



**CONSENSUS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:
A CRITICAL INQUIRY**

by

Terry O'Callaghan

B.A., (Honors), The Flinders University of South Australia, 1989
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1992

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a number of scholars have suggested that the Discipline is not in very good shape. Relativism is being advocated as a legitimate theoretical position, intellectual standards have fallen dramatically, and the field lacks both cohesion and direction. As a result, International Relations is said to be in a state of disarray. On this view, the culprit is theoretical pluralism. The plethora of approaches, theories, and perspectives now makes it impossible to achieve a consensus “on the subjects of inquiry and theorizing.” Without it, theoretical progress becomes impossible and the field stagnates. Theoretical pluralism, then, is regarded as a rather worrying trend, one which threatens the very existence of International Relations as an autonomous field of study.

This thesis takes issue with this interpretation. It argues that theoretical pluralism should be taken seriously and fostered. It is the only possible basis upon which the study of international politics can be undertaken. I argue that the “problem of the divided self” mitigates against the establishment of a permanent consensus on the subject.

Using this argument as a framework, I undertake an examination of the relationship between the idea of consensus and International Relations. I conclude that International Relations is a “dubious Discipline.” At the same time, it is too simple to speak about the “End of International Relations.” The Discipline continues to set the terms of theoretical debate. Unless this is recognized, attempts to move beyond International Relations will fail. This is precisely the fate of radical critics. I conclude by suggesting that one of the things which is wrong with the study of international politics is that there are too many scholars trying to legislate for the field as a whole.

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ERRATA

- Page 7 line 2 “normative” change to “Normative”
- Page 16, line 5, “there is no” change to “there can be no”
- Page 16, line 9, after “different” insert “from”
- Page 17, line 15, “this” to “the”
- Page 17, line 6, “had given” change to “gives”
- Page 21, line 13, “version” change to “versions”
- Page 22, line 3, “defines” change to “to define”
- Page 22, line 6, “legitimates” to “legitimate”
- Page 22, line 7, “or” change to “nor”
- Page 23, line 4, insert “the” between “of” and “latest”
- Page 26, line 11, “individuals” change to “individual”
- Page 26, line 12, remove comma
- Page 27, line 5, remove “the”
- Page 28, line 5 “there” change to “they”
- Page 32 line 18, remove “the”
- Page 32, line 18, “realism” change to “realist”
- Page 37, line 6, insert “they” between “way” and “do”
- Page 38, line 7, “Asian” change to “Asia”
- Page 41, line 7, “being” change to “be”
- Page 47, line 9, insert a comma after “accident”
- Page 48, line 7, “needs first” change to “needs the first”
- Page 50, line 4, insert “Lijphart” after Arend
- Page 51, line 7, insert a comma after “enterprise”
- Page 54, line 11, “fact gives” change to “fact which gives”
- Page 60, line 5, “what the new” change to “what new”
- Page 63, line 18, “world to be” change to “world is”
- Page 66, line 17, insert comma after “And”
- Page 70, line 13, “tradition” change to “framework”
- Page 84, line 18, comma after “and”
- Page 91, line 11, remove “about”
- Page 91, line 12, remove “about”
- Page 108, line 2, remove fullstop
- Page 121, line 16, “very something” change to “something very”
- Page 126, line 15, “state” change to “states”
- Page 140, line 5, “to study” change to “to the study of”
- Page 141, line 2, remove “the”
- Page 149, line 7, “contraditions” change to “contradictions”
- Page 161, line, 18, comma after “realism”
- Page 176, line 4, “into nature” “into **the** nature”
- Page 196, line 18, “Lyotard” change to “Lyotard’s”
- Page 197, line 11, inverted commas around italicized text
- Page 205, line 12, insert comma after “narrowness”
- Page 237, line 1 insert “it” between “that” and “is”

Page 237, line 3, "no" change to "not"
Page 237, footnote 1 "seeks" change to "seek"
Page 240, line 5, "This" change to "this"
Page 242, line 13, "dealer" change to "dealers"
Page 245, line 4, "to" change to "too"
Page 245, line 10 "though" change to "thought"
Page 245, line 21, "of" change to "on"
Page 247, line 17, remove "a"
Page 251, line 17, "that" change to "than"
Page 252, line 17, "is" change to "it"
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Page 253, footnote 39, "practiced" change to "practised"
Page 255, line 11, insert "of"
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Page 261, line 1, "seeks" change to "seek"
Page 261, line 5, "they" change to "the"
Page 265, line 1, "realism" change to "Realism"
Page 265, line 14, "radicals" change to "radical"
Page 269, line 2, insert "to"
Page 269, line 4 "and" change to "are"
Page 269, line 9 "to enough" change to "enough to"
Page 270, line 20, "here" change to "Here"

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Finally, George Eliot once said that animals were such agreeable friends because they ask no questions and pass no criticism. He must have had in mind my cat Coco. She has been great stress relief over the past year and deserves a pat or two as well.

Terry O’Callaghan, August 1998

To Mum

1931-1998

The absence of conceptual consensus and clarity,
perhaps more than any other factor, accounts for
the appearance of theoretical gridlock.

Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach



INTRODUCTION

DEFENDING THEORETICAL PLURALISM

The reflective person will perhaps feel free to move round the circle and enter into any position without settling anywhere. Of course, if one is preoccupied with the need to impart advice to those who conduct foreign policy, one will have to know where one stands. But it is desirable, and certainly not impossible, to combine the urgency of the committed citizen with the philosophical detachment of a student of international politics...I find my own position shifting round the circle. You will have guessed that my prejudices are Rationalist, but I find I have become more Rationalist and less Realist through rethinking this question during the course of giving these lectures. If I said Rationalism was a civilizing factor, Revolutionism a vitalizing factor, and Realism a controlling disciplinary factor in international politics, you might think I was playing with words, but I hope I have shown that there is more substance to international theory than that.

Martin Wight

The Problem of Theoretical Pluralism in the Study of International Politics

International Relations is now home to a number of competing perspectives, approaches, theories and methods. None reigns supreme and all claim to have insights into the character of international politics which are not evident in the others.¹ But not all scholars have embraced the new pluralism with an equal degree of commitment and vigor.² Indeed, most of those working within the North American mainstream are quite worried about its consequences for the future of the Discipline.³ True, some within this broad group acknowledge that competition between different theories and perspectives helps to bring out their strengths and weaknesses, that pluralism makes it possible to avoid the establishment of hegemonic orthodoxies, that it guarantees the intellectual roots of the field by preventing the complete rejection of the past in favour of the latest

1 In this thesis "International Relations" refers to the organized field of study as it has developed in North America after 1945. I refer to the subject matter of the field as "international politics."

2 By "theoretical pluralism" I mean the view that accepts and, at times, celebrates the fact that there is more than one legitimate theoretical interpretation of international politics and more than one relevant methodology. Some scholars refer to this as perspectivism. On this see, Lapid, Y., (1989), "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, pp.235-254. George, J., & Campbell, D., (1990), "Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference: Critical Social Theory and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.3, September, pp.269-293. Cox, W.S., & Sjolander, Claire Turenne, (1994), "Critical Reflections on International Relations," in Sjolander, Claire Turenne, & Cox, W.S., (eds.), *Beyond Positivism: Critical Reflections on International Relations* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp.1-10. It should be pointed out that I am not talking about "pluralism" as transnationalism or interdependence. On this see Little, R., (1996), "The Growing Relevance of Pluralism," in Smith, S., Booth, K., & Zalewski, M., (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.66-86. Viotti, P.R., & Kauppi, M., (1987), *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism*. New York: Macmillan.

3 Waltz, K.N., (1970), *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley. Holsti, K.J., (1985), *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory*. New York: George Allen & Unwin. Holsti, K.J., (1989), "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Which Are the Fairest Theories of All," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, pp.255-261. Biersteker, T.J., (1989), "Critical Reflections on Post-Positivism in International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, pp.263-267. Gilpin, R., (1986), "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.301-321. Jarvis, D.S.L., (1996), *The End of a New Beginning: The Crisis of the "Third Debate" and the Politics of Post-Modern International Theory*. Unpublished PHD Manuscript.

fashion, and that it leads to a more tolerant intellectual community.⁴ But, in the main, the assessment is uncomplimentary and disapproving. It leads to relativism, a decline in intellectual standards, makes it impossible to discriminate between good and bad theories, destroys objectivity, and stifles theoretical progress. Ultimately, it is regarded as an inappropriate way to organize the field. Thomas Biersteker even goes so far as to suggest that it may foster some particularly nasty political attitudes.⁵ The observation that the Discipline has lost its characteristic cohesion, is directionless, and in danger of becoming the intellectual equivalent of the Tower of Babel is a direct response to this pluralism and is offered as evidence of its “darker” side. Thus, Robert Gilpin complains that the Discipline, like the object of study, is in a state of anarchy.⁶ And Kalevi Holsti suggests that it is in “a state of disarray.”⁷

It is important to remember that this is not an entirely objective or unbiased viewpoint. Nor is it one which is very self-reflexive about its own understanding of the character of the theoretical enterprise.⁸ As Robert Crawford notes, “[t]hese debates are predicated on the unexamined conviction that the nature, purpose, and direction of theory is unproblematic.”⁹ In other words, there is a “sub-text” here, an unstated agenda. It is one which derives its inspiration from the

4 See especially Holsti, K.J., (1989), *op. cit.* Walt, S.M., (1998), “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Policy*, Vol.110, Spring, pp.29-46.

5 Biersteker, T.J., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.266.

6 Cited in Lapid, Y., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.237.

7 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.1.

8 On the subject of reflexivity see Neufeld, M., (1993), “Reflexivity and International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.1, Spring, pp.53-76.

9 Crawford, R., (1996), *Regime Theory in the Post-Cold War World: Rethinking Neoliberal Approaches to International Relations*. Aldershot: Dartmouth, p.20.

intellectual experiences of the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, it seems that students of international politics had made steady progress on the development of a general theory, had delineated a number of research sub-fields, and had managed to find substantial consensus on the “subjects of inquiry and theorizing.”¹⁰

Generally speaking, consensus refers to the ability of a group of individuals to achieve widespread agreement on a particular matter. Unfortunately, it is hard to find an extended discussion of this term in the theoretical literature, but there is no doubt about its centrality to the development of the Discipline after 1945. Harry Howe Ransom offers an excellent illustration of its significance.

Perhaps here we confront the ultimate truth, the unity of all knowledge. Even so, the road to a unified field theory, or simply a better understanding of international relations can only be built by a division of labor. But there must be some agreement on the direction of the road, standards of road building, and methods consonant with both standards and direction. The past twenty years has seen a considerable amount of effort devoted to hacking out some such agreement and to discussion about the “long road to theory.”¹¹

For Ransom, consensus is both a necessary precondition for there to be a Discipline, as well as an “ideal” which must continually be strived for. In other words, agreement among scholars is essential if International Relations is to have legitimacy within the human sciences. This attitude still dominates today and goes a long way to explain the suspicion which Holsti and Biersteker, among others, have towards theoretical pluralism and the “Third Debate” more generally. If there are competing ideas about the nature, scope, and character of the field, then consensus becomes

¹⁰ Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.2.

¹¹ Ransom, H.H., (1968), “International Relations,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol.30, No.2, May, p.346. Some time later, William Welch suggested that the first postulate for a Discipline is general agreement on basic terms. “I assume approximate consensus...” Welch, W., (1972), “The Possibility of an International Defenders of the Discipline of International Affairs,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.16, No.3, September, pp.295-319.

extremely difficult to achieve. Without it, the Discipline is threatened. I shall refer to those who reject pluralism on these grounds as “defenders of the Discipline” and will say more about this group of scholars in the first chapter.

Medical metaphors are wonderful for describing states of being. And it is interesting that they are often used when scholars are trying to highlight serious problems. It should not surprise anyone, then, that such metaphors are often employed as a way of describing the current state of International Relations. Thus, according to Holsti, there is no sense of “well-being” in the field today because agreement is no longer possible.¹² But are the intellectual assumptions of the 1950s and 1960s credible enough to warrant such a negative assessment of theoretical pluralism? Is consensus the appropriate way of ordering the field? Does pluralism make theoretical progress impossible? These are questions which I seek to answer in this thesis. Provisionally, however, I do not think that the 1950s and 1960s offer a credible benchmark by which to evaluate the new pluralism. Indeed, continuing the medical metaphor, I suggest that never in its short history has the study of international politics enjoyed a sense of “well-being.” International Relations is, and has always been, a sickly Discipline. And the reason for this is quite clear. Theoretical pluralism, not consensus is the only plausible way to order the study of international politics. To the extent that scholars defend the proposition that consensus is necessary for theoretical progress, they are unfortunately helping to keep this particular patient in an infirmed state. Defenders of the Discipline have got things around the wrong way. The royal road to a healthy and vibrant field of study is one which takes theoretical pluralism seriously. It must be embraced and fostered. And the reasons for this have little to do with facile arguments about pluralism being able to help

12 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.2.

scholars avoid becoming entangled in hegemonic orthodoxies, and so on. It has to do, instead, with what Istvan Hont calls “the permanent crisis of a divided mankind” and Michael Walzer terms “the problem of the divided self.”¹³ Thus, the issue of theoretical pluralism can only be discussed adequately on the terrain of normative theory.

The Irresolvable Tension Between Citizenship and Humanity

Normative international political theory has made something of a comeback over the past few years. As Steve Smith argues, “[i]nternational theorists are now condemned to live in interesting times, and the thrust of the Discipline in the last decade or so has been to re-establish normative concerns in the subject.”¹⁴ For those who have regarded the Discipline's long-standing relationship with the natural sciences as a wrong turn or detour, the revival of normative international political theory is an important development.¹⁵

As a distinctive approach, normative theories focus primarily on the ethical and moral dimensions of international politics.¹⁶ This includes research into the principles of international

13 Hont, I., (1994), “The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: ‘Contemporary Crisis of the Nation-State’ in Historical Perspective,” *Political Studies*, Vol.xlii, pp.166-231. Walzer, M., (1994), *Thick and Thin: Moral Arguments at Home and Abroad*. Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, p.85.

14 Smith, S., (1992), “The Forty Years’ Detour: The Resurgence of Normative Theory in International Relations,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.21, No.3, Winter, p.490.

15 See, for example, Linklater, A., (1990), *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*. 2nd Edition. London: Macmillan. Brown, C., (1994), *International Theory: New Normative Approaches*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf. See also Beitz, C., (1979), *Political Theory and International Relations*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Thompson, J., (1992), *Justice and World Order: A Philosophical Inquiry*. London: Routledge. Walzer, M., (1992), *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books. Frost, M., (1986), *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Donelan, M., (1978), “The Political Theorists and International Theory,” in Donelan, M., (ed.), *The Reason of States: A Study in International Political Theory*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.75-91.

16 For a general discussion of the idea of normative theory see Hoffman, M., (1994), “Normative International Theory: Approaches and Issues,” in A.J.R. Groom & Margot Light, (eds.), *Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory*. London: Frances Pinter, pp.27-44. Dyer, H.C., (1989), “Normative Theory and International

distributive justice, human rights, obligations between states, poverty, the conditions for the legitimate use of force, the nature and limits of international community, and so on. normative theorists, then, tackle issues which are concerned with the justification and evaluation of certain courses of action and their consequences. But the term is also used in relation to the ontological assumptions which underpin particular theories of international politics and the Discipline itself. It has been pointed out, for example, that all theories contain normative assumptions (either articulated or unarticulated) about the world. This is the sense which Chris Brown gives the term when he suggests that normative theories are concerned with the “wider questions of meaning and interpretation generated by the Discipline.”¹⁷

Given the kind of issues which interest the normative theorists, it is understandable that they look to the tradition of political thought for inspiration. But, in the past, anyone seeking answers to these sorts of questions has run up against arguments about the difference between international and domestic politics and the weakness (or irrelevance) of that tradition for the study of international politics.¹⁸ Nobody has made a case against the value of this tradition better than

Relations,” in Dyer, H.C., & Mangasarian, L., (eds.), *The Study of International Relations: The State of the Art*. London: Macmillan, pp.172-185. Frost, M., (1994), “The Role of Normative Theory in IR,” in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.23, No.1, Spring, pp.109-118. For a discussion which predates the recent work on the subject see Thompson, K.W., (1967), “Normative Theory in International Relations,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.21, No.2, pp.278-292. For a criticism of normative theory see Walker, R.B.J., (1994), “Norms in a Teacup: Surveying the New Normative Approaches,” *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol.38, Supplement 2, October, pp.265-270.

¹⁷ This comes closest to describing the approach of this thesis. Brown, C., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.3.

¹⁸ See Waltz, K.N., (1959), “Political Philosophy and the Study of International Relations,” in Fox, W.T.R., (ed.), *Theoretical Aspects of International Relations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, pp.51-67. One important exception is Wolfers, A., (1956), “Political Theory and International Relations,” in Wolfers, A., & Martin, L.W., (eds.), *The Anglo-American Tradition in Foreign Affairs: Readings from Thomas More to Woodrow Wilson*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.ix-xxvii. For a critique of the distinction between international and domestic politics see Walker, R.B.J., (1993), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martin Wight. It is no surprise, then, that his notorious essay on the subject is the point of departure for most attempts to reintegrate international political theory back into the tradition of political thought proper.¹⁹

One of the things which flows from a recognition of the importance of the tradition of political thought is an awareness of just how significant the tension between citizenship and humanity is for the study of international politics. Andrew Linklater, one of the leading normative theorists, gives an excellent description of this tension.

The fact that a dichotomy between a sense of obligation to the state and a belief in obligations to humanity persists within Western theory and practice is sufficient justification for the present analysis. An account of our experience of the modern state and our relations with outsiders would be defective if it did not probe that moral dualism or conflict embedded within the state's theoretical traditions and practical behaviour. These two concepts of obligation create an important problem or tension within the state which we may characterize as the problem of reconciling our existence as men with the acquired status of citizenship: we may characterize it also as a division within the lives of modern citizens, a sense of being pulled in competing directions by antagonistic ethical demands, manifest most clearly in both theoretical and practical attempts to produce a conclusive statement of the relationship between public and private morality...It is the tension between different concepts of obligation...which provides the international political theorist with some purchase on the world of international relations and which determines his immediate task, that of effecting a convincing philosophical reconciliation of the components of an apparently bifurcated moral and political experience.²⁰

No-one understood this problem better than Immanuel Kant and George William Friedrich Hegel. Yet it has to be said that even these great scholars never succeeded in offering a credible solution to this problem. Chris Brown suggests that their respective understanding of the character of international politics are the main "background theories" which many of the new normative

19 Wight, M., (1967), "Why Is There No International Theory?" in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.) *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.17- 34.

20 Linklater, A., (1990), *op. cit.*, pp.15-16.

theorists defer to in order to try to resolve this dilemma. It is worth briefly looking at their respective positions on this question then. I begin with Kant.

According to Kant, war interferes with the moral life and health of peoples. It “is the source of all evils and moral corruption.”²¹ Like Hobbes before him, he accepts that the natural state of man is one of war. Peace is something which has to be constructed artificially. The frequency and intensity of inter-state war means that the rights and freedoms of individuals is continually under threat by aggressive states.²² It becomes impossible for states to perfect their constitutions while they are continually worrying about being invaded. Consequently, Kant tries to work out a way to bring the national political order and the international state system into harmony. Just as individuals had moved beyond the state of nature, sovereign states must do the same.²³ In his view, it is the duty of all individuals and states to bring about the abolition of war and move in the direction of perpetual peace.

Kant’s essay on the subject of perpetual peace is his most impressive attempt to determine the conditions of a lasting peace by showing how states could be encouraged to give up their sovereignty and become part of a global cosmopolitan community. The first part of the essay is devoted to what Kant calls the preliminary articles. These articles are a set of “prohibitive laws,” the purpose of which is to change the attitude of states towards each other. These include such

21 Kant, I., (1979), *Kant’s Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.183 Elsewhere he writes that “[i]t must be admitted that the greatest evils which afflict civilized nations is brought about by war.”

22 It is important to remember that Kant was mainly concerned with the question of political right within states. He discusses international politics from this viewpoint.

23 Kant argues that there “is only one rational way in which states coexisting with other states can emerge from the lawless condition of warfare. Just like individual men, they must renounce their savage and lawless freedom, adapt themselves to public coercive laws, and thus form an international state.” *Ibid.*, p.107.

things as gradually abolishing standing armies, not incurring debts in relation to external affairs, and undertaking not to interfere with the constitutions of other states. Accompanying the preliminary articles are another set which offer a framework by which peace can be secured and maintained. These include a demand that all states develop a republican constitution, the setting up of a federation of free states, and a general rule of universal hospitality and free passage.

Kant is well aware of the role of power and expediency in international affairs. But there are two reasons why he thinks that his plan for “perpetual peace” is workable. The first is that states will eventually become morally, economically, and demographically exhausted from making war upon each other. After numerous imperfect attempts to achieve peace, states would eventually form a successful and lasting coalition, or what Kant calls a “great federation.”²⁴ The second reason is that, for Kant, “right” is all-pervasive. Even tyrants invoke the law from time to time and the most expedient kings and princes are not completely without principles. It is a matter of getting them to see that there is a better way, as well as a matter of education and of public free speech. But, in the end, human beings would slowly and painfully emerge from their political immaturity and see that the only alternative to “perpetual peace” is the peace of the “graveyard.” In the final analysis, Kant holds firmly to the view that enlightened self-interest is the key to bringing about a world federation and the eventual abolition of war.

24 *Ibid.*, p.51

Hegel disagreed with Kant's position and never tired of criticizing his universalism.²⁵

According to him, Kant is naive and misunderstands the nature of war. He is wrong to think that war is an absolute evil.

War is not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as a purely external accident, which itself therefore has some accidental cause, be it injustices, the passions of nations or the holders of power, etc., or in short, something or other which ought not to be. It is to what is by nature accidental that accidents happen, and the fate whereby they happen is thus a necessity. Here as elsewhere, the point of view from which things seem pure accidents vanishes if we look at them in the light of the concept and philosophy, because philosophy knows accidents for a show and sees in it its essence, necessity.²⁶

Hegel locates the cause of war in the peculiar nature of the state and the relationship of individuals to it. The essential features of the state are its individuality and its autonomy. This is what sets it apart from all other states. Moreover, its autonomy represents the essence of the identity of its inhabitants. A people are a product of a particular milieu, they have a history, common language, customs, passions, and particular social and political rules. Their identity cannot encompass all of humankind. The degree of cultural diversity on the planet not only mitigates against the possibility of individuals identifying with all peoples, it also means that a cosmopolitan world-state is out of the question. As Charles Taylor expresses it, human beings "cannot stretch their identification so wide as to include everyone."²⁷ What nations possess is a

25 This does not mean that Hegel did not hold Kant in very high regard. As Howard Williams writes "Hegel's approach to political theory is redolent with Kantian ideas." Williams, H., (1987), "Politics and Philosophy in Kant and Hegel," in Priest, S., (ed.), *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 196. Mertens, T., (1995), "Hegel's Homage to Kant's Perpetual Peace: An Analysis of Hegel's Philosophy of Right #321-340," *The Review of Politics*, Vol.57, No.4, Fall, pp.665-691.

26 Hegel, G.W.F., (1967), *The Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T.M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.209.

27 Taylor, C., (1975), *Hegel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.447.

feeling of “self-hood.”²⁸ It is an attitude of commonality that has the power to bind individuals into a single unit, willing to sacrifice themselves to preserve their own national character and way of life.

For Hegel, war arises out of a conflict between opposing ways of life. This is because a state’s own welfare “is the highest law governing the relation of one state to another.”²⁹ Thus, when two sovereign states enter into relations they always have their own goals and interests in sight. Treaties and alliances can be made, but they last only as long as they serve the welfare of the contracting parties. The international system, then, is a realm “infected with contingency.”³⁰

It is as particular entities that states enter into relations with one another. Hence their relations are on the largest scale a maelstrom of external contingency and the inner particularity of passions, private interests and selfish ends, abilities and virtues, vices, force, and wrong.³¹

Hegel does not believe that wars are good in themselves. He is no proto-fascist as some scholars have argued.³² On the contrary, “war is characterized as something that should pass away.”³³ The cycle between war, peace, and war again, is something that is characteristic of history and only history can judge the virtue or vice of the contingencies of war. One cannot understand war and peace without realizing the degree to which both are bound up in actual

28 Hegel, G.W.F., (1967), *op. cit.*, p.208.

29 *Ibid.*, p.214.

30 *Ibid.*, p.214.

31 *Ibid.*, p.215.

32 For a good discussion of this issue see Avineri, S., (1972), *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.194-207.

33 *Ibid.*, p.215.

human affairs. As Edward Black expresses it: “The history of war is part of the history of society.”³⁴ War is one of the ways by which history is propelled forward.

Hegel's understanding of war centres on the existence and legitimacy of the sovereign state. In more modern language, it is a “state-centric” viewpoint. He is not concerned to show the right or wrong of protagonists involved in specific wars. Rather, he is concerned to show that war is integral (for good or bad) to the existence of the concept of the sovereign state. War is the means by which sovereignty is assured. It brings people together, and is the highest expression of their solidarity and unity with one another. The threat and fear of death brings out the universal aspects of existence, and turns individuals away from the day to day routine of their lives. “Its necessary function is to embody the primacy of the universal; and thus, without it, peoples would stagnate in the swamp of private interests.”³⁵

Thus, Hegel thinks that Kant's proposal for a world federation is one-sided. It fails to understand that the state is an individual entity and that individuality necessarily implies difference.

Perpetual Peace is often advocated as an ideal towards which humanity should strive. With that end in view, Kant proposed a league of monarchs to adjust differences between states, and the Holy Alliance was meant to be a league of much the same kind. But the state is an individual, and individuality essentially implies negation. Hence even if a number of states make themselves into a family, this group as an individual must engender an opposite and create an enemy.³⁶

34 Black, E., (1973), “Hegel on War,” *The Monist*, Vol.57, No.4, October, p.378. See also Earle, W., (1973), “In Defence of War,” *The Monist*, Vol.57, No.4, October, pp.551-569.

35 Taylor, C., (1975), *op. cit.*, p.448. Harry Lime puts the point even more harshly than Hegel. “In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, bloodshed - they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock.” Greene, G., (1971), *The Third Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

36 *Ibid.*, p.295.

According to Hegel, then, Kant misunderstands the exclusionary nature of the state and what it ultimately takes to bring “is” and “ought” into a framework capable of ensuring a lasting peace. What Hegel objects to is, in the words of Raymond Plant, the assumption of “those of his contemporaries who found in philosophy not an actual reconciliation between man and the world, but the pious hope that such a reconciliation might eventually be achieved, for whom reconciliation was a mere ideal.”³⁷ The problem with Kantian universalism is that it is based on the assumption that theory can change reality; that thinking alone can bring about a “new world order.” For Hegel, this misunderstands the nature of the constraints on transformative action, the accidental in history, and the individuality of states and cultures.

Chris Brown is right to see these two illustrious thinkers as offering the representative “background” statements of the tension which lies at the heart of the modern political experience.³⁸ But what is interesting about Hegel is that he did not fully appreciate the implications of his critique of Kant. Despite acknowledging that individuals will always form exclusive communities, he believes that his system of philosophy can resolve “the problem of the divided self.” This is why his philosophy of history is so important to the overall success of his political theory. It is through his philosophy that he believes a “real” reconciliation between humanity and citizenship can be found.

It is not necessary to go into precisely how he goes about this task, but the proposition that history comes to an end in his system of philosophy is an arbitrary one and contradicts the view

³⁷ Plant, R., (1973), *Hegel*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.125.

³⁸ Brown, C., (1993), *op. cit.*, pp.24-28.

that human beings are free and the horizon of the future is always open.³⁹ Indeed, there is a strange paradox here. Hegel's philosophy is one of freedom, yet this freedom terminates in "absolute knowledge." If one does not accept his philosophy of history completely, as one accepts a religion, it is hard to see how the issue can be resolved satisfactorily.

To reject Hegel's system of philosophy, and the view that it is capable of bringing about an actual reconciliation between citizen and humanity, does not invalidate his more basic point about the exclusionary nature of the state (or any group for that matter) and how it will always create an "other." Indeed, as we have often seen over the past 150 years, it can always be put up as a valid response to Kantian and other forms of universalism. The modern identity, then, is a divided identity and unless one accepts that a system of philosophy is able to transcend this state of affairs or that a global hegemon will come along who can (benevolently) reshape or realign this identity, then it is clear that this problem is irresolvable.⁴⁰ This does not mean that scholars should abandon the task of seeking a resolution to this dilemma. It is simply to say that under present conditions such a resolution is unlikely. At the same time, it is the duty of all theorists of international politics to contribute to this discourse. The first step is to accept that theoretical pluralism is the only plausible way to organize the field.

39 For a critique of Hegel's philosophy of history see Polin, R., (1978), "Farewell to the Philosophy of History," in Yirmiah, Y., (ed.), *Philosophy of History and Action*. Jerusalem: The Magnus Press, pp.201-218. Popper, K., (1984), *The Open Society and its Enemies: Hegel and Marx*. London: Routledge. See also Fukuyama, F., (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. For criticisms of Fukuyama's Hegelianism see Bertram, C., & Chitty, A., (1994), *Has History Ended?: Fukuyama, Marx, Modernity*. London: Aldershot. Halliday, F., (1992), "An Encounter with Fukuyama," *New Left Review*, No.193, May/June, pp.89-95. Halliday, F., (1992), "International Society as Homogeneity: Burke, Marx, and Fukuyama," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.21, No.3, Winter, pp.435-461. Milliband, R., "Fukuyama and the Socialist Alternative," *New Left Review*, No. 193, May/June, pp.108-113. Rustin, M., (1992), "No Exit From Capitalism," *New Left Review*, No. 193, May/June, pp.96-107.

40 See also Hont, I., (1994), *op. cit.*

The Case for Theoretical Pluralism

Regardless of the criticisms which are levelled at Wight's understanding of the relationship between international theory and the tradition of political thought, I think he understands the impact of the "divided self" on the study of international politics better than most. Indeed, his trilogy of realism, rationalism, and revolutionism can be interpreted as different ways of coping with the fact that there is no resolution to this problem.

Of course, Wight does not employ this sort of language. But what is impressive about his classificatory scheme is that he does not fall into the trap of trying to establish a field of study which formally honors only one particular response to it. In this sense, his classificatory scheme is quite different and superior to the "inter-paradigm debate" or Waltz's "three images."⁴¹ With regard to the "inter-paradigm debate," for example, Steve Smith argues that it:

leaves much out of international theory, and puts any inter-paradigm debate onto advantageous terrain for realism...Thus, dividing the discipline into these three paradigms really does restrict what counts as international theory, and silences many other interpretations.⁴²

The same can be said for Waltz's "images." By trying to establish realism as the scientific foundation for the study of international politics, these early disciplinary architects never fully grasped the depth of the problem. They never understood that privileging any one of the "Three R's" would always invite a counter attack from the other standpoints. This is why there can never be a consensus on the substance of international politics and why I think Wight is worth studying.

41 On the "inter-paradigm debate" see Banks, M., (1985), "The Inner-Paradigm Debate," in Light, M., & Groom, A.J.R., (eds.), *International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory*. London: Frances Pinter, pp.7-26. See also Waltz, K.N., (1959), *Man, The State, and War*. New York: Columbia University Press.

42 Smith, S., (1995), "The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory," in Booth, K., & Smith, S., (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*. London: Polity Press, p.19.

At the same time, he recognizes the limitations of the “Three R’s” in a way that defenders of the Discipline do not. For Wight, students of international politics should not treat them as if they are homogeneous intellectual positions.⁴³ Towards the end of his posthumously published lecture series, he suggests that his classificatory scheme is only valuable at the point at which it breaks down.

The greatest political writers in international theory almost all straddle the frontiers dividing two of the three traditions, and most of these writers transcend their own systems...The three traditions are not like three railroad tracks running parallel into infinity. They are not philosophically constant and pure like three stately, tranquil and independent streams flowing first from Vitoria and Suarez to J.R. Brierly, and secondly, from Machiavelli to E.H. Carr, and lastly from Ignatius Loyola to Eric Hobsbawn and Palme Dutt. They are streams, with eddies and cross-currents, sometimes interlacing and never for long confined to their own river bed. They are, to vary the metaphor, threads interwoven in the tapestry of Western Civilization. They both influence and cross fertilize one another, and they change, although without, I think, losing their inner identity.⁴⁴

What Wight is suggesting is that there can never be a consensus among students of international politics because of the number of possible permutations which the “Three R’s” give rise to.

Given that “the problem of the divided self” mitigates against there being a consensus in the field, how is it that this problem has never received adequate attention? How is this “consensual urge” to be explained? One reason why, in a loose sense, realism dominated the field after 1945 is that it served as a blueprint for U.S. policy-makers so that they could chart a course through the Cold War.⁴⁵ But in taking on the job of “advisor to the prince,” these scholars had

43 There is, then, an interesting parallel between Wight’s argument and Smith’s criticisms of the inter-paradigm debate.

44 Wight, M., (1993), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp.259-260.

45 Hoffmann, S., (1991), “An American Social Science: International Relations,” in *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, pp.3-24.

to subordinate the interests of humanity to those of the citizen. In doing so, they developed the study of international politics into a field which formally excluded serious consideration of the interests of humanity. These concerns were simply pushed to the fringes, labeled idealist, and promptly ignored. I am not suggesting that this was an explicit goal but, rather, an unfortunate by-product of the evolution of the Discipline after 1945. Thus, defenders of the Discipline have little or no appreciation of the depth of the philosophical problem which had given rise to the field in the first place.

Two things flow on from this. First, the emphasis on consensus after 1945 can be seen as an attempt to give a definitive answer to the problem of the “divided self.” And, as such, it assumes that there is a resolution “out there.” Second, if Wight is correct in saying that most thinkers “straddle” the lines of the “Three R’s” then it highlights the hopelessness of the “consensual” approach to the complex material of international politics. The result, in my view, has been a crude confrontation between abstract ideal-types which have little respect for the diversity, nuance and subtlety in different theoretical positions, even within realism itself. The reason why the study of international politics is in an unhealthy state is not because of too much pluralism, but because International Relations has been starved of this particular value

The case for pluralistic ordering of the field, then, sees the North American Discipline as a partisan and hegemonic project which, for the most part, is philosophically ignorant of the way that the bifurcation between citizenship and humanity impacts on the study of international politics. Had the North American mainstream taken more notice of Wight’s arguments, they might have realized the folly of trying to solve “the problem of the divided self” by trying to develop a general theory based on universal agreement. In this sense, theoretical monism is the enemy of progress

and understanding, not its gate-keeper. The only way to make headway on this difficult issue is, first of all, to begin to acknowledge that there is no solution to the problem of the “divided self” and, second, by realizing that a pluralistic ordering of the field is our only ally in the face of this peculiarly modern dilemma. This is why it is necessary to promote genuine diversity in the field.

The Argument of the Thesis

Chris Brown recently argued that “[i]f we truly wish to promote diversity in international thought, it may be that a crucial first step will be to contribute to the work of dismantling “International Relations” as an academic discipline.”⁴⁶ I think he is right about this but what concerns me about some of the attempts in this direction is that they fail to appreciate just how central the idea of consensus has been to the evolution and success of the Discipline over the past fifty years and how potent this idea continues to be today. It is not enough to attack realism and positivism, as if this is all there is to the Discipline of International Relations. If one’s goal is to promote diversity by dismantling the Discipline, then it is vital to challenge the idea that consensus is essential to the study of international politics. It is not, nor should it ever have been regarded as such. It is only essential if one believes that those who study international politics cannot get along without a formal Discipline to direct their energies, legislate for them, and tell them what the parameters of the subject matter are.

It is easier now to see why I spent so much time probing “the problem of the divided self.” I use that discussion as a framework for an analysis of the idea of consensus in the study of international politics. My argument is that International Relations is a “dubious Discipline” insofar

46 Brown, C., “Fog in the Channel: Continental International Relations Theory Isolated or: An Essay on the Paradoxes of Diversity and Parochialism.” Unpublished paper presented to the March 1997 ISA Conference, Toronto, Canada, p.23.

as its leading spokespersons think that consensus is a precondition for theoretical progress. These defenders of the Discipline are wrong because there are no independent criteria upon which a permanent consensus can be established in the field. Once the matter is looked at from this perspective, I suggest that it has important implications for radical criticism of realism and for the way international politics is studied in the future.

Plan of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one examines three well-known criticisms of theoretical pluralism. The first is that international political theory used to be in fine shape because a general consensus existed among scholars. The second is that the Discipline is now in “crisis” because theoretical pluralism makes it impossible to reach a general consensus. And the third is that theoretical pluralism leads to relativism. I argue that this “package” of complaints only makes sense if a “real” consensus existed among scholars during the 1950s and 1960s. But this is not the case. For there are no independent criteria available to scholars which make it possible to establish a lasting consensus on the nature, scope and substance of the field. I do no more than outline this argument in chapter one. In chapters two, three and four I explain my position more fully. At the end of chapter one, I suggest that there are three “core” of assumptions which give International Relations its identity and its coherence. The first is positivism, the second is the autonomy of the Discipline, and the third is the meaning of realism. I devote a chapter to each of these ideas, demonstrating how in each case they do not offer a plausible basis upon which to claim that a consensus is possible.

In chapter two I deal with the problem of positivism, both in relation to debates in the human sciences and in International Relations. I argue that the “consensual urge” derives a great

deal of sustenance from here. It forms the epistemological basis for “theoretical progress” and goes a long way to offering a coherent strategy by which a consensus can be achieved and maintained. However, I argue that it is an inappropriate epistemology for the human sciences and point to the work of Martin Heidegger, Jurgen Habermas and Hans-Georg Gadamer to support my case.

Chapter three looks at the relationship between the idea of consensus and arguments about the autonomy of the Discipline. I claim that the price paid to establish International Relations as an autonomous field of study within the social sciences is the marginalization of political philosophy/theory.

Chapter four examines realism. I argue that instead of making consensus possible, the diversity of forms of realism actually demonstrates the difficulties with trying to maintain a consensus. The first half of the chapter is devoted to a cataloging of some of the more well-known versions of realism, and the second part argues that these different version are often underpinned by very different metatheories. This makes it extremely difficult to claim that realism is a homogeneous approach to the study of international politics. I argue that while there is some commonality among a wide range of scholars, there is not sufficient commonality to treat it in this way. Indeed, realism has no fixed meaning and is best described as a “ghost.”

Chapter five begins to draw some conclusions from this critical exercise. The chapter contains two arguments. First, given that no general consensus has (really) ever existed in the field. I argue that the Discipline of International Relations must be regarded as a “dubious Discipline.” Despite this, it is premature to talk about the end of International Relations since the Discipline continues to set the terms of theoretical debate, at least where realism is concerned. In

other words, the consensual urge is alive and well. I characterize this as the cycle of affirmation and repudiation. Scholars find themselves in a position of either affirming or repudiating realism. Arguably, to engage in, and define oneself in terms of this cycle is to perpetuate the myth that a consensus is possible and the intellectual conditions which gave rise to the Discipline in the first place. If the goal is to dismantle the Discipline of International Relations, then one has to see precisely how this cycle helps to legitimize the Discipline. It is, if you like, its pacemaker. I argue that the thing which neither realists or their radical critics understand is that because there is no basis upon which to establish a permanent consensus, realism should be seen as a fluid and ghost-like concept, rather than something which has a fixed meaning. In order to break free of the Discipline, one has to abandon the view that realism is something which should be affirmed unreservedly or repudiated totally. For the act of either affirming or repudiating realism presupposes that its meaning can be fixed. This, I suggest, is the legacy of the Discipline of International Relations and something which radical critics of realism fail to comprehend. Indeed, they are as complicitous in its survival as its staunchest supporters.

