

Theory, Images, and International Relations: An Introduction

Why do wars occur? Is nationalism the primary cause? Or ideology? Or the lack of world government? Or misperception? Or are people innately aggressive? How can stability (if not peace) be achieved? Why is there such tremendous social and economic inequality between different regions of the world? These are the sorts of questions that have preoccupied scholars and statesmen at various times over the millennia, whether the political entity in question were an ancient city-state or a modern nation-state, a centralized empire or a decentralized feudal system, a socialist or a liberal democratic society. Nor are these questions the private preserve of intellectuals, diplomatic practitioners, and assorted political pundits and commentators. At one time or another, most citizens reflect on one or more of these important queries.

International relations as a field of inquiry addresses such questions. Despite the adjective *international*, the field is concerned with much more than relations between or among states. Other actors, such as international organizations, multinational corporations, environmental organizations, and terrorist groups, are all part of what could more correctly be termed **world politics**. Studies have also focused on factors internal to a state, such as bureaucratic governmental coalitions, interest groups, and decision making. The study of international relations, therefore, ranges from balance of power politics and economic structures at the international level to the ideological and perceptual predispositions of individual leaders.

Given the tremendous diversity and complexity of *what* is studied, it is not too surprising that there is a multiplicity of views concerning *how* one studies international relations. The possible avenues go well beyond the realms of history and political science. They include economics, psychology, social psychology, sociology, and anthropology. All this may seem rather intimidating to the student. If it is any consolation, it can also be intimidating to the professional in the field. As a result, many professionals tend to focus on one particular aspect of international relations, perhaps alliance behavior, the functioning of the United Nations and other international organizations, decision making in crisis situations, or the construction of **international regimes**.

No matter how ambitious or modest an international relations research project may be, however, every scholar approaches it from a particular point of view. Although

some would argue that values ought to be central, most academics strive (or at least claim to strive) to reduce the impact of personal values when it comes to empirical research. Nevertheless, personal background and the nature of academic training inevitably influence the manner in which scholars interpret and examine international relations. As the German scholar Max Weber once argued: "All knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from particular points of view." How research is conducted will be "determined by the evaluative ideas that dominate the investigator and his age."¹ In other words, each individual's work will be influenced by a particular doctrine, image of the world, ideology, paradigm, or perspective. One may strive to be value free and objective, but at best, these goals can be achieved only imperfectly.

Different perspectives on international relations naturally generate debates. In the 1930s, realists and idealists argued over the nature of international politics and the possibility of peaceful change. In the 1960s, the so-called second great debate between traditionalists and behavioralists dealt with the question of appropriate methodology. Traditionalists emphasized the relative utility of history, law, philosophy, and other traditional methods of inquiry. Behavioralists argued in favor of social science conceptualization, quantification of variables, formal hypothesis testing, and causal model building. Dialectical approaches drawing on history and Marxist insights have been the subject of much discussion in certain journals in the field, although this debate is not widely reflected in the textbook literature. Critical theory perspectives raise doubts about the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying much of the social science work on international relations. Social constructivists see states and nonstate actors not as mere products of the international system, but as actually playing a decisive role in shaping it. These actors influence, and are influenced by, the international norms and institutions they construct—activities that sustain or create new interests, values, and the ordering of foreign policy preferences.

In this book we emphasize three alternative images or perspectives of international relations we label **realism**, **pluralism**, and **globalism**.² We argue that these images have provided the basis for the development of many theoretical works that attempt to explain various aspects of international relations. The image that one has of international relations is of critical importance. Each image contains certain assumptions about world politics—whether or not explicitly recognized by the researcher—concerning critical actors, issues, and processes in world politics. These images lead one to ask certain questions, seek certain types of answers, and use certain methodological tools in the construction and testing of hypotheses and theories. The advantage is that such images bring order to the analytical effort and make it more manageable. A potential disadvantage, however, is that alternative perspectives and insights may be ignored or overlooked. Although the realist, pluralist, and globalist images are not mutually exclusive in all respects, the differences in point of view and emphasis are much greater than any apparent similarities. The resultant attempts at theory building, therefore, also vary considerably. Although some of these works fit neatly into one of the three categories or images we have identified, some efforts combine assumptions underlying different images. After all, theoretical work need not be constrained by preexisting taxonomies or organizing frameworks. Theorists are free to break out of or transcend existing categories, perhaps forging new syntheses. Indeed, the international relations field remains dynamic, with theorists continuing to break new ground.

In this chapter, we first address the question of what is meant by the term *theory*. We then briefly discuss the three images as alternative perspectives that influence the construction of international relations theory.

WHAT IS THEORY?

The word *theory* means different things to different people. It may even mean different things to the same person. In common parlance, for example, something may be true “in theory” but not in fact or in a particular case or set of circumstances. In this rather loose usage, “in theory” equates to “in principle” or “in the abstract.”

Another meaning, somewhat more consistent with usage in this volume, views theory as a way of making the world or some part of it more intelligible or better understood. Theories dealing with international relations aspire to achieve this goal. Making things more intelligible may, of course, amount to nothing more than better or more precise *description* of the things we observe. Although accurate description is essential, theory is something more.

For many people, theory is *explaining* or *predicting*. One goes beyond mere description of phenomena observed and engages in *causal* explanation or prediction based on certain prior occurrences or conditions. Thus, whenever *A* is present, then *B* can be expected to follow. “If *A*, then *B*” as hypothesis may be subject to empirical test—that is, tested against real-world or factual data. “If states engage in arms races, then the likelihood of war increases” is an example of such a hypothesis. Indeed, formal statement and testing of hypotheses through the use of a statistical methodology is seen by many as central to the theory-building process. Others prefer to rely on nonquantitative case and comparative case studies, historical methods, and reasoned argument—the so-called traditional methods of theory building.

Whatever differences international relations scholars might have among themselves, they all agree on one thing—theory is necessary and unavoidable when it comes to explaining and attempting to foresee the future of international relations. As noted, theory is *unavoidable* in that all scholars approach their subject matter from what have been variously termed different perspectives, paradigms, metatheoretical constructs, or images. Theory is also *necessary* in that it tells us what to focus on and what to ignore in making sense of the world around us. Without theory, we would be overwhelmed and immobilized by an avalanche of mere facts. The sense we make of what we observe is informed by the perspectives and theories that we hold.

A theory, therefore, is an intellectual construct that helps one to select facts and interpret them in such a way as to facilitate explanation and prediction concerning regularities and recurrences or repetitions of observed phenomena. One can certainly think theoretically when it comes to explaining foreign policy processes in general or the foreign policy of a particular state. But international relations theorists tend to be interested in patterns of behavior *among* various international actors. In identifying patterns, the stage is set for making modest predictions about the possible nature and direction of change. To think theoretically, however, is not to engage in point predictions—“*A* will attack *B* the first week of the year”—however much foreign policy, national security, and intelligence analysts may aspire to such precision.³

To think theoretically is to be interested in central tendencies. As James Rosenau notes in the article that follows this chapter, the theorist views each event as an instance of a more encompassing class or pattern of phenomena. Fitting pieces into a larger whole makes theory building analogous to puzzle solving. In fact, for many theorists, the goal is not merely explanation of patterns of behavior, but explanations of patterns that at first glance seem counterintuitive or different from what one might expect.

Furthermore, the best theories are *progressive*—meaning they lead researchers to ask new and interesting questions—and are also *parsimonious*—explaining a great deal of behavior through the use of a relatively few concepts with relations among them clearly specified. By contrast, theories that lack this parsimony contain too many factors—quickly becoming as or more complex than the reality they purport to explain.

War continues to be a topic of considerable concern among international relations theorists using a wide variety of methodological approaches to developing better causal theory. War poses a substantial puzzle to theorists. The phenomenon persists even though wars are extremely costly in terms of lives and treasure lost. It may be that in the minds of decisionmakers, the expected benefit of going to war still outweighs expected costs in particular cases. Quincy Wright’s *A Study of War* and Lewis Richardson’s *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* were pioneering efforts at trying to solve this puzzle. Kenneth Waltz’s *Man, the State and War* examined causes in the context of three levels of analysis. Since the 1960s, J. David Singer and others sharing his preference for formal hypothesis testing through the use of statistical methods have been engaged extensively in studying the phenomenon of war. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita’s *The War Trap* and Michael Doyle’s *Ways of War and Peace* are examples of continuing efforts to gain better understanding of war by building better theory.⁴

One view is that the underlying cause of war is the absence of any world government or central authority vested with the capability to enforce rules, settle disputes, and maintain peace among states. It is this *anarchy* or lack of common government that poses no obstacle and thus permits war to occur. As such, anarchy is the *permissive cause* of war.⁵ Misperception may be the immediate or direct cause of a given war. Or, by contrast, war may break out not so much as the result of misperception or misunderstanding but because of the hardheaded, rational calculation that the benefits of going to war appear to outweigh the costs.

Theory in a stronger or more formal sense will go beyond proposing the cause of war in such broad terms and will insist that the relations among variables be clearly specified and weighted with the precision one finds in an algebraic equation or set of related equations.⁶ Such fully developed theory is not common in the social sciences, which are often said to be at a lesser level of progress than are the natural sciences.

General theories that would provide a complete account of the causes of war are less common than *partial*, or *middle-range*, theories that are more modest in the scope of what is to be explained or predicted. Part of the war puzzle addressed by such middle-range theorists, for example, involves crises and decision making in crises. Are partial theories about such things as crisis decision making like building blocks that can at some future date be assembled into a fully developed, general theory of war? Some theorists would say yes and that the most productive enterprise for the present is the devel-

opment of better middle-range theories. Not everyone would agree; some would argue that formulating general theory comes first, with partial theories being deduced or flowing from it.

The world of theory is an abstract one. Theories may exist apart from facts. Mathematical theorists, for example, deal entirely in the realm of abstraction, whether or not their work has direct relevance to problems of the world in which we live. Practical application for the work of mathematical theorists is sometimes found years later, if ever. Empirical theories in the social or natural sciences, by contrast, relate to facts and provide explanation or prediction for observed phenomena. Hypotheses associated with these theories are subject to test against real-world data or facts. The theorist need not have any purpose in developing such empirical theories other than satisfying his or her intellectual curiosity, although many will seek to make their work “policy relevant.”⁷⁷

Policy-relevant theories may have explicit purposes that stem from the value preferences of the theorist, such as reducing the likelihood of war or curbing the arms race. Acting on such theories, of course, is the domain of the policymaker, a task separate from that of the empirical theorist. Theorists who become policymakers may well make choices informed by what theories say will be the likely outcomes of implementing one or another alternative. Their choices may be informed by empirical theory or understanding of world events, but the decisions they make are still based on value preferences.

Normative theory deals precisely with values and value preferences. Unlike empirical theory, however, propositions in normative theory are not subject to empirical test as a means of establishing their truth or falsehood. Normative theory deals not with what *is*, the domain of empirical theory. Rather, normative theory deals explicitly with what *ought* to be—the way the world should be ordered and the value choices decisionmakers *should* make. Although the bulk of the effort in this volume is allocated to empirical theory within the context of separate images of world politics, we consider normative theory to be an important and policy-relevant, if often neglected, enterprise. Chapter 5 deals explicitly with normative theories relevant to international relations and foreign policy choices. We also identify normative preferences often associated with the three images of international relations theory that are at the core of our effort.

ALTERNATIVE IMAGES

This section provides an overview of the two most striking or immediately apparent distinctions among the three images of international relations under consideration: (1) the key *actors*, or *units*, and (2) the *assumptions* made about them. In the succeeding chapters, we go well beyond this brief examination of actors and underlying assumptions. The discussion of realism, for example, focuses on the concepts of power and the balance of power, the chapter on pluralism emphasizes decision making and transnationalism, and the treatment of globalism stresses the concept of dependency in a world capitalist context. We also discuss the intellectual precursors of these images and philosophical and conceptual issues such as determinism, voluntarism, system, and system change. Although normative assumptions and implications of the three images are

treated explicitly in Chapter 5, they are also woven throughout the discussion in earlier chapters.

We begin this introductory overview with a discussion of *realism*. As will become apparent, proponents of the other two perspectives have to a certain degree been forced to come to terms with this long-established tradition. Indeed, many of their arguments are addressed directly to the strengths and weaknesses of work by realists.

Realism—Major Actors and Assumptions

Realism is based on four key assumptions. First, *states are the principal or most important actors*. States represent the key unit of analysis, whether one is dealing with ancient Greek city-states or modern nation-states. The study of international relations is the study of relations among these units. Realists who use the concept of system defined in terms of interrelated parts usually refer to an international system of states. What of nonstate actors? International organizations such as the United Nations may aspire to the status of independent actor, but from the realist perspective, this aspiration has not in fact been achieved to any significant degree. Multinational corporations, terrorist groups, and other transnational and international organizations are frequently acknowledged by realists, but the position of these nonstate actors is always one of lesser importance. States are the dominant actors.

Second, the state is viewed as a *unitary actor*. For purposes of analysis, realists view the state as being encapsulated by a metaphorical hard shell. A country faces the outside world as an integrated unit. A common assumption associated with realist thought is that political differences within the state are ultimately resolved authoritatively such that the government of the state speaks with one voice for the state as a whole. The state is a unitary actor in that it is usually assumed by realists to have one policy at any given time on any particular issue. To be sure, exceptions occur from time to time, but to the realists, these are exceptions that demonstrate the rule and that actually support the general notion of the state as an integrated, unitary actor.

Even in those exceptional cases in which, for example, a foreign ministry expresses policies different from policy statements of the same country’s defense ministry, corrective action is taken in an attempt to bring these alternative views to a common and authoritative statement of policy. “End running” of state authorities by bureaucratic and nongovernmental, domestic, and transnational actors is also possible, but it occurs unchecked by state authorities in only those issues in which the stakes are low. From the realist perspective, if the issues are important enough, higher authorities will intervene to preclude bureaucratic end running or action by nongovernmental actors that are contrary to centrally directed policy.

Third, given this emphasis on the unitary state-as-actor, realists usually make the further assumption that *the state is essentially a rational actor*. A rational foreign policy decision-making process would include a statement of objectives, consideration of all feasible alternatives in terms of existing capabilities available to the state, the relative likelihood of attaining these objectives by the various alternatives under consideration, and the benefits or costs associated with each alternative. Following this rational process, governmental decisionmakers evaluate each alternative, selecting the one that

maximizes utility (maximizing benefit or minimizing cost associated with attaining the objectives sought). The result is a rank ordering of preferences.

As a practical matter, the realist is aware of the difficulties in viewing the state as a rational actor. Governmental decisionmakers may not have all the factual information or knowledge of cause and effect they need to make value-maximizing decisions. The process may well be clouded by considerable uncertainty as decisionmakers grope for the best solution. They also have to deal with the problem of human bias and misperception that may lead them astray. In any event, the choice made—if not always the *best* or value-maximizing choice in fact—is at least perceived to be a satisfactory one. It is a **satisficing** or suboptimal choice—less than a value-maximizing choice, but still good enough in terms of the objectives sought. The assumption of the unitary, rational actor is particularly important in **game theory** and many works on **deterrence theory**.

Fourth, realists assume that within the hierarchy of international issues, **national security** usually tops the list. Military and related political issues dominate world politics. A realist focuses on actual or potential conflict between state actors and the use of **force**, examining how international stability is attained or maintained, how it breaks down, the utility of force as a means to resolve disputes, and the prevention of the violation of territorial integrity. **Power**, therefore, is a key concept. To the realist, military security or strategic issues are sometimes referred to as **high politics**, whereas economic and social issues are viewed as less important or **low politics**. Indeed, the former is often understood to dominate or set the environment within which the latter occurs.

