CHAPTER 2

IR as an Academic Subject

Summary

This chapter shows how thinking about international relations (IR) has evolved since IR became an academic subject around the time of the First World War. Theoretical approaches are a product of their time: they address those problems of international relations that are seen as the most important ones in their day. The established traditions deal, nonetheless, with international problems that are of lasting significance: war and peace, conflict and cooperation, wealth and poverty, and development and underdevelopment. In this chapter, we shall focus on four established IR traditions. They are realism, liberalism, International Society, and International Political Economy (IPE). We also introduce more recent, alternative approaches that challenge the established traditions, including social constructivism and post-positivist approaches. The new voices in IR include feminist theory, Green theory, and IR theories from the Global South.

2.1 Introduction

The traditional core of IR has to do with issues concerning the development and change of sovereign statehood in the context of the larger system or society of states. This focus on states and the relations of states helps explain why war and peace form a central problem of traditional IR theory. However, contemporary IR is concerned not only with political relations between states but also with a host of other subjects: economic interdependence, human rights, transnational corporations, international organizations, the environment, gender inequalities, economic development, terrorism, and so forth. For this reason, some scholars prefer the label 'International Studies' or 'World Politics'. We shall stay with the label 'International Relations' but we interpret it to cover the broad range of issues.

There are four major classical theoretical traditions in IR: realism, liberalism, International Society, and IPE. In addition, there is a more diverse group of alternative approaches which have gained prominence in recent decades. The most important of these are social constructivism and post-positivist approaches, an umbrella term for several different strands of theory. The main task of this book is to present and discuss all these schools of thought. In this chapter, we examine IR as an evolving academic subject. IR thinking has developed through distinct phases, characterized by specific debates between groups of scholars. At most times during the twentieth century, there has been a dominant way of thinking about IR and a major challenge to that way of thinking. Those debates and dialogues are the main subject of this chapter.

There are a great many different theories in IR. They can be classified in a number of ways; what we call a 'main theoretical tradition' is not an objective entity. If you put four IR theorists in a room you will easily get ten different ways of organizing theory, and there will also be disagreement about which theories are relevant in the first place! At the same time, we have to group theories into main categories. Without identifying main paths in the development of IR thinking, we are stuck with a large number of individual contributions, pointing in different and sometimes rather confusing directions. But you should always be wary of selections and classifications, including the ones offered in this book. They are analytical tools created to achieve overview and clarity; they are not objective truths that can be taken for granted (see Box 2.1).

Of course, IR thinking is influenced by other academic subjects, such as philosophy, history, law, sociology, and economics. IR thinking also responds to historical

BOX 2.1 Key Arguments: IR theories as models

> [T]he main schools of general theory of international relations are not proven in any scientific sense: rather they constitute ways of perceiving international relations, metaphors or models which appeal to their adherents because that is the way they prefer to view the world.
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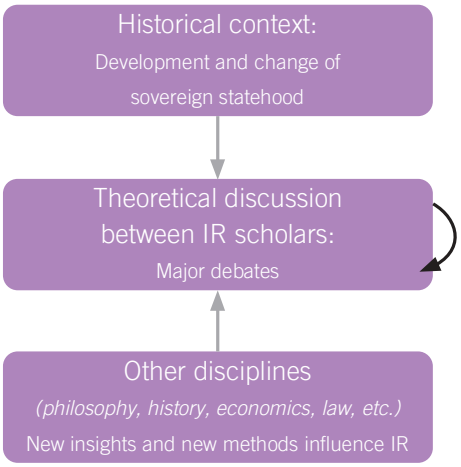
> **Wilkinson (2007: 2)**

FIGURE 2.1 The development of IR thinking



and contemporary developments in the real world. The two world wars, the Cold War between East and West, the emergence of close economic cooperation between Western states, and the persistent development gap between North and South are examples of real-world events and problems that stimulated IR scholarship in the twentieth century. And we can be certain that future events and episodes will provoke new IR thinking in the years to come: that is already evident with regard to the end of the Cold War, which has stimulated a variety of innovative IR thought in recent decades. The terrorist attacks that began on 11 September 2001 are another major challenge to IR thinking; the financial crisis that broke in 2008 and the current conflicts in the Middle East are yet other examples (see Figure 2.1). At the present time, the COVID-19 pandemic, the global refugee crisis, and the growth of socioeconomic inequalities, political populism, and nationalist politics challenge theorizing in IR.

There have been three major debates since IR became an academic subject at the end of the First World War, and we are now well into a fourth. The first major debate was between utopian liberalism and realism; the second between traditional approaches and **behaviouralism**; the third between neorealism/neoliberalism and neo-**Marxism**. The fourth debate is between established traditions and **post-positivist** alternatives. We shall review these major debates in this chapter because they provide us with a map of the way the academic subject of IR has developed over the past century. We need to become familiar with that map in order to comprehend IR as a dynamic academic subject that continues to evolve, and to see the directions of that continuing evolution of IR thought.

2.2 Utopian Liberalism: The Early Study of IR

The decisive push to set up a separate academic subject of IR was occasioned by the First World War (1914–18), which brought millions of casualties, large-scale physical destruction of large areas of continental Europe, and numerous political and military upheavals even after the main fighting had ended in November 1918. It was driven by

a widely felt determination never to allow human suffering on such a scale to happen again.

Why was it that the war began in the first place? And why did Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, and other powers persist in waging war in the face of the slaughter of millions of young men and with diminishing chances of gaining anything of real value from the conflict? The answers that the new discipline of IR came up with were profoundly influenced by liberal ideas. For liberal thinkers, the First World War was in no small measure attributable to the egoistic and short-sighted calculations and miscalculations of autocratic leaders in the heavily militarized countries involved, especially Germany and Austria. Unrestrained by democratic institutions and under pressure from their generals, these leaders were inclined to take the fatal decisions that led their countries into war (see Box 2.2).

Why was early academic IR influenced by liberalism? That is a big question, but there are a few important points that we should keep in mind in seeking an answer. The United States was eventually drawn into the war in 1917. Its military intervention decisively determined the outcome of the war: it guaranteed victory for the democratic allies (the US, Britain, France) and defeat for the autocratic central powers (Germany, Austria, Turkey). At that time, the United States had a president, Woodrow Wilson, who had been a university professor of political science and who saw it as his main mission to bring liberal democratic values to Europe and to the rest of the world. Only in that way, he believed, could another great war be prevented. In short, the liberal way of thinking had a solid political backing from the most powerful state in the international system at the time. Academic IR developed first and most strongly in the two leading liberal-democratic states: the United States and Great Britain. Liberal thinkers had some clear ideas and strong beliefs about how to avoid major disasters in the future, e.g., by reforming the international system, and also by reforming the domestic structures of autocratic countries.

BOX 2.2 Key Developments: Leadership misperceptions and war

It is my conviction that during the descent into the abyss, the perceptions of statesmen and generals were absolutely crucial. All the participants suffered from greater or lesser distortions in their images of themselves. They tended to see themselves as honorable, virtuous, and pure, and the adversary as diabolical. All the nations on the brink of the disaster expected the worst from their potential adversaries. They saw their own options as limited by necessity or 'fate', whereas those of the adversary were characterized by many choices. Everywhere, there was a total absence of empathy; no one could see the situation from another point of view. The character of each of the leaders was badly flawed by arrogance, stupidity, carelessness, or weakness.

Stoessinger (2010: 21–3)

President Wilson's vision of making the world 'safe for democracy' had wide appeal for ordinary people (see Box 2.3). It has been said that in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the popular alternatives for Europe were 'Wilson or Lenin' (Ziblatt 2017: 8). Wilson's ideas were formulated in a fourteen-point programme delivered in an address to Congress in January 1918, and he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919. His ideas influenced the Paris Peace Conference, which followed the end of hostilities and tried to institute a new international order based on liberal ideas.

Two major points in Wilson's ideas for a more peaceful world deserve special emphasis (Brown and Ainley 2009). The first concerns his promotion of democracy and self-determination. Behind this point is the liberal conviction that democratic governments do not and will not go to war against each other. It was Wilson's hope that the growth of liberal democracy in Europe would put an end to autocratic and warlike leaders and put peaceful governments in their place. Liberal democracy should therefore be strongly encouraged. The second major point in Wilson's programme concerned the creation of an international organization that would put relations between states on a firmer institutional foundation than in the past. In essence, that was Wilson's concept of the League of Nations, which was instituted by the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The idea that international institutions can promote peaceful cooperation among states is a basic element of liberal thinking; so is the notion about a relationship between liberal democracy and peace. We return to both ideas in Chapter 4.