In the final chapter I investigate the repudiationist claim in more detail, focusing primarily on the work of Jim George. I regard him as one of the leading critics of realism and his work is employed as something of a case study. I argue that Jim George is actually a dupe of the “dubious Discipline.”

It is clear to me that what drives the need to achieve agreement, to seek general theories, and develop schools of thought, and to tell others how they should think and what they should be interested in, where the boundaries of the field are, and the like, is a desire to legislate for the Discipline as a whole. To seek consensus, then, is not simply about getting at the truth about

international politics, it is also about getting others to submit to a pre-determined set of arguments, rules of conduct, and values. This is an activity which Hans Morgenthau popularized in the 1940s, and there is no shortage of scholars who have taken up this activity with gusto. Kenneth Waltz, Jim George, and Christine Sylvester are just some of latest in a long line of legislating theorists. Each, in their own way, seeks to re-make the field in ways which suit them and accord with their social and political views of the world. Of course, there is a legitimate place for this sort of activity, but when the leading theorists in the field are consumed with this task and little else, it is no wonder that the study of international politics is in such poor shape. The aim of the thesis is to expose some of the problems with this approach to the theory of international politics. This cannot help but promote a more pluralistic field, one where genuine dialogue and accommodation takes the place of intellectual warfare between the various disciplinary legislators.

CHAPTER ONE

UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL?

As a discipline, International Relations is not in very fine shape. There is, first of all, broad disagreement on a definition of a field. I confess that this does not worry me very much, for debates which try to determine the scope of a social science are rather pointless. Writers argue for their respective definitions as if there were an immutable essence of world politics, or sociology, and so on.

Stanley Hoffmann

Introduction

It has been suggested that the problem for theorists today is how to deal with relativism and the fact that it is no longer possible to achieve a consensus on the nature, scope, and character of international politics. I dispute this interpretation and question why the study of international politics should enjoy a greater degree of consensus than history or political theory. I begin by looking at the events which gave rise to the Discipline and how realism came to be considered a basis for establishing International Relations as an autonomous and “scientific” field of study. Before doing so, however, I want to briefly say something about that group of scholars whom I have labeled in the introduction as “defenders of the Discipline”

Generic labels and terms of reference serve a valuable purpose in helping to focus attention on a general tendency or strain of thought in a body of academic literature. To refer to a group of scholars as “defenders of the Discipline” is simply one way of drawing attention to the fact that, for a great many scholars, the Discipline is essential to the study of international politics.¹ It is the organizational framework within which they gain a sense of identity and belonging. On this view, the Discipline is necessary in order to distinguish students of international politics, and what they do, from historians, economists, and sociologists. It is much more than just a focal point for like-minded scholars, then. It is not like a club. The idea of a Discipline of International Relations is

¹ Holsti, K.J., (1985), *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory*. New York: George Allen & Unwin. Waltz, K.N., (1959), *Man, the State and War*. Gilpin, R., (1981), *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Keohane, R.O., (1986), “Theory of International Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.158-203. James, P., (1993), “Neorealism as a Research Enterprise: Toward Elaborated Structural Realism,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol.14, No.2, pp.123-148. Jarvis, D.S.L., (1997), *The End of a New Beginning: The Crisis of the “Third Debate” and the Politics of Post-Modern International Theory*. University of British Columbia. Biersteker, T.J., (1989), “Critical Reflections on Post-Positivism in International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, pp.263-266.

tied up with the development of an independent professional identity within the social and human sciences and with scholarly credibility. But more importantly, those who defend the Discipline do so because they think it is a vital ingredient in the advancement of systematic knowledge on the subject. From the point of view of this thesis, what unites “defenders of the Discipline” is a general suspicion of theoretical pluralism. This manifests itself in different ways. Some like Kalevi Holsti and Thomas Biersteker demonstrate their antipathy for a pluralistic ordering of the field through direct comment on the issue. Others do so by virtue of their belief in the possibility of a general theory of international politics. Kenneth Waltz and Patrick James are prime examples here. Some are less interested in developing a general theory, but place great importance on the autonomy of International Relations. And finally, some demonstrate their belief in the value of the Discipline by going on the offensive and criticizing individuals scholars who “celebrate” pluralism. Darryl Jarvis is a good example here. Needless to say this thesis, rejects these views. The reasons why will become evident over the next few chapters. For now it is necessary to say something about the development of the Discipline in the early part of this century and its “migration” to the United States after 1945.

The Construction of the Discipline

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, European power was unchallenged across the globe. Britain was hegemon and its navy controlled the high seas, the balance of power functioned effectively, Russia was still under imperial control, the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires were alive and well, the fate of the new states in Africa and Asia were decided in Europe, the United States was a second rate power, and China and Japan were at war.

Fifty years later, the world had witnessed two devastating wars, the decline of European power, and the ascendance of the United States and the Soviet Union to the status of superpowers. Geoffrey Barraclough is right to see this period as “a revolution of the first magnitude...”² But, according to him, it is too negative an interpretation of the period to suggest that this revolution came about simply as a consequence of the Europe’s exhaustion after two world wars. He argues that the signs were already there in the early part of the nineteenth century, long before Europe reached the zenith of its global influence. In order to understand the emergence of International Relations as an organized field of study, however, the two world wars are crucial moments.

The emergence of International Relations as an organized field of study coincides with the end of the First World War. Seven characteristics of this early phase are worth highlighting. First, its early architects opposed vigorously the 19th century balance of power system of international politics. Indeed, they had nothing but contempt for the power political thinking of Hegel, Bismarck, Treitschke, and others.³ Second, they were all politically committed intellectuals, rather than detached, dispassionate political scientists. In this, they resemble the neo-Marxists of the 1950s and 1960s.⁴ Alfred Zimmern even went as far as to call his professorial chair at Oxford “a Chair for the preaching of International Relations.”⁵ Third, they drew much of their inspiration

2 Barraclough, G., (1977), *An Introduction to Contemporary History*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p.89.

3 In 1914, Leonard T. Hobhouse called Hegel’s realism “a false and wicked doctrine.” See Hobhouse, L.T., (1960), *The Metaphysical Theory of the State: A Criticism*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.6.

4 For a critique of political commitment in intellectual life see Benda, J., (1969), *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

5 Markwell, D.J., (1986), “Sir Alfred Zimmern: Fifty Years On,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.12, No.4, October, p.289.

from the tradition of political philosophy. Zimmern was a specialist in ancient Greek civilization, Norman Angell was well versed in the works of Voltaire, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Paine, John Hobson had studied the classics at Oxford, and Leonard Hobhouse openly cites his affection for the political philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Fourth, they sought to develop a body of scientific knowledge on international politics.⁶ Thus, there were all rationalists. By this I mean that they believed that reason would ultimately triumph over the passions.⁷ Sixth, following from this rationalism, they had a firm belief in progress, in the basic “goodness” of humanity, and in the rule of law. They stressed that there was no necessary conflict of interest between states and put great store in the pacifying effects of international trade. Moreover, they supported the League of Nations and the principle of collective security. Above all, they believed that the international arena could be turned into a cooperative and peaceful domain and sought the abolition of war. Thus, a strong normative and prescriptive flavour permeated the intellectual agenda of the early pioneers of the field.

The dominance of this intellectual agenda did not last long, however. By the 1930s, the world again entered a period of violence and uncertainty, bringing “utopianism” into disrepute. Despite the emphasis these scholars placed on the value of legal covenants, they were unable to stop Europe going to war. The outbreak of the Second World War killed off the moral vision of

⁶ C.K. Webster, the first holder of the Wilson Chair in international politics at the University College of Wales, argues that “no scientific body of knowledge existed on the subject prior to 1914. If it had the war might have been averted.” See Olson, W.C., (1972), “The Growth of a Discipline,” in Porter, B., (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919-1969*. London: Oxford University Press, p.10.

⁷ This is not to be confused with Wight’s understanding of the term. For Wight, the rationalists are those who “believe in the value of, the element of international intercourse in a condition predominantly of international anarchy.” Wight, M., (1994), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, p.13.

the utopians and, for a second time in less than fifty years, “power politics and its analysis took centre stage.”⁸

E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is especially important in this regard. This book is the first sustained attack on utopianism. As Markwell notes, Carr's book represents “a direct assault on Zimmern and his ilk.”⁹ But this work is more than just a critique of a dubious political philosophy. It is also an attempt to lay a more solid and intellectually rigorous foundation for the Discipline.

Carr argues that the aspirations of the utopians is natural in any new field of study where the desire for change and the dictates of the moment overshadow all else. Only with disillusionment and failure do scholars become more circumspect and clear-headed about the nature and purpose of their subject matter. Carr refers to this attitude as “realist” because such a view does not shy away from a “hard ruthless analysis of reality.”¹⁰

According to Carr, the utopianism of the inter-war years is an expression of the political philosophy of the satisfied powers. It is simply the product of a particular set of social, political and historical circumstances, rather than a timeless and universal moral code. When it came to a concrete political problem, it could not find an absolute and disinterested standard for the conduct of international politics.¹¹ Moreover, the utopians were naive about the role of power in relations between states. Not all states have an interest in peace. Those who already control the

8 Olson, W.C., (1972), *op. cit.*, p.14.

9 Markwell, D., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.279.

10 Carr, E.H., (1964), *The Twenty Years' Crisis: 1919-1939*. 2nd. Edition. New York: Harper & Row, p.10.

11 *Ibid.*, pp.87-88.

international arena are more likely to pursue the goal of peace because it is in their interests to maintain the international *status quo*. Contrary to the belief of the utopians, then, there is no natural harmony of interests among states.

Although Carr's attack on utopianism of the inter-war years is devastating, he tries to show that the theory and practice of international politics contained elements of both the ideal and the real. "Every political situation contains mutually incompatible elements of utopia and reality, of morality and power."¹² As International Relations migrates to the United States after the Second World War, this message is largely lost as realism is established as the sole framework for the study of international politics. And so too is the "style" of theorizing employed by the utopians. The tradition of political philosophy is gradually marginalized in the face of a commitment to positivism.

Carr's great achievement is to have established a case for a realist approach to international politics. By demonstrating the superiority of realism, he helped to advance the Discipline into its second phase. Despite his obvious influence, however, International Relations is largely an American creation. This is something which has already been well documented.¹³ But what it essentially means is, as Nicholas Onuf observes, that:

its initiatives and achievements, detours and disappointments are the work of a small band of scholars. They share many assumptions, not least about politics and

¹² *Ibid*, p.94.

¹³ Hoffmann, S., (1987), "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics*. Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, pp.3-24. See also Kahler, M., (1993), "International Relations: Still an American Social Science?" in Miller, L.B., & Smith, Michael Joseph, (eds.), *Ideas and Ideals: Essays in Honour of Stanley Hoffmann*. Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, pp.395-414. Crawford, R., & Jarvis, D.S.L., (forthcoming), *International Relations: Still an American Social Science: Towards Diversity in International Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Political Science. They find in each other support and solace, and they follow each other like zigzagging shoals of minnows.”¹⁴

The leading minnow is undoubtedly Hans J. Morgenthau. Drawing on the writings on Max Weber, Morgenthau developed a realist theory of international politics which, he claimed, would offer guidance to U.S. policy-makers and a rationale for American involvement in world affairs. He was the first to systematize the principles of realism and clothe them in a social scientific language familiar to North American scholars.

According to Morgenthau, realism assumes that human beings are basically evil. The desire for world government and perpetual peace is wishful thinking and exceedingly dangerous. War, conflict and violence are an integral part of the human psyche, and will always remain so. It is morally reckless and politically naive, therefore, to overestimate the ability of humans to alter their world in a radical way. Realism:

...believes that the world, imperfect as it is from a rational point of view, is the result of forces inherent in human nature. To improve the world one must work with those forces, not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized.¹⁵

In opposition to the utopian philosophies of the liberals, Morgenthau put forward a counter-manifesto made up of six key principles. First, realism is governed by “objective laws” which have their roots in human nature. Second, the concept of the national interest, defined in terms of power, is the basic conceptual category which enables scholars, politicians, and diplomats to orient themselves in the international arena. Third, while the idea of “interest” is the

14 Onuf, N.G., (1989), *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, p.7.

15 Morgenthau, H., (1967), *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle For Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred Knopf, p.4.

essence of politics and something which is not subject to time and place, the notion of power which accompanies it is fluid. Its “content and the manner of its use are determined by the political and cultural environment.”¹⁶ Fourth, while realists are aware of the moral significance of political action, they are also aware of the gap or tension between moral command and political action. Questions of universal morality lay outside the realm of state action. Because states act in their own interests, and because international politics is conducted in an anarchic realm, questions of morality are continually subject to prudential constraints. If morality comes into play in the actions of states, it does so because it serves the immediate needs of that state. Fifth, by viewing the actions of all states through the lens of “interests defined in terms of power,” realists posit an initial equality among states in terms of how they act in the international arena. In this way, realism provides a good benchmark from which to evaluate the actions of all states, including one’s own. That states are considered equal means that theorists can avoid the pitfalls of ideology and nationalism. Finally, realism defends the autonomy of the political sphere. This implies two things. International Relations is distinct from economics, morality and law, and second, the international arena is distinct from domestic politics where these concepts find their valid expression.

Underlying these six principles is the principle of rationality. The international system can be understood rationally. This is not simply one categorial principle among a number, however.

It is the epistemic base upon which the Morgenthau’s realism edifice is built. Realism

shares with all social theory the need, for the sake of theoretical understanding, to stress the rational elements of political reality; for it is these rational elements that make reality intelligible for theory.¹⁷

16 *Ibid.*, p.9.

17 *Ibid.*, p.8.

His basic premise, then, is that “reality” is rational and capable of being explained by the social scientist. Hegel's dictum: “to those who look at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back” conveys Morgenthau's meaning nicely.

Realism, believing as it does in the objectivity of the laws of politics, must also believe in the possibility of developing a rational theory that reflects, however imperfectly and one-sidedly, these objective laws.¹⁸

It is clear that by a “theory” of politics based on reason, Morgenthau had something quite specific in mind. Because states are calculators of interests, the concept of rationality operative in international politics is most accurately represented in utilitarian terms. A “rational foreign policy minimizes risk and maximizes benefits, and hence complies both with the moral precept of prudence and the political requirement of success.”¹⁹

But understanding the utilitarian nature of international politics is not simply a descriptive insight, it is one which has practical value for statesmen and decision-makers. It allows states, including the United States, to know the limitation of their actions. As the well-known phrase goes, it allows “to know when to hold and to know when to fold.” Policy-makers and state leaders can, according to Morgenthau, make accurate predictions about the behaviour of others which is not colored and distorted by ideological, moral or psychological motives. Global progress comes, then, not as “revolutionaries” and “utopians” claim, through rapid political change, but “through

18 *Ibid.*, p.4.

19 *Ibid.*, p.7. Robert Keohane summarizes it well when he writes that states are rational in the sense that “they have consistent, ordered preferences, and that they calculate the costs and benefits of all alternative policies in order to maximize their utility in light of both those preferences and of their perceptions of the nature of reality.” Keohane, R.O., (1986), “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.11.

the workmanlike manipulation of the perennial forces that have shaped the past as they will the future.”²⁰

Due almost single-handedly to the efforts of Morgenthau, the period from 1945 to 1965 is dominated by the idea of realism. Just about all meaningful discussion about international affairs during this period was carried on, consciously or unconsciously, within the framework of the realist paradigm.²¹ There are a number of reasons for this. A strong distaste for the policy of appeasement, a cynicism for international law, and a general disillusionment with utopianism, undermined alternative approaches.²² Second, realism seemed to have a great deal of utility when applied to problems of foreign policy analysis. This meant that it was an extremely popular doctrine with politicians, diplomats, and policy-makers.²³ Its simple message seemed to capture the essential characteristics of the Cold War world, enabling policy-makers to justify their attempts to resist Soviet expansionism, and provided a rationale for U.S. involvement in world affairs. The strong advocacy posture of post-war realist scholars and this connection to the nerves

20 Morgenthau, H., (1967), *op. cit.*, p.9. Whether the classical realist conception of reason has any genuine practical moral potential seems a moot point. While it is true classical realists like Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Walter Lippman are highly critical of aspects of post-war U.S. foreign policy (something neorealists seem to have forgotten in their concern with descriptions of the international system), it has been argued that classical realism is a form of moral scepticism. On this see Cohen, M., (1984), “Moral Scepticism and International Relations,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol.13, No.4, Fall, pp.299-346.

21 For a good discussion of the idea of a “paradigm” as it is used in the field see Holsti, K.J., (1985) *op. cit.*, pp.10-12. Lipjhart, A., (1974), “The Structure of the Theoretical Revolution in International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*. Vol.18, No.1, March, pp.41-74. For a criticism of the inter-paradigm debate see Nicholson, M., (1996), “Imaginary Paradigms: A Sceptical View of the Inter-Paradigm Debate in International Relations.” Unpublished Paper. The University of Kent.

22 Banks, M., (1985), “The Evolution of International Relations Theory,” in Banks, M., (ed.), *Conflict in World Society: A New Perspective on International Relations*. London: Harvester Press, p.9.

23 Hollis, M., & Smith, S., (1992), *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p.28.

of political power, gave realism an intellectual sweep comparable to some of the great political ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Most significantly, however, the apparent success of realism during the post-war period lay in the fact that “it mimics the vocabulary of the state's rationalization of its own behaviour.”²⁴ This gave it the appearance of presenting a common sense view of international politics which accords with everyday intuitions. In other words, it seemed to express the “true” nature of international politics.²⁵ Indeed, it is largely for this reason that realism is often talked about as if it is international theory itself, or, as some prefer to call it, the “international politics paradigm.”²⁶

The value of a single consensually generated research agenda is easy to see. It allows scholars to speak and understand each other through the use of a common vocabulary, provides a common conceptual framework for research, helps to organize the parameters of the field, prioritizes subjects of inquiry and research, delimits the field, helps to set disciplinary goals, and most important, provides a neutral framework so that research findings can be verified and tested against the existing storehouse of knowledge. It is precisely this that realism is said to have offered researchers, despite the ongoing debate among realists as to the precise nature and mix of its core principles.

24 Rosenberg, J., (1990), “What's the Matter With Realism?” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 16, No.4, October, pp.297-298.

25 It is worth noting that in an academic environment dominated by positivism and the natural sciences, realism claimed to accord with the correspondence theory of truth. In other words, its emphasis on the “facts” gives it the veneer of being “scientific.”

26 Camilleri, J., & Falk, J., (1993), *The End of Sovereignty: The Politics of a Shrinking and Fragmenting World*. London: Edward Elgar, p.27.

According to those in the intellectual mainstream, it is because of the importance of realism that International Relations went from being an intellectual pursuit on “the untidy fringe of domestic politics” to a professional and autonomous field of study paralleling economics and psychology.²⁷ It helped to establish the Discipline’s identity. Of course, the Discipline had not yet found all the keys to unlock the scientific door, but if one reads the journal articles of the 1950s and 1960s, one is struck by the extent to which scholars regarded this as simply a matter of time. There was an air of self-confidence among scholars practicing their craft during this period.

Of course, there were disagreements among the realists. Few were completely happy with Morgenthau's understanding of realism. Not so much because they disagreed with the particular principles he ascribed to realism, but because of the Judeo-Christian philosophical and political assumptions he built into them. As Justin Rosenberg argues “the bulk of the criticism was concerned not with attacking his realist premises, but rather with rescuing them from the idiosyncracies of his *Weltanschauung*.”²⁸ Many criticized his lack of terminological precision, his concept of “power” chief amongst them.²⁹ As Charles McClelland notes, “with rare exceptions, the users of power explanations of international politics have only a misty notion of what they are talking about. Power is an arousing and poetic symbol capable of evoking a wide range of feelings,

27 The phrase belongs to Martin Wight. See Wight, M., (1967), “Why is There no International Theory?” in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.) *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.21.

28 Rosenberg, J., (1994), *The Empire of Civil Society*. London: Verso, p.23.

29 Raymond Aron for example, calls Morgenthau's use of power conceptually confusing. Aron, R., (1967), “What is a Theory of International Relations?” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.21, No.2, p.190. See also Aron, R., (1973), *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*. New York: Anchor Books, p.322. Similarly, Inis J. Claude argues that the concept of “balance of power” is open to numerous interpretations. Claude, I.J., (1962), *Power and International Relations*. New York: Random House, pp.25-26.

fears, satisfactions and discontents in people without contributing, however, to any genuine understanding.”³⁰ Stanley Hoffmann questioned its evaluative power and asked whether it provided an adequate framework for an analysis of international politics.³¹ Moreover, the growing importance of economic matters meant that Morgenthau's view that politics and economics should not be confused became increasingly hard to defend. Finally, his reliance on a human nature explanation for why states behave the way do was also questioned. Arguing that human beings were evil by nature, made it very difficult to explain why peace and cooperation occur from time to time. But, as John Vasquez argues, almost no-one considered abandoning realism during this period.³² Despite on-going debate over the precise characteristics of this idea, almost all scholars continued to honor the realist framework and respect the parameters of the Discipline.³³ The scholarly “consensus” seemed to be rock solid. But just at the time realism appeared secure, a shift in the tone and intensity of the Cold War and developments in political economy began to undermine its explanatory power and this had important consequences for the integrity of the Discipline.

30 Cited in Rosenthal, J.H., (1991), *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.37. For an incisive critique of the realist understanding and use of the concept of power see Smith, M.J., (1986), *Realist Thought From Weber to Kissinger*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, pp.222-223.

31 Hoffmann, S., (1981), “Notes on the Limits of Realism,” *Social Research*, Vol.48, No.4, Winter, p.654.

32 “Reviewing the literature of the 1960s, we find a number of schools which appear to challenge the Morgenthau paradigm because they use different concepts. However...all...must be considered elaborations on the initial paradigm...In effect the international relations literature of the 1960s was a set of variations on the Morgenthau paradigm.” Smith, S., & Hollis, M., (1992), *op. cit.*, p.32.

33 Whether more should have been made of the variations between individual realists at the time is an issue I take up in a later chapter.

The Inter-Paradigm Debate and the Undermining of “Consensus”

In the early 1970s, David Puchala and Stuart Fagan argued that “we may presently be taking at least a small step away from the anarchy of the traditional state system.”³⁴ The crude power politics of the Cold War years appeared to be giving way to a more cooperative and interdependent world. All this came about in a period in which American dominance of the international economy appeared to some to be in decline.³⁵ Richard Nixon, for example, began to talk of the beginnings of a multipolar world, while at the same time reducing America's military commitment in Africa and the Asian-Pacific region. To many observers, the realist understanding of international politics had simply been overtaken by world events.³⁶ Scholars began to question whether a paradigm which focused solely on security concerns was of much use to a world where political economy issues, the environment, human rights, poverty, underdevelopment, ethnicity, and issues of freedom were becoming increasingly significant. It seemed to point to the narrowness of the realist account of international politics. Richard Rothstein even went as far as to argue that we should not hang on to this dying paradigm because its “irrelevance” was becoming a danger to the emergence of a new international system.³⁷ Consequently, International Relations entered

34 Puchala, D.J., & Fagan, S.I., (1974), “International Politics in the Seventies: The Search for a Perspective,” in Maghroori, R., & Ramberg, B., (eds.), *Globalism Versus Realism: International Relations' Third Debate*. Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, p.41-42.

35 This is by no means a settled issue, however. On this see Kennedy, P., (1988), *The Rise and Decline of Great Powers*. New York: Random House. For a critique of the “decline” thesis see Strange, S., (1988), “The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony,” *International Organization*, Vol.41, No.4, Autumn, pp.551-574.

36 For a fuller statement of these issues see Rosecrance, R., et. al., (1971), “Whither Interdependence?” *International Organization*, Vol. 31, No.3, Summer, pp.425-472. See also Barry Jones, R.J. & Willetts, P., (1984), *Interdependence on Trial: Studies in the Theory and Reality of Contemporary Interdependence*. London: Frances Pinter.

37 Rothstein, R., (1972), “On the Costs of Realism,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.87, No.3, September, p.358.

a period of intellectual turmoil. The characteristic consensus began to evaporate. As James Rosenau argues, “[e]verywhere, it seems, established patterns have either come to an end or been greatly modified.”³⁸ The inter-paradigm debate, therefore, marks the beginning of the end of the monopoly and hegemony of realism and coincides with empirical changes in the nature of international politics. Most importantly of all, it marks the beginning of the end of the period of consensus on the nature, scope and character of the field.

Generally speaking, the inter-paradigm debate is a three-way debate between realists, Marxists, and liberals about how to assess the changes in the nature of international politics. In truth, it brought out into the open a range of epistemological and ontological concerns which had previously remained below the surface of debate.

Marxism has never had the kind of impact on the Discipline that liberal theorists have had. Indeed, it “flourished only on the fringes of the field.”³⁹ This partly reflected in the scathing and uncompromising nature of its critique of post-war American foreign policy, and the fact that it drew its intellectual inspiration from Marxism at a time when Marxism was regarded as an unmitigated evil by the Western powers. The theorists of interdependence and transnationalism, however, provided a far more significant and credible challenge to the hegemony of realism. Drawing on the earlier research of the integrationists and neo-functionalists, they argued that the international arena was undergoing rapid and unprecedented change. Robert Keohane and Joseph

38 Rosenau, J., (1980), *The Study of Global Interdependence*. London: Frances Pinter, p.13.

39 Banks, M., (1985), “The Inter-Paradigm Debate,” in M. Light & A.J.R. Groom, (eds.), *International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory*. London: Frances Pinter, pp.17-18.

Nye, for example, claimed that the very nature of world politics was changing.⁴⁰ Increases in transnational capital flows and technology transfers, the rise of MNCs, the thawing of relations between the superpowers, the growing importance of international institutions (both governmental and non-governmental), the growing permeability of borders, the global impact of nuclear weapons, the end of Bretton Woods and the relative decline of American hegemony, terrorism, and the explosion in communications technology, all suggested the relevance of a liberal approach to international politics. These were issues and concerns which realism simply failed to consider.

For liberal interdependence theories, states were becoming increasingly interlinked and dependent upon each other for everything from the flow of consumer goods to security. Whatever affected one state in the system ultimately has repercussions for all the others. The “oil crisis” was regarded as positive proof of this point. In other words, states had become vulnerable to developments beyond their borders and this tended to undermine the realist claim that the state is a “hard-shelled territorial unit.”⁴¹ Theorists of interdependence stressed the weakening of the decision-making capacity of states *vis a vis* the global economy, the blurring of the international and domestic political environments, and the general inability of states to control their international affairs.

Keohane and Nye, for instance, argued that their model of complex interdependence was superior to realism in at least three crucial ways. Realists focused only on interstate relations, whereas theorists of interdependence stressed multiple channels of communication (interstate,

40 Keohane, R.O., & Nye, J.S., (1977), *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little Brown & Co., p.3.

41 Herz, J.H., (1957), “Rise and Demise of the Territorial State,” *World Politics*, Vol.9, No.4, July, p.474. See also Herz, J.H., (1959), *International Politics in the Atomic Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.

transgovernmental, and transnational). Yet clearly transgovernmental and transnational activity did affect interstate relations. Realists could not account for this. Moreover, realists argued that states had a hierarchy of issues, with security being number one on the list. The diversity and blurring of issues confronting states today, however, meant that such a hierarchy was no longer appropriate. For example, good economic relations with another state may well do more to enhance security than increased military spending. Finally, in an era of complex interdependence, military force was being coming less important as a policy weapon. Realists had always assumed that military force was the pre-eminent means by which states achieved their goals.⁴² In the final analysis, relations between states could no longer be explained by looking at the behavior of states alone. States were no longer the only actors of relevance in the international arena.

Steve Smith and Martin Hollis are correct to point out “how sharply the transnationalist challenge breaks with the other approaches that have dominated the subject.”⁴³ Yet, in some respects, they miss the really important point about these paradigmatic alternatives. It is not just that these new approaches challenge the hegemony of realism, they begin to disturb the scientific aspirations of International Relations by making consensus and commensuration increasingly difficult to achieve. This, in turn, begins to have repercussions for the legitimacy of the Discipline. It is important, then, to understand the precise nature of the relationship between consensus and the Discipline and the function of epistemology in keeping this relationship stable.

42 Keohane, R.O., & Nye, J.S., (1977), *op. cit.*, pp.23-24

43 Smith, S., & Hollis, M., (1992), *op. cit.*, p.35.

Discipline and Consensus

When scholars speak about the “Discipline” rarely, if ever, do they ponder on the meaning of this word. It is a word which is used so often that its meaning appears relatively self-evident. In most of the theory literature, especially that which comes out of the United States, it simply refers to the formal “institution” which houses scholars with an interest in what takes place beyond the borders of the sovereign state. It is a term of belonging and identity which invokes images of a distinctive and autonomous field of study within the social sciences. But there is more to this idea than this. It is important to remember that a “discipline” is also a regime of behaviour and implies obedience to regulations, the acceptance of a pre-ordained code, the following of a technique, or a system of rules and regulations. Chess is a discipline, as is boxing, driving a motor vehicle, yoga, and baking a cake. All these activities require conformity to rules if they are to be successful. Even when used as a synonym for punishment, the term still conveys a sense of putting oneself (willingly or unwillingly) under direction, of being subservient to a regime of some sort, whether parental, legal or otherwise. Underlying all disciplines, then, is a set of edicts, reference points, and rules of the game. These are the things which make a discipline (small “d”) possible. By its very nature, a discipline requires a high degree of compliance and acceptance, as well as a belief that the orientation and outcome which it provides cannot be gained by alternate means. This holds true whether we are referring to the improvement of one's physical or spiritual well-being, the channeling of creative energies, the development of practical skills, or understanding international politics. In this sense, a discipline has an *a priori* hold on those who seek to employ it. In other words, it involves agreement. It is not possible to play chess unless both protagonists agree on the rules before they commence play. Another way to put this, is to say that any formal

discipline (small “d”) requires an epistemology. Nobody makes this point better than Richard Rorty.

The dominating notion of epistemology is that to be rational, to be fully human, to do what we ought, we need to be able to find agreement with other human beings. To construct an epistemology is to find the maximum amount of common ground with others. The assumption that an epistemology can be constructed is the assumption that such common ground exists.⁴⁴

An epistemology, then, is what distinguishes a discipline (small “d”) from simple laxity and unsystematic practice.

Whether it is acknowledged or not, this meaning carries over into the Discipline of International Relations. For an academic Discipline to exist and have legitimacy within the social sciences, it requires that scholars submit to a number of constraints, codes of practices, and so on. It requires an epistemology so that scholars can speak and understand each other through the use of a common vocabulary, provides a common conceptual framework for research, prioritizes research, delimits the field, generates a level of consensus, helps to set disciplinary goals, provides a neutral framework so that research findings can be verified and tested against existing disciplinary knowledge, defines the meaning and nature of theory, and helps to build a community of scholars. One of the things which makes International Relations a Discipline (large “D”) is that its members agree to abide by certain rules and practices (that is, discipline with a small “d”). Accepting the basic validity of these assumptions is the precondition for establishing International Relations as a Discipline.

44 Rorty, R., (1979), *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.316.

Academic Disciplines also need on-going endorsement. If they are to flourish and have legitimacy within the social or human sciences, they require a continued commitment to the principles which brought them into being in the first place. In other words, the particular discipline concerned has an *a priori* hold on the allegiance of scholars studying within it. When this commitment wanes, or the situation which gave rise to it changes, the Discipline becomes ineffective, loses its *raison d'être* and either breaks down or undergoes metamorphosis. The point is that, under such circumstances, there is no longer a discernible consensus. No-one expresses this point better than Edward Said.

Fields, of course, are made. They require coherence and integrity in time because scholars devote themselves in different ways to what seems to be a commonly agreed-upon subject matter. Yet it goes without saying that a field of study is rarely as simply defined as even its most committed partisans - usually scholars, professors, experts, and the like - claim it is. Besides, a field can change so entirely, in even in the most traditional disciplines like philology, history, or theology, as to make an all-purpose definition of the subject matter almost impossible.⁴⁵

An "institution" like International Relations is no different in this respect. It requires an original agreement (consensus) among a group of practitioners that International Relations should exist with certain rules of the game and, at the same time, it requires on-going agreement if this particular field of study is to flourish and bear intellectual fruit. What it comes down to is that International Relations is premised upon a pre-established or *a priori* notion of "consensus." As Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff have argued, "[b]efore we can develop theory, we must have at least a vague consensus within the community of scholars as to what the field of international politics

45 Cited in Cox, W.S., & Sjolander, Claire Turenne, (1994), "Critical Reflections on International Relations," in Sjolander, Claire Turenne, & Cox, W.S., (eds.), *Beyond Positivism: Critical Reflections on International Relations* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.1.

entails.”⁴⁶ In other words, there has to be a founding act in all Disciplines, whether this comes about through a felt need, a creative urge, or a flash of intuition. In the case of International Relations, the founding act comes about partly from a desire to rid the world of war, and partly from a sense that international politics is not given its due intellectually in the other human sciences. Frederick Dunn neatly sums up the logic behind the founding of International Relations:

The questions which arise out of the relations among nations are certainly important and difficult. They likewise possess their own coherence and uniqueness since they arise out of relations in a special kind of community, namely, one made up of autonomous units without a central authority having a monopoly of power. Pulling together the fragments of knowledge about them obviously serves to focus attention on them and to encourage the development of more intelligent ways of handling them. Recent events have reinforced the growing conviction that the questions of international relations are too complex and dangerous to be dealt with any longer as sidelines of existing disciplines.⁴⁷

The founding of International Relations, then, requires an initial agreement on a number of things. First, that a certain class of ideas are important enough to be treated on their own terms; and second, an agreement about precisely what that class of ideas is.⁴⁸ This is what Kalevi Holsti means when he says that:

the major contributions to international theory occurred within a single paradigm. Despite numerous debates and disagreements, there has been fundamental agreement on three questions: (1) that the proper focus of the study is the causes of war and the conditions of peace/security/order; (2) that the main units of analysis are the diplomatic-military behaviors of the only essential actors, nation-

46 Dougherty, J.E., & Pfaltzgraff, R.L., jr., (1971), *Contending Theories of International Relations*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Co. pp.15-16.

47 Dunn, F.S., (1948), “The Scope of International Relations,” *World Politics*, Vol.1, No.1, October, p.143.

48 The institutional paraphernalia such as text books, exams, degrees and so forth, is one of the consequences of this founding act.

states; and (3) that states operate in a system characterized by anarchy, the lack of a central authority.⁴⁹

It is also what William Olson means when he argues that “it is true that there has been a gradual emergence of a basic core of facts and a system for their ordering which is acknowledged by a great many, if not most, of the scholars in our field.”⁵⁰ Despite disagreement and debate on certain issues, then, there is a deeper agreement on the fundamental questions of what it is that one studies in International Relations, and what makes someone a student of international politics as opposed to a student of history, psychology or domestic politics. Indeed, the use of phrases like “our field” and “we” presupposes that agreement exists, that “we” all speak the same language and understand each other, and submit to the rigors of the disciplinary agenda.⁵¹ During most of the Cold War era, defenders of the Discipline believed that realism fitted the bill nicely. It offered a better, and more complete account of international politics than its rivals, and a less naive and dangerous one as well.

But what about the epistemological question? What epistemology accompanied this founding act of agreement about International Relations? The epistemology which accompanied

49 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.10. Although Holsti does not mention it, he is drawing on arguments first made by John Vasquez. See Vasquez, J., (1983), *The Power of Power Politics*. London: Frances Pinter, especially chapter 1.

50 Olson, W.C., (1972), *op. cit.*, p.4.

51 When agreement is regarded as the *raison d’etre* of good scholarship, anyone who does not harmonize with this goal or whose thinking deviates from the “agreed” path is marginalized and effectively silenced. Richard Falk comments are interesting in this regard. According to him, he has not been taken seriously by his colleagues precisely because he did not accept the conventional wisdom. As he expresses it: “I am struck, first of all, by my own marginality.” Falk, R.A., (1989), “Manifesting World Order: A Scholarly Manifesto,” in Kruzal, J., & Rosenau, J.N., (eds.), *Journeys Through World Politics: Autobiographical Reflections of Thirty-Four Academic Travelers*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, p.153. Similarly, one might suggest that, despite Wight’s enormous influence in Great Britain, one of the reasons for his relative obscurity in North America is because he did not study international politics in the prescribed (and agreed) manner.

the development of International Relations derived from the Enlightenment and the philosophies of the natural sciences. I call this epistemology rationalist and will say more about it in the following chapter. Here I want only to point out that whatever else the natural sciences have done for “modernity,” they have, rightly or wrongly, defined the conditions for generating consensus on theoretical matters, for a subject to qualify as a science, and for the discovery of truth and knowledge. The defenders of the Discipline have bought this epistemological bill of goods almost unconditionally. Indeed, the very idea of consensus and agreement is an outgrowth of a scientific culture; a culture which believes that its achievement is the first and necessary step on the royal road to truth and knowledge. It is no accident for example, that despite all the political differences between the “utopians” and the “realists,” epistemologically speaking very little separates them. We can see this by comparing Alfred Zimmern and James Rosenau on this question. Alfred Zimmern writes “politics can be studied in universities in as scientific a spirit as any other subject of study, whether in the natural or human sciences.”⁵² While James Rosenau argues that the nation-state is “amenable to the process of formulating and testing hypotheses as are the characteristics of the electron or the molecule.”⁵³ Hans Morgenthau was one of the first to point out that underlying epistemology of the utopians and despite the scathing nature of his critique of this epistemology, post-war realists (including himself) and defenders of the Discipline do not deviate from it substantially.⁵⁴ They simply refine it.

52 Cited in Markwell, D.J., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.289.

53 Rosenau, J.N., (1980), *The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy*. London: Frances Pinter, p.32. It has to be said, thought, that Rosenau would probably want to revise this statement today.

54 Morgenthau, H.J., (1967), *op. cit.*

International Relations, then, contains two kinds of discourse. The first gives rise to International Relations and aims at achieving a consensus on the nature, scope and character of the field. The second discourse concerns itself with the cut and thrust of world politics, debates about the precise meaning of concepts, and so on. Here, debate and difference of opinion is necessary because it increases knowledge, makes it possible for scholars to develop more precise categories of thought, and ultimately, enlarges the realm of agreed truths. In this sense, the second discourse needs first.

This helps us to understand the almost desperate need to find common ground when confronted with the inter-paradigm debate. The “common ground” (synthesis) is simply a way of trying to keep disciplinary consensus alive. Michael Banks, for example, argues that the inter-paradigm debate “should be seen as a discourse about choice of analytical frameworks, rather than as a militant confrontation between mutually incompatible world views.”⁵⁵ He goes on to point out that there may well be common ground between realism, structuralism and pluralism (Interdependence), the three main contenders to the debate. Similarly, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argue that realism and interdependence are not necessarily antithetical. But whatever the truth of these arguments, it is important not to sanitize the extent to which the arrival of “new kids on the block” simply means business as usual. No matter how much synthesis is possible between the competing approaches to the inter-paradigm debate, at some point they do begin to clash. And the very fact that they offer distinctive choices inevitably makes consensus harder to achieve. Thus, what is significant about the inter-paradigm debate is not that new approaches appear, but that these approaches begin to undermine the traditional picture of what it means for

⁵⁵ Banks, M., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.20.

International Relations to be a Discipline. It is understandable, then, that scholars like Holsti tend to equate a loss of consensus with a Discipline in “disarray” and “crisis.”⁵⁶ The inter-paradigm debate, then, marks the beginning of a challenge to the dominance of the consensus approach to the study of international politics.