Pluralism—Major Actors and Assumptions

The pluralist image (often referred to as **liberalism** or as a *liberal* construct) consists of a different set of assumptions. First, **nonstate actors** are important entities in international relations that cannot be ignored. International organizations, for example, can be independent actors in their own right. The organization's own decisionmakers, bureaucrats, and other associated groups have considerable influence in areas such as agenda setting—determining which issues are most important politically. International organizations are more than simply arenas within which sovereign states compete. Organizational power and autonomy are neither absolute nor nonexistent but something in between, varying from organization to organization. Similarly, other nongovernmental actors, such as environmental organizations and multinational corporations (MNCs), cannot be dismissed as being of merely marginal importance, given an increasingly **interdependent** world economy. Indeed, in some cases, they are even capable of circumventing the authority of the state.

Second, for the pluralist, *the state is not a unitary actor*. Indeed, the realist view of the state as unitary actor is an abstraction that masks the essence of politics that is found principally within the state. The state is not some **reified** entity—an abstraction to be treated as if it were a physical being that acts with single-minded determination, always in a coherent manner. It is, rather, composed of individual bureaucracies, interest groups, and individuals that attempt to formulate or influence foreign policy. Competition, coalition building, conflict, and compromise among these actors are the stuff of politics. To speak of “the foreign policy” of the United Kingdom or the United

States, for example, is really to speak of a number of foreign policy decisions determined by competition among a number of actors. Foreign policy preferences, therefore, are not set in stone. Pluralists disaggregate the state—break it into its component parts. They reject the notion of the state as an integrated entity, impermeable to outside forces. Both governmental and nongovernmental actors pass through this soft outer shell, sometimes taking actions with policy implications contrary to preferences of central state authorities. These are not just exceptional cases from the pluralist perspective. In fact, focusing on the state as if it were a unitary actor again misses the essence of politics. This is not only in terms of interactions *within* the state; equally important, it is the **transnational** dimension of state and nonstate actors that operates *across* national borders. The pluralist image thus offers greater complexity than the relatively simpler image of states as unitary actors interacting with one another.

Third, pluralists *challenge* the utility of the realist assumption of *the state as rational actor*. This follows logically from the pluralist image of the disaggregated state in which the foreign policy decision-making process is the result of clashes, bargaining, and compromise between and among different actors. In some cases, a particular policy may be suggested in order to enhance the bureaucratic power, prestige, and standing of one organization at the expense of others. Although this may seem rational from the perspective of an individual bureaucracy, it can lead to poor, if not disastrous, foreign policies. The pursuit of individual, value-maximizing strategies at the organization level can lead to collective disaster at the nation-state level. Moreover, the decision-making process is typically one of coalition and countercoalition building, bargaining, and compromising that may not yield a best or optimal decision. Attempting to establish a consensus or at least a **minimum winning coalition** is a process far different in kind from the earlier simple description of what is usually meant by the term **rational**. Misperception on the part of decisionmakers as a result of incomplete information, bias, stress, and uncertainty about cause and effect is also a key focus of attention for some pluralist scholars. All such factors undercut the idea of a rational decision-making process.

Finally, for the pluralist, *the agenda of international politics is extensive*. The pluralist rejects the notion that the agenda of international politics is dominated primarily by military-security issues. Foreign affairs agendas have expanded and diversified over recent decades such that economic and social issues are often at the forefront of foreign policy debates. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, himself a realist, noted as far back as 1975 that

progress in dealing with the traditional agenda is no longer enough. A new and unprecedented kind of issue has emerged. The problems of energy, resources, environment, pollution, the uses of space and the seas now rank with questions of military security, ideology, and territorial rivalry which have traditionally made up the diplomatic agenda.⁸

Not surprisingly, such a statement was made at a time of détente, or relatively relaxed tensions, between East and West. It may be that as international tensions decrease, economic and social, or **welfare**, issues tend to come to the forefront of international debate.

Globalism—Major Actors and Assumptions

Globalism, as we use the term, is a third perspective, fundamentally different from both the realist and the pluralist images. In the 1970s, debate within the international relations discipline tended to focus on the realists and pluralists. Only recently has attention been paid to the globalist perspective. Globalists typically assume that the starting point of analysis for international relations is *the global context within which states and other entities interact*. Globalists emphasize the overall structure of the international system or, more colloquially, the “big picture.” To explain behavior, one must first grasp the essence of the global environment within which such behavior takes place. This is a dominant theme within the globalist image, although some realists and pluralists also share this perspective. To understand the external behavior of states requires more than merely examining factors internal to a state. One must first grasp how the structure of the system conditions and predisposes certain actors to act in certain ways.

Second, globalists assume that it is not only useful but also imperative to *view international relations from a historical perspective*. It is only through an examination of history that one can understand the current environment within which world politics takes place. For many globalists, Marxists as well as non-Marxists, the defining characteristic of the international system is that it is **capitalist**. This requires the study of the rise of capitalism as it emerged in sixteenth-century Western Europe, its development, changes, and expansion to the point at which today we can speak of a **world capitalist system** that conditions and constrains the behavior of all states and societies. Some states and societies benefit from this capitalist system; others do not. Furthermore, the evolution of the world capitalist system supposedly accounts for the creation of states, not just their behavior. While realists and many pluralists tend to see states as a given, utilizing them as *independent variables*, some globalists view states as *dependent variables*—that which is to be explained.

Third, although globalists recognize the importance of states-as-actors, international organizations, and transnational actors and coalitions, the particular focus of their analysis is on how these and other factors act as *mechanisms of domination* by which some states, classes, or elites manage to benefit from this capitalist system at the expense of others. More specifically, globalists are typically concerned with the development and maintenance of **dependency relations** among northern, industrialized states (in North America, Europe, Japan) and the poor, underdeveloped, or industrially backward Third World or less developed countries (LDCs) of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The basic argument is that these latter states and societies are underdeveloped not because they have failed to develop capitalist economic systems or because they are poorly integrated into the world capitalist system. On the contrary, it is not a matter of too little capitalism but of too much. Far from being placed outside the mainstream of the world capitalist system, LDCs have become an integral part of it. The structure of the global political economy has developed in such a manner—intentionally and unintentionally—as to keep the Third World countries underdeveloped and dependent on the rich northern states. The LDCs play a crucial role in the economic well-being of the United States and other advanced industrial countries by providing cheap labor, raw

materials necessary to fuel the American economy, and markets for American manufactured goods. As part of the world capitalist system, LDCs cannot choose their own path toward economic and political development. Autonomous development in these circumstances is not possible.

Finally, as should now be apparent, globalists emphasize to a greater extent than either realists or pluralists the critical *importance of economic factors* when it comes to explaining the dynamics of the international system. Realists, you will recall, subordinate economic factors to those of a political-military nature. Pluralists argue that this is an open question; they typically reject this high versus low politics dichotomy. Social and economic issues to pluralists are at least as important as the security concerns of the realists. Globalists, however, start with the assumption that economics is the key to understanding the creation, evolution, and functioning of the contemporary world

**TABLE 1.1 Alternative Images of International Relations:
Underlying Assumptions**

	Realism	Pluralism	Globalism
<i>Analytic Unit(s)</i>	1. State is the principal actor	1. State and nonstate actors are important	1. Classes, states and societies, and nonstate actors operate as part of world capitalist system
<i>View of Actor(s)</i>	2. State is unitary actor	2. State disaggregated into components, some of which may operate transnationally	2. International relations viewed from historical perspective, especially the continuous development of world capitalism
<i>Behavioral Dynamic</i>	3. State is rational actor seeking to maximize its own interest or national objectives in foreign policy	3. Foreign policymaking and transnational processes involve conflict, bargaining, coalition, and compromise—not necessarily resulting in optimal outcomes	3. Focus is on patterns of dominance within and among societies
<i>Issues</i>	4. National security issues are most important	4. Multiple agenda with socioeconomic or welfare issues as, or more, important than national security questions	4. Economic factors are most important

system. Although the pluralist and globalist would seem to share common ground because both place importance on economic and social questions, they differ fundamentally in the ways in which they deal with them. The more fragmented pluralist image of multiple actors bargaining, compromising, and building coalitions within and across national borders contrasts sharply with the structural image of the globalist. The globalist would tell a pluralist that the outcome of bargaining among various actors is in most cases predetermined if it involves a **North–South** issue. Such interactions take place within the context of an exploitative and dependent relation that works, at the most general level, to the benefit of maintaining the world capitalist system and, more specifically, to the benefit of particular groups or classes.

Images of International Relations: Some Qualifications

We find the threefold division of realism, pluralism, and globalism to be a useful way to view the diverse images on which many theoretical efforts are based in the field of international relations. We are the first to admit that this classification scheme also has its limitations. Accordingly, we offer several qualifications and clarifications.

First, each image should be viewed as an **ideal or pure type** in that each image emphasizes what a number of seemingly diverse theoretical approaches have in common.⁹ For example, there are substantial differences in the works of Kenneth Waltz, Stanley Hoffmann, and the late Hans J. Morgenthau, but all three scholars share core assumptions of the realist perspective. What unites them as international relations theorists is more important for our purposes than what divides them.

Second, the overview of key assumptions of each of the three perspectives might give the impression that the three images are mutually exclusive in all respects. This is not the case. Realists such as Robert Gilpin and Stephen Krasner are prominent contributors to work on international political economy. In underscoring the importance of economic factors in international relations, they differ from some other scholars who put relatively more emphasis on political-military factors. Gilpin, Krasner, and other theorists who share their orientation to the international political economy focus on the *political* determinants or influences on international economic relations. They ask such questions, for example, as how do changes in the distribution of power among states affect the degree of openness in the international trading system?

Such globalists as Immanuel Wallerstein also recognize the significance of the state in international relations but prefer to emphasize economic trends and class relations. Similarly, many interdependence theorists of pluralist orientation do not deny the importance of the state as a key international actor, but they prefer to examine non-state actors as well as transnational, socioeconomic factors that they see as having reduced the autonomy of the state-as-actor. Even if the three images are not mutually exclusive in every respect, and even if every observer of international relations can agree that sensitivity to alternative perspectives on world politics is commendable, the reader may want to keep in mind how difficult it is to combine three images with so very different underlying assumptions from which all subsequent analyses, hypotheses, and theories derive.

Third, we readily confess that not all international relations specialists can be assigned conveniently to one particular image. Bruce Russett, for example, has written on dependency, the democratic peace, and conflict between states-as-actors—each subject associated, respectively, with globalist, pluralist, and realist images. Robert Jervis has bridged two camps in his pluralist examination of psychological factors in foreign policy decision making and in his realist focus on national security questions associated with deterrence, arms races, and how the anarchical international system provides the environment within which wars occur. Robert Keohane was a prominent contributor in the 1970s to pluralist works on transnationalism and interdependence that reflected a **liberal** understanding of a world politics composed of multiple kinds of both state and such nonstate actors as international organizations, corporations, bureaucracies, and even individuals and small groups. Interest by Keohane and others in how international **regimes** and associated institutions influence, and are influenced by, both competition and cooperation among states led them to adapt the realist analytical assumption of the rational, unitary state as the starting point for work referred to as **neoliberal institutionalism**. Neoliberals understand the continuing importance of nonstate actors but are not about to ignore states that continue to play a prominent and often decisive role.

Although we believe that the vast majority of writers within the international relations discipline tends to be associated with one of the three perspectives, notable exceptions do not, in our estimation, undermine the utility of the tripartite division of the field that we employ in this volume. We acknowledge a certain amount of conceptual eclecticism by scholars in the study of international relations, perhaps reflecting the absence of a single, dominant perspective. For some, conceptual diversity is to be applauded; for others, it is a source of despair. Be that as it may, our focus is primarily on ideas, trends, and generalized images of international relations and only secondarily on the work of particular authors. Indeed, our references to work in the international relations field are meant to be representative of the images we discuss, not encyclopedic in scope. Just as it is hoped that the reader will come to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three perspectives, so too do many specialists in the field weigh the relative utility of these alternative images in generating insights helpful in answering particular theoretical questions they may be asking.¹⁰ Moreover, it is not surprising to find a certain amount of conceptual eclecticism in the work of a number of theorists whose interests have changed over the years.¹¹

Fourth, the images tend to focus more on *what* is studied than on *how* to conduct such studies. A central argument we make is that quantitative and nonquantitative approaches to the study of international politics are methods that transcend the three images we have identified. Statistical methods, formal hypothesis testing, and **causal modeling** find their adherents within each of the perspectives, as do the more traditional, nonquantitative, historical, philosophical, legal, case study, and comparative case study methods. Our point remains that these are *methods*, not images of international relations or world politics. Images may influence the choice of methods, but images and methods are not one and the same.

Although it has been the subject of endless debates and much bloodletting in academic circles, the behavioralist—traditionalist (or the “science”—traditionalist)

dichotomy is not particularly useful for our purposes. One can argue over the relative merits of particular methods for answering political questions, but a more fundamental concern is the conceptual framework within which those methods are used. Are these methods informed by realist, pluralist, or globalist images of international politics, and how useful are these alternative images by which we order or make some sense of what we observe?¹²

Efforts to predict global futures through complex modeling, for example, reflect one or another of the three images we identify.¹³ An image of international or world politics influences the selection of units or processes examined and variables identified and operationalized. Thus, for realists, states and state interactions are of key importance; for pluralists, transnational interactions to include communications flows across national borders may well be the central focus; and for globalists, patterns of class or North–South relations of dominance or dependence are perhaps most important.

Similarly, methods associated with the literature on **decision-making** and **public choice theory**—economic models applied to political decision making—transcend the three world images we identify.¹⁴ Assumptions made about actors and processes are informed by realist, pluralist, and globalist images and color the use a particular method is given. Thus, **public or collective goods theory**, **game theory**, **econometrics**, and other approaches identified with the rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of **political economy** find their adherents among scholars holding diverse images and thus are not the exclusive preserve of realists, pluralists, or globalists.

Finally, we wish to state explicitly that the three images we identify are not *theories* of international relations.¹⁵ Rather, they represent general perspectives on international relations out of which particular theories *may* develop. Assumptions of an image may become part of a theory (such as the realist assumptions of a unified, rational, state-as-actor in some realist works), but more often than not, they simply help to orient a scholar's research by highlighting certain units of analysis for investigation in the construction of a theory and help to determine what constitutes evidence in the testing of hypotheses.

THE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

It is necessary to address further the question every scholar of international relations must first ask no matter what image or perspective one holds: Where should one focus one's research efforts? Let us assume that we are rather ambitious and wish to explain the causes of war between states. Does one deal with individual decisionmakers or small groups of individuals engaged in the policy process? How important, for example, are such factors as the correctness of individual perceptions or bargaining skill in determining the decision to go to war? On the other hand, if one looks outside the individual or small decision-making group to the entire state apparatus, society as a whole, or the international political system of states, one is acknowledging the importance of external or environmental factors as well.

