social world?

Marx's dialectical framework of relations in process also has important implications for the ways in which we think about politics, freedom, and unfreedom. Traditionally understood in terms of authoritative processes of rule (based upon an official monopoly of the means of coercion), or the authoritative allocation of values (who gets what, etc.), from a Marxian perspective these understandings of politics seem remarkably limited, and *limiting*. In the context of a dialectical view of history, politics appears as struggle over processes of social self-production, the ability to steer those processes in one direction or another and thus to shape the kind of world in which we will live and the kinds of persons we will become in that world. Politics, in short, concerns future possible worlds. And freedom may correspondingly be understood in terms of social self-determination – our collective ability to shape ourselves and our world. This is an expansive understanding of freedom, much broader and potentially more empowering than the traditional liberal

understanding of freedom as individual choice (often expressed in a market context where the object of choice is the maximal satisfaction of the individual's private wants and needs). Based on the dialectical approach to understanding history, with its expansive conceptions of politics and of freedom, Marx developed a powerful and enduringly relevant critique of capitalist social life.

Marx and the critique of capitalism

Marx was one of the most incisive critics of a peculiarly modern form of social life – capitalism. For Marx, capitalism was not to be confused with markets or exchange, which long predated capitalism. Rather, capitalism represented a form of social life in which commodification had proceeded to such a degree that human labour itself was bought and sold on the market. One of Marx's central insights was that this situation presupposed the development of historically specific class-based relations and powers: the concomitant development of capital – socially necessary means of production reconstituted as the exclusive private property of a few – and wage labour as the compulsory activity of the many. Under the class relations of capitalism, direct producers are not personally tied to their exploiter, as were slaves in bondage to their master or feudal serfs bound to the lord's estate. In a real historical sense, then, capitalism frees workers to treat their labour as their own property. However, this freedom is complemented by a peculiarly capitalist kind of unfreedom. Insofar as means of production are under the ownership and control of a class of private owners, workers are *compelled* to sell their labour to members of this owning class in order to gain access to those means of production, engage in socially productive activity, and secure through their wages the material necessities of survival.

Marx's critique of capitalism hinged upon the claim, intelligible within the context of his dialectical theory of social self-production, that capitalism simultaneously involves historically unique forms of human freedom and unfreedom, empowerment and disempowerment. Marx believed that although capitalism develops the productive powers of human societies to historically unprecedented heights, it does so in ways which are also disabling, exploitative, and undemocratic.

Capitalism is *disabling* insofar as this way of organizing social life distorts and obscures real historical possibilities for social self-determination. Socially empowered as never before to remake their world and themselves, people under capitalism are simultaneously prevented from realizing the full implications of their socially productive powers and the fuller forms of freedom these powers might make possible. Within the context of capitalist commodification and the ideology it supports, historically specific forms of social organization and activity take on the appearance of objective, necessary, natural, universal conditions. Marx referred to this kind of disabling mystification as 'alienation' or 'fetishism'. Insofar as these appearances involve abstracting particular elements out of the constitutive relations through which they are produced, and representing them as if they were self-subsistent, preconstituted entities, this ideological mystification may be understood as a sort of reification – the practice of conflating abstractions with reality.

One of the reified forms of appearance generated by capitalist social life is the abstract individual. When we understand ourselves as monadic persons pursuing private wants and needs via our interactions with others, our social practices reproduce our identity as

abstract individuals. These individuals are abstract insofar as they are understood to embody certain attributes (propensities, preferences, aptitudes, rights, etc.) which 'are assumed as given, independently of social context' (Lukes 1973: 73). For persons understood in this way all social relations appear 'external', that is, as either an instrument or an obstacle for the realization of already given private purposes. The practices which might be seen as specific to a particular historical or social context (and hence to be potentially changeable along with that context) are instead presumed to be hard-wired into individuals as such. Thus the self-interested behaviour which Adam Smith observed among private producers in the context of a commodity society is represented as a universal human attribute, a natural 'propensity to truck, barter, and exchange' (Smith 1993: 21).

Further, to the extent that we understand ourselves as isolated individuals, we confront our social environment not as our collective social product, but as an objective constraint on our individual choices. Social life becomes something which happens to us, rather than a collective way of being in the world. This is an instance of a powerful critical insight derived from Marxian theory: to the extent that people understand existing social relations as natural, necessary, and universal, they are prevented from looking for transformative possibilities, precluded from imagining the social production of alternative possible worlds. In short, they may abdicate their collective powers of social self-production. Ironically, then, the unprecedented development of productive capacity under capitalism has as its historical correlate the disempowerment of collective human producers.

A second strand of Marxian critique holds that capitalism is exploitative. Often couched in the arcane language of the labour theory of value which Marx adopted for the purposes of his critical engagement with classical political economy, the theory of exploitation is a complex and controversial topic (Brewer 1990: 26–36; and Schmitt 1997: 100–13), but it may be more readily understandable when expressed as an instance of the disabling unfreedom discussed above. On Marx's view, capital is the *result* of socially productive activity, the creation of value by labour. Viewed as a 'thing', capital itself has no productive powers. But viewed as a social relation, capital is productive only as accumulation of previously expended labour power, set in motion by newly expended labour power. Yet, because capitalism is characterized by private ownership of the means of production, as owner the capitalist controls the production process and expropriates its product – the *surplus value* created by labour (i.e. the product of labour above and beyond that required to sustain the workers themselves). The process and product of socially organized labour are subordinated to private property and incorporated into the accumulation of capital.

Of course, the capitalists' ability to control the production process and expropriate its product depends upon the successful reproduction of their class-based powers, and the insulation of these powers from more democratic, collective forms of decision-making. The third strand of Marxian critique thus highlights the degree to which capitalism creates *private social powers* located in a separate 'economic' sphere of social life, effectively off limits from explicitly 'political' public deliberation and norms of democratic accountability. This is perhaps best understood in terms of an historical contrast. Pre-capitalist modes of production such as feudalism involved the direct coercive expropriation of surplus labour by the dominant class, a landed nobility whose social powers were simultaneously economic and political. Should serfs fail to yield surplus labour to their lord, the social significance of this was not simply a private deal gone bad but rather a direct

challenge to the political-economic order upon which the lords's social position rested. That the lord would respond with coercive force would not have seemed extraordinary in a social context where economic and political aspects of social life were fused in this way.

In a modern capitalist context, however, it is relatively unusual (although certainly not unheard of) for employers to use direct coercive force as an integral part of their extraction of surplus labour. Rather, workers are compelled to work, and to submit to capitalist control of the workplace, by what Marxists often refer to as the 'dull compulsion of economic life', the relentless daily requirement to earn enough to pay the rent and put food on the table. The direct intervention of explicitly political authority and directly coercive force within the capitalist workplace is the exception rather than the rule. The social powers of capitalist investors and employers are ensconced in this depoliticized and privatized economic sphere, understood not as intrinsically political powers but as individual prerogatives attendant upon the ownership of private property. By virtue of being understood as attributes of 'private property', these powers are made democratically unaccountable (it is, after all, nobody else's business what each of us does with our own private property). Further, because of the state's structural dependence on private investment, government is effectively compelled to serve the long-term interest of the capitalist class (not necessarily congruent with that of individual capitalists). Failure to create the political conditions perceived by capitalists as a business-friendly climate would result in capitalist investors sending their capital after higher profits elsewhere and leaving the government to preside over economic crisis which could well be politically catastrophic for incumbent office holders. Insofar as politicians of all major parties are acutely aware of this structural dependence upon maintenance of a business-friendly climate, a range of possible policy orientations (which might be perceived as threatening to the profitability of private investment) are effectively precluded. This implicit veto power over public policy is yet another sense in which Marxists have argued that capitalism is undemocratic.

In these ways, then, capitalism effectively privatizes the social powers of investors and employers, lodging these in a privatized economic sphere, understood to be separate from the sphere of politics, public affairs, or the state. None of this is uncontested in principle or uncontested in fact. A system of social organization premised upon *privatized social powers* is a system fraught with contradictions and tensions. Historical materialism highlights these powers, along with their structural and ideological defences, in order to subject them to critical scrutiny. The purpose of this critical analysis of historical structures is to enable identification of historically real possibilities for progressive social change.

Capitalism as a system of social organization, as a way of life, presupposes as part of its structure both a privatized and depoliticized economic sphere and, correspondingly, a public, political state. Further, this separation is embodied in a variety of cultural practices and representations in which we appear to ourselves as private individuals, workers, consumers, rights-bearing citizens, confronting a pre-given world in which we must choose the most efficient means for the realization of our private purposes. To identify capitalism narrowly with the economy – and therefore Marxism with economic analysis – is to miss the crucial point that particular forms of political and cultural organization and practice are bound up with capitalist social reality, and are implicated in political struggles over the reproduction – or transformation – of that entire way of life.

Classical theories of imperialism

Among the most influential contributions of the Marxist tradition to the study of world politics have been theories of imperialism. According to Anthony Brewer's authoritative text (1990: 25), Marx himself never actually used the term 'imperialism'. Further, Brewer's interpretation of Marx's relatively few discussions of the topic suggests that colonialism is not essential to capitalism: 'capitalism does not need a subordinated hinterland or periphery, though it will use and profit from one if it exists' (Brewer 1989: 57). Although he had relatively little to say about imperialism as such, regarding the expansionary dynamics of capitalism which we would nowadays associate with globalization Marx was prescient:

“ The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image. ”

Marx 2000: 248–9³

The conventional wisdom of some mainstream IR theorists notwithstanding, capitalism for Marx was clearly not a purely 'domestic' phenomenon, hermetically contained within the territorial vessels of modern nation-states. Its expansionist dynamics (rooted in the imperatives of competitive accumulation) overflowed those boundaries and outdistanced the geographical scope of state-based political authority. For Marx, the privatized social powers of capital have long had global horizons. Marx thought that the international activities of industrial capital (as distinct from the trading of merchant capital) were potentially transformative for the social organization of production on a world scale, spreading and intensifying the capitalist organization of production and greatly expanding socially productive powers. Consistent with his dialectical analysis of capitalism, Marx believed this process would entail both progressive and retrogressive aspects, generate massive suffering as well as the potential for qualitative and, he hoped, progressive social change.

In the early twentieth century, as the First World War loomed, a generation of Marxist writers emerged who are most appropriately associated with the theory of imperialism. Including Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding, Nicolai Bukharin, and most famously Vladimir Lenin, these writers argued that advanced processes of capitalist accumulation were driving the major capitalist countries into colonial expansionism. Although the precise mechanisms driving capitalism toward imperialism varied (e.g. the quest for raw materials, overproduction requiring a search for new markets, or over-accumulation compelling the export of capital), their thinking converged on the notion that advanced capitalist countries would be driven by the imperatives of capital accumulation to support the international expansion of their great monopolistic blocs of industrial-financial capital. In a finite world where much of the globe had already been colonized by one or another of the great imperialist powers, 'inter-imperialist rivalry' was seen as an

overwhelmingly likely source of conflict, and the First World War would have appeared as confirmation of this.

Classical theories of imperialism have been subjected to sharp criticism insofar as they represent species of economic determinism – the idea that processes intrinsic to the economy are the primary determinants of social and political life. In the following section, I will discuss the evolution of dialectical theory in the form of Western Marxism and critical theory, and explain how these theoretical developments provide important conceptual resources for recasting Marxian theories of global power in more dialectical, and enabling, forms.

Western Marxism and critical theory

The Bolshevik revolution and the rise of Official Soviet Marxism in the ‘East’ provided the backdrop for the development of ‘Western Marxism’ – a family of innovative theories which both built upon, and reacted against, aspects of the classical Marxist tradition. The Marxist expectation that proletarian revolution, once ignited, would sweep the advanced capitalist world was bitterly disappointed in the early twentieth century. The Russian revolution gave birth to socialism in one nation and Marxists in the West were left to ponder the reasons why working-class revolution had failed to materialize in their own countries and, subsequently, why fascism had triumphed in some Western countries. Official Soviet Marxism soon solidified into a rigid Stalinist dogma in the service of a one-party state, stifling rather than enabling critical discourse and social self-determination. It is in this historic context that we may understand Western Marxism and critical theory not just in terms of a critique of capitalism but also a corresponding critique of positivism and economic determinism as ways of understanding social life. In the apt summary of critical theorist Douglas Kellner, ‘those individuals who became known as “Western Marxists” saw the need to concern themselves with consciousness, subjectivity, culture, ideology and the concept of socialism precisely in order to make possible radical political change’ (1989: 12). I will highlight the core contributions of two major strands of the Western Marxist tradition: the critical theory associated with the Frankfurt school, and the dialectical Marxism associated with Antonio Gramsci and his followers (among whom I count myself).

The term Frankfurt school refers to a group of theorists originally associated with the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt University beginning in the 1920s. In some regards, these theorists worked within the spirit of the Marxian critique of the disabling effects of capitalist modernity, but in other ways they diverged from more mainstream forms of Marxism. Two of the early leading lights of the Frankfurt school, Horkheimer and Adorno, began ‘to lose faith in the revolutionary potential of the working class in the face of the triumph of fascism and the integration of labour into the capitalist system in the democratic capitalist countries’ (Kellner 1989: 105). Further, they saw how, in the Soviet Union, Marxism was being transformed into rigid doctrine of economic determinism sanctified as objective ‘science’. In the face of these developments, they wanted to retain

a critical and potentially progressive role for social theory, but were wary of orthodox Marxism’s preoccupation with production (narrowly understood) and the corresponding emphasis on the historic role of the proletariat. Critical theorists were deeply suspicious of the idea that objectively valid forms of knowledge could be arrived at independent of social context, innocent of prevailing practices and norms. They questioned the dichotomization of is and ought, fact and value, known object and knowing subject, which underpinned ‘positivist’ forms of scientific knowledge claims and associated constructs. Horkheimer and Adorno, in particular, were sharply critical of ‘instrumental reason’ – a technical rationality of means (choosing the most efficient instrument to pursue a pre-given goal) which claims neutrality as to ends. Rather, the construction of knowledge claims is no less a purposive social practice than any other, and theory is permeated with social values and norms, fraught with political implications for the future, whether these are explicit or implicit. Theories which claim objective truth are then profoundly misleading: on the one hand, mystifying the normative commitments which underpin their own truth claims; and, on the other, denying that alternative normative values and future possible worlds are at stake in knowledge claims which the theory offers up as fact. Underlying bureaucratically administered societies of both East and West, twentieth-century cultures permeated by positivism and instrumental reason stifled critical discourse.

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, incarcerated in Mussolini’s fascist prisons for the last decade of his life, was likewise sharply critical of economic and positivistic forms of knowledge, including forms of Marxism based on economic determinism. Gramsci insisted on situating the process of human knowledge construction in particular historical social contexts and, in a devastating critique of the economic and scientific Marxism of Bukharin, he derided as ‘metaphysical materialism . . . any systematic formulation that is put forward as an extra-historical truth, as an abstract universal outside of time and space’ (Gramsci 1971: 437). For Gramsci, Marxism was not the objective truth of history, but was rather a way of telling the story of history from *within* a capitalist historical context, a story which could lead people to consider possible post-capitalist futures and ask themselves how, together, they might get there from here.

Accordingly, Gramsci developed a theory of hegemony as a form of political power which relied more strongly upon consent than coercion. In a hegemonic social situation, dominant groups (classes, class fractions, and their various allies) articulate a social vision which claims to serve the interests of all, and they use selective incentives to recruit junior partners into their coalition and to divide and disable opposition. Gramsci believed that in advanced capitalist societies, in which civil society was highly developed, hegemonic power might be promoted and contested in fora of popular culture, education, journalism, literature, and art, as well as in political parties and unions. Under conditions of hegemony, subordinate social groups might be led to consent to the power of dominant groups, making the widespread use of direct (and obviously oppressive) coercive power unnecessary. However, Gramsci argued, hegemony was not seamless, a dominant ideology which simply foreclosed any possibility of critique. On the contrary, hegemony could be and should be continuously challenged throughout civil society. In this way, Gramsci hoped, an atomized and depoliticized capitalist culture might be challenged by a counter-hegemonic political culture, people might be led to think of their economic lives as having

political significance, and they might begin to question capitalism's structured separation of the economic from the political aspects of social life. This latter he saw as the necessary precondition for the concurrent democratization of economic, cultural, and political life, a gateway to a variety of possible postcapitalist futures (see Rupert 2005).

Contemporary critical analysis of global power

The forms of critical theory developed by the Frankfurt school and by Gramsci might lead us to regard with some scepticism claims of scientific objectivity associated with positivistic forms of International Relations theory, and the economic determinism underlying classical theories of imperialism. And, indeed, contemporary theorists have drawn upon these and related intellectual resources to begin to construct critical theories of world politics. Pioneering contributions were made in the early 1980s by scholars such as Richard Ashley, Robert Cox, and Andrew Linklater.

Ashley (who initially drew heavily on the contemporary critical social theorist Jürgen Habermas, but later became more closely associated with poststructuralism) began to develop a critique of Waltzian neorealism which, he argued, reframes classical realism (with its emphasis on actively interpreting the pragmatic, artful, and creative practices of statecraft) into a positivist theory in which world politics is itself depoliticized, reduced to an economic logic which takes as given the world it confronts, and inquires only as to 'the efficient achievement of whatever goals are set before the political actor' (Ashley 1986: 292). Questions regarding political ends are evacuated from the study of world politics, and the ability of theory critically to contemplate alternative possible worlds is effectively denied. The result, according to Ashley, is 'the impoverishment of political imagination and the reduction of international politics to a battleground for the . . . clash of technical reason against technical reason in the service of unquestioned ends' (1986: 297). Also, drawing on Habermas, critical IR theorists such as Linklater (1996) have sought to dereify the state, and to reincorporate processes of social reasoning and 'discourse ethics' into an explicitly normative account of the construction of political community at various levels. As Devetak (1995: 172) explains, 'discourse ethics promotes a cosmopolitan ideal where the political organization of humanity is decided by a process of dialogue in which participation is open to all who stand to be affected by the decision'.

Robert Cox (1986) also drew on the idea of critical theory to call into question prevailing modes of theorizing world politics: as a species of positivist or 'problem-solving' theory, 'Neorealism implicitly takes the production process and the power relations inherent in it as a given element of national interest, and therefore as a part of its parameters' (1986: 216–17). Assuming what needs to be explained, neorealism describes patterns in the operation of power among states without inquiring as to the social relations through which that power is produced. Moreover, those relations themselves have a history, a process of production, and they need not remain forever as we see them now. Accordingly, Cox adopts what he calls a method of 'historical structures' in which 'state

power ceases to be the sole explanatory factor and becomes part of what is to be explained' (1986: 223):

“ The world can be represented as a pattern of interacting social forces in which states play an intermediate though autonomous role between the global structure of social forces and local configurations of social forces within particular countries. . . . Power is seen as emerging from social processes rather than taken as given in the form of accumulated material capabilities, that is as the result of these processes. (Paraphrasing Marx, one could describe the latter, neo-realist view as the 'fetishism of power'.) ”

Cox 1986: 225

A critical theory approach to global politics would then take a relational, process-oriented perspective, and seek to show how social forces (classes, social movements, etc.), states, and world orders are bound up together in particular constellations of historical structures. It would inquire as to the ways in which those historical structures – entailing political, cultural, and economic aspects – had been socially produced, the ways in which they differentially empower various kinds of social agents, and the kinds of resistances which those power relations engender. It would seek to highlight tensions and possibilities within the historical structures of the present in order to open up political horizons and enable social agents situated within those structures to imagine, and potentially begin to realize, alternative possible worlds. The view of theory defended by Cox – and his characterization of 'problem-solving theory' – is discussed in Chapter 1.

Case study: War on Terror or twenty-first-century imperialism?



Within eighteen months of the horrible events of 11 September 2001, the USA, the UK, and an assortment of junior partners were engaged in a massive military invasion of Iraq. Despite the fact that Iraq had no demonstrable connection with the attacks, in its public justifications of the war the Bush administration associated the invasion of Iraq with its 'War on Terror'.

How can the dialectical approach to explanation associated with Marxism and critical theory help us to make sense of these vexing developments? From this perspective, a satisfactory account would need to incorporate not just the historical structures of global capitalism (with their economic, political, and cultural aspects) but also the ideologies and actions of human agents situated within these structures. The resulting multi-layered explanatory account would resemble a sort of dialectical layer cake seeking to explain: (1) how the structures of capitalist modernity create the possibility of particular kinds of world politics; (2) how those possibilities were realized in the particular forms of the twentieth-century capitalist world order; (3) within those historical structures, the key relationship between capitalism, Fordism, and the geopolitics of petroleum; and (4) the ideologies of 'economic security' which have animated US policy-makers from the Cold War to the Bush administration. I will be able to do no more in this context than to sketch

out the broad outlines of what such an explanation might look like. That should be enough, however, to show how this kind of analysis differs from other approaches to the study of world politics.

Recall that at the heart of capitalism is a class relation between those who own means of production and those who must sell their labour-power in order to gain access to those means of production. One of Marx's most important insights was that this class relationship presupposes a broader set of social relationships, a set of social structures which make this kind of relation possible. One of these enabling structures involved the constitution of social means of production as private property, and hence presupposed the privatization and depoliticization of economic life (recall, by way of contrast, how economic and political life had been fused under feudalism). The creation of a privatized and depoliticized economy implies the exclusion of public, political concerns from the economy, and their assignment to a separate sphere of society, one which we have come to associate with the modern state. The political states which have developed within capitalist modernity are understood to be sovereign within their territory, and thus are enabled to legislate and regulate 'domestic' affairs. Yet, the activities of private economic actors continuously overflow those boundaries – in no small measure because of the dynamics of capitalism as a system of accumulation without limits, driven by the compulsions of relentless market competition. The structural contours of capitalist modernity, then, involve a system of territorially limited political authority and flows of economic activity which are not similarly limited. This structure represents a condition of possibility for imperialism – the exercise by states of coercive power in the service of capital accumulation – as well as systems of global hegemonic power in which coercive force is less evident and the ideological politics of consent come into the fore (Rosenberg 1994; Wood 2003; Cox 1986).