The Problem of Relativism

The old saying that one person’s honey is another’s poison is, I suggest, a fairly accurate description of international political theory at present. On one side of the fence, are scholars who “celebrate” the fact that there are a multitude of perspectives and approaches to choose from.⁵⁷ On the other, are those who argue that this development has undermined the ability of scholars to achieve agreement on the nature and scope of the theoretical enterprise and is responsible for the current malaise in the study of international politics. The latter viewpoint is not particularly novel, however. In 1974, many years before anyone had heard of the “Third Debate,” Arend Lijphart, suggested that:

the prevailing view concerning the development of theory in international relations is that the field is beset by a bewildering variety of theoretical approaches, models, and concepts - that it is in such a state of change, chaos, and confusion as the contemporary world scene which it seeks to comprehend...⁵⁸

It is certainly true that there is no longer any agreement on what methods to employ, what questions to ask, where the field begins and ends, what the core concepts are, what the role and purpose of theory is and should be, or whether students of international politics should be

56 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.1.

57 George, J., & Campbell, D., (1990), “Patterns of Dissent and the Celebration of Difference,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.3, September, pp.269-293.

58 Lijphart, A., (1974), *op. cit.*, p.41.

detached observers, political activists, or current affairs commentators. It is also true that the field is now home to literally dozens of competing theoretical approaches, most of which rely on incommensurable metatheories for their legitimacy. But does this constitute a “crisis” as scholars like Arendt, Holsti and others assume?

To determine whether this is the case, it is important to keep in mind that one of the criticisms which has been made against advocates of theoretical pluralism is that they are pushing the field in the direction of relativism. If there are no neutral or objective criteria to judge the value of competing interpretations, theoretical progress will become impossible, standards of scholarship will deteriorate, and the Discipline will end up resembling a cacophonous Tower of Babel. At this point, relativism and its debilitating effects are not far off. As Thomas Biersteker puts it:

My principal reservation about post-positivism is that however desirable it may be to open international relations to methodological pluralism and relativism, post-positivist scholarship does not offer us any clear cut criteria for choosing among the multiple and competing explanations it produces. Once liberal toleration yields to the production of alternative interpretations and understandings, how are we to choose from the abundance of alternative explanations? How are we to judge whether interpretation A is to be preferred to interpretation B in a post-positivist era? How are we to ensure that post-positivist pluralism, in the absence of any alternative criteria, will avoid legitimizing ignorance, intolerance, or worse?⁵⁹

How can this sort of outcome be avoided? This is a difficult question and one I do not think critics like Biersteker and Holsti have an adequate answer for. Holsti, for example, admits that multiple realities are now a fact of life and that the “realist” framework no longer commands universal agreement among scholars. At the same time, it is extremely difficult to find a workable solution to this problem in his work. It is probably for this reason that Holsti and others look on

⁵⁹ Biersteker, T.J., (1989), *op. cit.*, pp.265-266.

the 1950s and 1960s with a degree of nostalgia. “One could write at the end of the 1960s that all was well on the international theory front.”⁶⁰ Clearly, Holsti thinks a vital ingredient for disciplinary and theoretical well-being has been lost in the move from a consensually-based field of study to one which is made up of competing perspectives and methodologies. Although he does not say so, he seems to be implying that the theorist has to make a choice based on a comparison between the past and the present: continue to pursue consensus or risk endangering the theoretical enterprise and International Relations along with it.

According to Holsti, there are at least three dangers with theoretical pluralism. The first is that it will produce “confusion and intellectual cacophony.”⁶¹ The second is that the accumulation of theories and approaches will be “without purpose” and this will make theoretical progress impossible.⁶² And, finally, that it is likely to leave International Relations without a way of maintaining its hard won intellectual standards. Without such standards, anything and everything will count as knowledge, with no way of determining useful from useless knowledge, good from bad theories, truth from fiction. Thus, he seems to think that post-positivists are engaged in a wrecking operation which is likely to destroy the Discipline. Accordingly, this relativist urge must be resisted. Charging post-positivists with relativism, then, is one way of justifying the Discipline

60 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.2.

61 Holsti, K.J., (1989), “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Which Are the Fairest Theories of All?” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, p.256.

62 *Ibid.*, p.257.

and continuing to promote the need for agreement.⁶³ But what is relativism and in what ways has it impacted on the study of international politics?

Relativism comes in a number of forms.⁶⁴ Cultural, ethical, historical, political, and epistemological relativism are some of the most well-known. Generally speaking, this idea is a particular way of interpreting, translating and explaining reality.⁶⁵ It challenges the assumptions of philosophers, theorists, and religious believers by denying the existence of any universal truth whatsoever. There is no hierarchy of peoples, no unfolding of *Geist* or hidden-hand directing particular cultures. In short, there is no implicit teleology, eschatology, or pre-determined world view; the notion of a steadily progressive goal for humanity is little more than a myth. Instead, relativists acknowledge the diversity of beliefs, the multiplicity of cultures, conceptual schemes, paradigms, theories and forms of life. No one viewpoint takes precedence over another, for, according to the relativist, we have no way to judge whether one is better than another. Rather, they are all unique expressions of particular historical epochs, and particular ways of seeing the world. In the final analysis, history exhibits only “difference.” There is, as Richard Bernstein expresses it, “a nonreducible plurality of such schemes, paradigms and practices.”⁶⁶

63 A task now thought to be all the more necessary considering the relativistic turn in the Discipline.

64 Very little has been written on the problem of relativism in the field. This is remarkable given the extent to which defenders of the Discipline regard it as a danger. The exceptions are Nardin, T., (1989), “The Problem of Relativism in International Relations,” *Millennium: Journal of International Relations*, Vol.18, No.2, Summer, pp.149-161. Spegele, R.D., (1995), “Political Realism and the Remembrance of Relativism,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol 21, No.3, July, pp.211-236.

65 Lukes, S., & Hollis, M., (1982), “Introduction,” *Rationality and Relativism*. London: Basil Blackwell, p.1.

66 Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. London: Basil Blackwell, p.11.

Those who argue against relativism do so because they think that once the possibility of knowledge is made problematic, scholarship is reduced to a contest between self-referential and subjective opinions. Ultimately, one view is as good as the next and there is no way of adjudicating between these contending interpretations. As Yosef Lapid writes:

If adopted uncritically or taken to its logical conclusion, methodological pluralism may deteriorate into a condition of epistemological anarchy under which almost any position can legitimately claim equal hearing.⁶⁷

If intellectual life succumbs to the relativity of standards, nothing will have binding validity. Critics of relativism are quite frightened about this and often suggest that it will result in scepticism, irrationalism, nihilism, and the decay of society.⁶⁸ As George Kaufmann argues, “when men no longer bring themselves to take a position on issues of truth and value, human culture cannot long survive.”⁶⁹ It is easier to see now why the alleged threat of relativism poses such a problem for students of international political theory. The ability to distinguish between the validity of differing viewpoints becomes impossible. The very real possibility exists, then, that students of international politics will no longer be sure of anything.⁷⁰ The concept of “truth” vanishes as the

⁶⁷ Lapid, Y., (1989), “The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, p.249.

⁶⁸ Historical relativism is a form of scepticism. Scepticism is, in general, a mode of thinking that doubts the ability of the senses to be able to discover how things really are. Sceptics doubt our ability to have any true knowledge. But historical relativism believes in the conditioned and finite nature of all historical knowledge. Thus, while it may be a form of scepticism, the fact that it is historical alters its focus. Philosophical irrationalism is the fundamental doubt of the ability of reason to adjudicate between competing claims. Nihilism is an extremist mode of thought which denies all values whatsoever. Absolute nihilism denies that there is anything called human existence.

⁶⁹ Kaufmann, G., (1960), *Relativism, Knowledge and Faith*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.4.

⁷⁰ It is perhaps worth pointing out that these sentiments can also be found in other Disciplines. In the field of literary theory, for example, E.D. Hirsch argues that “[s]ome of my colleagues are indignant at the present decadence in literary scholarship, with its anti-rationalism, faddism, and extreme relativism. I share their feelings. Scholars are right to feel indignant toward those learned writers who deliberately exploit the institutions of scholarship - even down to the punctilious conventions like footnotes and quotations - to deny, that is, the whole

goal of theorizing, and the study of politics becomes a wholly subjectivist process. Thus, one often hears the criticism that post-positivism is simply a form of political advocacy.⁷¹ Relativism, then, represents an abrogation of the intellectual's duty to the furtherance of knowledge and truth and is the end result of not being able to reach agreement on the fundamentals. Moreover, it puts us on the slippery slope to nihilism. This is one of the reasons why positivism is regarded as a valuable tool of theoretical discovery. It allows scholars to start from the same point, check the truth of each others theoretical statements, and ultimately leads to permanent, unimpeachable knowledge. But what gives defenders of the Discipline reason to believe that such an unimpeachable knowledge of international politics is possible?

According to them, there is both continuity and permanence in the character of international politics and it is this fact gives realists confidence in the existence of objective "natural" laws of international politics. This is summed up nicely in Hans Morgenthau's view that:

Political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature. In order to improve society it is first necessary to understand the laws by which society lives. The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.⁷²

That realists believe the social and political world functions according to natural laws helps to explain their long-term interest in science. Indeed, some have even argued that realism is, and has always been, a science. Robert Gilpin, for example, suggests that Thucydides is the first

point of the institutions of scholarship, to deny that is, the possibility of knowledge." Hirsch, E.D., jr., (1978), *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p.13

71 Cited in Lapid, Y., (1989), "Quo Vadis International Relations? Further Reflections on the "Next Stage" of International Theory," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, Spring, p.80.

72 Morgenthau, H., (1967), *op. cit.*, p.4

scientific student of international politics, Machiavelli the first political scientist, and interprets E.H. Carr as presenting us with a “science” of international politics. What the term “science” means to each of these thinkers is so profoundly different from the meaning Gilpin ascribes to the term that it renders the historical connection questionable. As Daniel Garst argues, a scientific account of *The Peloponnesian Wars* is “suspect” from the outset because of the historicity of the speeches and the fact their reconstruction from Thucydides' memory must be “incomplete and biased.”⁷³ But no matter what status we accord to early forms of realism, there is no doubt the desire to turn realism into a science is the most significant feature of post-war realist scholarship and the reason why consensus is such a highly regarded value.

Whatever truth claims can be attached to the scientific aspirations of the realists, one thing is certain: relativism threatens it. Where realists strive for “truth” about international politics, post-positivist relativists put the whole project in doubt. From the perspective of these aspiring social scientists, then, the choices are simple: a science of international politics offers knowledge, relativism only ignorance; science offers release from dogmatism and superstition, relativism threatens to plunge us into a new dark age; science offers hope in the future, relativism only hopelessness. Science offers us a solid foundation to work from, relativism does not. Given this, the antidote is simple: follow the neorealists, with their strong commitment to a structural theory of international politics. For the first principle of the philosophy of science is that there is a permanent, fixed, ahistorical framework or Archimedean point which allows us to ground knowledge, determine standards of rightness, and, ultimately, give us the security of knowing that

73 See Garst, D., (1989), “Thucydides and Neorealism,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.1, March, pp.3-27.

we know something, instead of nothing. For Descartes, it is *the cogito*, for Kant *the transcendental unity of apperception*, for Habermas it is the *ideal speech situation*. And, for neorealists, the concept of structure acts as its foundation. The structure of the international system is fixed, naturally given, and not open to doubt. Neorealism “exposes an area of theoretical bedrock which can serve as a solid foundation for further development of international system theory.”⁷⁴

The nature of international politics, then, can be deduced from the way “structure” impinges on and conditions the behavior of states. As Robert Gilpin it: “Realism...seeks to understand how states have always behaved and presumably always will behave. It does not believe that the condition of anarchy can be transcended.”⁷⁵ The structure of the international system, then, is given prior to the historical outcomes of state interaction. In this way, the concept of structure functions like a unifying concept tying past, present, and future together into a single interpretive whole conditioned by the “fact” of anarchy. And, in serving this function, it stops relativism dead in its tracks.

The value of a science of international politics is that it provides the possibility of an agreed upon starting point for the development of sub-theories, a commensurable language and frame of reference, as well as an agreed upon standard by which social scientists can judge the veracity of each other's findings. Thus, the structuralist “turn” of neorealism ensures epistemological certitude. Central to this is the belief that they have found a standard prior to, and

74 Buzan, B., (1989), “Systems, Structures and Units: Restructuring Waltz's Theory of International Politics.” Paper presented to the British/International Studies Association, p.4.

75 Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.226.

unaffected by, history. This is not to say they lack an interest in past events. On the contrary, it is the observance of such events which allows them to ground their theories in the concept of “structure.” Yet Neorealism is ahistorical, in the sense that history is not something constitutive of human subjectivity or consciousness. On this view, history does not affect human rationality, identity, culture, and the like. Thus, Gilpin begins his well-known book with the view that his book will “assume rationality is not historically or culturally bound.”⁷⁶

Value-neutrality is also an important aspect of the neorealist response to the alleged threat of relativism. Without it, “structure” would be little more than a figment of the theorist's own imagination and personal bias, rather than something objectively given and scientifically knowable. The central difference between classical realism and neorealism concerns turns on just this point. Against older classical realism, neorealists argue the concept of “human nature” is value-laden, and altogether too ambiguous to serve as a solid foundation for theoretical inquiry. Moreover, where classical realism considered the role of theory to be prescriptive in the sense of providing a set of criteria by which to guide foreign policy analysis, neorealism makes no such claims. Truly scientific explanation must be a value-neutral activity. This is not to say that prescription, in the form of control or prediction, cannot follow once scientific explanation has been achieved. A scientific theory of international politics must be arrived at first and that can only be accomplished by the expulsion of all value non-neutral criteria.

Both the structural foundationalism and the value-neutrality of neorealism provide a formidable edifice against relativism. The relativist wants to point to the historically conditioned nature of all thought, theoretical frameworks, experiences, cultures, and value judgements, while

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xii.

neorealists argue that by appealing to timeless laws operating within a structural foundationalism, it is possible to gain an ontological priority over historical difference. In essence, relativism is overcome by positing a static concept of history which gives priority to unity over historical diversity, or, as Bertell Ollman puts it, “the absolute pre-dominance of the whole over the parts.”⁷⁷

Two Manifestations of Relativism in International Relations

There is no doubt that relativism has crept into International Relations. It is worth looking at two different manifestations of it. The first can be found in the work of Richard Mansbach and Yale Ferguson. They argue that contemporary international theory overlooks significant areas of reality, namely historicity and values. For them, as for all post-positivists, these are two essential and unavoidable components of human experience. But once they are made central, Mansbach and Ferguson argue we need to recognize that objective knowledge of international politics is an impossible goal. This realization results in an argument which is a species of both historical and value relativism.

The argument put forward by Mansbach and Ferguson has three interrelated theses. The “source” of all normative values is society itself. They argue that these values are socially constructed and value-laden. Paradigms and conceptual schemes are all part of the *Zeitgeist*, and adherence to the possibility to value-freedom is simply misplaced. The scientist believes in the value of the advancement of science, the economist in the value of the free market, and the realist in the importance of security and order. There is no privileged position outside of reality that is objective absolutely; all becomes a function of ideological preference.

⁷⁷ Cited in Ashley, R.K., “The Poverty of Neorealism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.265.

Debates in international theory are cyclical. Under these circumstance, intellectual progress is “illusory.”

What is striking about these debates and what distinguishes them from debates in the natural sciences is that essentially the same arguments and emphases tend to recur over and over again through time, despite superficial changes in concepts and language... because they revolve around enduring normative themes. The key assertions of Realism and Idealism, for example, have been present...at least since Thucydides.⁷⁸

Because they see an eternal recurrence of issues, paradigm change in international theory is of a different kind to that which Thomas Kuhn articulates in his celebrated book.⁷⁹ For Kuhn, change in paradigms occurs when anomalies in the dominant paradigm become so pronounced that they lead to an intellectual “crisis” in order to resolve them. This brings about the ascendancy of the paradigm which is best able to resolve the anomalies of its predecessor.

In contrast to this view, Mansbach and Ferguson argue that in the study of international politics, paradigm change is related to “issue salience.” This, in turn, always concerns changes in the status of normative values. Changes in issue salience redirect attention toward values that underlie the newly important issues and away from values that are associated with declining issues.⁸⁰

Whatever the merits of their argument, it never gets beyond showing what issues contribute to the demise of the old dominant paradigm. In this case, the decline of realism is the

78 Mansbach, R.W., & Ferguson, Y.H., (1986), “Values and Paradigm Change: The Elusive Quest for International Relations Theory,” in Karns, M., (ed.) *Persistent Patterns and Emergent Structures in a Waning Century*. London: Praeger Press, p.14.

79 Kuhn, T., (1970), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd. Edition Enlarged. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

80 Mansbach, R.W., & Ferguson, Y.H., (1986), *op. cit.*, 21.

result of such events as the backlash to the Vietnam war, the OPEC oil crisis, the growing importance of nonmilitary concerns, problems of nuclear war, the challenge to positivism, and so forth.⁸¹ But if one is going to talk of a shift in the perception of normative values, it is not enough simply to demonstrate empirically why one set of normative values declined. To be convincing, one must also show what the new values are on the rise, and what it is that makes the new values the particular values which happen to arise after a period of intellectual “crisis.” Instead of teasing out these sorts of issues, they simply posit vague and unhelpful generalizations to explain the newly emerging paradigm. There are references to a new “ethos of society,” changes in the “normative temper of an era,” and “new opportunities for value satisfaction” as opposed to “value deprivation.” But their inability to deepen the discussion to the appropriate level of abstraction, and in the direction needed to make their argument convincing, leads them to shift the focus of the paper mid-stream.⁸² They proceed to outline some of the “several dimensions” along which normative value change may or may not occur.⁸³ Unfortunately, they never say what the “enduring normative themes” they speak of are *in concreto*, only that normative values exist in eternal recurrence.⁸⁴ They argue the source of all normative values is society. But they never define

81 *Ibid.*, p.20.

82 The lack of specificity with regards to the issue of newly emergent values reflects their own ambivalence over the future direction of the study of international politics. It is Mansbach and Ferguson who coined the term “conceptual chaos,” and it would seem they are the victims of their own lack of conceptual vision. It is perhaps interesting that in a more recent publication about the problematic nature of contemporary state theory the same problem arises. They seem to have no clear direction beyond realizing the current state of the field is chaotic. See also Ferguson, Y.H., & Mansbach, R.W., (1990), *The State, Conceptual Chaos, and the Future of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, Colorado: The University of Denver Press.

83 They call these mutability-immutability; optimism-pessimism; competitiveness-community; elitism-nonelitism.

84 The only supporting evidence they draw upon is that political realism and idealism existed in ancient Greece.

what it is they mean by society, or ask the next logical question: what is it about society that conjures forth normative values? The question of normative values, and its relation to society, only makes sense in the context of a concern with reason. Yet, they never mention reason at all.⁸⁵ It is difficult to see how one can consider the issue of values without simultaneously asking what conception of rationality underpins changing attitudes to rules, norms, and values. Moreover, there is no attempt to pose the question of whether some normative values are more enduring than others. Is freedom more important than power? Is justice more important than freedom? Are all normative values the same?

If we take these difficulties together, the only conclusion which can be drawn is that their perception of intellectual history, and of the fall and rise of normative values, is nothing less than an unquestioning and conservative form of historical and value relativism. This is evident from the following statement.

International relations will therefore continue to be characterized by a welter of competing theories which reflect significant political, subjective, and normative differences until the global system enters a new period of rapid and stressful change. At that point, a dominant theory, resembling a Kuhnian paradigm, may emerge for some period of time, after which the cycle will resume.⁸⁶

For Mansbach and Ferguson, the dominant values of an age are the right ones if only because they have supplanted the previous paradigm. Their thesis is a version of “might is right,” except in the

85 That the concept of “reason” figures nowhere in their argument reflects the highly subjectivist nature of their viewpoint. It is precisely this sort of argument that traditionalists like Gabriel Almond and Thomas Biersteker have voiced concern over.

86 In the final footnote they write that the study of geopolitics is simply characterized by “diversity.” Mansbach, R.W., & Ferguson, Y.H., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.30

current post-positivist climate “might” is no longer defined in realist terms as “power,” but as “values.”

Two points need to be made here. It is a form of relativism which can, I think, best be described as soft and submissive. It is willing to acknowledge that universal values exist in time, although it accords no intrinsic significance to them except as ideology. In addition, there is a sense of resignation (or perhaps even desperation) in this relativism, as if they have been forced into historical and value relativism as the only possible solution to the intractable problem of reconciling paradigm change with the need to take history and values seriously. As they express it:

...political science will continue to develop more like one of the arts than one of the sciences unless or until political scientists can isolate themselves from the milieu whose problems they seek to address. This, we believe, is an impossible task *and probably not one worth undertaking*.⁸⁷

The use of the word “probably” here is instructive for its ambivalence. Clearly, positivism still informs their thinking. The positivist promise of progressive knowledge remains a kind of unobtainable Holy Grail. In short, to be “resigned” to the fact that it is impossible to have progressive knowledge is still to be held by the power of this ideal, giving the positivist conception of knowledge a kind of unwarranted mythical primacy. Moreover, the use of the term “political science” seems particularly out of place in an argument against the possibility of a “science” of international politics. Actually, this resignation leads to the loss of the “political” dimension of international political theory altogether. Future international theory will become little more than an exercise in value description. There is no basis left upon which to deal with, or even criticize, the various paradigms which arise. The result is a complete submission to that paradigm which is

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15. The italics are mine.

able to gain dominance at a particular time and place in history. Interestingly, this is not the case with post-structural forms of relativism. They are profoundly political in that they are unwilling to acquiesce to the dominant paradigm. In essence, they argue that soft and submissive forms of relativism will not do because they give up in the face of the reality of power. The only answer lies in resistance. According to post-structuralists like Richard Ashley, this means that the only appropriate form of relativism is a defiant one which calls all paradigms into question, and privileges none of them.

Mansbach and Ferguson's argument does have merit on at least two counts, however. For good or bad, it is an attempt to deal with the thorny issues of the place and role of normative values. So too, it seeks to take history seriously as something intimately connected to what we are as human beings and not simply as a sterile recounting of past events. In addition, and equally important, their attempt to incorporate these elements into a conception of international politics suggests a high degree of frustration and ultimately a loss of faith in traditional approaches to the subject; approaches which have systematically shunned questions of historicity and values in the name of the "will to science."

The second form of relativism draws its inspiration from a range of sources, amongst them French post-structuralism and European critical theory. Radical post-positivists like Richard Ashley argue that the world to be characterized only by contingency, diversity, and finitude. Or, as Ashley terms it - *historicity*. The drive toward unity in interpretation, which is characteristic of neorealism, is misconceived and illusory. Moreover, such claims always turn out to be discourses which impose a particular conception of reality on the world. For Ashley, unity is synonymous with power and, therefore, has totalitarian implications. He argues that denying

validity to all truth claims liberates individuals from the seductive appeal that such universalist claims have. He celebrates relativism as the only possible course of action in a world which continually tells individuals what to think, what to do, and how they should and should not organize themselves.

The essence of Ashley's relativism arises out of what he terms the "radical undecidability of history." According to him, a good example of this "undecidability" can be seen by looking at two equally truthful propositions which are at the centre of contemporary international theory debate. The first is the dependence of historical practices on institutionalized structures, conventions, or background understandings. What is suggested here is that agents, events, and human practices are formed by, and the result of, pre-determined structures. As Giddens puts it: this antecedent structure is "the very ontological condition of human life in society as such."⁸⁸ Alternatively, historical practices generate social structures. Such structures arise only because they are the product of knowledgeable human practices. Thus, rather than structures having a priority above and beyond human agency, it is this agency which is the pre-condition of its existence and continual reaffirmation. Yet, for Ashley, this issue can never be decided finally because to support one view is necessarily to exclude the insights of the other. In essence, it results in a theoretical paradox. As Ashley expresses it:

But what comes of this paradoxical opposition, as poststructuralism understands it, is not a stable synthesis, an absolute ground, or a new sovereign centre for the monological interpretation of history. What emerges instead is a respect for this paradox as an opposition in which it is never possible to choose one proposition over another. It is an undecidable opposition that destabilizes all pretence to secure

88 Giddens, A., (1976), *New Rules in Sociological Method*. New York: Basic Books, p.19.

grounds at the end of history, but it is also an opposition that must be respected as an inescapable feature of the ways in which one may think about history.⁸⁹

By refusing to decide in favor of any particular viewpoint, by celebrating the paradox of theory, Ashley is advocating relativism. Like the relativism of Mansbach and Ferguson, post-structural relativism is unwilling to make a judgement as to the truth value of any theory. There is no single overarching truth to be discerned. There is only a myriad of different theories, interpretations, conceptual schemes, and paradigms. But, unlike the relativism of Mansbach and Ferguson, which can do no more than shrug its shoulders in the face of a dominant paradigm discourse, Ashley wants continually to cast doubt as to the validity of all such a projects. By taking all paradigms in their historicity (even his own), Ashley wants to challenge what he takes to be a central motif of all theories; that is, they exist and gain their meaning as a relation of power. Ashley concludes that:

In contrast to modern social theory, poststructuralism eschews grand designs, transcendental grounds, or universal projects of humankind. The critical task, instead, is to expose the historicity-the arbitrariness, the political content, and the dependence upon practice - of the limits that are imposed in history, and inscribed in paradigms of the sovereignty of man.⁹⁰

While it is true that there are significant differences between these two forms of relativism, they are similar in a least one important way. Both acknowledge historicity and values as defining

89 Ashley, R.K., (1989), "Living on the Border Lines: Man, Post-structuralism and War," in Der Derian, J., & Shapiro, M., (eds.) *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings in World Politics*. Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., p.274. This is a very different reading of the agent-structure problem than that recently put forward by the so-called structurationists. They argue the solution to this problem lies, not by privileging structure over agency, or agency over structure, but by positing them as ontologically concurrent, or ontologically equal. For Ashley, this is simply another attempt at a solution to that which is insoluble. On the structurationist perspective see Giddens, A., (1984), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration*. London: Polity Press. Also Wendt, A., (1987), "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization*, Vol.41, No.3, Summer, pp.335-371.

90 Ashley, R.K. (1989), *op. cit.*, p.284.

characteristics of all conceptual schemes and theories.⁹¹ The distinction between relativist and non-relativist forms of post-positivism revolves around how we interpret this insight. Relativists like Mansbach and Ferguson can only submit to the dominant theoretical framework and the values which attend it, while waiting for another to rise up to take its place. But, for Ashley, this is defeatist. We should resist them all and grant none special or privileged status. On his view, they all threaten to enslave us. But whether we submit to the dominant values, or resist them all, the end result for mainstream scholars is the same: we lose the ability to decide whether one theory is better than another, and thus, whether one set of values is more worthy than another. We are deprived of the ability to make critical judgements.

The idea of a Discipline of International Relations is premised upon the idea that rock solid foundations are essential for the generation of systematic knowledge. Without this, the epistemological basis for establishing International Relations as an autonomous field of study within the social or human sciences evaporates. It is possible now to see a little more clearly why post-positivist relativism threatens the traditional agenda. Any view which celebrates relativism, or acknowledges theoretical diversity to the degree that some writers do, rejects any possibility of achieving the sort of objective standards demanded by a scientific theory. As a result, it undermines the integrity of International Relations. And for some like Ashley, this is precisely the goal.

There is probably no answer to the charge of relativism which would satisfy the defenders of the Discipline. Certainly, relativism exists, but I am tempted to say so what! This is a problem only if the rules of the game set out by the Discipline are accepted. If one rejects these, it negates

⁹¹ It is interesting Lapid seems to overlook this in his discussion of post-positivism. See Lapid, Y., (1989), *op. cit.*

much of the force of the criticism. David Campbell's advice then, is an adequate response to this issue. "We have to realize that "giving up" recourse to ultimate foundations will not debilitate us, because we have never had those foundations in the first place."⁹² I would suggest, then, that the issue of relativism and how it might be avoided in the field is not a significant problem. This is not to say that post-positivism is problem free or anything like that. Far from it. It is only to suggest that relativism is not the root cause of the apparent difficulties facing the Discipline. On the contrary, the problem lies with the proposition that consensus is possible.

What is Wrong with Consensus?: Some Preliminary Comments

International Relations is not, to use Michael Oakeshott's famous phrase, an "enterprise association" in which there is agreement over what is meant by "international theory," the methods appropriate to its pursuit and evaluation, and its purpose. While it is true that the absence of consensus has become a source of concern for many scholars in recent years, such concern is probably exaggerated. In my view, the desire for consensus in the field is incompatible with those features of the world that justify sustained examination in the academy. For a variety of well-known reasons that require no rehearsal here, International Relations has been a site of contestation and "great debate" in the past, but the spirit of such well-known fissures between realists and idealists, behaviouralists and historians, and more recently, among defenders of various "paradigms," has rarely been one of dialogue and accommodation. On the contrary, the degree of anxiety they tend to provoke among so many self-anointed cartographers of dissent is possibly unparalleled in the human sciences. What is missing in much of the recent literature is any

92 Campbell, D., (1988), "Recent Changes in Social Theory: Some Questions for International Relations," in Higgott, J.L., (ed.), *New Directions in International Relations: Australian Perspectives*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, p.43.

meaningful reflection on what is meant by a Discipline, and why International Relations should enjoy any more substantial a consensus than, say, history or political theory. My aim is to challenge that particular understanding of International Relations which has developed in the United States after 1945. This understanding fostered a monistic, rather than a pluralistic, attitude to the pursuit and development of international theory.

To suggest, as I did earlier, that International Relations is an American creation is not to discount the contribution of other countries to the early development and growth of the field, it is simply to acknowledge that it was scholars in the United States who first established International Relations as a distinct and formal social science. As a result, the influence of American scholarship and research on the study of international politics has been enormous. The advent of continental philosophy, as well as a more vigorous profile from scholars outside of the American core, indicate that this influence may be waning. Yet the American conception of things remains a powerful force in the study of International Relations today.

At the same time, it is not my intention to disparage American scholarship. It has been a fountain of great insight over the years. But there is something of a contradiction between the universalism inherent in the notion of a Discipline of International Relations and the American hegemony of the subject.⁹³ The extent to which concepts, ideas and themes developed in the United States remain the organizational centre around which International Relations (and International Political Economy for that matter) is studied in Canada, Europe, and the Antipodes, or how negative mainstream American scholars are toward non-American generated theories and

93 Chris Brown has an interesting opinion on this matter. See Brown, C., (1997), "Fog in the Channel: Continental International Relations Theory Isolated Or: An Essay on the Paradoxes of Diversity and Parochialism in IR Theory." Unpublished Paper presented to the 1998 ISA Conference, Toronto, Canada, March.

ideas on international politics, makes it possible to see that the universalism inherent in the idea of a Discipline of International Relations is little more than a thinly disguised parochialism masquerading as a global field of study. When Barry Buzan suggests, for example, that the “English School” realism should be more like regime theory, or by Robert Keohane that critical theorists should develop research agenda which reflect the concerns of positivists at Harvard, it is clear that the meaning that is attributed to the notion of a Discipline is heavily skewed in one direction.⁹⁴ The result, is a bland and narrow definition of International Relations which runs counter to the complexity and diversity of the materials which go to make up its subject matter. The American conception of the Discipline should be abandoned in favour of a more open and pluralistic one.⁹⁵

The paradox is that anyone can “join” International Relations, regardless of their formal training as economists, anthropologists, or historians. The inherently inter-disciplinary nature of International Relations - and all the human sciences for that matter - cannot be contained in a way that justifies a rigid academic division of labour between itself and other areas of study within political science. This argument should not be (mis)interpreted as a belittlement of the field, or as an attempt to relegate it to the margins of political science. On the contrary, it is precisely my belief in the pertinence of international politics that makes me suspicious of legislative proposals

94 Buzan, B., (1993), “From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meets the English School,” *International Organization*, Vol.47, No.3, Summer, pp.327-352. Keohane, R.O., (1988), “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.4, December, pp.379-396.

95 Nicholas Onuf reaches a similar conclusion: “the reconstruction of International Relations requires that the Discipline be stripped of its current pretensions. If this is taken to mean the abandonment of International Relations (the discipline as it is) and the possibility of international theory (theory peculiar to International Relations) then I agree.” Onuf, N.G., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.27.

that seek to cordon off the Discipline from “outsiders.” Such proposals merely mirror the efforts of the sovereign state to guarantee its monopoly over the use of force within a given territory. It would be very odd to insist on the sovereignty of the Discipline when the nature of state sovereignty is itself becoming a central issue within it.⁹⁶

Conclusion

According to defenders of the Discipline, the study of international politics is becoming relativist and this is something anyone with an interest in this field should be concerned about. They argue that relativism makes it impossible to achieve meaningful agreement on fundamental theoretical issues. Without such agreement, theoretical progress becomes impossible and the Discipline is likely to remain in “crisis.” This is why scholars like Holsti look upon the 1950s and 1960s with a nostalgic fondness. During that time, a consensus existed on the methods of study, the parameters of the Discipline, and so on. And this is because just about everybody worked within the same (“realist”) tradition. The view of these critics of post-positivism is a simple one: “united we stand, divided we fall.” For them, this is the only way that relativism can be kept out of the study of international politics.

Despite the appeal and obvious success of this perspective, it is flawed. I have argued that not only is this a problematic interpretation of the state of the Discipline, but the desire for

⁹⁶ The literature on this subject is voluminous. For a representative selection see Biersteker, T.J., & Weber, C., (1996), *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Bartelson, J., (1995), *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Saurin, J., (1995), “The End of International Relations? The State and International Theory in the Age of Globalization,” in Macmillan, J., & Linklater, A., (eds.), *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations*. London: Pinter, pp.244-261. Camilleri, J., & Falk, J., (1993), *op. cit.* Ashley, R.K., & Walker, R.B.J. (1990), “Conclusion: Reading Dissidence/Writing the Discipline: Crisis and the Question of Sovereignty,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.3, September, pp.367-416. Walker, R.B.J., & Mendlovitz, S., (1990), “Interrogating State Sovereignty,” in Walker, R.B.J., & Mendlovitz, S.H., (eds.), *Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, pp.1-12.

consensus is misplaced. If this is the case, then, International Relations is actually a house of cards propped up by an idea which is substantially out of place in the study of international politics. Now I am not suggesting that scholars should be at each other throats, as if internecine war is a good thing. My point is more subtle than this. It is that consensus is not, nor should it ever have been treated as a formal principle upon which success or failure in the field depends. To the extent that scholars have accepted it as such, they are mistaken and at odds with the character of the subject matter.

The emphasis on consensus goes a long way to explain why defenders of the Discipline accept a number of problematic assumptions about how the field should be ordered and studied. An inquiry into this idea, and the Discipline more generally, needs to take these assumptions into account and subject them to penetrating analysis. This is what I intend to do in the following three chapters. The assumptions I have in mind are: (1) that positivism is an adequate methodology; (2) that International Relations is an autonomous Discipline; and, (3) that the meaning of realism is clear-cut. There are others, but I take these to be central to the constitution of International Relations. Each of these assumptions is questionable.

CHAPTER TWO

THE METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM: POSITIVISM

Descartes, wishing to cut in one blow the root of all prejudices began by placing everything in doubt, submitting everything to rational examination; starting from this single incontestable principle: "I think, therefore, I exist," and proceeding with the greatest precautions, he believed he was moving towards the truth and found only some lies...Will his successors be more fortunate; will their systems last longer? No...They are beginning to waver; they will fall as well, they are the work of men.

J.J. Rousseau

Introduction

No-one has done more to promote the idea of a general theory of international politics than Kenneth Waltz.¹ He is the leading defender of the Discipline. Indeed, he suggests that his *Theory of International Politics* has the capacity to establish International Relations as a scientific Discipline. In doing so, he likens his achievement to that of Copernicus. The latter is widely regarded as the father of undogmatic scientific thought. Waltz seems to be suggesting that his work is revolutionary in the same way. Whether one agrees with this or not, there is no doubt that it is the most sophisticated formulation of the “core” assumptions I spoke of in the previous chapter. In this sense, his text can be interpreted as a demonstration of how it is possible to generate and maintain a consensus in the study of international politics. I want to argue, however, that his efforts should not be seen as a revolution of the first order, but rather as a failed coup.²

Waltz’s project relies heavily on a “positivist” methodology. It is this aspect of his work which is the most contentious and open to criticism. Arguably, positivism is an inappropriate methodology for the study of international politics on at least two counts. First, it severs the link

1 See especially Waltz, K.N., (1970), *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley.

2 Justin Rosenberg suggests that after reviewing Waltz’s theory that it is hard not to avoid the conclusion that “the mountain has labored, and brought forth a molehill.” Rosenberg, J., (1990), “What’s the Matter With Realism?” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.16, No.4, October, p. 294.

between the study of international politics and the social or human sciences.³ And second, it does not offer a set of neutral criteria which make consensus achievable.

To establish this argument, I divide the chapter into four sections. The first looks at why positivism has come under fire in recent years. To establish this argument, I draw on the post-positivist writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas. In the second section, I look at how Waltz's theory is informed by a positivist epistemology. In the third, I argue that neorealism is best seen as an unexceptional species of rationalism in politics. In the final section, I argue that positivism is not a value neutral methodology as its defenders claim, and so fails to live up to its claim to offer criteria which will lead to a general consensus. Being a species of rationalism in politics it advances a specific and contentious political theory which has never enjoyed universal support.

It needs to be kept in mind here that I am not concerned with quantitative, mathematical, or empirical studies of international politics. Undoubtedly, there is an important place for this sort of work in the field. My concern is with the idea that a general scientific theory of international politics is possible and desirable.

3 As David Campbell observes: "The dominance of positivism in International Relations has created a situation where the discipline has been divorced from developments in philosophy and social theory. Insofar as International Relations follows the positivist/empiricist understanding of knowledge, its theoretical pretensions must be deemed inadequate." Campbell, D., (1988), "Recent Changes in Social Theory: Some Questions for International Relations," in Higgott, J.L., (ed.), *New Directions in International Relations: Australian Perspectives*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, p.9. Some continental writers, schooled in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, prefer to talk about the "human sciences," rather than the "social sciences." In this thesis, the two terms can be taken to be synonymous.

The Character of Positivism

Positivism has a number of specific attributes depending on the particular form it takes.⁴ It is probably safest, though, to treat it as an intellectual style which has dominated the human or social sciences. Nevertheless, positivists do share a number of things in common. First, they believe in the unity of knowledge. This means they do not make any distinction between the natural and the human sciences. Second, they believe that the hypothetical-deductive model is the only model capable of yielding verifiable “knowledge” in both sciences.⁵ Third, they believe that the only true knowledge is factual knowledge unmediated by history, culture, custom, or tradition. It is knowledge that is not dependent upon ethical or political norms. Fourth, positivists seek the discovery of law-like generalizations (if A, then B) about the workings of the natural and the social world which, once known, give the scientist the ability to control and manipulate outcomes. Finally, the form of practice which accompanies positivism consists in the technical application of theoretical knowledge, or what Robert Cox calls “problem-solving theory.”⁶ The concern of a positivist conception of politics, or science of society is, therefore, efficiency. It attempts, through a set of procedures, to discover the technically optimal means of implementing

4 Steve Smith delineates three different “variants” of positivism in the history of the philosophy of science. The first he attributes to August Comte, the second to the logical positivists of the 1930's, and the third which has emerged since the collapse of logical positivism. This last variant has been most influential in the social sciences, mainly through the work of Carl Hempel, Ernest Nagel, and Karl Popper. See Smith, S., (1996), “Positivism and Beyond,” in Smith, S., & Booth, S., & Zalewaki, M., (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.14-15. An excellent introduction to positivism is Kolokowski, L., (1970), *Positivism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

5 This is often referred to as the “unity of science” or the “unity of scientific method” by analytical philosophers.

6 Cox, R., (1986), “Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.208.

decisions and achieving goals. In other words, positivism underpins a rationalist approach to sociology, politics, and public policy.