Work by Kenneth N. Waltz in the 1950s on the causes of war represented a path-breaking effort due to his identification of distinct levels of analysis and his attempt to

specify the relations among these levels¹⁶ (an excerpt is provided in one of the readings that follows in Chapter 2). Was the cause of war to be found in the nature of individuals? (Are humans innately aggressive?) Or in the nature of states and societies? (Are some types of states more aggressive than others?) Or in the nature of the international system of states? Each answer reflects a different level of analysis—individual, state and society, or international (see Figure 1.1). Waltz's conclusion was that the *permissive* cause of war is the condition of anarchy in the international political system of states, whereas the *efficient* causes of any given war can be found as well at the other levels of analysis (individual or state and societal levels). Whether or not one agrees with his conclusion, the important point is that his analysis of the problem of war was at different levels. In 1961, the importance of the question of levels of analysis to the study of international relations was further discussed in detail in an often-cited article by J. David Singer. Singer argued that one's choice of a particular level of analysis determines what one will and will not see. Different levels tend to emphasize different actors and processes.¹⁷

For example, it is quite common for the levels of analysis to include (1) the international system (distribution of power among states, geography, technology, and other factors); (2) the state (often treated as a unified actor) and society (democratic, authoritarian, etc.); (3) groups as in bureaucratic politics; (4) individuals as in psychology and individuals in the context of the groups of which they are a part as in social psychology. It is also quite typical for these various levels to be used to explain the foreign policy behavior of states—the dependent variable. The state, in other words, is often the **unit of analysis**, and explaining its behavior could entail taking into account factors at all of these levels of analysis.

But *which* level of analysis, one may ask, is most important? To take a specific example, let us assume that the foreign policies of most states exhibit relative constancy, or slowness to change. How is this constancy to be explained? Some scholars

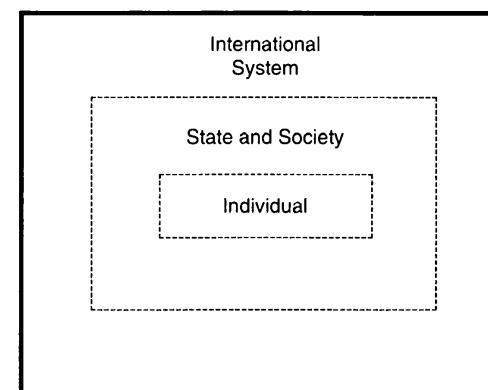


FIGURE 1.1 Levels of Analysis

point to external factors such as the balance of power among states that is relatively slow to change in any major way. Others emphasize relatively constant factors within the state—the same decisionmakers or decision-making processes, with incremental or small changes being the rule.

Another example: How are arms races explained? Some scholars point to international factors such as the military expenditures and hostility of other states that lead to an increase in the production of weapons. Other researchers emphasize the importance of domestic factors such as bureaucratic competition between branches of the military services and budgetary processes that encourage a steady increase in expenditures.¹⁸

The easy answer to the question of which level of analysis should be emphasized is that all levels of analysis should be considered. Such a response is not particularly useful because it suggests that we have to study everything under the sun. Few scholars would even attempt such a task,¹⁹ and the resulting theory would hardly be parsimonious. Hence, a great deal of the literature on international relations is constantly posing the questions of *what* should be examined *within* each level of analysis, and *how* actors, structures, and variables relate to one another across levels of analysis and over time.

This issue of levels of analysis also subtly pervades the three images. What have been termed **neorealists**, for example, note how the overall structure of the international system influences the behavior of states or the perception of decisionmakers. Hence, neorealist analysis emphasizes the systems level. Similarly, certain globalists, as we have noted, examine how the historical development of the capitalist world economy generates state actors. Despite their differences, both neorealists and *world-system theorists* emphasize the systems level. Those authors associated with the pluralist image, however, who examine bureaucracies, interest groups, and individuals tend to emphasize the state-societal and individual levels of analysis. Some pluralists, however, are also interested in how the development and spread of international norms influence state behavior—a system-level focus.

There is a final important issue that should be mentioned in conjunction with the levels of analysis but that goes well beyond the latter as it raises basic philosophy-of-science questions concerning the so-called *agent-structure* problem. As summarized by one author, the problem

emerges from two uncontentious truths about social life: first, that human agency is the only moving force behind the actions, events, and outcomes of the social world; and second, that human agency can be realized only in concrete historical circumstances that condition the possibilities for action and influence its course. “People make history,” observed Marx in an often-quoted aphorism, “but not in conditions of their own choosing.” These truths impose two demands on our scientific explanations: first, that they acknowledge and account for the powers of agents; and second, that they recognize the causal relevance of “structural factors,” that is, the conditions of action. The “agent-structure problem” refers to the difficulties of developing theory that successfully meets both demands.²⁰

This problem is usually viewed as a matter of **ontology**, the branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature of being. In this case, the ontological issue deals with the nature

of both agents (very often viewed as the state) and structures (as in the international system), and relations between them. As we will see in the following chapters, a constant theme is how authors deal with the relative importance of human agents and “structural factors,” or what we call the issue of **voluntarism** and **determinism**. Very often unstated, one’s position on this issue heavily influences how one goes about explaining international politics as well as assessing the possibilities and means of peaceful change.

SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

Positivism

All three images discussed in this book essentially reflect a positivist approach to understanding international relations. **Positivism** involves a commitment to a unified view of science, meaning a belief that it is possible to adopt the methodologies of the natural sciences to explain the social world, which includes international relations. Positivists believe that objective knowledge of the world is possible and, hence, have a faith and commitment to the Enlightenment’s rationalist tradition. The so-called great debates of the international relations discipline—realism versus idealism and traditionalism versus behavioralism—have given way to debates on **epistemology**—how one knows or acquires knowledge. Accordingly, we undertake here a discussion of these epistemological issues, including the vigorous critiques of mainstream international relations theorizing by postpositivists, critical theorists, and postmodernists.

Positivism has been under assault for its attempts to separate facts from values, to define and **operationalize** concepts into precisely and accurately measurable variables, and to test truth claims in the form of hypotheses drawn from theories. Whether using quantitative or statistical methods or such nonquantitative (or “qualitative”) methods as case and comparative-case studies, those who have tried to be scientific have been criticized for ignoring or taking insufficient account of the personal or human dimension of scholarship. What we observe in either the natural or the social sciences is heavily influenced by the **interpretive understanding** we have of the concepts we employ, not to mention causal relations we infer when we specify the relations among variables, theories, hypotheses, and the observed behavior of states and nonstate actors in the political and social milieu in which they are immersed.

It was the Scottish writer David Hume (1711–1776) who objected to causal inferences drawn too readily. A skeptic at heart, Hume recognized that causality is itself not directly observable but merely a construct used by human beings to make what they observe around them understandable or even predictable. To Hume, causality is no more than an inference human beings draw from the conjunction of impressions about the things we observe. For example, when we perceive that some factor or event (*X*) precedes another (*Y*), our minds may be prone to think that *X* is the cause of *Y*. Consistent with Hume and also influenced by the positivism of the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798–1857), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) developed formal canons of induction that would allow both natural and social scientists to arrive at causal truth

claims by applying systematically one or another of five specified tests or methods to observed phenomena.²¹

The empiricism of these earlier writers was adopted by scholars in the “Vienna circle” of the 1930s who developed a somewhat extreme scientific form called logical positivism—the pursuit of a pure science that would separate fact from value and achieve the precision of mathematics. Among members of the Vienna circle were such luminaries as Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath, and Rudolf Carnap. They were also influenced by the earlier work of their contemporary, Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) related the thought and ideas we have to the words we use, focusing on the necessary logic and precision of language applied to observations about the world. Following Wittgenstein, the Vienna circle and its followers would seek both logical precision and clarity in scientific language.

In the post–World War II period, a broad, somewhat watered-down application of positivist premises to the social sciences—an approach that also included incorporation of statistical methodologies and the use of mathematical equations to specify causal relations among variables—resulted in a highly critical reaction to this “modernist” epistemology. Taking various critiques into account, refinement of positivist epistemology continued during the 1950s and 1960s.

Carl Hempel, for example, set forth a deductive-nomological schema for scientific explanation. He referred to “laws invoked in a scientific explanation” as covering laws. Thus, what is to be explained—the explanandum—is preceded by certain explanatory sentences—an explanans that “consists of general laws” and “other statements” concerning “particular facts.”²² Hempel applied this formalized deductive approach in the formulation of both universal and probabilistic law-like statements.

In the mid-1930s, Karl Popper had addressed empirical tests of hypotheses drawn from theories. To “prove” empirically that a certain hypothesis or universal proposition is true is virtually impossible since to do so in an absolute sense would mean submitting it to an infinite number of tests in space and time. Popper argued that to be scientific, claims or propositions have to be stated in falsifiable form. Falsifiability means simply that if a proposition is false, it must be possible empirically to show that it is false. To Popper, scientific propositions must be falsifiable. With varying degrees of confidence based on logical consistency and available evidence, one can accept a falsifiable proposition at least until, by experiment or other scientific means, one shows it to be false.²³

One example in the study of international relations of a positivist social science at work is the effort of Kenneth Waltz to offer a more formal theory of international politics. To Waltz, “theories explain laws.”²⁴ Waltz identifies a power-based structure of the international system that purportedly explains the behavior of states as the system’s principal actors. Having stated “the theory being tested,” one proceeds to

infer hypotheses from it; subject the hypotheses to experimental or observational tests; . . . use the definitions of terms found in the theory being tested; eliminate or control perturbing variables not included in the theory under test; devise a number of distinct and demanding tests; if a test is not passed, ask whether the theory flunks completely, needs repair and restatement, or requires a narrowing of the scope of its explanatory claims.²⁵

The positivism Waltz owes to Popper is clear in the last comment that underscores the importance of falsifiability in the testing of theories and hypotheses drawn therefrom.²⁶

Interpretive Understanding, Critical Theory, and a Postmodernist Critique of International Relations Theory

If the central question of *epistemology* is how we know what we think we know, critical and postmodernist theorists set aside the abstract universalist claims of logical positivists, focusing instead on the human perception and understandings that give diverse meanings to the concepts and theories we formulate and the behavior we observe.

That facts, concepts, and theories may not be separated from values stems from their observation and construction by human **agency**. To post-modernists, what we see, what we choose to see or measure, and the mechanisms or methods we employ are all of human construction that essentially rely on perception and cognitive processes influenced as well by prior understandings and meanings. Even the language we use constitutes an embedded set of values that are an integral part of any culture.

Thomas S. Kuhn’s effort in his identification of “scientific revolutions” focused on the natural sciences,²⁷ but it has perhaps had even greater impact on understanding in the social sciences. Arguing that **paradigms**, or frameworks of understanding, influence the way we observe and make sense of the world around us, Kuhn was criticized for his alleged relativism—a direct challenge to the positivist school. To some of his opponents, knowledge was understood to be empirically grounded and not so arbitrary as to be based on such preexisting or newly discovered frameworks of understanding. To be fair, Kuhn did not reject empirically based claims as such. He argued only that when theories and component concepts associated with a particular paradigm are challenged empirically or theoretically, holders of this paradigm may be forced through some modification to accommodate the new finding or insight or give way to a new paradigm.

Thus, the Ptolemeic idea of Earth as center of the universe—an understanding also closely tied to and reinforcing certain underlying religious beliefs—was toppled by the Copernican revolution in human understanding of the heavens, a paradigm shift developed further from the empirical observations of Galileo. A highly complex, Earth-central, Ptolemeic astronomy (still used in celestial navigation) was replaced by a vision that portrayed Earth as merely one among a number of planets revolving around the Sun—the solar system. Similarly, it was Einstein’s theory of relativity that challenged the Newtonian understanding of gravity and the laws of motion, effectively reducing Newtonian mechanics to Earth-based, observable laws not as directly applicable either to the macrouniversal domain of astrophysics or to the microdomain concerning motion of subatomic particles in quantum mechanics. Of course, even these new paradigms are subject to challenge in an eternally skeptical, scientific approach to knowledge.

There is substantial debate within the social sciences generally, and in particular fields such as international relations, as to whether these fields are developed sufficiently to justify identification of paradigms. Setting this issue aside, the important point in Kuhn’s thesis is that knowledge, even in the natural sciences, is grounded in human understanding in the form of paradigms that influence observation and the

construction of concepts and theories. At least as much or even more so, such interpretive understanding or agreed meaning would seem to apply to the social sciences that deal with human behavior in all its forms.

Hermeneutics is a linguistic study of the meanings human beings hold that contribute to, and flow from, the languages they construct and use. Emphasis in hermeneutics is on how we interpret or draw meaning. In Wittgenstein's later work, he became critical of earlier claims in his highly formal *Tractatus*, which is mentioned in the discussion above for its influence on the Vienna circle. Indeed, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) paint a picture more prone to coping with ambiguities that come from the context of language use.²⁸

Both Weber (for his concept of *Verstehen*, or *interpretive understanding*) and the later Wittgenstein are among those figures whose ideas have influenced formation of epistemological challenges to modernist, scientific thought. These challenges have come from more recent critical and postmodernist theorists—Jürgen Habermas and his associates in what is commonly referred to as the Frankfurt school of critical theory and, separately, postmodernist French scholars Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and others. In the extreme, a few postmodernists deny the possibility of any empirically based truth claims, thus underscoring their total rejection of positivism.

Some critical theorists argue that beliefs held by theorists necessarily bias their truth claims and may well be part of global ideological schemes to legitimate particular world orders. In supporting an alleged agenda of domination, it may be convenient to advance ideologies often masquerading as scientifically based theories. One of the tasks of critical theorists is to unmask such deceptions, probe for deeper understandings or meanings, and expose the class or other interests these ideologies or alleged theories are designed to serve. Power is a core concept for critical theorists.

The present-day Frankfurt school is in some respects an outgrowth of the critical work of an earlier generation within this “school” of thought that included Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. Indeed, the development of critical theory has included rather diverse philosophical influences: escaping from ideological constraints, as in the revolutionary spirit of Rousseau; searching for universal moral principles with the universality of application found in Kant; identifying the oppression of class or other socioeconomic structures observed by Marx; understanding the role of human psychologies in relationships of dominance, drawn from the work of Freud; and rejecting determinism in favor of a more Gramsci-style Marxism that adopts a normative, but practical, approach to challenging and overthrowing structures of domination.

One example of criticism applied to a positivist understanding of international relations is Richard Ashley's comment on Waltz's structural explanation summarized in the previous section. Although we are not classifying Ashley as a critical theorist, the influence of critical theory in the following passage is apparent. Referring to Waltz and the “poverty of neorealism,” Ashley asserts:

What emerges is a positivist structuralism that treats the given order as the natural order, limits rather than expands political discourse, negates or trivializes the significance of variety across time and place, subordinates all practice to an interest in control, bows to the ideal of a social power beyond responsibility, and thereby deprives political interaction of those

practical capacities which make social learning and creative change possible. What emerges is an ideology that anticipates, legitimizes, and orients a totalitarian project of global proportions: the rationalization of global politics.²⁹

Critical theory may be viewed separately from postmodernism since most critical theorists retain strict methodological criteria to guide their work. Nevertheless, some critical theory does overlap with, or can be understood more broadly, as part of a postmodernist understanding. In this regard, postmodernist ontology³⁰ is prone to find the **subtexts** and to **deconstruct**—unpack and take apart—the meanings embedded in what we say or write and even in the ways we act. Human beings are essentially subjective creatures; to postmodernists, claims made to empirically based, objective truth are necessarily hollow. Our understandings and meanings are, after all, humanly constructed. In the extreme, no knowledge or truth is possible apart from the motivations and purposes people put into their construction. From this perspective, truth is entirely relative.

These are, to say the least, significant challenges to “modernist” science more generally and to international relations theory in particular. It is difficult, however, so quickly to deny or dismiss scientific methodologies that have produced so much accumulated knowledge in so many diverse fields of human inquiry. Defenders of positivism see critical and postmodernist thinkers as misrepresenting science which, after all, retains an inherently skeptical orientation to truth claims and demands continued and unending empirical tests of such propositions. Just as it has historically accommodated empirical, theoretical, and philosophical critiques by modifying its methods and understandings, science remains open to critical, postmodernist, and other challenges.