Wilsonian idealism can be summarized as follows. It is the conviction that, through a rational and intelligently designed international organization, it should be possible to put an end to war and to achieve more or less permanent peace. The claim is not that it will be possible to do away with states and statespeople, foreign ministries, armed forces, and other agents and instruments of international conflict. Rather, the claim is that it is possible to tame states and statespeople by subjecting them to the appropriate international organizations, institutions, and laws. The argument liberal idealists make is that traditional

BOX 2.3 Key Quotes: Making the world safe for democracy

We are glad now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretense about them, to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the right of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Woodrow Wilson, from 'Address to Congress Asking for Declaration of War', 1917, quoted from Vasquez (1996: 35–40)

power politics—so-called 'Realpolitik'—is a 'jungle', so to speak, where dangerous beasts roam and the strong and cunning rule; whereas under the League of Nations the beasts are put into cages reinforced by the restraints of international organization; i.e., into a kind of 'zoo'. Wilson's liberal faith that an international organization could be created that would guarantee permanent peace is clearly reminiscent of the thought of the most famous classical liberal IR theorist: Immanuel Kant in his pamphlet *Perpetual Peace* (1795).

Norman Angell is another prominent liberal idealist of the same era. In 1909, Angell published a book entitled *The Great Illusion*. Angell argues that in modern times territorial conquest is extremely expensive and politically divisive because it severely disrupts international commerce; war therefore no longer serves profitable purposes. The general argument set forth by Angell is a forerunner of later liberal thinking about modernization and economic interdependence. Modernization demands that states have a growing need of things 'from "outside"—credit, or inventions, or markets or materials not contained in sufficient quantity in the country itself' (Navari 1989: 345). Rising interdependence, in turn, effects a change in relations between states. War and the use of force become of decreasing importance, and international law develops in response to the need for a framework to regulate high levels of interdependence. In sum, modernization and interdependence involve a process of change and progress which renders war and the use of force increasingly obsolete.

The thinking of Wilson and Angell is based on a liberal view of human beings and human society: human beings are rational, and when they apply reason to international relations, they can set up organizations for the benefit of all. Public opinion is a constructive force; removing secret diplomacy in dealings between states and, instead, opening diplomacy to public scrutiny ensures that agreements will be sensible and fair. These ideas had some success in the 1920s; the League of Nations was indeed established and the great powers took some further steps to assure each other of their peaceful intentions. The high point of these efforts came with the Kellogg–Briand Pact of 1928, which practically all countries signed. The pact was an international agreement to abolish war; only in extreme cases of self-defence could war be justified. In short, liberal ideas dominated in the first phase of academic IR. Indeed, the liberal ideas had already been influential before the First World War, as demonstrated by the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 (see Box 2.4).

Why is it, then, that we tend to refer to such ideas by the somewhat pejorative term of 'utopian liberalism', indicating that these liberal arguments were little more than wishful thinking? One plausible answer is to be found in the political and economic

BOX 2.4 Key Developments: The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907

The Hague Conventions were two international peace treaties made at conferences in the Hague in 1899 and 1907 that were attended by all major powers. The Hague Conventions dealt with rules for warfare but also included negotiations about disarmament and an attempt to set up a court of arbitration that would allow countries to solve disagreements in a peaceful way. A third conference was to take place in 1914 (it was later rescheduled to 1915) but the outbreak of the First World War put a stop to it.

developments of the 1920s and 1930s. Liberal democracy suffered hard blows with the growth of fascist dictatorship in Italy and Spain, and Nazism in Germany. Authoritarianism also increased in many of the new states of Central and Eastern Europe—for example, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia—that were brought into existence as a result of the First World War and the Paris Peace Conference and were supposed to become democracies. Thus, Wilson's hopes for the spread of democratic civilization were shattered. In many cases, what actually happened was the spread of the very sort of state that he believed provoked war: autocratic, authoritarian, and militaristic states. At the same time, liberal states themselves were not democratic role models in every way: several of them held on to vast empires, with colonies kept under coercive control (Long and Schmidt 2005). Woodrow Wilson himself was a staunch defender of racial hierarchy in the United States and he did not press for self-determination for non-European peoples (Skowronek 2006).

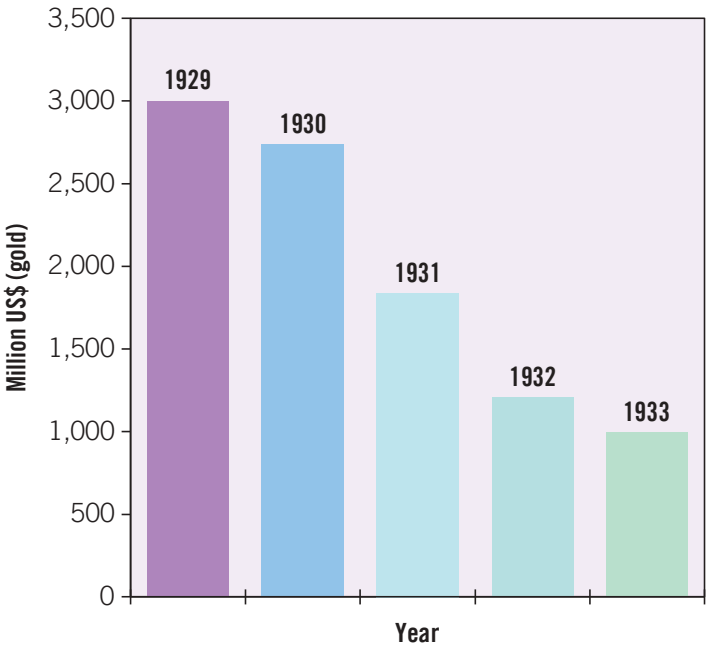
The League of Nations never became the strong international organization that liberals hoped would restrain powerful and aggressively disposed states. Germany and Russia initially failed to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty, and their relationship to the League was always strained. Germany joined the League in 1926 but left in 1933. Japan also left at that time, while embarking on war in Manchuria. Russia finally joined in 1934, but was expelled in 1940 because of the war with Finland. By that time the League was effectively dead. Although Britain and France were members from the start, they never regarded the League as an important institution and refused to shape their foreign policies with League criteria in mind. Most devastating, however, was the refusal of the United States Senate to ratify the covenant of the League (see Box 2.5). Isolationism had a long tradition in US foreign policy, and many American politicians were isolationists even if President Wilson was not; they did not want to involve their country in the murky affairs of Europe. So, much to Wilson's chagrin, the strongest state in the international system—his own—did not join the League. With a number of states outside the

BOX 2.5 Key Developments: The League of Nations

The League of Nations (1920–46) contained three main organs: the Council (fifteen members including France, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union as permanent members) which met three times a year; the Assembly (all members) which met annually, and a Secretariat. All decisions had to be by unanimous vote. The underlying philosophy of the League was the principle of collective security which meant that the international community had a duty to intervene in international conflicts: it also meant that parties to a dispute should submit their grievances to the League. The centre-piece of the [League] Covenant was Article 16, which empowered the League to institute economic or military sanctions against a recalcitrant state. In essence, though, it was left to each member to decide whether or not a breach of the Covenant had occurred and so whether or not to apply sanctions.

Evans and Newnham (1992: 176)

FIGURE 2.2 Contraction of world trade: Total imports of seventy-five countries 1929–33 (million gold US$)



Based on Kindleberger (1973: 280)

League, including the most important, and with the two major powers inside the organization lacking any real commitment to it, the League never achieved the central position marked out for it in Wilson's blueprint.

Norman Angell's high hopes for a smooth process of modernization and interdependence also foundered on the harsh realities of the 1930s. The Wall Street crash of October 1929 marked the beginning of a severe economic crisis in Western countries that would last until the Second World War and would involve hard measures of economic protectionism. World trade shrank dramatically (see Figure 2.2), and industrial production in developed countries declined rapidly. In July 1932—at the trough of the Great Depression—American production of pig iron reached its lowest level since 1896 (Galbraith 1988: 142). In ironic contrast to Angell's vision, it was each country for itself, each country trying as best it could to look after its own interests, if necessary to the detriment of others—the 'jungle' rather than the 'zoo'. The historical stage was being set for a less hopeful and more pessimistic understanding of international relations.

2.3 Realism and the Twenty Years' Crisis

Liberal idealism was not a good intellectual guide to international relations in the 1930s. Interdependence did not produce peaceful cooperation; the League of Nations was helpless in the face of the expansionist power politics conducted by the authoritarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and Japan. These developments put Wilsonianism on

the defensive. Already under the peace negotiations at Versailles in 1919, the French premier George Clemenceau is supposed to have ridiculed Wilson's Fourteen Points by pointing out that even God Almighty could do with ten. But now Academic IR also began to speak the classical realist language of Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes in which the grammar and the vocabulary of power were central.

The most comprehensive and penetrating critique of liberal idealism was that of E. H. Carr, a British IR scholar. In *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1964 [1939]) Carr argued that liberal IR thinkers profoundly misread the facts of history and misunderstood the nature of international relations. They erroneously believed that such relations could be based on a harmony of interest between countries and people. According to Carr, the correct starting point is the opposite one: we should assume that there are profound conflicts of interest both between countries and between people. Some people and some countries are better off than others. They will attempt to preserve and defend their privileged position. The underdogs, the 'have-nots', will struggle to change that situation. International relations is, in a basic sense, about the struggle between such conflicting interests and desires. That is why IR is far more about conflict than about cooperation. Carr astutely labelled the liberal position 'utopian' as a contrast to his own position, which he labelled 'realist', thus implying that his approach was the more sober and correct analysis of international relations.