The productive power of Fordist capitalism

These structures of capitalist modernity are not automatically self-perpetuating, but rather are continuously (re-)produced, challenged, or changed by human agents under particular historical circumstances. Thus, these structures may assume distinct forms during identifiable historical periods. During the twentieth century, Fordist industrial capitalism in the USA was setting global standards of dynamism and productivity (this itself was not simply an historical datum but the result of long and complex political struggles – see Rupert 1995). After the Second World War a transnational coalition, centred on Fordist industrial capital, emerged and promoted a hegemonic world-order project which envisioned a global economy of free trade, but one in which state managers would be able to use macroeconomic policy to sustain economic activity and levels of consumption, and in which labour unions might be tolerated or even encouraged as brokers of industrial consent, securing the cooperation of workers within the framework of Fordist mass-production industry in exchange for real wages which would grow along with productivity. In the USA and across much of the industrial capitalist world, organized labour was integrated into a hegemonic coalition which sought to rebuild the world economy along the lines of this 'corporate-liberal' model (van der Pijl 1984; Rupert 1995). Securing a measure of political stability and institutionalizing a rough correspondence between mass production and consumption, this set of historical structures enabled a period of unprecedented economic growth and capital accumulation, and

institutionalized a culture of mass consumerism, especially in the wealthy global 'North'. The political economy of Fordist capitalism played a central role in the great global order struggles of the twentieth century: arguably, it was the unparalleled productive power of Fordist capitalism which enabled the geopolitical triumph of the allies over the autarkic and authoritarian capitalism of the axis powers, and subsequently of the reunified West over the Soviet bloc in the Cold War.

Fordist capitalism depended not only on politically quiescent industrial labour and predictable levels of consumer demand for the products of mass production industry; it also required fuel and lubricants for its machines, raw material for its pervasive petrochemical industry, and inputs for its increasingly mechanized and chemical-intensive agriculture. Oil, in short, was indispensable to the energy-intensive form of Fordist capitalism at the heart of the twentieth-century world order. Although the US oil industry was able to provide from domestic production the great bulk of the oil consumed by the allies during the Second World War, by the end of the war it was clear that US reserves were not sufficient to fuel the reconstruction of the capitalist world economy or its growth in subsequent decades.

US foreign policy in the pursuit of capitalist interests

Framed in terms of 'economic security', US global strategy after the Second World War aimed not just at 'containing' the power of the Soviet Union, but also at creating a world which would be hospitable to the growth of US-centred capitalism (Pollard 1985). US strategists explicitly envisioned a symbiotic relationship between the vitality and robustness of the capitalist 'free world' and globally projected US military power (May 1993). Viewed through the lenses of this strategic vision, protecting the free world was closely identified with promoting a vigorous US-centred capitalist world economy, and it was this world-view which appeared to justify US interventions in order to counter political forces which might inhibit the growth of US-dominated global capitalism. Insofar as the Fordist world order depended upon ample and cheap supplies of oil which the USA could not itself provide, US strategists sought to establish predominance in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region.

Pivotal to postwar US strategic dominance in the Gulf were its relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Franklin Roosevelt had established a strategic partnership with the Saudi ruling family in 1945: 'Roosevelt forged an agreement with Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi dynasty, to protect the royal family against its internal and external enemies in return for privileged access to Saudi oil' (Klare 2004: 3). In Iran, US influence was secured for a quarter-century by the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup in which the democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, was overthrown by forces who re-established the autocratic power of the Iranian monarch, the reliably pro-American Shah. In light of this history, it is little wonder that the Iranian Revolution which finally ended the Shah's rule in 1979 fused a Shiite Islamic theocracy with bitter anti-Americanism (Kinzer 2003). Nor should it be surprising that the USA-Saudi relationship is deeply ambivalent, with widespread resentment of US influence (and, for the last decade, military presence) in the Kingdom finding expression through the fundamentalist Wahhabi brand of Sunni Islam which predominates there. It is against this backdrop of global geopolitics and the ideology of economic security that we can reinterpret the invasion of Iraq under the guise of the War on Terror.

The most hawkish elements in the administration of George W. Bush exploited the atmosphere of jingoism and fear in the USA following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 to put into effect their long-cherished vision of US global military supremacy, unilateral action, and the pre-emptive use of military force deployed to create a world in which the US model of capitalist democracy is unquestioned – a strategic vision now known as the Bush Doctrine. Building on ‘a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence’ – a unipolar condition to which Bush refers as ‘a balance of power that favors freedom’ – ‘[t]he United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the globe’ (White House 2002: 1–2). Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s continuing defiance of US power in a region of such enormous strategic significance effectively mocked the Bush administration’s pretensions to unquestioned global supremacy. That removing Saddam was a high priority for those who formulated the Bush Doctrine should not then be surprising. The administration also hoped that a postwar client regime in Iraq would provide the USA with a base of operations in the heart of the Gulf region more reliably open to US forces than Saudi bases. Further, among the so-called neoconservatives in the administration and their intellectual guides (such as the Arabist Bernard Lewis), it was believed that a forcefully ‘democratized’ Iraq would lead to the spread of liberal democracy throughout the Middle East, ‘drain the swamp’ of authoritarianism and poverty which was believed to be the breeding ground of terrorism, and lessen the perceived threats posed to Israel. Speaking just before the invasion of Iraq began, Vice-President Cheney suggested that the ‘War on Terror’ might be won by a forceful display of power and resolve in the heart of the Arab Middle East: ‘I firmly believe, along with men like Bernard Lewis, who is one of the great students of that part of the world, that strong, firm U.S. response to terror and to threats to the United States would go a long way, frankly, toward calming things in that part of the world’ (Cheney quoted in Waldman 2004).

But the Iraq War cannot be properly understood in abstraction from questions of world order following in the wake of Fordist capitalism. Iraq sits atop oil reserves estimated as second only to those of Saudi Arabia, so US dominance in postwar Iraq might promise a reliable source of petroleum supply as well as significant leverage over the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and global oil prices. US dependence on imported oil continues to grow – as does the petroleum consumption of Europe, Japan, and rapidly industrializing countries like India and China – and no other petroleum reserves are as vast, or as significant for the future of global strategic power in a post-Fordist world, as those of the Gulf region. The Bush administration’s National Energy Policy task force, chaired by Vice-President Cheney, estimated that the Gulf region will be supplying around two-thirds of the world’s oil needs by the year 2020 (Dreyfuss 2003: 44). In their quest for global supremacy and a capitalist world order favourable to US interests, Bush administration officials may well have believed that militarily-based strategic dominance in the Middle East, and an American hand on the world’s oil tap, would represent a bargaining chip of incalculable value when dealing with potentially incooperative allies and emergent rivals (especially China) even more dependent upon imported oil than the USA itself (Everest 2004).⁴ On this view, the War on Terror is inextricably bound up with US attempts to achieve strategic dominance in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region, and this latter is deeply entangled with the historical structures of US-centred global Fordist capitalism.

Conclusion

Marxism is neither solely preoccupied with the economy, nor with domestic relations. Rather it aims at a critical understanding of capitalism as an historically particular way of organizing social life, one which entails political and cultural as well as economic relations and practices, which has never been containable within the boundaries of territorial states, and which has crucial implications for processes of social self-production on scales from the workplace and household to global order. Conceived by Marx as a dialectical theory of relations in process, the enabling implications of Marxist theory were substantially vitiated by interpretations which cast it as a form of economic determinism. Seeking to recover its ability to illuminate dialectical tensions and possibilities, Western Marxism and critical theory formulated sharp critiques of economic determinism and positivistic forms of knowledge more generally. These currents led toward a re-emphasis of politics, culture, and ideology within a broadly materialist understanding of social life, pointing towards an approach which Cox (1986) described as a ‘method of historical structures’. Employing an analytic approach similar to the one Cox suggests, we may understand the Iraq War as the product of a confluence of social relations and processes which traverse and interrelate social forces, states, and world orders. The structures of capitalist modernity, the historical forms they assumed in the epoch of Fordism and the hegemonic world order which emerged out of that context, strategic ideologies of economic security, and the culture of Fordist consumerism are all implicated in this story.

But what of the political potential of Marxist theory, its ability to illuminate tensions and possibilities in the present which could open up alternative possible worlds and modes of social life? This is, in one sense, the perennially deferred question of Marxist theory. In the absence of a unitary revolutionary agent – the famous ‘workers of the world’ – how can a materialist theory talk about transformative politics? Some Frankfurt school theorists became deeply pessimistic about this. Certainly, from the perspective of an anti-determinist, non-teleological ‘marxism without guarantees’ (Hall 1996), no straightforward *a priori* answer to this question is possible. But twenty-first-century global politics is not without hope. As the century turned, a confluence of diverse social forces and movements – a ‘movement of movements’, radically decentralized yet strategically coordinated, sharing not so much a coherent ideological vision as a vigorous opposition to capitalist globalization – began through its collective resistance to enact new kinds of global politics. In a series of dramatic, globally visible protests, they called into question the reified representations of capitalist global hegemony and asserted that ‘another world is possible’. They explicitly connected globalizing capitalism with US imperial power and, just prior to the invasion of Iraq, used their transnational activist networks to call forth and coordinate simultaneous anti-war demonstrations in hundreds of cities around the world, involving many millions of participants – an unparalleled achievement of grassroots global politics. While some of these social movements embraced heterodox forms of Marxism such as ‘Autonomism’ (on which, see Tormey 2004: 114–17), most were probably non-Marxist in their political orientation. Yet, these movements were united in a kind of dialectical self-understanding: they represented themselves as contesting historically specific constellations of capitalist or corporate social power in order to open up the

possibility of alternative future worlds. In this, I would suggest, they were true to the spirit if not the letter of Marx's dialectical theory of politics in the modern, capitalist world (see Rupert 2005). In such a world, where dialectics of power and resistance are continually re-enacted in various ways, I would argue that the central insights of Marxism and critical theory retain their relevance.



QUESTIONS

1. What do Marxists mean when they talk about a *dialectical* understanding of history?
2. How does such a view shed critical light on liberal individualist theories, such as that of Adam Smith?
3. What are the implications of a dialectical understanding of history for the way in which we think about *politics* and *freedom*? When we see the world in terms of dialectical theory, how do we need to redefine these terms?
4. Why do Marxists believe that capitalism cannot be adequately understood as a 'domestic' phenomenon? How has this belief been reflected in the theories of imperialism?
5. What do Marxists mean when they talk about capitalism as more than just an economy? In what ways are politics and culture integral to capitalism as a way of life?
6. How do the insights of Western Marxism shed critical light on more 'economistic' forms of Marxism?
7. What is the purpose of critical theory? How does it differ from 'positivist' or 'problem-solving' theory?
8. On what grounds has 'neorealist' IR theory been criticized by contemporary proponents of critical theory? What are the analytical and political limits of neo- or structural realism which critics highlight? What would a critical theory of world politics do which structural realism or other positivist theories cannot?
9. How does a critical understanding of capitalism as a way of life encompassing economic, political, and cultural or ideological aspects help us to make sense of US global strategy since the Second World War?
10. How does such an understanding enable us to reframe the War on Terror as an instance of twenty-first-century imperialism?



FURTHER READING

- Brewer, A. (1990), *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge). A comprehensive explication and critique of the various theories of imperialism to which the Marxian tradition has given rise.
- Cox, R. and Sinclair, T. (1996), *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Collected in this book are some of the most seminal essays by a leader in the neo Gramscian tradition of international studies.

- Isaac, J. (1987), *Power and Marxist Theory* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press). This innovative book uses a 'critical realist' view of the relation between agents and structures to reinterpret the concept of social power at the heart of Marxian theory.

- Kellner, D. (1989), *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press). Interprets the critical theory associated with the Frankfurt school as an outgrowth of a strongly Marxian-inflected critique of capitalist modernity, but one which diverged from increasingly orthodox Marxism over the course of the twentieth century.

- Robinson, W. I. (2004), *A Theory of Global Capitalism* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press). Robinson posits the emergence of a globalized process of capital accumulation, a transnational capitalist class, and a nascent transnational state.

- Rosenberg, J. (1994), *Empire of Civil Society* (London: Verso). Rosenberg critically situates the theory and practice of *Realpolitik* within the relations and processes of capitalist modernity.

- Rupert, M. and Smith H. (2002) (eds), *Historical Materialism and Globalisation* (London: Routledge). Essays from a variety of scholars broadly sympathetic to historical materialism but understanding in very different ways its significance in a world of globalizing capitalism.

- Shannon, T. (1992), *An Introduction to the World-system Perspective*, 2nd edn (Boulder CO: Westview). A schematic overview and sympathetic critique of world-system theories.

- Tormey, S. (2004), *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld). Informed by a post-communist sensibility, this book offers a critical overview of theories and practices of contemporary anti-capitalism from Autonomism to Zapatismo.

- Wood, E. M. (2003), *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso). A contemporary reinterpretation of imperialism theory from an influential Marxian political theorist.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- Marxists.org Internet Archive. A massive electronic resource including extensive selections of texts (in a variety of languages) from many major Marxist theorists, articles on the history of Marxism, and an encyclopedia of Marxism.
www.Marxists.org
- The Socialist Register. Web page of a leading socialist annual containing Marxian analyses of globalizing capitalism, US imperialism, and a variety of other topics.
<http://socialistregister.com>
- Dialectical Marxism. The writings of political philosopher Bertell Ollman, one of the world's leading scholars of dialectical theory. Check out 'Class Struggle', Ollman's Marxist board-game.
www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/index.php



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

Constructivism

K. M. FIERKE

→ Chapter contents

- Introduction
- Constructivism and rationalism
- Constructivism as middle ground
- Consistent constructivism
- Case study
- Conclusion

✓ Reader's guide

This chapter will examine the key debates that have shaped the development of constructivism in International Relations (IR). The introduction will explore the general notion that international relations is a social construction, as it emerged from the critique of more traditional theories of IR. The second and third sections will examine the demarcations that have come to distinguish various constructivisms, focusing in particular on the contrast between those who seek a 'better' social science, and therefore better theory, as opposed to those who argue that constructivism is an approach that rests on assumptions at odds with those of positivist method. The fourth section will analyse the significance of this difference for undertaking research, including questions about the role of language and causality. The final section will bring these insights to bear in relation to the problem of NATO enlargement, which is an interesting case study because it so clearly defies several claims of realist theory.

Introduction

In the 1980s, when the Cold War was raging with renewed force, social movements concerned about the prospect of nuclear war emerged on both sides of the Atlantic. They shared roughly the same objective, that is to bring an end to the nuclear arms race, but approached the challenge in different ways. One movement, the US Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign came to the conclusion, given lessons from the Vietnam War protests, that achieving its objectives required moderation in behaviour and message. Rather than dressing like hippies, they would dress in suits, appeal to Middle America, and mobilize citizens to pressure their congressmen (*sic*). Their proposals were formulated in a measured way that would minimize alienating people and appeal to the wider spectrum. In another political context, across the water, the critique was somewhat more hard hitting and diverse. Rather than calling on the USA and Soviet Union to simply stop the development, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons, they demanded actual disarmament and in some cases unilateral disarmament. While loose cooperation existed at the European level, in the form of European Nuclear Disarmament, movements in the Netherlands, Germany, or Italy, had a distinctive character.

These critical movements shared the aim of changing the nuclear status quo, and each was shaped by the politics of its respective locations, as well as the larger context of the Cold War. I start with this example from the political world for two reasons. First, against this background, that is the mid-to-late 1980s, questions began to be raised about the theories and scientific methods of IR and the extent to which they were implicated in the production of international power (see Cox 1981; Ashley 1981, 1984; Walker 1987). Challenges to the assumptions underpinning the study of IR emerged against the backdrop of a historical context where political actors were challenging the assumptions of the Cold War. As the end of the Cold War was ushered in, further questions about these changes and the social construction of IR were formulated. The failure of IR scholars to predict or initially explain the end of the Cold War, on the basis of the dominant theories of IR, reinforced the importance of these questions.

Second, the two social movements are a useful metaphor for thinking about the construction of constructivism within IR. Constructivists, broadly defined, have shared a critique of the static material assumptions of traditional IR theory. They have emphasized the social dimensions of international relations and the possibility of change. They have, however, differed in their approach. Some have been more conscious of their broader audience and have shaped their critique in a language that would open a space for dialogue with mainstream scholars. Others have been harder hitting in stating the problem and more far reaching in their critique. The two together have shaped the place of constructivism in IR. The main point – and, I might add, a very constructivist point – is that academic debate, no less than political, emerges in historically and culturally specific circumstances.

This is evident in other debates that have shaped IR theory. The debate between realism and idealism was a reflection on the weaknesses of idealism after the First World War against the background of Hitler's expansion across Europe (see Carr 1946). Attempts to solidify the scientific status of realist IR were led by European émigrés to the USA,

following the Second World War. The debate between behaviouralists and traditionalists pitted scholars in the USA, who wanted to make International Relations into a science, against the international society theorists of the English school (see Knorr and Rosenau 1969). The postpositivist debate in the late 1980s was a reaction against the dominant place of scientific method in the American context (see Lapid 1989; see Chapter 11). The 'dialogue' over constructivism was a reaction to the third debate, or, as some prefer to call it, the fourth debate (see Chapter 1), and an attempt to speak across the barricades it had constructed, while addressing problems raised by the end of the Cold War.

The idea that international relations is a social construction can be thought about in quite simple terms. To construct something is an act which brings into being a subject or object that otherwise would not exist. For instance, a material substance, such as wood, exists in nature, but it can be formed into any number of objects, for instance the beam in a house, a rifle, a musical instrument, or a totem pole. Although these represent material objects in and of themselves, they do not exist in nature but have come about through acts of human creation. Once constructed, each of these objects has a particular meaning and use within a context. They are social constructs in so far as their shape and form is imbued with social values, norms, and assumptions rather than being the product of purely individual thought or meaning. Similarly, explicitly social phenomena, such as states or alliances or international institutions, that is the collective subjects of international relations, may build on the basic material of human nature, but they take specific historical, cultural, and political forms that are a product of human interaction in a social world.

Constructivists have highlighted several themes. First, the idea of social construction suggests difference across context rather than a single objective reality. Constructivists have sought to explain or understand *change* at the international level. Traditional theories of IR, which have often assumed the sameness of states, for instance, across time and space, have prioritized the identification of regularities for the purpose of generalization and theory construction. The dramatic changes with the end of the Cold War and in its aftermath revealed the importance of historical context and raised questions about the transition from conflict to cooperation or from peace to war.

Second, constructivists have emphasized the *social* dimensions of international relations, and have demonstrated the importance of norms, rules, and language at this level. The importance of Gorbachev's 'New Thinking' in bringing an end to the Cold War, the increasing importance of norms of humanitarian intervention, and the spread of liberal democratic values raised critical questions about the exclusive emphasis of realist theory on material interest and power. Constructivists emphasized that the latter were unable to account for some of the key issues of post-Cold War international politics and sought to provide a more complete or 'better' explanation, based on an analysis of how material and ideational factors combine in the construction of different possibilities and outcomes.

Third, constructivists have argued that, far from an objective reality, international politics is 'a world of our making' (Onuf 1989). In response to the over-determination of 'structure' in neorealist and neoliberal theory, constructivists introduced the possibility of agency and have emphasized *processes of interaction*. It is not that actors are totally free to choose their circumstances, but rather that they make choices in the process of interacting

with others and, as a result, bring historically, culturally, and politically distinct 'realities' into being. In this respect, international relations is a social construction rather than existing independent of human meaning and action. States and other actors do not merely react as rational individuals but interact in a meaningful world.

The central themes of change, sociality, and processes of interaction point to the added value of constructivism within a field that has emphasized generalization across time, materiality, and rational choice. However, as already suggested, constructivists have not sung from a single hymn sheet and the meaning of constructivism in IR has been transformed over time. In what follows I deepen discussion of the themes above by examining how the meaning of constructivism has been shaped by specific debates within IR.

Constructivism and rationalism

Most constructivists have presented some kind of critique of rationalism. However, unlike poststructuralism (see Chapter 11), this critique has not involved a wholesale rejection of scientific method. Below I examine how the meaning of constructivism has been shaped out of the dialogue with rationalists. Four central points will be discussed, including the nature of being, the relationship between structures and agents, the constitution of the material world, and the role of cognition.

Social being

Ontology is a word originating with metaphysics, which refers to the nature of being and focuses on the types of objects the world is composed of. Rationalist theories of IR have an individualist ontology insofar as the basic unit of analysis is the individual (whether human or state). Neorealist theory, for instance, treats states as if they were individuals who try to maximize their ultimate aim of survival. Neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz (1979), present individual states as the prior condition for a structure of anarchy, which then constrains their character and behaviour. In a competitive environment, generated by multiple states acting in their self-interest, to follow a different logic of action, it is argued, would be suicide. While emphasizing the individual state and the distribution of power, his theory does contain an element of 'socialization', insofar as the effects of structure are produced 'through socialization of the actors and through competition among them' (Keohane 1986: 63).

Arguments by neoliberals, such as Goldstein and Keohane (1993), who focus on the role of ideas, contain a similar tension between the individual and the social. Ideas are treated as causal factors that are exchanged by fully formed individuals. As Ruggie comments:

“ The individuals featured in [Goldstein and Keohane's] story are not born into any system of social relationships that helps shape who they become. When we first encounter them, they are already fully constituted and poised in a problem-solving mode.”