Positivism is primarily a method for arriving at knowledge of a particular domain. The rise of epistemology in the seventeenth century can be attributed mainly to the discovery of the significance of method. In the search for knowledge, method is employed to guard against error, guesswork and unfounded intuitions in the search for truth. As Hans-Georg Gadamer expresses it, the only way that scholars can safeguard themselves from error is by the “methodically disciplined use of reason.”⁷ The alleged value of a method is that it precludes mistakes “because the methodically controlled mind is aware of its position at all times, knows its origin and the rules that govern its progress; and therefore the end of method is clear and distinct, because the steps of derivation can be retraced, reconstructed and rechecked at will.”⁸

Those who reject positivism do not take issue with the idea of method *per se*, as if they celebrate error in intellectual life. Instead, they argue that the human sciences are fundamentally different to the natural sciences. Accordingly, the dominance of the latter over the former amounts to little more than a “tyranny of Method.”⁹ To put the point differently, “the fundamental hubris of method consists in its presumption to exhaust the sphere of truth.”¹⁰

7 Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *Truth and Method*. 2nd. Edition. London: Sheed and Ward, p.246

8 Weinsheimer, J.C., (1985), *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p.7.

9 Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. London: Basil Blackwell, p.xi.

10 Weinsheimer, J.C., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.8.

Positivism: A Critique

It is a mistake to interpret post-positivism as a unitary response to the problems associated with the division between the natural and the human sciences.¹¹ Indeed, it is difficult to cover the sweep and the complexity of many of its arguments in a few pages. However, no-one has done more to expose the problems with positivism than Hans-Georg Gadamer. He is one of its leading critics and his arguments are worth examining.

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* has one overriding goal: to develop a theory of interpretation which improves on those of his predecessors and which, at the same time, highlights the difficulties associated with modelling the human sciences on an epistemology derived from the philosophy of the natural sciences. "The question I have asked seeks to discover and bring into consciousness something that methodological dispute serves only to conceal and neglect, something that does not so much confine or limit modern science as precede it and make it possible."¹² Gadamer, then, is not concerned with methodologies used in different Disciplines, but with a question which is prior to methodologies and to the epistemological distinction between subject and object.

Gadamer follows Martin Heidegger here. The latter argues that all interpretations come about through projections of meaning that arise from the interpreter's own historical reality. All interpretation is conducted with certain questions in mind which stem from within the interpreter's own consciousness. The interpretation itself contributes to, and has bearing, upon the final result

11 For an excellent summary of the alternatives see Hiley, D.R., Bohman, J.F., & Shusterman, R., (1991), *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. For more general discussions see Rabinow, P., & Sullivan, W.M., (1979), *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Baynes, K., Bohman, J., & McCarthy, T., (1989), *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

12 Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *op. cit.* p.xvii.

of what is interpreted. No interpretation is value-neutral because the interpreter cannot escape the presuppositions of his or her own mind or historicity. As Heidegger argues:

Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.¹³

The twin claims that it is possible to have an objective value-neutral foundation to understanding and that value-free or presuppositionless knowledge in the human sciences is possible, is undermined by this insight.

Gadamer restructures hermeneutics according to Heidegger's insight and, in doing so, abandons method as the primary principle of understanding. Does this mean that truth becomes impossible, as Emilio Betti has suggested?¹⁴ Gadamer rejects this, saying that tradition itself is the guarantor of truth.

The experience of historical tradition goes quite beyond that in it which can be investigated. It is true or untrue not only in the sense concerning which historical criticism decides, but always mediates truth, in which one must try to share.¹⁵

But when Betti talks of method as leading to truth, he means it in a very different way to Gadamer. In Gadamer's sense, the true object of an interpretation is the meaning of the text, not value-free knowledge. This object is attained by its integration into a totality which includes the horizon of the text, the present horizon of the interpreter, and the application of the object (its meaning) to the present. One can say that both subject and object together constitute one great

13 Heidegger, M., (1986), *Being and Time*. London: Basil Blackwell, pp.191-192.

14 For an English translation of Betti's critique of the Heideggerian tradition see Bleicher, J., (1983), *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.51-94.

15 Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.xiii.

horizon, or what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons.” Thus our relationship to the text is one of participation, not of distancing. That individuals participate, and are immersed in an interpretation in this way, points to the problematic nature of the assumption that strict objectivity (in a scientific and value-neutral sense) is possible in the domain of the human sciences. It means that individuals can never view the world as it really is. There is no “glassy essence” to the world.¹⁶ Scholars, like human beings generally, are not “unencumbered” selves.¹⁷ They bring to theory-building biases, presuppositions, value-judgements, and so on.

We can get some idea of the force of Gadamer's critique by looking at the concept of *vorurteil*. This generally translates as prejudice or pre-judgements.¹⁸ Gadamer argues that understanding is the result of a historically accumulated wealth of knowledge, insights, “intuition flashes,” as well as a basic historically operative structure. No theory proceeds in a vacuum. This is as much the case with a literary text as it is with a scientific one. Indeed, even the meaning of a particular scientific experiment does not come about simply because of factors relevant to the experiment; it arises out of the tradition of interpretation about the nature, function, and purpose of scientific experiments.

The essential feature of Gadamer's work, then, is premised on our being-already-in-the-world. This means that it is not possible to get free of our pre-judgements or from our historical

16 The term is Richard Rorty's. See Rorty, R., (1979), *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

17 I have borrowed this term from Michael Sandel. See Sandel, M.J., (1984), “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self,” *Political Theory*, Vol.12, No.1, February, pp.81-96.

18 Bernstein argues the term “prejudice” conveys Gadamer's intentions more accurately. Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *op. cit.*, p.191. Also see Palmer, R.E., (1969), *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p.181.

boundedness. Hence, individuals are always involved in a historical tradition: “The finitude of man's being consists in the fact that firstly he finds himself at the heart of tradition.”¹⁹ There is no understanding of history without reference to the present. History is always the history of effects. Through the tradition in which we live our lives, history is continually acting upon us by shaping all that we do and think:

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in family, society and state in which we live.²⁰

Gadamer also challenges what he calls the Enlightenment's “prejudice against prejudice.” This is not a conservative ambition as Habermas suggests, rather he is simply pointing out that “all understanding inevitably involves some prejudices.” And, according to Gadamer, the great thinkers of the Enlightenment were no different in this regard.

This is Gadamer's way of articulating the “background” which operates behind all human activity, scientific or otherwise, and gives it its particular characteristics. In speaking about the idea of prejudice, therefore, Gadamer certainly does not mean dogmatic unchallengeable opinions born of a narrow mind. On the contrary:

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the original directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something- whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those

19 Cited in Ricoeur, P., (1981), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.67-68.

20 Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.245.

things that can produce a pass saying, "Nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity.²¹

Gadamer's radical use of the concept of prejudice leads to four important insights. First, prejudices come to us through tradition; second, they are constituted by the social and historical epoch in which we live; third, they have an anticipatory character in that they are always open to critical testing and transformation. Finally, Gadamer suggests that all reason functions within traditions. Tradition is not simply what is old hat, or something which is a millstone around the necks of scholars. A tradition that is alive is one which is determinate of human existence and individuality, and is always open to modification through a process of mediation with history.²²

Understanding itself should be thought of not so much as an action of subjectivity but as entering into the happening of tradition in which past and present are constantly mediated. It is this that must be acknowledged in hermeneutic theory, which is much too strongly dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.²³

Richard Bernstein remarks that Gadamer's critique of positivism is "devastating."²⁴ And it is hard to disagree with him. It is a radical redefinition of philosophy which challenges positivism, not so much by saying it is flawed, but by showing that there is a theoretical dimension

21 Gadamer, H-G., (1976), *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated and Introduced by D. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.9.

22 In an important passage, Gadamer writes: "The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be reaffirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only what is new, or what is planned, appears the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything that anyone knows, and combines with the new to create a new value." Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.250.

23 *Ibid.*, p.258.

24 Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *op. cit.*, p.118.

to understanding which precedes it and makes it possible.²⁵ For Gadamer, positivism abstracts from concrete historical reality and alienates us from the “true” mode of historical consciousness by not taking into account the finitude, historicity, and intersubjective dimensions of human personality. Moreover, it demonstrates the misguided nature of any view which believes theory can be a value-neutral form of inquiry.

One of the interesting conclusions reached by Gadamer is that positivism is itself historically rooted and culturally specific. It is unable to escape the historical conditions of its own existence. And here it seems that Habermas agrees with him. For the latter, all reason is committed reason. “Theoretically guided action is a consequence of the fact that ‘commitment’ is *the undisputed basis of all rational endeavour*.”²⁶ Reason is a “critical” tool, having the power to inquire into the validity of traditional values, morals, forms of life, and ideological presuppositions; any conceptual scheme, in fact, which made a claim to truth, without sufficient rational basis. A critical self-reflective attitude based on reason is one concerned with overcoming forms of dogmatism. Dogmatism is the enemy of Enlightenment as confinement is to freedom. Failure to adopt a “critical” posture means humanity remains the prisoner of dogmatism.

In the fight against dogmatism, Habermas argues that critical theory and positivism are, in fact, allied. Both are forms of what he calls “the critique of ideology.” Positivism shifts the emphasis from the original enlightenment meaning, however. “It is directed against dogmatism in a new guise. Any theory that relates to *praxis* in any way other than by strengthening and

25 In other words, the development of the neorealist perspective already contains intellectual biases which cannot be expunged by labelling it “science.” Our being-already-in-the-world is the ontological basis of all our theoretical judgements.

26 The Italics are mine. Habermas, J., (1972), “Dogmatism, Reason and Decision: On Theory and Practice in Our Scientific Civilization,” in *Theory and Practice*. Translated by J. Viertel. Boston: Beacon Press, p.258.

perfecting the possibilities for purposive-rational action must now appear dogmatic.”²⁷ The basic issue facing all forms of critical theory, then, is to inquire into this shift from a conception of theory as a guide to liberating practices, to its conversion at the hands of scientific rationality into technical control over social forces. It is Habermas's belief that we can no longer distinguish between the practical and the technical, between *praxis* and *poiesis*, a distinction essential to the traditional conception of theory and practice. Questions of right action, ethics and the good life, and truth are reduced to questions of control. On this view, a liberative practice is simply technical mastery over nature and the social world.

Emancipation by means of enlightenment is replaced by instruction in control over objective or objectified processes. Socially effective theory is no longer directed toward the consciousness of human beings who live together and discuss matters with each other, but to the behaviour of human beings who manipulate.²⁸

Against this, Habermas attempts to reassert the conception of theory and practice that had originally guided the thinkers of the Enlightenment. For him, this means restoring the original relationship between “reason” and “commitment.” What is more, this insight is validated by positivism itself. Indeed, what makes Habermas's argument so convincing in this regard is that it demonstrates that positivism is itself a form of committed reason. Positivism is committed *via* strategic reason to the value of rationalization.

No matter how much it insists on a separation of theory and commitment in its opposition to dogmatism, positivism's critique of ideology itself remains a form of committed reason: *no lens volens*, it takes a partisan position in favour of progressive rationalization.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.264.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.254-255.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.268.

In other words, positivists express a position every bit as “interested” as the most ardent Marxist or revolutionary whom they admonish as crass ideologues. As John Vincent writes: “inaction as well as action can form the basis of an operational philosophy.”³⁰ To acknowledge “commitment” as an essential attribute of reason, then, indicates the need to broaden the understanding of reason in order to account for those practices which define “commitment” in terms other than technical. It certainly provides an important counter argument to those, like Gabriel Almond, who treat “committed reason” as a form of political advocacy and denigrate it on those grounds.³¹ If Gadamer and Habermas are right about this, it pushes us beyond the positivist conception of what should and should not count as rational, and, therefore, what should and should not count as theory. Indeed, a conception of reason that is wholly technical, while not wrong itself, proves only to be a moment in the life of reason, not reason itself.

Post-positivists, then, reject epistemological foundationalism, the possibility of finding nonhistorical conditions for historical development, the possibility of their being value-neutral knowledge of the social and political world, the dominance of the natural sciences in the study of human beings and society, and the narrowness of the positivist account of rationality. Instead, they stress the importance of the category of meaning in human behaviour, the historically rooted nature of human existence, finitude, and the importance of making clear the underlying assumptions in all theoretical discourses, and in some cases, the autonomy of the human sciences.

30 Vincent, J., (1982), “Realpolitik,” in Mayall, J., (ed.), *The Community of States*. London: Allen & Unwin, p.,73.

31 Cited in Lapid, Y., (1989), “Quo Vadis International Relations? Further Reflections on the ‘Next Stage’ of International Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, Spring, p., 80.

But this is only part of the story. I said earlier that in undermining positivism, post-positivists highlight some of the most important intellectual problems of our age. The positivist tradition has become so firmly embedded in the psyche of the modern world that to challenge it has repercussions throughout the whole of intellectual life.³² What begins as an attempt to highlight the difficulties of modelling the human sciences on the natural sciences then, ends up as a struggle and confrontation with many of the values which have been taken for granted over the past two centuries. And here post-positivism shades off in quite a large number of directions, as scholars critical of positivism seek to understand the contemporary world, and chart a suitable course for the future.

Neorealism: A Copernican Revolution in International Relations?

The revolt against the “tyranny of method” was well and truly underway in the human sciences during the 1970s. But Waltz never once considered the possibility that the attack on positivism from Gadamer and Habermas would have important implications for his work and for International Relations more generally. Part of the reason for this, I suspect, has to do with Waltz’s belief that international politics takes place in a distinct realm. Because of this, debates in social and political theory have little or nothing to say to students of international politics. He could not have been more mistaken.

Waltz focuses on four aspects of the theoretical debate in the Discipline: (1) the shortcomings of Morgenthau's understanding of realism; (2) the arguments put forward by the theorists of interdependence; and (3) the scientific inadequacies of the Discipline; and, (4) the

³² As David Harvey notes: “The crisis of our time is a crisis of Enlightenment thought.” Harvey, D., (1991), *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. London: Basil Blackwell, p.41.

primacy of American power in the international system. His purpose is “to construct a theory of international politics which remedies the defects of present theories.”³³ While not the only neorealist scholar, he is undoubtedly its most systematic and interesting exponent.³⁴ Indeed, his approach is a “touchstone for all neorealists, much as Morgenthau's text served as a touchstone for realists during the 1950s and 1960s.”³⁵ It is instructive, then, to explore Waltz's reformulation and defence of realism.

For Waltz, realism is not necessarily flawed. Rather, Morgenthau and others had not developed the realist enterprise rigorously enough. Indeed, he goes to great lengths to preserve the central attributes of realism.³⁶ He retains the state-centric assumption, the rationality assumption (although Waltz denies this), the power assumption, the centrality of anarchy, and a balance of power theory.³⁷ Waltz, however, argues that there is no need to infer the anarchical nature of international politics from the inherent imperfection of human nature. This is both unscientific and reductionist. It is unscientific because it is based upon a dubious metaphysic, and

33 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.1.

34 Scholars such as Robert Tucker, Stephen Krasner, and Robert Keohane have all been labeled “neorealists” at one time or another. Whether they accept this label is another matter. On Gilpin's and Keohane's attempt to distinguish themselves from Waltz's neorealism see Gilpin, R., (1986), “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.301-321. See also Keohane's article in the same volume, pp.158-203.

35 Baldwin, D.A., (1993), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.13.

36 “Waltz acknowledged that Classical Realism was indeed open to theoretical and methodological attack, but not on grounds claimed by mainline critics. He insisted that these authors had failed to identify the basis on which international relations could be developed scientifically.” Buzan, B., Little, R., & Jones, C., (1993), *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.2.

37 On this see Keohane, R.O., (1986), *op. cit.*, pp.164-165.

reductionist because it fails to take systemic causes of state behaviour into account.³⁸ Morgenthau's reductionism is a consequence of overlooking the degree to which the structure of the system itself conditions the actions of states. He attributes to the system that which rightly belongs at the unit level. Put differently, for Morgenthau the concept of anarchy is simply a general environmental condition, rather than a structural force which conditions and constrains the behaviour of states.³⁹ Instead, what is needed, according to Waltz, is a systemic theory which focuses attention on both the structure of the system and the interactions which take place between both the units of the system and between the units as a consequence of the system. The structure of the international system is responsible primarily for the outcomes perceived at the systems level. It rewards some behaviour and punishes others. More importantly, it constrains the behaviour of the units, and can frustrate their objectives because others possess similar powers.

Two factors define the structure of the international system. First, the way in which it is ordered, in this case anarchically. Second, structure defines the distribution of the capabilities of the units. The major players, then, are constitutive of the international system.⁴⁰ By abstracting out all the particular attributes of states from the structure, Waltz thinks he can determine the kinds of behaviour which the structure of the system exerts on states and, at the same time, account for their behaviour more accurately. In this way, he believes he overcomes the "human

38 See Waltz, K.N., (1959), *Man, The State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press. Especially chapter two.

39 Waltz, K.N., (1991), "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," in Rothstein, R.L., (ed.), *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations*. Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, p.21-37.

40 Waltz had earlier argued bipolarity was the most stable form of international system. Waltz, K.N., (1964), "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus*, Vol.93, No.3, Summer, pp.881-909.

nature” problem which plagued earlier realists. This rethinking of realism then, paves the way for it to become a scientific theory.

This is what scholars such as Barry Buzan, Robert Keohane and Robert Gilpin find most attractive about Waltz’s realism. It brings a degree of systematization, clarity and universality which the idea had previously lacked. As Buzan expresses it, “Waltz's accomplishment is to identify important durable elements in a field where development of scientific analysis is everywhere hampered by the apparent universality of change.”⁴¹ For Waltz, then, international political phenomena closely resemble natural science phenomena and can be appropriately understood with the help of the procedural methods of the natural sciences. Neorealism is, as Richard Ashley notes, a “progressive scientific redemption of Classical Realism.”⁴²

For Waltz, theory is an undertaking which seeks to reveal laws and regularities about the international system. The measure of a good theory is its usefulness, and this is gauged by a desire to control outcomes and events. It is concerned solely with advancing technical rationality in international political theory. His theory is value-free (at least in his own mind) to the extent that states are taken to be objective units unencumbered by such factors as religion, ideology, culture, type of government, and so forth. These characteristics of states are banished from the system's

41 Buzan, B., (1989), “Systems, Structures, and Units: Reconstructing Waltz's Theory of International Politics.” Paper delivered at the British/International Studies Association, March. Keohane writes that the significance of his theory is in his attempt to “systematize political realism into a rigorous, deductive systemic theory of international politics.” Keohane, R.O., (1986), “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.15. And despite the intensity of the post-positivist challenge to neorealism, it is a view he maintains to this day. In 1993, he argued that: “More precise than classical realism, neorealism was also more narrowly drawn, and more easily challenged. Yet its scientific ambitions gave it wide appeal...” Keohane, R.O., (1993), “Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge After the Cold War,” in Baldwin, D.A., (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.271.

42 Ashley, R.K., (1981), “Political Realism and Human Interests,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2, June, p.25.

structure by labelling them “process.” Moreover, neorealism is ahistorical in the sense that it posits immutable laws and an international arena which is unchanging, and unreformable. But what makes Waltz's theory particularly positivist is the way that he uses the history and development of microeconomic theory (which is also modeled on the natural sciences) as an analogy for the development of International Relations into an autonomous field of study.⁴³

In defining the notion of theory, for example, Waltz argues that, “[t]he meaning does not accord with usage in much of traditional political theory...[but]...it does correspond to the definition of the term in the natural sciences and in some of the social sciences, especially economics.”⁴⁴ Belief in the value of economics as a model for theory is a commitment to a rational choice theory of human agency, and, by extension, state action. States are nothing more than *homo economicus* writ large.

By referring to the neorealist conception of international politics as a version of rational choice theory, I mean a theory which explains the rationality of states in terms of a relation between preferences, actions and consequences. The sole aim of agents is to maximize the satisfaction of their preferences with the lowest possible costs. The success of an action depends on there being no other option open to that agent which could bring about a higher degree of utility.⁴⁵ On this model, preferences are systematically ordered and calculable. What is considered “rational action” rests on a conception of social theory based upon three factors: (i) it is a means

43 For a discussion of the historical connection between positivism and economics see Hollis, M., & Nell, E.J., (1975), *Rational Economic Man: A Philosophical Critique of Neo-Classical Economics*. London: Cambridge University Press, pp.47-53.

44 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.33.

45 Hollis, M., (1987), *The Cunning of Reason*. London: Cambridge University Press, p.16.

only analysis; As Gilpin expresses it “rationality only applies to the endeavour, not the outcome”;⁴⁶ (ii) it also assumes a basic egoism; (iii) finally, it posits social atomism in that all individuals act in the same way. It does not matter who they are or what strata of society they come from, or what their social and cultural disposition is. The only difference might be the level of skill with which the atomistic individual tackles the problem of preference satisfaction. Taken together, rational choice theory is said to “have an excellent value in predicting or illuminating significant features of social and political life.”⁴⁷ Thus, Gilpin concludes, “economics provides a highly developed theory of social behaviour, and for this reason economic theory has been applied to an ever increasing range of social and political phenomena.”⁴⁸ But it is not simply a question of whether economic theory has utility for the study of international politics as Gilpin believes, or, whether one can write a book that is coherent from beginning to end based upon principles of economic rationality. The issue is a great deal more profound than this. It concerns what we are as human beings, our way of being if you like. Human beings as minimizers-maximizers, satisficers, wanters and achievers comprises only one aspect of what it is to be human, and a small one at that. The issue, then, is whether neorealism can account for the whole range of state behaviour by basing politics upon categories derived from neo-classical economics.

The motivations underlying the neorealist enterprise are easy to see. The first is the re-establishment of realism as the “international relations paradigm” and, with it, the creation of a new and more scientifically credible basis for establishing a consensus among scholars. In other

46 Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.x.

47 Hindess, B., (1984), “Rational Choice Theory and the Analysis of Political Action,” *Economy and Society*, Vol.13, No.3, p.259.

48 Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.xi.

words, he believes that he has done for International Relations what Immanuel Kant once suggested he had done for philosophy - brought about a Copernican revolution.⁴⁹ Thus, Waltz sees his theory as bringing to a close the difficult search for a general theory of international politics. He offers a scientific basis for the study of international politics and provides scholars with a formula, similar to that used by economic theorists, to establish International Relations as an autonomous field of study.⁵⁰ As Buzan notes approvingly, neorealism helps to establish the “identity of International Relations as a field of study distinct from Political Science.”⁵¹

The Connection Between Positivism and Rationalism

Despite the fanfare which accompanied the publication of Waltz’s formulation of realism, it is a quite unexceptional political theory. It draws on, and develops views about the nature of reality, theory, the relationship between theory and knowledge, about the ends of theory, and about the unity of the sciences, which are part of the general pool of ideas inherited from Descartes and mainstream Enlightenment thought. And while there may be some truth to the claim that it represents an important intellectual advance within the “closed world” of International Relations, if we consider it in light of the broader currents of thought which grace our intellectual table, it proves to be just another species of rationalism in politics.⁵² As such, it tells us more about

49 See Kant, I., (1984), “Preface to the Second Edition,” *The Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Dent, p.14

50 On the comparison which Waltz drew between neorealism and economic theory, see Waltz, K.N., (1991), *op. cit.*

51 Buzan, B., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.3.

52 Martin Wight uses the term “rationalism” to refer to views about international politics which derive from natural law. See Wight, M., (1994), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, pp.13-15. Needless to say, this is not the sense in which I use the term. I have borrowed the term “closed world” from Jim George. See George, J., (1994), *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press.

the nature of International Relations (that neorealism should be regarded as an intellectual advance of some note within that domain), than the creative novelty of neorealism itself. As Michael Oakeshott notes, “[b]y one road or another, by conviction, by its supposed inevitability, by its alleged success, or even quite unreflectively, almost all politics today have become Rationalist or near-Rationalist.”⁵³

Like most other terms in the social sciences, rationalism means different things to different people. In its strict sense, it refers to a particular theory of knowledge common to Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, which employs a deductive method of reasoning as opposed to sense experience to determine the nature of things. In its more popular sense, it refers to an intellectual disposition which is committed to reason as opposed to faith, habit or custom, rejects all metaphysical explanations of the nature of things, believes that the way to new knowledge in politics is through the application of methods derived from the natural sciences (the unity of the sciences), considers maximum efficiency to be the key determinant of success, and judges the value of political outcomes solely by cost-benefit analysis, theories to be tools for solving problems, and holds to an instrumental or technical conception of reason. It is used here to refer to the dominating spirit of the modern age. This is what Cassirer means when he talks of the Cartesian spirit permeating “all fields of knowledge until it dominates not only philosophy, but also literature, morals, political science, and sociology, asserting itself even in the realm of theology to which it imparted a new form.”⁵⁴

53 Oakeshott, M., (1962), “Rationalism in Politics,” in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. New York: Basic Books, p.1.

54 Cassirer, E., (1951), *op. cit.* p.28.

It is important to stress that rationalism, in the sense that I am using the term, is an intellectual attitude or a philosophy for coping with the social and political world. It draws its strength out of the epistemological tradition, and especially out of positivism. Its value lies “in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination.”⁵⁵ It is a kind of bedrock philosophy, an epistemology upon which particular and specialized theories can be built to deal with the difficult and intractable problems of political life. The key to understanding this spirit is its defence of the “sovereignty of technique.”⁵⁶

It is hard to imagine a more rationalist Discipline than International Relations. Neorealists are simply the latest in a long line of theorists who accept the basic assumptions of rationalist thought and develop theories of international politics according to its dictates. Moreover, this is how neorealists see themselves. Keohane, for example, states that “[r]ealist and neorealists theories are avowedly rationalistic.”⁵⁷ Yet there are exceptions to this rule. Hans Morgenthau's first post-war publication, for example, is an anti-rationalist manifesto to rival the most polemical of the twentieth century. What is interesting about Morgenthau, at least from my perspective, is that despite his critique of rationalism, no one has done more to advance its cause. Indeed, the

55 On neorealism as a “problem-solving” theory see Cox, R., (1986), “States, Social Forces, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” in Keohane, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.208-209.

56 The phrase is Oakeshott's. Oakeshott, M., (1962), *op. cit.*, p.11.

57 Keohane, R.O., (1988), “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.4, December, p.381. See also the discussion of rationalism by Alexander Wendt. Wendt, A., (1992), “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol.46, No.2, Spring, pp.391-394.

consensual urge which has been so prominent in the field over the past few decades derives primarily from his work.

In *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, Morgenthau tried to account for what he called the “crisis of our civilization.”⁵⁸ For him, the onset of the Second World War and the inability of liberal internationalism and the science of peace to be able to cope politically and militarily with Fascism highlights a “general decay in the political thinking of the West.” Morgenthau argued that this crisis had its roots in the rationalist mind-set of the modern age.

He used the term rationalism in a similar manner to the way I have used it above. It is a broad term of reference to account for all those philosophical, ethical and political modes of thinking which believe that modern science has the capacity to solve all the social and political problems which confront human beings.⁵⁹ As he expresses it in the preface, the “belief in the redeeming power of science is mistaken.”⁶⁰ By highlighting the weaknesses of rationalism and its faith in science and by stressing the reality of power in politics, Morgenthau sought to lay a new foundations for the study of politics generally, and for International Relations in particular. As Greg Russell points out, “[p]erhaps more than any subsequent publication, this brief and

58 Morgenthau, H.J, (1965), *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.2. This work was originally published in 1946.

59 Morgenthau's attack on “rationalism” is by no means original. The claim that “rationalism” misunderstands human nature, the social world, and politics can be found in various forms in the writings of Herder, the romantics, Hegel, Nietzsche, Weber and others. What is important about this work, however, is that it outlines the basics of his “realist” analysis of international politics.

60 Morgenthau, H.J., (1965), *op. cit.*, p.vi.

contentious work constitutes the core of Morgenthau's contribution to political philosophy and statecraft in the United States.”⁶¹

Central to the task of laying a foundation for a theory of international politics was the need to disentangle the human sciences from the grip of the natural sciences. For Morgenthau, this would break the hold of rationalism on the study of politics and allow for the development of better theories.⁶² Morgenthau is one of the first to point out the extent to which the idealists and utopians accepted the unity of science, arguing that the “principles of scientific reason are always simple, consistent, and abstract; the social world is always complicated, incongruous, and concrete.”⁶³ Instead, the natural sciences are concerned with isolating single causes and gaining a degree of detachment which is an almost impossible task in human affairs.⁶⁴

According to Morgenthau, the rationalist ethos cannot be applied willy-nilly to the social world. That the idealists had believed that such a transposition was possible, was the result of a gross misunderstanding of “the nature of man, the nature of the social world, and the nature of

61 Russell, G., (1990), *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, p.92.

62 Charles Taylor has also been a strong advocate of maintaining this distinction. See Taylor, C., (1972) “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” *Review of Metaphysic*, Vol.25, No.1, September, pp.3-51. Taylor, C., (1980), “Understanding in the Human Sciences,” *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol.34, No.1, September, pp.25-38. Taylor, C., (1981), “Understanding and Explanation in the *Geisteswissenschaften*,” in Holtzman, S.H., & Leich, C.M., (eds.), *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp.191-210. For a general discussion on these issues see Hiley, D.R., Bohman, J.F., & Shusterman, R., (eds.), (1991), *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

63 Morgenthau, H.J., (1967), *op. cit.*, p.10

64 “While the natural sciences have to do with isolated causes operating upon motionless objects, the social sciences deal with interminable chains of causes and effects, each of which, by being a reacting effect, is the cause of another reacting effect, and so forth *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, the links of such a chain are the junctions and crossing points of many other chains, supporting and counteracting each other. The scene of this intricate spectacle is what we call the “social world.” Morgenthau, H.J., (1967), *op. cit.*, pp.129-130.

reason.”⁶⁵ The resultant failure of idealism appeared to Morgenthau to demonstrate the delusive nature of appeals to rationalism in the human domain. The natural sciences and the human sciences were two fundamentally different kinds of science. The application of the former to the latter distorts the unique historical character of the human sciences and the kind of knowledge which is generated by Disciplines which fall within this ambit. Morgenthau concluded that

Politics is an art and not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman. The social world, deaf to the appeal to reason pure and simple, yields only to that intricate combination of moral and material pressures which the art of the statesman creates and maintains.⁶⁶

But insisting on a distinction between the natural and the human sciences is one thing, it is quite another to provide a suitable epistemological basis for the study of politics in the absence of rationalism. This is the question which Morgenthau tried to confront toward the end of the text.⁶⁷ In this regard, Morgenthau's work reflects a tradition of thought that goes back to Max Weber, and before him, to Wilhelm Dilthey.

It is now generally recognized that Dilthey's attempt to ground the human sciences was not wholly successful.⁶⁸ Dilthey never completely extricated himself from the scientism of the historical school and his search for objectively valid knowledge of history is itself a reflection of the rationalist idea of an autonomous subject which stands outside of history. Indeed, Dilthey's quest for “objectively valid knowledge was itself an expression of the scientific ideal of clean, clear data.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10.

⁶⁷ Russell argues that “Morgenthau's intellectual perspective... attempted to provide a foundation for systemic political inquiry...” Russell, G., (1990), *op. cit.*, p.96.

⁶⁸ See Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.192-214.

And this guided his thinking toward the atemporal, spatialized metaphors and images of mental life compatible with scientific thinking.”⁶⁹ Morgenthau inherits this difficulty, although not in the precise form which it appears in Dilthey's work. Whereas the later sought the foundations of the human sciences in the structures of meaning and in the relationship between experience, expression and understanding, Morgenthau, drawing more on Weberian resources, attempts to ground the human sciences in general, and International Relations in particular, in the “lust for power which is common to all men.”⁷⁰

It is precisely at this point that Morgenthau starts to get into trouble. The wooliness of terms like “power” and the metaphysical nature of his foundations clash with the rationalist temper already at work in the Discipline. Moreover, Morgenthau can be criticized on exactly the same grounds as Dilthey. He never really escapes from rationalism, despite the significance of his critique of some of its more rampant manifestations. *Politics Among Nations*, and much of his later writings, are a confusing half-way house between metaphysics and science, between objectivism and interpretivism. His defence of objective laws of international politics and his desire to bring rationality to bear upon international politics goes a long way toward nullifying the emphasis he places on the tragic, the contingent, and the unpredictable in international politics. Moreover, he wants to build a solid foundation for the human sciences, but forgets that the foundational enterprise comes right out of the pages of the natural sciences. In this regard, Palmer's criticism of Dilthey applies equally to Morgenthau. His post-war writings are infused with a tension

69 Palmer, R.E., (1969), *op. cit.*, p.106. See also Gadamer's complaint that there is an “unresolved Cartesianism” in Dilthey's work.

70 Morgenthau, H.J., (1967), *op. cit.*, p.9.

between rationalist and anti-rationalist themes. In the end, this tension gets interpreted by many of his contemporaries, not as a starting point for further reflection on the problem of rationalism, but as a reason for making the Discipline more rationalist. In other words, his failure to deal effectively with the problem of the unity of science led to a strengthening of the rationalist spirit in the Discipline, not to a relaxation of it. This explains Holsti's view that:

While Morgenthau said a great deal about the principles upon which to found a successful foreign policy, his lasting intellectual contribution was to the scientific study of international politics - a paradox, because he rejected much of the research which explicitly adheres to social scientific methodologies.⁷¹

In other words, the Discipline continues down the rationalist road because of Morgenthau, not in spite of him. In the end, Morgenthau's epistemology led neither to good art nor good science.

To a large degree, this explains Waltz's motivations.

This is not to argue, of course, that the Discipline is rationalist and nothing else besides. Morgenthau's statement about the scholar peering over the shoulder of the diplomat is regarded by many as quintessentially hermeneutic (and therefore not rationalist at all).⁷² What I am concerned with, however, is what might be called the "structure" or the organizing mentality of the Discipline, and this is clearly rationalist. This is why Morgenthau is interesting. Morgenthau the interpreter confronts Morgenthau the political scientist and this leaves his work riven with epistemological contradictions. He highlights the difficulties of trying to escape the rationalist mind-set of the Discipline.⁷³ Thus, when I speak of the Discipline as rationalist, I am talking about

71 Holsti, K.J., (1984), "Along the Road to International Theory," *International Journal*, Vol.34, No.2, p.341.

72 Ashley, R.K., (1981), *op. cit.*, pp.204-236.

73 Quite often this tension in Morgenthau's work is mentioned but passed over. Joel Rosenthal for example, argues for Morgenthau "the discernment and interpretation of facts was as important to the social scientist as the gathering of the facts themselves." Rosenthal, J.H., (1991), *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and*

the way it is ordered or structured. That practitioners did not always live up to the principles themselves, or that hermeneutic traces exist in the work of this or that writer, does not invalidate this way of describing International Relations.

The Problem With Rationalism

We can see some of these themes in Robert Keohane's work. He wants to acknowledge that something new has happened in international politics, and that neorealism needs further work to explain regimes and international cooperation.⁷⁴ Neorealism, Keohane tells us, "does not explain change well."⁷⁵ At the same time, like Waltz and Gilpin, he believes in the value of positive science for the study of international politics:

A good structuralist theory generates testable implications about the behaviour on an a priori basis, and, therefore, comes closer than interpretive description to meeting the requirements for scientific knowledge of neopositivist philosophers of science such as Lakatos.⁷⁶

One of the ways Keohane believes change can more adequately be theorized within the neorealist framework is with a loosening up of the rationality assumption. Keohane defines the strict version of the rationality assumption in the following manner.

American Culture in the Nuclear Age. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.3.

74 By calling Keohane a neorealist, I realize that this term does not sit very well with him. However, as I argue later, despite his protestations against being labeled a neorealist, his epistemology is neorealist through and through. On his attempt to disassociate himself from this claim see Keohane, R.O., (1993), "Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge After the Cold War," in Baldwin, D., (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.271-272.

75 Keohane, R.O., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.18 It is not my intention to discuss the copious amounts of literature on the problem of international change. On the issue of change see Buzan, B., & Barry Jones, R.J., (1981), *Change and the Study of International Relations: The Evaded Dimension*. London: Frances Pinter. Vincent, R.J., (1983), "Change and International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, Vol.9, No.1, January, pp.63-70. Czempiel, K-O., & Rosenau, J.N., (1989), *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics in the 1990s*. Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co.

76 Keohane, R.O., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.193.

To say governments act rationally in this sense means that they have consistent, ordered preferences, and that they calculate the costs and benefits of all alternative policies in order to maximize their utility in light both of those preferences and of their perceptions of the nature of reality.⁷⁷

He argues this conception is found in the work of all realists since Thucydides. But he criticizes this view on the grounds that it fails to note that the maximization of utility may not always occur. Due to structural impediment, states may be forced to accept less than the optimal maximization of their utility. Thus, he introduces the concept of bounded rationality. Moreover, in *After Hegemony*, the notion of empathy enters the rationality assumption “in order to see how cooperation in world politics may be affected if actors take into account others' welfare as part of their own sense of well-being.”⁷⁸ This reorientation of the rationality assumption, then, is meant to account for the growing importance of international institutions and issue-based politics and, “attain closer correspondence with reality.”⁷⁹

But on what grounds can Keohane claim to alter the substantive characteristics of the rationality assumption? It is not enough to say that all realists from Thucydides through to Morgenthau and Waltz have not got it quite right. The perceived constancy of rationality over the millennia is part of the reason why a scientific explanation of international politics has been considered possible in the first place. If rationality exhibits changed characteristics, it means we can no longer predict continuity to the degree necessary to maintain scientific status. Unlike Waltz who maintains that an absolutely fixed structure is evident in the international arena and therefore

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁷⁸ Keohane, R.O., (1984), *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.110.

⁷⁹ Keohane, R.O., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.191.



pushes “a vast array of causes down to the unit level,” Keohane wants to make the concept of structure less rigid in order to account for change at the structural level.⁸⁰ But if this is the case, there is a tension between the demands of positivism and the demands of a changing reality. Instead of a greater fit between the two it becomes doubtful whether Keohane does either justice. First, a science of international politics rests on the assumption that universal laws about international politics can be known objectively, yet with the modification of the rationality assumption a strict science becomes impossible. This is because we have no way of determining what further modifications of rationality might, or might not, be possible and what the consequences with regard to future outcomes might be. It is conceivable, for example, that bounded rationality could metamorphosize into some other form of rationality, which in turn could affect the way states behave considerably. Anarchy could become hierarchy if empathetic relations persist. Of course, Keohane can argue that he is the only one in the last two millennia that has discovered that the essence of international rationality is bounded. But this is a little hard to believe. The essential point is that if Keohane is correct, rationality has changed. But to admit this is to admit that a scientific explanation of international politics cannot be sustained. A positivist explanation is built upon the assumption that rationality exhibits transcendental qualities. Keohane cannot have it both ways. He cannot maintain a commitment to scientific explanation derived from a tradition which maintains rationality is constant, while at the same time countenance the possibility of a conception of rationality which reflects the particular social and political world of the late twentieth century and its concern for regimes and issue-politics. To alter the rationality

80 See also Buzan, B., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.5.

assumption substantively casts doubt on the possibility of a scientific explanation. It introduces the very thing scientific explanation works so hard to dispel - uncertainty.