The other significant realist statement from this period was produced by a German scholar who fled to the United States in the 1930s to escape from the Nazi regime in Germany: Hans J. Morgenthau. More than any other European émigré scholar, Morgenthau brought realism to the US, and with great success. His *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, first published in 1948, was for several decades the most influential American book on IR (Morgenthau 1960).

For Morgenthau, human nature was at the base of international relations. And humans were self-interested and power-seeking and that could easily result in aggression. In the late 1930s, it was not difficult to find evidence to support such a view. Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Imperial Japan pursued blatantly aggressive foreign policies aimed at conflict, not cooperation. Armed struggle for the creation of *Lebensraum*, of a larger and stronger Germany, was at the core of Hitler's political programme. Furthermore, and ironically from a liberal perspective, both Hitler and Mussolini enjoyed widespread popular support, despite the fact that they were autocratic and even tyrannical leaders.

Why should international relations be egoistic and aggressive? Observing the growth of fascism in the 1930s, Einstein wrote to Freud that there must be 'a human lust for hatred and destruction' (Ebenstein 1951: 802–4). Freud confirmed that such an aggressive impulse did indeed exist, and he remained deeply sceptical about the possibilities of taming it. The realist theologian Reinhold Niebuhr drew on Christianity to explain this. According to the Bible, humans have been endowed with original sin and a temptation for evil ever since Adam and Eve were thrown out of Paradise. The first murder by man is Cain's killing of his brother Abel out of pure envy. Realists such as Carr and Morgenthau adopted Niebuhr's view of humans, shorn of its theological basis (Smith 1986: 129–30). Whether the source was religious or found in psychology, the common starting point for realist analysis is this: Human nature is plain bad (Waltz 1959: 27).

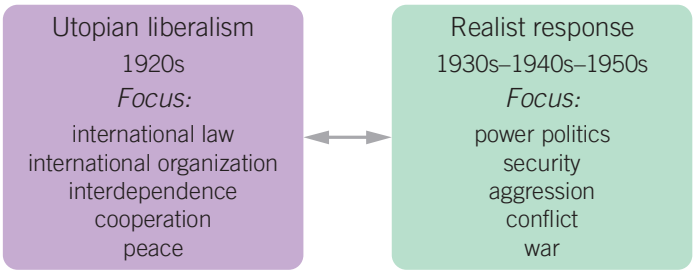
The second major element in the realist view concerns the nature of international relations. 'International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power. Whatever the ultimate aims of international politics, power is always the immediate aim' (Morgenthau 1960: 29). There is no world government. On the contrary, there is a system of sovereign and armed states facing each other. World politics is an international anarchy. The 1930s and 1940s appeared to confirm this proposition. International relations was a struggle for power and for survival. The quest for power certainly characterized the foreign policies of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The same struggle, in response, applied to the Allied side during the Second World War. Britain, France, and the United States were the 'haves' in Carr's terms, the 'status quo' powers who wanted to hold on to what they already had, and Germany, Italy, and Japan were the 'have-nots', who wanted to change the status quo. So it was only natural, according to realist thinking, that the 'have-nots' would try and redress the international balance through the use of force.

Following realist analysis, the appropriate response to such attempts is two-pronged. On the one hand, rising power should be recognized and given its due, if necessary in the form of political and territorial concessions. On the other hand, it should be met by countervailing power and the intelligent utilization of that power to provide for national defence and to deter potential aggressors. In other words, it was essential to maintain an effective balance of power as the only way to preserve peace and prevent war. The League of Nations failed to constrain Germany. It took another world war, millions of casualties, heroic sacrifice, and vast material resources finally to defeat the challenges from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan. All of that might have been avoided if a realistic foreign policy based on the principle of recognizing and accommodating power when prudent and meeting it with countervailing power when necessary had been followed by Britain, France, and the United States right from the start of Germany's, Italy's, and Japan's sabre-rattling.

The third major component in the realist view is a cyclical view of history. Contrary to the optimistic liberal view that qualitative change for the better is possible, realism stresses continuity and repetition. Each new generation tends to make the same sort of mistakes as previous generations. Any change in this situation is highly unlikely. As long as sovereign states are the dominant form of political organization, power politics will continue and states will have to look after their security and prepare for war. In other words, the Second World War was no extraordinary event; neither was the First World War. Sovereign states can live in peace with each other for long periods when there is a stable balance of power. But every now and then, that precarious balance will break down and war is likely to follow. There can, of course, be many different causes of such breakdown. Some realist scholars think that the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 contained the seeds of the Second World War because of the harsh conditions that the peace treaty imposed on Germany. But domestic developments in Germany, the emergence of Hitler, and many other factors are also relevant in accounting for that war.

In sum, the classical realism of Carr and Morgenthau combines a pessimistic view of human nature with a notion of power politics between states which exist in an international anarchy. They see no prospects of change in that situation; for classical realists, independent states in an anarchic international system are a permanent feature of

FIGURE 2.3 First major debate in IR



international relations. The classical realist analysis appeared to capture the essentials of European politics in the 1930s and world politics in the 1940s far better than liberal optimism. When international relations took the shape of an East–West confrontation, or Cold War, after 1947, realism again appeared to be the best approach for making sense of what was going on.

The utopian liberalism of the 1920s and the realism of the 1930s–1950s represent the two contending positions in the first major debate in IR (see Figure 2.3). The first major debate was clearly won by Carr, Morgenthau, and the other realist thinkers. Realism became the dominant way of thinking about international relations, not only among scholars, but also among politicians and diplomats. Yet it is important to emphasize that liberalism did not disappear. Many liberals conceded that realism was the better guide to international relations in the 1930s and 1940s, but they saw this as an extreme and abnormal historical period. Liberals, of course, rejected the deeply pessimistic realist idea that humans were 'plain bad' (Wight 1991: 25) and they had some strong counter-arguments to that effect, as we shall see in Chapter 4. Finally, the post-war period was not only about a struggle for power and survival between the United States and the Soviet Union and their political–military alliances. It was also about cooperation and international institutions, such as the United Nations and its many special organizations. Although realism had won the first debate, there were still competing theories in the discipline that refused to accept permanent defeat.

2.4 The Voice of Behaviouralism in IR

The second major debate in IR concerns methodology. In order to understand how that debate emerged, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that the first generations of IR scholars were trained as historians or academic lawyers, or were former diplomats or journalists. They often brought a humanistic and historical approach to the study of IR. This approach is rooted in philosophy, history, and law, and is characterized 'above all by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgment' (Bull 1969). Locating judgement at the heart of international theory serves to emphasize the normative character of the subject which at its core involves some profoundly difficult moral questions that neither politicians nor diplomats nor anyone else who is involved can escape, such as the deployment of nuclear weapons and their justified uses, military intervention in independent

BOX 2.6 Key Concepts: Behaviouralist science in brief

Once the investigator has mastered the existing knowledge, and has organized it for his purposes, he pleads a 'meaningful ignorance': 'Here is what I know; what do I not know that is worth knowing?' Once an area has been selected for investigation, the questions should be posed as clearly as possible, and it is here that quantification can prove useful, provided that mathematical tools are combined with carefully constructed taxonomic schemes. Surveying the field of international relations, or any sector of it, we see many disparate elements . . . wondering whether there may be any significant relationships between A and B, or between B and C. By a process which we are compelled to call 'intuition' . . . we perceive a possible correlation, hitherto unsuspected or not firmly known, between two or more elements. At this point, we have the ingredients of a hypothesis which can be expressed in measurable referents, and which, if validated, would be both explanatory and predictive.

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1971: 36–7)

states, the upholding or not of empires, and so forth. This way of studying IR is usually referred to as the traditional, or classical, approach.

After the Second World War, the academic discipline of IR expanded rapidly; particularly in the United States, where government agencies and private foundations were willing to support 'scientific' IR research which they could argue to be in the national interest. That support produced a new generation of IR scholars who adopted a rigorous methodological approach. They were usually trained in political science, economics, or other social sciences, rather than diplomatic history, international law, or political philosophy. These new IR scholars thus had a very different academic background and equally different ideas concerning how IR should be studied. These new ideas came to be summarized under the term 'behaviouralism', which signified not so much a new theory as a novel methodology that endeavoured to be 'scientific' in the natural-science meaning of that term (see Box 2.6).

Just as scholars of science are able to formulate objective and verifiable 'laws' to explain the physical world, the ambition of behaviouralists in IR is to do the same for the world of international relations. The main task is to collect empirical data about international relations, preferably large amounts of data, which can then be used for measurement, classification, generalization, and, ultimately, the validation of hypotheses; i.e., scientifically explained patterns of behaviour. Behaviouralism is more interested in observable facts and measurable data, in precise calculation, and the collection of data in order to find recurring behavioural patterns, the 'laws' of international relations. According to behaviouralists, facts are separate from values. Unlike facts, values cannot be explained scientifically. The behaviouralists were therefore inclined to study facts, and first and foremost the observable behaviour of human beings, while ignoring values. The scientific procedure that behaviouralists support is laid out in Box 2.7.