What critical and postmodernist perspectives do contribute to theorizing in international relations is an ever-increased epistemological sensitivity to, and caution concerning, the fragility of what we think to be true. Normative theory may well influence the interpretive understanding that leads us to formulate the concepts we adopt.³¹

Interpretive understanding thus has its place in international relations theorizing—an enterprise captured by realist, pluralist, and globalist images specified in this volume and in the ongoing search for new syntheses in human understandings of the political world that will take us beyond these categories.

Feminism and International Relations Theory

Although some feminists are critical theorists or postmodernists, others remain positivists. Accordingly, we place feminism as another, separate critique of conventional international relations theory that offers an alternative perspective and starting point for both theory and practice.

Feminist understandings have had and likely will continue to have substantial impact on a global scale concerning human rights to equal treatment and the empowerment of women, allowing them the same opportunities that traditionally and historically have been reserved in most cultures to men. Some feminists note that empowering women will also give them the means to limit family size voluntarily, thus reducing population growth rates to economically sustainable levels. Women are also

seen by many feminists as more prone to constructive, peaceful approaches to the many conflictual issues on the global agenda. They are underrepresented in these efforts.

At the risk of pushing gender stereotypes too far, we can summarize a feminist perspective in international relations³² theory as being more prone to see human beings coming together constructively and collaboratively in various organizational forms. Human relationships matter. Rather than adopt a cold, abstract analysis of the interaction of states and nonstate actors as, for example, structural- or neorealists often do, the feminist perspective underscores the constructivist potential of people. Multilateral rather than unilateral or hegemonic models enhance this human potential for building peaceful relationships and positive, interdependent linkages across national borders. Pluralist liberal institutionalism and regime construction are consistent with this perspective.

It is not as if men are incapable of such thoughts or that women cannot be hard-headed realists or any more or less aggressive than men. Indeed, it may be that many women have adopted what some feminist theorists have labeled “masculine” understandings, perhaps in order to be taken seriously in a male-dominated world that extends to academic communities.

Advocates of the feminist perspective in international relations theory, however, identify a feminist perspective not tied by gender to particular individuals, but rather generally associated with women across cultures due to both genetic and environmental factors. Although not all would agree, a few point to traditional family and community-building roles that women have historically played as informing the feminist perspective. Having said that, however, feminist perspectives are not in any way restricted to women. Indeed, many men engaged in theorizing are quite capable of (and often have adopted) what are labeled feminist perspectives.

SUMMATION

For the realist, states are the principal or most important actors on the international political stage and represent the key unit of analysis. States are viewed as unitary actors that behave in a generally rational manner. National security issues dominate the hierarchy of the international agenda. For the pluralist, by contrast, nonstate actors are also important entities. The state is disaggregated into its component parts and is continually subjected to outside elements, including state as well as nonstate actors. The hierarchy of world issues is also subject to change and is not always dominated by matters of military security. For the globalist, all actors must be viewed within the context of an overarching global structure. The defining characteristic of this structure is its capitalist nature; it must be viewed in a historical context with a particular emphasis on the role of dominant classes that transcend the particular confines of any one state. To understand the mechanisms of dependency whereby rich, industrialized states maintain poor LDCs in a subordinate position within this world capitalist system requires an appreciation of the paramount role played by economic factors.

We now turn to a more comprehensive discussion of the three images of international relations, giving in subsequent chapters summaries of major actors and

assumptions, intellectual precursors and influences, key concepts and representative theoretical works, and criticisms.

NOTES

1. Max Weber, *Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), pp. 81, 84.
2. Such categorizations are popular, in part reflecting a desire to bring some degree of order to the theoretical chaos of the field. See, for example, James N. Rosenau, “Order and Disorder in the Study of World Politics,” in *Globalism Versus Realism: International Relations’ Third Debate*, ed. Ray Maghroori and Bennett Ramberg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 1–7.
3. For one argument on the importance of developing “generic knowledge” about international relations, see Alexander L. George, “Is Research on Crisis Management Needed?” in *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management*, ed. Alexander L. George (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), p. 5. Cf. Kenneth N. Waltz, “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” *Journal of International Affairs*, 44, 1 (Spring/Summer 1990): 21–37.
4. Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Lewis F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). See also Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *The War Trap* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993); J. David Singer and P. F. Diehl, *Measuring the Correlates of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).
5. Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, pp. 232–38. Consistent with this view, anarchy is also a *necessary* condition for war to occur, but it is by no means *sufficient* as a sole cause of the phenomenon. The distinction between underlying and immediate causes of war can be traced back to Thucydides, a 5th century B.C. Greek historian.
6. For a discussion on how to approach the study of international conflict, see the articles by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Stephen Krasner, and Robert Jervis in *International Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1985): 121–54. Bueno de Mesquita in particular calls for the development of rigorous, deductive, axiomatic theory.
7. For arguments challenging the supposed ability to determine in an objective manner what constitutes “facts,” let alone “the real world,” see Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).
8. Henry A. Kissinger, “A New National Partnership,” *Department of State Bulletin*, 72 (17 February 1975): 199, cited in Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), p. 3.
9. On ideal types, see Weber, *Methodology*, pp. 90–93. Cf. Max Weber, *Basic Concepts in Sociology*, trans. H. P. Secher (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962, 1969), pp. 52–55.
10. Whether different images of the world lead to the formulation of different questions or whether the questions themselves have resulted in these different mental constructs for dealing with them is arguable and may depend on the particular theorist.
11. It is one thing to produce a work that is purposely eclectic, drawing on insights from a wide variety of sources, but this is different from attempting to reconcile underlying assumptions reflecting fundamentally divergent perspectives on world politics without relaxing one or more of these critical assumptions. For attempts at reconciliation, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Neorealism and Neoliberalism, *World Politics* 40, 2 (January 1988): 235–51; Richard K. Ashley, *The Political Economy of War and Peace* (London: Frances Pinter, 1980); Nazli Choucri and Robert C. North, *Nations in Conflict: National Growth and International Violence* (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1975); Richard W. Mansbach and John A. Vasquez, *In Search of Theory: A New Paradigm for Global Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). See also John Gerard Ruggie, “Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis,” *World Politics*

- 35, no. 2 (January 1983): 261–85; and Alan C. Lamborn, "Theory and the Politics in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 1997): 187–214. He argues that many of the competing research programs share a core set of metatheoretical assumptions.
12. See the articles in Klaus Knorr and James N. Rosenau, eds., *Contending Approaches to International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). See also G. David Garson, "Marxism as Methodology," in his *Handbook of Political Science Methods*, 2d ed. (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1976), pp. 9–20.
 13. The dominant image among most world modelers, however, is a pluralist one informed by what Ashley calls "liberal positivist commitments." See Richard K. Ashley, "The Eye of Power: The Politics of World Modeling," *International Organization* 37, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 500.
 14. See, for example, Bruno S. Frey, "The Public Choice View of International Political Economy," *International Organization* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 199–223; Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982) and *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). See also "Symposium: Mancur Olson on the Rise and Decline of Nations," *International Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 1983): 3–37; and John A. C. Conybeare, "Public Goods, Prisoners' Dilemmas, and the International Political-Economy," *International Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1984): 5–22.
 15. Nor are the images equivalent to the research program discussed by Imre Lakatos. Such a research program, if formulated for international relations, would be more specific than the images discussed in this book but more general than any particular theory we mention. See Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Lakatos is attempting to refute what he sees as the relativism of Thomas Kuhn's influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
 16. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).
 17. J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," in *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 20–29.
 18. The literature on arms races is extensive. For reviews, see Urs Luterbacher, "Arms Race Models: Where Do We Stand? *European Journal of Political Research* 3, no. 2 (June 1975): 199–217, and Kendall D. Moll and Gregory M. Luebbert, "Arms Races and Military Expenditure Models: A Review," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 1 (March 1980): 153–85. A preliminary test of an external model of arms races is Thomas R. Cusack and Michael D. Ward, "Military Spending in the United States, Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25, no. 3 (September 1981): 429–69. See also Matthew Evangelista, *Innovation and the Arms Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).
 19. See, however, the series of books by Rudolph J. Rummel under the title *Understanding Conflict and War*. The first of the series is subtitled *The Dynamic Psychological Field* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1975).
 20. David Dessler, "What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?" *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 443. See also Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 335–70; John S. Dryzek, Margaret L. Clark, and Garry McKenzie, "Subject and System in International Interaction," *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 475–504.
 21. We have simplified Mill's canons of induction as follows: The cause or independent variable (X) that explains the dependent variable (Y) can be inferred by the: (1) *method of agreement*— X is always present whenever Y is also present; (2) *method of difference*— X is always absent whenever Y is also absent; (3) *joint method of agreement and difference*—when X and Y are both present in one set but not in another, as in controlled experiments when X is put in one experiment to see if Y appears, but X is omitted from the other experiment in the expectation that Y will not appear; (4) *method of concomitant variation*—when X and Y both vary in relation to one another either in the same or opposite directions (e.g., a positive or direct relation—as X increases (or decreases), Y also increases (or decreases))—or a negative or inverse relation—as X increases, Y decreases, or as X decreases, Y increases; (5) *method of residues*—as when, in a statistical analysis of the percentage of explained and unexplained variance, a certain independent variable (X) or certain

- independent variables (X_1 , X_2 , etc.) have been identified as accounting for some of the variations in Y , the remaining variation can be accounted for as due to other independent variables present even if they have not been identified as such. See the discussion and specification of these canons in A. James Gregor, *An Introduction to Metapolitics: A Brief Inquiry into the Conceptual Language of Political Science* (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 146–50.
22. Carl G. Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 51.
 23. See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959). Metaphysical, nonfalsifiable statements such as religious beliefs about an afterlife or predictions about the end of the world may well be true, but they are in any event beyond the domain of a science that is limited by human or machine-assisted observations. If they are true, the truth of these claims will only be known when they occur. If they are false, we will never know because their occurrence can always be anticipated as coming, but not yet experienced. That is why to followers of Popper, such statements, whatever their truth may be, are inherently metaphysical, not scientific.
 24. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 6.
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Thinking Theory Thoroughly

JAMES N. ROSENAU

James Rosenau addresses creative theorizing and develops nine principles to guide those who would engage in this enterprise. Indeed, not everyone is prone automatically to think theoretically.

It rarely happens, but now and again in academic life one is jolted into returning to fundamentals, into ascertaining whether one has unknowingly strayed from one's organizing premises. This happened to me recently when a graduate student inquired whether she should take an "independent reading" course under my direction. Noting that my competence was limited, I responded by asking what topics or problems she planned to investigate. Her answer startled me, perhaps partly because it was ungrammatical but mainly because I found it pedagogically challenging. Her answer was simple: "I would like you to teach me to think theory!" I agreed to take on the role of advisor.

At this writing, some eleven weeks, many conversations and much reflection later, I still find the assignment challenging, though now I am beginning to wonder whether the capacity to think theoretically, the inclination to perceive and assess the course of events as suggestive or expressive of larger forces, is a talent that can be taught. It may be, instead, a cast of mind, a personality trait, or a philosophical perspective that some acquire early in life and others do not.

If this is so, there is not much that a professor can do to teach students how to think theoretically. They can be introduced to the nature

of theories, taught the various purposes theories can serve, exposed to the controversies over the relative worth of different theories, and instructed on the steps required for the construction of viable theories. And, to solidify the learning of these lessons, they can then be given assignments in which they have to formulate concrete hypotheses and tie them together into an actual theoretical framework. The learning of these skills underlying the design of theories is not, however, the equivalent of learning how to think theoretically. Or, more accurately, it is not the equivalent of what I understood my student as wanting me to teach her. In fact, she may only have been asking instruction on the dos and don'ts of theoretical design. But because of the way she worded her request I interpreted her as seeking more than an introduction to the procedures and techniques essential to creative theorizing. It seemed to me she was looking to acquire not a set of skills, but rather a set of predispositions, a cluster of habits, a way of thinking, a mental lifestyle—or whatever may be the appropriate label for that level of intellectual existence that governs the use of skills and the application of values—that she did not possess and that she thought she valued enough to want to make part of her orientation toward interna-

tional phenomena. It is this more fundamental dimension of the life of the mind that I now suspect may not be teachable or learnable, a caveat that needs emphasis at the outset because the ensuing analysis amounts to nothing less than a pronouncement on how to think theoretically.

Nine Pre-Conditions for Creative Theorizing

It follows that the task of disciplining ourselves and our students to think theoretically consists, first, of identifying the cognitive inclinations and perceptual impulses from which creative theory springs and, second, of then forming intellectual habits which assure the prevalence of these inclinations and impulses whenever we turn to theory-building endeavors. The central question examined in this paper follows: what are the mental qualities that best enable one to "think theory" and how can their acquisition be best assured? Nine such qualities strike me as especially conducive to the development of good theorists. Each of the nine seems equally important and there is some overlap among them. Accordingly, the sequence of their elaboration here should not be interpreted as implying a rank ordering.

To think theoretically one has to avoid treating the task as that of formulating an appropriate definition of theory.

So as to clarify what is involved in thinking theoretically, let me start with the proposition that the task is not one of developing a clear-cut definition of theory. On balance, it is probably preferable to have a precise conception of the nature of theory rather than a vague one, but definitional exactness is not the only criterion of thinking theoretically and it may not even be a necessary requirement for such thought. I can readily imagine a young student thinking theoretically about international phenomena well before his or her first course on the subject turns to the question of what constitutes theory and the various uses to which it can be put. Indeed, I

have had the good fortune of encountering a few students who were, so to speak, born theoreticians. From their very first comments in class as freshmen it was clear that they thought theoretically even though they have never had any methodological training or any exposure to the history of international relations.

Most of us are not so lucky. Most of us have to be trained to think theoretically and then we have to engage in the activity continuously in order to achieve and sustain a genuinely theoretical perspective. Hence, the fact that a few among us can maintain such a perspective without training and practice is a useful reminder that definitional clarity is not a prerequisite to creative theorizing.

The reminder is important because many of us tend to exaggerate the importance of exact definitions. To be clear about the nature of theory is not to guarantee the formulation of meaningful theory. Such clarity can be misleading. It can provide a false sense of security, a misguided confidence that one needs only to organize one's empirical materials in the proper way if one is equipped with a clear-cut definition of theory. It is my impression that much of the writing in our field derives from this premise that good definitions automatically yield good theories, as if the definitions somehow relieve the observer of the need to apply imagination and maintain philosophical discipline.

To be sure, much of the writing also suffers from loose and ambiguous conceptions of theory or from a confusion between theory and method. Such research would, obviously, be more valuable if it proceeded from a tighter and clearer notion of what the theoretical enterprise entails. So, to repeat, I am not arguing against definitional clarity. On the contrary, I believe it is highly appropriate to help students achieve such clarity by introducing them to the vast array of articles and books now available on the dynamics, boundaries, uses, and abuses of theory in the international field. But I am arguing

for more than definitional clarity. I am arguing for caution and restraint in the use of definitions: in digesting the literature on theory and building a more elaborate conception of what it involves, one has to be careful not to lean too heavily on definitions and guidance. Also needed is a cast of mind, a mental set that focuses application of the definitions and facilitates creative theorizing.

To think theoretically one has to be clear as to whether one aspires to empirical theory or value theory.