Ruggie 1998: 866.

Constructivists have questioned the individualist ontology of rationalism and emphasize instead a social ontology. As fundamentally social beings, individuals or states cannot be separated from a context of normative meaning which shapes who they are and the possibilities available to them. Indeed, the concept of sovereignty is first and foremost a social and constitutive category insofar as the prior condition for *recognizing* the sovereignty of individual states is a *shared understanding* and acceptance of the concept.

The relationship between the individual and the social structure is important for both rationalism and constructivism, but is conceived in different ways by each. For rationalists, structure is a function of competition and the distribution of material capabilities. Structures first and foremost constrain the actions of states. The subjects of rationalism are guided by a logic of consequences, that is a rational act is one that will produce an outcome that maximizes the interests of the individual unit.

Constructivists focus more on the norms and shared understandings of legitimate behavior, although material factors also play a role. In their view, structures not only constrain; they also constitute the identity of actors. The subjects of constructivism are guided by a logic of appropriateness (March and Olson 1989). What is rational is a function of legitimacy, defined by shared values and norms within institutions or other social structures rather than purely individual interests. As Ole Jacob Sending (2002: 449) states, the self, in this logic, becomes social through acquiring and fulfilling an institutional identity. In this respect, norms not only constrain behaviour; they also constitute the identities of actors. Human rights norms, for instance, constrain less because of power considerations than because human rights are a constitutive feature of liberal democratic states, in particular, and increasingly, at the international level, the identity of legitimate states. The emphasis on norms and rule following can be distinguished from instrumentally rational behaviour in that actors try to 'do the right thing' rather than maximizing or optimizing their given preferences (Risse 2000: 4).

Mutual constitution

A social structure leaves more space for agency, that is for the individual or state to influence their environment, as well as to be influenced by it. The title of Alexander Wendt's famous article (1992), 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It', captures this idea. It is not that states in anarchy can, on a whim, change their circumstances. Rather, relationships evolve over time. They are not characterized, across the board, by enmity and egoism. The USA and Britain have evolved as friends, while other states are enemies. Many states within the European Union are former enemies who have learned to cooperate. Relationships are a product of a historical process and interactions over time. Wendt (1992: 404–5) illustrates this in his example of Alter and Ego, two space aliens who meet for the first time, and who, through a series of gestures, determine whether the other is hostile or friendly. Each exercises an element of choice, and thus agency, in how this relationship develops. Choice is not, however, unlimited. Alter and Ego coexist in a social relationship, and their choices are partially dependent on the response of the other. The space for choice can thus be said to be mutually constituted.

Rather than emphasizing how structures constrain, as rationalists do, constructivists focus on the constitutive role of norms and shared understandings, as well as the

relationship between agency and structure (Wendt 1987). The subjects of international politics are not uniformly and universally rational egoists but have distinct identities shaped by the cultural, social, and political – as well as material – circumstances in which they are embedded. They are not static but ever evolving as they interact with each other and their environment.

Social facts

Rationalists assume a static world of *apriori* and asocial egoists who are primarily concerned with material interests. While constructivists would not deny the importance of interests, they would tie them more directly to the identity of the subject. Neither identity nor interests can be detached from a world of social meaning. As suggested in the last section, identity as a liberal democracy cannot be detached from an interest in complying with human rights norms. Identity as a capitalist cannot be separated from an interest in generating profit. Likewise, identities may be formed in conflict, for example, as enemies who have an interest in self-protection. Far from being detached from the material world, identity, and subsequent interest, may constitute a world populated by particular kinds of object. Missiles, for instance, are not created in a vacuum. The mass production of nuclear weapons by the USA, after the Second World War and during the Cold War, was a response to the emerging conflict with the Soviet Union. These weapons were bound up in the constitution of the Soviet Union as an enemy, defined by a distinction between capitalist and communist, among others, and related to an interest in containing that enemy.

Most objects of international relations, unlike trees, rocks, or glaciers, exist only by virtue of human acts of creation which happen in a cultural, historical, and political context of meaning. They are social facts, rather than purely material ones, that exist because of the meaning and value attributed to them. John Searle (1995: 2) argues that social facts depend on human agreement and typically require human institutions for their existence. Without the attribution of value, and the existence of financial institutions, a dollar bill or euro note would be nothing more than a piece of paper. As already suggested, sovereignty or the borders dividing states exist only by virtue of human agreement. Likewise, a nuclear weapon does not exist in nature, although objects in nature, such as sticks, can be used as weapons. It is human design and intent that shapes the material object into one with a specific meaning and use within a context, where specific identities and interests are at stake.

Social cognition

The question of intent in designing material objects or institutions raises a further issue about the role of human reasoning. Many constructivists have built on a Weberian concept of *Verstehen* or *understanding*, which refers to the hermeneutic theme that 'action must always be understood from within' and thus, that social meaning is a function of 'what is in people's heads' (Adler 1997: 326). The constructivist emphasis on *Verstehen* is interesting in so far as Weber was also one early source of the rational actor model. While rationalists highlight the rationality of decisions in terms of self-interest, thereby minimizing the role of context, constructivists have brought the social dimension back in.

Intersubjective meanings are not merely the aggregation of individual beliefs but have some independent status as collective knowledge, based on the notion that although 'each of us thinks his own thoughts, our concepts we share with our fellow men' (Toulmin 1972: 35). Verstehen is the 'collective interpretations, practices and institutions of the actors themselves' (Adler 1997: 326).

The emphasis on Verstehen highlights a similarity and difference between rationalists and constructivists. The difference is that the former emphasize the individual while the latter emphasize the social. However, looking more closely at the role of individual cognition and rationality in constructivism, the difference appears to be less stark. The logic of appropriateness emphasizes the individual (Sending 2002). The rational thought processes of Wendt's (1992) Alter and Ego are prior to social interaction. Verstehen emphasizes cognition and what is 'in the head' (Adler 1997: 326).

Constructivism, as outlined above, clearly adds a social dimension that is missing from rationalist approaches. However, it also contains some inconsistencies, which will be explored in the next section. These inconsistencies arise from the combination of a social ontology with an epistemology that rests on a separation between an external world and the internal thought processes of individuals. Constructivism, in this depiction, is cast in the positivist language of causality and hypothesis testing, complemented by a focus on the rationality of individuals, although more deeply embedded in a social context. The emphasis on the individual unit, whether human or state, fails to sufficiently problematize how the individual unit is constituted. Given the emphasis on ontology, the autonomy of the social and the role of language is obscured, both in their relation to the material world and individual cognition.

Constructivism as middle ground

Constructivism, as discussed above, has occupied a 'middle ground' between rationalist and poststructuralist approaches to IR (a ground it shares with the English school, as argued in Chapter 7). Initially, when the word was introduced to IR by Nicholas Onuf (1989), it referred broadly to a range of postpositivist perspectives, which shared a critique of the static assumptions of mainstream IR theory. Since that time, constructivism has become a subject of contention, with scholars making a distinction between 'conventional' constructivism, which is said to occupy the middle ground, and more critical variations (Adler 1997; Hopf 1998; Campbell 1998a), including poststructuralism. Conventional constructivists have not rejected the scientific assumptions of positivist science to the extent that more explicitly postpositivist approaches have. As Jeff Checkel (1998: 327) argues, the quarrel with rationalists is not epistemological but ontological (see also Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998: 675).

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the origin and nature of knowledge and begins with a question about how we come to have knowledge of the world. Constructivists embrace an intersubjective ontology, emphasizing norms, social agents, and structures, and the mutual constitution of identity, but accept an epistemology

indebted to positivism,¹ which includes hypothesis testing, causality, and explanation. Ted Hopf (1998: 171) argues that emphasis on the ontological is part of an effort to overcome some of the scepticism about constructivism – arising from a conflation with postmodern approaches – and a scepticism because constructivists are assumed to be ambivalent towards mainstream social science methods. Hopf distinguishes 'conventional' constructivism by its distance from critical theory. He refers to conventional constructivism as a 'collection of principles, distilled from social theory but without the latter's more consistent theoretical and epistemological follow through' (Hopf 1998: 181). Both rationalists and constructivists claim that no great epistemological or methodological differences divide them (Wendt 1998: 116; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998: 675).

By accepting a positivist epistemology, constructivists have gained considerable legitimacy, such that the debate with rationalists has come to occupy an important place in the discipline (Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998: 683). At issue in these debates is the nature of social science itself and therefore the discipline of IR, that is the claim to a 'naturalist' conception of science (associated with the positivists) or a social one (Adler 1997: 320). The primary concern of the conventional constructivists is one of bringing the social back into a discipline that has been undersocialized (Wiener 2003: 256). The constructivist emphasis on causality, hypothesis testing, and objective (intersubjective) truths, is distinguished from poststructuralists who are 'not especially interested in the meticulous examination of particular cases or sites for purposes of understanding them in their own distinctive terms' (Ashley 1989: 278). As Adler (1997: 334) states, constructivists are interested in providing a better explanation, rather than emancipation *per se*.²

Shifting the middle ground

As Kurki and Wight argue in Chapter 1 the discipline of IR has failed to take philosophy of social science questions seriously and has far too often embraced an otherwise discredited 'positivism'. The key issue here is whether the combination of a constructivist ontology and a positivist epistemology is a consistent position. This question is implicit in Hopf's (1998) claim that critical constructivists have a 'more consistent theoretical and epistemological follow through'. Several scholars (Kratochwil 2000: 74; Onuf 1989; Fierke and Jørgensen 2001), have examined constructivism as part of a longer lineage outside IR and with a genealogy that intersects with, but is distinct from, poststructuralism. Constructivism is, from this perspective, first and foremost an epistemological position, heavily indebted to the so-called 'linguistic turn'.³ If, following on the linguistic turn, constructivism raises fundamental questions about the natural connection between word and thing or between symbol and the symbolized (Palan 2000: 4), is it consistent to marry a social ontology to a positivist epistemology?

Positivist epistemology rests on a correspondence theory of language, that is objects are assumed to exist independent of meaning and words act as labels for objects in this reality. Hypothesis testing represents one expression of this assumption about language. It is a method of comparing scientific statements about the world with the world to see whether they correspond. By contrast, a constructivist epistemology, as a product of the linguistic

turn, builds on the notion that we cannot get behind our language to compare it with that which it describes (Wittgenstein 1958). Language is bound up in the world rather than a mirror of it. The language of a knight in chess cannot be separated from the material object; it is by this language that we distinguish the knight, and the rules applying to it, from a piece of wood.

The distinction between conventional and critical constructivists often rests on an assumption that the former accept the existence of an objective world, while the latter emphasize 'merely' language. However, as Kratochwil (2000: 91) notes, 'hardly anyone doubts that the "world" exists "independent" from our minds. The question is rather whether we can recognize it in a pure and direct fashion . . . or whether what we recognize is always already organized and formed by certain categorical and theoretical elements'. The either/or designation of objective world versus interpretive relativism is too stark. A more nuanced position understands language as rule-based. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Approach or theory

The ontology/epistemology issue is related to a further concern regarding constructivism's status as an approach or a theory. Onuf (1998: 1) argues that constructivism is not a theory but a way of studying social relations. Alexander Wendt's book, *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), builds a constructivist theory. Wendt accepts certain tenets of mainstream methodology, although his is a modified commitment to positivism within a scientific realist framework (see Chapter 1). The problem with his approach is two-fold. On the one hand, if constructivism and positivism rely on differing assumptions about the nature of 'reality', then building a constructivist theory on a positivist epistemology is inconsistent. On the other hand, to treat constructivism as a theory in the same sense as realism is misleading: comparing realism with constructivism is like comparing apples and oranges. Realism is a substantive theory, which in IR theory has been married to positivist assumptions, but could also, arguably, be rethought on the basis of constructivist assumptions. It is not, in this line of thought, that constructivism is fundamentally incompatible with theory, but rather it necessarily raises a question about the nature of theory.

The constructivist label is now most often used to designate a middle ground between rationalist and poststructuralist approaches. This middle ground has emphasized a social ontology, a common epistemology with the mainstream, and a focus on the development of constructivist theory. Another constructivism shifts this middle ground, highlighting the inseparability of a social ontology and epistemology. Both accept the 'possibility of a reality to be constructed', which distinguishes them from poststructuralists who problematize this possibility (Zehfuss 2002).

In the next section, I argue that the second constructivism is more consistent than 'conventional' constructivism. I use the label 'consistent constructivism' to highlight that its assumptions correct the inconsistency at the core of conventional constructivism. This contrasts with the more common distinction between conventional and critical constructivism. The latter term often includes poststructuralism, while the idea of consistent constructivism presented here does not.

Consistent constructivism

Constructivists and rationalists have engaged in dialogue but method has not been on the agenda. There is a tension between a school of constructivism that sees no fundamental differences with mainstream methods and another which understands constructivism as an approach with roots in the linguistic turn. The inconsistency is most evident in relation to the role of language and rules, on the one hand, and the question of causality, on the other.

Language and rules

The role of language has been largely ignored in the debate between rationalists and constructivists. The avoidance of language is in part a reflection of the effort to create distance from poststructuralists, who are associated with interpretive relativism. It is also a reflection of the middle ground's focus on ontology. An approach to language that is consistent with the social ontology of constructivism should also occupy an epistemological middle ground. In between a view of language as either a mirror of the world or pure interpretation, is an understanding of language and action as rule-based. It is a small step from a focus on the role of norms and rules in international relations, to an acknowledgement that these only find expression and are constituted only in a language and action that is rule-based and itself infused with norms.

This conception of language rests on a distinction between rules (the concern of constructivists) and interpretation (the emphasis of poststructuralists). Following a rule is different from an interpretation. As Wittgenstein states,

“ there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying a rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases. Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term interpretation to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another. ”

Wittgenstein 1958: para. 201

The unitary view of science rests on a dichotomy between the objective and the subjective. In this view language operates as a set of labels for the objective reality or for the mental processes of individuals. A consistent constructivist approach to language challenges this dichotomy. In this view, language use is fundamentally social. We are socialized into it and in the process we do not simply learn words but how to act in the world – what it means to promise, threaten, and lie, the types of context in which these speech acts are appropriate or meaningful, or even what it means to formulate a hypothesis, vote, or deploy a missile. Language use is part of acting in the world. Without language we could not begin to communicate with one another, attribute meaning to objects or acts in the world, think individual thoughts, or express feelings.

Hypothesis testing in positivist science rests on an assumption that labels will be either true or false. An approach to language as rule-based requires that we 'look and see' how language is put to use by social actors as they construct their world. In a situation of change, categories of identity or action are not likely to be static. For instance, the

dominant categories defining identity in communist Yugoslavia were different from those that emerged along with the conflict between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. The category Yugoslavia subsumes all of the latter under a common identity as 'southern slavs'. By contrast, the ethnic categories construct clear historical, religious, and political distinctions between the different groups. These categories may have begun as interpretations, in that they substituted one rule of identity for another, but they became rule-like in their designation of identity and the actions that followed from this. In the transition from Yugoslavia to violent conflict, neighbours, who had lived together in peace, became the objects of ethnic cleansing.

A consistent constructivist approach to language shifts emphasis to the generation of meaning, norms, and rules, as expressed in language, by the subjects of analysis. It is also concerned less with the intentions of individuals, as suggested by conventional constructivists (March and Olson 1989; Sending 2002; Adler 1997), than the intention expressed in social action. As Wittgenstein (1958: para. 337) said, 'An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions.'

In the prior example, the 'intention' of individuals engaged in ethnic cleansing could not be separated from a social world in which neighbours had become 'dangerous others', defined as Chetnik, Ustasa, or Ottoman – terms with deep historical resonance – who had to be eliminated because of the threat they posed. Intention and action were defined in a public language by socially constituted actors. Questions of intention relate to a second category of inconsistency.

Reasons and causes

The other seeming inconsistency in the construction of constructivism *vis-à-vis* rationalism is the frequent emphasis on causality (Checkel 1997, 1998; Finnemore 1996: 28; Adler 1997: 329). On the surface, this appears to be merely a matter of word use. But the conflation of reason and cause raises a more serious issue, which is illustrated by the following example. Take a question about US President Bush's reasons for invading Iraq or the cause of the US invasion. Multiple possible reasons/causes have been identified: from oil, to the desire to complete unfinished business from the Gulf War, to concerns about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, to human rights.

An hypothesis focusing on Bush's individual reasons or the cause of the invasion seeks an explanation that corresponds with the world. But truth and falsity are ultimately slippery insofar as we cannot get inside individual minds, and the competition to identify the 'true' cause or intention usually devolves into a battle of interpretations. The question can be asked in a different way, however, focusing less on the ultimate truth of why Bush or the USA undertook the invasion, and more on the social fact that the invasion happened and how it became possible. We might pose this 'how possible' question, as Howard (2004) has, in terms of the puzzle that Iraq actually posed less of a threat than North Korea yet became the object of invasion, while the latter was the subject of negotiations. He traces how the historical pattern of interaction between the two laid the groundwork for different policies towards these two 'Axis of Evil' states.

The 'how possible' question reveals the importance of public language and the intentionality embedded in it. It is now known that intelligence communities on both sides of the Atlantic got it wrong, in (falsely) believing that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction

An explanation that the invasion was caused by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is more accurately stated in the following terms. The reason for the invasion of Iraq, given by foreign-policy elites, was the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. Whether these actors believed the intelligence or manufactured it, this 'reason' made the invasion possible. The reason was the means for persuading the US public, and US soldiers, that this was a legitimate act by their government. The reason was strengthened by the link made in political discourse between Saddam and the attackers on 9/11. The premise that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, although based on false data, established the context for making a justification, that is giving a reason for the invasion. This reason was publicly accessible in political language. It constituted an action and a 'reality', that is the invasion. The intention to invade was embedded in these language games and in the act of invasion itself.

To refer to a reason as a cause is an interpretation, that is it takes the rule by which 'giving a reason' has meaning and gives it a different meaning. However, a reason has a different logic than a cause. While X may give a reason for their action to Y, in doing so X explains their action. This may have an influence on Y, but, if so, it is less as a cause, in the sense that the impact of one stone on another may propel the latter in forward motion. It rather is part of a conversation where X is trying to persuade Y, and thereby legitimate their own actions in terms that can be understood and accepted by the other.

To give a reason, or to engage in many other speech acts, from promising to threatening, opens a space for the other to be engaged and respond. As a two-way relationship, this interaction is not merely a question of who has the greater material power; it is dependent on some degree of common language (the other must be able to understand what is being said and what constitutes a reason, promise, or threat), which incorporates standards of legitimacy (that is what will suffice as a good reason, as well as conditions, relating to past words and actions, which make a promise or threat credible). Power is a factor, since, particularly in the case of threats, material capability is one, although not the only, condition of credibility. Power may also be a factor insofar as the legitimacy of a reason may be tied to social role or position. For example, Western states may give reasons for maintaining a large nuclear arsenal, which are accepted as legitimate, while the desire for even one nuclear weapon by a small Middle Eastern nation, such as Iraq or Iran, may be widely viewed as illegitimate.

To call a reason a cause is to transform the meaning of the former. Obviously, the meaning of words can change over time. However, in this case, the two words are in conflict. We can replace the rule by which 'a reason' is given meaning with an interpretation that it is a 'cause', but this is like changing the direction of a signpost, which has constituted a regular use or custom (Wittgenstein 1958: para. 158).

Case study: the construction of NATO expansion



The purpose of this final section is to discuss the relevance of these distinctions in relation to an empirical context of international relations. The expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has generated a literature that is explicitly constructivist

in its orientation which grows out of a critique of more materialist or rationalist explanations. Two questions in particular have guided the constructivist critique. The first is how to explain not only the persistence but the expansion of the alliance after the demise of its Cold War enemy. Neorealists argue that alliances will disband in the absence of a threat. They assume that the state is the ultimate unit of analysis and that the benefits of cooperation will wane in the absence of a shared threat. The second question is how to explain the expansion of NATO in the absence of any obvious material, that is economic or military, interest in doing so.⁴ From a realist perspective, NATO would only expand if it were a necessary and efficient way to balance against perceived threats (Schimmelfennig 1999: 203).

Non-constructivist accounts of NATO expansion

Competing versions of neorealism predicted, for different reasons, that NATO would at best be obsolete and at worst would collapse, given the demise of the Soviet Union eliminated NATO's *raison d'être*. Some neorealists have dodged the issue of subsequent enlargement, arguing either that NATO survival or enlargement is unimportant or that insufficient time has lapsed for the predictions to come true (Rauchhaus 2001: 12). Others have conceded that questionable assumptions led towards inaccurate conclusions. Waltz (Rauchhaus 2001) for instance, argued that it was a mistake to treat NATO purely as a military alliance, given its high degree of institutionalization and the range of issues it deals with. While this institutionalization provides a partial explanation of why NATO is surviving and expanding, Waltz focuses on how the USA used NATO to advance its own agenda, an argument that I will later return to.

Neoliberals have focused their explanations more explicitly on institutional questions, emphasizing, for instance, the institutional goals of promoting stability between member-states and preventing competition between them. While providing a clear explanation for NATO's survival, arguments of this kind are more ambiguous on the question of expansion. For instance, an institutional argument might have predicted that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) when the Cold War ended) would become the institutional cornerstone of post-Cold-War Europe, given it already incorporated states in the East and West.

Organizational theory, which emphasizes the internal dynamics of organizations, might assume that NATO had a momentum of its own, independent of its member-states or any specific objective, such as defence against the Soviet Union. In this line of thought, NATO would use the resources at its disposal to generate new goals that would justify the organization's continuation (Rauchhaus 2001: 16). From this perspective, one might argue that the desire of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) to join NATO became a justification for its continuing existence. As will be discussed later, this overlaps with a constructivist analysis insofar as justification, which is a part of 'giving reasons', happens in an interaction. However, as Haas (Rauchhaus 2001: 17) argues, organizational analysts have failed to recognize that international organizations are fundamentally different from domestic ones. While domestic justification had a role, the international justification *vis-à-vis* the CEECs and Russia arguably did as well.