BOX 2.7 Key Arguments: The scientific procedure of behaviouralists

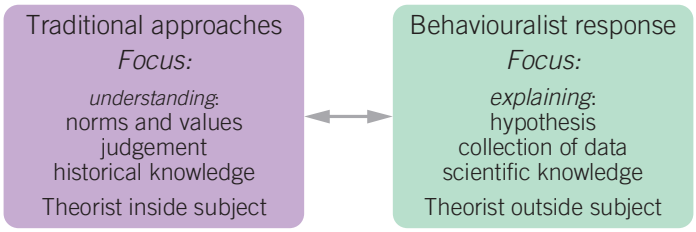
The hypothesis must be validated through testing. This demands the construction of a verifying experiment or the gathering of empirical data in other ways . . . The results of the data-gathering effort are carefully observed, recorded and analyzed, after which the hypothesis is discarded, modified, reformulated or confirmed. Findings are published and others are invited to duplicate this knowledge-discovering adventure, and to confirm or deny. This, very roughly, is what we usually mean by 'the scientific method'.

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1971: 37)

The two methodological approaches to IR briefly described in the previous section, the traditional and the behavioural, are clearly very different. The traditional approach is a holistic one that accepts the complexity of the human world, sees international relations as part of the human world, and seeks to understand it in a humanistic way by getting *inside* it. That involves imaginatively entering into the role of statespeople, attempting to understand the moral dilemmas in their foreign policies, and appreciating the basic values involved, such as security, order, freedom, and justice. To approach IR in that traditional way involves the scholar in understanding the history and practice of diplomacy, the history and role of international law, the political theory of the sovereign state, and so forth. IR is in that view a broadly humanistic subject; it is not and could never be a strictly scientific or narrowly technical subject. A good example is the work of E.H. Carr, which was based on a rejection of the notion that IR insights could be subjected to scientific testing against empirical observations. Indeed, Carr's work is probably best situated in the reflexivist (or post-positivist) tradition we investigate later in the book (Jackson 2016: 207).

The other approach, behaviouralism, has no place for morality or ethics in the study of IR because that involves values, and values cannot be studied objectively; i.e., scientifically. Behaviouralism raises a fundamental question which continues to be discussed today: can we formulate scientific laws about international relations (and about the social world, the world of human relations, in general)? Critics emphasize what they see as a major mistake in that method: the mistake of treating human relations as an external phenomenon in the same general category as nature so that the theorist stands *outside* the subject—like an anatomist dissecting a cadaver. The anti-behaviouralists hold that the theorist of human affairs is a human being who can never divorce themselves completely from human relations: they are always *inside* the subject (Hollis and Smith 1990; Jackson 2000; for a general appraisal, see Jackson 2016). Some scholars attempt to reconcile these approaches: they seek to be historically conscious about IR as a sphere of human relations while also trying to come up with general models that seek to explain and not merely understand world politics. Morgenthau might be an example of that. In studying the moral dilemmas of foreign policy, he is in the traditionalist camp; yet he also sets forth general 'laws of politics' which are supposed to apply at all times in all places, and that would appear to put him in the behaviouralist camp (see Chapter 3).

FIGURE 2.4 Second major debate in IR



After a few years of vigorous controversy, the second great debate (see Figure 2.4) petered out. Though it would be wrong to say that the behaviouralists won the second major debate in IR outright, it is clear that they placed the traditionalists on the defensive. That was largely because of the domination of the discipline after the Second World War by US scholars, the vast majority of whom supported the quantitative, scientific ambitions of behaviouralism (Jackson 2016: 60). They also led the way in setting a research agenda focused on the role of the two superpowers, especially the United States, in the international system. That paved the way to new formulations of both realism and liberalism that were heavily influenced by behaviouralist methodologies. These new formulations—**neorealism** and **neoliberalism**—led to a replay of the first major debate under new historical and methodological conditions.

2.5 Neoliberalism: Institutions and Interdependence

Realism, having won the first major debate, remained the dominant theoretical approach in IR. The second debate, about methodology, did not immediately change that situation. After 1945, the centre of gravity in international relations was the Cold War struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. The East–West rivalry lent itself easily to a realist interpretation of the world.

Yet during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, a good deal of international relations concerned trade and investment, travel and communication, and similar issues which were especially prevalent in the relations between the liberal democracies of the West (see Table 2.1). Those relations provided the basis for a new attempt by liberals to formulate an alternative to realist thinking that would avoid the utopian excesses of earlier liberalism. We shall use the label 'neoliberalism' for that renewed liberal approach. Neoliberals share old liberal ideas about the possibility of progress and change, but they repudiate idealism. Most of them also strive to formulate theories and apply new methods which are scientific. In short, the debate between liberalism and realism continued, but it was now coloured by the post-1945 international setting and the behaviouralist methodological persuasion.

In the 1950s, a process of regional integration was getting under way in Western Europe which caught the attention and imagination of neoliberals. By 'integration' we refer to a particularly intensive form of international cooperation. Early theorists of integration studied how certain functional activities across borders (trade, investment, etc.) offered mutually advantageous long-term cooperation. Other neoliberal

theorists studied how integration fed on itself: cooperation in one transactional area paved the way for cooperation in other areas (Haas 1958; Keohane and Nye 1975). During the 1950s and 1960s, Western Europe and Japan developed mass-consumption welfare states, as the United States had done already before the war. That development entailed a higher level of trade, communication, cultural exchange, and other relations and transactions across borders.

This provides the basis for *sociological liberalism*, a strand of neoliberal thinking which emphasizes the impact of these expanding cross-border activities. In the 1950s, Karl Deutsch and his associates argued that such interconnecting activities helped create common values and identities among people from different states and paved the way for peaceful, cooperative relations by making war increasingly costly and thus more unlikely. They also tried to measure the integration phenomenon scientifically (Deutsch et al. 1957).

In the 1970s, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye further developed such ideas. They argued that relationships between Western states (including Japan) are characterized by complex interdependence: there are many forms of connections between societies in addition to the political relations of governments, including transnational links between business corporations. There is also an 'absence of hierarchy among issues'; i.e., military security does not dominate the agenda any more. Military force is no longer used as an instrument of foreign policy (Keohane and Nye 1977: 25). Complex interdependence portrays a situation that is radically different from the realist picture of international relations. In Western democracies, there are other actors besides states, and violent conflict clearly is not on their international agenda. We can call this form of neoliberalism *interdependence liberalism*. Keohane and Nye (1977) are among the main contributors to this line of thinking.

When there is a high degree of interdependence, states will often set up international institutions to deal with common problems. Institutions promote cooperation across international boundaries by providing information and reducing costs. Institutions can be formal international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the European Union (EU) or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); or they can be less formal sets of agreements (often called regimes) which deal

TABLE 2.1 OECD countries, total import/export, percentage of gross domestic product (GDP)

	1960 %	1970 %	1980 %	2000 %	2015 %	2019 %
Imports	11	13	19	23	28	30
Exports	11	13	18	22	29	31

Based on World Bank statistics (CC BY 4.0)

http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS?locations=OE&name_desc=false&view=chart

http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.IMP.GNFS.ZS?locations=OE&view=chart

TABLE 2.2 Variations of liberalism

THEORY	FOCUS
• Sociological liberalism	Cross-border flows, common values
• Interdependence liberalism	Transactions stimulate cooperation
• Institutional liberalism	International institutions, regimes
• Republican liberalism	Liberal democracies living in peace with each other

with common activities or issues, such as agreements about shipping, aviation, communication, or the environment. We can call this form of neoliberalism *institutional liberalism*. Oran Young (1986) and Robert Keohane (1989) are influential scholars in this area.

The fourth and final strand of neoliberalism—*republican liberalism*—picks up on a theme developed in earlier liberal thinking. It is the idea that liberal democracies enhance peace because they do not go to war against each other. It has been strongly influenced by the rapid spread of democratization in the world after the end of the Cold War, especially in the former Soviet satellite countries in Eastern Europe. An influential version of the theory of democratic peace was set forth by Michael Doyle (1983). Doyle finds that the democratic peace is based on three pillars: the first is peaceful conflict resolution between democratic states; the second is common values among democratic states—a common moral foundation; the final pillar is economic cooperation among democracies. Republican liberals are generally optimistic that there will be a steadily expanding 'Zone of Peace' among liberal democracies even though there may also be occasional setbacks.

These different strands of neoliberalism are mutually supportive in providing an overall consistent argument for more peaceful and cooperative international relations (see Table 2.2). They consequently stand as a challenge to the realist analysis of IR. In the 1970s, there was a general feeling among IR scholars that neoliberalism was on the way to becoming the dominant theoretical approach in the discipline. But a reformulation of realism by Kenneth Waltz (1979) once again tipped the balance towards realism. Neoliberal thinking could make convincing reference to relations between industrialized liberal democracies to argue its case about a more cooperative and interdependent world. But the East–West confrontation remained a stubborn feature of international relations in the 1970s and 1980s. The new reflections on realism took their cue from that historical fact.