Moreover, his use of the concept of empathy is also instructive. Not only does it violate the canon of realism - a canon he takes as true since time immemorial - that states are only interested in expanding and/or maintaining their *own* power, but as an analytical category it conflicts with the value-neutral claims of positivism. Indeed, if we separate Keohane's actual work from his pledge to neorealism, we can draw no other conclusion than he has entered the world of post-positivism, or at least validates its claims in a spectacular way. Ultimately, he lends support to Ashley's claim that rationality is historically bounded. Thus, he is more post-structuralist than he realizes!

It is also difficult to sustain the claim to value-neutrality. Neorealism clearly has its own set of prior commitments, biases, and prejudices which it smuggles into the framework of its theoretical propositions under the guise of value-neutrality. First, neorealists argue the best theory of international politics is one which marries the principles of realism with a positivist conception of theory. This presupposes a conception of what a good theory is. A good theory is a scientific one. So too, the commitment to technical rationality (as opposed to some other form of rationality) demonstrates the best means of understanding and controlling international processes, insures the progress and sanctity of knowledge, and leads to the conclusion that a "science of international politics" is a good in-and-for-itself. Thus, Gilpin talks in terms of a "faith that a 'science of international politics' will ultimately save mankind."⁸¹ This amounts to saying that in the absence of such a theoretical framework, we shall be severely debilitated in our ability to solve

81 Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.226.

international problems, perhaps increasing the chances of war. Again, as Gilpin puts it: “A scholar of international politics has a responsibility to be true to this faith that the advancement of knowledge will enable us to create a more just and peaceful world.”⁸² Arguably, what this boils down to is that neorealism is a political theory which defends a particular way of life and of doing politics. It is, therefore, as value non-neutral and ideologically motivated as any form of Marxism. More precisely, it is ideology on at least two counts, being both a liberal-capitalist ideology and an ideology of science. This expresses itself as a version of the “good life.” In essence, it fails to recognize its own time-bound nature, and instead of offering a theory of international politics which is universally valid, it offers us a view which is rooted firmly in the modern American psyche. It amounts to saying: *what is good for the United States is good for the world*. As Carr expressed it: “men come easily to believe that arrangements agreeable to themselves are beneficial to others.”⁸³ As I said earlier one need not get involved in the issue of whether this is a worthy or unworthy project. Yet it becomes worrisome in the sense that this sort of explanation deprives theory of the capacity for critical self-reflection.

If the foregoing has any cogency, it seems rather bizarre to talk of science as the handmaiden of the search for “a more just and peaceful world” and to believe this is a value-free undertaking. On the one hand, positivists want to avoid the problems associated with relativism by an appeal to a value-free foundationalism, and, on the other, they have a particular set of values which they wish to enshrine as universally valid.⁸⁴

82 *Ibid.*, pp.226-227.

83 Carr, E.H., (1964), *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*. New York: Harper & Row, p.75.

84 It is interesting here to reflect on Aron's view that what a theory of international politics should offer “...is an understanding of various ideologies...The theory of practice, or praxiology, differs from these ideologies insofar

This has three important consequences. It makes problematic the neorealist claim that a purely objective apprehension of international reality is possible. Second, if all theories and approaches are value-laden they must in some way or other reflect characteristics of the social and political milieu in which they have their genesis. Finally, all theories contain a vision of the “good life.” They are, therefore, historical in a more fundamental sense than the superficial observation of past events. We need only ask neorealists, how long has it been since the study of international politics has deemed it necessary to “solve” international problems with methodological procedures, to get some idea of the hopelessness of trying to step outside of history. It is not surprising, then, that neorealism proves not to be “scientific” in the sense of the term used by the natural sciences.

This is most clearly highlighted in the rather loose and imprecise way that neorealists use the term tradition. Indeed, if we reflect on Gadamer's arguments about the nature of tradition, it makes it extremely difficult to take neorealists seriously when they talk about the importance of a tradition of political realism. It is precisely because of the richness and openness of tradition that neorealists are able to make the claims they do and to reaffirm its continued relevance. But it also points to the contradictory and paradoxical nature of their undertaking. By invoking tradition, they demonstrate they are involved in an on-going and open-ended historical process, yet the static nature of neorealism deprives their tradition of its very essence - its vitality. In effect, neorealism does not take its own tradition seriously: it chops it off at the knees and says “Nothing new will pass here.” Robert Walker makes a similar point, “many contemporary realists have been caught

as it considers them all and determines the full implications of each one.” Aron, R., (1967), “What is a Theory of International Politics?” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.21, No.2, p.204.

trying to defend a tradition that can be traced back to Thucydides while also laying claim to the universalistic categories of modernity.”⁸⁵

It is clear from the foregoing that post-positivists have a different understanding of the subject/object relationship. Rather than objectifying reality by purging it of its subjective aspects, post-positivists speak in terms of intersubjectivity. According to post-positivists, intersubjectivity provides a more realistic way of thinking about human beings and their relationship to the world. For it conveys our participation in the process of understanding; an activity that is lost, or at least smothered, by the subject/object distinction.

We live in an age which is becoming increasingly cognizant of reason's impotence in the face of infirmities which human reason itself has unleashed globally. Post-positivism is nothing more than a timely response to the perceived impotence of a universal, abstract and totalizing conception of reason. Richard Bernstein's comment seems eminently applicable to the current situation in International Relations: “While at first glance the debates may appear to have very different emphases, all of them, in essence, have a single concern and focus: to determine the nature and scope of human rationality.”⁸⁶ Theorists who seek to turn International Relations into a science believe this to be a settled question - reason is universal. Epistemology is about demonstrating the possibility of a universal conception of reason which all individuals have the capacity for, and engage in. Any attempt to understand human beings and their world must begin here, or risk falling into irrationalism and relativism. But at another level, a universal conception

85 Walker, R.B.J., (1993), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.30.

86 Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *op. cit.*, p.2.

of reason is also a theory of standards of agreement - a universal language if you like. On this view, there is no reason why perfect agreement cannot be attained providing we adhere to the methodological procedures which ensure the purity of reason.

It is clear from the last chapter, however, that the rationalist spirit runs right through the Discipline. The study of international politics is, and has always been, a rationalist undertaking. For all the forcefulness of E.H. Carr's critique of utopianism, like most other post-war realists, he maintains the need for a scientific approach to the study of international politics. Indeed, one of his key arguments is that utopianism is not scientific enough. The hallmark of science is, according to Carr, the "hard ruthless analysis of reality."⁸⁷ Good science is oriented towards understanding the world as it is, and as it appears to the senses, not governed by what ought to be the case if all human beings were capable of moral perfection. The scientific ethos is there at the Discipline's inception. It is as much a part of the Discipline's founding act, and goes hand in hand with the desire to study war and peace in a systematic way. By the same token, the debate between the so-called traditionalists and the behaviourists revolved around precisely the same issue. According to the latter, the traditionalists failed to understand the proper meaning of a science of international politics. Thus, they repeated Carr's criticism of the utopians.

What we have witnessed in theoretical debates of the last seventy years, then, is a continuous struggle and questioning over the place, definition, and quality of science in the study of international politics. From this perspective, the dissection of the history of the Discipline into

87 Carr, E.H., (1964), *op. cit.*, p.10.

three major debates seems nonsensical, and of relatively little heuristic value. For it fundamentally obscures the continuity in the rationalist core of International Relations.⁸⁸

It is a great pity that the field has been fixated and bogged down in this issue. The Discipline's love affair with the natural sciences has stifled the study of international politics, depriving the field of new and potentially more interesting ways of seeing, creating, and doing theory. Rationalist approaches may have something to offer the study of international politics. But theory by scientific method is limited: "strictly speaking, method is incapable of revealing new truth; it renders explicit the kind of truth already implicit in the method."⁸⁹ Just as there is no liberal or marxist chemical experiments, so too, we cannot understand human beings and their relationship to the world solely by scientific and rationalist means. What this suggests is that International Relations is underpinned by a way of thinking which is severely one-sided.

Conclusion

There is a very great irony in the neorealist project. Here is a set of arguments designed to achieve and maintain a consensus on the nature, scope and character of the field, yet no single theoretical development this century has done more to divide theorists than this one. By any standard of evaluation, the reliance on positivism as a means of achieving a consensus must be judged a failure. But the need for consensus is justified by other intellectual arguments. Notably, the idea that international politics takes place in a unique domain, distinct from domestic politics.

88 For a critique of the view that the history of International Relations can be told in terms of three major debates see Schmidt, B.C., (1994), "The Historiography of Academic International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, Vol.20, No.4, October, p.351.

89 Palmer, R.E., (1969), *op. cit.*, p.165.

But I think there are problems with this assumption as well and I explore these in the next chapter..

CHAPTER THREE

THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM: THE AUTONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Is there a worthwhile free-standing body of 'international theory' from which both appropriate questions and convincing answers can be drawn, or should 'international relations theory' be seen as one dimension of a wider project of political and social theory, drawing both its coherence and legitimacy from this context?

Chris Brown

Introduction

According to defenders of the Discipline, International Relations is a distinct intellectual realm, with its own parameters, theoretical framework, traditions, and customs. This view rejects the idea that the human sciences are a multidisciplinary enterprise and denies the possibility that the division of the human sciences into distinctive hegemonic enclaves is problematic. I use the terms “the autonomy of International Relations” and “disciplinary autonomy” to convey this sense of intellectual independence.

Three arguments are often put forward to justify the autonomy of International Relations. The first is Martin Wight’s argument about survival. The second has to do with the problem of war. The third concerns the inherent differences between international and domestic politics. I argue that none of these arguments warrant the conclusion that International Relations is, in fact, an autonomous field of study. That defenders of the Discipline believe so, can, I think, easily be explained by the desire to achieve a general consensus on the nature, scope, and character of the field.

I divide this chapter into four parts. First, I look at the “state of nature” in Hobbes. Second, I discuss the distinction between international and domestic politics. In the third section, I look at why Kenneth Waltz rejects the tradition of political philosophy as a basis for the Discipline on the grounds that it does not aid consensus. And, in the final part, I examine the arguments which are used to justify the autonomy of the Discipline. I argue that they are not convincing and conclude that the “consensual urge” is partly the cause of the marginalization of the tradition of political philosophy.

Hobbes and the State of Nature

The perception that international politics is fundamentally different to domestic politics goes back at least to Thomas Hobbes.¹ He is the first “modern” thinker to consider the political significance of a world divided into independent sovereign states. Despite noting this distinction, however, he is more concerned with understanding the conditions necessary for political stability within the state. He is only indirectly interested in international politics. But, as Hedley Bull notes, “we are entitled to infer that all of what Hobbes says about the life of individual men (sic) in the state of nature may be read as a description of the condition of states in relation to one another.”²

Hobbes's political theory is concerned essentially with the problem of order. Motivated by the chaos and disorder of the English civil war, Hobbes sees the central question as: What are the conditions necessary for the establishment and maintenance of political order? Hobbes answers this question with reference to a theory of human nature, a theory of sovereign authority, and a theory of the conditions of political obligation. While it is not necessary to discuss his theory in its entirety, Hobbes' “analysis of the state of nature remains the defining feature of realist thought.”³

The idea of a “state of nature” is employed to show why rational individuals would prefer to live under a supreme power than live in a world without order. According to Hobbes, the state of nature is a state of misery and hardship in which individuals continually struggle for survival.

1 Baruch Spinoza should not be forgotten here. He, like Hobbes, also acknowledged the existence of world divided into sovereign states. Parkinson argues that the differences between the two “were slight” and stemmed from their different social, political and religious backgrounds. See Parkinson, F., (1977), *The Philosophy of International Relations: A Study in the History of Thought*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, p.37.

2 Bull, H., (1981), “Hobbes and the International Anarchy,” *Social Research*, Vol.48, No.4, Winter, pp.720-721.

3 Smith, M., (1986), *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.13.

Hobbes calls this a “Warre of every one against every one.”⁴ In the state of nature, individuals tyrannize their fellows and pillage and plunder each others goods. The natural state is, then, a state of mutual weakness. Even the strongest and most powerful individuals are incapable of completely securing themselves against attack. Individuals in the state of nature live continually in fear of dying violently. There is a “continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁵ In other words, anarchy and lawlessness prevail. In this situation, there is no time for leisure or social communion. It is spent perpetually trying to outwit competitors in order to stay alive. But given Hobbes' rather pessimistic conception of human nature, which stresses self-interest above all other motives, under what conditions would individuals trust each other enough to give up their natural right to everything so that their long term survival could be guaranteed? Part of Hobbes's answer is summarized by David Held.

If individuals surrender their rights by transferring them to a powerful authority which can force them to keep their promises and covenants, then an effective and legitimate private and public sphere, society and state can be formed. Thus the social contract consists in individuals handing over their rights of self-government to a single authority - thereafter authorized to act on their behalf - on the condition that every individual does the same.⁶

Only in this way can the miseries and horrors of the state of nature be transcended and the conditions necessary for human flourishing be created.

4 For a fuller account of the state of nature as a state of war see Hobbes, T., (1985), *Leviathan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.183-188.

5 *Ibid.*, p.186.

6 Held, D., (1990), “Central Perspectives on the Modern State,” in Held, D., et. al., *States and Societies*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.6. For a more detailed analysis see Hampton, J., (1988), *Hobbes and the Social Contract Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hobbes is the first to put forward the so-called “domestic analogy”.⁷ Just as a state of war prevails among individuals in the state of nature, so too a state of war prevails amongst independent states in the international arena. As he puts it in a famous passage from *Leviathan*:

Kings, and Persons of Sovereigne authority, *because of their Independency*, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their Forts, Garrisons and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdomes; and continual Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of War.⁸

But it is not part of Hobbes's theory that a contract can be struck between individual states in the international arena so that the anarchy of the international system can be overcome. Hobbes never really confronts the Kantian question why states should transcend the international state of nature through an appeal to a global contract. He only says that the international state of nature is less disagreeable and miserable than the domestic one. Despite this, it is clear that, for Hobbes, the state is the only possible arena for the serious conduct of political life.

International Anarchy and Domestic Hierarchy

To the extent that defenders of the Discipline accept this distinction, they follow in the footsteps of Hobbes, believing that states are in a posture of war with each other and that this parallels the state of nature. And, like him, they perceive a radical difference between international and domestic politics. Robert Gilpin, for example, repeats Hobbes's comment to the Second Earl of Devonshire that “it's a jungle out there” as a way of pointing both to the anarchical nature of the

7 See Hedley Bull's definition of the “domestic analogy” in Bull, H., (1966), “Security and Anarchy in International Relations,” in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.) *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.35-50 See also Suganami, H., (1986), “Reflections on the Domestic Analogy: The Case of Bull, Beitz, and Linklater,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.12, No.2, April, pp.145-158.

8 Hobbes, T., (1985), *op. cit.*, pp.187-188. The italics are mine.

international arena and the fundamental difference between domestic and international politics.⁹ In similar fashion, Hedley Bull argues that “Hobbes's contribution to the Realist tradition was to provide a rigorously systematic account of the logic of relations among independent powers that find themselves in a situation of anarchy.”¹⁰

So important is the concept of anarchy to this understanding of the character of international politics that Richard Ashley has recently described it “as a foundational truth, a self-evident limit that virtually defines the compass of imaginable possibility.”¹¹ It should be stressed, however, that while defenders of the Discipline agree in principle with Hobbes, they generally regard his views more as a logical starting point for reflection on the causes of war among sovereign states, than a descriptively accurate interpretation of the contemporary world. There is, therefore, a tendency in contemporary realist scholarship to shy away from treating international politics as simply a war of all against all. As Hedley Bull points out, states neither exhaust their energies in securing themselves to such a degree that life is nasty, brutish and short; nor are they subject to violent attack in quite the same way that individuals in a state of nature are.¹² Thus, to think of international politics as being in a state of war does not necessarily mean that states are always locked in mortal combat, only that “over a period of time they have a known disposition

9 Gilpin, R., (1986), “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.304.

10 Bull, H., (1981), *op. cit.*, pp.720-721.

11 Ashley, R.K., (1988), “Untying the Sovereign State: A Double Reading of the Anarchy Problematique,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.17, No.2, Summer, p.227.

12 Bull, H., (1977), *The Anarchical Society*. London: Macmillan, pp.46-51. Stanley Hoffmann also makes this point. See Hoffmann, S., (1981), *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, p.14.

to fight.”¹³

Defenders of the Discipline use the term anarchy then, to describe the nature of international politics. The international system is an anarchical system.¹⁴ There is, as William Fox suggests, “an absence of government.”¹⁵ Anarchy, in this sense, is used to describe a political domain bereft of a central body or power capable of exercising absolute control over the entire system. Rather, there are a multiplicity of power centres, “each of which claims the right to take justice into its own hands and to be the sole arbiter of the decision to fight or not to fight.”¹⁶ In other words, states are autonomous and sovereign. They determine their own fate, make their own decisions, and control a specific territory and its inhabitants. The state must protect its citizens and their property.¹⁷ “The primary external function of the state is to protect the property rights and personal security of its members vis-a-vis other states.”¹⁸ First and foremost, the state is a protection agency. Or, as Charles Tilly suggests, the state is “a protection racket”.¹⁹ This explains

13 Bull, H., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.722. See also Bull, H., (1966), “Society and Anarchy in International Relations,” in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.) *op. cit.* Waltz makes a similar point. To say that the state of nature is a state of war “is meant not in the sense that war constantly occurs but in the sense that, with each state deciding for itself whether or not to use force, war may break out at any time.” Waltz, K.N., (1979), *Theory of international Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, p.102.

14 Art and Jervis refer to this as the “anarchical *environment* of international relations.” See Art, R., & Jervis, R., (1986), *International Politics*. 2nd edition. Boston: Little Brown, p.1 The italics are mine.

15 Cited in Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.88.

16 Aron, R., (1973), *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*. An abridged Version. New York: Anchor Press, p.9.

17 This includes protection against harm from other citizens, as well as protection against external threats.

18 Gilpin, R., (1981), *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.17.

19 Tilly, C., (1986), “War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime,” in Evans, P., Reuschmeyer, D., & Skocpol, L.T., (eds.), *Bringing the State Back in*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.169.

why defenders of the Discipline think that military power is of such vital importance to all states. States seek to increase their power relative to their neighbours in order to make themselves feel safer at home. Accordingly, cheating, deception, posturing, the making and breaking of treaties, diplomacy, and war become acceptable instruments of national policy. The international arena rewards only those states which help themselves.

This makes the international arena a very unstable and unpredictable environment, if not inherently war-prone, as states clash in the furtherance of their individual aims. Moral considerations are ambiguous here. Some realists, following Hobbes, argue that morality has no place in relations between states. The Melians found this out 2,500 thousand years ago. A state which places morality above power is a state which may as well fall on its own sword. Others, however, think of morality as simply another instrument of national policy, like diplomacy and war. In both views, the idea that morality has meaning in-and-for-itself is rejected.

All this is in sharp contrast to the internal life of the state. The crucial difference between international politics and domestic politics is, according to defenders of the Discipline, the existence of a legitimate authority with the capacity to rule over the citizenry. Domestic politics is hierarchically ordered and highly organized. Within this framework, individuals develop their talents and skills, amass wealth, pursue knowledge, improve their moral character, interact with each other, and pursue the sciences. This is a realm of rights and duties, obligation, consent, freedom, order and belonging. Consequently, domestic political life exhibits a broad identity of interests among its citizens. It has a *res publica*.²⁰ Waltz summarizes the distinction in the

20 Donelan, M., (1978), "The Political Theorists and International Theory," in Donelan, M., (ed.), *The Reason of States: A Study in International Political Theory*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.77.

following way:

National politics is the realm of authority, of administration, and of law. International politics is the realm of power, of struggle, and of accommodation. The international realm is preeminently a political one. The national realm is variously described as being hierarchic, vertical, centralized, heterogeneous, directed, and contrived; the international realm as being anarchic, horizontal, decentralized, homogeneous, undirected, and mutually adaptive.²¹

Kenneth Waltz and Political Philosophy

According to defenders of the Discipline, then, the anarchy/hierarchy distinction justifies the establishment of International Relations as an autonomous field of study. Positivism plays an important role here. One of the key tenets of positivism is the need to isolate the realm under scrutiny. International Relations is amenable to scientific treatment precisely because the international arena can be roped off from domestic affairs. Moreover, a strong belief in the immutability of international politics also helps to reinforce the commitment to a scientific understanding of theory.

Positivism is not something which is important for its own sake, however. What it seemed to offer was a path to maturity for a fledgling and youthful field; a path which would help cement International Relations solidly within the human sciences and bestow upon it a degree of respectability and integrity which many of the field's early theorists thought was lacking. In this sense, positivism was supposed to do for the study of international politics what rational choice theory did for economics.

Two alternative approaches to the problem of achieving disciplinary autonomy can be found in the literature. The first approach employs the tradition of political thought. The second,

²¹ See Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.113.

prioritizes positivism.²² Interestingly, Kenneth Waltz has tried both approaches. It is hard to find a theorist who pursues the goal of autonomy more vigorously than Kenneth Waltz. He is a consummate synthesizer and interpreter of the intellectual currents within the field, as well as an admirable representative of the positions I am trying to articulate here. In an essay which appears around the time of the publication of *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz probes the question of whether or not the tradition of political thought has anything important to say to students of international politics. For him, the writings of the political philosophers contain an enormous reservoir of insights into the nature of international politics.²³

Waltz makes four interrelated arguments here. The first concerns the short-comings of induction as a methodology for studying international politics. Broadly speaking, induction is a methodological procedure which seeks to verify the validity of a general law by observing particular instances. It “is a belief that truth is won and explanation achieved through the accumulation of more and more data and the examination of more and more cases.”²⁴ For Waltz,

22 Although the positivists do not quite see it this way. As Richard Cox puts it, “[p]olitical philosophy is the pre-scientific precursor of political science, that political science is theoretical in the modern sense of that term, and that modern theory, as understood by modern science, is potentially superior in its understanding of political phenomena to the kind of understanding characteristic of political philosophy.” Cox, R., (1966), “The Role of Political Philosophy in the Theory of International Relations,” *Social Research*, Vol.28, No.3, Autumn, p.261.

23 Waltz, K.N., (1959), “Political Philosophy and the Study of International Relations,” in Fox, W.T.R., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.51-68. Arnold Wolfers has also made this argument. According to him, the field of international politics should be grounded in what the political philosophers of the past have said about international relations. “Analyzes of national conduct by men (the political philosophers) of keen insight into human behaviour and wide experience in the affairs of the political world cannot fail to be valuable to anyone seeking to understand what makes the clock tick in International Relations.” Wolfers, A., (1956), “Political Theory and International Relations,” in Wolfers, A., & Martin, L.W., (eds.), *The Anglo-American Tradition in Foreign Affairs: Readings from Thomas More to Woodrow Wilson*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.ix-xxvii. See also Hoffmann, S., (1960), “International Relations as a Discipline,” in *Contemporary Theory in International Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, pp.1-2

24 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.3.

theorizing requires more than the simple piling up of data. Different scholars read data differently, with no way of being certain that the truth is reached. In other words, induction offers defenders of the Discipline a weak and unsatisfactory foundation.²⁵

The second is that the political philosophers, like contemporary students of international politics, were concerned with the “problem of identifying and achieving the conditions of peace, a problem that plagues man (sic) and bedevils the student of international politics, and has, especially in periods of crisis, bedeviled political philosophers as well.”²⁶ For this reason, the tradition of political thought is “the most direct route to the construction of international-political theory.”²⁷ Toward this end, Waltz adopts a threefold categorization of the writings of the political philosophers, based upon their respective understandings and discussions of the cases of war. The main thrust of Waltz's argument is that the causes of war can be located either in the failings of human nature, the particular domestic organization of the state, or in the anarchy of the international state-system; a system devoid of any higher authority capable of exercising power legitimately at a global level. For him, the last account is the most adequate because it understands conflict as arising from a general thirst and competition for power among sovereign states.

These three “images” allow a comparison and a critical evaluation of the contributions of their work to the study of international politics. His final argument follows on from this.

The argument is...that more frequent and more systematic concern by the student of international relations with the classics of political philosophy can help him to

25 Waltz is keen to point out, however, that while empiricism has its limits, data is an important tool in the study of international politics. However, without a theory to draw inferences from the data, induction has limited scope.

26 Waltz, K.N., (1959), *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.61.

27 *Ibid.*, p.62

order and comprehend the data with which he must work and to improve his critical judgement of statements of cause and interrelation. The function of political philosophy is to help to form, sharpen, and critically ground the fundamental understandings that we all build up somehow in our minds.²⁸

Waltz's interest in political philosophy is governed by a range of assumptions about the nature of international politics. Most importantly, that the causes of war and the conditions of peace exhaust the subject matter of international politics. In other words, what is relevant in the tradition of political thought are those themes which fall within the parameters of the so-called realist paradigm. In this sense, political philosophy is regarded as the servant of International Relations and called upon to facilitate the interests of a Discipline seeking to develop an independent body of international political theory. This is a thoroughly utilitarian and instrumental appropriation of political philosophy. Waltz makes no secret of this. What counts is establishing the "usefulness" of political philosophy. However, according to Waltz, the value of political philosophy to the study of international politics is made problematic by the diversity of arguments and the variety of philosophical opinions evident in the tradition. As he puts it, the "answers given by the early political philosophers to the question as to why wars recur, are bewildering in their variety and contradictory qualities."²⁹ The tradition offers no clear criteria to resolve the differences between the "three images."³⁰ For Waltz, the tradition can only be made "useful" if order and systematicity are brought to this diversity. The metaphor of the three images, then, is Waltz's way of making the relevant insights of political thought subject to methodology.

28 *Ibid.*, p.67.

29 *Ibid.*, p.62.

30 We can see here Waltz's early attitude towards theoretical pluralism and the problem of relativism.

Despite this rather unorthodox appropriation of the tradition, an appropriation which Waltz himself calls “eclectic,” his concern with the causes of war and the conditions of peace is undoubtedly normative. Yet it is hard to take this sort of argument seriously. The subordination of considerations of morality to those of power politics, the utilitarian attitude to the tradition, the lack of interest in the works of living moral philosophers, the inattention to other important normative concerns such as international justice, human rights, and poverty, and the single-mindedness with which he pursues the goal of autonomy, deprives normative theory of much of its substantive content. And given that the tradition of political thought is unabashedly normative, it takes a leap of faith to believe that he takes the normative content of political theory seriously. Under these circumstances, it is hard not to draw the conclusion that Waltz pays little more than lip-service to the tradition of political thought.³¹

On the question of the use of methodological or typological devices in conjunction with the tradition of political thought, it appears that Waltz is arguing that while international politics is normatively oriented (solving the problem of war and understanding the conditions of peace), but that the utilization of a particular method (the three images) does not in anyway compromise the normative content of this project. Yet, there is very something odd about making the tradition of political thought conform to the canons of modern science, however immaturely defined this might be in Waltz's early work. This affects profoundly the normative content of the subject matter of international politics by demanding that it conform to, and be judged by, a mode of thinking which

31 Indeed, it has to be said that Waltz's understanding of the tradition of political thought/political philosophy is, to say the least, quite bizarre. In a recent interview, he suggests that “[t]here is very little theory in political philosophy, but it's great literature.” See Halliday, F., & Rosenberg, J., (1998), “Interview with Ken Waltz,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.24, No.3, July, p.372.

is alien to it. Normative forms of theory have no validity on their own terms, and cannot tell us anything (the bewildering variety of answers problem) without the methodological tools of modern social sciences. Such a view only serves to further degrade the value of normative theory.

I argued earlier that two options for achieving disciplinary autonomy can be found in the literature. The first is that disciplinary autonomy can be achieved by a selective and judicious reading of the tradition of political thought. Presumably, once the tradition has been mined for “insights” into the causes of war and the conditions of peace and a general theory established, the tradition becomes redundant and of no further use, except perhaps to future historians of the field.³² Richard Cox makes this point. Despite their apparent defence of the tradition of political thought, Waltz and others all begin from the premise that a separate theory is possible and necessary...[and that]...whatever its particular form, a general theory of international politics will essentially be independent of political philosophy.”³³

But not everybody was happy with the degree of progress being made on this problem. In 1952, for example, Kenneth Thompson lamented that “[n]o serious student would presume to claim that the study of international politics had arrived at the stage of an independent academic discipline.”³⁴ Seven years later, William Fox noted that “[t]here is no body of propositions

32 According to Quincy Wright, “a general theory of international relations means a comprehensive, comprehensible, coherent, and self-correcting body of knowledge contributing to the understanding, the prediction, the evaluation, and the control of relations among states and of the conditions of the world.” Cited in Dougherty, J.E., & Pfaltzgraff, R.L., jr., (1971), *Contending Theories of International Relations*. New York: J.B. Lippincott Co. p.29.

33 Cox, R., (1962), *op. cit.*, pp.261-262.

34 Thompson, K.W., (1952), “The Study of International Relations: A Survey of Trends and Developments,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol.14, No.4, October, p.433. A few years earlier William Fox argued that “whether international relations has yet arrived as a separate academic discipline is probably as much a matter of debate in 1949 as in 1929.” Fox, W.T.R., (1949), “Interwar International Relations Research: The American Experience,”

conventionally called ‘international relations theory’ in the sense that there is economic theory.”³⁵

In the next decade, and in the same year that Martin Wight published his famous essay defending the free-standing nature of international political theory, Charles McClelland commented that:

The vigorous development in research stimulated the hope that a coherent and unified discipline soon would emerge. We have been somewhat disappointed in these expectations. It is still troublesome to explain clearly how international relations fits in among the older fields of the social sciences. A good part of the difficulty can be laid at the doorstep of international relations theory.³⁶

Even in the late seventies Trevor Taylor argued that “despite five decades of effort, International Relations has not made substantial [theoretical] advances.” He tried to account for this lacuna in international politics theory by arguing the need “to stress the imagination and thought shown so far rather than the failure to achieve ultimate success.”³⁷

There are a number of reasons why international political theory seemed to develop so slowly for these scholars. The discovery of general laws of the behaviour of states proved more difficult than had first been thought. There had been a lack of agreement over the definition of term science.³⁸ Finally, the question of whether or not International Relations was indeed capable of achieving autonomy was still hotly debated among theorists, especially the functionalists and neofunctionalists. Indeed, the only thing that the early post-war theorists of international politics

World Politics, Vol.2, No.1, October, p.79.

35 Fox, W.T.R., (1959), *Theoretical Aspects of International Relations*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, p.33.

36 McClelland, C., (1966), *Theory and the International System*. New York: Macmillan, pp.1-2. See also Thompson, K.W., (1952), *op. cit.*, p.433.

37 Taylor, T., (1979), “Introduction: The Nature of International Relations,” in Taylor, T., (ed.), *Approaches and Theory in International Relations*. London: Longman, p.15.

38 We need only compare the different meaning the term had for Hans Morgenthau and his behaviourist critics.

seemed to agree on is that the key which would unlock the disciplinary puzzle is a theoretical key, and even here empiricist dissenters could be found. But it never once occurred to them that they were wasting their time. If anything, it steeled their resolve further. Despite setbacks and disappointments, then, the “consensual urge” remained a prominent feature of the theory literature of the period.

The application of positivism to the problem of disciplinary autonomy is an explicit critique of the view that an autonomous Discipline can be established *via* the tradition of political thought. It is a response to the perceived failure of the tradition of political thought to provide the basis for a general theory of international politics and an autonomous Discipline.

Waltz clearly lost faith in the ability of the tradition of political thought to bring about the desired result sometime during the 1960s and early 1970s. For him, it became clear that it could never produce a general theory of international politics. Its concepts were far too woolly and metaphysical. In this sense, his recent work is essentially a rejection of his earlier position. Positivism is now seen as the most appropriate means to ground the study of international politics and establish the Discipline as an autonomous field of study. Thus, Barry Buzan claims that the great achievement of Waltz's new science of international politics is that it establishes “the identity of International Relations as a field of study distinct from political science.”³⁹ In other words, Waltz's “Copernican revolution” is simply another name for a solution to the problem of how to develop International Relations into an autonomous social science.

Waltz's positivist ‘turn’ is clearly animated by the same goal which led him to defend the

39 Buzan, B., (1989), “System, Structure, and Units: Reconstructing Waltz's Theory of International Politics.” Paper presented to the British/International Studies Association, March, p.3.

usefulness of political philosophy in 1959; that is, the need to establish International Relations as an autonomous and independent field of study. What has changed in the intervening years is the method by which this goal would be achieved. What stands out in Waltz's writings is the intensity of the commitment to this idea of autonomy. Indeed, he approaches this problem, not with an open mind which might have countenanced the possibility that the goal of disciplinary autonomy may not be possible or even desirable, but rather, with an attitude which says, in effect, this is what is necessary for International Relations. The only issue is how this can most convincingly and most easily be established. The methods of the natural sciences are simply a better way to achieve this autonomy and gain access to systematic theoretical knowledge of international politics.

What is distinctive about the post-war study of international politics in North America is not just the dominance of realism, then, but also the single-mindedness with which its specialists have devoted themselves to the goal of perfecting a rationalist approach to international politics. The question concerning the value of the tradition of political philosophy for the study of international politics and the desire to develop International Relations into an autonomous social science with a professional identity reflect this commitment. The question is whether or not it is something of a Faustian bargain to sacrifice the tradition of political philosophy on the alter of an autonomous Discipline. The price might be worth paying if there was something credible about the arguments used to justify the need for an autonomous Discipline. Arguably, there is little reason to be convinced by any of them.

International Relations: An Autonomous Discipline?

Three well-known arguments are often used by defenders of the Discipline to support their claim that International Relations is an autonomous field of study. The first is that there is a natural

recalcitrance to international politics being theorized about. International Relations is autonomous because the principles of traditional political theory do not apply. Martin Wight has popularized this argument. Second, it is argued that International Relations has a distinct identity because of its concern with war, conflict and endemic global violence; a concern which receives, and has always received, “inadequate” attention elsewhere in political science. Third, it may be argued that the autonomy of International Relations, and the possibility of consensus within it, is justified by the particular qualities of the domain in which relations between sovereign states take place. I examine each of these in turn.

(a) International Relations: A Domain Without a Political Theory

For Wight, political theory is a tradition of speculation about the state.⁴⁰ But no comparable tradition of international theory exists. International theory has no texts to rival Plato's *Republic*, Augustine's *City of God*, or Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*.

It is easy to recognize political theory, but not so easy to recognize international theory, and one might suspect that historically there was no such thing. There is no obvious tradition of inquiry, or body of theory or speculation, about the relations between state, and about the problems of obligations between states in the absence of government.⁴¹

What there is of international theory “is scattered, unsystematic and mostly inaccessible to the layman. Moreover, it is largely repellent and tractable in form.”⁴² There are, however, four possible candidates for the existence of a tradition of international theory to rival political theory.

40 Wight, M., (1966), “Why is There no International Theory?” in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.), *op. cit.*

41 Wight, M., (1994), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, p.1.

42 Wight, M., (1966), *op. cit.*, p.20. In the lectures, he writes that, “it is not the absence of the literature which is the difficulty...but its scatteredness.” See Wight, M., (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.3-4.

But on close inspection none of these prove to be adequate. According to Wight, the writings of the irenists are merely “curiosities of political literature.”⁴³ The so-called Machiavellians are “inaccessible except to the scholar.”⁴⁴ The writings of statesmen and diplomats also prove to be unacceptable. Wight never really says why, except for a reference to the historical distortions in the memoirs of Bismarck. One suspects that such men as Bismarck, Richelieu, and Churchill are men of “practical skills and pragmatical reason” and their memoirs, documents, and letters are more relevant to the study of foreign policy than to the theory of international politics.⁴⁵ The scattered essays of the political philosophers (Hume, Rousseau, Kant) on international politics come closest to meeting the requirements of a tradition of international political theory. However, international political theory is “at the margins of their activities.”⁴⁶

The lack of a classical tradition leaves international theory in a sorry state of affairs. According to Wight, “it can be argued that international theory is marked, not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty.”⁴⁷ However, the lack of crucial texts is not enough to account for the extent of the “intellectual and moral poverty” which haunts international theory. Wight thinks that the advent of the sovereign state and the Enlightenment doctrine of progress have been key factors in the intellectual impoverishment of international theory.

The emergence of the modern sovereign state out of the religious wars of the seventeenth

43 Wight, M., (1966), *op. cit.*, p.19.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Wight does make this point in his most recent publication. See Wight, M., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.4.

46 Wight, M., (1966), *op. cit.*, p.20.

47 *Ibid.*

century was an important turning point in western political experience. With it came two related ideas. The first was that every individual should enjoy the protection of a state. The second was that the state was the only organization capable of representing the interests of individuals in the international arena. The twin principles of *rex est imperator in regno suo* and *superiorum non recognoscens* also set in motion a reorientation of political loyalties away from God, the Church, and the Great Chain of Being, and toward the secular authority of kings and princes.⁴⁸ Individuals began to define themselves territorially and anthropomorphically. Political energies became focused on the state itself, rather than on relations between them. International politics came to be seen as the ragged edge of domestic politics.

International theory can be discerned existing dimly, obscured and moreover partitioned, partly on the fringe or margin of ordinary political philosophy and partly in the province of international law. This is owing to a historical accident, due ultimately to the cultural cleavage in Western society that occurred in the sixteenth century.⁴⁹

The emergence of the sovereign state, then, sets in stone the distinction between political theory and international theory and leads to the impoverishment of the latter in the process. The only alternative to this arrangement for Wight is to view the emergence of the sovereign state as a “temporary historical phase,” which will soon be superseded by a world-state or world government. This would maximize the scope of political theory. But such a move is regarded by Wight (and all realists) as both counter-intuitive and a danger to human freedom. On the contrary,

48 John Herz refers to the process by which the king became the sole political authority in his realm and was not required to recognize any superior authority (i.e., the Church) to his/her own as “a transition from medieval hierarchism to modern compartmentalized sovereignties.” See Herz, J., (1957), “Rise and Demise of the Territorial State,” *World Politics*, Vol.9, No.4, July, p.475.

49 Wight, M., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.1

the “division of mankind into many states is the guarantee of freedom.”⁵⁰ In other words, a world-state leads to tyranny. Moreover, this presupposes a notion of historical progress. But international politics cannot be understood progressively.⁵¹ It is a “realm of recurrence and repetition; it is the field in which political action is most regularly necessitous.”⁵²

Political theory, on the other hand, is capable of being understood progressively. The language of political theory is a language appropriate to control over the social environment.⁵³ No such formalized control exists in the international system.⁵⁴ The doctrine of progress is not, therefore, applicable to the study of international politics. This leads Wight to conclude that there is “a kind of recalcitrance to international politics being theorized about.”⁵⁵ But if this is so, then what can legitimately be called international theory?

The emergence of the sovereign state dictates what international theory must be concerned with. International politics is concerned with the survival of states in a hostile and unregulated

50 Wight, M., (1966), *op. cit.*, p.23.

51 Wight's disbelief in the idea of progress stems from two sources, his Christian pessimism and his dislike for the Kantian (revolutionism) tradition. On this see Bull, H., (1976), “Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations,” in *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol.2, pp.108-109. It also explains his abiding interest in Thucydides and the distant past. For what took place at that time was “as pertinent to his purpose as those of the present or of the recent past.” See Porter, B., (1978), “Patterns of Thought and Practice: Martin Wight's ‘International Theory’,” in Donelan, M., (ed.), *The Reason of State: A Study in International Political Theory*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.69.

52 Wight, M., (1966), *Ibid.*, p.26. See also Wight, M., (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.3-4.

53 Wight seems to conceive of political theory in wholly instrumental terms. This is a highly debatable interpretation of the nature of political theory. See Brown, C., (1994), *International Theory: New Normative Approaches*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.7.