Foreign-policy approaches to NATO enlargement have highlighted the role of justifications to the US public. Kuchan (Rauchhaus 2001: 13), for instance, argues that key figures in the Clinton White House, inspired by pressure from heavy weights such as Kissinger and Brezinski, or fears of the electoral consequences of ignoring the influence of Eastern leaders, such as Lech Walesa or Vaclav Havel, on ethnic communities in the USA, were the motor behind the expansion process. This type of analysis largely ignores the rest of the world, including the NATO member-states – like the neorealist argument – and assumes the domestic and, in particular, electoral considerations of the White House were the most important factor. It isolates a decision of the Clinton administration in 1993 as the beginning point and fails to problematize the reluctance on the part of NATO, as well as the Clinton administration itself, to initially consider enlargement.

Contributors to a volume on NATO enlargement (Rauchhaus 2001: 19), representing diverse theoretical perspectives, agreed that the one area of consensus in this debate is the driving role of the USA and its preponderance of power. This consensus is very similar to Waltz's neorealist argument that enlargement is explained in terms of the advancement of US interests. NATO, in these analyses, is largely an arm of the USA, and the rest of the world is invisible. Constructivist analyses have focused more explicitly on the dynamics within NATO itself and have highlighted and accounted for many of the explanations mentioned above, in a more complex framework. They have focused on the interaction of different actors, and not simply US interests. They go beyond the institutional focus of neoliberals, to examine the role of NATO's shared values and norms of liberal democracy in propelling expansion.

Constructivism and NATO enlargement

Frank Schimmelfennig (1999: 210), for instance, argues that the identities, interests, and preferences of actors are products of intersubjective social structures, such as culture, institutions, and social interaction. It is not merely the cost-benefit analysis that determines an actor's behaviour, but rather their values and norms, and standards of legitimacy – in other words, a logic of appropriateness. In this respect, the enlargement of an international organization represents a process of international socialization. He hypothesizes that a state will seek and be granted NATO membership if it demonstrates that it shares liberal values and the multilateralist norms of the Western community. He explains NATO's decision to expand to the east as motivated by a desire to promote and strengthen liberal values, peace, and multilateralism in the area. The Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were chosen first because they were more advanced than other CEECs in adopting and internalizing Western values and norms.

NATO expanded in order to spread its liberal values. Schimmelfennig concludes that both values and material interests are important. In fact, the process was in part driven by threat, for instance the perception that undemocratic governments are a threat to the world order NATO prefers. The democratic socialization of members on its borders would promote the security needs of existing NATO members. Values and norms are more important, in his view, because the liberal democratic identity of NATO is driving the process and provides a framework for instrumental action.

While Schimmelfennig provides an explanation for NATO expansion, and a better explanation than neorealist accounts in particular, it is limited in two respects. First, he

does not adequately address the question of why spreading its values would be *more* important for a military alliance than material interests. Second, in presenting the process as driven by NATO he ignores a further puzzle: that is, NATO was initially reluctant to consider expansion, yet over several years made gradual steps in this direction. Analyses that focus on a more dialogical process involving NATO, the CEECs, and Russia more squarely address these questions.

From a consistent constructivist perspective, NATO enlargement was mutually constituted out of an ongoing process in which actors occupying different positions gave reasons for their actions. These reasons are accessible through a public language. The method of language analysis is akin to that used by Thucydides (1954) – although far more modest – in constructing his narrative of the Peloponnesian War. Recurring categories used by NATO, the CEECs, and Russian elites provided the basis for pinpointing changes in the definition of their identities and interests over time (Fierke 1999: 29). The method begins with a recognition that it is all too easy for analysts, or political actors, to interpret the past through their current location in historical or geographical space. In this respect, the consensus among US scholars about the central role of the USA, for instance, is not surprising. By tracing changes in the language of actors in multiple locations, and the reasons given over time, the gradual construction of outcomes becomes evident.

It is impossible in this short space to outline the various changes in any detail.⁵ Instead I make a few points that are salient to the argument of this chapter. First, dialogue itself was a part of the language of the unfolding process of NATO expansion. Following the collapse of the Eastern bloc and Warsaw Pact, 'dialogue' was presented as an alternative to NATO expansion. At the time, neither the CEECs nor NATO itself assumed that the organization would enlarge, particularly in light of public questions about the continuing relevance of NATO. The CEECs focused on the potential for a reconstituted CSCE as the framework for a pan-European security system. The US Bush administration, while stressing a commitment to democracy in Eastern Europe, was reluctant to discuss its security needs (Rodman 1995: 5).

In December 1991, NATO presented the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) as an alternative to extending military protection and as a forum for political dialogue and cooperation with the East, which would prevent the formation of competing alliances. Through 1992, NATO expressed clear opposition to enlargement 'for the foreseeable future'. Reasons ranged from the potential Russian response to fears it would weaken the alliance or become a source of division. The Clinton administration had, at the time, made the relationship to Russia a policy priority (Crawford in Rauchhaus 2001: 41). In 1993, Germany began to call for opening the European integration process, and NATO shifted towards a position of enlargement 'at an appropriate time'. This happened against the background of an increasing suspicion on the part of the CEECs that Western countries, which had challenged the Eastern bloc dissidents to tear down the wall dividing East and West, appeared to be constructing barriers to keep the CEECs out. In 1994, faced with increasing pressure from the CEECs to join NATO, and the prospect that a decision to enlarge would mobilize nationalist forces in Russia, NATO mapped a middle course. The clear opposition to enlargement 'in the foreseeable future' was replaced by 'no immediate enlargement', but agreement to the principle that the Alliance should be opened to new members. The result was the Partnership for Peace (PfP) which was designed to enhance

dialogue and cooperation with the East, and reflected a desire to avoid 'new divisions of Europe'. The PfP provided a means to delay the expansion decision while allowing CEECs to prepare for the possibility of future membership by taking on a clearer military dimension. After Clinton's visit to Poland in mid-1994, when he stated that enlargement was a matter of 'when rather than if', the process gained momentum. The actual decision to enlarge, in December 1994, was accompanied by a commitment to deepen dialogue with Russia.

It is tempting to view these layers of dialogue as a vehicle for the USA or NATO to realize its interests or inculcate the CEECs with its values. While clearly in part true, this claim fails to recognize the extent to which the dialogue transformed all the participants and made enlargement possible. NATO's identity and interests were shaped by the process no less than Russia or the CEECs. The enlargement decision emerged out of the tension between CEEC demands for inclusion and Russian claims that expansion would recreate the division of Europe. NATO, in each of its moves, manoeuvred between these two positions.

Second, when the analysis is set up as a three-way dialogue, rather than the disciplining by NATO of the CEECs, an answer to the further question of why a military alliance would be primarily concerned about spreading its values comes into sight: NATO, confronted with the discrepancy between past promises to dissidents in the East during the Cold War, and its actions following the end of the Cold War, could not discount future enlargement, even though its members gave plenty of reasons for doing so. Maintaining its identity, against the backdrop of questions about its continuing relevance, required aligning its actions with its ideals. This element was evident in the analysis of another form of language, that is the speech act.

A speech act is a category of language that does not simply describe or convey information but is an act in and of itself. To promise or to threaten are not words referring to objects in the world but acts *vis-à-vis* others with language. Speech acts are dependent on a context. Fierke and Wiener (1999) analyse how, in a context of change, NATO's past 'promises' to the CEECs came back to haunt it as 'threats' to its identity, thereby transforming its institutional interest in enlargement.

Amid the dramatic changes of the early 1990s, past promises became one of the stable features of an otherwise uncertain situation. NATO had, in the 1980s, encouraged human rights initiatives in the CEECs to act in accordance with democratic ideals in resisting totalitarianism. Once the containment of the Soviet Union was no longer necessary, the CEECs argued that Western institutions had a responsibility to assist the CEECs in their recovery, in helping them to uphold these values. The threat was not merely one of instability in the East or, as suggested by Schimmelfennig, authoritarian neighbours. Rather, the failure to fulfil the promise, and the exposure of this failure, presented a threat to the identity of NATO. The threat contributed to a change in the structure of its institutional interests. The decision about NATO expansion unfolded *over time* and became NATO's *raison d'être*, against the backdrop of arguments that it was obsolete.

In order to maintain its identity, NATO had to act in a manner that was consistent with the ideals it had espoused during the Cold War, particularly in the face of claims that it was failing to do so. As Williams (2001: 532) notes, recognition involves not only recognition of the other but a judgement that it represents a *certain kind*, that is that it is worthy of respect. While Williams focuses on recognition of the CEECs by NATO, and, like other

constructivist analyses, emphasizes the disciplining influence of NATO's norms on the CEECs (Schimmelfennig 1999; Rasmussen 2001); a dialogical analysis reveals that NATO identity also required recognition. Recognition depended on a consistency between words and actions, which eventually dictated enlargement to the East. This argument more clearly brings out the importance of the *process of interaction* between East and West in making the outcome of enlargement possible.

When language is connected to epistemology and method, a space is opened for greater attention to this process as an interaction or a dialogue in which each side is changed as a result of its engagement with the other. In this line of argument it is not merely the desire of the CEECs for recognition as NATO members that is at stake, but also the recognition of NATO identity in the face of widescale assumptions that it had become obsolete in the absence of any visible threat from the former Soviet Union. The desire of the CEECs to join NATO became proof of its continuing relevance. This type of analysis is also more equipped to address the question of why NATO expanded in the absence of any apparent interest in doing so and why liberal democracy, rather than military considerations, would be the driving force.

Conclusion

Constructivism was introduced to IR as the Cold War was ending. The central themes of change, sociality, and processes of interaction made it possible to examine dimensions of international relations that had been ignored, given the emphasis by dominant theories on generalization across time, material interest, and a notion of structure that was overly determined. The dialogue between constructivists and rationalists focused on ontological questions, contrasting the individual ontology of the former with the social ontology of the latter. In this dialogue, questions of epistemology and method were largely ignored, as many constructivists accepted the basic tenets of 'positivist' social science and adopted the language of causality and hypothesis testing. In a disciplinary context where this view of science was understood to be the mark of legitimacy, conventional constructivism has made important inroads. It is a small further step to recognize the inconsistencies generated by this dialogue. These inconsistencies are reinforced by the anomalies raised by the end of the Cold War and NATO expansion. While generating inconsistencies, the engagement with the mainstream over constructivism has also opened a space for broadening the dialogue to ask further questions about the methods most appropriate to a constructivist approach. A more consistent constructivism rests not only on a social ontology but also a social epistemology, which has the analysis of language and processes of interaction between multiple actors at its core. The importance of these tools was illustrated in a brief analysis of NATO expansion, which demonstrated the added value of approaching the context as a dialogue between NATO, Russia, and the CEECs that unfolded over time. From this perspective, not only the disciplining role of NATO's liberal norms was important in the process of enlargement, but the pressure placed on NATO to act in a manner consistent with its own promises and the principles it had expounded.

Both the construction of constructivism within IR, and the construction of NATO enlargement in international relations, emerged out of a dialogue between contextually bound actors occupying different positions. As such they both are examples of the constructivist point, originally made by Nicholas Onuf (1989) that we occupy a 'world of our making'.

QUESTIONS

1. Constructivism was a response to changes in the world of international relations. Discuss.
2. Is it more important to generalize about international relations across time or to account for processes of change?
3. Discuss the idea that international relations is a social construction.
4. How have the central themes of constructivism contributed to the discipline of IR?
5. What are the central differences between rationalists and constructivists?
6. What does it mean to say that identities and interests are mutually constituted?
7. What was at stake in the distancing of 'conventional' constructivists from poststructuralists?
8. What is the significance of thinking about constructivism as an approach or a theory?
9. Is language important in a constructivist analysis? Why or why not?
10. Discuss the merits of different explanations of NATO enlargement.
11. What is the added value of a constructivist analysis of NATO expansion?

FURTHER READING

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- Finnemore, Martha (1996), *National Interests and International Society* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press). An exploration of the role of norms in international relations.
- Katzenstein, Peter (1996), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press). An edited collection of a range of empirical studies that apply a constructivist analysis.
- Kratochwil, Friedrich (1989), *Rules, Norms and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). A seminal work on the role of rules in international relations.
- Onuf, Nicholas (1989), *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press). The work that introduced constructivism to International Relations.
- Wendt, Alexander (1999), *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). The most comprehensive effort to build a constructivist theory of international relations.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- A Second Image: A Constructivism Resource
<http://home.pi.be/%7Elazone/>
- NATO
www.nato.int



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

10

Feminism

J. ANN TICKNER AND LAURA SJOBERG

→ Chapter contents

- Introduction
- Gender in International Relations
- Typology of IR feminist theories
- Gender, security, and global politics
- Case study
- Conclusion

✓ Reader's guide

This chapter introduces feminist perspectives on international relations. It provides a typology of feminist International Relations (IR) theories, outlining their major tenets with illustrations from specific authors. Feminist theories of IR use gender as a socially constructed category of analysis when they analyse foreign policy, international political economy, and international security. This chapter focuses on feminist perspectives on international security. Feminist security research takes two major forms: theoretical reformulation and empirical evaluation. This chapter chronicles developments in feminist reanalyses and reformulations of security theory. It illustrates feminist security theory by analysing the case of United Nations Security Council sanctions on Iraq following the First Gulf War. It concludes by discussing the contributions that feminist IR can make to the discipline of IR specifically, and to the practice of international politics more generally.

Introduction

Feminist theories entered the discipline of International Relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The beginnings of IR feminism are associated with a more general ferment in the field – often referred to as the ‘third debate’ (or sometimes as ‘fourth debate’, see Chapter 1). Early IR feminists challenged the discipline to think about how its theories might be reformulated and how its understandings of global politics might be improved if gender were included as a category of analysis and if women’s experiences were part of its subject matter. Feminists claimed that only by introducing gender analysis could the differential impact of the state system and the global economy on the lives of women and men be fully understood. IR feminists critically re-examined some of the key concepts in the field – concepts such as sovereignty, the state, and security. They began to ask new questions – such as whether it makes a difference that most foreign-policy leaders, military personnel, and heads of international corporations are men and why women remain relatively disempowered in matters of foreign and military policy.

IR feminists have also sought to make women visible as subjects in international politics and the global economy. They draw attention to women’s invisibility and gender subordination in the theory and practice of international politics. Less than 10 per cent of the world’s heads of state are women. IR feminists ask why this is the case and how this might affect the structure and practice of global politics. More recently, ‘second generation’ IR feminist empirical case studies have focused on hitherto understudied issues such as military prostitution, domestic service, diplomatic households, and home-based work, much of which is performed by women.¹ Through these studies feminists have sought to demonstrate how vital women are to the foreign policies of states and to the functioning of the global economy. Since most women speak from the margins of international politics, their lives offer us a perspective outside the state-centric focus of conventional Western international theories and broaden the empirical base upon which we build these theories. Feminist scholars suggest that if we put on gendered lenses we get quite a different view of international politics (Peterson and Runyan 1999: 21).

Feminists define gender as a set of socially constructed characteristics describing what men and women ought to be. Characteristics such as strength, rationality, independence, protector, and public are associated with masculinity while characteristics such as weakness, emotionality, relational, protected, and private are associated with femininity. It is important to note that individual men and women may not embody all these characteristics – it is possible for women to display masculine ones and vice versa. Rather, they are ideal types; the ideal masculine type (in the West – white and heterosexual) is sometimes referred to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’. These characteristics may vary over time and place but, importantly, they are relational, meaning they depend on each other for their meaning. They are also unequal. Men, women, and the states they live in generally assign more positive value to masculine characteristics than to feminine ones – at least in the public sphere. The foreign policies of states are often legitimated in terms of hegemonic masculine characteristics; a desirable foreign policy is generally one which strives for power and autonomy and which protects its citizens from outside dangers. Appeals to these gender dualisms also organize social activity and divide necessary social activities between groups

of humans; for example, since women are associated with the private sphere, it is seen as ‘natural’ for women to be caregivers while men’s association with the public space makes them ‘natural breadwinners’ (Harding 1986: 17–18). While feminists rightly question the naturalness of these dichotomized distinctions, they have consequences – for women, for men, and for global politics. We will be discussing these consequences throughout the chapter.

In this chapter we trace the history of the development of feminist IR. We outline a typology of IR feminist theories which build on, but go beyond, a variety of IR approaches, such as liberalism (Chapters 5 and 6), constructivism (Chapter 9), critical theory (Chapter 8), poststructuralism (Chapter 11) and postcolonialism (Chapter 12) – theories which are discussed in other chapters. We offer some redefinitions and reanalyses of security as an illustration of how feminists are reformulating some of the key concepts in IR. We have chosen to focus on security because it has been central to the discipline since its founding in the early twentieth century. It has also been an important issue for feminist scholars because women have largely been absent – as security providers in the traditional state/military security sense and also as security scholars in the IR discipline. We will illustrate our feminist analysis of security through an examination of United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s. We propose that feminist IR offers some insights into this case that other sanctions theories do not. We conclude by suggesting the contributions of feminist IR to the discipline specifically and to global politics more generally.

Gender in International Relations

The ‘third debate’ of the late 1980s was a time when many scholars in the discipline began to debate its ways of knowing (Lapid 1989). Certain scholars began to question both the epistemological and ontological foundations of a field which, in the USA especially, had been dominated by positivist, rationalist, and materialist theories. Postpositivist scholarship, which includes critical theory, some forms of constructivism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, questions positivists’ beliefs about the possibility of creating universal, objective knowledge. Rejecting rationalist methodologies and causal explanations, postpositivists advocate more interpretive, ideational, and sociological methods for understanding global politics. They ask in whose interests and for what purpose is knowledge constructed. For a more detailed account of the different kinds of theorizing in IR, see Chapter 1.

Many feminists share this postpositivist commitment to examining the relationship between knowledge and power. They point out that most knowledge has been created by men and is about men.² Although IR postpositivists have been as slow as positivists to introduce gender into their research, their epistemological critiques created space for feminist analyses in a way that other IR scholarship had not. Conventional IR relies on generalized rationalist explanations of asocial states’ behaviour in an anarchic international system. IR feminist theories focus on social relations, particularly gender relations;

rather than anarchy, they see an international system constituted by socially constructed gender hierarchies which contribute to gender subordination. In order to reveal these gender hierarchies, feminists often begin their examinations of international relations at the micro-level – attempting to understand how the lives of individuals (especially marginalized individuals) affect and are affected by global politics.

IR feminist research can be divided into two complementary but distinct generations: first generation, which largely focused on theory formulation, and second generation, which approached empirical situations with 'gendered lenses'. First-generation IR feminist theory was primarily concerned with bringing to light and critiquing the gendered foundations of IR theories and of the practices of international politics. Second-generation IR feminists have begun to develop their own research programmes – extending the boundaries of the discipline, investigating different issues, and listening to unfamiliar voices. These feminists use gender as a category of analysis in their studies of real-world events in global politics, incorporating feminist conceptual critiques into their analyses of specific situations. They have studied the gendered nature of the global economy, foreign policy, and security by examining specific political and economic situations in concrete historical and geographic contexts.

Typology of IR feminist theories

As in IR more generally there is a wide variety of feminist theoretical perspectives. Many of them build on, but go beyond, some of the IR perspectives discussed in other chapters – such as liberalism, constructivism, critical theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. While they may disagree about the reasons, all of them are trying to understand women's subordination. IR feminists share an interest in gender equality or what they prefer to call gender emancipation. But what feminists mean by gender emancipation varies greatly, as does their understanding of the appropriate paths to reach it. We will now briefly outline the assumptions and methodological preferences of some of these approaches and refer to some exemplary writings in each. We note that there is significant overlap between these perspectives and that our typology is somewhat of a simplification, but useful for analysis.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism calls attention to the subordinate position of women in global politics but remains committed to investigating the causes of this subordination within a positivist framework. Liberal feminism challenges the content but not the epistemological assumptions of conventional IR. Liberal feminists document various aspects of women's subordination. For example, they have investigated the particular problems of refugee women, income inequalities between women and men, and human rights violations incurred disproportionately by women such as trafficking and rape in war. They look for women in the institutions and practices of global politics and observe how their presence (or lack thereof) affects and is affected by international policy-making. They ask what a

world with more women in positions of power might look like. Liberal feminists believe that women's equality can be achieved by removing legal and other obstacles that have denied them the same rights and opportunities as men.

Liberal feminists also use gender as an explanatory variable in foreign-policy analysis. Using social scientific methods, Mary Caprioli and Mark Boyer (2001) employ quantitative social science data and statistical measures to test a variant of the democratic peace hypothesis – namely, whether there is a relationship between domestic gender equality and states' use of violence internationally. According to their measures of gender inequality, their results show that the severity of violence used by states in international crises decreases as domestic gender equality increases. Caprioli and Boyer are using gender as a variable to explain certain policies and policy results.

Many postpositivist IR feminists are critical of liberal feminism. They see problems with measuring gender inequality using statistical indicators. Caprioli and Boyer use national indicators, such as numbers of women in parliament and years since women gained the vote, to measure gender equality. Postpositivist feminists claim that such measures are inadequate for understanding gender inequality which is associated with gender role expectations that keep women out of positions of power; as we mentioned earlier, gender-laden divisions between public and private spheres consign women to certain socially accepted roles. Postpositivist feminists point out that gender inequalities continue to exist in societies that have long-since achieved formal equality so we must go deeper into our investigations of gender hierarchies if we are to explain these inequalities. All these feminists use gender (as we defined it earlier) as a category of analysis to help them understand these inequalities and their implications for global politics.