2.6 Neorealism: Bipolarity and Confrontation

Kenneth Waltz broke new ground in his book *Theory of International Politics* (1979), which sets forth a substantially different realist theory inspired by theoretical insights in microeconomics. His theory is most often referred to as 'neorealism', and we shall employ that label. Waltz attempts to formulate 'law-like statements' about international

relations based solely on the systemic relations in the state system. He thus departs sharply from classical realism in showing virtually no interest in the **ethics of statecraft** or the moral dilemmas of foreign policy—concerns that are strongly evident in the realist writings of Morgenthau.

Waltz's focus is on the 'structure' of the international system and the consequences of that structure for international relations. The concept of structure is defined as follows. First, Waltz notes that the international system is anarchical; there is no worldwide government. Second, the international system is composed of like units: every state, small or large, has to perform a similar set of government functions such as national defence, tax collection, and economic regulation. However, there is one respect in which states are different and often very different: in their power, what Waltz calls their relative capabilities. Waltz thus draws a very parsimonious and abstract picture of the international system with very few elements. International relations is an anarchy composed of states that vary in only one important respect: their relative power. Anarchy is likely to endure, according to Waltz, because states want to preserve their autonomy.

The international system that came into existence after the Second World War was dominated by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union; i.e., it was a bipolar system. The demise of the Soviet Union has resulted in a different system with several great powers but with the United States as predominant; i.e., it is moving towards a multipolar system. Waltz does not claim that these few pieces of information about the structure of the international system can explain everything about international politics. But he believes that they can explain 'a few big and important things' (Waltz 1986: 322–47). What are they? First, great powers will always tend to balance each other. With the Soviet Union gone, the United States dominates the system. But 'balance-of-power theory leads one to predict that other countries . . . will try to bring American power into balance' (Waltz 1993: 52). Second, smaller and weaker states will have a tendency to align themselves with great powers in order to preserve their maximum autonomy. In making this argument, Waltz departs sharply from the classical realist argument based on human nature viewed as 'plain bad' and thus leading to conflict and confrontation. He terms these 'reductionist' explanations which cannot explain anything on their own. For Waltz, states are power-seeking and security-conscious not because of human nature but rather because the structure of the international system compels them to be that way.

This last point is also important because it is the basis for neorealism's counter-attack against the neoliberals. Neorealists do not deny all possibilities for cooperation among states. But they maintain that cooperating states will always strive to maximize their relative power and preserve their autonomy. In other words, just because there is cooperation, as, for example, in relations between industrialized liberal democracies (e.g., between the United States and Japan), it does not mean that the neoliberal view has been vindicated. We return to the details of this debate in Chapter 4. Here we merely draw attention to the fact that in the 1980s, neorealism succeeded in putting neoliberalism on the defensive. Waltz's theoretical arguments were significant in this respect. But historical events also played an important role. In the 1980s the confrontation between

the United States and the Soviet Union reached a new level. US President Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', and in that hostile international climate, the arms race between the superpowers was sharply intensified.

During the 1980s, some neorealists and neoliberals came close to sharing a common analytical starting point that is basically neorealist in character; i.e., states are the main actors in what is still an international anarchy and they constantly look after their own best interests (Baldwin 1993). Neoliberals still argued that institutions, interdependence, and democracy led to more thoroughgoing cooperation than is predicted by neorealists. But many current versions of neorealism and neoliberalism were no longer diametrically opposed. In methodological terms there was even more common ground between neorealists and neoliberals. Both strongly supported the scientific project launched by the behaviouralists, even though republican liberals were a partial exception in that regard. This was somewhat paradoxical as Waltz (1979: Ch. 1), whose intervention had paved the way for this rapprochement, had expressly disputed the behaviouralist notion that theories could be tested up against empirical observations (Wæver 2009; Jackson 2016: 123–4). We return to the theoretical and methodological nuances within neorealism in Chapter 3.

As indicated earlier, the debate between neorealism and neoliberalism can be seen as a continuation of the first major debate in IR. But unlike the earlier debate, this one resulted in most neoliberals accepting most of the neorealist assumptions as starting points for analysis. Robert Keohane (1993; Keohane and Martin 1995) attempted to formulate a synthesis of neorealism and neoliberalism coming from the neoliberal side. Barry Buzan et al. (1993) made a similar attempt coming from the neorealist side. However, there is still no complete synthesis between the two traditions. Some neorealists (e.g., Mearsheimer 1993, 1995b, 2019) and neoliberals (e.g., Rosenau 1990; Moravcsik 1997) are far from reconciled to each other and keep arguing exclusively in favour of their side of the debate. The debate is, therefore, a continuing one.

2.7 International Society: The English School

The behaviouralist challenge was most strongly felt among IR scholars in the United States. The neorealist and neoliberal acceptance of that challenge also came predominantly from the American academic community. As indicated earlier, during the 1950s and 1960s, American scholarship completely dominated the developing but still youthful IR discipline. Stanley Hoffmann made the point that the discipline of IR was 'born and raised in America', and he analysed the profound consequences of that fact for thinking and theorizing in IR (Hoffmann 1977: 41–59).

However, in the United Kingdom, a school of IR had existed throughout the period of the Cold War which was different in two major ways. It rejected the behaviouralist challenge and emphasized the traditional approach based on human understanding, judgement, norms, and history. It also rejected any firm distinction between a strict realist and a strict liberal view of international relations. The IR school to which we refer is sometimes called 'the English School'. But that name is far too narrow: it overlooks the fact that several of its leading figures were not English and many were not even from the

United Kingdom; rather, they were from Australia, Canada, and South Africa. For that reason, we shall use its other name: *International Society*. Two leading International Society theorists of the twentieth century are Martin Wight and Hedley Bull.

International Society theorists recognize the importance of power in international affairs. They also focus on the state and the state system. But they reject the narrow realist view that world politics is a Hobbesian state of nature in which there are no international norms at all. They view the state as the combination of a *Machtstaat* (power state) and a *Rechtsstaat* (constitutional state): power and law are both important features of international relations. It is true that there is an international anarchy in the sense that there is no world government. But international anarchy is a social and not an anti-social condition; i.e., world politics—at least in the present age—is an 'anarchical society' (Bull 1995) (see Box 2.8). International Society theorists also recognize the importance of the individual, and some of them argue that individuals are more important than states. Unlike many contemporary liberals, however, International Society theorists have traditionally regarded IGOs and NGOs (intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations) as marginal rather than central features of world politics. They emphasize the relations of states and they play down the importance of transnational relations. Even the United Nations is seen as a 'pseudo-institution' which pales in significance next to the real institutions of world politics, which include the balance of power, international law, diplomacy, and war (Bull 1977: xiv).

International Society theorists find that realists are correct in pointing to the importance of power and national interest. But if we push the realist view to its logical conclusion, states would always be preoccupied with playing the tough game of power politics; in a pure anarchy, there can be no mutual trust. That view is clearly misleading; there is warfare, but states are not continually preoccupied with each other's power, nor do they conceive of that power exclusively as a threat. On the other hand, if we take the liberal idealist view to the extreme, it means that all relations between states are governed by common rules in a perfect world of mutual respect and the rule of law. That view too is clearly misleading. Of course, there are common rules and norms that most states can be expected to observe most of the time; in that sense, relations between states constitute an international society. But these rules and norms cannot by themselves

BOX 2.8 Key Concepts: International Society

A *society of states* (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form 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. My contention is that the element of a society has always been present, and remains present, in the modern international system.

Bull (1995: 13, 39)

guarantee international harmony and cooperation; power and the balance of power still remain very important in the anarchical society.

The United Nations system demonstrates how both elements—power and law—are simultaneously present in international society. The Security Council is set up according to the reality of unequal power among states. The great powers (the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France) are the only permanent members with the authority to veto decisions. That simply recognizes the reality of unequal power in world politics. The great powers have a de facto veto anyway: it would be very difficult to force them to do anything that they were not prepared to do. That is the 'realist power and inequality element' in international society. The General Assembly—by contrast with the Security Council—is set up according to the principle of international equality: every member state is legally equal to every other state; each state has one vote, and the majority rather than the most powerful prevails. That is the rationalist 'common rules and norms' element in international society. Finally, the UN also provides evidence of the importance of individuals in international affairs. The UN has promoted the international law of human rights, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Today there is an elaborate structure of humanitarian law which defines the basic civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights that are intended to promote an acceptable standard of human existence in the contemporary world. That is the cosmopolitan or solidarist element of international society.

For International Society theorists, the study of international relations is not about singling out one of these elements and disregarding the others. They do not seek to make and test hypotheses with the aim of constructing scientific laws of IR; rather, they are trying to understand and interpret international relations. International Society theorists thus take a broader historical, legal, and philosophical approach to international relations. IR is about discerning and exploring the complex presence of all these elements and the normative problems they present to state leaders. Power and national interests matter; so do common norms and institutions. States are important, but so are human beings. Statesmen and stateswomen have a national responsibility to their own nation and its citizens; they have an international responsibility to observe and follow international law and respect the rights of other states; and they have a humanitarian responsibility to defend human rights around the world. But, as the crises in the Darfur region of Sudan (2003–9) and elsewhere clearly demonstrated, carrying out these responsibilities in a justifiable way is no easy task (Jackson 2000). In sum, International Society is an approach which tells us something about a world of sovereign states where power and law are both present. The ethics of prudence and the national interest claim the responsibilities of statespeople alongside their duty to observe international rules and procedures. World politics is a world of states but it is also a world of human beings, and it will often be difficult to reconcile the demands and claims of both. The main elements of the International Society approach are summarized in Table 2.3.