54 The only mechanism capable of generating some control over the international environment is the balance of power. On this see Wight, M., (1973) “The Balance of Power and International Order,” in James, A., (ed.), *The Bases of International Order: Essays in Honour of C.A.W. Manning*. London: Oxford University Press, pp.85-115. And, more recently, Wight, M., (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.164-180.

55 Wight, M., (1966), *op. cit.*, p.32.

environment. International theory is the theory of survival. It concerns “national existence and national extinction.”⁵⁶ The *raison d’etre* of the state is to ensure the survival of itself and its citizens and provide an environment in which the latter are able to flourish. In the words of another prominent realist, “[t]he survival motive is taken as the ground of action in a world where the security of states is not assured.”⁵⁷

Political theory refers to, and is concerned with, the “good life.” Wight never defines precisely what he means by the “good life.” All that he says is that it is instrumental control of the social environment. Just how much or how little control is conducive to the “good life” is an issue which Wight does not discuss. Nor does he suggest just what kind of substantive values should be included in the “good life.” Indeed, one can argue that this omission is itself symptomatic of the difficulties which defenders of the Discipline have had in dealing with normative concerns. All that can be discerned from Wight's remarks is that the “good life” is co-extensive with the domestic political order, but the question of which kind of domestic political order remains opaque. Because political theory concerns the “good life,” it has no place in the study of international politics. International political theory is, and can only be, a theory of survival.

Chris Brown argues that Wight is wrong for three reasons.⁵⁸ First, he mischaracterizes political theory. If political theory is understood as speculation about the state, then it may well make sense to talk about international theory as a discourse of relations between states running parallel to political theory. But if political theory is recast in terms of, say, the search for justice,

56 *Ibid.*, p.32.

57 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.92.

58 Brown, C., (1994), *op. cit.*

then the distinction between political theory and international theory would no longer be a tenable one. “The key point is that a focus on justice - as opposed to the state - produces a very different, and richer, account of international theory.”⁵⁹ On this view, international theory is not a discourse which runs parallel to political theory and is concerned only with relations between sovereign states, it “*is political theory seen, from a particular angle and through a particular filter.*”⁶⁰

Second, while the 1950s and 1960s were relatively hostile to “normative” approaches to international politics because of the positivist bias in the social sciences, subsequent years have proven to be more ‘favorable’ to the development of such theories. Brown credits the return of “grand theory” associated primarily with the work of John Rawls as one reason for this turnaround.⁶¹ Moreover, the Vietnam War and the Arab-Israeli conflict of the late 1960s had enormous impact on the prevailing academic wisdom, as scholars such as Michael Walzer began to probe the ethical dimensions of these and other conflicts.⁶²

Finally, Brown agrees with Wight that contemporary international political theory suffers from intellectual and moral paucity. But it does not suffer from paucity because of the peculiar structure of the modern state system as Wight thinks, but because the Discipline has tried to exist without the aid of what he calls ‘background theories.’ By this, Brown means specifically the

59 *Ibid.*, p.7.

60 *Ibid.*, p.8. (Italics in the original)

61 A good summary of this literature can be found in Skinner, Q., (1985), *The Return of the Grand Theory of the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

62 “I did not begin by thinking about war in general, but about particular wars, above all about the American intervention into Vietnam.” This is the first sentence of the preface to Michael Walzer's important work. Walzer, M., (1992), *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*. 2nd. Ed. New York: Basic Books, p.xxv.

political theories of Kant and Hegel. Instead of stressing continuities with past international thought, the tendency has been to discount communitarian and cosmopolitan thought and to seek theories of international politics which do not rely on extra-disciplinary foundations.”⁶³ By attempting to get along without these “background theories,” Brown suggests that the Discipline became normatively impoverished.

The way to a richer understanding of international politics, then, is quite clear. It requires another look at the background theories themselves. And this means acknowledging the importance of the tradition of political thought for the study of international politics. Thus, for Brown, detaching international theory from its philosophical roots in the name of a *sui generis* Discipline severely distorts and narrows the theoretical possibilities for understanding the normative complexities of international politics.

The above arguments are designed to open up the field to the vast intellectual resources of the tradition of political thought by shifting the emphasis away from the narrow concern with the sovereign state. The best sources of international theory come, not only from the pen of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, or Kenneth Waltz, but also from that of Immanuel Kant, G.F.W. Hegel, J.S. Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Karl Marx, Leo Tolstoy, Ghandi and many others, in forms of communitarian and cosmopolitan theories.

(b) The Significance of War

The second argument concerns the claims that International Relations is an autonomous field of study because students of international politics study the problem of war. As a twentieth century invention, International Relations began on the margins of political science. As David

63 Brown, C., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.77.

Armstrong notes, it:

developed as a distinct discipline both as a response to events like the two world wars and the cold war and because there were certain phenomena - war, diplomacy, strategy, international law, the balance of power, the numerous ramifications of sovereignty - that were inadequately, or not at all, treated elsewhere in the social sciences.⁶⁴

In what sense were war and related issues “inadequately...treated elsewhere?” Armstrong is ambiguous. Were the other social sciences inadequate *per se* because they did not consider the phenomena that have become the staple diet of International Relations scholars? Or were they inadequate for those who believed that such phenomena were eminently suitable for academic study, and needed a “home” within the academy if they were to receive “adequate” attention? Unfortunately, the first question is never asked. As International Relations monopolized the phenomenon of war, other social sciences were never challenged to explore the implicit boundaries of their own legitimacy. Ironically, war, whose implications for the future of the human race are obvious, became the preserve of a Discipline that defined itself in terms of what it was not.

Had defenders of the Discipline challenged the legitimacy of the boundaries of other social sciences at the time, rather than crediting themselves with the creation of a new one, the dubiousness of establishing it around a single problem (war) might well have been seen more clearly. To employ the problem of war as the main criterion for the justifying the autonomy of International Relations is no different than seeking to develop a Discipline which takes democracy, freedom or capitalism as its central concern. Yet to suggest this for these latter concepts would be regarded as quite bizarre.

64 Armstrong, D., (1995), “Why is There Too Much International Theory,” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.30, No.2, July, p.362.

Not only was International Relations handicapped from the start by its peripheral status in political science, it was also (and in large part continues to be) burdened with the enduring problems of presentism. This manifests itself in a number of ways, but the combination of marginalization and problem-solving helps to explain the enduring state-centrism that has characterised International Relations this century. By this I do not mean that International Relations scholars should not take the state seriously as a unit of analysis. They should, but this does not mean taking the state for granted, or ignoring important challenges to its power and legitimacy. The territorial boundaries of the state need not cohere with disciplinary boundaries, nor is there any reason why a concern with the problem of war between states should preclude attention to war within them. Arguably, intra-state war is replacing war between states as a source of global disorder. Since this trend is inextricably linked with the collapse of state authority in many parts of the global periphery, even those who remain resolutely deaf to calls for a “new agenda” cannot fail to note that the traditional agenda has been seriously weakened in recent years. To claim that this question can be pursued adequately under the aegis of a self-standing Discipline then, is to fail to read the “sign of the times”: a rather serious charge against a Discipline which has always prided itself on its practical relevance to current political affairs. Continuing to defend the traditional agenda, then, is not only to risk irrelevance, it is also to perpetuate one of the most dubious myths to ever have cast its spell over the field. For neither in theory, nor in practice has International Relations ever had the degree of autonomy its defenders have claimed or sought to bring about.

Even those “traditionally” trained scholars who find themselves in a position of acknowledging the extent to which intra-state war is replacing war between states, seem unwilling to confront the theoretical contradiction between this state of affairs and their earlier defence of

the autonomy of international politics. The argument is aimed as much at them, as it is against those who continue to live in the theoretical darkness.

In addition, although war is undoubtedly of legitimate concern, and deserves to remain a high priority, it is not a form of behaviour that can be defined with sufficient precision to warrant the status of a “dependent variable.” Just as the concept of “aggression” is notoriously difficult to pin down in discourses of just war and collective security, the search for the cause(s) of war remains hampered by the elusiveness of precisely what it is that scholars are trying to explain. Furthermore, as Hidemi Suganami argues, in seeking the causes of war, one must distinguish between three separate issues: the conditions in the absence of which war would not be possible, patterns of war and peace over space and time, and finally, explanations of particular wars.⁶⁵ Kenneth Waltz, in his magisterial survey of the literature, observed (almost tautologically) that although the absence of world government made war possible no examination of the other issues could be pursued without acknowledging factors at levels of analysis other than the international.⁶⁶ Finally, if the empirical study of war is justified by the desire to achieve peace, the latter cannot be a privileged goal unless its achievement is accompanied by a reduction of all the factors that contribute to the onset of violence between states. The student of war must necessarily, therefore, be concerned with all forms and sources of global conflict. This challenge does not justify an autonomous Discipline, nor does it facilitate the identification of a specific and isolable subject-matter.

65 Suganami, H., (1990), “Bringing Order to the Causes of War Debate,” *Millennium: Journal of International Politics*, Vol.19, No.1, Spring, pp.19-35.

66 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*

(c) Studying in an Anarchic Realm

If war *per se* does not help in justifying International Relations as an autonomous Discipline, what about the related claim that (international) theory is necessary because international politics are conducted in a discrete (non)place? According to this argument, it is not war or any other phenomenon that justifies International Relations. Rather, as Stanley Hoffmann explains, “international relations take place in a milieu which has its own ‘coherence and uniqueness,’ its rules of the game which differ sharply from the rules of domestic politics, its own perspective.”⁶⁷ The uniqueness of this domain is the fact that it lacks a central government or power capable of exercising absolute legitimate control over the entire system.

It is worth exploring this claim further before noting its implications for international political theory. The world is divided among sovereign states. War is an ever-present background possibility among states that co-exist in a condition of anarchy. There is no world government, although elements of “international governance” in the form of international organization and sustained patterns of co-operation no doubt moderate the extreme image of international politics as a jungle. In this environment political authority is dispersed along territorial lines. It is therefore difficult to co-ordinate global action to deal with global problems that do not respect territorial borders.

Images of starvation, cruelty, and injustice that bombard television screens around the world are distressing. It may seem arbitrary that some individuals enjoy the privileges of peace and prosperity while other human beings suffer simply because they happen to have been born in

⁶⁷ Hoffmann, S., (1959), “International Relations: The Long Road to Theory,” *World Politics*, Vol.11, No.3, April, p.346.

Somalia rather than Australia, Canada or the United States. Modernity is, among other things, an ethos of reason and belief in the growth of reason to control the human environment so that it fulfils human purposes and contributes to the well-being of humanity. Of course, suffering does not correlate with territorial boundaries, but the political capacity to respond to it does. Cosmopolitan moral sentiments are constantly being frustrated by particularist political identities. This is puzzling, frustrating, and is certainly curious. How did this schism come about? What sustains it? How may it be overcome, if indeed it should? Such questions may indeed explain the need for theory but they arise from a pre-theoretical set of concerns which are essentially ethical rather than, or perhaps in addition to, the scientific urge to explain patterns of state behaviour.

The duty of scholars is to understand. This is their particular vocation. However, as Michael Banks points out, understanding in this area is:

not a matter of hunting down immutable laws. It is an exploration of the manner in which some political ideas have become political facts, whereas others have not...To seek understanding, therefore, is to take part in a debate between competing sets of ideas.⁶⁸

One of the most interesting trends in International Relations over the last decade or so is an acknowledgment of the fact that “the world” is not independent of the perceptual and conceptual horizons which allow us to organize, simplify and select from it the data which constitute the “raw material” of empirical theory. Try as defenders of the Discipline might to occupy some Archimedean point from which to understand international politics “objectively,” it is by no means clear how it is possible to achieve this goal. If that is the case, it implies that the pursuit of consensus at a disciplinary level is not only chimerical, but positively dangerous, since it involves

⁶⁸ Banks, M., (1984), “The Evolution of International Relations Theory,” in Banks, M., (ed.), *Conflict in World Society: A New Perspective on International Relations*. Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.4.

the concealment or subordination of ideas and values incompatible with the hegemonic core. In this context, theoretical pluralism is a sign of health, not disarray.

Of course, the appeal for consensus has never been limited to the realm of the subject-matter, nor has International Relations ever been autonomous in the way its spokespersons have studied that subject-matter. If “relations among states” is the ontological site of International Relations, the latter has also been dominated by an implicit consensus that its subject-matter is amenable to the development of “theory” that obeys the alleged requirements of epistemological rigor regardless of ontological domain. In 1959, Hoffmann described many of the pitfalls that lay in store on what he called “the long road to theory,” but the metaphor itself aptly expressed the confidence that even if the car had to be built from scratch, as it were, the road was already there. During International Relations's “long boom” years in the United States after 1945, the founding and expansion of the Discipline not only required an initial agreement that international politics could be isolated analytically, but also that the domain was amenable to the systematic elaboration of empirical theory in a positivist mode. This enabled scholars to speak and understand each other through the use of a common vocabulary, prioritize research, set disciplinary goals, and provide a “neutral” epistemological framework so that research findings could be verified and tested against existing disciplinary knowledge.

International Relations then, comprises an autonomous Discipline only insofar as it is possible to maintain a consensus on the epistemological dimension as well as the ontological dimension. The seduction of ritualistic appeals for “disciplinary integrity” that generate legislative demands for consensus and concern for division should be avoided. These appeals are obviously necessary to sustain the myth that academic specialization is a prerequisite for knowledge which,

in turn, is a prerequisite for enlightened intervention, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain that myth in light of the dramatic failure of the Discipline to predict the end of the cold war on the basis of its existing stock of empirical theory. This is not to say that the ontological condition that gives rise to International Relations no longer exists. The world continues to be divided among states. Despite the ubiquity of references to globalizing forces of one kind or another, there is precious little evidence to suggest that this foreshadows the imminent transcendence of sovereignty as a constitutive principle of constitutional pluralism in international society. It is, however, to say that the academic study of international politics should not take this condition for granted, nor should it exclude “relations” and processes that are not usefully understood within a state-centric representation. Ideological, environmental, gender, and especially market capitalist “relations,” to mention but four, are not best explored within a Discipline that continues to respect the conditions of its emergence at the close of the first world war. One major constraint to the systematic academic study of these questions is the persistence of an academic division of labor between students of “international,” “domestic,” and “comparative” politics. This division has sustained striking instances of mutual neglect between bodies of literature whose substantive concerns patently have large areas of overlap.

This is a message which, interestingly enough, can be found in the work of Alfred Zimmern. According to him, International Relations should not be treated as an autonomous field of study. It is a “bundle of subjects...viewed from a common angle.”⁶⁹ Zimmern thought that International Relations should be global in its scope and include “political science, political economy,

69 Zimmern, A., (1935), “Introductory Report to the Discussions in 1935,” in Zimmern A., (ed.), *University Teaching of International Relations*. Report of the Eleventh Session of the International Studies Conference. Paris: International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, The League of Nations, p.x.

international law, geography, history, sociology, and political and moral philosophy...He even asked whether other subjects should be included, namely psychology and in their more general aspects law, biology, geology, and demography..."⁷⁰ It is true that this argument is likely to take away the breath of the most diligent scholar. But what should not be lost sight of is the more basic question. Is damage done to study international politics if disciplinary autonomy is pursued? Underlying Zimmern's view is a concern that autonomy would lead to a narrow rather than a broad field of study. There is no doubt that he showed great foresight on this point. William Olson suggests that prior to 1945 this was the prevailing viewpoint on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷¹ Unfortunately, as the field migrated to North America after 1945, the drive to establish International Relations as an autonomous field of study all but excluded this issue from serious debate.

Defenders of the Discipline often say they are concerned with the pursuit and furtherance of knowledge about what takes place beyond the borders of the sovereign state. Indeed, this is partly the reason why consensus is regarded as such an important value. But I fail to see how this goal could be achieved without at least wondering whether Zimmern and his fellow idealists might be right on this point. It is not so much adding to the storehouse of knowledge that motivates defenders of the Discipline then, but the development of a professional identity and the intellectual credibility which follows from this status.

There is a strange irony in this, however. Whether they admit it or not, defenders of the

70 Cited in Olson, W.C., & Groom, A.J.R., (1991), *International Relations Then & Now: Origins and Trends in Interpretation*. London: Harper Collins Academic, p.90.

71 Olson, W.C., (1972), "The Growth of a Discipline," in Porter, B., (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics, 1919-1969*. London: Oxford University Press, p.13.

Discipline have never been able to escape the influence of other Disciplines. They have always utilized ideas and insights from other fields of study. Both the positivism and structuralism, for example, do not originate within International Relations. The former is present in the work of David Hume and the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, the latter in the work of Claude Levi Strauss. So too, the conception of rationality and the understanding of theory have been borrowed directly from neoclassical economic theory. Fred Halliday, then, is right to suggest that the Discipline has always been “an absorber and importer, not a producer in its own right.”⁷² But what Halliday fails to note is that international theory has also been highly selective in what it absorbs and imports. It is not enough to respond to this by arguing that the concerns of international theorists are limited to relations between states, or to say as Martin Wight does, that there is “a kind of recalcitrance of international politics to being theorized about.”⁷³ This does not follow. Questions of peace and war, security, national existence, democratic and despotic regimes, poverty, international justice, life and death, cannot adequately be understood except in relation to the human beings these concepts effect and are about.

Conclusion

The legitimacy of International Relations rests, to a large extent, on the claim that the international arena operates according to a very different logic to domestic politics. It is clear, however, that none of the arguments used to defend this proposition are persuasive. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of proceeding on the assumption that they are, is that

72 Halliday, F., (1985), “A Crisis in International Relations,” *International Relations*, Vol.8, No.4, November, p.408.

73 See Jackson, R., (1990), “Martin Wight and the Good Life,” in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.19, No.2, Summer, pp.261-272.

defenders of the Discipline have lost touch with the tradition of political philosophy. One way of interpreting this is to see the marginalization of political philosophy as the price defenders of the Discipline have paid for generating a consensus in the field. After all, whatever else may be said about political philosophy, it is pluralistic in nature.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM: THE MEANING OF REALISM

There are not two realists who agree either in their analysis of what is, or on what ought to be, or on how to get from here to there. Thirty seven years after the first appearance of *Politics Among Nations*, it looks as if Morgenthau won his battle but lost an unwinnable war.

Stanley Hoffmann

Introduction

Defenders of the Discipline place a great deal of emphasis on positivism and on the autonomy of the international arena. They do so in order to establish a case for the independence and legitimacy of International Relations among the social sciences. Contrary to this view, I have suggested that they fail to be convincing and provide no basis for claiming that a permanent consensus can be established on the nature, scope, and character of the field. In the case of positivism, it can be demonstrated that it is not value-neutral and that it reflects a partisan intellectual agenda devoted to the application of technical knowledge to problems of international order. Similarly, the three arguments used to defend the autonomy of the Discipline are flawed. But what about “realism”? After all, I have already noted how influential this idea has been over the past half a century. In this chapter, I argue here that defenders of the Discipline are on no more solid ground with this idea.

The structure of a number of theoretical debates in the field give the impression that realism is a cohesive and tightly-knit discourse about international politics. It has what some postmodernists refer to as an “essence” or a “pure identity.”¹ This is partly the reason why theoretical debates in the field treat realists as a tightly-knit and cohesive group of scholars. In the realist-idealist debate, for example, realists stand against their competitors as a single unified group with a unique perspective on international politics. Because of this, it is often suggested that realism is a “school of thought whose members harbor shared assumptions about the primacy of states as international actors, the separation of domestic and international politics, and who

1 Der Derian, J., (1996), “A Reinterpretation of Realism: Genealogy, Semiology, Dromology,” in Beer, F.A., & Heriman, R., (eds), *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, p.281.

describe the latter in terms of anarchy and a concomitant ubiquitous struggle for power and security.”² Of course, differences exist, but defenders of the Discipline claim that these are not so significant as to undermine the cohesiveness, homogeneity, and stability of this idea.

I want to challenge this understanding of realism. While it is true that there are commonalities among a wide range of scholars, there are also massive differences between them. Indeed, at the metatheoretical level, the gulf between different “realists” can be so stark that it makes little sense to talk about this idea in unqualified terms. To put the point more forcefully, while it is true that there are commonalities among a huge number of scholars, there is not sufficient commonality among them to determine its meaning with any accuracy.

Like the previous chapters, I argue here that one of the reasons why defenders of the Discipline stress the common ground rather than the differences is so that a consensus on the “subjects of inquiry and theorizing” can be maintained.³ The first part of this chapter looks at how defenders of the Discipline have tried to tame or discipline (small “d”) the idea of realism by treating it as an ideal-type. In section two, I look at some of the different interpretations of realism and note just how broad the range of views are which attract this label. I suggest that this idea is better seen as a site of metatheoretical contestation, rather than something cohesive and homogeneous. One argument which defenders of the Discipline often put forward as a way of highlighting its cohesiveness and homogeneity is to say that it is a tradition of thought which stretches back to Thucydides. In section three, I analyze this claim and argue that this does not

2 Griffiths, M., (1992), “Order and International Society: The Real Realism?” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.3, July, p.217.

3 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory*. New York: George Allen & Unwin, p.2.

justify the degree of homogeneity which defenders of the Discipline claim for realism. Instead, it is an idea which is nebulous, open to multiple interpretations, and is impossible to define authoritatively and objectively. If it is true that the commonality among realists is overstated, the alleged consensus of the 1950s and 1960s is artificially manufactured, rather than a product of genuine scholarly agreement. Under these circumstances, the integrity of International Relations must seriously be questioned.

Disciplining Realism

An ideal-type is a technique for distilling the main elements in a diverse body of literature. It is a justification for ignoring difference and diversity. To talk about ideal-types in the human sciences is to talk about conceptual abstractions. They are intellectual constructs which scholars use to understand some complex aspect of the social and political world. Patterns of behavior, phenomena, and institutional forms such as capitalism are so rich and multi-dimensional that it is necessary to reduce them to their basic elements. These devices are simply ways of bringing structure and meaning to a vast range of disconnected fragments of reality. They make the seemingly unintelligible intelligible, and help scholars to gain insights into the functioning of a particular aspect of reality.

This way of grappling with the social and political world can only ever lead to an approximation of the reality in question. It can never be a mirror image. And there is always the problem of determining just what basic features of an ideal-type are important and what are peripheral. This will depend, to a large extent, on the kinds of problems being investigated, the research interests of those who use this approach, and the particular questions being asked. What an ideal-type offers is a degree of parsimony and a way of controlling, limiting, and managing

complex phenomena for the purposes of understanding. In essence, ideal-types are rational constructions. They cut through variation and difference in order to express the core of a particular slice of reality. This is why they are a valuable tool in the social sciences. They help to shed light on problems and ideas which by themselves are too complex, diverse, and unmanageable.⁴

Although he never actually uses this terminology, Hans Morgenthau is the first to think about realism as an ideal-type. His debt to Max Weber is well-documented.⁵ The best evidence of this is the distinction he draws between a photograph and a painted portrait. In making this distinction, Morgenthau acknowledges the gap which exists between trying faithfully to mirror reality and the need to cope with its inevitable complexity. Thus, when he says that “it is no argument against the theory here presented that actual foreign policy does not or cannot live up to it” and that this “argument misunderstands the intention of the book, which is to present not an indiscriminate description of political reality, but a rational theory of international politics,” he is doing no more than defending the use of ideal-types in the study of international politics, as well highlighting the need to reduce its complexities to a small number of manageable elements.⁶ As he argues in the beginning of his famous work, his theory of international politics seeks “to bring

4 One of the outstanding examples of this approach is Isaiah Berlin’s essay on negative and positive freedom. Berlin, I., (1969), “Two Concepts of Liberty,” *Four Essays on Liberty*. London: Oxford University Press, pp.118-172.

5 Rosenthal, J.H., (1991), *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.14. See also Smith, M.J., (1986), *Realist Thought From Weber to Kissinger*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

6 Morgenthau, H.J., (1967), “A Realist Theory of International Politics,” in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 4th edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p.8.

order and meaning to a mass of phenomena which without it would remain disconnected and unintelligible.”⁷

Generally speaking, the founding of realism as an ideal-type involves three sorts of arguments. First of all, the “slice of reality” in question is partitioned off and defended as an autonomous realm. Second, it has to be shown that this domain lends itself naturally to “ideal-typing.” The fact that a number of scholars throughout history have used similar concepts to express their thoughts about international politics is sufficient justification here. The third step is to determine what elements are central to the ideal-type and what are peripheral. In other words, the rational essence of the ideal-type has to be drawn out of the particular “slice of reality” and this means outlining a list of core propositions. When this process is complete hitherto unforeseen connections can be made, a theory constructed, understanding improved, and so on. The “founding moment” is complete.

Those scholars whose intellectual sympathies lie with realism have internalized this approach. So much so, that it is now repeated every time a discussion of realism is on the agenda. Repeating the steps of the “founding moment” is a central part of the ritual of legitimacy which realists go through to verify the existence and value of the ideal-type. Robert Keohane's view is typical in this regard. When he compares the writings of Thucydides and Hans Morgenthau, he confidently concludes that, although 2,500 years separates them, their views are remarkably similar. According to Keohane, both agree that the most important actors in world international politics are territorially organized entities, that state behavior can be explained rationally, and that states

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

seek power and calculate their interests in terms of power.⁸ By noting these (and only these) point of affinity between the two, Keohane deduces the existence of a realist tradition, and in the process, claims to have captured its essence. Of course, it does not seem to worry Keohane that Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes got on quite nicely without this ideal-type method to guide them in their musings about international politics.

It is in the nature of an ideal-type then, that discussion focuses on the common ground rather than on the differences, tensions, anomalies, and contradictions within an idea. One of the interesting things about Keohane's discussion is that he ignores totally the vast differences between Thucydides and Morgenthau's understanding of international politics. Without this continued emphasis on unity, the cohesion of realism begins to fall apart.

Determining the precise dimensions of the common ground is a very difficult task. Indeed, it is very difficult to determine what the core attributes of realism are. Keohane suggests there are three basic propositions to it. Viotti and Kauppi suggest there are four, Morgenthau discovers six, while Kegley and Wittkopf generate a somewhat longer list. The number is, of course, immaterial, except perhaps that it highlights the difficulty in working out precisely what it is that is being talked about when the word realism is invoked. How often do paragraphs like the following appear in the literature.

We characterize as realist assumptions what we sense are the central tendencies, or at least, ranges of consensus, within the realist camp. Thus, we stipulate that the following are widely shared propositions that define political realism in opposition to rival approaches. While not all realists make all of the assertions, we believe that all realists make most of the assertions, that all the assertions are made by most

⁸ Keohane, R.O., (1986), "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond," in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.163.

realists, and that formal theory will one day demonstrate more clearly an underlying deductive structure linking many of the assertions.⁹

The difficulties in maintaining the credibility of the ideal-type are clearly evident here. Yet Wayman and Diehl are not fazed by the loose edges, or the possibility that this idea might ultimately lack the degree of cohesion that they attribute to it. This is borne out by the fact that they are unsure about the underlying structure which makes it possible to talk about common ground among the realists. They are left with a rather nebulous and unhelpful definition of this idea as “disagreements over common ground.”¹⁰ The point is that differences are marginalized along the way in an effort to keep the existence and unity of realism intact. What joins realists together seems to always take precedence over what divides them. Interestingly enough, it is hard to find anyone, who upon admitting that there is common ground among realists, actually goes on to consider the significance of the asymmetries between them. Yet, such a strategy would, I suggest, yield a more accurate picture of the character of realism than is possible through the application of a Weberian-inspired sociological method to this idea. To defend an understanding of realism based on “shared beliefs” then, is an intellectual strategy employed to ensure that the meaning of realism can be fixed within well-defined and manageable limits. It amounts to a taming of a particular set of disparate historical and political ideas and, if the post-war realists are to be believed, results in a stable, relatively homogeneous and unified image of international politics.

⁹ Wayman, F.W., & Diehl, P.F., (1994), “Realism Reconsidered: The Realpolitik Framework and its Basic Propositions,” in Wayman, F.W., & Diehl, P.F., (eds), *Realpolitik Reconsidered*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p.8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4.

Beyond the undervaluing of difference within realism, there are two other difficulties which plague this approach to the study of international politics. Both, I suggest, are rampant in the field and a cause for concern. The value of ideal-typing is often said to lie in the fact that it offers an objective and value-neutral basis or standard for theorizing about international politics. But behind the veneer of objectivity lies a method which has been employed in an evaluative, if not overtly political way. This is certainly the case with those who frame the study of international politics in terms of a debate between realists versus idealists. Morgenthau is a good example of this. His *Scientific Man and Power Politics* is a potent critique of the political theory of the inter-war years. The normative character of this work is clearly evident throughout and Morgenthau makes no effort to hide it. Nor does he clothe his arguments in the scientific language of value-neutrality and objectivity. This work is good quality political theory and, in my view, his most interesting work. Given the views expressed in that work, however, it is hard to see how developing the idea of realism into an ideal-type (his “six principles of political realism”) could lead to an objective and unbiased theory of international politics. In this case, the ideal-type is employed to justify what Morgenthau already thinks is true. Thus, he has a stake in the success of the method he employs. Even using the term idealism or utopianism to describe the political theory of the inter-war years is a political act and enough to suggest that those who are supposed to fit this category have little or no credibility.

Furthermore, when scholars begin to conceive of the theoretical alternatives in these reductionist ideal-type terms, subtlety is quickly squeezed out. The best evidence of this is just how invisible the so-called idealists have been for most of the post-war period. Cornelia Navari’s comment is interesting in this regard. According to her, the leading realists used Norman Angell’s

work somewhat unfairly. He “became a constant reference point in their defence of the realist position. The label was sufficient to assure that, while frequently referred to, his own ideas should receive scarcely any critical attention.”¹¹ Indeed, J.D.B. Miller suggests that the post-war realists have got him all wrong. Angell, it seems, is actually a realist.¹² The point is that post-war realists have never fully understood the normative aspect of using ideal-types to study international politics. This has resulted in the marginalization of a whole body of literature and, in some cases, a distortion of the work of thinkers who may or may not even fit the label placed on them.¹³ Finally, the use of the ideal-type method for disciplining realism presupposes that there are criteria available to scholars which are not as contested as the ideal-types themselves. This is hardly the case, as the recent epistemological debates make clear.

Most text books imply, by their organizational structure, that ideal-typing is a good way to acquaint students and lay-people with a very complex set of ideas. In other words, ideal-types make good pedagogical devices. Generally speaking, this is true. But I do not think it is clear-cut in the case in International Relations. The continual presentation of realism and idealism (and any other “ism” for that matter) as if they are monolithic entities is a mistake which has done more to lead students astray, distort their capacity for independent thought, allowed them to think about complex intellectual positions in terms of trite cliches, misrepresent the works of serious

11 Navari, C., (1989), “The Great Illusion Revisited: The International Theory of Norman Angell,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.15, No.4, October, p.341.

12 Miller, J.B.D., (1986), *Norman Angell and the Futility of War: Peace and the Public Mind*. London: Macmillan, p.137.

13 For a reassessment of Idealism see Schmidt, B.C., (1998), “Lessons From the Past: Disciplinary History of International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.42, No.3, September, pp.435-460.

intellectuals, and given them a view of the field which is inaccurate, all in the name of consensus. Laurie Johnson is right to ask whether students of international politics should “give unifying theory such pride of place if it serves only as a sterile heuristic device?”¹⁴ This is not to say that there are not scholars in the field who are aware of this. Michael Doyle’s recent work is an exceptionally good use of ideal-types. In the case of realism, for example, he devotes a whole chapter to the subtleties, tensions, and differences with this body of thought. It is worth taking a leaf out of his book and look at some of the important interpretations of this idea.

The Many Realisms of International Relations

What is Realism? Everyone is assumed to know, but none can agree, and even those who call themselves realists are divided on what it is. It is no wonder that Richard Rothstein complains that:

Two confessed realists may reach totally dissimilar conclusions about the same case - in fact, at times, it is difficult to relate an individual realists position on policy to his philosophical convictions. Correlating Morgenthau and Kennan on policy with Morgenthau and Kennan on “Realism” requires a Talmudist’s skill and patience, not to say a willingness to suspend disbelief. The difficulty is that reality is so complex and ambiguous that the policies which we choose to call “realistic” at any particular moment depend to a significant degree on personal predispositions and perspectives.¹⁵

And more recently, Donald Brand argues that:

George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, and Raymond Aron have all been described as realists in international politics. Each of these authors has recently published a synoptic work which sheds light on his fundamental political principles. When these books are examined, the limited utility of “realism” as a category becomes evident,

14 Johnson, L., (1993), *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, p.271.

15 Rothstein, R., (1972), “On the Costs of Realism,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.87, No.3, September, p.352.

for the differences among these authors are far more striking than their similarities.¹⁶

It is possible to see what these scholars are talking about if time is taken to list some of the views which pass for realism in the literature. What is truly striking, at least when presented in this way, is just how wide the philosophical, political, and ethical divisions are within this idea.

(a) Realism as the Law of the Jungle

Realism as the “law of the jungle” is undoubtedly the most notorious form of realism. Its major premise is simple. The weak are always subject to the will of the strong. To employ the metaphor of the “law of the jungle,” as Hobbes did, is to draw a parallel between human society and the animal kingdom.¹⁷ In the jungle, the stronger more powerful animals dominate and prey upon the weaker ones in an never ending cycle of kill and be killed. When the stronger weaken, become infirmed, or meet a better opponent, they too become prey. Similarly, the interests of the strongest states in the international system will also always prevail. States are rapacious, self-interested, and motivated by an intense will to power. The international arena has no central government to enforce a code of ethics, administer justice, and protect the weak. For Callicles, this is the natural order of things. It is what is euphemistically called “natural justice.”

This sort of realism is expressed in different ways by the Athenian generals against the Melians, by Thrasymachus and Callicles in their attempts to refute the arguments of Socrates, by Hobbes in his views about the state of nature as being comparable to a “war of all against all” and,

16 Brand, D., (1995), “Realists Make Strange Bedfellows: Kennan, Kissinger, and Aron,” *Polity*, Vol.28, No.2, Winter, p.277.

17 See Gilpin, R., (1986), “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.304

more recently, by social Darwinists and the theorists of fascism. It is a form of realism which equates morality with naked physical power. Indeed, in this context, it is appropriate to think of morality as diplomatic window-dressing. For realists of this ilk, acting morally in the international arena, especially when a state is faced with subjugation, is simply to open a doorway to oblivion.

(b) Realism as Science

Students of international politics have been preoccupied with the possibility of developing Realism into a science since the 1940s. This endeavor reaches its high-point with the publication of Waltz's 1979 classic.¹⁸ I have discussed the main aspects of Waltz's "theory" in chapters two and three, but it is worth reiterating its basic structure here, especially the extent to which it is influenced by the success of economic theory.

Scientific theories are theories which are capable to producing propositions (general laws) which are repeatable under ideal conditions. Only in this way, is it possible for scientists to predict outcomes. Thus, if two and two are added together, they will always equal four. No matter how many times the "experiment" is repeated the same result will follow. Or, if certain chemicals are mixed in certain quantities at a certain temperature, combustion is achieved. This procedure can be repeated forever, but the same outcome will result. This is the empirical basis of all science.

The undisputed success of this experiment-prediction-control relationship in the natural sciences is, according to Waltz, most clearly emulated in the social sciences by economic theory. His own work sets out with the explicit aim of replicating the developmental and methodological logic of economic theory in International Relations. Or, to put the point differently, raise "realism" to a science; a task which he believed earlier realists had been unable to complete satisfactorily.

¹⁸ Waltz, K.N., (1979), *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.

An important procedural requirement of any science is the need to isolate the domain or phenomena one wishes to make the object of study. It is of little consequence whether the object is a single cell organism, a molecule, the human psyche, or the economy. The scientist must begin by “de-cluttering” the field of inquiry in order to achieve the highest possible degree of focus and clarity. Too many variables make the drawing of conclusions impossible, prediction a hit and miss affair, and outcomes hard to control.

The introduction of the concept of “structure” into realism and the exclusion of troublesome variables such as human nature, leaves Waltz with a much narrower and less complex conception of realism than that of, say, Hans Morgenthau or John Herz. The scientific status of realism derives from the degree of parsimony and rigor which he is able to bring to it by raising the concept of structure to a key theme of realist theory. Along with this apparently more solid foundation for realism, Waltz attacked the reductionist logic of the behaviourists and the older realists, thought that the interdependence theorists offered a one-sided account of international politics, defended a state-centric position, placed an important emphasis on the significance of the great powers, especially the role of the United States in maintaining order in the international system, and finally, argued that the more nuclear weapons that states have the greater the degree of global stability which is possible. All in all, this offered a powerful, and novel, interpretation of realism. And, as I noted earlier, fulfilled a line of thinking which began during the 1950s and 1960s. Waltz's great achievement is to be the first to have brought realism and positivism together in a science.

In a subsequent essay, Waltz attempts to clarify the logic which led him to attempt to develop realism into a science.¹⁹ It is worth noting the parallel he draws between international politics and the early experiences of the physiocrats. According to Waltz, the importance of the early physiocrats is that they were the first to isolate the economy from the polity and from society. As he expresses it, an “invention was needed that would permit economic phenomena to be seen as distinct processes, that would permit an economy to be viewed as a realm of affairs marked off from social and political life.”²⁰ The fact that international politics takes place in a distinct arena means that the first criteria for a scientific treatment of realism is already present.²¹ Thus, Waltz's great achievement is to be the first to make the connection between anarchy and science explicit. In doing so, he develops an entirely unique form of realism and, in the process, fulfils a long-time ambition of scientifically-minded scholars within International Relations.

The break with other forms of realism is clear and unequivocal. Waltz claims that Morgenthau “confused the problem of explaining foreign policy with the problem of developing a theory of international politics...His appreciation of the role of the accidental and the occurrence of the unexpected in politics dampened his theoretical aspirations.”²² To deny that Morgenthau's

19 Waltz, K.N., (1991), “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” in Rothstein, R.L., (ed.) *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, pp.21-37.

20 *Ibid.*, p.22.

21 As Stanley Hoffmann expresses it, “International relations takes place in a milieu which has its own “coherence and uniqueness,” its rules of the game which differ sharply from the rules of domestic politics, its own perspective.” Hoffmann, S.H., (1959), “International Relations: The Long Road to Theory,” *World Politics*, Vol.11, No.3, April, p.346. Elsewhere he writes that “[t]he starting point of any valid theory of international politics is the recognition of the radical difference between the domestic and the international milieu.” Hoffmann, S.H., (1959), “Theory and International Relations,” *The State of War: Essays on the Theory and Practice of International Politics*. London: Pall Mall Press, p.13.

22 Waltz, K.N., (1991), *op. cit.*, p.26.

work constitutes “theory” because it does not meet the philosophy of science standards effectively closes the book on all other versions of realism. Just as one cannot adhere to a Ptolemaic theory of movement of the planets at the same time as one embraces Copernicus's account, one cannot embrace a scientific and non-scientific account of realism simultaneously. To adhere to one is to reject the other. This is what Jim George means when he talks about the “closed world” of Neorealism.²³ Waltz says as much when he warns that bringing back “the rich variety and wondrous complexity of international life” would be achieved at the “price of extinguishing theory.”²⁴

A good indicator of just how far removed this conception of realism is from alternative formulations is its lack of relevance to the actual practices of diplomats and policy-makers. Morgenthau, for example, believed that realism should offer those in power a roadmap by which they could make sound foreign policy decisions.²⁵ When cast in strict structural-scientific terms, however, realism can have no advisory function. As Alexander Wendt notes, it cannot predict “whether two states will be friends or foes, will recognize each others sovereignty, will have dynastic ties, will be revisionist or status quo powers, and so on.”²⁶ The distinction between international theory and foreign policy analysis is drawn so rigidly that realism cannot be applied

23 George, J., (1994), *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press, p.111.

24 *Ibid.*, p.32.