Critical feminism

Critical feminism goes beyond liberal feminism's use of gender as a variable. It explores the ideational and material manifestations of gendered identities and gendered power in global politics. Many critical feminists build upon, but go beyond the work of IR scholar Robert Cox. Cox (1981) portrays the world in terms of historical structures made up of three categories of reciprocal interacting forces: material conditions, ideas, and institutions. These forces interact at three different levels: production relations, the state–society complex, and historically defined world orders. While ideas are important in legitimating certain institutions, ideas are the product of human agents – therefore, there is always the possibility of change. Critical theory is committed to understanding the world in order to try to change it.

Sandra Whitworth is a feminist critical theorist who builds on Cox's framework. In her book *Feminism and International Relations* (1994) she claims that understandings about gender depend only in part on real material conditions of women and men in particular circumstances. She suggests that gender is also constituted by the meaning given to that reality – *ideas* that men and women have about their relationships to one another. Her research examines the different ways gender was understood over time in the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the effects that these changing understandings had on both institutions' population policies at various times in their history.

Christine Chin's *In Service and Servitude* (1998) also uses a critical feminist approach to study female domestic workers. Chin examines the increasing prevalence of underpaid and often exploited foreign female domestic workers in Malaysia during the 1970s – a time when the state was modernizing the economy. She rejects a traditional economic explanation of wage differentials to explain the importation of Filipino and Indonesian female domestic labour because, in this case, economic theory does not account for state involvement or the social dynamics around the employment of foreign domestic workers. Adopting a critical approach, Chin argues that the Malaysian state supported the importation and employment of foreign female domestic workers, who were often working in conditions not much better than slavery, as a part of a strategy to co-opt and win the support of middle-class families and decrease ethnic tensions. Her study shows that the Malaysian state, like other states, is not neutral, but an expression of class, race, and gender-based power which won support by co-opting certain citizens while repressing others. Consistent with critical theory more generally, Chin sees her study as emancipatory – to identify existing power relations with the intention of changing them.

Feminist constructivism

IR social constructivists called for rethinking the ways we see and understand international politics by adding a social layer to IR's analyses. They emphasize the ideational rather than the material elements of global politics. Constructivist approaches range broadly – from positivist versions that treat ideas as causes to a postpositivist focus on language. All agree that international life is social and that agents and structures are co-constituted. They challenge realist assumptions about states as unitary actors; instead, they see states as the dynamic results of the social processes that constitute their existence. States and other international actors' perceptions of their own and others' identities shape their behaviour in global politics.

Constructivist feminism focuses on the way that ideas about gender shape and are shaped by global politics. Elisabeth Prügl's book *The Global Construction of Gender* (1999) uses a linguistically based feminist constructivist perspective to analyse the treatment of home-based work in international negotiations and international law. Since most home-based workers are women, the debate about regulating this type of employment is an important one from a feminist perspective. Low wages and poor working conditions have often been justified on the grounds that home-based work is not 'real work' since it takes place in the private reproductive sphere of the household rather than the more valued public sphere of waged-based production. Prügl shows how ideas about womanhood and femininity contributed to the international community's debates about institutionalizing these workers' rights, a debate which finally culminated in the passage of the ILO's Homework Convention in 1996 due, in large part, to the lobbying of a variety of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). She sees gender as an institution that codifies power at every level of global politics, from the home to the state to the international system. She argues that gender politics pervades world politics, creating a set of linguistically based rules about how states interact with each other and with their own citizens. Prügl and other constructivist feminists study the processes whereby ideas about gender influence global politics as well as the ways that global politics shapes ideas about gender.

Nevertheless, as her study shows, political spaces created by negotiations do provide openings for alternative interpretations; therefore, they can be sites for emancipation.

Feminist poststructuralism

Poststructuralists focus on meaning as it is codified in language. They claim that our understanding of reality is mediated through our use of language. They are particularly concerned with the relationship between knowledge and power; those who construct meaning and create knowledge thereby gain a great deal of power. Feminists point out that men have generally been seen as the knowers – what has counted as legitimate knowledge in the social sciences has generally been based on knowledge about men's lives in the public sphere; women have been marginalized both as knowers and as the subjects of knowledge.

Poststructuralist feminism is particularly concerned with the way dichotomized linguistic constructions, such as strong/weak, rational/emotional, and public/private, serve to empower the masculine over the feminine. In international relations, dichotomous constructions, such as civilized/uncivilized, order/anarchy, and developed/underdeveloped, have been important in how we divide the world linguistically. Poststructuralists believe that these distinctions have real-world consequences. Dichotomous constructions denote inferiority and even danger with respect to those on the outside – they are also gendered and have racial implications. Feminist poststructuralists seek to expose and deconstruct these hierarchies – often through the analysis of texts and their meaning. They see gender as a complex social construction and they emphasize that the spoken meaning of gender is constantly evolving and changing with context. Deconstructing these hierarchies is necessary in order for us to see them and construct a less hierarchical vision of reality.

Charlotte Hooper's book *Manly States* (2001) is an example of poststructural textual analysis. One of her central questions is what role does International Relations theory and practice play in shaping, defining, and legitimating masculinities. She claims that we cannot understand international relations unless we understand the implications of the fact that it is conducted mostly by men. She asks how international relations might discipline men as much as men shape international relations. Hooper sets about answering this question through an analysis of theories of masculinity together with a textual analysis of *The Economist*, a prestigious British weekly newspaper that covers business and politics. She follows the practice of intertextuality – 'the process by which meanings are circulated between texts through the use of various visual and literary codes and conventions' (Hooper 2001: 122). Through an examination of texts, graphs, photos, and advertising material, she concludes that *The Economist* is saturated with signifiers of hegemonic masculinities and that gendered messages are encoded in the newspaper regardless of the intentions of its publishers or authors. She aims to show that gender politics pervades world politics and that gender is a social construction that results from practices that connect arguments at all levels of politics and society including the international.

Postcolonial feminism

Many postcolonial writers are poststructuralists. Their particular concern is colonial relations of domination and subordination established under imperialism. They claim that

these dominance relationships have persisted beyond the granting of independence to formerly colonized states and that they are built into the way the colonized are represented in Western knowledge. Arguing that the colonized must represent themselves, postcolonial scholars aim to 'speak back', a task made harder by the erasure of their history and culture. Like poststructuralist scholars more generally, postcolonial scholars argue that, in international relations, constructions of 'self' and 'other' foster racial and cultural stereotypes that denote the other – in their case ex-colonial subjects – as inferior.

Postcolonial feminism makes similar claims about the way Western feminists have constructed knowledge about non-Western women. Just as feminists have criticized Western knowledge for its false assumptions about universality when, in reality, it is knowledge constructed mainly from men's lives, postcolonial feminists see false claims of universalism arising from knowledge which is based largely on the experiences of relatively privileged Western women. Chandra Mohanty (1988) critiques some Western feminists for treating women as a homogeneous category which does not acknowledge their differences depending on their culture, social class, race, and geographical location. This ethnocentric universalism robs women of their historical and political agency. Postcolonial feminists, such as Mohanty, are concerned that Western feminists assume that all women have similar needs with respect to emancipation when, in fact, their realities are very different. Postcolonial feminists challenge Western portrayals of Third World women as poor, undereducated, victimized, and lacking in agency. They see gender subordination as sitting at the intersection of gender, race, and culture. Recognizing this, they seek to redress these subordinations within their own cultural context, rather than through a universal understanding of women's needs.

Gender, security, and global politics

In this section we focus on how the theoretical perspectives we have outlined and how the scholarship we have discussed contribute to our understanding of security and insecurity. Feminist definitions of security, explanations of insecurity, and suggestions as to how to improve security are very different from those of conventional IR. We begin this section by offering some feminist redefinitions of security and insecurity. Then we suggest some feminist reanalyses of security and outline some empirical evidence that feminists are using to formulate their reanalyses.

Redefining security and its subjects

Conventional IR scholars, notably realists, define security primarily in terms of the security of the state. A secure state is one that can protect its physical and moral boundaries against an 'anarchic' international system. Neorealists focus on the anarchic structure of the international system, where there is no sovereign to regulate state behavior. They portray states as unitary actors whose internal structures and policies are less important than this anarchic condition for explaining their security and insecurity. The power-seeking

behaviour and military capabilities of states are seen as ways to increase their security; many security specialists believe that power-seeking in order to promote security explains much of the international behaviour of states.

In the 1980s, certain IR scholars began to challenge these explanations and to articulate broader definitions of security. Noting that most wars since 1945 have been fuelled by ethnic and nationalist rivalries and have not been fought across international boundaries, they began to examine the interrelation of military threats with economic and environmental ones. Most of the world's poorest states have active military conflicts within their boundaries. These conflicts contribute to high numbers of civilian casualties, to structural violence – the violence done to people when their basic needs are not met – and to environmental destruction. Critical security scholars, as they are called, began to define security in terms of threats to human well-being and survival – security of the individual and their environment, as well as that of the state.

Like critical security scholars, many IR feminists define security broadly in multidimensional and multilevel terms – as the diminution of all forms of violence, including physical, structural, and ecological. According to IR feminists, security threats include domestic violence, rape, poverty, gender subordination, and ecological destruction as well as war. Feminists not only broaden *what security means* but also *who is guaranteed security*. Most of their analyses of security start at the bottom, with the individual or the community, rather than with the state or the international system. IR feminists have demonstrated how the security of individuals is related to national and international politics and how international politics impacts the security of individuals even at the local level.

Feminist research is demonstrating how those at the margins of states may actually be rendered more insecure by their state's security policies. The Malaysian case, discussed earlier, demonstrates that the exploitation of foreign domestic servants, often thought of as a 'private' issue, was permitted by the Malaysian state in order to win support of its middle class, thereby diminishing ethnic tensions – tensions that were causing threats to the security of the state. In *Sex Among Allies* (1997), a study of prostitution around US military bases in South Korea in the 1970s, Katharine Moon shows how prostitution became a matter of top-level US–Korean security politics. Clean up of prostitution camps, effected by imposing health standards and monitoring sex workers, was directly related to establishing a more hospitable environment for US troops at a time when the USA was pulling troops out of South Korea. Both these cases show how considerations of national security translated into insecurity for marginalized vulnerable women. Redefinitions of security and rethinking about the subjects of security prompt feminists to ask different questions, particularly about whose lives are being secured and whose are not.

Challenging the myth of protection

Our earlier definition of masculinity and femininity defined men as 'protectors' and women as 'protected'.³ It is a widespread myth that men fight wars to protect 'vulnerable people' usually defined as women and children. Yet, women and children constitute a majority of casualties in recent wars as civilian casualties have risen from about 10 per cent at the beginning of the twentieth century to almost 90 per cent by its close. In 1999 about 75 per cent of refugees were women and children, many of them fleeing from wars. Wars

make it harder for women to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities; as mothers and family providers, women are particularly hurt by the economic consequences of wars. Feminists have also drawn our attention to wartime rape; often rape is not just an 'accident' of war but, as in the case of the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a deliberate military strategy. Instead of seeing military power as part of a state's arsenal to defend against security threats from other states, feminists see that militaries are often threats to the security of individuals (particularly women) and competitors for scarce resources on which women may depend more than men.

Looking at the effects of war through gendered lenses, we find that war is a cultural construction that depends on myths of protection. Such myths have been important in upholding the legitimacy of war. They also contribute to the delegitimation of peace which is often associated with feminine characteristics, such as weakness, concession, and idealism. Looking at these gendered constructions may deepen our understanding of the causes of war and allow us to see how certain ways of thinking about security have been legitimated while others have been silenced.

Understanding economic insecurity

Feminist analyses of military security have looked at the gendered impacts of war, particularly as they relate to the security of individuals. Feminist research on economic security highlights women's particular economic vulnerabilities. While there are obviously enormous global differences in women's socioeconomic status, depending on race, class, and geographic location, women are disproportionately located at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale in all societies. In order to explain this, feminists have drawn our attention to a gendered division of labour that had its origins in seventeenth-century Europe, where definitions of male and female were becoming polarized in ways that were suited to a growing division between work and home required by early capitalism. The notion 'housewife' began to place women's work in the private domestic sphere as opposed to the public world of production inhabited by men. Even though most women do work outside the home, the association of women with gendered roles, such as housewife, caregiver, and mother, came to be seen as 'natural'. Consequently, when women do enter the workforce, they are disproportionately represented in the caring professions or 'light' manufacturing industries, occupations that are chosen because of values that are often emphasized in female socialization. Women provide an optimal labour force for contemporary global capitalism because, since they are defined as housewives rather than workers, they can be paid lower wages on the assumption that their wages are supplemental to family income. Elisabeth Prügl's study of home-based labour, discussed earlier, talks about the low remuneration of home-based work which is grounded in this assumption. Nevertheless, in actual fact, about one-third of all households are headed by women.

Even when women do benefit from entry into the workforce, they continue to suffer from a double or even triple burden since women carry most of the responsibility for household labour and unpaid community work. Unremunerated labour plays a crucial role in the reproduction of labour necessary for waged work, yet it has rarely been of concern to economic analysis. A narrow definition of work as work in the waged economy, one that is used in economic accounting, tends to render invisible many of the contributions that women make to the global economy. The disproportionate poverty of women cannot

be explained by market conditions alone; gendered role expectations about the economic worth of women's work and the kinds of tasks that women are expected to do contribute to their economic insecurity.

Like critical security scholars, feminist have broadened their definitions and analyses of security. But they go further by showing how important gender as a category of analysis is to our understanding of security and insecurity. Using our gendered lenses we will now examine in more detail the UN sanctions policy on Iraq during the 1990s, a case which supports this proposition.

Case study: UN sanctions on Iraq



In 1991 Iraq invaded and conquered Kuwait, claiming a right to Kuwaiti territory. The United Nations (UN) declared Iraq's invasion illegal and ultimately used military force to eject Iraq from Kuwait. This conflict is known as the First Gulf War. At the end of the First Gulf War, UN Security Council Resolution 687 left Iraq under a strict import and export embargo. According to the Resolution, the embargo would remain in place until Iraq met a list of demands imposed by the Security Council. These demands related to Kuwaiti independence, Iraqi weapons, terrorism, and liability for the Gulf War.⁴ This sanctions regime, originally intended to last about a year, stretched over thirteen. It was marked by confusion, fits and starts, partial compliance, and ulterior motives. Iraq's cooperation was inconsistent at best and Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq, often openly defied the sanctions. Throughout the 1990s, Iraq remained under one of history's longest and most strict economic sanctions regimes.

In the mid-1990s, international popular opinion turned against the sanctions because of the tragic humanitarian consequences. Many states that favoured the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime became critical of the sanctions. A number of UN Security Council member-states, including France and Russia, turned against the sanctions. Still, a Security Council vote to lift the sanctions was never taken because such a vote would have faced certain veto from the USA. The USA, but not the UN, insisted on regime change in Iraq as a condition for lifting sanctions. Meanwhile, pictures of malnourished children were publicized by activist organizations fighting the sanctions. The USA and the UN Security Council blamed Saddam Hussein for Iraq's non-compliance, while the Iraqi government blamed the UN.

The sanctions regime was a humanitarian disaster. The impacts of a thirteen-year near-total embargo on the Iraqi economy were extensive. Before the First Gulf War, Iraq had an export-based economy, exporting oil. Iraq imported almost all of its food and other basic necessities. The Iraqi gross national product (GNP) fell by 50 per cent during the first year of sanctions, and declined to less than \$500 in the following years. By 2000, Iraq was the third poorest country in the world. Economic decline caused a sharp decline in real wages and widespread unemployment.

These adverse economic impacts caused most Iraqis serious material problems. Often, women had less secure jobs than men because their job tenure had been shorter and they were not seen as the primary income-earners for their families. Iraq had neither the money to buy, nor the means to produce, essential supplies; before the sanctions it had imported

most of its food. With no income, a crippled infrastructure, and an international law against both imports and exports, Iraq had a difficult time acquiring food. The result was catastrophic malnutrition. Households rarely had enough food and women were often the last to eat. Iraqis also lacked clean water, baby milk, vitamins, health-care supplies, and adequate electricity. The oil-for-food programme implemented by the UN Security Council allowed some needed supplies to enter Iraq by permitting limited oil exports. While the programme did result in some food entering Iraq, its provisions failed to provide for the restoration of Iraq's oil infrastructure which had been badly damaged in the First Gulf War. As a result, the oil-for-food programme did not meet the basic needs of Iraqi citizens. It was not until certain members of the international community began to trade with Iraq in the late 1990s despite the sanctions that the worst humanitarian impacts dissipated.

These deprivations had severe medical impacts. Finding adequate prenatal care was next to impossible for Iraqi women; even if their children were born healthy, the lack of vitamins and baby milk meant that child mortality skyrocketed. The cancer rate rose by 400 per cent. It is estimated that the sanctions led to the deaths of about 1 million Iraqis, half of them children and another 30 per cent women (Mueller and Mueller 1999). In a country that had previously possessed a world-class medical system, curable diseases and starvation were the leading causes of death. The education systems also plummeted. Crime rates and prostitution rose while culture, the arts, and religious activity decreased. Joy Gordon (1999) claimed that sanctions sent Iraq back to the stone age.

Some IR analyses of sanctions

Following the success of limited sanctions on South Africa in the 1980s, which contributed to the ending of Apartheid, economic sanctions were seen as a powerful but humane tool. IR analyses of the effectiveness of sanctions are informed by a variety of theoretical perspectives. Realists view sanctions as a way of raising the cost of non-compliance for the country on which sanctions are imposed until it becomes unacceptable (Baldwin 1985). Liberals explain sanctions as a way of depriving the target country of the means to commit a violation of international norms (Martin 1992). In other words, sanctions take away the resources an errant state would use to defy international will. Constructivists argue that sanctions are a socializing phenomenon, communicating a message of disapproval through the combination of negative consequences and international shame (Crawford and Klotz 1999). Scholars who focus on language see sanctions as discourse – as tools of argumentation which allow actors to demonstrate the importance of their point to other actors reticent to agree (Morgan and Schwebach 1997). Within each of these schools of thought, there are disagreements about which (if any) sanctions have worked, and how frequently they should be used. A feminist theory of sanctions draws from all these perspectives but goes beyond them, using gender as a category of analysis.

Feminists interpret sanctions on Iraq

Economic sanctions do not appear to be a security issue in the narrow sense: they are not fought with guns on a battlefield, or with bombs on airplanes. The UN Security Council

did not declare war on Iraq and the sanctions on Iraq did not *look like* a conventional war. However, as we mentioned earlier, IR feminists who study war pay attention to structural and physical violence, and to what is happening on the ground – to individuals and communities. From this perspective, economic sanctions on Iraq not only looked like a war; they looked like a war on Iraq's most vulnerable citizens.

As we have shown, the UN Security Council's sanctions regime deprived most Iraqi citizens of their basic everyday needs. The aim of the sanctions was to stir up popular discontent against the Iraqi government and its policies. In other words, sanctions tried to *hurt civilians* so they would change their government. If sanctions were a war, they were a war against non-combatants. The civilians who were hurt the most were not the rich and powerful or the decision-makers, since they had the ability to buy food and supplies on the black market. Instead, it was Iraq's most vulnerable population that suffered most – low-income people, women, children, and the elderly. Economic sanctions against Iraq constituted both physical and structural violence. *Physical* violence was incurred through frequent bombings intended to communicate the unhappiness of UN member-states with Iraq's non-compliance. *Structural* violence was incurred through the destruction of the economic infrastructure and the lack of nutrition and medical care that had supported Iraq's poorest citizens. By these measures feminists would conclude that economic sanctions constitute war. This being the case, we will now suggest some research questions that feminists might ask and what we might learn from their analyses.

A liberal feminist study of sanctions might ask how many women participated in the sanctions decision-making process; they might also measure the varying effects of sanctions on individuals, focusing on gender differences. From this they might conclude that, while few women were involved in constructing and implementing the sanctions policy, women suffered more than their male counterparts, both through direct deprivation and through the effects of sanctions on their homes, families, and jobs.

Feminists from all postpositivist theoretical perspectives would introduce gender as a category of analysis and investigate the role that gender played in the politics of the sanctions regime. They might investigate how both the Iraqi government and the advocates of the sanctions regime used gender as a public relations argument against their opponents.

Along those lines, feminists might investigate the political appropriation of gender categories by both sides of the conflict. IR feminists emphasize the gendered social hierarchy in global politics that fosters an atmosphere of coercive competition by valuing traits associated with masculinity (bravery, strength, and dominance) over traits associated with femininity (compromise, compassion, and weakness). Feminists might investigate the gendered discourses of competitive masculinity that each side of the sanctions war used to legitimize their actions and delegitimize the enemy's; such discourses are often manifested in times of inter-state conflict. Specifically, they might point to instances where US CIA Director George Tenet talked about penetrating Saddam Hussein's 'inner sanctum', where US President George H. W. Bush talked about protecting Iraqi women as a justification for sanctions and war, and where Saddam Hussein countered with the threat of showing the USA what a 'real man' he was. It is often the case, particularly in times of conflict, that we personify enemy states in gendered ways, referring to them by their leaders' names. This hides the negative impacts of war on the lives of individuals – individuals who may not be responsible for the conflict in the first place. Feminists might also explore the punitive

relationship between the UN Security Council and Iraq as an example of a hegemonic masculinity feminizing a weaker enemy.