The challenge posed by the International Society approach does not count as a new major debate. It should rather be seen as an extension of the first debate and a repudiation of the seeming behaviouralist triumph in the second debate. International Society builds on classical realist and liberal ideas, combining and expanding them in ways

TABLE 2.3 International Society (the English School)

METHODOLOGICAL FOCUS	MAIN ELEMENTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM
Understanding	Power, national interest (realist element)
Judgement	Rules, procedures, international law (liberal element)
Values	Universal human rights, one world for all (cosmopolitan element)
Norms and historical knowledge	
Theorist inside subject	

that provide an alternative to both. International Society adds another perspective to the first great debate between realism and liberalism by rejecting the sharp divisions between them. Although International Society scholars did not enter that debate directly, their approach clearly suggests that the difference between realism and liberalism is drawn too sharply; the historical world does not choose between power and law in quite the categorical way that the debate implies.

As regards the second great debate between the traditionalists and the behaviouralists, International Society theorists did enter that debate by firmly rejecting the latter approach and upholding the former approach (Bull 1969). International Society scholars do not see any possibility of the construction of 'laws' of IR on the model of the natural sciences. For them, that project is flawed: it is based on an intellectual misreading of the character of international relations. For International Society scholars, IR is entirely a field of human relations: it is a normative subject and it cannot be fully understood in non-normative terms. IR is about understanding, not explaining; it involves the exercise of judgement: putting oneself in the place of statespeople to try better to understand the dilemmas they confront in their conduct of foreign policy. The notion of an international society also provides a perspective for studying the issues of human rights and humanitarian intervention that figured prominently on the IR agenda at that time. Finally, the International Society approach includes a historical dimension that is missing in much contemporary IR. Two key claims here are that many international systems have been characterized by hegemony rather than the balance of power and that the norms of international society are historical creations that have characterized some but not all international systems (Bull 1977; Watson 1992; Møller 2014).

To sum up: International Society scholars emphasize the simultaneous presence in international society of both realist and liberal elements. There is conflict and there is cooperation; there are states and there are individuals. These different elements cannot be simplified and abstracted into a single theory that emphasizes only one explanatory variable—i.e., power. That would be a much too simple view of world politics and would distort reality. International Society theorists argue for a humanist approach

that recognizes the simultaneous presence of all these elements, and the need for holistic and historical study of the problems and dilemmas that arise in that complex situation.

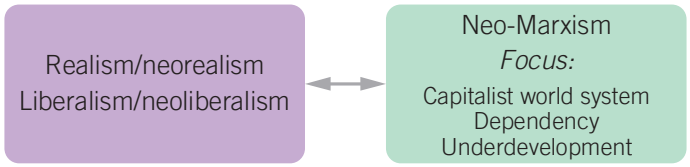
2.8 International Political Economy (IPE)

The academic IR debates presented so far are mainly concerned with international politics. Economic affairs play a secondary role. There is little concern with the weak states in the developing world. As we noted in Chapter 1, the decades after the Second World War were a period of decolonization. A large number of 'new' countries appeared on the map as the old colonial powers gave up their control and the former colonies were given political independence. Many of the 'new' states are weak in economic terms: they are at the bottom of the global economic hierarchy and constitute a world of developing states (formerly referred to as the Third World). In the 1970s, developing countries started to press for changes in the international system to improve their economic position in relation to developed countries. Around this time, neo-Marxism emerged as an attempt to theorize about economic underdevelopment in developing countries.

This became the basis for a third major debate in IR about international wealth and international poverty—i.e., about International Political Economy (IPE). IPE is basically about who gets what in the international economic and political system. The third debate takes the shape of a neo-Marxist critique of the capitalist world economy together with liberal IPE and realist IPE responses concerning the relationship between economics and politics in international relations (see Figure 2.5). We introduce these three perspectives in Chapter 6.

Neo-Marxism is an attempt to analyse the situation of developing countries by applying the tools of analysis first developed by Karl Marx. Marx, a famous nineteenth-political economist, focused on capitalism in Europe; he argued that the bourgeoisie or capitalist class used its economic power to exploit and oppress the proletariat, or working class. Neo-Marxists extend that analysis to developing countries by arguing that the global capitalist economy controlled by the wealthy capitalist states is used to impoverish the world's poor countries. 'Dependence' is a core concept for neo-Marxists. They claim that countries in the developing world are not poor because they are inherently backward or undeveloped. Rather, it is because they have been actively underdeveloped by the rich countries of the developed world. Developing countries are subject to unequal exchange: in order to participate in the global capitalist economy they must sell their raw materials at cheap prices, and have to buy finished goods at high prices. In

FIGURE 2.5 Third major debate in IR



marked contrast, rich countries can buy low and sell high. For neo-Marxists that situation is imposed upon poor countries by the wealthy capitalist states.

Andre Gunder Frank claims that unequal exchange and appropriation of economic surplus by the few at the expense of the many are inherent in capitalism (Frank 1967). As long as the capitalist system exists, there will be underdevelopment in the developing world. A similar view is taken by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1983), who has analysed the overall development of the capitalist world system since its beginning in the sixteenth century. Wallerstein allows for the possibility that some developing countries can 'move upwards' in the global capitalist hierarchy. But only a few can do that; there is no room at the top for everybody. Capitalism is a hierarchy based on the exploitation of the poor by the rich, and it will remain that way unless and until it is replaced.

The liberal view of IPE is almost exactly the opposite. Liberal IPE scholars argue that human prosperity can be achieved by the free global expansion of capitalism beyond the boundaries of the sovereign state, and by the decline of the significance of these boundaries. Liberals draw on the economic analysis of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other classical liberal economists, who argue that free markets together with private property and individual freedom create the basis for self-sustaining economic progress for everybody involved (see also Friedman 1962: 13–14). Thus, whereas Marxist IPE views international capitalism as an instrument for exploitation of developing countries by developed countries, liberal IPE views it as an instrument of progressive change for all countries regardless of their level of development.

Realist IPE is different again. It can be traced back to the thoughts of Friedrich List, a nineteenth-century German economist. It is based on the idea that economic activity should be put into the service of building a strong state and supporting the national interest. Wealth should thus be controlled and managed by the state; that statist IPE doctrine is often referred to as '**mercantilism**' or 'economic nationalism'. For mercantilists, the creation of wealth is the necessary basis for increased power of the state. Wealth is therefore an instrument in the creation of national security and national welfare. Moreover, the smooth functioning of a free market depends on political power. Without a dominant or hegemonic power, there can be no liberal world economy (Gilpin 1987: 72). The United States has had the role of hegemon since the end of the First World War. But beginning in the early 1970s, the US was increasingly challenged economically by Japan and by Western Europe. And according to realist IPE, that decline of US leadership has weakened the liberal world economy, because there is no other state that can perform the role of global hegemon.

These different views of IPE show up in analyses of three important and related issues of recent years. The first issue concerns economic **globalization**; that is, the spread and intensification of all kinds of economic relations between countries. Does economic globalization undermine 'national' economies by erasing national borders and by subjecting national economies to the exigencies of the global economy? The second issue is about who wins and who loses in the process of economic globalization. The third issue concerns how we should view the relative importance of economics and politics and how the rules of the game are formulated and maintained in international affairs. Are global economic relations ultimately controlled by states which set out the framework of rules

that economic actors have to observe? To what extent has system governance become more difficult since the post-war **Bretton Woods** era? Underlying many of these questions is the issue of state sovereignty: are the forces of global economics making the sovereign state obsolete? The three approaches to IPE come up with very different answers to these questions, as we shall see in Chapter 10. We will also identify key differences between the hard science American school of IPE and the more qualitative and normative tradition of IPE that dominates outside of America.

In short, the third major debate further complicates the discipline of IR because it shifts the subject away from political and military issues and towards economic and social issues, and because it introduces the distinct socioeconomic problems of developing countries. It expands the academic IR research agenda to include socioeconomic questions of welfare as well as political–military questions of security. Yet both realist and liberal traditions have specific views on IPE, and those views have been attacked by neo-Marxism. And all three perspectives are in rather sharp disagreement with each other: they take fundamentally different views of the international political economy in terms of both concepts and values. In that sense, we do indeed have a third debate. The debate was focused on North–South relations at first, but it has long since expanded to include IPE issues in all areas of international relations. There was no clear winner in the third debate, as we shall see in Chapter 6 and Chapter 10.

2.9 Dissident Voices: Alternative Approaches to IR

The debates introduced so far have concerned the established theoretical traditions in the discipline: realism, liberalism, International Society, and the theories of IPE. Currently a fourth debate on IR is well under way. It involves various critiques of the established traditions by alternative approaches, sometimes identified as post-positivism (Smith et al. 1996). There have always been 'dissident voices' in the discipline of IR: philosophers and scholars who have rejected established views and tried to replace them with alternatives. But in recent years these voices have grown stronger.