Progress in the study of international affairs depends on advances in both empirical and value theory. But the two are not the same. They may overlap; they can focus on the same problem; and values always underlie the selection of the problems to which empirical theories are addressed. Yet they differ in one overriding way: empirical theory deals essentially with the "is" of international phenomena, with things as they are if and when they are subjected to observation, while value theory deals essentially with the "ought" of international phenomena, with things as they should be if and when they could be subjected to manipulation. This distinction underlies, in turn, entirely different modes of reasoning, a different rhetoric, and different types of evidence.

The habit of making the necessary analytic, rhetorical, and evidential distinctions between empirical and value theory can be difficult for young students to develop. Indeed, it can be weak and elusive for any of us who have strong value commitments and a deep concern for certain moral questions. The more intensive are our values, the more are we tempted to allow our empirical inquiries to be guided by our beliefs rather than by our concern for observation. For this reason I have found that helping students become habituated to the is-ought distinction is among the most difficult pedagogical tasks. They can understand the distinction intellectually and they can even explain and defend it

when pressed; but practicing it is another matter and often their empirical analyses slip into moral judgments without their being aware of it. It is as if they somehow fear that their values and the policy goals they want to promote will be undermined if they allow themselves to focus on observable phenomena. Such, of course, is not the case. On the contrary, moral values and policy goals can be well served, even best served, by putting them aside and proceeding detachedly long enough to enlarge empirical understanding of the obstacles that hinder realization of the values and progress toward the goals.

This is the one line of reasoning on behalf of thinking theoretically that my most value-committed students find persuasive. If empirical theory is posited as a tool of moral theory, they can approach it instrumentally and see virtue in habituating themselves to distinguishing between the two. It takes a while, however, before the perceived virtues of habituation are translated into actual habits and, in fact, some never manage to make the transition, hard as they may try. Impatient with the need for change, convinced that time is too scarce to afford the slow pace of empirical inquiry, many simply give up and dismiss the is-ought distinction as one of those picayune obsessions to which some academics fall prey.

It is my impression that impatience with empirical theorizing is likely to be especially intense among Third World students of international relations. The newly developed consciousness of the long-standing injustices built into First World–Third World relationships, the lure of dependency theory, and perhaps a frustration over the central tendencies of social science in the First World have made Third World theorists particularly resistant to detached empirical theorizing. Their resistance gives a First World scholar pause: is his insistence on habituating oneself to the is-ought distinction yet another instance of false superiority, of projecting onto the developing world practices that have worked in industrial societies? It could be.

.Of late I have become keenly aware of the biases that may underlie my intellectual endeavors and thus I am not prepared merely to brush aside the idea that the is-ought distinction may be inappropriate to theorizing in much of the world. In this particular instance, however, I cannot even begin to break the habit. The relevance of the distinction strikes me as global, as independent of any national biases, as necessary to thinking theoretically wherever and whenever enlarged comprehension is sought. Empirical theory is not superior to moral theory; it is simply preferable for certain purposes, and one of these is the end of deepening our grasp of why international processes unfold as they do.

Aware that my own expertise, such as it may be, lies in the realm of empirical theory, the ensuing discussion makes no pretense of being relevant to thinking theoretically in the moral context. All the precepts that follow are concerned only with those mental qualities that may render us more thoroughgoing in our empirical theorizing.

To think theoretically one must be able to assume that human affairs are founded on an underlying order.

A prime task of empirical theory is to explain why international phenomena are structured as they are and/or behave as they do. To perform this task one must assume that each and every international phenomenon is theoretically explicable, that deeper understanding of its dynamics could be achieved if appropriate instruments for measuring it were available. To assume that everything is potentially explicable is to presume that nothing happens by chance, capriciously, at random, that for every effect there must be a cause. That is, there must be an underlying order out of which international relations springs. If this were not the case, if events could occur for no reason, there would be little point in theorizing. If some events are inherently inexplicable, efforts to build creative

theory are bound to fall short to the extent that they embrace phenomena that may occur at random. Indeed, in the absence of the assumption of an underlying order, attempts to fashion theory are futile, pointless exercises, a waste of time that could be better spent writing poetry, playing tennis, or tending the garden.

This is *not* to say that thought only acquires the status of theory when it purports to account for every event. As indicated below, theory is also founded on the laws of probability. Hence it only purports to account for central tendencies, but this claim is unwarranted if an assumption of underlying order is not made. That is, to think theoretically one must presume that there is a cause for every effect even though one does not seek to explain every effect.

I have found that most students have a difficult time becoming habituated to the assumption of an underlying order. They see it as a denial of their own freedom. To presume there is a cause for everything, they reason, is to deprive people of free will, perhaps even to relieve them of responsibility for their actions. The assumption of an underlying order does not, of course, have such implications. One's freedom of choice is not lessened by the fact that the choices made are not random and, instead, derive from some source. Yet, fearful about compromising their own integrity, many students cannot accept this subtlety and insist on the premise that people have the capacity to cut themselves off from all prior experience and to act as they please for no reason whatsoever. To support their resistance to the assumption of an underlying order, they will often cite instances of international history when the unexpected occurred or when a highly deviant, impetuous, and irrational action was undertaken, as if somehow irrationality and impetuosity are capricious and do not stem from any sources.

Besides patiently reassuring dubious students that there are no insidious threats in the assumption of an underlying order, resistance to

the idea can be lessened, even broken in some instances, by pointing out how the assumption offers hope for greater understanding and deeper comprehension. To presume that there is a cause of every effect is to assume that everything is potentially knowable, that inquiry can pay off, that one is not necessarily destined to go down an intellectual path that dead ends, leads nowhere. The assumption of an underlying order, in other words, is pervaded with hope. We do not make it to allow ourselves to be hopeful, but it has that consequence. It enables us to view ourselves as totally in charge of our own investigations, limited only by our imaginations and the resources at our disposal. It allows us to approach the chaos we perceive in the world around us as a challenge, as an orderliness that has yet to be identified and traced. It permits us to dare to think theory thoroughly because the affairs of people are patterned and the patterns are susceptible to being uncovered.

To think theoretically one must be predisposed to ask about every event, every situation, or every observed phenomenon, "Of what is it an instance?"

Of all the habits one must develop to think theoretically, perhaps none is more central than the inclination to ask this question at every opportunity. It must be a constant refrain, a melody that haunts every lurch forward in the process of moving from observations to conclusions. For to see every event as an instance of a more encompassing class of phenomena is to sustain the search for patterns and to avoid treating any phenomenon as inherently unique. To think theoretically is to be at home with abstractions, to generalize, to discern the underlying order that links otherwise discrete incidents, and such a mode of thinking cannot be achieved and maintained unless every observed phenomenon is approached as merely one instance of a recurring sequence.

Again students appear to have a hard time building up this habit. They are inclined to

probe for the special meaning of an event, to explore it for what sets it apart from all other events, rather than to treat it as an instance of a larger pattern. They want to understand the Iranian revolution, not revolutions as a social process, and to the extent this is their preference, to that extent do they resist building up the impulse to always reach for more general theoretical insights. Indeed, I have had many students who simply do not know where to begin when asked to indicate of what pattern some event they regard as important is an instance. Their faces turn blank and their tongues turn silent. They are paralyzed. They do not know what it means to treat the event as merely an instance of something, as just part of a larger category. And so they stumble, mumble, or otherwise resist thinking in those elementary terms out of which theorizing springs.

My response here is twofold. First, I try to portray the pleasure, the sheer joy, to be had from taking steps up the ladder of abstraction. Fitting pieces into larger wholes offers, I believe, a special sense of satisfaction, a feeling of accomplishment not unlike that which accompanies solving a puzzle or resolving a mystery. Indeed, theory building can readily be viewed as puzzle solving, as uncovering the dynamics embedded deep in the interstices of human relationships, and there are few students who are not intrigued by the challenge of solving puzzles.

If appealing thus to the curiosity of students does not succeed in getting them to ask habitually "Of what is this an instance?" (and often it is not a sufficient incentive), I revert to a second line of reasoning which, in effect, amounts to an attempt to shame them into the habit. This involves pointing out the implications of stumbling and mumbling, of not being able to discern any larger class of phenomena of which the observed phenomenon is an instance. The implications are unmistakable: to be paralyzed by the question "Of what is this an instance?" is not to know what one is interested in, to be lack-

ing questions that generate and guide one's inquiry, to be confused by the phenomena one claims to be worthy of investigation. Based on the presumption of an underlying order, I believe that no phenomenon exists in isolation, unique only unto itself, and thus I believe that we always have an answer to the of-what-is-this-an-instance question, whether we know it or not. Accordingly, the task is not one of figuring out an answer presently unknown to us; it is rather that of explicating an answer that we have already acquired but have yet to surface. I am arguing, in other words, that we do not get interested in an international phenomenon for no reason, that our interest in it stems from a concern about a more encompassing set of phenomena, and that there is therefore no need to be paralyzed by the question if we press ourselves to move up the ladder of abstraction on which our intellectuality is founded. Once shamed into acknowledging that their concerns are not confined to the lowest rung on the ladder, most students are willing to begin to venture forth and approach the phenomena they observe as mere instances of something else.

To think theoretically one must be ready to appreciate and accept the need to sacrifice detailed descriptions for broad observations.

One cannot begin to mount the rungs of the ladder of abstraction if one is unable to forgo the detailed account, the elaborated event, the specific minutia. As indicated, the theoretical enterprise is committed to the teasing out of central tendencies, to encompassing ever greater numbers of phenomena, to moving up the ladder of abstraction as parsimoniously as possible. Thus theory involves generalizing rather than particularizing and, in so doing, it requires relinquishing, subordinating, and/or not demonstrating much of one's impulse to expound everything one knows. It means, in effect, that one must discipline one's self to accept simple explanations over complex ones.

These are not easy tasks. Most of us find comfort in detail. The more details we know, the more are we likely to feel we have mastered our subject. To forgo much of the detail, on the other hand, is to opt for uncertainties, to expose ourselves to the criticisms of those who would pick away at our generalizations with exceptions. The temptations to fall back on details are thus considerable and much concentration on the upper rungs of the ladder of abstraction is required if the temptations are to be resisted.

Happily this is less of a problem for beginning students than more mature ones who are introduced late to the theoretical enterprise. The former have yet to acquire extensive familiarity with details and they are therefore not likely to feel threatened by the loss of their knowledge base. They want to focus on the unique, to be sure, but at least it is possible to expose them to the case of theorizing before they find security in endless minutiae. Exactly how more mature scholars accustomed to the comforts of detail can be persuaded to be theoretically venturesome is, I confess, a problem for which I have yet to find anything resembling a solution.

To think theoretically one must be tolerant of ambiguity, concerned about probabilities, and distrustful of absolutes.

To be concerned about central tendencies one needs to be accepting of exceptions, deviations, anomalies, and other phenomena that, taken by themselves, run counter to the anticipated or prevailing pattern. Anomalies ought not be ignored and often explorations of them can lead to valuable, path-breaking insights; but neither can anomalies be allowed to undermine one's focus on central tendencies. Empirical theories deal only with probabilities and not with absolutes, with how most phenomena are likely to respond to a stimulus and not with how each and every phenomenon responds. Theorists simply do not aspire to account for every phenomenon. They know there will be anomalies and exceptions; indeed, they are suspicious on

those unlikely occasions when no exceptions are manifest. Rather their goal is to build theories in which the central tendencies encompass the highest possible degree of probability, with certainties and absolutes being left for ideologues and zealots to expound.

Although they engage in it continuously in their daily lives, students tend to be resistant to the necessity of thinking probabilistically when they turn to theorizing. More accurately, they tend to be reluctant to ignore the ambiguity, to be restless with anything less than perfect certainty, as if any exception to the anticipated central tendencies constitutes a negation of their reasoning. I have found this low tolerance of ambiguity difficult to contest. Many students, fearful of uncertainty, seem to get fixated on the exception, and it is very hard at that point to recapture their interest in central tendencies. The very rhetoric of their everyday language—that things are “completely” the case or that an observation is “absolutely” accurate—reinforces their inclinations to be intolerant of deviations. In this mood they recognize only the “whole truth” as valid and regard central tendencies as a partial rather than a legitimate form of knowledge.

I confess to perplexity over how to handle this obstacle to theorizing on the part of students. I have tried elaborating on the many ways in which probabilistic thinking underlies their daily lives. I have tried making analogies between the physicist and the political scientist, pointing out that the former does not aspire to account for the behavior of every atom any more than the latter aspires to accounting for every voter. I have tried sarcasm, stressing the noxious values that derive from a concern with absolutes. Neither alone nor in combination, however, do such techniques seem to have any effect on many students. Whatever its sources, their intolerance of ambiguity is apparently too deep-seated to yield to reasoning or persuasion. So, reluctantly, I have concluded that students with a low tolerance of ambiguity and a high

need for certainty are unlikely to ever think theory thoroughly and that it is probably wasted energy to try to teach them to do so.

To think theoretically one must be playful about international phenomena.

At the core of the theorizing process is a creative imagination. The underlying order of world affairs is too obscure and too complex to yield to pedestrian, constricted, or conventional minds. Only deep penetration into a problem, discerning relationships that are not self-evident and might even be the opposite of what seems readily apparent, can produce incisive and creative theory. Thus to think theoretically one must allow one’s mind to run freely, to be playful, to toy around with what might seem absurd, to posit seemingly unrealistic circumstances and speculate what would follow if they were ever to come to pass. Stated differently, one must develop the habit of playing and enjoying the game of “as if”—that is, specifying unlikely conditions and analyzing them as if they prevailed.

Put in still another way, it has always seemed to me that good theory ought never be embarrassed by surprises, by unanticipated events that have major consequences for the system on which the theory focuses. A Hitler–Stalin pact, a Nixon resignation, or a Sadat peace initiative should not catch the creative theorist unawares because part of his or her creativity involves imagining the unimaginable. One imagines the unimaginable by allowing one’s variables to vary across the entire range of a continuum even if some of its extreme points seem so unlikely as to be absurd. To push one’s thinking beyond previously imagined extremes of a continuum is to play the game of “as if,” and it involves a playfulness of mind that mitigates against surprises as well as facilitates incisive theorizing.

How one teaches playfulness is, of course, another matter. In some important sense it is an intellectual quality that cannot be taught. One acquires—or perhaps inherits—creativity early

in life and no amount of subsequent training can greatly enhance the imaginative powers of those with tunnel vision and inhibited mentalities. On the other hand, encouragement to playfulness can bring out previously untapped talents in some students. Many have become so used to being told what to think that their creative impulses have never been legitimated and, accordingly, they have never even heard of the existence of the “as if” game. So no harm can be done by pressing our students (not to mention ourselves) to be playful and flexible in their thinking, and just conceivably such an emphasis may produce some unexpected results.

To think theoretically one must be genuinely puzzled by international phenomena.

Creative use of the imagination requires humility toward international phenomena. One must be as concerned about asking the right questions about the order underlying world affairs as finding the right answers. To focus only on answers is to be sure about the questions one wants to probe and this, in turn, is to impose unnecessary limits on one’s capacity to discern and integrate the deeper structures of global politics. If, on the other hand, one is genuinely puzzled by why events unfold as they do, one is committed to always asking why they occur in one way rather than another and, in so doing, pressing one’s theoretical impulses as far as possible.