Towards a feminist theory of sanctions

We suggest three major insights that feminists contribute to the theory of sanctions. First, feminists look for where the women are in sanctions regimes. They see that women are disproportionately affected by comprehensive sanctions. Women and children are the most likely to be malnourished. When women are malnourished, every stage of the child-bearing process becomes more difficult. Pre-natal and infant health care is often the first facet of the health-care system to suffer when a sanctioned economy begins to decline. Women lose their jobs and are charged with running households deprived of basic goods. An international policy of economic deprivation is felt most heavily at the level of individual households. While women suffer disproportionately from sanctions regimes, very few women are present in the decision-making process. When the sanctions on Iraq were enacted, there were no female heads of UN Security Council member-states. Feminists see the sanctions regime on Iraq as an example of the systematic exclusion of women's voices from decisions about international policies that disproportionately affect them. State and inter-state security policy can cause women's (and other individuals') insecurity.

The second insight feminists have is a critique of the gendered logic of sanctions as a policy choice. Sanctions are enacted by stronger actors in an attempt to force the weaker actor to submit to their will. They are coercive in nature – comply, or you starve. Feminists criticize the adversarial nature of international politics because it valorizes masculine values, such as pride, victory, and force, over feminine ones, such as compromise, compassion, and coexistence – values that are often seen as signs of weakness by most states and many of their citizens, women and men alike. This results in confrontational policies, policies that often hurt those at the margins of international political life the most. Sanctions demonstrate coercive, masculine policy logic. Postcolonial feminists would add a criticism of the assumption that the UN Security Council members somehow knew *better than Iraq* what was good for Iraqis. It is often the case that powerful people, many of whom are men, claim to know what is best for subordinate people (and often for women). IR feminists critique the gendered logic and gendered impacts of sanctions.

The third insight that IR feminists have to offer a theory of sanctions is a critical re-examination of the question of responsibility. Feminists look not only for the problems with hierarchical gender relationships in global politics, they also look for solutions. Having seen the tragic, gendered humanitarian consequences of the sanctions regime, feminists might ask why no one was fixing them. The Iraqi government used people's suffering to advance its political position at the expense of its most vulnerable citizens. Saddam Hussein showed no flexibility which could have saved lives. Whether or not the international community truly believed that the goal of sanctions was worth the catastrophic loss of life in Iraq, many governments in the international arena let people die. Feminists draw attention to the construction of state borders as a way to separate 'self' from 'other' and distance ourselves from the suffering of others. Feminists encourage states and their citizens to reflect on the false perception of separateness and the global

hierarchies thereby created. Deconstructing these hierarchies might lead people to care for, rather than compete with, those others outside state boundaries.

Feminists would conclude that economic sanctions are not isolated areas of conflict within an otherwise peaceful system. Acts of coercion, physical or economic, put in place by both sides to win international competitions are not only violent, but part of a system that is condoning violence, both physical and structural. The sanctions regime on Iraq contributed to the perpetuation of a violent international system in which the most vulnerable people are rarely secure. Feminist IR highlights these gendered insecurities as central to global politics.

Conclusion

We believe that feminist IR has contributed substantially to our understanding of global politics over the last twenty years. Feminists have restored women's visibility, investigated gendered constructions of international concepts and policies, and questioned the naturalness of the gendered categories that shape and are shaped by global politics. First-generation feminist IR scholars have offered theoretical reformulations while second-generation scholars have applied these theoretical reformulations to concrete situations in global politics.

We have provided a brief overview of a number of different IR feminist theories, including liberal, critical, constructivist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial. While we realize it may be an over-simplification, we created this typology to illustrate one of the major goals of feminist IR – to demonstrate that gender relationships inhere in all IR scholarship. Gender relationships are everywhere in global politics; whenever they are not recognized, the silence is loud. IR feminists suggest that all scholars and practitioners of international politics should ask gender questions and be more aware of the gendered implications of global politics. Scholars should ask to what extent their theories are constructed mainly by men and from the lives of men. Practitioners should ask how their policies impact women and whether a lack of women's voices influences their policy choices. Recognizing gender and other hierarchies of power and their implications for the lives of both women and men allows us to begin to degender global politics – from inside the United Nations to inside the home.

In this chapter, we focused on feminist interpretations of security. Security is so important to states that sometimes they pursue sanctions and wars and cause structural violence in the name of preserving or enhancing security. However, in preserving state security members of the international community may violate the security of their own and others' most marginal citizens, notably women, children, the elderly, the poor, and the sick. IR feminists study security at the individual and community level; they notice the differential impacts of security policies on women and marginalized people more generally and interrogate the gendered nature of concepts such as war, security, and the state. The insights they produce reveal some new causes of insecurity at the global level, including gender subordination.

Gender subordination is visible at every level in the Iraq sanctions case. Individual women were disproportionately impacted by the sanctions; gendered states exploited that disparate impact by engaging in gendered discourses of masculine competition. From the policy logic to the effects, sanctions on Iraq were an example of a gendered international security policy. We have laid out a few paths feminists have used in reformulating IR's understandings of sanctions in order to make women and gender relationships visible, and thereby suggest some new ways to enhance security. These suggestions offer IR scholars of all perspectives some new insights into the feminist claim that gender is not just about women but also about the way that international policies are framed, studied, and implemented.



QUESTIONS

1. More than half the world's labour comes in the form of the unpaid, home-based labour of women. If this type of labour was remunerated, labour costs in the global economy would triple. How does women's free labour affect the global economy?
2. Does it make any difference to the foreign policies of states that a vast majority of policy-makers are men? Does it matter to the content of IR scholarship that most of its leading scholars are men?
3. Cynthia Enloe, a prominent IR feminist, has claimed that 'the personal is international and the international is personal' (1990: 195). What does she mean by this?
4. Sanctions against Iraq were a case of extreme humanitarian suffering and political intransigence, but other sanctions have been more successful. Do gendered lenses have anything to say about economic coercion more generally? If so, what?
5. What about the men? How does gender affect men's experiences in everyday life? In global politics?
6. Once we realize that gender plays a pervasive role in global social and political interactions, we begin to ask what we can do about it. Could global politics be degendered?
7. One of the major claims that IR feminists make is that individual lives are global politics. How might your trip to the grocery store, choice of television programming, or choice of internet sites be global politics?
8. The debate about whether or not women should get the vote was a contentious one in most countries. Do women have something different from men to say about global politics? If so, what?
9. Many scholars who work on the humanitarian consequences of war talk about the effect of war on innocent women and children. How might women experience war differently from men?
10. Since feminist insights stretch across different perspectives on IR, this chapter raises the issue as to whether feminism belongs in one chapter of a book about IR theories. How might gendered lenses see the cases in other chapters?
11. Following the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a number of scholars and activists argued that the international laws of war should include a prohibition against genocidal rape. What might a feminist perspective on IR contribute to the discussion of the problem of wartime rape?

12. In his 2002 State of the Union Address to the US Congress, President George W. Bush claimed that 'brutality against women is always and everywhere wrong', implying that brutality against women might justify war. Would a feminist perspective on IR agree?



FURTHER READING

- Peterson, V. Spike and Runyan, Anne Sisson (1999), *Global Gender Issues*, 2nd edn (Boulder CO: Westview). Peterson and Runyan introduce and apply 'gendered lenses' to global politics.
- Tickner, J. Ann (2001), *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Columbia University Press). The author of the first singly authored book in feminist IR lays out a foundation for feminist IR in the twenty-first century.
- Enloe, Cynthia (2000), *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press). Enloe finds the relationship between gender and security in political phenomena as different as a military base and a can of soup, and weaves a framework for feminist security theories from these observations.
- Marchand, Marianne H. and Runyan, Anne Sisson (2000) (eds), *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances* (London and New York: Routledge). This book addresses genderings in the global economy, going beyond the narrow limits of conventional approaches to globalization to reveal the complexities of global restructuring based on gendered economic and social disparities.
- Chin, Christine (1998), *In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian 'Modernity' Project* (New York: Columbia University Press). Chin uses gendered lenses to show that the very private phenomena of home-based labour interacts with and is international relations in important, gendered ways.
- Moon, Katharine H. S. (1997), *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press). Moon demonstrates that international security policy takes place at the level of regulating individual women's lives in Korean prostitution camps.
- Prügl, Elisabeth (1999), *The Global Construction of Gender: Home-based Work in the Political Economy of the 20th Century* (New York: Columbia University Press). Prüggl examines the social, political, and economic dynamics of home-based work in the twentieth century from a feminist constructivist perspective.
- Robinson, Fiona (1999), *Globalising Care: Ethics, Feminist Theory and International Relations* (Oxford: Westview Press). Robinson derives an ethic of care from feminist theories and applies her theoretical insights to the empirical study of care for health and welfare around the world.
- True, Jacqui (2003), *Gender, Globalization, and Post-socialism: The Czech Republic after Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press). True applies the insights of feminist theories of international political economy and international security to post-socialist Eastern Europe.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

- Council of Women World Leaders
www.womenworldleaders.org
- UN Division for the Advancement of Women
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw
- Women in International Security
wiis.georgetown.edu
- MADRE, an international women's human rights organization
www.madre.org
- Global Fund for Women
www.globalfundforwomen.org



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

11

Poststructuralism

DAVID CAMPBELL



Chapter contents

- Introduction
- The interdisciplinary context of poststructuralism
- The reaction of International Relations to poststructuralism
- The critical attitude of poststructuralism
- Understanding discourse
- Discourses of world politics
- Case study
- Conclusion



Reader's guide

The way the discipline of International Relations 'maps' the world shows the importance of representation, the relationship of power and knowledge and the politics of identity to the production and understanding of global politics. Poststructuralism directly engages these issues even though it is not a new paradigm or theory of International Relations. It is, rather, a critical attitude or ethos that explores the assumptions that make certain ways of being, acting, and knowing possible. This chapter details how and why poststructuralism engaged International Relations from the 1980s onwards. It explores the interdisciplinary context of social and political theory from which poststructuralism emerged, and examines the misconceptions evident in the reception this approach received from mainstream theorists. The chapter details what the critical attitude of poststructuralism means for social and political inquiry. Focusing on the work of Michel Foucault, it shows the importance of discourse, identity, subjectivity, and power to this approach, and discusses the methodological features employed by poststructuralists in their readings of, and interventions in, international politics. The chapter concludes with a case study of images of humanitarian crises that illustrates the poststructural approach.

Introduction

Interpretation, mapping, and meta-theory

Every discussion and every understanding of international politics depends upon abstraction, representation, and interpretation. That is because 'the world' does not present itself to us in the form of ready-made categories, theories, or statements. As the French philosopher-historian Michel Foucault (1984b: 127) has argued, 'the world does not provide us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know.' This means whenever we write or speak of 'the realm of anarchy', the 'end of the Cold War', 'gendered relations of power', 'globalization', 'humanitarian intervention', 'finance capital' – indeed, when we employ any term to grasp the meaning of events and issues – we are engaging in abstraction, representation, and interpretation. No matter what particular perspectives claim, even the most 'objective' theory that claims to offer a perfect resemblance or mirror image of things does not escape the inevitability and indispensability of interpretation (Bleiker 2001).

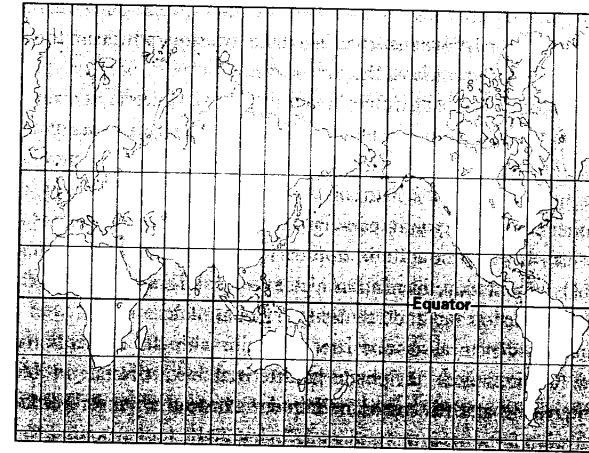
Political leaders, social activists, scholars, and students are all involved in the abstraction, representation, and interpretation of 'the world' whether they engage in the practice, theory, or study of international relations. This does not mean, however, that anyone can simply make things up and have the products of their imagination count as legitimate knowledge. That is because the dominant understandings of world politics are both *arbitrary* and *non-arbitrary*: arbitrary in the sense that they are but one possibility among a range of possibilities, and non-arbitrary in the sense that certain social and historical practices have given rise to dominant ways of making 'the world' that have very real effects upon our lives.

The dominant interpretations of 'the world' have been established by the discipline of International Relations, which traditionally talks of states and their policy-makers pursuing interests and providing security, of conflict and the need to balance power, of stability and the danger of anarchy, of economic relations and their material effects, of the rights of those who are being badly treated. The 'we' who talk in this way do so from a particular vantage point. 'We' are often white, Western, affluent, and comfortable. These representations, then, are related to our identities, and they establish a discourse of identity politics (primarily organized around the state) as the favoured frame of reference for world politics.

This highlights the relationship between knowledge and power. It is commonplace to say that 'knowledge is power', but this assumes they are synonymous rather than related. The production of maps illustrates the significance of the relationship between knowledge and power and the inevitability of interpretation. Maps are not simply inert records or passive reflections of the world of objects. They are selective in their content, particular in their styles, and limited in their subjects. They favour, promote, and influence specific sets of social relations (Harley 1988).

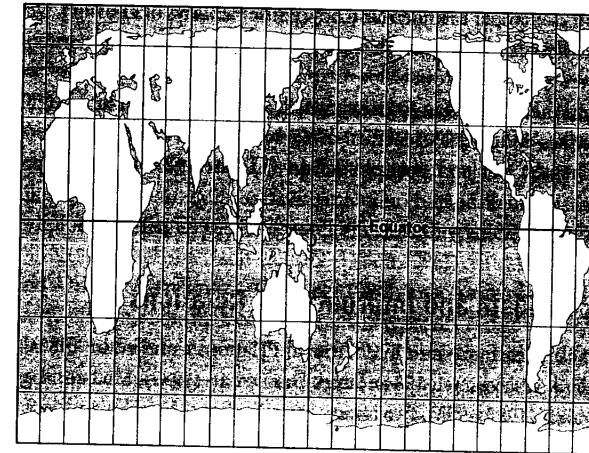
Consider the commonly used Mercator projection (Figure 11.1). Drafted in 1569 in order to provide the direct lines necessary for navigation, it placed Europe at the centre and put two-thirds of the world's landmass in the Northern Hemisphere. This representation

Figure 11.1 The Mercator projection (Pacific central).



Source: Oxford University Press.

Figure 11.2 The Peters projection (Pacific central).



Source: Oxford University Press.

supported the British Empire, and later reinforced Cold War perceptions of the Soviet threat (Monmonier 1996). Contrast this to the Peters projection, developed in the 1970s (Figure 11.2). This was based on equal-area projection which de-emphasized Europe and the North, and gave greater prominence to the South. Although not the first equal-area projection (which had been available since 1772) it was technically more accurate.

The Peters projection was significant because it came to prominence at a time of Third World political assertiveness in the United Nations, and was promoted by UN agencies keen to secure more resources for development. The Peters projection is, therefore, a manifestation of the power relations that challenged the two superpowers in the 1970s, and a form of knowledge which promoted the global South.

International Relations as a discipline 'maps' the world. However, it is only the critical perspectives – and poststructuralism in particular – which put the issues of interpretation and representation, power and knowledge, and the politics of identity at the forefront of concerns. Because of this poststructuralism is not a model or theory of international relations. Rather than setting out a paradigm through which everything is understood, poststructuralism is a critical attitude, approach, or ethos which calls attention to the importance of representation, the relationship of power and knowledge, and the politics of identity in the production and understanding of global affairs.

This means poststructuralism does not fit easily with the conventional view that International Relations is a discipline characterized by a diverse set of paradigms competing in 'great debates' (discussed in Chapter 1). Instead of being regarded as another school with its own favoured actors and issues to highlight, poststructuralism needs to be understood as promoting a new set of questions and concerns. This function – as a critical attitude rather than theory – means poststructuralism has a different perspective on the relationship between theory and practice. Instead of seeing a distinction *between* theory and practice, it sees theory *as* practice. This comes about because, in the first instance, poststructuralism poses a series of meta-theoretical questions – questions about the theory of theory – in order to understand how particular ways of knowing, what counts as knowing, and who can know (which includes other theories and theorists), have been established over time. In this context, poststructuralism is part and parcel of a wider group of critical social theories. It is an approach which comes from prior and extensive debates in the humanities and social science, in a manner akin to critical theory (Chapter 8), feminism (Chapter 10), and postcolonialism (Chapter 12). Like those perspectives, poststructuralism enters the study of international relations once the possibility of posing meta-theoretical questions within the discipline has been established.

Poststructuralism and International Relations

Poststructuralism's entrance into International Relations came in the 1980s through the work of Richard Ashley (1981, 1984), James Der Derian (1987), Michael Shapiro (1988), and R. B. J. Walker (1987, 1993). Two important collections (Der Derian and Shapiro 1989; Ashley and Walker 1990) brought together the early studies. These focused mostly on articulating the meta-theoretical critique of realist and neorealist theories to demonstrate how the theoretical assumptions of the traditional perspectives shaped what could be said about international politics. What drove many of these contributions was an awareness of how other branches of the social sciences and humanities had witnessed significant debates about how knowledge of the world was constructed. Recognizing that the dominant approaches to International Relations were unaware, uninterested, or hostile to such questions, the above authors sought to connect International Relations to its

interdisciplinary context by introducing new sources of theory. The motivation for the turn to poststructuralism was not purely theoretical, however. Critical scholars were dissatisfied with the way realism – and its revivification at that time through neorealism – remained powerful in the face of new global transformations. These scholars felt that realism marginalized the importance of new transnational actors, issues, and relationships and failed to hear (let alone appreciate) the voices of excluded peoples and perspectives. As such, poststructuralism began with an ethical concern to include those who had been overlooked or excluded by the mainstream of International Relations.

In focusing on the conceptual and political practices that included some and excluded others, poststructural approaches were concerned with how the relations of inside and outside were mutually constructed. For realism, the state marked the border between inside/outside, sovereign/anarchic, us/them. Accordingly, poststructuralism began by questioning how the state came to be regarded as the most important actor in world politics, and how the state came to be understood as a unitary, rational actor. Poststructuralism was thus concerned at the outset with the *practices of statecraft* that made the state and its importance seem both natural and necessary. This approach is not anti-state, it does not overlook the state, nor does it seek to move beyond the state. In many respects, poststructuralism pays more attention to the state than realism, because – instead of merely asserting that the state is the foundation of its paradigm – poststructuralism is concerned with the state's historical and conceptual production, and its political formation, economic constitution, and social exclusions.

After the first wave of meta-theoretical critiques, subsequent studies employing a poststructural approach – while continuing to develop the theoretical basis for their alternative interpretations – engaged political events and questions directly. This research includes analyses of state identity and foreign policy in Korea, Bosnia, and the USA (Bleiker 2005; Campbell 1992, 1998b, 2005); studies of the gendered character of state identity in the context of US intervention (Weber 1994, 1999); studies of the centrality of representation in North–South relations and immigration policies (Doty 1993, 1996) a deconstructive account of famine and humanitarian crises (Edkins 2000); interpretive readings of diplomacy and European security (Constantinou 1995, 1996); the radical rethinking of international order and security (Dillon 1996); critical analyses of international law and African sovereignties (Grovougi 1996); a recasting of ecopolitics (Kuehls 1996); the rearticulation of the refugee regime and sovereignty (Soguk 1999); a problematization of the UN and peacekeeping (Debrix 1999); a semiotic reading of militarism in Hawaii (Ferguson and Turnbull 1998); investigations of contemporary warfare, strategic identities, security landscapes, and representations of sovereignty (Coward 2002, Der Derian 1992, 2001; Dillon 2003; Dillon and Reid 2001; Klein 1994; Lisle and Pepper 2005); a reinterpretation of area studies (Philpott 2001); and a rethinking of finance and the field of international political economy (de Goede 2005, 2006).

This list is not exhaustive, nor is it the case that all the authors cited would willingly accept the label 'poststructural' for their work. Nonetheless, their work intersects with, and would not have been possible without, an interdisciplinary debate that called into question the authority of the positivist meta-theoretical assumptions which secured realist and other traditional perspectives in International Relations. Before detailing what a

poststructuralist perspective involves, it is necessary, therefore, to outline the key elements of this interdisciplinary debate.

The interdisciplinary context of poststructuralism

Positivism and science in question

International Relations has been shaped by the influence of science and technology in the development of the modern world. The potential for control and predictive capacity that the natural sciences seemed to offer provided a model that social scientists sought to emulate. This model, **positivism**, was founded on the empiricist theory of knowledge, which argued that sensory experience provides the only legitimate source of knowledge. 'Experience' refers to direct sensory access to an external reality comprising material things. As an epistemology (a meta-theory concerning how we know), the empiricist conception of knowledge understands knowledge as deriving from a relationship between a given subject (the person that knows) and a given object (that which is known).

These theoretical developments were central to a major historical transformation – the intellectual clash in the Renaissance period between the church and science which challenged the dominance of theology for social order. These intellectual developments, named as the Enlightenment, included making 'man' and 'reason', rather than 'god' and 'belief', the centre of philosophical discourse, and the construction and legitimation of the state, rather than the church, as the basis for political order. It was a moment in which knowledge intersected with power to lasting effect. Although the Enlightenment conception of knowledge was intended to free humanity from religious dogma, it was eventually transformed into a dogma itself. By the end of the nineteenth century, its dominance meant that knowledge was equated with science and reason limited to scientific reason. This dogmatization of science meant that social life is centred on technical control over nature and administrative control over humans, so that political issues became questions of order and efficiency.