25 It is well-known that Morgenthau was often disappointed by the fact that American foreign policy did not always live up to the standards he set out in his famous work. The Vietnam War is probably the most spectacular instance of this. According to him, the war did not serve the national interests of the U.S. See Morgenthau, Hans J., (1962), “The Immaturity of Our Asian Policy,” in *The Impasse of American Foreign Policy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp.251-277. Also Morgenthau, H.J., (1962), “Vietnam: Another Korea?” in *The Restoration of Politics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, pp.365-375.

26 Wendt, A., (1992), “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol.46, No.2, Spring, p.396.

to foreign policy problems. As Waltz puts it, the “problem is not to say how to manage the world, including its great powers, but to say how the possibility that great powers will constructively manage international affairs varies as systems change.”²⁷

(c) Realism as a Kuhnian Paradigm

The idea of a “paradigm” came to prominence in the philosophy of science in the early 1960s, mainly through the work of Thomas Kuhn.²⁸ Kuhn sought to explain how scientific revolutions take place in the natural sciences. Although his major work has little to say on the matter of revolutions in the social sciences, scholars in the latter domain quickly seized upon this idea in order to strengthen and clarify the organizational and sociological foundations of the Discipline, as well as “describe and evaluate scientific inquiry.”²⁹

The notion of a paradigm is controversial.³⁰ Yet it does appear to have a number of distinguishing features. First, the existence of a paradigm is essentially what distinguishes periods of normal scientific activity from revolutions. Second, the idea assumes a body of scientific knowledge and practice out of which grow coherent traditions of research. Third, a paradigm has an organizational dimension, guiding present and future research. Four, a paradigm regulates scientific activity; those who are committed to a paradigm share the same rules and standards of

27 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.210.

28 Kuhn, T., (1970), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. See also Barnes, B., (1985), “Thomas Kuhn,” in Skinner, Q., (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.85-100.

29 Vasquez, J.A., (1983), *The Power of Power Politics*. London: Frances Pinter, p.1.

30 Indeed, his critics have been quick to point out the ambiguities in his use of this term. See Bernstein, R.J., (1976), “Thomas Kuhn’s Ambiguous Concept of a Paradigm,” in *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp.84-93.

scientific practice. Five, it has disciplinary importance, generating consensus, coherence and unity among scholars, while helping to legitimate a distinct field of activity.

One way of understanding the rise (and continued significance) of realism in International Relations is to employ this notion of a paradigm. John Vasquez defines it as “the fundamental assumptions scholars make about the world they are studying.”³¹ Strictly speaking, however, realism is not itself a paradigm. Rather, a paradigm is a metatheory, a way of organizing or framing realism so that it is possible to develop it into a theory. As Vasquez notes, a “paradigm is in some sense prior to theory. It is what gives rise to theories in the first place.”³² I have included it here simply because it is a distinct way of thinking about realism.

Arend Lipjhart is the first to employ this notion as a way of accounting for the various approaches in International Relations. For him, the general pattern of development here parallels that of the scientific Disciplines.³³ Lipjhart describes the traditional paradigm as revolving “around the notions of state sovereignty and its logical corollary international anarchy.”³⁴ Kalevi Holsti has taken this further, pointing out that the causes of war and the conditions of peace/security/order, the essential actors and the units of analysis, and the images of the world are the key concerns of all participants to the International Relations dialogue. As a result, “we can legitimately claim that

31 Vasquez, J.A., (1983), *op. cit.*, p.5.

32 *Ibid.*, p.5

33 Lipjhart, A., (1974), “The Structure of the Theoretical Revolution in International Relations,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.18, No.1, March, p.43.

34 *Ibid.*, p.43.

the main figures in the 'classical tradition' have operated within a single paradigm."³⁵ What Holsti has in mind when he speaks of the classical tradition is realism pure and simple. For him, as for Lipjhart, the study of international politics, prior to the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, conformed to a single research agenda. In this sense, the traditional paradigm had a ubiquitous presence in the field. It set out the questions, determined the core concepts, methods, and issues, and shaped the direction of research.

Realism no longer has a universal hold over the study of international politics. The paradigmatic status of realism has been challenged by other equally credible paradigms. The inter-paradigm debate is an acknowledgment of the fact that there is now more than one all-encompassing picture of international politics.³⁶ To speak about the existence of paradigms in International Relations is to use a very conventional framing of issues. To ask the question: What is the nature of international politics, or what is the relationship between the international economy and international politics, a paradigmatic answer will first set out the realist, the liberal and the radical viewpoints, and then try to evaluate each.³⁷ Indeed, it is hard not to get the impression that the language of the paradigm is employed mainly for its heuristic value; that is, to make summation of opposing views easier to understand. At the same time, paradigms are sort of ideal type explanations and have all the faults which accompany such explanations. The edges of the theories are a lot fuzzier than their interpretation as paradigms makes clear. Having said this, realism cast

35 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.11.

36 Banks, M., (1985), "The Inner-Paradigm Debate," in M. Light & A.J.R. Groom (eds.), *International Relations: A Handbook of Current Theory*. London: Frances Pinter, pp.7-26.

37 Tooze, R., (1992), "Conceptualizing Global Politics," in McGrew, A.G., & Lewis, P.G., (eds.), *Global Politics: Globalization and the Nation-State*. London: Polity Press, pp.233-249.

either as a single, dominant, and universal research paradigm, or as one paradigm among a number of competing ones, is without doubt the dominant mode of presentation of this theory over the past quarter of a century. Yet if the value of casting realism in terms of a paradigm is that “it is useful in conveying the unity and internal coherence of a series of works produced over time by various authors,” then one would expect that the different realist authors fit neatly within the specified framework.³⁸ There is much division among realists on important philosophical questions, such as the status of morality and the differences between historical and structural forms of realism, that it calls into question the credibility of the language of the paradigm for understanding international politics. One of the main problem with paradigms is that they give a false sense of coherence and unity to theories. They gloss over the internal inconsistencies.

Timothy Dunne has pointed out the connection between traditions and paradigms. Indeed, his taxonomy of traditions lists “tradition as paradigm” as one of its primary manifestations. Thus, to be skeptical about the value of speaking about a tradition of realism is also to be skeptical about a paradigmatic understanding of realism.³⁹

(d) Realism as Moral Skepticism

Skepticism is an ancient school of Greek philosophy, associated mainly with Pyrrho. The skeptics believed that while one can seek real knowledge of things, such knowledge always eludes us. Not only do skeptics believe that our senses are unreliable, but the best evidence for there being

38 Keenes, E., (1988/89), “Paradigms of International Relations: Bringing the Politics Back In,” *International Journal*, Vol.44, Winter, p.44-67.

39 Dunne, T., (1993), “Mythology or Methodology? Traditions in International Theory,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.19, No.3, July, p.309.

no real knowledge of things is that the experts themselves give contradictory answers to epistemological questions.

In its more general everyday usage, a skeptic is someone who habitually doubts the truth or authenticity of accepted beliefs, especially religious doctrines or moral codes. This attitude filters through to International Relations in views that one cannot make moral judgement either about the actions of states, or the consequences of those actions. Hermann Georing provides us with an excellent example of this position.

What do you mean, morality? - word of honour? Sure, you can talk about word of honour when you promise to deliver goods in business. - But when it is the question of the *interests of the nation!*?...Then morality stops!⁴⁰

Charles Beitz sees that this sort of view as one of the foundations of the realist approach to foreign policy and “has attained the status of a professional orthodoxy in both academic and policy circles.”⁴¹

(e) Realism as Communitarianism

Although communitarian thought has its roots in the writings of Aristotle, Herder, Hegel and others, it has come to prominence over the past two decades primarily as a critique of some versions of liberalism.⁴² This critique, however, is part of a broader project aimed at showing the

40 Holmes, R.L., (1989), *On War and Morality*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.50.

41 Beitz, C., (1979), *Political Theory and International Relations*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.15.

42 The term is Charles Taylor's. See Taylor, C., (1985), “Atomism,” in *Philosophical Papers, Volume Two: Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.187-210. See also MacIntyre, A., (1985) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd. Edition. London: Duckworth. Sandel, M., (1982), *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Taylor, C., (1989), “Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate,” in Rosenblum, N., (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp.159-182. Taylor, C., (1989), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Walzer, M., (1983), *Spheres of Justice:*

incoherence of the Enlightenment project, and the state of malaise which afflicts contemporary moral discourse.

According to Stephen Mulhill and Adam Swift, the communitarian critique of liberalism has five facets to it.⁴³ First, communitarians argue that the priority of the right over the good in deontological liberalism means that the individual is given prior to his or her ends. This fails to understand the way that human beings are constituted by the ends they choose, the values they hold, and the community in which they live. Second, deontological liberalism is a form of asocial individualism which fails to understand the extent to which a person's identity only makes sense as part of a community. It also underestimates the significance which communal goods have for individuals. Third, communitarians question the universalism of deontological liberalism. They argue that no theory of justice can apply universally and cross-culturally. Fourth, communitarians are also concerned with the degree of skepticism implied by Rawls' argument. If individual choice is simply a question of subjective preference, then there is no rational justification for determining whether one way of life is better or worse than any another. Finally, communitarians argue that while the deontologists eschew reliance on a "thick" theory of the good their arguments do, in fact, rely on such a theory. In other words, communitarians argue that all theories of justice, presuppose a theory of the good life, even deontological and atomistic ones.⁴⁴

A Defence of Pluralism and Equality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Walzer, M., (1990), "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory*, Vol.18, No.1, February, pp.6-23.

43 The main targets of the communitarians is Nozick, R., (1974), *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books. Rawls, J., (1971), *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Dworkin, R., (1977), *Taking Rights Seriously*. London: Duckworth.

44 Mulhill, S., & Swift, A., (1992), *Liberals & Communitarians*. London: Basil Blackwell. pp.10-33.

The centrepiece of the communitarian argument is the proposition that human beings only develop their characteristically human capacities within society. The individual does not exist prior to society. Society is what shapes us, gives our lives meaning, and makes us fully human. It is a necessary condition for individuals becoming moral agents and fully responsible, autonomous beings.⁴⁵ For the communitarians, failure to understand this leads to a loss of community spirit and political agency. Here the communitarians are picking up on the Aristotelian idea that human beings are by nature political animals. To conceive of individuals as presocial and deny that their choices are a result of their social embeddedness, is to end up with a very truncated the notion of what it means to be fully human.

In recent years, communitarianism has attracted the attention of students of international politics. Both Chris Brown and Janna Thompson have discussed it in the context of normative international political theory.⁴⁶ Its significance lies in the fact that it forms the basis of a powerful defense of the moral worth of the sovereign state. If human beings are socially embedded, and individuals cannot be fully human outside of a shared community, then the form of social organization which most clearly expresses the shared values of the community must have some moral worth. Contrary to the cosmopolitan view, then, the state (or the nation) cannot be regarded as morally irrelevant. The difference between the two positions turns, to a large extent, on where

45 Taylor, C., (1985), "Atomism," in *op. cit.*, pp.190-191.

46 Brown, C., (1992), *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf. Thompson, J., (1992), *Justice and World Order: A Philosophical Inquiry*. London: Routledge. See also Rengger, N.J., (1992), "A City Which Sustains All Things: Communitarianism and International Society," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.21, No.3, Winter, pp.353-369. Hoffman, M., (1994), "Normative International Theory: Approaches and Issues," in Groom, A.J.R., & Light, M., (eds.) *Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory*. London: Pinter Publishers, pp.27-44. Cochran, M., (1995), "Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism in a Post-Cold War World," in MacMillan, J., & Linklater, A., (eds.), *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations*. London: Pinter, pp.40-53.

one locates the ultimate source of moral value. For cosmopolitans, it is the individual or humanity as a whole, not particular political communities which is the site of moral value.

What is the value of classifying international political theory according to these two approaches? First, it does not come with the intellectual baggage which bedevils traditional discussion of ethics and international politics. It offers international political theory a clean slate. Second, it enables scholars to link their research with the formidable historical resources of political theory. Third, it places normative questions at the center of international political theory, and helps to “facilitate an understanding of the values at stake in the new global order.”⁴⁷ Moreover, it has the advantage that it “is more or less inclusive for the modern age - all varieties of international political theory can be seen as falling into one or other camp without too much violence being done to the intentions of the theorist.”⁴⁸

Chris Brown has pointed to the relationship between realism and the writings of Robert Gilpin. Gilpin argues that:

the essence of all social reality is the group. The building blocks and ultimate units of social and political life are not the individuals of liberal thought nor the classes of Marxism...Realism, as I interpret it, holds that the foundation of political life is what Ralf Dahrendorf has called “conflict groups.”⁴⁹

Gilpin never explores the moral implications of this statement for his understanding of international politics, he simply regards it as a central feature of realist thought. Moreover, he does not think of himself as a communitarian. It is quite possible that questions about the morality of the

47 Cochran, M., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.48.

48 Brown, (1992), *op. cit.*, p.27.

49 Gilpin, R., (1986), *op. cit.*, pp.304-305.

sovereign state would not fit very well with his overall understanding of realism especially when a few moments before he speaks of realism in terms of the law of the jungle. It is true, of course, that he rejects the possibility of moral and political progress in the international sphere, and so clearly rejects the cosmopolitan outlook.⁵⁰ The point is that anyone who believes that the social group or the community is the ultimate source of value can be said to be a realist in some sense. Conversely, anyone who utilizes a cosmopolitan/communitarian framework, and is willing to discuss questions of the morality of states acknowledges that realism as communitarian is a legitimate ethical position, whether they agree with it or not. Thus, Brown argues that Gilpin's realism is an "attenuated version of communitarian thought."⁵¹

The importance of the communitarian/cosmopolitan dichotomy is that it allows scholars to engage ethically and philosophically in international politics in order to articulate "the principles of a more perfect political order."⁵² Realism cast in other ways cannot participate in this project. To define realism as a form of communitarianism (attenuated or otherwise), then, is a way of sanitizing and moulding realism for the purpose of moral argument. In other words, to employ the cosmopolitan/communitarian framework is to acknowledge the persuasive force of a certain reading of realism, but deny the force of other readings. Certainly, to think of realism in this way is automatically to reject realism as skepticism.

What is interesting about realism as Communitarianism, then, is that it omits from consideration so much of what other scholars would deem to be central to realism. There is no

50 *Ibid.*, p.321.

51 Brown, C., (1992), *op. cit.*, p.26.

52 Cited in Cochran, M., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.46.

mention of the anarchy of the inter-state system, balance of power, no acknowledgment of the tension between principle and pragmatism, or the role of science in the study of international politics. Realism as Communitarianism focuses exclusively on the concept of a person, the moral standing of states, and the appropriate site of principles of justice (universalism versus particularism). Yet in this limited capacity, and through its defense of the sovereign state from a moral point of view, Communitarianism can claim legitimately to be a form of realism.

(f) Realism as “Advice to the Prince”

Advising the prince, the policy-maker, the politician, or the general public is something which writers, philosophers, and commentators have been doing for many thousands of years. “How to” manuals are as much a part of human literary history, as poetry, prose or letter writing. Human beings appear to have a psychological need to give others the benefit of their wisdom, to help them out, to show them that a better way, a better understanding, a better practice exists which can make them more knowledgeable, their conduct more appropriate, their life more fulfilling. Castiglione's attempt to set out a code of behaviour for individuals entering into courtly life and Machiavelli's attempt to show the Prince how best to rule are excellent examples of this genre of literature.

Realists have not been exempt from this psychological desire to influence the behaviour of others. Indeed, realism is often thought of as a theory designed primarily to make the job of the diplomat and the policymaker easier. As Keohane argues, “[t]hese self-styled realists sought to reorient United States foreign policy so that American policymakers could cope with Soviet

attempts at domination without either lapsing into passive unwillingness to use force or engaging in destructive and quixotic crusades to “make the world safe for democracy.”⁵³

(g) Realism as Pragmatism

It is also possible to think of realism as a view which acknowledges that diplomats, politicians, and policy-makers are at times forced to make decisions which violate the precepts of ordinary morality. These realists willingly concede that states should behave according to ethical standards, moral codes, international norms, and fixed principles. Yet because of the nature of their duty, these realists also point out that principled behaviour may not always be possible or, indeed, be the best course of action. Not only are there “hard cases” in international politics which are difficult to resolve for whatever reason, but choices sometimes need to be made which are ultimately a question of the lesser of two evils. Acting according to ethical principles may not always be possible, especially when the survival of the state is at issue.

This sort of realism seeks to remind the moralist that it is sometimes necessary to put principles aside and think pragmatically and creatively in the conduct and management of international affairs. The old adage that “circumstances alter cases” is the motto here. To demand adherence to absolute ethical principles, to insist on conformity to moral laws and abstract formulae, may well lead to far more extreme and terrible outcomes than if a flexible, intuitive, and pragmatic approach to policy is pursued.

There is a sense of the tragic in this sort of realism; an acknowledgment that for all the importance of moral rules, institutional norms, and codes of conduct, the structure of the

⁵³ Keohane, R.O., (1986), “Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.9.

international system is such that when states cannot resolve their differences and arbitration fails, war and violence is the last best option and unprincipled behaviour will become unavoidable. The tragedy, according to these realists, is that the “tension between principle and pragmatism is a permanent feature of the task of managing the participation of states in international relations.”⁵⁴

(h) Realism as “International Society”

This is realism British style and includes among its ranks Martin Wight, Charles Manning, Hedley Bull, Adam Watson, James Mayall, and John Vincent.⁵⁵ The international society perspective begins with the question of whether Hobbes was correct to interpret international politics as a state of nature and whether the consequences of anarchy make it impossible for a system of sovereign states to form some kind of a society.

“Law of the Jungle realism” recognizes no society or community in the international arena. Anarchy is treated strictly as meaning a total absence of government. As a consequence, the international arena is a place where the strong survive and the weak die out. Right belongs to the most powerful state in the system, morality is non-existent, cooperation does not exist, and power is the only salient commodity. The only sense in which a “society of states” might be said to exist is when it is artificially enforced by the sword, as when an empire conquers and subordinates a number of smaller, less powerful states.

⁵⁴ Claude, I.J., jr., (1993), “The Tension Between Principle and Pragmatism in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.19, No.3, July, p.243.

⁵⁵ Wight, M., (1994), *International Theory: The Three Traditions*. Leicester: Leicester University Press. Manning, C., (1962), *The Nature of International Society*. London: London School of Economics. Bull, H., (1977), *The Anarchical Society*. London: Macmillan. Watson, A., (1992), *The Evolution of International Society*. London: Routledge. Vincent, J.R., (1974), *Nonintervention and International Order*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Vincent, J.R., (1986), *Human Rights and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Mayall, J., (1990), *Nationalism and International Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In contrast, while the international society perspective accepts that the world is divided into a number of sovereign independent states, and lacks a central government, states have managed to establish “common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interests in maintaining these arrangements.”⁵⁶ These arrangements help to bring about a degree of order to the international system, precarious and imperfect though this order may be.

At the same time, and true to its post-war realist heritage, it is thoroughly anti-utopian. This view has no sympathy for the idea of world government. In steering a course between Law of the Jungle realism and projects for world government, the international society perspective offers (apparently) a more realistic interpretation of the nature of international politics. The international society perspective offers something of an intellectual *via media*. By interpreting the consequences of anarchy in a less radical, more relaxed fashion, defenders of this view believe that they come to a closer, to the meaning of realism and therefore, offer a better understanding of the nature of the international system than the one bequeathed to them by Hobbes.

That international society is consonant with international reality is a crucial element for the plausibility of this sort of realism. Time and time again, Hedley Bull makes the point that international society is, and has always been, a reality. “The element of international society has always been present in the modern international system because at no stage can it be said that the conception of the common interests of states, of common rules accepted and common institutions worked by them, has ceased to exert an influence.”⁵⁷

56 Bull, H., & Watson, A., (1984), “Introduction,” in Bull, H., & Watson, A., (ed.), *The Expansion of International Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.1.

57 Bull, H., (1977), *op. cit.*, p.42.

(i) Realism as neo-Aristotelianism

For Roger Spegele, realism is not “a single theoretical entity which can be refuted by single disconfirming instances,” but “a many-mansioned tradition of thought about international politics.”⁵⁸ He distinguishes between three types of realism. The first two he refers to as “common-sense” and “concessional.” The former appears to correspond primarily to the work of Carr, Morgenthau, and Wight, the latter to Waltz and Gilpin. According to Spegele, the main problem with this form of realism was that its defenders never examined the epistemological and ontological assumptions which drove it, preferring instead to concentrate on the task of educating statesmen to the dangers of totalitarianism. For example, the epistemological basis of common-sense realism is a practical common-sense knowledge which individuals develop and rely on during the conduct of their everyday lives. Despite the possible significance of this epistemology for the study of international politics, Spegele argues that the early realists never took the time to justify and ground this insight. In failing to do so, they left themselves open to “the charge of obsolescence.” In other words, they needed to be far more analytical about the notion of “theory” which animated their work.⁵⁹ For “the analysis of concepts involves the discovery of truths that hold good irrespective of even dramatic changes in international society.”⁶⁰

58 Spegele, R.D., (1987), “Three Forms of Political Realism,” *Political Studies*, Vol.35, No.2, June, p.189.

59 Spegele notes that the failure of Morgenthau to “clarify his understanding of ‘theory,’ made it appear as if the common-sense view of international relations was somehow both a theory and not a theory.” *Ibid.*, p.192. This criticism accords with the view later expressed by Waltz, that the realism of these post-war scholars was not really theory at all. See Waltz, K.N., (1991), “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” in Rothstein, R.L., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.24-26.

60 Spegele, R.D., (1987), *op. cit.*, p.192.

This left the way open for the concessional realists. By using the methodological tenets of scientific empiricism, they were able to provide a more solid grounding and justification for realism that its predecessors were able to do. Spegele rejects both the commitment to scientific empiricism and utilitarianism which underlies this form of realism. Neither of these theories are self-evidently true and they have the additional drawback of putting considerable distance between “concessional realism” and the central ideas and notions of realism as traditionally understood.”⁶¹

Spegele's own understanding of realism derives, on the one hand, from Aristotle's philosophy of science, and on the other, from his philosophy of practice. By employing Aristotle's categories, he seeks to ground realism in a realist philosophy of science. And although he does not develop this “ground” to its fullest extent he does set out five key principles which he thinks makes neo-Aristotelian realism “intuitively appealing.”

The first principle is that theories can be true, and some theories are true. Concessional realists like Waltz only use the term “true” to correspond to general laws. Second, theoretical terms like “state,” “power,” and “national interest” should be interpreted realistically. Third, international politics is a domain of “soft” facts. In other words, all phenomena, ideas, and so forth require mediation and interpretation. Four, in neo-Aristotelian realism theory and practice exhibit ineliminable tensions. Five, in international politics, consequentialism is an appropriate morality.

It should be pointed out that very few mainstream scholars will see anything remotely corresponding to what has passed for realism over the past fifty years. But the fact that it does not is significant. For it highlights with great urge clarity the gap between the view espoused by

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.199.

defenders of the Discipline and the diversity of its forms today. Moreover, it would be no argument against this to say that this view comes from “left-field” and is not representative of realism. It is precisely the fact that the idea of realism has no gate-keeper, no oracle who defines its essence, no *a priori* meaning, that Spegele can employ the term for his own intellectual purposes. At the same time, it is clear that Spegele's account stretches the meaning of realism beyond anything which could realistically fit within the paradigmatic expression of it. If, as Keenes argues, the key reason for thinking of realism in terms of a paradigm is that it gives “unity and internal coherence,” to the theory, then it is hard to see how one could bring neo-Aristotelian realism into the fold without stretching the meaning of unity well beyond normal and accepted usage.

(j) Realism as Postmodern Structurationism

Discussion about something called postmodern realism will be regarded by many as oxymoronic and certainly a contradiction in terms. After all, an approach which eschews all efforts at developing foundations is anti-modernist and anti-rationalist, situates itself on the margins of discourse, and deconstructs the ideas, values, and assumptions of a generation of scholars, is hardly likely to be suitable raw material for a reconciliation or synthesis with a view which is the source of its condemnation and ire. To the committed postmodernist, such a venture would be analogous to sleeping with the enemy. And one can imagine that “hard-core” realists would be equally unimpressed about such a possibility. It stretches the imagination to think that Kenneth Waltz and Jim George could ever find common ground!

Nevertheless, some scholars have explored the possibility of such a synthesis.⁶² Tony Porter, for example, believes that postmodernism can contribute to our understanding of international politics in two important ways. According to him, meaning is constructed and manipulated through the use of words and symbols. He argues, therefore, that most of our views of international politics are third hand, developed through our interaction with television, movies, texts, and through the words, gestures, and arguments of politicians and diplomats (assuming of course that they are to be believed). Very few individuals have a first hand knowledge of important international political events. What is often overlooked is the “rhetorical techniques and concrete mechanism by which ideas are created and disseminated.”⁶³ The value of postmodernism lies in highlighting the way that meanings are created and how they are linked to subtle “strategies of domination.” Where once students of international politics regarded “power” solely in terms of a usable resource, postmodernists have shown that it is also a relational idea which involves the manipulation of words and symbols.

This is why “deconstruction” as a technique should not be seen as something entirely negative. Its positive function lies in the way that it analyzes texts to reveal their internal inconsistencies and hidden assumptions. In doing so, deconstruction unmasks the “will to power” which lies behind all arguments, world-views, ideologies, and claims to truth, and shows them to

62 Porter, T., (1994), “Postmodern Political Realism and International Relations Theory's Third Debate,” in Sjolander, C.T., & Cox, W.S., (eds.), *Beyond Positivism: Critical Reflections on International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press. Barry Buzan has also indicated that this might be possible. There is “no reason why much of the post-modern discourse cannot eventually be merged into realism. There are traditions within realism that are receptive to the idea of language as power, and discourse as a major key to politics.” Buzan, B., (1996), “The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?” in Smith, S., Booth, K., & Zalewski, M., (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.59. One can only imagine what some of the more vocal postmodernists would say about such a marriage!

63 *Ibid.*, p.110.

be rhetorical and arbitrary. It provides a means of gaining new insights into the reading of texts and “helps to avoid the creation of stale orthodoxies, and discover clues to metatheoretical contradictions.”⁶⁴

Postmodernism also contains important insights into nature of modernity. Its understanding of the significance of the sovereignty/anarchy dualism in the creation, repression, and exclusion of the other point to a unique understanding of the degree of violence hidden in its language, concepts, and assumptions. Moreover, postmodernism helps to shed light on the social and political conditions necessary for the rise of the modern state. Moreover, he thinks realism and postmodernism have something in common with each other. Both reject abstract political ideals such as those which dominate the idealism of the 1930s, stress the ubiquity of power, see history as fractured and dissonant, and order as imposed.

Despite the contribution of postmodernism to our understanding of international politics and despite points of contact with realism, Porter finds fault with it on a number of counts. Among other things, it is intolerant to alternative theoretical frameworks, underestimates the significance of material constraints, is insensitive to the importance of values and consensus, excludes, obscures, and underestimates the “nondominating potential in modernity,” and fails to recognize the existence of an extra textual reality.⁶⁵

The value of a “structurationist” approach to the study of international politics is that it is able to overcome these shortcomings. Now Porter does not say a great deal about structuration

64 *Ibid.*, p.111.

65 *Ibid.*, p.122.

theory. But it is clear that he thinks that it is superior to deconstructionist strands of postmodernism because it:

allows us to draw on the postmodern insights about meaning construction and about the relationship between modernity and international relations. It also allows us to relink such analysis with the extra textual world, a world that is alive with contingency and is created by humans for their own fulfillment.⁶⁶

Where postmodernists see only domination, structurationists are oriented toward freedom from domination by emphasizing human agency. In other words, by focusing on practices rather than texts, structurationism, however, allows more scope for individuals to understand and alter the circumstances of their lives. Postmodern political realism, then, is a structurationist metatheory. What is interesting here is not so much the specific details of Porter's argument, but the fact that realism is used as a synonym for an amalgam of structuration and postmodern themes.

What do all these interpretations of realism tell us? What, for example, is to be made of the fact that Roger Spegele and Patrick James both claim to be realists yet have fundamentally opposed views about what this means? According to James, realism is capable of being turned into a science. It only needs further "elaboration."⁶⁷ Spegele, on the other hand, argues that "theory attempts to tell us how the world is; but how the world is and how we tell what is in it should not be understood in terms of the strong naturalistic models which predominate in positivist-empiricism..." Or consider for a moment the place of ethics in realism. How, for example, can it be regarded as a view which defends the separation of ethics from politics and deny that states are moral agents at the same time as it is regarded as synonymous with a communitarian morality? To

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.125.

⁶⁷ James, P., (1993), "Neorealism as a Research Enterprise: Toward Elaborated Structural Realism," *International Political Science Review*, Vol.14, No.2, pp.123-148.

suggest that there are a broad spectrum of views within realism is a rather facile and unsatisfactory response. After all, what makes these arguments interesting is not that their defenders organize their thinking around the state, or that they are concerned with “power” and “security.” In some respects, every thinker in the western tradition can be said to have broached these subjects to a lesser or greater degree. What is interesting about these views is that they clash at a fundamental level.

Realism: An Arena of Metatheoretical Conflict?

A number of more enlightened scholars in the Discipline have expressed some doubts about the orthodox way of presenting realism. While they accept that realists share some common ground, they argue that differences between them cannot be ignored. As Stephen Brooks notes:

International relations scholars have tended to focus on realism’s common features rather than exploring potential differences. Realists do share certain assumptions and are often treated as a group, but such a broad grouping obscures systematic divisions within realist theory.⁶⁸

Differences within realism are significant and must, in the interests of theoretical clarity, be taken seriously. What, then, are these divisions within realist theory? According to Steven Van Evera, there are five pairs of debates within realism which generate different and contested interpretations.⁶⁹ Most scholars, however, are content to treat realism as an idea which consists of two competing forms, although there is no agreement on what to call these. For example, John Mearscheimer distinguishes between Morgenthauian and Waltzian versions of realism and argues

⁶⁸ Brooks, S.G., (1997), “Dueling Realisms,” *International Organization*, Vol.51, No.3, Summer, p.445.

⁶⁹ They are: (1) hawkish realists versus dovish realists; (2) pessimistic realists versus optimistic realists; (3) second image realists versus third image realists; (4) structural realists versus human nature realists; and (5), amoralist realists versus moralist realists. Cited in Frankel, B., (1995), “Restating the Realist Case: An Introduction,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Spring, p.xix.

that his own views are closer to the latter.⁷⁰ Stephen Brooks in his commentary on this issue differentiates between neorealism and what he calls postclassical realism.⁷¹ Jack Snyder differentiates between defensive and aggressive forms of realism.⁷² Richard Ashley, who first pioneered this argument, speaks about the difference between practical and technical realism.⁷³ And finally, Robert Walker talks about realism cleaving along structural and historical lines.⁷⁴

However, the issue of realism's coherence can be looked at from another perspective. What should not be forgotten is that not all structuralist forms of realism are the same. Nor are historicist ones. Walker's distinction is meant only as a conceptual one, and not to be taken as if there is nothing further to be said on this issue. Arguably, to do justice to the differences within realism, it is necessary to go beyond this basic framework. Account has to be taken both of the different metatheories which underpin many of the versions of realism abroad today, as well as the fact that many of these clash.

It is customary to contrast first and second order theory as a way of defining a metatheory. First order theory concerns itself with the way the world works. It leads to substantive theories.

70 Mearscheimer, J., (1994/1995), "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security*, Vol.19, No.5, p.9, fn 20.

71 Brooks, S., (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 445.

72 Snyder, J., (1991), *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, pp.11-12.

73 Ashley, R.K. (1981), "Political Realism and Human Interests," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2, June, pp.204-236.

74 As Walker notes, "[s]tructuralist positions generally aspire to scientific status, to ahistorical laws and explanations. Historicist positions lean towards the categories of hermeneutics and practice." Walker, R.B.J., (1987), "Realism, Change, and International Political Theory," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.1, March, pp.65-86. See also Walker, R.B.J., (1989), "History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.2, Summer, pp.163-183.

Second order theory focuses on the “ontological and epistemological issues of what constitute important or legitimate questions and answers for International Relations scholarship, rather than on the structure and dynamics of the international system.”⁷⁵ But these are not separate activities. Behind every first order theory is a second order metatheory. What is often forgotten, however, is that the same first order theories can be underpinned and directed by divergent metatheories. If Mark Neufeld’s description of a metatheory has merit as an answer to the question what is a “good theory.” it is clear that different realists offer very different answers to this question and, in the case of Morgenthau, there are appears to be more than one metatheory at work at the one time.⁷⁶ This is why it is inadequate to just distinguish between two forms of realism. Thus, even the “enlightened” post-orthodox view does not go nearly far enough.⁷⁷ The binary categories developed by these writers are simply inadequate to account for the broad metatheoretical variations within realism.

To make sense of realism, then, the place to start is to acknowledge that it is an idea which is subject to intense metatheoretical conflict. R.B.J. Walker is more aware of this than most, when he notes that realism should be seen as a “a knot of historically constituted tensions and contradictions.”⁷⁸ There are three aspects of metatheories which interest me, at least for the discussion to follow. The first is the fact that scholars employ them (knowingly or unknowingly)

75 Wendt, A., (1991), “Bridging the Theory/Metatheory Gap in International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.17, No.4, October, p.383. See also Neufeld, M., (1993), “Reflexivity and International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.1, Spring, p.54.

76 *Ibid.*, p.54.

77 Barry Buzan is an exception here and I shall take a look at what he has to say on this issue in the following chapter. See Buzan, B., (1996), *op. cit.*, pp.45-67.

78 Walker, R.B.J., (1987), *op. cit.*, p.68.

in their interpretations of realism. Second, these often compete and are incommensurable, as the case of James and Spegele illustrates. And third, that there is little or no discussion in the literature about the way these metatheories impact on the meaning and coherence of realism.

None of this is to suggest that there is absolutely no place for thinking about realism as an ideal-type within the Discipline today. There may well be. But it seems to me that if the importance of differentiation is acknowledged, then such disciplining techniques actually retard our ability to learn about this idea. They hide from view the very things that need to be brought out into the open, investigated and explained. It is not possible to make any sense of the fact that realism is capable of being bundled with different and quite incompatible metatheories when ideal-type thinking is employed. Of course, for some, this might seem all the more reason to employ such a technique. But I do not think this helps at all. What is interesting about realism in this regard is that the different interpretations represent substantially different views about the human condition, about the nature and goal of politics, the clash of values, and the difficulty of making just decisions in politics. This existential moment is lost when realism is spoken of as a coherent approach to the study of international politics. It leads to a down-playing of the significance of moral conflict in our lives, removes ideas from the context of their creation, and ultimately leads to a rather distorted picture of the political world. It is almost as if there has been an unconscious intellectual conspiracy among defenders of the Discipline to bury metatheoretical issues as deep in the bedrock of discussion as possible, in the hope that no-one will notice their existence and importance. Clearly, intellectual accuracy takes a back seat to the demand for a strong, consensual, professional, and streamlined field of study.

Stanley Hoffmann suggests that “we may dis-cover that the realist paradigm...has to be seriously amended, not only for the present but for the past.”⁷⁹ I do not think that there is any doubt about this today. To regard realism as a cohesive intellectual discourse is to ignore the role of metatheories in the various interpretation of this idea. Every version of realism I have looked at relies on a substantially different and conflicting metatheory. Each form of realism can be regarded as self-sufficient and free-standing, deriving its legitimacy entirely from within its own understanding of what an adequate realism should look like.

But if realism does not have the degree of cohesion that the conventional wisdom suggests, and is better seen as an arena of intellectual conflict, then it is impossible to treat it as an idea which has a pure identity. And, without such an “identity,” many of the assumptions, categories, and frameworks which have fed discussion and debate in the Discipline over the past fifty years simply become redundant. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, it is only possible to employ the inter-paradigm debate, for example, if realism has a “pure identity” which confronts an equally pure liberal or Marxist identity. If it does not, the inter-paradigm debate loses its intellectual value as a way of framing the study of international politics. And clearly those who exploit this sort of argument do so precisely to achieve this outcome. As Der Derian puts it, he seeks to “flood the protected marketplace of international political theory with a multiplicity of realisms, devalue its proprietary origins, and in the process break its traditional dependency upon an evil, utopian, or merely irrational other to maintain a pure identity.”⁸⁰ But what does it mean to

79 Hoffmann, S., (1987), “An American Social Science: International Relations,” in *Janus and Minerva: Essays in the Theory and Practice of International Politics*. Boulder, Colorado: The Westview Press, p.22.

80 *Ibid.*

speaking about realism as an idea bereft of such an identity? Before I discuss this question, I think it is important to inquire into the validity of the assertion that realism derives its coherence from its status as a tradition. Invocations about the existence of a tradition offer a powerful antidote to the argument made here.

The Realist Tradition: Fact or Fiction?

As with all human practices, traditions are important. They shape lives, provide a basis for social interaction and community, allow people to share in a common past, and comfort families, social groups, and nations in times of distress. Traditions provide individuals with structure, order, and continuity. At the same time, people die for traditions, murder for them, are persecuted by them and persecute in their name. Just as traditions can be invigorating, enlightening, and uplifting, they can also be retrograde, oppressive, and destructive.

From the point of view of the critic and reformer, the complex metaphysical structure of traditions make them extremely difficult to comprehend and challenge. One either belongs to a tradition and is, so to speak, “in the know,” or one is an outsider and excluded from its time-honored truths. To argue against a tradition, criticize its precepts, or probe its shortcomings, is not only to come up against something which has linkages with the past, but to come up against a world-view. And, as with most world-views, an element of faith and subjective feeling is always involved. Understandably, dislodging such traditions, no matter how bizarre or flawed, is much easier to achieve in theory, than in practice. The most penetrating critique is unlikely to sway the loyal follower.

Traditions are important in intellectual life as well, providing scholars with a sense of purpose, an identity, as well as a frame of reference to guide their research activities. And like other

forms of tradition, an inner strength is derived from accepting their validity. Arguments which have been transmitted through the ages and have stood the test of time are necessarily more worthy and credible than ones which are contemporary. They also tend to be more resistant to criticism. The idea of a “classical tradition” encompasses this meaning. As Hans-Georg Gadamer argues, “[the classical is what resists historical criticism because its historical dominion, the binding power of its validity that is preserved and handed-down, precedes all historical reflection and continues through it.”⁸¹

When defenders of the Discipline turn their minds to the more metaphysical and ontological aspects of their creed, or are responding to very demanding criticisms, they often invoke the notion of “tradition.” Its existence has the status of an unquestioned historical fact among the faithful. Even Stanley Hoffmann, who often refers to himself as a liberal (although it might be more appropriate to call him a liberal realist), claims with great certainty that “we can all trace our ancestry back to Thucydides, just as political scientists can trace theirs to Aristotle.”⁸² Kenneth Waltz speaks of a “striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia.”⁸³ And finally, Robert Gilpin suggests that “one must inquire whether or not twentieth-century students of international politics know anything that Thucydides and his fifth century compatriots did not know about the behaviour of states.”⁸⁴ In this sense, the “tradition” helps to bond scholars together into a coherent and identifiable group. By recognizing a degree of symmetry

81 Gadamer, H-G., (1985), *Truth and Method*. 2nd Edition. London: Sheed & Ward, p.255.

82 Hoffmann, S., (1991), *op. cit.*, p.3.

83 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *op. cit.*, p.66.