I do not use the notion of “genuine puzzles” casually. They are not simply open-ended questions but refer, rather, to perplexity over specific and patterned outcomes. To be genuinely puzzled about the declining capacity of governments to govern effectively, for example, one does not ask, “Why do governments do what they do?” Rather, one asks, say, “Why are most governments unable to control inflation?” or “Why do they alter their alliance commitments under specified conditions?” Genuine puzzles, in other words, are not idle, ill-framed, or

impetuous speculations. They encompass specified dependent variables for which adequate explanations are lacking. I do not see how one can begin to think theoretically if one does not discern recurrent outcomes that evoke one’s curiosity and puzzlement. Some analysts believe they are starting down the road to theory when they start asking what the outcomes are, but such a line of inquiry leads only to deadends, or worse, to endless mazes, because one never knows when one has come upon a relevant outcome. Genuine puzzles can lead us down creative paths, however, because they discipline us to focus on particular patterns.

One cannot teach others to be puzzled. Again it is very much a matter of whether curiosity has been repressed or allowed to flourish at an early age. It is possible, however, to keep after students and colleagues with the simple question, “What genuinely puzzles you about international affairs?” Hopefully repetition of the question will prove to be sufficiently challenging to facilitate a maximum expression of whatever may be the curiosity potential students may possess.

To think theoretically one must be constantly ready to be proven wrong.

Perhaps nothing inhibits the ability to be intellectually puzzled and playful more than the fear of being embarrassed by the inaccuracies of one’s theorizing. Many of us have fragile egos that are so sensitive to error as to lead us to prefer sticking close to conventional wisdom rather than risking speculation that may be erroneous. It is as if our stature as students depends upon the soundness of our observations.

Fragile egos are not readily bolstered and some students may never be capable of venturing forth. In my experience, however, there is one line of reasoning that some students find sufficiently persuasive to lessen their fears of appearing ridiculous. It involves the thought that our comprehension of international phenomena can be substantially advanced even if

our theories about them prove to be woefully wrong. Such progress can occur in two ways. One is that falsified theory has the virtue of indicating avenues of inquiry which no longer need be traversed. Doubtless egos are best served by theoretical breakthroughs but if one presumes that knowledge is at least partly developed through a process of elimination, there is some satisfaction to be gained from having narrowed the range of inquiry through theory that subsequently proves fallacious.

Secondly, unsound theory can facilitate progress by provoking others into demonstrating its falsity and attempting to show how and why it went astray. Indeed, assuming that the erroneous theory focuses on significant matters, often the more outrageous the theory is, the more it is likely to provoke further investigation. Thus even if one cannot negotiate a theoretical breakthrough on one's own, one can serve one's ego by the possibility that one's errors may sustain the knowledge-building process. This is surely what one astute analyst had in mind when he observed, "it is important to err importantly."

Conclusion: Bringing It All Together

Plainly, there is no easy way to evolve the habit of thinking theoretically. Indeed, if the foregoing nine precepts are well founded, it can be readily argued that theorizing is the hardest of intellectual tasks. Clearing away the confusion of day-to-day events and teasing out their underlying patterns is not merely a matter of applying one's mental skills. Sustained, disciplined, and uninhibited work is required, and even then theory can be elusive, puzzles difficult to identify, details hard to ignore, and probabilities tough to estimate. And the lures and practices of non-theoretical thinking are always present, tempting us to forgo the insecurities and ambiguities of high levels of abstraction in

favor of the comfortable precision available at low levels.

Yet the payoffs for not yielding to the temptations and persisting to think theoretically are considerable. There is an exhilaration, an exquisiteness, to be enjoyed in the theoretical enterprise that virtually defies description. Stimulated by the rarified atmosphere, energized by the freedom to roam uninhibitedly across diverse realms of human experience, one gets giddy at high levels of abstraction. It is that special kind of giddiness that comes from the feeling that one is employing all the resources and talents at one's command, moving beyond anything one has done before. And if one should be so fortunate as actually to achieve a theoretical breakthrough, then the exhilaration, the excitement, and the sense of accomplishment can approach the thrill of discovery that Darwin, Einstein, Freud, and the other great explorers of underlying order must have experienced at their moments of breakthrough.

For all the difficulties it entails, then, thinking theoretically is, on balance, worth the effort. And so, therefore, is the effort to teach others to think thoroughly in this way. The habits of theoretical thinking may not always be teachable, and they may not even be teachable at all; but if our efforts successfully manage to reach only a few students, they are worth undertaking. And it is even conceivable that in trying to teach others to think theoretically, we may refine and enlarge our own capacities for comprehending the underlying order that sustains and alters the human condition.

Note

1. Marion J. Levy, "Does It Matter If He's Naked? Bawled the Child," in Klaus Knorr and James N. Rosenau (eds.), *Contending Approaches to International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 93.



Positivism and Beyond

STEVE SMITH

The author takes up the essential critique of positivism and empiricism—the impossibility of “pure unvarnished perception” or “objective observation.” He then examines alternatives to positivism: scientific realism, looking for “structures and things of the world that make science possible”; critical theory, drawn from the Frankfurt School—“that there can be no such thing as true empirical statements” apart from “knowledge-constitutive interest in control and prediction”; feminist epistemology that identifies the dominance of male perspective to the virtual exclusion of feminine understanding; and postmodernism that observes how knowledge is “dependent on underlying power structures” and focuses on “the fundamental problem” of “how to match the subjective self, or knower, with an ‘objective’ or external world.” The author concludes that “epistemological concerns are absolutely salient for contemporary international theory,” but that these problems do “not mean accepting a less rigorous epistemological warrant” than positivism has offered.

For the last forty years the academic discipline of International Relations has been dominated by positivism. Positivism has involved a commitment to a unified view of science, and the adoption of methodologies of the natural sciences to explain the social world. The so-called “great debates” in the discipline’s history, between idealism and realism, traditionalism and behaviourism, or between transnationalism and state-centrism, have not involved questions of epistemology. The discipline has tended to accept implicitly a rather simple and, crucially, an uncontested set of positivist assumptions which have fundamentally stifled debate over both what the world is like and how we might explain it. This is not true of those who worked either in the so-called “English school” or at the interface between international relations and political theory, because these writers never

bought into the positivist assumptions that dominated the discipline. But it has been the dominance of positivism that has accounted for both the character, and more importantly, the content of the central debates in international theory.

Viewed in this light, even the inter-paradigm debate of the 1980s looks very narrow, because all three paradigms, (realism, pluralism and globalism/structuralism) were working under positivist assumptions. This helps explain just why they could be seen as three versions of one world, rather than three genuine alternative views of international relations. Similarly, the current “debate” between neo-realism and neoliberalism becomes much clearer when it is realised that both approaches are firmly positivist. My central claim here will be that positivism’s importance has been not so much that it

has given international theory a method but that its empiricist epistemology has determined what could be studied because it has determined what kinds of things exist in international relations. . . . The one feature that the new “critical” approaches to international theory have in common is a rejection of the assumptions of what is loosely described as positivism. By “critical” here is meant the work of post-modernists, Critical Theorists (in the Frankfurt School sense), feminist theorists and post-structuralists. There can be little doubt both that these various approaches represent a massive attack on traditional or mainstream international theory, and that this traditional or mainstream theory has been dominated by positivist assumptions. . . .

It is because of these two features of contemporary international theory that Lapid writes of the current period constituting the “post-positivist era” of international theory; indeed he adds that the debate between traditional and post-positivist theory is so important that it is the third “discipline-defining debate” in international relations’ history (1989, pp. 235–9), following the two earlier debates between idealism and realism in the 1930s and 1940s, and between traditional and scientific approaches to studying the discipline in the 1960s. In essence, then, because much contemporary “critical” international theory self-consciously portrays itself as being *post*-positivist, this makes it rather important to be clear as to what positivism means and what might be involved in speaking of a *post-positivist* international theory.

The stakes are high in such a debate. This much is clear from the way that mainstream theorists have responded to the rise of the approaches that Lapid groups together as post-positivist (and which I above called “critical theories”). One particularly important response has been that of Robert Keohane, who, in his Presidential Address to the International Studies Association in 1988, spoke of the need to evaluate the rival research paradigms of rationalist

(i.e. traditional neo-realism and neo-liberalism) and reflective (i.e. what I termed “critical”) approaches in terms of their “testable theories”, without which “they will remain on the margins of the field . . . [since] . . . it will be impossible to evaluate their research program” (1989, pp. 173–4). As is noted below, this form of response reveals the dominance of positivism, since Keohane issues the challenge on grounds that are themselves positivist. Thus, positivism is precisely what is at issue in what Lapid calls the third debate because of its role in underpinning theory and, ultimately, serving as the criterion for judging between theory. Crucially, Keohane’s central move is to propose that judgement between rationalist and reflective theories takes place on criteria that not only favour rationalism, but, more importantly, are exactly the criteria that reflective accounts are attacking. But note that a failure to come up to the (positivist) mark will result in reflective work being confined to the margins. Important consequences follow, then, from whether or not theories are positivist, and these consequences are not confined to questions as to what counts as knowledge but also involve the standing of theories and theorists within academia. All of this makes it very important to be clear as to how positivism operates in international theory, and to show how it is seen not merely as one explicit alternative among many but rather as the implicit “gold standard” against which all approaches are evaluated.

But the stakes are also high because of the links between theory and practice. International theory underpins and informs international practice, even if there is a lengthy lag between the high-point of theories and their gradual absorption into political debate. Once established as common sense, theories become incredibly powerful since they delineate not simply what can be known but also what it is sensible to talk about or suggest. Those who swim outside these safe waters risk more than simply the judgement that their theories are wrong; their entire ethical or

moral stance may be ridiculed or seen as dangerous just because their theoretical assumptions are deemed unrealistic. Defining common sense is therefore the ultimate act of political power. In this sense what is at stake in debates about epistemology is very significant for political practice. Theories do not simply explain or predict, they tell us what possibilities exist for human action and intervention; they define not merely our explanatory possibilities but also our ethical and practical horizons. In this Kantian light epistemology matters, and the stakes are far more considerable than at first sight seem to be the case.

Having pointed out just how much is at stake in any discussion of epistemology in international theory, it is necessary, before examining the present debate about whether we can characterise the current situation in international theory as one of “positivism and beyond”, or simply “beyond positivism”, to look at the history of positivism in the social sciences and then to examine various alternative epistemological positions. This will provide the intellectual context for the debates in international theory, as well as serve as an introduction to the language and contexts of these wider philosophy of social science debates.

The History of Positivism

Positivism has a long history in the social sciences. There are three main chronological variants of positivism in the history of the social sciences, with the third of these being the most relevant for international relations. What unites them is a strong commitment to a specific way of gaining knowledge about the world, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The first variant is that developed by Auguste Comte in the early nineteenth century (indeed it was Comte who coined the word “positivism”, as well as “sociology”). Comte’s aim was to develop a science of society, based on the *methods* of the natural sciences, namely observation. Its aim was to reveal the “evolu-

tionary causal laws” that explained observable phenomena. For Comte, positive science was a distinct third stage in the development of knowledge, which progressed first from theological to metaphysical knowledge and then to positivist knowledge. He saw the sciences as hierarchically arranged, with mathematics at the base and sociology at the top, and thought that each of the sciences passed through the three stages of knowledge. Crucially, he therefore thought that all sciences (including the sciences dealing with society) would eventually be unified methodologically. This view was enormously important in the development of the social sciences throughout the nineteenth century, fundamentally influencing writers as diverse as Marx and Engels, and Durkheim. It is an assumption that still dominates the discipline of International Relations insofar as scholars search for the same kinds of laws and regularities in the international world as they assume characterise the natural world.

The second variant is that of logical positivism (or as it is sometimes called logical empiricism), which emerged in the 1920s in what was known as the Vienna Circle. This variant dominated English-speaking philosophy into the late 1960s, and is the starker variant of the three summarised here. The central shared proposition of the members of this circle was that science was the only true form of knowledge and that there was nothing that could be known outside of what could be known scientifically. Hence, statements were only cognitively meaningful if they could be falsified or verified by experience. Moral and aesthetic statements were seen therefore as cognitively meaningless since they could not be in principle verified or falsified by experience. Such statements are merely expressions of preferences or feelings and emotions, but they are not knowledge. Thus, for instance, logical positivists rejected Comte’s notion of causal laws explaining observable phenomena as metaphysical and therefore unscientific. In international relations, such a view would mean that it was simply not

possible to speak of unobservables such as the structure of the international system or the "objective" laws of human nature.

The third variant is the one that has been most influential in the social sciences in the last fifty years. It emerged out of logical positivism, but moved away from its extremely stark criteria for what counts as knowledge and its reductionist view (contra Comte) that all cognitive knowledge should be based on the principles of physics. Christopher Lloyd has summarised its four main features as follows (1993, pp. 72–3): first, *logicism*, the view that the objective confirmation of scientific theory should conform to the canons of deductive logic; second, *empirical verificationism*, the idea that only statements that are either empirically verifiable or falsifiable (synthetic) or true by definition (analytic) are scientific; third, *theory and observation distinction*, the view that there is a strict separation between observations and theories, with observations being seen as theoretically neutral; finally, *the Humean theory of causation*, the idea that establishing a causal relationship is a matter of discovering the invariant temporal relationship between observed events.

This view was extremely important in the social sciences, where the orthodoxy of the 1950s and 1960s was one of trying to apply the ideas of the main proponents of this view, Carnap, Nagel, Hempel and Popper, to the fledgling social science disciplines. Particularly important was the work of Carl Hempel (especially 1966 and 1974) because he developed an extremely influential account of what is involved in explaining an event. He argued that an event is explained by "covering" it under a general law. Usually this takes the form of a deductive argument whereby (1) a general law is postulated, (2) antecedent conditions are specified, and (3) the explanation of the observed event deduced from (1) and (2). This model is known as the "deductive-nomological" model, and Hempel argued famously that it could be applied to the social sciences and to history

(1974). He also put forward an alternative, the "inductive-statistical" model, whereby statistical or probabilistic laws are established inductively and are used to show how a specific event is highly likely given the established law (1966, p. 11).

This third variant underpins much of the literature of international relations since the 1950s. Its features seem to me to have become somewhat detached from their philosophical roots as they have taken hold in international relations. In my judgement, positivism in international theory has had four underlying and very often deeply implicit assumptions, which deal with many of the points raised in Lloyd's four-point summary noted above but in an altogether less philosophically conscious and explicit way. The first is a belief in the unity of science (including the social sciences). This was especially influential in international relations, and many would argue continues to be so. Accordingly, the slow pace of development of international theory could be explained by comparing it to the development of physics, which took centuries to create powerful theories. In short, the same methodologies and epistemologies apply to all realms of enquiry. In philosophical language this is known as naturalism, of which there are strong and weak versions; the strong view is that there is no fundamental difference between the social and the "natural" worlds; the weaker version is that despite differences between the two realms the methods of the natural sciences can still be used for the analysis of the social world. In international relations an example of the strong version might be the view that the international system is essentially the same as the systems of the natural world; the weaker version is illustrated by the claim that scientific methods can be used to understand the beliefs of decision-makers even though this does not mean that these beliefs follow some (strong) laws of behaviour.

The second influential assumption is the view that there is a distinction between facts and

values, and, moreover, that "facts" are theory neutral. This fitted particularly well into the rush towards behavioural quantification in the 1960s, and was a position very much to the fore in the USA during the debates over US involvement in Vietnam. In philosophical terms this is an objectivist position, one that sees objective knowledge of the world as possible despite the fact that observations may be subjective. Thirdly, there has been a powerful belief in the existence of regularities in the social as well as the natural world. This, of course, licenses both the "deductive-nomological" and the "inductive-statistical" forms of covering law explanation. Again, in international relations terms, this kind of assumption lies at the heart of debates about polarity and stability, or about long cycles in world history. Finally, there has been a tremendous reliance on the belief that it is empirical validation or falsification that is the hallmark of "real" enquiry, a position we have already seen explicitly taken by Keohane; in philosophical language this is the adoption of an empiricist epistemology.