The positivist account of science at the base of Enlightenment thought is founded upon three empiricist assumptions. First, **epistemic realism**: the view that there is an external world, the existence and meaning of which is independent of anything the observer does. Second, the assumption of a *universal scientific language*: the belief that this external world can be described in a language that does not presuppose anything, thereby allowing the observer to remain detached and dispassionate. Third, the **correspondence theory of truth**: that the observer can capture the facts of the world in statements that are true if they correspond to the facts and false if they do not. We can see these assumptions in Hans Morgenthau's classic text when he writes that a theory must 'approach political reality with a kind of rational outline' and distinguish 'between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgement,

divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking' (Morgenthau 1978: 3–4).

Post-empiricism in science

A number of intellectual developments have demonstrated that the positivist understanding of scientific procedure that the social sciences have tried to model does not actually represent the conduct of scientific inquiry. The 'linguistic turn' in Anglo-American philosophy was a move away from the idea that language is a transparent medium through which the world can be comprehended – a view that suggested it was possible to get 'behind' language and 'ground' knowledge in the world itself – towards an account of language that understood it as embedded in social practice and inseparable from the world (Rorty 1967). Allied with the development of hermeneutic thought in continental philosophy – a tradition originally concerned with the reading of biblical, classical, and legal texts which developed into an account of the importance of interpretation to being human – these shifts contributed to a new understanding of the relationship between language and reality (see George 1994). Developments in the philosophy of science itself – especially what are called the postpositivist and post-empiricist debates (see Hesse 1980) – have also challenged the validity of the positivist account. These developments have also contributed to a reappraisal of science through social studies that question the value of 'facts' and the meaning of 'objectivity' for social inquiry (Megill 1994; Poovey 1998). Finally, the development of complexity science (including chaos theory and other new approaches to regularity) extends even further the challenge to 'common sense' assumptions of what counts as science and how it is conducted, and links contemporary understandings of science with poststructuralism (Dillon 2000). Given this, poststructuralism is in no sense anti-science.

In the philosophy of science, the post-empiricist debates focused on the core of the contention between positivists and anti-positivists: the Enlightenment conception of knowledge. For the Enlightenment the search for truth meant the search for foundations, facts that could 'ground' knowledge. The post-empiricist perspective is thus concerned with the rejection of such *foundational* thought (such as the claim that the state is the organizing principle of international relations, or that ethical theory requires established rules of justice as grounds for judging right from wrong), which it achieves through a new understanding of the subject/object relationship in theories of knowledge. Post-empiricists conceive of this relationship as one in which the two terms construct each other rather than the fundamental opposition of two pre-given entities. This undermining of the separation of subjects and objects means any claim to knowledge that relies on dichotomies analogous to the subject/object dualism (e.g. facts against values, objective knowledge versus subjective prejudice, or empirical observation in contrast to normative concerns) 'is ... epistemologically unwarranted' (Bernstein 1979: 230; Bernstein 1983).

The end result is that in place of the basic assumptions of epistemic realism, a universal scientific language and the correspondence theory of truth that lay behind positivist understandings of science and the Enlightenment conception of knowledge, all inquiry – in *both* the human sciences and the natural sciences – has to be concerned with the social constitution of meaning, the linguistic construction of reality, and the

historicity of knowledge. This reaffirms the indispensability of interpretation, and suggests that all knowledge involves a relationship with power in its mapping of the world.

The reaction of International Relations to poststructuralism

Critical anxiety

As we shall see, these dimensions are present in and help make possible the poststructuralist accounts of politics and international relations introduced above, even as those accounts go beyond the priority given to language in the constitution of reality that marks constructivist approaches to international politics. We need to be clear, then, about the similarities and differences in the critical approaches to International Relations. An awareness of these distinctions, however, is something that has been absent from the responses the critical approaches have provoked in the field.

Those who have objected to the meta-theoretical critiques of realism, neorealism, and the like, particularly the way those critiques have called into question the reliance on external reality, foundations, objectivity, and the transparency of language, have often called those critiques 'postmodern', even though there are few if any scholars who use that label, and many who explicitly reject it (see Campbell 1992: 246–7).

In one of the first assessments of the meta-theoretical critiques, Robert Keohane (1988) dichotomized the field into 'rationalists' versus 'reflectivists' and castigated the critical approaches of the latter position for lacking social scientific rigour. Keohane faulted the critical approaches for failing to embrace the empiricist standards concerning research agendas, hypothesis construction, and testing that would (in his eyes) lend them credibility. However, in making his claims, Keohane failed to demonstrate an awareness or understanding of the challenge posed by post-empiricist developments in the philosophy of science for his supposedly objective criteria (see Bleiker 1997). Subsequently accused of 'self-righteousness' (Wallace 1996), lambasted as 'evil' and 'dangerous' (Krasner 1996), castigated for 'bad IR' and 'meta-babble' (Halliday 1996), misread as 'philosophical idealism' (Mearsheimer 1994/5), and considered congenitally irrational (Østerud 1996), those named as 'postmodernists' have been anything but welcomed by the mainstream of International Relations (see Devetak 2001 for the best review using this term). Aside from their unwillingness to engage ways of thinking they regarded as 'foreign', these critics reacted as if the questioning of critical approaches meant that the traditional containers of politics (especially the state) and the capacity to judge right from wrong were being rejected. In so doing, they mistook arguments about the historical production of foundations for the claim that all foundations had to be rejected.

When theoretical contests provoke such vehemence, it indicates that there is something larger at stake than different epistemologies. As Connolly (2004) has argued, different methodologies express in one way or another deep attachments – understood as

metaphysical commitments or existential faith – on behalf of those who advocate them. For those who take such intense objection to the critical perspectives they herd together and brand as 'postmodern', their faith is a particular understanding of science. Their attachment to that faith in science – despite the debates in the philosophy of science that demonstrate how their understanding of science cannot be supported through reason – in turn derives from an anxiety about what the absence of secure foundations means for ethics and politics. Bernstein (1983) has named this the 'Cartesian Anxiety', because in the philosophy of Descartes the quest was to find a secure ground for knowledge. The Cartesian Anxiety is the fear that, given the demise of objectivity, we are unable to make judgements that have been central to the understanding of modern life, namely distinguishing between true and false, good and bad. The challenge, though, is to escape from the straightjacket in which intellectual understanding and political life has to be organized by recourse to either one option or the other. The post-empiricist debates in the philosophy of science have demonstrated that dualistic or dichotomous frameworks are unstable. We need, in Bernstein's (1983) words, to move beyond objectivism and relativism. We need to develop modes of interpretation that allow judgements about social and political issues at home and abroad while accepting, first, that such judgements cannot be secured by claims about a pre-existing, external reality and, second, such arguments cannot be limited by invoking dichotomies such as fact/value or objective/subjective.

Poststructuralism misunderstood as postmodernism

By labelling the critical perspectives which deal with interpretation and representation in international politics as 'postmodern', the critics are suggesting that it is modernity which they believe to be under threat. If we are to understand what is meant by this label of postmodernism, we also have to be concerned with modernism. What is meant by this term?

'Modernism' refers to the predominant cultural style of the period from the 1890s to the outbreak of the Second World War, encompassing the ideas and values in the painting, sculpture, music, architecture, design, and literature of that period. Modernism was part of the great upheavals in political, sociological, scientific, sexual, and familial orders in Europe and the USA. It was also part of colonialism and imperialism, in which these aesthetic and technological transformations radically affected the political, sociological, scientific, sexual, and familial orders of non-Western societies. Modernism had much to do with large technological and scientific transformations which made the early twentieth century a time of both infectious optimism and unsettled fear. It was an era which saw the industrial revolution produce mass railways, the first aircraft, automobiles, light bulbs, photography, films, and a host of other mechanical inventions. These machines offered the hope of improved social conditions, increased wealth, and the possibility of overcoming human limitations. But their impact on pre-mechanized ways of life made people fear for the existing social order, at the same time as they compressed time and space in the global order. Modernism was the cultural response to this change, evident in the abstract art of the Cubists (like Picasso and Braque) whose work distorted perspectives and favoured manufactured objects over natural environments (see Hughes 1991; Kern 1983). Its aim was to represent, interpret, and provide critical commentary on modern life.

The faith in technology of the early modernists was soon extinguished in the First World War. The great machines of promise turned into technologies of mass slaughter. The future lost its allure, and art became full of irony, disgust, and protest. In the imperial domain of Europe the questioning of modernism fuelled anti-colonial nationalism. In this context, 'modernism' was a political intervention in a specific cultural context that had global affects. But, after fascism in Europe, another world war, the Holocaust, and the process of decolonization, the critical edge of modernism was spent. Modernist cultural forms lost any sense of newness and possibility.

It is against this background that 'postmodernism' emerged during the period after the Second World War, representing and interpreting the indeterminate, pluralistic, and ever more globalized culture of the Cold War world. In literature, art, architecture, and music the term 'postmodern' designated a particular, often eclectic, approach to this cultural context. (Examples here include the painting of Andy Warhol, the intermingling of styles in the architecture of Charles Jencks, and the music of Madonna.) In this context, 'postmodernism' refers to cultural forms inspired by the conditions of accelerated time and space and hyper-consumerism that we experience in the globalized era some call 'postmodernity'.

Many of the problems associated with the concept of 'postmodernism' come from the misleading periodization associated with the prefix 'post'. Many critics of postmodernism attack it by arguing that it assumes a temporal break with modernity. They argue that the term 'postmodernity' assumes that we live in an historical epoch that is quite distinct from, and in some way replaces, 'modernity'. However, as Jameson (1991) has argued, the structure of postmodernity that critical, interpretive approaches seek to engage historically is not a new order that has displaced modernity. It is, rather, a cultural, economic, social, and political problematic marked by the rearticulation of time and space in the modern world (see also Harvey 1989). It is evident in developments such as financial speculation and flexible accumulation that depart from the modern, industrial forms of capitalism rooted in the exploitation of labour in the production process.

Much of the confusion and hostility surrounding the concept of 'postmodernism' in International Relations stems from the mistaken idea that those deploying an interpretative analytic to critically understand the transformations in modernity are celebrating the apparently shallow and accelerated cultural context that has challenged many of modernity's certainties. While 'postmodernity' is the cultural, economic, social, and political formation *within* modernity that results from changes in time-space relations, poststructuralism is one of the interpretative analytics that critically engages with the production and implication of these transformations.

The critical attitude of poststructuralism

Political context

In philosophical terms a number of the scholars who resist the mistaken label of 'post-modernism' are more comfortable with the term 'poststructuralism'. 'Poststructuralism' is

a distinct philosophical domain which has a critical relation to structuralism, modernity, and postmodernity. The 'structuralist' philosophical movement is associated with 'modernist' cultural forces. Structuralism was a largely French philosophical perspective associated with linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and cultural critic Roland Barthes.² Structuralists aimed to study the social and cultural construction of the various structures that give meaning to our everyday lives. Poststructuralism is equally concerned to analyse such meaning-producing structures, but in a manner consistent with transformations in the social order of the late twentieth century.

The events that influenced poststructuralism were associated with the resistance struggles against established and imperial power blocs, such as the Algerian and Vietnam wars, the Prague Spring of 1968, the May 1968 movement in France, cultural expression in Yugoslavia, demands for Third World economic justice and the civil rights, and environmental and women's movements in the USA and elsewhere. According to the French philosopher Giles Deleuze (1988: 150) these events were part of an international movement which 'linked the emergence of new forms of struggle to the production of a new subjectivity'. In other words, these struggles, unlike the revolutionary movements of the early twentieth century, were not concerned with freeing a universal 'mankind' from the chains imposed upon it by society, but with reworking political subjectivity given the globalizing forms of late capitalism. This context means poststructuralism has important things to say about the concept of identity in political life.

Michel Foucault: limits, ethos, and critique

The critical attitude of poststructuralism can be found in the writing of numerous thinkers.³ For the purposes of simplicity, this chapter will focus on the work of Michel Foucault. Thinking the present historically involves an ethos of what Foucault has called 'the limit attitude'. It involves considering the limits that give meaning to our thought and practice – for example reason and rationality is given meaning by the establishing of limits at which unreason and irrationality are said to begin. Moreover, a 'limit attitude' involves interrogating those limits, not by getting rid of, escaping, or transcending them, but by contesting and negotiating them through argumentation.

This critical attitude is consistent with the Enlightenment project to critically interrogate the conditions of human existence and is animated by an emancipatory ideal. The critical attitude is emancipatory insofar as it draws out the limits that shape existence and in so doing gives the conditions under which such limits – and the exclusions they entail – can be challenged. Although those dismissive of 'postmodernism' claim that it is an anti-modern and anti-Enlightenment position, to talk in those terms (anti- versus pro-Enlightenment) is to replicate the either/or exclusionary logic that Foucault terms the 'blackmail of the Enlightenment'. Rather than succumbing to such gestures of rejection, Foucault argues that the attitude of modernity has had from its beginnings an ongoing relationship with attitudes of 'counter-modernity'. This agonism is itself characteristic of and inherent in the Enlightenment, for, in Foucault's terms, what connects us with the Enlightenment 'is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as

a permanent critique of our era' (Foucault 1984a: 42). Poststructuralism, then, is first and foremost an approach rather than a theory. As Foucault argues:

“ The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. ”

Foucault 1984a: 50

As an approach, attitude, or ethos, poststructuralism is inherently critical. Critique, though, is a positive rather than negative attitude. It is about disclosing the assumptions and limits that have made things as they are, so that what appears natural and without alternative can be rethought and reworked. Critique is thus also inescapably ethical, because it is concerned with change. As Foucault writes:

“ A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest. We must free ourselves from the sacralization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life and in human relations as thought . . . It is something that is often hidden, but which always animates everyday behavior. There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits. Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. ”

Foucault 1988: 154–5. See Campbell 1992: ch. 9

Taking these arguments into account, we can see that poststructuralism has a lot in common with the attitude of Frankfurt school critical theory (see Chapter 8). Indeed poststructuralism also has much in common with the post-empiricist debates outlined earlier. It has a similar disdain for foundationalism (ideas of grounding thought on universal rules that exist independently of the observer), shares the view that language is central to the constitution of social life, and agrees that the historicity of knowledge (the historical production of knowledge in socio-cultural structures and, hence, the refutation of the idea of universal/timeless knowledge) is a major concern.

Subjectivity, identity, and power

However, poststructuralism differs from Frankfurt school thought in ways that are important to the analysis of international relations. Most importantly, poststructuralism takes a different conception of the human subject. Whereas much of Frankfurt school critical theory takes critique to involve the uncovering or emancipation of a 'humanity' whose autonomy and freedom is bound by ideology, Foucault's work involves creating 'a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects'

(Foucault 1982: 208). For Foucault, the modern individual is an historical achievement. This is to say that there is no 'universal person' – a human-being that has been the unchanging basis for all history – on whom power has operated throughout all time. Rather, the individual human is an effect of the operations of power. Similarly, there is no 'human nature' shared by all members of the species – the nature of individuals, their humanity, is produced by certain power structures. Foucault's poststructuralism is thus offering the most thoroughgoing questioning of foundations around. That is because it is a questioning of foundations that includes the category of 'man' as well as the bases upon which social and political order is constructed. Foucault is thus concerned with forms of subjectivity. What are the subjects of politics? If they are 'humans', in what way is the 'human' subject constituted historically? How have the identities of women/men, Western/Eastern, North/South, civilized/uncivilized, developed/underdeveloped, mad/sane, domestic/foreign, rational/irrational, and so on, been constituted over time and in different places? All of which means that *identity*, *subjectivism*, and *power* are key concepts for poststructuralism.

Foucault's focus on the constitution of the subject is in accord with poststructuralism's concern with the dualisms which structure human experience. In particular, it is concerned with the interior/exterior (inside/outside) binary according to which that which is inside is deemed to be the self, good, primary, and original while the outside is the other, dangerous, secondary, and derivative. French philosopher Jacques Derrida has approached this issue through his strategy of deconstruction – reversing the original order of the binary pair of terms to demonstrate how the exclusion of the second term is central to the first (Culler 1982). In this argument, the outside is always central to the constitution of the inside; the insane is central to the constitution of what it is to be sane or rational; the criminal is central to the constitution of the law-abiding citizen; and the foreign is pivotal in understanding the domestic. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979) demonstrates how what the prison confines is as much the identity of society outside the walls as it is the prisoners on the inside. The good, civilized society is constituted by the bad, barbaric prisoners it confines. When drug abuse and prostitution are made pathological by being criminalized, the effect is to normalize a moral order in which certain behaviours are excluded.

The critique of inside/outside dualisms leads poststructuralist thinkers to emphasize the importance of studying cultural practices. Instead of claiming that reality is understood by isolating the internal nature of the object studied (e.g. states and their desire to maximize power) poststructuralism studies the cultural practices through which the inclusions and exclusions that give meaning to binary pairs are established. This shift to cultural practices means that poststructuralist thinkers refuse to take any identity – individual or collective – as given and unproblematic. Rather, they see identity as culturally constructed through a series of exclusions. The particular events, problems, actors that are recognized in history are thereby understood as constituted by an order always dependent upon the marginalization and exclusion of other identities and histories. This means there are considerable affinities between poststructuralism and postcolonialism.

The emphasis on practices of exclusion in poststructural accounts involves a different understanding of power. For Foucault power is not simply *repressive* (i.e. imposing limits and constraints on the infinite possibilities of the world) but is *productive* because of the imposition of limits and constraints. Relations of power establish the limitations of

self/other, inside/relation to outside, but without those limitations those notions of self/inside, other/outside would not exist. The limitations are therefore productive: we know what that thing *is* by knowing what it is *not*. Foucault calls this productive power 'disciplinary power', power that disciplines in order to produce a certain political subject. The aim of poststructural analysis is, therefore, not to eliminate exclusion (since that is what makes meaning possible) but to understand the various forms of exclusion that constitute the world as we find it, understand how they come to be and how they continue to operate, and make possible interventions that can articulate alternatives.

Understanding discourse

Language, reality, and performance

The operations of disciplinary power, and the conceptions of subjectivity and identity to which it gives rise, takes place within discourse. Discourse refers to a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible. Those employing the concept are often said to be claiming that 'everything is language', that 'there is no reality', and, because of their linguistic idealism, they are unable to take a political position and defend an ethical stance abounds.

These objections demonstrate how understandings of discourse are bedevilled by the view that interpretation involves only language in contrast to the external, the real, and the material. These dichotomies of idealism/materialism and realism/idealism remain powerful conceptions of understanding the world. In practice, however, a concern with discourse does not involve a denial of the world's existence or the significance of materiality. This is well articulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 108): 'the fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition . . . What is denied is not that . . . objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside of any discursive condition of emergence.' This means that while nothing exists outside of discourse, there are important distinctions between linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. There are also modes of representation which are ideational though strictly non-linguistic, such as the aesthetic and pictorial. It is just that there is no way of comprehending non-linguistic and extra-discursive phenomena except through discursive practices.

Understanding discourse as involving both the ideal and the material, the linguistic and the non-linguistic, means that discourses are performative. Performative means that discourses constitute the objects of which they speak. For example, states are made possible by a wide range of discursive practices that include immigration policies, military deployments and strategies, cultural debates about normal social behaviour, political speeches, and economic investments. The meanings, identities, social relations, and political assemblages that are enacted in these performances combine the ideal and the material. As a consequence, appreciating that discourses are performative moves us away

from a reliance on the idea of (social) *construction* towards *materialization*, whereby discourse 'stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface' (Butler 1993: 9, 12). Discourse is thus not something that subjects use in order to describe objects; it is that which constitutes both subjects and objects.

Discourse, materialism, and meaning

Within International Relations, there has been much misunderstanding of discourse in these terms. Even some constructivists (Wendt 1999) maintain a strict sense of the material world external to language as a determinant of social and political truth. When faced with poststructural arguments, they will maintain that no discursive understanding can help you when faced with something as material as a bullet in the head (Wendt 1999: 113; Krasner 1999: 51; cf. Zehfuss 2002). At first glance, this appears irrefutable. So how would a poststructuralist respond? First, they would say that the issue is not one of the materiality of the bullet or the reality of death for the individual when struck by the bullet in a particular way. The undeniable existence of that world external to thought is not the issue. Second, they would say that such a world – the body lying on the ground, the bullet in the head, and the shell casing lying not far away – tells us nothing itself about the meaning and significance of those elements. They would say that the constitution of the event and its elements is a product of its discursive condition of emergence, something that occurs via the contestation of competing narratives. Did the body and the bullet get to be as they are because of suicide, manslaughter, murder, ethnic cleansing, tribal war, genocide, a war of inter-state rivalry, or . . . ? Each of those terms signifies a larger discursive formation through which a whole set of identities, social relations, political possibilities, and ethical outcomes are made more or less possible. Whichever figuration emerges as the accepted or dominant one has little to do with the materiality of specific elements and much to do with power of particular discourses materializing elements into comprehensible forms with political effects. Therefore, focusing specifically on the bullets that riddled their bodies tells us very little about those circumstances beyond the fact people died, something that occurs in many other dissimilar circumstances. Not least it fails to tell us how people, knowing full well the likely futility of their actions in the face of overwhelming force, nonetheless sacrifice themselves. That is an explanation which is going to require, among other things, that attention be paid to discourses of loyalty, pride, and the nation. If in International Relations we limit ourselves to the immediate cause and context of material events we will be unable to understand the larger ethical and political issues.

Discourses of world politics

Theory as the object of analysis

Understanding discourse as performative materialization, rather than linguistic construction, takes us beyond the idea that it is just a practice employed by the subjects of international relations (be they states, institutions, or trans-national actors). We need to

consider not only the international relations discourse various actors are involved in but also the discourse of International Relations – the modes of representation that give rise to the subjects of international relations and constitute the domain to which International Relations theory is purportedly only responding.