Two factors help explain that development. The end of the Cold War changed the international agenda in some fundamental ways. In place of a clear-cut East/West conflict dominated by two contending superpowers, a number of diverse issues emerged in world politics, including, for example, state partition and disintegration, civil war, terrorism, democratization, national minorities, humanitarian intervention, ethnic cleansing, mass migration and refugee problems, gender inequality, environmental security, climate change, and so forth. An increasing number of IR scholars expressed dissatisfaction with the dominant Cold War approach to IR: the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. Many IR scholars now take issue with Waltz's claim that the complex world of international relations can be squeezed into a few law-like statements about the structure of the international system and the balance of power. They also criticize Waltzian neorealism for its conservative political outlook; there is not much in neorealism that can point to change and the creation of a better world.

Post-Cold War developments do not fit well into a neorealist analysis. For example, the United States is today the preponderant power in the world, especially in terms

of military strength. Neorealist logic dictates that other states will balance the United States because offsetting US power is a means of guaranteeing one's own security (Waltz 2000: 56; Fettweiss 2004; Paul et al. 2004). But this has not happened; there has been no major balancing of US power since the end of the Cold War, though the rise of China might be changing this. In order to understand that situation, we are led towards different types of analysis of current international relations, including constructivism, some forms of liberalism, International Society theories, or even classical realism.

Social constructivism is an approach that has grown in importance since the 1980s. Constructivists emphasize the role of human agency and the importance of ideas in international relations. This stands in contrast to neorealist and neoliberal theory, which focus on material power, such as military force, economic capabilities, and interdependencies. The thinking of central actors such as Donald Trump or of international organizations such as the IMF, and the ideas and norms of behaviour that such actors promote are as important for international relations as is the distribution of military and other capabilities. Chapter 7 introduces social constructivism. Constructivists argue that the international system is constituted by ideas, not material power.

In recent years, the 'dissident voices' in IR have increased in number; there is now a diverse group of approaches that question the established traditions in more fundamental ways. Uneven globalization has helped create rising inequality in the world and has also led to mass migration. This has sharpened the focus on identity: who are 'we' and what are our relations to other groups at home and abroad? One aspect concerns the different ways in which IR is practised and developed in various parts of the Global South. We have mentioned the dominance of the United States in the development of the discipline of IR. The new focus on international relations from the Global South is an attempt to focus on the different ways IR scholarship has developed in other parts of the world, in particular outside the Global North (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Hobson 2012; Deciancio 2016; Smith and Tickner 2020). There are always several stories to tell in IR, and there should be an 'aspiration for greater inclusiveness and diversity in our discipline' (Acharya 2014: 649). A recent collection of scholarship discusses how this might affect the discipline of IR, our view of global issues, the selection of key concepts and categories, and the future of IR (Smith and Tickner 2020).

Another alternative approach focuses on the environment. Most observers agree that the globe is facing a severe environmental crisis due to climate change (global warming) and a host of other challenges. Thinking about international relations is typically based on human-centred thought (**anthropocentrism**), whereas the emerging '**green theory**' has ecology-centred thought (ecocentrism) as its foundation. It promotes a 'green theory of value' where the preservation of nature is put before the promotion of human development (Dyer 2017). Some believe that a 'green dimension' would not be too difficult to add onto our current theoretical debates about international security and economics. Others claim that existing IR thinking is simply 'ecologically blind' (Eckersley 2016). Such a stance involves dramatic changes in our view of what is important in international relations. We return to this debate in Chapter 11.

Feminism, which we introduce in Chapter 8, entered the discipline of IR in the 1980s. It focused on the subordination of women in international politics and economics.

A great deal of feminist IR scholarship is concerned with documenting and analysing different aspects of a gendered world with women in less privileged and less visible positions. Emphasis is also on the identification and critique of socially constructed gender norms that assign higher values to characteristics of masculinity than to attributes connected to femininity. In several ways, established IR theory is charged with promoting gendered ideas about hierarchy that confirm the subordination of women (Smith 2018; Zalewski 2019).

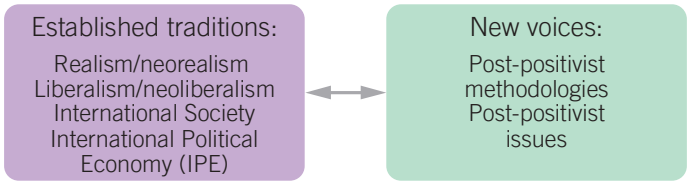
Finally, we should note that there is a vibrant debate today about world order. The central issue is whether things are generally getting better in the world so that the people and the planet are moving forward in most respects, or whether things are getting worse so that we are moving backwards or downwards. This debate is not centred on one theory or set of approaches. It involves contributions from most of the theoretical positions discussed in this book, and we return to it in Chapter 12.

In sum, developments since the end of the Cold War have pointed away from the theoretical convictions of neorealism and have also challenged the great optimism of many liberal views. New perspectives have emerged, both as regards theory; that is, *how* to best approach the study of IR, and as regards substantial issues; that is, *which* issues should be considered the most important ones for IR to study (see Figure 2.6). We have chosen to present these developments in four chapters later in this volume.

Chapter 7 presents constructivist theories of IR. Chapter 8 considers post-positivist approaches, including post-structuralism, postcolonialism, and feminism. These approaches criticize established theories on both methodological and substantial grounds, but they are not in agreement about what is the best replacement for the methods and theories that are now being rejected. Chapter 11 addresses key issues in contemporary IR: climate change; international terrorism; religion in IR; and balance and hegemony in world history. They are rival answers to the question: what is the most important issue or concern in world politics now that the Cold War has come to an end? Finally, Chapter 12 takes on the big question of 'world order or world chaos?', presenting the key arguments from the major contenders in the discussion.

Social constructivism and the non-traditional issues and methodologies mentioned here have something in common: they claim that established traditions in IR fail to come to grips with the post-Cold War changes of world politics. These recent approaches should thus be seen as 'new voices' that are trying to point the way to an academic IR discipline that is more in tune with international relations in the new millennium. In short, many scholars argue that a fourth IR debate has been thrown open in the 1990s between the established traditions on the one hand and these new voices on the other.

FIGURE 2.6 Fourth major debate in IR



2.10 Criteria for Good Theory

This chapter has introduced the main theoretical traditions in IR. It is necessary to be familiar with theory, because facts do not speak for themselves. We always look at the world, consciously or not, through a specific set of lenses; we may think of those lenses as theory. Is development taking place in the developing world or is it underdevelopment? Is the world a more secure or a more dangerous place since the end of the Cold War? Are contemporary states more prone to cooperate or to compete with each other? Facts alone cannot answer these questions; we need help from theories. Theories tell us which facts are important and which are unimportant; that is, they structure our view of the world. They are based on certain values, and often they also contain visions of how we want the world to be. Early liberal thinking about IR, for example, was driven by the determination never to repeat the disaster of the First World War. Liberals hoped the creation of new international organizations would foster a more peaceful and cooperative world. People's values and political priorities thus often play a role in choosing one theory ahead of another.

Because theory is necessary in thinking systematically about the world, it is better to get the most important theories out in the open and subject them to scrutiny. We should examine their concepts, their claims about how the world hangs together, and what the important facts are; we should probe their values and visions. We should also spend time on the relationships between theories on the one hand and the real world on the other hand; we have devoted the entire Part 3 of the book to that subject (Chapters 9 through 12).

These considerations always beg a big question: which theory is best? It may seem an innocent question, but it raises a number of difficult and complex issues. One answer is that the question about the best theory is not really meaningful, because different theories, such as realism and liberalism, are like different games, played by different people (Rosenau 1967; see also Smith 1997). This metaphor fits even better if we look at the more abstract philosophical wagers different theories make. Different theories are based on different views of whether or not reality is independent of the human mind that perceives it and about whether or not the most important things that our theories deal with are phenomena that can be observed empirically. At this very abstract level, there are definitely different games being played, with different sets of rules. There has recently been a strong call for recognizing this diversity and hence for accepting pluralism in IR (Jackson 2016). The most important aspect of this pluralism is that we cannot use one single methodology to assess theories that make starkly different assumptions about the world and the relation of the researcher to that world. This is a point we need to bear in mind when discussing theories such as social constructivism and post-positivism in the chapters that follow.

However, even if theories are in many ways different, it does make sense to rank them on some general criteria, just as it makes sense to select the athlete of the year even if the candidates for that honour compete in very different athletic disciplines. What would be the criteria for identifying the best theory? We may think of several relevant criteria, among them:

- Coherence: the theory should be consistent, i.e., free of internal contradictions.
- Clarity of exposition: the theory should be formulated in a clear and lucid manner.