The impact of positivism on international theory has been surprisingly unreflective, with the canon of positivism significantly shaping the discipline since the 1950s. But there has been little in the way of a discussion of what positivism actually means. . . . [T]he terms "positivism" and "empiricism" are conflated and confused in international relations. . . . But it is certainly evident that in international relations positivism has tended to involve a commitment to a natural science methodology, fashioned on an early twentieth-century view of physics; that is to say a physics before the epistemologically revolutionary development of quantum mechanics in the 1920s, which fundamentally altered the prevailing view of the physical world as one which could be accurately observed. Accordingly, positivism in international relations, as in all the social sciences, has essentially been a methodological commitment, tied to an empiricist epistemology: together these result in a very re-

stricted range of permissible ontological claims. Thus whilst the terms "positivism" and "empiricism" are used interchangeably, in both the philosophy of social science and the philosophy of natural science, I think that it is absolutely necessary to maintain a conceptual distinction between the two. However, this is not easy to do because whereas for the logical positivists (or logical empiricists) positivism operated as an epistemological warrant about what kinds of knowledge claims might be made, in the third variant of Hempel, Popper *et al.* summarised above, positivism was much more than just a commitment to an empiricist epistemology. If it is difficult to differentiate between the use of the terms in the philosophy of natural and social science, in international relations and the other social sciences the two terms are virtually synonymous.

An answer to the question "what does positivism mean in international relations?" can now be given. Positivism is a methodological view that combines naturalism (in either its strong (ontological and methodological) or its weak (methodological) sense, and a belief in regularities. It is licensed by a strict empiricist epistemology itself committed to an objectivism about the relationship between theory and evidence. Whilst the usage of terms such as "epistemology", "methodology" and "ontology" may be various and inconsistent it is important that we separate "epistemology" conceptually from both "ontology" and "methodology", and then separate positivism from empiricism. Thus, as to the latter, I do not accept the view that empiricism = positivism = epistemology + methodology; rather positivism is a methodological position reliant on an empiricist epistemology which grounds our knowledge of the world in justification by (ultimately brute) experience and thereby licensing methodology and ontology in so far as they are empirically warranted.

As to the separation of epistemology, methodology and ontology, the three are indeed fundamentally interrelated. Methodology (why

use that method?) needs the warrant of an epistemology (answer: because this method discriminates between “true” and “false” within the range of what we could know to be “true” or “false”); whereas ontological claims (what is the world like and what is its furniture?) without an epistemological warrant is dogma and will not itself license a methodology. . . . My argument should not be taken as meaning that just because I have come to this point in this chapter via an analysis of empiricism this means I think the epistemological warrant is or should be empiricism, although this is the assumption that has underpinned much of the literature of international relations for the last forty years. But I do maintain that epistemology matters because it determines of what we can have knowledge; moreover, it is not possible to wish it away, or undermine its importance, by arguing, as is fashionably the case amongst post-modernist philosophers and (philosophical) realists, that ontology is prior to epistemology. All of this is very tricky ground but my main claim is simply that I see neither ontology nor epistemology as prior to the other, but instead see the two of them as mutually and inextricably interrelated. Thus, just as epistemology is important in determining what can be accepted ontologically, so ontology affects what we accept epistemologically. In this light, prioritising one or the other, as has certainly been the case in work on the philosophy of knowledge (prioritising epistemology) and in post-modernist work (which prioritises ontology), misses the point because such a move sets up a false distinction between the two and implies that one is separable from the other. . . .

Empiricism, as noted above, is the view that the only grounds for justified belief are those that rest ultimately on observation. Based upon the work of philosophers such as David Hume and John Locke, its central premise is that science must be based on a phenomenalist nominalism, that is to say the notion that only statements about phenomena which can be directly experi-

enced can count as knowledge and that any statements that do not refer to independent atomised objects cannot be granted the status of justified knowledge (Kolakowski, 1972, pp. 11–17). Empiricists believe that science can rest on a bedrock of such pure observation, and from this bedrock can be established, by induction, the entire scientific structure. Put simply, basic beliefs, warranted by direct perception, provide the basis for induction so that we can move away from a very narrow foundation for knowledge to much wider inductive generalisations. Of course, it is much more complicated than this. . . . The key point, however, is the simple one that if one grants that such a bedrock, however narrow, exists, then one can see how there might be an empirical foundation to knowledge.

But there are serious, and in my view insuperable, limitations to an empiricist epistemology. I will simply outline three fundamental ones. The first is that the epistemological warrant offered by empiricism is very narrow indeed, if in the end it has to be based on direct observation. Such a warrant rules out any consideration of (unobservable) things like social or international structures, or even social facts (to use Durkheim’s phrase which refers to those shared social concepts and understandings such as crime, which he believed should be treated “as things”). Thus, many philosophers point out that a strict empiricism actually allows us to *know* very little about only a very restricted amount of “reality”. The second limitation is that, strictly speaking, empiricism does not allow us to talk about causes since these are unobservable. The best we can do, following Hume, is to talk about “constant conjunctions”, and therefore eschew notions of necessity. Causation is thus reduced to mere correlation, and our enquiry is therefore limited to that of *prediction* and cannot involve *explanation*. Hempel’s covering law model, for example, can tell us what we might expect to happen, but not why it happens. Moreover, the logical structure of the covering law model allows us to make correct predictions

from false premises. Overall, then, the kind of knowledge we can gain from an empiricism that refuses discussion of unobservables such as causes is very limited indeed.

But it is the final problem that really undermines empiricism most fundamentally: put simply it is the objective that the kind of pure unvarnished perception talked of by empiricists is simply impossible. There can be no “objective” observation, nor any “brute experience”. Observation and perception are always affected by prior theoretical and conceptual commitments. Empiricism, in other words, underestimates the amount of theory involved in perception or observation. To describe what we experience we have to use concepts, and these are not dictated by what we observe; they are either *a priori* in the mind, or they are the result of a prior theoretical language. The problems for empiricism arising out of its underestimation of the role of theory have been most clearly expressed in Quine’s famous essay “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1961), in which he disputed both aspects of the empiricist view of the relationship between theory and facts. First, he noted that there was no easy distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, and that even analytical statements (that is those deemed true by convention) are susceptible to revision by experience. For empiricists this matters because they treat theory (or, in Hume’s phrase the “relations of ideas”) as “merely” a series of tautologies, or to use Martin Hollis’s phrase (1994, p. 52) a “filing system”; no truths about the world can come from this filing system, such truths can only come from observation (or again to use Hume’s phrase, from “matters of fact”). Quine’s first objection, then, punctures the neat distinction between analytic and synthetic statements that is central to the empiricist view of the role of theories.

His second objection is equally fundamental. Whereas empiricism rests on pure observation, Quine argues that this is simply not possible, since theory is involved in all empirical observation. Even the most simple acts of “pure”

observation involve a web of belief which is both far removed and far more complex than the individual act of observation. Our senses cannot give us access to “the truth” since there is no way of describing experience independently of its interpretation. There are, therefore, no brute facts, no facts without interpretation, and interpretation always involves theory. Thus, whereas the empiricist view of knowledge clearly implies that if experience differs from our prior beliefs then we should change our beliefs (since these can never reveal any truths about the world), Quine shows that the web of belief in which individual acts of observation occur can give us reasons to think that it is our interpretation of observation that is mistaken. Any individual observation, therefore, can be revised or redefined. Theories define what the “facts” are, and it is always an alternative to reject the “facts” and thereby save the theory. Facts are always theory dependent, and not independent as empiricism maintains. To quote Quine “it is misleading to speak of the empirical content of an individual statement. . . . Any statement can be held true come what may. . . . Conversely. . . . no statement is immune to revision” (1961, p. 43).

These are absolutely fundamental objections to the empiricism that has dominated international theory, and, despite protests to the contrary by many contemporary empiricists, I think they apply to much of the work currently being undertaken in international relations. . . .

Contemporary Epistemological Debates

If, as I have claimed, positivism and its epistemological foundation, empiricism, are seriously flawed, if rationalism (empiricism’s long-standing rival) is currently out of favour, and if pragmatism seems to run into a series of objections from those who want to retain notions of a foundational truth, then maybe there are other positions that might be of interest to those international theorists attempting to locate their work in an epistemology other than empiricism.

Broadly speaking there are *five* alternatives in the philosophy of knowledge that look particularly promising for post-positivist international theory. These are (a) scientific realism, (b) hermeneutics, (c) Critical Theory (in its Frankfurt School sense, hence the capital C and T to differentiate it from the more generic notion of “critical theories” which is used to refer to all post-positivist approaches), (d) feminist standpoint epistemology, and (e) post-modernist epistemology. Some of these are related to the approaches mentioned above: notably, both scientific realism and Critical Theory share much with rationalism, and hermeneutics, feminist standpoint and post-modernism have close links to pragmatism.

The central claim of *scientific realism* is that it makes sense to talk of a world outside of experience; that is to say, it is interested in uncovering the structures and things of the world that make science possible. Accordingly, the empiricist conception of the role of theories (as heuristic) is entirely wrong in that the existence of theoretical concepts such as electrons or classes are to be treated in the same way as so-called “facts”. As a result, its epistemology is nonempiricist, with epistemology being the transitive objects of science which we create to represent and account for intransitive objects such as the structures and furniture of the world. Bhaskar distinguishes between the real, the actual and the empirical: the first refers to what entities and mechanisms make up the world, the second to events, and the third to that which we experience. The problem with empiricism is that it has looked at the third of these as a way of explaining the other two so that it reduces questions about what is (ontology) to questions about how we know what is (epistemology). As Bhaskar puts it: “It is important to avoid the epistemic fallacy . . . [which] consists in confusing the ontological order with the epistemic order, priority in being with priority in deciding claims to being” (1978, p. 250). Similarly, Bhaskar rejects rationalism since it too reduces

ontology to epistemology by its reliance on the role of theoretically necessary conceptual truths to make sense of the world. In contrast, realist science is an attempt to describe and explain the structures and processes of the world that exist independently of our perception of them. Indeed, for science to be possible, the world *must* be made up of real structures and processes. Bhaskar fundamentally disputes the primacy given to epistemology by both rationalism and empiricism, since they reduce ontology to epistemology. For Bhaskar, ontology is primary, but is nothing like as flexible as the pragmatists imply: in this sense scientific realism disputes the primacy of epistemology over ontology in rationalism and empiricism, yet sees pragmatism as mistaken in its claim (or more accurately its implication) that what is true is only what is “good in the way of belief”.

Hermeneutics develops out of the work of Dilthey, Husserl, Weber, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Gadamer. Its central claim is antinaturalist in that it does not see the social world as in any sense amenable to the kind of treatment that empiricism, and especially positivism, assumes. Developing out of textual analysis, hermeneutics, as developed by Dilthey in the nineteenth century, starts from the premise that the analysis of nature and the analysis of the mind are very different enterprises. For Dilthey, each required a very different form of analysis, contra positivism, and these forms of analysis are what we now call explaining and understanding. Hermeneutics can at first sight be seen as a concern with how to understand a text or an actor, and the work of Collingwood (1946) and Skinner (see especially, Tully, 1988), are primarily concerned with this essentially methodological hermeneutics. However, the much more radical work of particularly Heidegger (1962), and Gadamer (1994) raises ontological questions about the nature of being: what does it mean for us to interpret and understand the world? Crucially, hermeneutics reverses the argument of traditional epistemology and instead of a being

- interpreting a world sees a being formed by tacit know-how which is prior to the interpretation of facts, events, or data. Individuals are caught up in a hermeneutic circle whereby we can only understand the world by our being caught up in a web of significance. Hermeneutics, in short, has ontological significance, which means that the traditional concerns of epistemology are inappropriate for understanding and making sense of our beliefs, since they posit the interpretive or observing subject as in some way prior to questions about the nature of being. In its place, Gadamer stresses the importance of the embeddedness of all analysis in language and history; individuals analyse and act within what Gadamer refers to as an “horizon”, by which he means their beliefs, preconceptions and situatedness and which both enables and constrains them. Crucially, for Gadamer, this embeddedness means that notions of truth and reason are themselves historically constituted, so that the kinds of claims about objective knowledge that have dominated epistemological discussions between rationalism and empiricism are fundamentally mistaken. What Gadamer proposes is an ontology of knowledge, reason and truth which shows how they are embedded in history rather than being above it. Epistemology, in its traditional sense discussed above, can therefore never be something prior, neutral, foundational or decisive, but instead has to be seen as secondary to ontology.

Critical Theory has a more recent history, emerging out of the work of the Frankfurt School in the inter-war years. Its most influential thinker has been Jürgen Habermas. The main implication for epistemology has derived from his work on a broader conception of reason than the instrumental view which dominates Western science and his development of a non-positivist methodology for the social sciences. In his book *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1987, first published in 1968), Habermas puts forward the view that there are three types of knowledge: empirical-analytical (the natural sciences), historical-hermeneutic (concerned with meaning and understanding), and critical sciences (concerned with emancipation). Habermas claims that each of these types of knowledge has its own set of “cognitive interests”, respectively, those of a technical interest in control and prediction, a practical interest in understanding, and an emancipatory interest in enhancing freedom. The epistemological implication of this transcendental claim is that there can be no such thing as true empirical statements, for example in the realm of the natural sciences, independent of the knowledge-constitutive interest in control and prediction. Since the late 1960s, Habermas has moved away from this rather restricted notion of knowledge-constitutive interests towards the development of what he terms a theory of communicative action (1984; 1987), in which he is concerned with developing an epistemology based on the notion of universal pragmatics or discourse ethics, whereby he sees knowledge emerging out of a consensus theory of truth. Central to this is his idea of an “ideal speech situation”, which he sees as implicit in the act of communication, and as rationally entailing ethical and normative commitments. The “ideal speech situation” is based upon the notion that acts of communication necessarily presuppose four things: that statements are comprehensible, true, right and sincere. It is not that Habermas thinks that the ideal speech situation is something that is commonly found in communicative actions, only that it is presumed by the very acts themselves. Habermas believes that we could in principle reach a consensus on the validity of each of these four claims, and that this consensus would be achievable if we envisaged a situation in which power and distortion were removed from communication so that the “force of the better argument prevails” (Outhwaite, 1994, p. 40). Thus, his epistemological position is one which seeks to avoid the simple objectivism of positivism whilst at the same time stopping short of embracing the kind of relativism implicit in traditional hermeneutics.

He proposes that the social sciences cannot proceed as do the natural sciences, and instead must see action from the perspective of the actor involved; but he maintains that this does not mean that the social sciences cannot criticise these perspectives on theoretical and ethical grounds. Crucially, Habermas's emphasis on the existence of foundations for making judgements between knowledge claims places his work as a direct descendant of the Kantian enlightenment project, a position that has been both a major source of criticism from post-modernists and yet a great source of strength to those who want to link foundational knowledge to emancipation.