This means poststructural accounts – in addition to the concern with the representations invoked by the actors of world politics – investigate the practices that constitute entities called ‘actors’ capable of representation. This includes the cultural, economic, social, and political practices that produce particular actors (e.g. states, non-government organizations, and the like). It also includes investigating the role of theorists and theory in representing some actors as more significant than others. In this latter sense, this means that instead of theory being understood as simply a *tool for analysis* poststructuralism treats theory as an *object of analysis*. This reorientation, which derives from poststructuralism’s status as an approach to criticism rather than a critical theory *per se*, is no less practical in its implications. It asks, for both theorists and practitioners of international relations, how do analytic approaches privilege certain understandings of global politics and marginalize or exclude others?

This approach is evident in arguments that offer historical, theoretical, and political rereadings of the traditional concerns of International Relations. For example, Walker (1993) has investigated the way that many realist questions and answers have been produced via a particular reading of Machiavelli. His conclusion is that the dominant tradition in International Relations has endorsed a narrow ahistorical reading of the paradigmatic realist which has given us the slogans of power over ethics, ends justifying means, and the necessity of violence. Similarly, in identifying anarchy as integral to realist thought, Ashley (1984, 1988) demonstrated that its status as a ‘given’ is a matter not of factual observation but part of a particular discursive strategy which disciplines our understanding of the multiple and ambiguous events of world politics through hierarchies such as sovereign/anarchic, domestic/international, objective/subjective, real/ideal, is/ought, and masculine/feminine. This means that the problematization of ‘reality’ offers two possible solutions of which only one can be chosen: e.g. sovereignty or anarchy. The operation of this ‘anarchy problematique’ results in world politics being mapped into zones of sovereignty and zones of anarchy with sovereignty being normatively superior to anarchy.

From subjects to subjectivity

One of the most important functions of these historical and theoretical critiques has been to demonstrate that what we take to be real, timeless, and universal in both the domain of international relations and field of International Relations is produced through the imposition of a form of order. A poststructural approach seeks, therefore, to make strange and denaturalize taken-for-granted perspectives. Important here are the discourses of danger we consume as citizens of a modern state. In an argument examining US foreign policy towards Central America, Shapiro (1988: ch. 3) shows that foreign policy can be understood as the process of making ‘strange’ the object under consideration in order to differentiate it from ‘us’. In the case of the construction of the ‘Central American Other’, the moral and geopolitical codes of US foreign policy discourse make US intervention in the

region seem necessary, both in terms of US interests and the subject state’s own good. Campbell (1992) developed this account to show that US foreign policy generally should be seen as a series of political practices which locate danger in the external realm – threats to ‘individuality’, ‘freedom’, and ‘civilization’ – thereby constructing the boundary between the domestic and the international, which brings the identity of the USA into existence. Together these arguments examine the practices of statecraft that produce ‘the state’ as an actor in international relations and the practices of statecraft that produce the identity of particular states. As such, these arguments are directly concerned with the state so they cannot be understood as being against the state or its importance. They focus on the production and meaning of the state rather than simply assuming or asserting that states exist naturally as particular identities.

These examples build upon poststructuralism’s concern with subjectivity, identity, and power. In general, they shift analysis from assumptions about pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity and its political enactment. This is achieved through three methodological precepts, which can be understood by contrasting them to the basic assumptions of the traditional approaches to International Relations.

Methodological precepts: interpretation, representation, politics

The most common meta-theoretical discourse among mainstream theories is committed to an epistemic realism, whereby the world comprises objects the existence of which is independent of ideas or beliefs about them. This commitment sanctions two other analytic forms common to the field: a narrativizing historiography in which things have a self-evident quality that allows them to speak for themselves; and a logic of explanation in which the purpose of analysis is to identify those self-evident things and material causes so that actors can accommodate themselves to the realm of necessity they create.

Contrary to the claims of epistemic realism, a poststructural approach maintains that because understanding involves rendering the unfamiliar in the terms of the familiar, interpretation is unavoidable and such that there is nothing outside discourse, even though there is a material world external to thought. Contrary to a narrativizing historiography, a poststructural approach employs a mode of historical representation which self-consciously adopts a perspective, a perspective grounded in the view that identity is always constituted in relationship to difference. Because of this, poststructural approaches need to be understood as interventions in conventional understandings or established practices. And, contrary to the logic of causal explanation, a poststructural approach works with a logic of interpretation that acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the ‘real causes’, and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another. As such, poststructural approaches identify and explain how actors, events, or issues have been problematized. This means poststructuralism examines the ‘problematizations’ which make it possible to think of contemporary problems, and then examines how that discourse has emerged historically to frame an understanding of problems and solutions (Campbell 1998a: preface).



Case study: images of humanitarian crises

As an approach that adopts a critical stance in relation to its objects of concern, poststructuralism differs from other theoretical perspectives in International Relations. Because it does not seek to formulate a theory of international relations, it does not outline a detailed scheme of international politics in which some actors, issues, and relations are privileged at the expense of others. As such, poststructuralism can therefore concern itself with an almost boundless array of actors, issues, and events. The choice of actor, issue, or event is up to the analyst undertaking a poststructural analysis. Because of this, there is no one set of actors, issues, or events that would illustrate poststructuralism better than others.

The case study chosen to illustrate poststructuralism here concerns visual images of humanitarian disaster, especially famine. Visual imagery can be approached from a range of theoretical positions, but in the way it calls attention to questions of interpretation, perspective, and their political effects, it is well suited to demonstrate aspects of a poststructural account. It also reminds us that discourse should not be confined to the linguistic (Rose 2001: chs 6, 7).

Visual imagery is of particular importance for international politics because it is one of the principal ways in which news from distant places is brought home. Indeed, ever since early explorers made a habit of taking cameras on their travels, photographs have provided much basic information about the people and places encountered on those travels. Much like cartography, these images contributed to the development of an 'imagined geography' in which the dichotomies of West/East, civilized/barbaric, North/South, and developed/underdeveloped have been prominent (Said 1979; Gregory 1995). Since the advent of technology for moving images (i.e. film, television, and video), much of the news from abroad centred on disaster, with stories about disease, famine, war, and death prominent (Moeller 1999). In the post-Cold War era, news about humanitarian emergencies has become increasingly prominent.

Humanitarian emergencies are matters of life and death. But they do not exist for the majority of the people in the world unless they are constructed as an event. This construction, which materializes these issues of life and death in particular ways, is achieved in large part through media coverage. These media materializations create a range of identities – us/them, victim/saviour – and are necessary for a response to be organized. This argument is consistent with poststructuralism's reorientation of analysis from the assumption of pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity because it maintains that the event (the emergency or disaster) and the identities of those involved are the effects of discursive practices through which they are brought into being. As the development consultant Jonathan Benthall argues (thereby illustrating that one does not have to cite Foucault *et al.* to formulate a poststructural analysis):

“ the coverage of disasters by the press and the media is so selective and arbitrary that . . . they 'create' a disaster when they decide to recognise it. To be more precise, they give institutional endorsement or attestation to bad events which otherwise have a reality restricted to a local circle of victims. Such endorsement is a prerequisite for the marshalling of external relief and reconstructive effort. ”

Benthall 1993:11

Pictures, especially those imprinted as photographs or frames of film, are especially apt for a poststructural analysis because they foreground questions of representation. Such pictures have been culturally produced as authoritative documents that witness atrocity and injustice, in large part because they are accepted as transparent windows on an already existing world. Through the photograph we are said to be able to view things as they are. However, technologically generated images are anything but objective records of an external reality. They are necessarily constructions in which the location of the photographer, the choice of the subject, the framing of the content, the exclusion of context, and limitations on publication and circulation unavoidably create a particular sense of place populated by a particular kind of people.

Famine images remain powerful and salient in modernity because they recall a precarious pre-modern existence industrialized society has allegedly overcome. Understood as a natural disaster in which there is a crisis of food supply, famine is seen as a symptom of the lack of progress that results in the death of the innocent (Edkins 2000). It is for this reason that famine images are more often than not of women and children, barely clothed, staring passively into the lens, flies flitting across their faces (Figure 11.3). Content analyses of newspaper photos during the Ethiopian famine of 1984 (which gave rise to the Live Aid phenomenon) found that mothers and children featured more than any other subject (Figure 11.4). As one study noted:

“ All these pictures overwhelmingly showed people as needing our pity – as passive victims. This was through a de-contextualised concentration on mid- and close-up shots emphasising body language and facial expressions. The photos seemed mainly to be taken from a high angle with no eye-contact, thus reinforcing the viewer's sense of power compared with their apathy and hopelessness. The 'Madonna and Child' image was particularly emotively used, echoing the biblical imagery. Women were at the same time patronised and exalted. ”

van der Gaag and Nash 1987: 41

Content analyses of news images through time reveals that regardless of the context, time, or place in which famine has been observed, the same images recur (Moeller 1999: ch. 3) (Figure 11.5). They recur because they are the icons of a disaster narrative, in which complex political circumstances are interpreted through an established journalistic frame of reference. In this discursive formation, outsiders come from afar to dispense charity to victims of a natural disaster who are too weak to help themselves (Benthall 1993: ch. 5). Instead of this discursive formation having to be explained in full each time, the recurrence of the iconic image of the starving child triggers this general and established understanding of famine, thereby disciplining any ambiguity about what is occurring in famine zones.

This discursive formation has effects on 'us' at the same time as it gives meaning to 'them'. Indeed, it establishes a series of identity relations that reproduce and confirm notions of self/other, developed/underdeveloped, North/South, masculine/feminine, sovereignty/anarchy, and the like. Given that most contemporary famine imagery comes from one continent, it reproduces the imagined geography of 'Africa', so that a continent of 900 million people in fifty-seven countries is homogenized into a single entity represented by a starving child (Figure 11.6). In doing this, a stereotypical famine image is not creating

Figure 11.3 Famine victims with aid workers, Idaga Hamus, Northern Ethiopia, 1984.



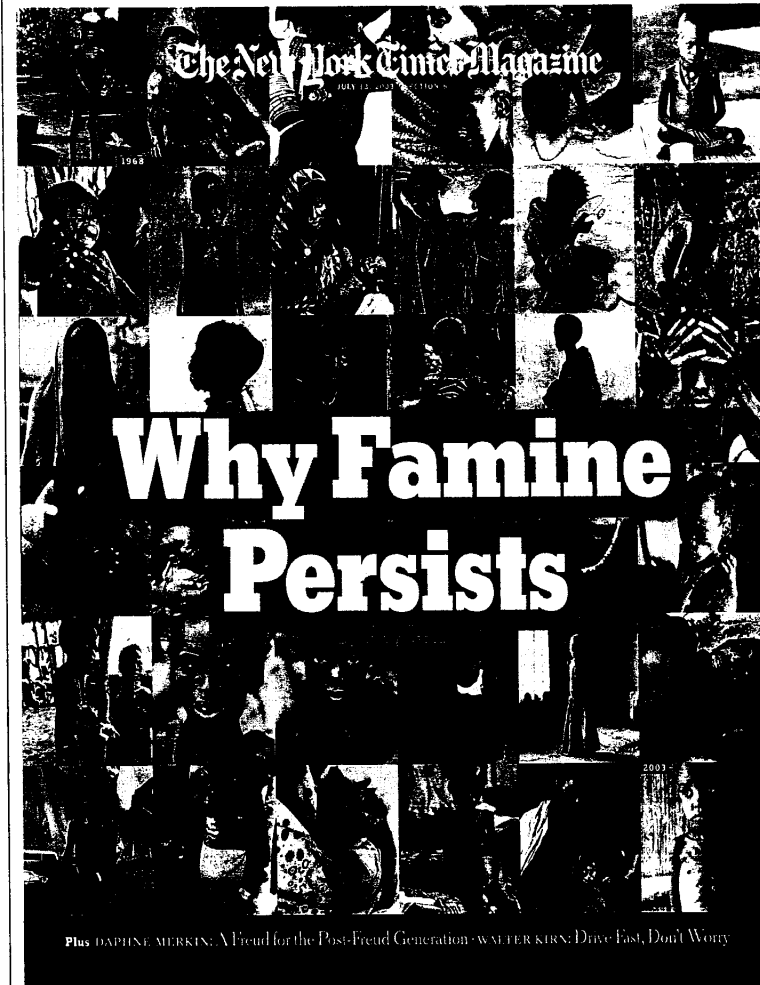
Source: Camerapix.

Figure 11.4 Mohamed Amin and Michael Buerk filming in Ethiopia, 1984.



Source: Camerapix.

Figure 11.5 *New York Times* magazine cover, July 2003.



Source: New York Times.

something from nothing. It is drawing upon established modes of representation, bringing into the present something that has been historically significant for European identity—that since the first colonial encounters 'Africa' has been understood as a site of cultural, moral, and spatial difference populated by 'barbarians,' 'heathens,' 'primitives,' and 'savages'. This attention to the historical emergence of particular modes of representation is a feature of poststructural analysis. Understood as genealogy, this concern with history

Figure 11.6 Daily Mirror cover image, 21 May 2002, 'Africa's Dying Again'.



Source: Mirrornpix.

dispenses with the search for origins and deals with how dominant understandings have come to work in the present (see Foucault 1977; Ashley 1987).

As detailed above, the logic of interpretation that marks a poststructural analysis is concerned with the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another. In terms of this case study, this focus would note two impacts. First, that the discursive production of 'Africa' means the majority of outsiders (more than 80 per cent of UK respondents in one survey) view the continent in wholly negative terms as a place of disease, distress, and instability.⁴ Second, such representations establish the conditions of possibility for state and non-state action with regard to humanitarian crises, especially as they depoliticize the issues and render them best dealt with by humanitarian aid. Significantly, this logic of interpretation encompasses a notion of causality. But, rather than claiming a direct cause-effect relationship between pictures and policy (as in some

arguments about the 'CNN effect' in international politics), this focus on the conditions of possibility posits an 'emergent causality' in which elements infuse and resonate across cultural and social domains, creating real effects without being able to specify a direct, causal link (see Connolly 2004).

The overall purpose of a poststructural analysis is ethical and political. Its emphasis on how things have been produced over time seeks to denaturalize conventional representations so as to argue that they could have been different. By repoliticizing dominant representations, poststructural analyses call attention to the inclusions and exclusions involved in producing that which appears to be natural, fixed, and timeless, and argue that the political action which follows from naturalized understandings could be pursued differently. In the context of humanitarian crises, especially famines, this would establish the following: the modern understanding of famine as starvation has been secured by visual representations of women and children as innocent victims, marginalizing in the process indigenous notions of famine as social catastrophe (Edkins 2000). Understanding famine as starvation leads to international action as humanitarian aid, directed towards the condition of individuals, whereas understanding famine as social catastrophe could lead to international action as conflict resolution, directed towards the state of the community. If followed, the consequence of this would be a complete overhaul of humanitarian action in the post-Cold War world.

Conclusion

From a poststructural perspective, interpretation and representation are indispensable and unavoidable when it comes to engaging both the domain of international politics and the field of International Relations. This claim is supported by the developments in philosophy and science which have undermined empiricist and positivist accounts of knowledge and theory. With its emphasis on the importance of language, culture, and history, the interdisciplinary context that has made critical perspectives like poststructuralism possible has challenged the 'common sense' and 'taken for granted' assumptions about reality which many traditional theories of International Relations have relied upon.

In assessing poststructuralism, it is important to be clear about the purpose of this body of thought. Poststructuralism is different from most other approaches to international politics because it does not see itself as a theory, school, or paradigm which produces a single account of its subject matter. Instead, poststructuralism is an approach, attitude, or ethos that pursues critique in particular ways. Because it understands critique as an operation that flushes out the assumptions through which conventional and dominant understandings have come to be (suppressing or marginalizing alternative accounts in the process), poststructuralism sees critique as an inherently positive exercise that establishes the conditions of possibility for pursuing alternatives. It is in this context that poststructuralism makes other theories of International Relations one of its objects of analysis, and approaches those paradigms with meta-theoretical questions designed to expose how they are structured.

Although it does not outline a specific theory of international relations, poststructuralism nonetheless offers a number of general and constructive arguments that can be used to approach the study of international politics in a different manner. Poststructuralism reorients analysis away from the prior assumption of pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity. This involves rethinking the question of power and identity, such that all identities are understood as effects of the operation of power and materialized through discourse. While poststructuralism rejects empiricist understandings of knowledge, its critical approach is often empirical, using archives, images, survey data, content analysis, and the like as evidence in understanding the relationship between power and knowledge. The result of a poststructuralist analysis is itself an interpretation of international politics, and as such can (and should) be subject to the same ethos of critique that gave rise to it.

Poststructuralism has often found itself marginalized within International Relations. That is largely because those critical of it have misunderstood many of its central claims (especially with regard to the relationship between language and reality) and have been anxious about the effect of following its meta-theoretical questioning to its logical conclusion. Others have sought to confront poststructuralism with criticisms founded on positions that poststructuralism has questioned – arguing, for example, poststructuralism fails to accept the existence of material reality when it has questioned the idealism/materialism dualism on which that objection depends (Laffey 2000; cf. de Goede 2003). Poststructuralism is, like all perspectives, certainly open to question. But, to be effective, critiques need to engage poststructuralism in its own terms. The starting point for an effective critique of poststructuralism involves recognizing that, instead of seeking to establish a social science, it embodies an ethical and political attitude driven by the desire to make all facile gestures difficult.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to say that abstraction, interpretation, and representation are indispensable and unavoidable?
2. How does the discipline of International Relations 'map' the world?
3. How are power and knowledge related? What does it mean to say they are related rather than synonymous with each other?
4. What are the key features of the positivist meta-theoretical discourse which have underpinned traditional approaches to international politics, and how have developments in the philosophy of science challenged these features?
5. What are some examples of foundational thought in International Relations, and what critiques have been directed at foundational thought generally?
6. What is the relationship between modernity and postmodernity, modernism and postmodernism, and why do many scholars express an anxiety about what they (mistakenly) call 'postmodernism' in International Relations?

7. What is the critical attitude of poststructuralism as expressed in the work of Michel Foucault, and how does it differ from traditional conceptions of social scientific theory?
8. What is meant by the claim that poststructuralism reorients analysis from pre-given subjects to the problematic of subjectivity?
9. What are the main features of Foucault's conception of power and how does it differ from traditional perspectives in International Relations?
10. If there is 'nothing outside discourse', does this mean that language is all there is and reality is only a product of the imagination?
11. How can poststructuralism's concern with subjectivity, identity, power, and discourse be connected to the categories and concerns of International Relations?
12. Should poststructuralism be viewed as a paradigm in International Relations? How can we assess its impact on the discipline?



FURTHER READING

- Bleiker, R. (2000), *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Theoretically and empirically sophisticated demonstration of how exploring questions of identity, agency, and subjectivity widens the understanding of politics and permits a conception of resistance.
- Campbell, D. (1998a), *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, revised edn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). One of the first book-length studies that works with a poststructural attitude to rethink international politics, with an epilogue in the revised edition reviewing the discipline's debates around identity.
- Der Derian, J. and M. J. Shapiro (1989) (eds), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington KY: Lexington Books). The first collection of poststructural work, for which the publisher insisted on having 'postmodern' in the title.
- Der Derian, J. (2001), *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (Boulder CO: Westview). Based on theoretical readings and empirical fieldwork, this monograph, written before 9/11, offers a prescient recasting of the nature of contemporary war.
- Edkins, J. (1999), *Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In* (Boulder CO: Lynne Reinner). Provides a good introduction to the work of Derrida and Foucault, amongst others, emphasizing questions of subjectivity and politics.
- Edkins, J., Pin-Fat, V., and Shapiro, M. J. (2004) (eds), *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics* (New York: Routledge). Offers recent work focusing on the issue of sovereignty, and introduces the idea of biopolitics to International Relations.
- George, J. (1994), *Discourses of Global Politics* (Boulder CO: Lynne Reinner). Important discussion of the interdisciplinary debates in the social sciences that make a poststructural account possible.
- Shapiro, M.J. and Alker, H. R. (eds), *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). A collection that demonstrates the wide range of events, issues, and topics involving the concept of identity that can be examined with a critical ethos.

■ Walker, R. B. J. (1993), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Seminal discussion that critically examines International Relations as political theory, thereby establishing the possibility for poststructural analyses.



IMPORTANT WEBSITES

Although neither of these sites is self-consciously poststructuralist, the critical approaches to their objects of concern embodies the ethos of critique described above:

- The Imaging Famine project. Examines media coverage of famine from the nineteenth century to the present day. Focusing on photographic images, it contains background documents, reports as well as historic and contemporary photo essays.
www.imaging-famine.org
- The Information Technology, War and Peace project. At Brown University's Watson Institute, it covers the impact of information technology on statecraft and new forms of networked global politics.
www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/index2.cfm



Visit the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book for lots of interesting additional material. www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/dunne/

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Postcolonialism

SIBA N. GROVOGUI



Chapter contents

- Introduction
- International morality and ethics
- Orientalism and identities
- Power and legitimacy in the international order
- Case study
- Conclusion



Reader guide

Without impugning the eloquence and character of our precursors, any student of international relations may legitimately ask whether the likes of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Kant give accurate accounts of the complex, varied, and unpredictable events that characterized their times. One may also ask whether their maxims of war-making and peace-making hold lessons for the present, and, importantly, whether their representations of human nature, power, and interest correspond to the experiences of societies conquered by Europe. Postcolonialism highlights that the views of politics held by these figures may not correspond to the experiences of non-Western societies. It offers new ways of knowing and thinking about the complex and fluid events that have shaped relations around the world by stressing the varying contexts of power, identity, and value across time and space. This chapter will, first, explore the morality and ethics in postcolonialism before moving on to discuss Said's work on 'Orientalism'. The chapter will then discuss notions of power and legitimacy in reference to the issue of nuclear proliferation. Finally, the case-study section discusses the issue of the nationalization of the Suez Canal from a postcolonial perspective.