- Unbiased: the theory should not be based on purely subjective valuations. No theory is value-free, but the theory should strive to be candid about its normative premises and values.
- Scope: the theory should be relevant for a large number of important issues. A theory with limited scope, for example, is a theory about US decision-making in the Gulf War. A theory with wide scope is a theory about foreign policy decision-making in general. Moreover, the theory is better if the issues it explains have hitherto been puzzling and if it offers policy advice for decision makers and practitioners.
- Depth: the theory should be able to explain and understand as much as possible of the phenomenon that it purports to tackle. It should be as complete as possible. For example, a theory of European integration has limited depth if it explains only some part of that process and much more depth if it explains most of it.

Other possible criteria could be set forth (see e.g., Walt 2005: 26–8); but it must be emphasized that there is no objective way of choosing between the evaluative criteria. It is clear that there are often trade-offs between the criteria and that some criteria can load the dice in favour of some types of theory and against others. There is no simple way around the problem.

As textbook writers, we see it as our duty to present what we consider the most important theories and their relationships to the real world in a way that draws out the strength of each theory but is critical of its weaknesses and limitations. This book is not aimed at guiding you towards one single theory which we see as the best; it is aimed at identifying the pros and cons of several important theories in order to enable you to make your own well-considered choices from the available possibilities.

In this connection, a final issue is important. As has often been pointed out, cooperation between theories is possible; they can be combined in various ways (but not in every way!) in order to create stronger analytical frameworks (Howard 2010; Sil and Katzenstein 2010). Theories in IR have traditionally operated at different levels of analysis. Kenneth Waltz (1959) famously distinguished whether scholars take the level of the individual, the national level, or the state system as the starting point in explaining international politics. Waltz refers to this as three different images, or what J. David Singer (1961) in his review of Waltz's book termed different 'levels of analysis'. Classical realism is very much based on individuals, or what Waltz termed the 'first image', whereas neorealism is based on the state system, or the 'third image'. The liberal theory of the democratic peace, meanwhile, is a good example of the 'second image', which is based on the national level.

In recent decades, strong voices within IR have called for explanations that combine levels, or cut across images. More particularly, there seems to be an emerging consensus that many outcomes of interest to IR scholars can only be made sense of by integrating system-level pressures and domestic-level factors (Sørensen 2001; Hui 2005; Schweller 2006; Deudney 2007; Nexon 2009: 353–4; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). For example, states react to changes at the systemic level (e.g., the US turns its attention towards Asia due to the growth of Chinese power). But they do so differently because of domestic factors (e.g., Joe Biden's policy is different from Donald Trump's policy). A good

example of such an integrated approach is found in neoclassical realism, which takes international anarchy and power competition as a starting point but argues that state behaviour is also determined by domestic conditions (Schweller 2006). Another example is recent research into the different political constraints on foreign policy faced in democracies and autocracies (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2012). This research builds on Robert Putnam's (1988: 427) seminal work on 'two-level games', which he framed as an attempt to address the following problem: 'Domestic politics and international relations are often somewhat entangled, but our theories have not yet sorted out the puzzling tangle.'

Attempts to combine the two levels have brought IR and Comparative Politics into a close dialogue in recent decades. Not long ago, these two disciplines followed what Rustow (1970: 348) once termed a 'conventional division of labor' with IR focusing on international factors and Comparative Politics focusing on domestic factors. Today, they have become so enmeshed with each other that some scholars openly discuss whether we should abandon them as subdisciplines and move on by creating one big subject (Reiter 2015). Our position is that doing so would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. There remains a substantial difference in focus: whereas IR scholars are mainly interested in domestic factors when they contribute to our understanding of international relations, comparativists mainly emphasize international factors when they affect domestic political processes. Hence, '[e]ach may look at the same subject matter without asking the same questions' (Gourevitch 1978: 881). These differences should be evident to anyone who reads an introduction to IR and compares it with an introduction to Comparative Politics.

But whatever the vantage point, our theories certainly need to bridge the divide between international and domestic factors. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. One of the key reasons for the dominance of neorealism since the publication of Kenneth Waltz's (1979) *Theory of International Politics* is how forceful his purely systemic or third image theory is. As with any good theory, it explains a lot with a little. It does so by abstracting from reality, leaving behind the messy details that we would need to factor in to understand particular empirical developments (Jackson 2016: 123–5). As Wæver (2009: 204–5) puts it, the book's 'grand success owed much to being widely accepted as setting a new standard for "theory" in the discipline'.

It is difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to reach this standard when we try to combine levels. The analytical purchase of Waltz's theory owes exactly to his argument that we can ignore the first and second image—what he terms 'reductionist' theories (1979: Ch. 4)—in favour of a pure third image or systemic theory. It is not that Waltz does not recognize that domestic factors are often important and that they sometimes mean that states will act in a way that contradicts the predictions based on the structure of international politics. But he abstracts from this in order to focus on how the system level shapes and shoves the units and domestic actors in general terms.

By integrating levels, we risk weakening our theories and we face the problem that we might be trying to combine theories that cannot easily be synthesized (Wæver 2009: 213–14). We here face a trade-off that can be stated as follows: by combining levels we gain a more comprehensive understanding of empirical developments but we risk losing

theoretical clarity. The simple and elegant theory explains some important things but leaves much in the dark. A complex and nuanced theory may explain more but also draws so much in that we may be left in doubt about what is really important and what is less important. At the same time, we face an increasing need to combine the analysis of domestic and international forces in an intensely globalized world. We will end each chapter with a discussion about how well theories fare when confronted with this trade-off.

2.11 Conclusion

The above-mentioned theories constitute the main analytical tools and concerns of contemporary IR. We have seen how the subject developed through a series of debates between different theoretical approaches. These debates were not conducted in splendid isolation from everything else; they were shaped and influenced by historical events, by the major political and economic problems of the day. They were also influenced by methodological developments in other areas of scholarship. These elements are summarized in Figure 2.1.

No single theoretical approach has clearly won the day in IR. The main theoretical traditions and alternative approaches that we have outlined are all actively employed in the discipline today. That situation reflects the necessity of different approaches to capture different aspects of a very complicated historical and contemporary reality. World politics is not dominated by one single issue or conflict; on the contrary, it is shaped and influenced by many different issues and conflicts. The pluralist situation of IR scholarship also reflects the personal preferences of different scholars: they often prefer particular theories for reasons that may have as much to do with their personal values and world views as with what takes place in international relations and what is required to understand those events and episodes.

Key points

- IR thinking has evolved in stages that are marked by specific debates between groups of scholars. The first major debate is between *utopian liberalism* and *realism*; the second debate is on method, between *traditional approaches* and *behaviouralism*. The third debate is between *neorealism/neoliberalism* and *neo-Marxism*; and an ongoing fourth debate is between *established traditions* and *post-positivist alternatives*.
- The first major debate was won by the realists. During the Cold War, realism became the dominant way of thinking about international relations not only among scholars but also among politicians, diplomats, and so-called 'ordinary people'. Morgenthau's (1960) summary of realism became the standard introduction to IR in the 1950s and 1960s.
- The second major debate is about method. The contenders are traditionalists and behaviouralists. The former try to understand a complicated social world of human affairs and the

values fundamental to it, such as order, freedom, and justice. The latter approach, behaviouralism, finds no place for morality or ethics in international theory. Behaviouralism wants to classify, measure, and explain through the formulation of general laws like those formulated in the 'hard' sciences of chemistry, physics, etc. The behaviouralists seemed to triumph for a time but in the end neither side won the debate. Today both types of method are used in the discipline. There was a revival of traditional normative approaches to IR after the end of the Cold War.

- In the 1960s and 1970s, neoliberalism challenged realism by arguing that interdependence, integration, and democracy are changing IR. Neorealism responded that anarchy and the balance of power are still at the heart of IR.
- International Society theorists maintain that IR contains both 'realist' elements of conflict and 'liberal' elements of cooperation, and that these elements cannot be collapsed into a single theoretical synthesis. They also emphasize human rights and other cosmopolitan features of world politics, and they defend the traditional approach to IR.
- The third debate is characterized by a neo-Marxist attack on the established positions of realism/neorealism and liberalism/neoliberalism. This debate concerns IPE. It creates a more complex situation in the discipline because it expands the terrain towards economic issues and because it introduces the distinct problems of developing countries and of the politics of international economic cooperation. There is no clear winner of the third debate. Within IPE, the discussion between the main contenders continues.
- Currently a fourth debate is under way in IR; it involves an attack on the established traditions by alternative approaches, sometimes identified as 'post-positivist alternatives'. The debate raises both methodological issues (i.e., *how* to approach the study of an issue) and substantial issues (i.e., *which* issues should be considered the most important ones). Some of these approaches also reject the scientific claims of neorealism and neoliberalism. These dissident voices have increased in number and influence in recent years.

? Questions

- Identify the major debates within IR. Why do the debates often linger on without any clear winner emerging?
- Which are the established theoretical traditions in IR? How can they be seen as 'established'?
- Why was early IR strongly influenced by liberalism?
- Seen over the long term, realism is the dominant theoretical tradition in IR. Why?
- Why do scholars have pet theories? What are your own theoretical preferences?
- Is it fair to put the label 'utopian liberalism' on the liberal politics of the 1920s? Why or why not?
- How much of a challenge do the alternative approaches present to the established theories in IR?
- What are the pros and cons of combining system-level pressures and domestic factors in IR theories?