Feminist work on epistemology is diverse, and only one variant of it will be dealt with here. . . Sandra Harding (1986) has noted three main strands in feminist work on epistemology: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist post-modernism. The first of these ultimately rests on the kind of empiricist epistemology discussed above, while the third has much to do with the work on post-modern epistemology discussed in the next section. The central claim of feminist standpoint epistemology is well expressed in the work of Nancy Hartsock (1983), who set out to "explore some of the epistemological consequences of claiming that women's lives differ structurally from those of men" (1983, p. 284). For Hartsock, the male (and Western, and white) domination of science and knowledge has produced knowledge which is partial and which excludes or marginalises women. Developing the Hegelian notion of the master-slave relationship, standpoint feminists argue that this marginality can be turned to epistemic advantage since women can have a better knowledge of male-dominated science than can the men involved; thus feminist standpoint knowledge will have both explanatory and emancipatory potential for greater than that created by feminist empiricists. The implication of feminist standpoint analysis for epistemology is enormous since it requires us to challenge the

traditional epistemological assumption that the identity of the knower was irrelevant in the process of knowing, an assumption found in both rationalism and empiricism. Indeed, not only is a feminist standpoint epistemology corrosive of such a claim, but so is feminist empiricism, since each is claiming that there can be no "master" narrative and that the situatedness of the mind is irrelevant. Moreover, feminist work on epistemology has made it abundantly clear that the knowing mind of traditional epistemology is axiomatically a male mind. This has radical consequences, since it requires us to abandon the idea of a disinterested and detached knowing subject, a move which is equally problematic for both rationalism and empiricism; in its place feminists propose the idea that knowledge is a social activity. In this light, the knowledge produced by this process cannot but fail to be influenced by the social location of those who construct it. The fundamental question for epistemology therefore becomes "whose knowledge?"

Post-modern work on epistemology is extraordinarily diverse, and defies easy summary . . . because its central tenet is one which seeks nothing less than the overthrow of virtually all preceding positions on epistemology. There are extensive debates over what is post-modernism and how it differs from post-structuralism, let alone quite what a post-modern epistemology looks like. It is a genre of work that has been attacked and dismissed, usually by people who have not bothered to engage with the complex issues involved (and maybe without reading the texts either!). . . .

The central implication of Foucault's work for epistemology comes from his concern with the historically specific conditions in which knowledge is generated. In his book *The Order of Things* (1970), he undertook "an archaeology of the human sciences" to show how the human sciences were not "natural" modes of enquiry but rather were made possible by an underlying structure of thought. His work on prisons

(1977), on the rise of "modern" medicine (1975) and on madness (1967) was concerned not so much with the content of the knowledge generated in these areas but rather on the relationship between knowledge and practice—that is to say on the relationship between power and knowledge—a relationship so intertwined that he referred to it as power/knowledge; each is always involved in the operation of the other. His later work on genealogy (1986) sought to show how specific academic "discourses" emerged not as a neutral result of scholarly enquiry, but as the direct consequence of power relations. In short, power is implicated in all knowledge systems, such that notions like reason or truth are the products of specific historical circumstances. The concept of truth has to alter accordingly, since it can no longer refer to an underlying or foundational notion of truth, but rather to the idea of multiple truths. Epistemology is therefore decidedly not the centrepiece of philosophical enquiry, but is instead dependent on underlying power structures. This is a very radical move away from empiricism, rationalism or even pragmatism; it was also a source of considerable dispute between Foucault and Habermas. Finally, Foucault saw the concept of truth not as an empirically valid concept but rather as a tool for resisting power. Accordingly, the central feature of epistemology, a concern with the criteria for determining the truth, is replaced by a much more practical notion of truth-as-tool.

Derrida's work can be seen as an attack on one central assumption of traditional work on epistemology, what he calls the "metaphysics of presence". His claim is anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist in that he refuses to see the knower as a given, and instead as merely one more construction of language and culture. Accordingly, he sees as flawed the central tenet of empiricist and rationalist epistemology, namely that the fundamental problem of epistemology is how to match the subjective self, or knower, with an "objective" or external world. His work on deconstruction forces us to examine the "reason-

ableness of reason", since he locates it within a specific cultural and historical setting of thinking and writing. His meticulous examinations of specific pieces of writing (see as examples, 1976, 1978, 1982) show how arbitrary and particular are the logocentric structures which mark language and thought; it is this which removes the foundations from rationalism and empiricism, since it completely subverts the idea of a prior presence (the metaphysics of presence). Instead, the knower is always caught up in a language and mode of thinking which, far from interpreting a world, instead constructs it. . . .

Positivism in International Theory

Having mapped out the terrain of the debate in the social sciences, this section will look at positivism in international theory, and the next will speculate about the possibilities open for developing a post-positivist international theory. The first question is whether international theory is currently dominated by positivism, or whether instead it has in some way moved *beyond* positivism.

At the outset I want to stress just how ill-defined "positivism" is in international theory. Basically there are three common ways of using the term. The *first* treats positivism as essentially the same thing as empiricism, which is to say that each is seen as an *epistemology*. An epistemology deals with how it is that we might know something about the world. A *second* uses positivism in a *methodological* way, by which is meant a set of rules for the actual practice of science or study. *Thirdly*, positivism is often equated with *behaviouralism*, by which is meant a very restrictive reliance on quantitative data, and a disregard for what goes on inside actors' heads, as the basis for knowledge claims. Usually, it is the first of these uses that has characterised international relations, but the overlap of usages has been especially marked, and it is quite common to be able to discern more than one of the above usages in any given enquiry.

Within philosophy the term involves a series of different kinds of commitments. As Martin Hollis shows, . . . positivism is usually seen by philosophers as entailing both empiricism (an epistemology) and naturalism (the view that the natural and social worlds are one and the same kind of thing, a view which has both ontological and methodological consequences); positivism thereby entails methodological, ontological and epistemological assumptions and commitments. Indeed Andrew Sayer has remarked that the terms positivism and empiricism are so contested that he chooses not to use them in his (philosophical) realist rejection of these two associated positions (1992, p. 7).

The problem is not just that international theorists have tended to use the term in very free and easy ways, unaware of the depths of the philosophical waters involved, but, more importantly, that the vast majority of international relations research over the last 30 years has rested *implicitly* on positivist assumptions. Thus, while many of the leading behaviouralists were aware of their commitment to positivism and indeed in many cases were powerful advocates of its strengths (see Hoole and Zinnes, 1976, which includes a particularly robust and tetchy defence by Singer), many others adopted an unthinking positivism, and worked within a Kuhnian normal science thereby foreclosing debate or theoretical and philosophical self-consciousness. This has been especially problematic when the interrelationship of the epistemological, methodological and ontological entailments of positivism are ignored, and when theorists are unaware of the consequences of these. Moreover, there has been little in the way of discussion as to what an alternative to positivism might look like. It is often erroneously assumed either that "we are all positivists now" or that positivism is now much more sophisticated than it once was, and that this "neo-positivism" overcomes the inadequacies of the positivism-as-behaviouralism that characterised international

theory in the 1950s and 1960s (such a position is well illustrated by Hermann, Kegley and Rosenau, 1987, pp. 18–22). In short, mainstream international theory has never really bothered to examine its positivist assumptions, nor what alternatives are available. Keohane's response to one such move to develop an alternative illustrates this poverty of imagination.

However, there have been notable exceptions to this silence about the role of positivism, but at first sight these seem to have been relatively ineffective in altering the orientation of the mainstream discipline. But on reflection such a view may simply reflect a massive (and very common) underestimation of the hold that positivism has had over international relations. One seemingly important reaction came in the so-called "great debate" of the mid-1960s, when Hedley Bull attacked the "scientists" for their methodological assumptions (see Knorr and Rosenau, 1969, for a collection of the main papers dealing with this "debate"); in place of "science" Bull proposed more traditional and historical analysis. Now the problem with the debate was that it ignored both epistemology and ontology; it was instead a very narrow dispute about what methods were appropriate for the study of international relations. A second celebrated debate came in the late 1960s with the induction/deduction dispute between Oran Young and Bruce Russett (see Young, 1969 and Russett, 1969); this was essentially a debate about whether enquiry was led by observation or by theory. But again this, although it seemed more important at the time, was really only another debate about the appropriateness of different methods. A third, and much more substantive, response was the critique of Charles Reynolds (1973, 1992), which noted the weaknesses of empiricism and in its place proposed a form of Collingwoodian history whereby the task of the theorist was to understand events as perceived by the individuals involved in them. But this too was largely ignored in the mainstream literature. The reason seems to me to be

that the mainstream was simply too wedded to positivism, and crucially, wedded in an implicit rather than an explicit way. On an anecdotal level, I recall many discussions with leading specialists in my own research area at the time (foreign policy analysis) who denied outright that they were positivists, associating it with a crude form of behaviourism which had failed 'to produce the goods'. This was very evident in the mid-1970s when the comparative foreign policy movement lost its impetus (see Kegley, 1980, Rosenau, 1976 and Smith, 1986). The response was *not* to abandon positivism, since this seemed untouched by the problems facing this sub-field of the discipline, but rather to reject the excessive reliance on quantitative data characteristic of behaviourism, and also to question the belief in an inductive route to general theory. But, of course, neither of these moves involved a rejection of positivism, only one component of it, and a rather extreme one at that.

More recently, a series of post-modernist writers (most notably Jim George 1988, pp. 67–70 and 74–85; 1994, pp. 41–68) and Richard Ashley (1984) have written about the limitations of positivism. But their work has been largely ignored by many traditionalists precisely because they write from theoretical positions that traditionalists do not accept as capable of providing "real" or "proper" knowledge. Kenneth Waltz's (1986) response to Ashley's (1984) critique, John Mearsheimer's quite amazingly confused comments on "critical theory" (1995), Kal Holsti's (1993) worries that such interventions do not lead to "progress", Roy Jones's (1994) reaction to Rob Walker's work, and Kal Holsti's (1989) and Tom Biersteker's (1989) responses to Lapid's article on post-positivism discussed above, are very clear examples of the reaction to post-structural or post-modern attacks on positivism. Rare indeed is the attempt to engage with these criticisms. . . . Yet again the reaction is essentially that writers such as Ashley and George are not doing "proper" international

relations. Part of the reason for this quite consistent rejection of attacks on positivism in international relations is, as stated above, that many international relations specialists tend to think of it in a very narrow sense; in this light, the critiques mentioned above "do not apply to them". But there is more to it than that, and in my judgement the explanation lies in the epistemological and ontological features of positivism. Thus the methodological aspects of positivism can be rejected as unduly quantitative or behavioural, but doing so does not mean that positivism's epistemological basis, and thereby its range of possible statements about what exists (its ontological realm), are also rejected. Positivism-as-methodology may be rejected but all too often positivism-as-epistemology continues to play the same role as before.

My basic argument, then, is that positivism is usually equated with a specific epistemological position, but almost always involved methodological commitments; together these result in a very limited range of possible ontological claims. It is precisely this linkage that lies at the heart of Keohane's view of what is at stake in the rationalist/reflective debate; and it is this linkage that explains just why his proposed test of the alternatives is so problematic. Keohane accepts as settled exactly the kind of epistemological and methodological questions that non-positivists want to problematise, and therefore his proposed test results in only a small range of ontological statements being deemed acceptable. Positivism is therefore used in a variety of ways, lacks a common definition, conflates and confuses very distinct philosophical concepts (so that positivism is sometimes used to refer to an epistemology and at others to refer to a methodology), is implicitly and explicitly powerful, and through the 1980s has come to be increasingly criticised. All of which begs the question of whether we can move beyond positivism, and what might such theories look like; or, perhaps whether there can now only be post-positivist theory?

Positivism and Beyond

At the outset I want to claim that there is really no such thing as a post-positivist approach, only post-positivist approaches. I have written about this before (Smith, 1995), pointing out that there were two main debates concerning post-positivist international theory, between explanatory and constitutive theory and between foundational and anti-foundational theory. I called traditional international theory as overwhelmingly explanatory in character, and post-positivist theory as constitutive, and among post-positivist approaches saw critical theory, historical sociology, and some feminist theory as foundational and post-modernism and some feminist theory as anti-foundational. This classification can now be improved on so as to take account of the fact that the various post-positivist approaches operate within very different epistemological positions.

My claim is that whilst the vast bulk of international theory is indeed explanatory because it is positivist, and though a lot of post-positivist work is constitutive (or reflective to use Keohane's term), the post-positivist accounts are working with distinctively different epistemologies. It is this which explains why there is no prospect of them constituting an alternative. Rather, historical sociology, despite the fact that it has been central in undermining the realist concept of the state, seems to me now to be largely working within an empiricist epistemology, if not an outright positivism. The epistemological positions of the other three sets of approaches seem to fit within at least three of the five alternative epistemological stances summarised above. Thus, although the post-positivist approaches are united in an opposition to traditional international theory, one of them works within the same epistemology as traditional theory, and the others are operating in distinctly different epistemologies to each other.

To illustrate these differences I will broaden my recent division of approaches into founda-

tionalist and anti-foundationalist. In its place I will use four criteria, those of *objectivism*, *empiricism*, *naturalism* and *behaviouralism*, to assess the precise commitments of the alternative epistemologies. Following Martin Hollis's definitions of these . . . *objectivism* can be defined as referring to the view that objective knowledge of the world is possible; *naturalism* as meaning that there is a single scientific method which can analyse both the "natural" and the social worlds; *empiricism* as involving the claim that knowledge has finally to be justified by experience; and *behaviouralism* as meaning that we do not need to worry about what actors think they are doing to explain their behaviour. . . .

Although the five views have been influential in developing post-positivist international theory, it is interesting to note that some have been much more influential than others. Scientific realism has been used very little (see Wendt, 1987; Dessler, 1989), which is rather surprising given that it has enormous potential for those who wish to construct an account of the influence of unobservable structures (such as the international system or the society of states?) on behaviour. Similarly, hermeneutics, as distinct from work on perceptions, has been little used, despite its obvious implications for the study of decision-making (for one important exception see Shapcott, 1994; see also the essays in Little and Smith, 1988). Feminist standpoint epistemology has been supported by Keohane (1991) as offering additional insights (to those of the mainstream), and used by Tickner (1992) in her book on international relations, but, as Zalewski (1993) argues, has otherwise been largely ignored in international theory. The other two epistemological perspectives, Critical Theory and post-modernism have been far more widely incorporated into international theory (for paradigmatic examples see, respectively, Cox, 1981, 1987; Hoffman, 1987; Linklater, 1990, 1992; and George, 1994; Ashley, 1987; Walker, 1993; Der Derian, 1987; Campbell, 1992). There is evidently still a large amount of epistemological

space for the development of post-positivist approaches in international theory.

In conclusion, my task has been to show that positivism has had an enormous influence in international theory primarily because it has critically influenced what the discipline could talk about; in this sense it matters because its epistemological assumptions have had enormous ontological consequences. International theory now has a number of post-positivist approaches, which are opening up space not merely for other ways of thinking about international relations but also for other international realities. But there is no hope of a (single) post-positivist approach because some very distinctly different and mutually exclusive epistemological positions underlie post-positivist international theories. My aim has been to say something about both the nature of positivism and its traditional alternatives, and about the kinds of epistemological positions open to those who want to move beyond positivist international theory. This does not mean, however, that anything goes epistemologically, or that one can adopt a pick and mix approach to these alternative epistemological positions. Indeed, my main argument is that epistemological concerns are absolutely salient for contemporary international theory and to claim that the move away from positivism does not mean accepting a less rigorous epistemological warrant for theory. In my judgement, the weaknesses of positivism are so fundamental that the positivist project cannot be resurrected. At the same time, positivism's dominance of the discipline has been, and continues to be, so great that it has come to be seen as almost common sense. But more important still has been positivism's role in determining, in the name of science, just what counts as the subject matter of international relations. Its epistemology has had enormous ontological effects, and these have affected not only the study but also the practice of international relations. In positivism's place, international theory needs to develop strong post-positivist theories

based on a variety of epistemologies because much more than epistemology is at stake.

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