84 Gilpin, R., (1981), *War and Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.227.

between the writings of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and others, defenders of the Discipline are doing no more than acknowledging their intellectual debt to these scholars.⁸⁵

It does not seem to matter, however, that the existence of a realist tradition is a relatively recent intellectual invention corresponding to the birth of International Relations as a formal Discipline, or that Thucydides is a pagan and Augustine a Christian, or that it is questionable to detach the ideas of past thinkers from the philosophical milieu in which their ideas originally made sense.

Defenders of the Discipline are also very whimsical about who fits into the “tradition.” Thrasymachus and Callicles rarely get a mention. Yet their views about justice being the right of the stronger are as forcefully stated as anything written by Thucydides.⁸⁶ And Hegel's critique of Kantian idealism reaches a degree of sophistication unmatched by any twentieth century scholar. Unfortunately, he too is rarely consulted. And Kautilya. Well, who is he?

At the same time, philosophers and political theorists offer very different interpretations of the writings of the early realists than do the faithful in the Discipline. Yet there is an almost complete lack of critical engagement with these interpretations. Robert Walker, for example, notes that Machiavelli's writings stem primarily from a commitment to the development of political communities.⁸⁷ His comments on international politics and war need to be understood in this light.

85 Robert Walker has identified two other ways in which the idea of a tradition is employed in the Discipline. The first posits an endless struggle between realists and idealists, while the second speaks of international political theory as a tradition of thought which runs parallel to political theory. Walker, R.B.J., (1993), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.31-34

86 Two exceptions are Holmes, R.L., (1989), *op. cit.*, pp.52-54. And Hare, J.E., & Joynt, C.B., (1982), *Ethics and International Affairs*. London: Macmillan, pp.24-26.

87 He argues that “Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau and the rest are presented as unproblematic figures, often in disguises that make them unrecognizable to anyone who examines the textual evidence we have of them.

For Walker, these interpretations actually undermine the existence and coherence of the realist tradition. The point is that defenders of the Discipline never discuss the issue at all. They simply rehearse a conventional interpretation of their favored thinkers without considering the contested nature of the interpretations they offer or whether alternative interpretations might prove to be textually more accurate. In essence, defenders of the Discipline simply manufacture a “historical tradition” of thought out of caricatural readings of important (past) thinkers, with little respect for the integrity or depth of their thought.

This point can be illustrated with reference to Robert Gilpin's response to Richard Ashley.⁸⁸ Gilpin begins by firing a few broad-sides over the bow of Ashley's polemical ship. Ashley's views are confused, misleading, and perplexing, while his penchant for jargon is an “assault on language and gives us social scientists a bad name.”⁸⁹ This is little more than insult-trading, due largely to the rather belligerent tone of Ashley's attack on realism/neorealism.

It is certainly true that Ashley's work is jargon-laden. But no more or less so than most other specialists in the field. What are terms like “subsystems dominance,” “interdependence,” “polar,” “bipolar,” “multipolar,” “unipolar,” “window of vulnerability,” and “long cycles,” if not

That each of these figures is open to sharply differing interpretations has mattered little. In place of a history of political thought is offered an ahistorical repetition in which the struggles of these thinkers to make sense of the historical transformations in which they were caught are erased in favor of assertions that they all articulate essential truths about the same unchanging tragic reality: the eternal game of relations between states.” Walker, R.B.J., (1989), *op. cit.*, p.172. Brian Schmidt makes a similar point. “The work customarily elevated to the classical canon were primarily concerned with achieving the good life inside the confines of the territorial sovereign state and only, if at all, marginally concerned with the external relations between sovereign authorities.” Schmidt, B.C., (1994), “The Historiography of Academic International Relations,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.20, No.4, October, p.354.

88 Gilpin, R., (1986), *op. cit.*, pp.301-321. Gilpin is mainly referring to Ashley, R.K., (1986), “The Poverty of Neorealism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp255-300.

89 Gilpin, R., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.303. see also Kratochwil, F., (1984), “Errors Have Their Advantage,” *International Organization*, Vol.38, No.2, Spring, p.307

jargon? Indeed, jargon is an endemic problem in International Relations thanks mainly to the behaviourists. No-one has made this point clearer than Jean Bethke Elshtain when she speaks of the Discipline as being “encumbered with a lifeless jargon...a patina of aseptic, ahistorical and anodyne terminology.”⁹⁰ Yet Gilpin never hoists his colleagues on this petard. It is clear that he simply does not “like” Ashley's particular brand of jargon. Gilpin needs reminding of the adage: those without sin cast the first stone. The profusion of dry economic terms in his own work, as well as such sentences as “[t]he positive correlation between bipolarization of blocs and the outbreak of war forces consideration of whether bipolar or multipolar systems have a higher propensity to polarize into blocs,” would seem to negate much of the force of this criticism of Ashley's linguistic disposition.⁹¹

At a more substantive level however, Gilpin complains that by lumping Stephen Krasner, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Tucker, Charles Kindleberger, George Modelski, Robert Keohane, and himself together as neorealists, the individuality of these scholars is lost. Ashley treats as a single clique perspectives which should be judged on their own merits. According to Gilpin, this “motley crew” offers “a rather disparate set of professional and political perspectives,” not a unified view of international politics.⁹²

Being tarred with someone else's brush is something which Gilpin is extremely unhappy with and makes a point of showing that his approach and understanding of international politics is different to that of Waltz. Consequently, he finds it rather distressing that “Waltz and Krasner

90 Elshtain, J.B., (1987), *Women and War*. London: Harvester Press, p.89.

91 Gilpin, R., (1980), *op. cit.*, p.89.

92 Gilpin, R., (1986), *op. cit.*, p.301.

should be held accountable for the foibles of Gilpin...”⁹³ The problem, according to him, is that Ashley “fails to consider whether the points of agreement or disagreement are the more fundamental.”⁹⁴

Gilpin's response to being treated as a member of a realist clique is to begin by defining the nature of realism. Yet Gilpin is once again a sinner masquerading as a saint. First of all, it is to be wondered, given the previous discussion, whether anyone can define realism adequately in a hundred pages, let alone in one and a half. But this does not seem to worry Gilpin. A page and a half is all it takes to demonstrate that “Ashley has a very narrow and constricted comprehension of the variety and richness of realist thought.”⁹⁵ But when he discusses the content of the realist tradition, he falls victim to many of the same errors that he accuses Ashley of. Not only does he not define what he means by the term “tradition,” but it is hard to see what is so rich about a view which contains only three major propositions. More significantly, his essentialist reading of realism violates the individuality and intellectual integrity of those scholars whom he appeals to in order to discredit Ashley's case. Imagine how Thomas Hobbes would feel to know that he is now recognized as a footnote to Thucydides and his legacy to the present is a rather banal observation taken, not from his philosophical works, but from a letter, about the correspondence between international politics and life in the jungle. One suspects he would react in precisely the same way that Gilpin does. The point is that Gilpin never once questions the validity of his interpretation of Thucydides or Hobbes. He invokes a certain reading of them without considering for a moment

93 *Ibid.*, p.302.

94 *Ibid.*

95 *Ibid.*, p.305.

whether this reading is warranted. But in trying to show the richness and diversity of realist thought, and in the process restore his own intellectual sovereignty, he ends up denying that same sovereignty to others. Ultimately, Ashley is let off the hook.

In addition, none of the so-called “founding fathers” of International Relations considered themselves to be working within a “recognizably established and specified discursive framework” in the way that Paul the Apostle, St. Augustine, and Martin Luther do with regard to Christianity, or, in the case of Marxism, Georgy Lukacs, Rosa Luxemburg, and Perry Anderson. Nicolo Machiavelli, for example, never considered himself to be follower of Thucydides. Indeed, his entire philosophy, *pace* Leo Strauss, is premised on the failure of the so-called classical tradition. Nor would he have understood quite what it meant to be a member of a Thucydidean tradition. After all, it is the fact that he broke with historical tradition in important ways which makes his writings so compelling today.⁹⁶ And although Hobbes thought that Thucydides' famous work confirmed his own philosophy, “he interpreted Thucydides in a unique fashion in order to do so.”⁹⁷

If realism is a tradition then, it is a (modern) analytical tradition, not a historical one. Brian Schmidt defines the former as “an intellectual construction in which a scholar may stipulate certain ideas, themes, genres, or texts as functionally similar. It is, most essentially, a retrospectively created construct determined by present criteria and concerns.”⁹⁸ In other words, realism (as

96 Leo Strauss has argued that: “The founder of modern political philosophy is Machiavelli. He tried to effect, and did effect, a break with the whole tradition of political philosophy. He compared his achievement to that of men like Columbus. He claimed to have discovered a new moral continent. His claim is well founded; his political teaching is “wholly new.” Strauss, L., (1975), “What is Political Philosophy?” *Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss*. New York: Pegasus, p.40.

97 Johnson, M, L., (1993), *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, p.x.

98 Schmidt, B.C.,(1994), *op. cit.*, p.353.

opposed to *realpolitik*) is a post-war viewpoint read back into the writings and events of the past for the purpose of constructing a theory of international politics.

Defenders of the Discipline have systematically confused these two forms of tradition. One of the consequences of this action is that “the discipline is given a false sense of coherence and continuity.”⁹⁹ Thus, Schmidt rejects John Vasquez's claim that “the field has been far more coherent, systematic and cumulative than all the talk of contending approaches and theories implies.”¹⁰⁰ The best evidence of this is, according to Schmidt, that Hans Morgenthau and Hedley Bull were so scathing of the behavioural project. For Vasquez, on the other hand, the behavioural revolution represents no more than a methodological hiccup in an otherwise coherent and continuous “realist” history. The essence of Schmidt's argument is that this view “obscures the actual academic practices that have contributed to the discursive development of the field.”¹⁰¹

To think about realism as a retrospectively created analytical construct rather than as a timeless historical tradition is an important insight. It leads to the conclusion that realism is “less as a coherent theoretical position in its own right than as the site of a great many contested claims and metaphysical disputes.”¹⁰² The disagreements among realists then, are by no means as superficial as defenders of the Discipline suggest. This is not just a quantitative judgement either. It is not just a question of which way the pendulum swings. The fact is that the gulf between realists on important epistemological, political, and ethical issues is extremely wide. Many of these

99 *Ibid.*, p.356.

100 *Ibid.*, p.357.

101 *Ibid.*, p.357.

102 Walker, R.B.J., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.105.

views have completely different emphases, are opposed on ontological and epistemological grounds, serve very different intellectual goals, and offer contradictory answers to similar questions. Ultimately, there is far less correspondence in the idea of realism, and among those whose work is said to comprise its essential core, than defenders of the Discipline allow for. It is misleading to ignore or minimize these differences in order to privilege the language of unity and tradition and present International Relations as a consensually generated Discipline. The price of this fantasy is a general loss of philosophical acumen among theorists of international politics.

One interesting way of demonstrating this is to consider Laurie Johnson's findings that there are very real philosophical differences between the views of human nature in Hobbes and Thucydides.¹⁰³ According to Johnson, Thucydides did not subscribe to the Hobbesian view that all humans were motivated by a narrow passion-driven self-interest. Instead, the former is far more attuned to the differences in the national character of the Spartans and the Athenians. In so doing, she rejects the kind of human nature universalism found in Hobbes. For Johnson then, there are good reasons for "removing Thucydides from the list of fathers of realism. Consequently, she suggests "that Thucydides might offer an alternative approach to analyzing international relations."¹⁰⁴

What writers like Walker, Schmidt, Johnson, and others are suggesting is that appeals to tradition are unconvincing as a justification for treating realism as a homogeneous and relatively coherent body of thought. Indeed, it is further confirmation that consensus is a value which has

103 In a similar vein, Walker notes that Thucydides famous work "has been mined both for its alleged lessons about the primacy of power over justice, and as a highly moral text, one which reflects a view much closer to that represented by Socrates than by Thrasymachus..." *Ibid.*, p.108.

104 Johnson, M, L., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.212.

been inflated well beyond what it is reasonable to expect from any “realistic” assessment of the materials on the subject of international politics. It has been possible to manufacture consent only because defenders of the Discipline have not subjected their justificatory arguments to deep and penetrating philosophical analysis.

Conclusion

Although continually invoked in theoretical discourse then, rarely, if ever, do scholars interpret realism in precisely the same way. Donald Brand is right to suggest that “realists make strange bedfellows.”¹⁰⁵ There is no list of precepts which all realists agree on. And despite nearly half a century of effort, no-one can be said to have captured its essence unequivocally and to the satisfaction of all concerned. At the same time, the boundary between realism and its competitor approaches is something which has always been the subject of debate. Barry Buzan, for example, openly admits that he pushes “the boundaries of realism further out than some people think appropriate.”¹⁰⁶ Under these circumstances, it is clear that realism does not have the degree of cohesion and homogeneity that is often suggested by defenders of the Discipline.¹⁰⁷ To try to turn this idea into a general theory of international politics and something around which a consensus can be achieved is quite a bizarre notion. This idea is clearly not a tradition which has been handed-down since the beginning of recorded history. Instead, it is an idea whose meaning is nebulous,

105 Brand, D., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.277.

106 Buzan, B., (1996), *op. cit.*, p.47. On the issue of where the boundary of “realism” begins and ends, see Herz, J., (1981), “Political Realism Revisited,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2, June, pp.182-197.

107 This is what Stanley Hoffmann is alluding to in the quotation which opens this chapter. In a similar vein, Peter Gelman suggests that “the diversity of theoretical priorities among “realists”...limits the utility of realism as a word that can either describe or enlighten.” Gelman, P., (1988), “Hans J. Morgenthau and the Legacy of Political Realism,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.14, No.2, October, p.248.

ephemeral, exceptionally transitory, open to multiple interpretations, and impossible to define authoritatively and objectively. Just what this means is something I want to take up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHALLENGING THE “DUBIOUS DISCIPLINE”

Words and things have come unstuck

John O’Neill

Introduction

Defenders of the Discipline are clearly unhappy with the state of international political theory at present. They have no science of international politics, no better record of prediction than the most suspect fortune-teller, a “theory” that is unable to escape criticism and condemnation, and a radically transformed world to contend with. Moreover, they are divided on the degree of anarchy in the international system, just how much parsimony is possible in a theory, and over the significance of political institutions as global actors.¹ And, if this is not enough, the disciplinary ethos which they prize so highly is no longer universally respected. By any measurement, this does not look much like intellectual progress.

Today, these defenders cut a lonely figure alongside post-modernists, feminists, social constructionists, Wittgensteinians, structurationists, critical theorists, Gramscian political economists, liberals, and normative theorists, to name but a few of the more popular incantations within post-positivism. Now they can look back to the loss of an empire, and forward to sharing what remains of it with upstarts and neophytes, none of whom they regard as having the insight, depth, and the substance of the traditional discourse.

Hans Morgenthau once suggested that it is the task of every generation “to rediscover and reformulate the perennial problems of political ethics and to answer them in light of the experience

¹ See Baldwin, D.A., (1993), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press. Kegley, C.W., jr., (1995), *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge*. New York: St. Martins Press. For an argument which suggests these are two versions of the same broad approach see George, J., (1997), “Australia’s Global Perspectives in the 1990s: A Case of Old Realist Wine in New (Neo-liberal) Bottles,” in Leaver, R., & Cox, D., (eds.), *Middling, Meddling, Muddling: Issues in Australian Foreign Policy*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, pp.12-43.

of the age.”² It would seem that such a task lies ahead of us today, not only in the difficult realm of ethical theory, but across the whole spectrum of intellectual life. The situation has been neatly summed up by Jane Flax.

Western culture is in the middle of a fundamental transformation: “a shape of life” is growing old. The demise of the old is being hastened by the end of colonialism, the uprising of women, the revolt of other cultures against white hegemony, shifts in the balance of economic and political power within the world economy, and a growing awareness of the costs as well as the benefits of scientific “progress”.³

Of course, scholars can debate the precise meaning of this shift: whether we are witnessing the death throes of the modern age or the birth pangs of a new one, or the possibility that Western modernity is in the grips of an intellectual “crisis” which parallels that of the Scientific Revolution. But whatever position one adopts on these issues it is clear that “there is a growing sense that something is wrong with the way that the relevant issues and options are posed - a sense that something is happening which is changing the categorial structure and patterns in which we think and act.”⁴ It is implicit in Theodor Adorno's claim that there is no universal history from savagery to humanitarianism but there is one from the slingshot to the megaton bomb; in Charles Taylor's notion of the “malaise of modernity,” Christopher Lasch's “culture of narcissism,” Michel Foucault's “carceral archipelago,” Alasdair MacIntyre's complaint about “the failure of the Enlightenment project,” and Jean-Francois Lyotard understanding of “the postmodern

2 Cited in Rosenthal, J.H., (1991), *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in a Nuclear Age*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, p.42.

3 Cited in George, J., (1993), “On Incarceration and Closure: Neorealism and the New/Old World Order,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.2, Summer, pp.215-216.

4 Bernstein, R.J., (1983), *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Practice*. London: Basil Blackwell, p.2.

condition.”⁵

Defenders of the Discipline have been painfully slow to acknowledge this. For them, two and a half thousand years of Western history exhibits only “recurrence and repetition” and the Discipline remains vital to the study of international politics.⁶ Yet such simplistic formulae fail to capture the complexity and diversity of international politics today. Arguably, no head-way will be made in the field if time is spent patronizing such outmoded assumptions, listening to those who suggest that nothing of significance has occurred to warrant a revision of the way that international politics is studied, or by treating International Relations as if it is an autonomous field of study.

It is interesting in this regard that Darryl Jarvis, a staunch supporter of the Discipline, suggests that “the latest “crisis” posed by the “Third Debate” be approached, not as a disjunctural event unusual in character, but as a *distinctive recurrence endemic to the very discourse of International Relations.*”⁷ What Jarvis is suggesting is that one of the defining qualities of the Discipline is that it has never been able to escape from chaos and upheaval. If this is so, it indicates that Holsti, Biersteker and others are mistaken to argue that the Discipline is in disarray because of post-positivism, or relativist elements within it. A better interpretation is one which lays the

5 Adorno, T., (1973), *Negative Dialectics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.321. Taylor, C., (1991), *The Malaise of Modernity*. Toronto: Anansi Press. Lasch, C., *The Culture of Narcissism American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. MacIntyre, A., (1985), *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd Edition. London: Duckworth. Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish*. Lyotard, J-F., (1984), *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

6 Wight, M., (1967), “Why is There no International Theory?” in Wight, M., & Butterfield, H., (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.32.

7 Jarvis, D.S.J., (1995), *The End of a New Beginning: The Crisis of the ‘Third Debate’ and the Politics of Post-Modern International Theory*. Unpublished PHD Thesis, p.36. The italics are mine.

blame squarely at the feet of the constitution of the Discipline itself. In other words, the Discipline has well and truly fallen short of its own expectations. In this sense, blaming post-positivism (or challenging its advocates to put forward a research program) is like shooting the messenger.

But there is another reason to be skeptical of those seeking to blame post-positivism for the current state of the Discipline. Such critiques presuppose that independent criteria exist which make it possible to determine success or failure in international political theory. But, in fact, no such criteria are available to students of international politics.⁸ The disciplinary framework is not God-given and these defenders do not hover above the world as neutral observers. They have their own intellectual agenda and seek to defend its hegemony at all costs, even to the point of ignoring important deficiencies within it. The result is a subjective and relatively ill-informed assessment of the contemporary intellectual scene: one which adds nothing to clarifying important issues concerning the future study of international politics. To realize this is a crucial step in getting clear on the state of the field. It has been suggested that International Relations is showing signs of maturity. However, unless one recognizes that there is no indisputable basis upon which to establish a permanent consensus, maturity will be a long time coming. To put the point differently, it is time to recognize that the field will not advance as long as scholars continue to defend the autonomy of this ill-begotten child of the twentieth century from the rest of the social sciences. The first part of this chapter seeks to understand the ramifications of this conclusion. I argue that getting beyond the “dubious Discipline” is not as easy as some scholars might assume.

⁸ Thus, Kalevi Holsti would seem to contradict himself when he admits that “theoretical pluralism is the only possible response to the multiple realities of a complex world.” See Holsti, K.J., (1989), “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Which are the Fairest Theories of All,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3, September, p.256.

International Relations: A Critical Assessment

Underlying the disciplinary ethos is a search for enlightenment. This term is generally used to denote the passage of human thought from darkness to illumination, mythology to knowledge, and conveys the movement of human consciousness from the irrational to the rational. To be enlightened is to see the world in the clear light of day. It is to escape from the shadows of the Platonic cave.

In the eighteenth century the term gained currency as a social and political movement which embraced the idea of progress. The Marquis de Condorcet, for example, sought to defend the idea of the progressive perfectibility of the human species.

Such is the aim of the work I have undertaken, and its result will be to show by appeal to reason and fact that nature has set no term to the perfection of human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is truly indefinite and that the progress of this perfectibility, from now onwards independent of any power that might wish to halt it...⁹

In Condorcet's view, the march of reason toward perfectibility would bring about a society which would guarantee the rights of all, overthrow aristocratic and clerical tyranny, and bring an end to cultural, political, sexual, and economic inequalities among individuals and nations. Also wars, violence and civil strife would become a thing of the past, as humans perfected themselves in accordance with their "true" nature. Eventually, reason would triumph over evil and human beings would live in harmony, peace, and happiness.¹⁰

⁹ Condorcet, M.J.A., de Caritat, Marquis de, (1955), *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*. London.

¹⁰ Later, Henri Saint Simon, one of the earliest defenders of a science of social life would repeat Condorcet's sentiments. As Alex Callinicos reports, "Saint-Simon...saw progress taking concrete shape in industrial society, where scientific knowledge would become the basis of social power and class antagonism disappear." Cited in Callinicos, A., (1990), *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*. London: Polity Press, p.62.

This is a spectacularly idealistic vision. But the Enlightenment also had a pessimistic side. Despite talk about peace, harmony and moral perfection, war and violence persisted and little evidence existed to suggest that this was about to change. Understandably, this dampened the optimism of the more “realistic” enlightenment thinkers to a significant degree. As Peter Gay notes, “many of them preached peace in the candid expectation that their preachments would go unheard.”¹¹

War represented everything the eighteenth century philosophers despised. It was instigated by the despotic and arbitrary wills of kings and princes, supported by corrupt clergies, financed by oppressive and unfair taxes, and worst of all, fought by individuals who either knew no better, or had no alternative. Moreover, it was the barrier to perpetual peace, to use Immanuel Kant's evocative phrase. As Peter Savigear expresses it:

The dissatisfaction of the philosophers derived from the contradiction which appeared to exist between the actual fact of the power of the state and its disposition to war, and the necessity felt by them to create a better world.¹²

Kant was clearly unhappy with this contradiction and, as I noted in the introduction, took it upon himself to reconcile the disposition of the modern state system to war with the possibility of establishing a lasting peace. Thus, Kant's claim that Puffendorf, Vattel and Grotius are “sorry

11 Gay, P., (1979), *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Volume 2: The Science of Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., p.404. Gay also cites Voltaire's jibe against Rousseau as evidence of the exasperation which many of them felt about the prospect of a world without war and violence. “They said peace, peace and there was no peace, and this mad Diogenes of a Rousseau proposes perpetual peace.”

12 Savigear, P., (1978), “European Political Philosophy and International Relations,” in Taylor, T., (ed.), *Approaches and Theory in International Relations*. London: Longman, p.44. Even before the *philosophes* had tried to deal with this problem, Jean Jacques Rousseau had concluded a treatise on the idea of perpetual peace by arguing that there is little prospect of such a peace without a bloody revolution, and if this was the only option, it was one to be feared rather than embraced. See Rousseau, J.J., (1970), “Abstract of the Abbe de Saint Pierre's Project for Perpetual Peace,” in Forsyth, M.G., Keens-Soper, H.M.A., & Savigear, P., (eds.), *The Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts From Gentili to Trietschke*. London: George Allen & Unwin, pp.127-179.

comforters” might equally be applied to the *philosophes*. For if the Enlightenment was unable to fulfill its perfectionist goals, then the promise of a rational and morally perfect world could only ever be an empty one.

Whether they recognize it or not, defenders of the Discipline stand within this broad intellectual tradition and perpetuate its ambiguities. Robert Gilpin is a good example of a scholar who acknowledges the significance of the Enlightenment. “Political realism is, of course, the very embodiment of this faith in reason and science. An offspring of modern science and the Enlightenment...”¹³ Like his intellectual forebears, then, however, his work is ambiguous on the idea of progress. First of all, he is pessimistic, even sceptical about the possibility of moral and political progress in international politics. As he puts it: “I am not even sure that progress exists in the moral and international spheres.”¹⁴ On the other hand, his belief in the power of reason, the value of problem-solving theory, the commitment to a liberal/capitalist world order, and the undeniable “faith” in modern scientific methods is as optimistic and progressivist as anything written by Condorcet, Auguste Comte, or Henri Saint Simon.¹⁵

The opposite of enlightenment is concealment. To conceal is to hide from view, to keep secret. For the philosophers of the eighteenth century, the church and the clergy concealed the liberative power of reason from the masses and made them subservient to an ideology of tradition, authority, prejudice, and arbitrary power. Breaking the hold of this ideology is one of the things

13 Gilpin, R., (1981), *War and Change in World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.226.

14 Gilpin, R., (1986), “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Relations,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.321.

15 Gilpin argues that a science of international politics has the capacity to “save mankind.” Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.226.

which made the thinkers of the eighteenth century revolutionaries. It is beautifully summed up in Kant's challenging phrase: "dare to use your own understanding."¹⁶ Kant's three critiques are meant to provide a "way out," an exit from social, political and spiritual ignorance.¹⁷

According to defenders of the Discipline, the aim of a theory of international politics is to help scholars explain what goes on in the international arena so that they can control outcomes (at least potentially), moderate the behaviour of states, maintain stability in a system notorious for its instability, and generally promote order and well-being in that arena. But, unlike their idealist adversaries, they are a lot less sanguine about the extent to which they can actually influence events and maintain order in the absence of an orderer. Still, their overall goal, like all thinkers of a modernist hue, is enlightenment. They seek, through the application of reason, to determine the true nature and course of international politics. Indeed, when shorn of its intellectual finery and terminological sophistication, International Relations is nothing more than a home for those who seek to control power with reason. This is evident in the way that its defenders attempt to cut through the rhetoric of state behaviour, attack ideology and moralism in the study of international politics, and in their desire to discover the perennial laws of politics. In adopting this stance, they believe they are adding to the storehouse of knowledge, making the opaque clear, the dark light, and the complex world of international politics more transparent. In other words, they are epistemologically progressivist, even though they are highly skeptical of progress as a political goal. To be enlightened on disciplinary terms then, is to describe and explain the inner-workings

16 Kant, I., (1979), "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in Reiss, H., (ed.), *Kant's Political Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.54-60.

17 Michel Foucault interprets Kant in this way. See Foucault, M., (1984), "What is Enlightenment?" in Rabinow, P., (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp.34-35.

of the international system, to understand that it resists the forces of change and reform, and face a political world which is violent, hostile, and conflict-ridden in a realistic and cautious manner.

It should not be forgotten, however, that this agenda also conceals. The strange silence on nationalism, the lack of attention to gender, the existential barrenness of much of the traditional discourse, and the marginalization of political theory/philosophy/ethics are just some of the areas which have been occluded by the disciplinary regime. The idea that scholarly activity is best represented as a linear activity, moving towards greater clarity and knowledge then, is too simplistic and probably incorrect. A more appropriate account is one which is aware that enlightenment and concealment are always in tension. As Hans-Georg Gadamer expresses it:

One has to ask oneself whether the dynamic law of human life can be conceived adequately in terms of progress, of a continual advance from the unknown to the known, and whether the course of human culture is actually a linear progression from mythology to enlightenment. One should entertain a completely different notion: whether the movement of human existence does not issue in a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment. Might it not be just a prejudice of modern times that the notion of progress that is in fact constitutive for the spirit of scientific research, should be transferable to the whole of human living and human culture? One has to ask whether progress, as it is at home in the special field of scientific research is at all consonant with the conditions of human existence in general. Is the notion of an ever mounting and self-perfecting enlightenment finally ambiguous?¹⁸

I think it is important to recognize that I am not quarreling with the moral intent in the writings of defenders of the Discipline. To be concerned with reducing, or at least controlling war and violence in the international arena is certainly an important and worthwhile goal. But their motivations are not an issue here. Only the most cynical of scholars could accuse post-war theorists of being unconcerned with the horrors of the world around them. Holsti has made this

¹⁸ Gadamer, H-G., (1986), "Hermeneutics as a Practical Philosophy," *Reason in the Age of Science*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p.104.

clear when he notes that the reason scholars study international politics is because of deeply held normative convictions about the problem of war. "It is *the* problem of universal import."¹⁹

There is, of course, the issue, often raised by radical post-modernists, of whether an adherence to the philosophy of rationalism implicates post-war realists in the genocide, death camps, nuclear terror, and other technological barbarities of the twentieth century. Jim George, for example, refers to "the nightmarish Enlightenment dream which...connects the ascent of modern, rational subject with the experiences of Hiroshima and Auschwitz."²⁰ But it is hard to know quite how to handle such an accusation, except to say that if it is true then everyone who has felt the benefits of technology, from the poor in the Third World to the academic who uses a PC to write books and papers, and communicates with his or her colleagues in Britain or the United States on the internet, is also indicted. And even if we accept this claim, defenders of the Discipline can be convicted only of false consciousness. The motivations and intentions which underpin their desire to systematize and universalize, and which led them down the scientific road in the first place, cannot be faulted.

At issue, then, is the theoretical and disciplinary basis of this Enlightenment enterprise, not the moral psychology which motivates it. However, the actual social practices of these scholars - the pretense to professionalism, the need for a continual reaffirmation of the field's relevance, the commitment to a scientific rationalist ethos, the penchant for creating new and generally unhelpful terms, the gradual retreat into the rarefied air of the academy which has taken place over the past

19 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *The Dividing Discipline: Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory*. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.8.

20 George, J., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.216.

twenty five years, the loss of a critical public voice, and the almost complete lack of philosophical depth in the disciplinary agenda, actually conspire to destroy the significance of their original aims.

To speak out against what is concealed by the Discipline then, is to argue for a fundamentally different approach to the study of international politics. It is one which rejects the possibility of cumulative knowledge of the field, is far more modest in its theoretical claims, and places more explicit emphasis on those areas of international reality which have been systematically forgotten as the Discipline marched down the scientific road.

This is also an argument against the notion of parsimony in the study of international politics. This term is associated with “sparse, logically tight theories,” with intellectual elegance, and simplification.²¹ But, in truth, it is a code word for the failure of “global” accounts of international politics, for intellectual narrowness for political irrelevance, and for a type of theorizing which has never been able to live up to its own inflated ideals. Nicholas Onuf is quite right to argue that:

The reconstruction of International Relations requires that the discipline be stripped of its current pretensions. If this is taken as abandonment of International Relations (the discipline as it is) and the possibility of international theory (theory peculiar to International Relations) then I agree.²²

Like Onuf, I have sought to strip International Relations of its pretensions. Towards this end, I have demonstrated that achieving consensus among students of international politics is a

21 Cox, R.W., (1986), States, Social Forces, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.197.

22 Onuf, N.G., (1989), *World of Our Making: Rules and Rules in Social Theory and International Relations*. Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, p.27.

project which could never have succeeded. For there is not now, nor has there ever been an uncontested basis upon which such a consensus could be established. Once this is acknowledged, it becomes clear that criticizing post-positivism because of its inability to generate a consensus is a little like criticizing human beings for breathing. But is Onuf right to suggest that we should abandon International Relations? Does this mean the end of International Relations?

I think it does, but with an important caveat. If this sort of language is employed, it is important to bear in mind that what has ended is not the activity of studying international politics *per se*, but a particular (and in my view peculiar) ideal of what the field should be like and how it should be ordered. For clearly, there is no universal commitment to this project. Certainly, there are still students of international politics, especially in North America, who still unthinkingly speak of “the discipline” and “our discipline,” as if there is still a fabric of consensus which still binds together all those interested in what takes place in the domain of the international. And it may be the case that there are pockets where such a disciplinary “we” exists. But, in truth, the disciplinary fabric no longer binds, there is no more “we” in any commanding or universal sense. To speak in these terms today is quite recidivist, and certainly unreflective. It is also important to remember that this “we” was never, nor could it ever be universal in any real sense, despite the rather loose use of the term in much of the post-war theory literature. This is the reason why, given the character of the thesis, I have taken the trouble to avoid the use of strong inclusivist language. E.H. Carr once argued that a key problem with utopian thought was that it claimed to represent the interests of the entire world when, in fact, it represented only the interests of the satisfied powers. One might say the same thing to those who use the term “we” when talking about International Relations. Despite its universalist pretensions, the Discipline is and has always been

a relatively localized phenomena, confined to North America, Great Britain, parts of Europe, and the Antipodes. At the very most, this “we” reflects the dominance of the United States after the Second World War. In other words, by appealing to a mythical “we,” post-war scholars clothed their ethnocentrism in a legitimating discourse of science. But they did more than this. They also created a disciplinary environment which tended to exclude or marginalize any form of thought which did not fit the dominant disciplinary profile. There is good reason, then, to be skeptical of arguments concerning the autonomy of International Relations within the social sciences. For it is clear that the desire for broad consensus at the metatheoretical level could never be achieved. Under these circumstances, James Richardson is right to ask whether it is “anything more than honorific” to describe International Relations as a Discipline.²³ The fact is that today commensuration is impossible across the breadth of the field, regardless of the relativism of scholars such as Richard Ashley and despite the fact that defenders of the Discipline carry on as if nothing has changed (epistemologically speaking).²⁴ To talk and think about generating commensuration on theoretical matters today is myopic at best, and probably tells us more about the ability of scholars to make “silk purses out of sows ears” than anything else.²⁵

None of this is to imply that the study of international politics no longer exists then, or that

23 Richardson, J.L., (1991), “The State of the Discipline: A Critical Practitioner's View,” in Higgott, R., & Richardson, J.L., (eds.), *International Relations: Global and Australian Perspectives*. Canberra: The Australian National University Press, p.27.

24 Buzan, B., Jones, C., & Little, R., (1993), *The Logic of Anarchy: From Neorealism to Structural Realism*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.20. Baldwin, D.A., (1994), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.1.

25 Friedrich Kratochwil has alluded to the rather forced intellectual legerdemain which has gone on in recent years to try to bolster the coherence of the rationalist project. Kratochwil, F., (1993), “The Embarrassment of Changes: Neorealism as the Science of Realpolitik Without Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, January, p.66.

the elements of what Kalevi Holsti calls “the classical tradition” no longer warrant attention.²⁶ There are far more fruitful ways to engage in international political theory than clinging to the idea that the latter must conform to epistemological criteria that may not be consistent with the phenomena - the ontological subject-matter - of international politics, even if they bear the promise of fulfilling “scientific” criteria of theoretical progress.

Instead of accepting the idea that international political theory should explain patterns of state behaviour by grounding them in the alleged imperatives of anarchy, a move that begs crucial questions about the source and nature of those imperatives, it is important to be far more critical of the practices that sustain the autonomy of International Relations.²⁷ Whatever else international “society” may be, Stanley Hoffmann is quite right to insist that it is not an integrated system or a global community. It is inherently hostile to any reforms that may undermine the principle of state sovereignty as a basis for the legitimate exercise of political power on a global scale.

The absence of agreement which is at the heart of most of the angst among defenders of the Discipline at present is indicative of the failure to establish International Relations as an autonomous Discipline with its own theoretical approaches in which the terms of debate are widely shared. This has simply never been the case in International Relations, and it is clearly impossible today. Indeed, the degree of diversity in the 1990s is so great that it is not even possible to undertake the ambitious cartographic exercises that were so popular in the 1970s and 1980s. A decade ago one could still get away with constructing trilogies of “schools of thought” employed by writers such as Holsti, Wight and Bull. Who would dare to continue in such a vein today? The

26 Holsti, K.J., (1985), *op. cit.*, p.7.

27 See Onuf, N.G., (1989), *op. cit.*, pp.1-31.

fragmentation of International Relations is such that it includes fissures at many levels of analysis that cut across each other. In addition to the well-worn debates of yesterday, one must now acknowledge “isms” that simply do not fit criteria of selection and evaluation that are themselves at issue in these post-positivist days.

In attacking the idea that the study of international politics should be pursued within an autonomous Discipline, I want to make it clear that my argument does not entail a facile celebration of diversity for its own sake. The false dichotomy between dogmatic appeals to discipline (show us your research programme or we'll show you the door!) on the one hand, and a relativistic clash of “global voices” (to use the misleading title of Rosenau's recent edited collection) on the other, can be avoided.²⁸ These are not the only alternatives. A third is to acknowledge the value of pluralism and debate in performing our role as students of international politics and as participants in its reform. It is time to cease casting around for yet another “self-image” of the Discipline as a whole within which to generate typologies of “schools of thought” as well as criteria for their evaluation. This has always been a popular activity for aspiring cartographers of International Relations, and one could fill many pages with the various “debates” said to constitute the Discipline at various stages in its history. These exercises in disciplining disorder are now redundant. It needs to be said, however, that they are extremely valuable when presented for pedagogical purposes in arranging and organizing the ways in which particular substantive questions have been answered. For example, if one thinks that the question “what is international society?” is a good one to ask, then Martin Wight's taxonomy of realists, rationalists

28 Keohane, R.O., (1988), “International Institutions: Two Approaches,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.4, December, pp.392.

and revolutionists may be useful to consider the range of responses to it. Similarly, if one's question is "what is international justice, and on what philosophical basis should one attempt to develop normative criteria for evaluating the use of force and the distribution of wealth in the world?" then Chris Brown's book, based around a distinction between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, is a good introduction. Alternatively, the question "what was the Cold War, and how did it begin?" may yield a completely different typology between orthodox, revisionist, and post-revisionist accounts. Typologies such as these, based on substantive questions generated independently of their answers, are extremely useful. Alternatively, the question "what are the main paradigms in International Relations?" is not an interesting question. It is not even a useful question. Nor are a whole list of similar questions such as: What does post-modernism have to offer students of international relations? What is the relationship between Neoliberalism and Neorealism? How does feminism challenge the hegemonic discourse of realism in contemporary international theory? What is a "great debate" in International Relations and how many of them have there been? What is the "next stage" in international relations theory? These, and a host of other questions that have obsessed academics and students in recent times, are second-order questions, not first-order questions about the world. They perpetuate the myth so neatly expressed by Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff that "[b]efore we can develop theory, we must have at least a consensus within the community of scholars as to what the field of international relations entails."²⁹

There is no easier way to bore students of international relations to death than by taking them on a tedious journey through the "great debates" of International Relations. Unless one's interest is

29 Dougherty, J.E., & Pfaltzgraff, R.L., jr., (1971), *Contending Theories of International Politics*. New York: J.B. Lippincott & Co, p.15

grounded in, and stays grounded in, substantive questions about the world, the fate of a marginal Discipline will be of no interest to anyone but those who have some professional stake in its outcome.

Is the only alternative to the view articulated here a “flea market,” to use a colorful phrase of Stanley Hoffmann’s?³⁰ A flea-market is an open air venue where cheap or used goods are sold. It is the haunt of the bargain hunter, the financially embarrassed, the curious, and those with a penchant for locally produced art and crafts. It is also a place of great diversity and color, but without much symmetry, order, or focus. One could, therefore, argue that without a Discipline to focus our thoughts and provide a home for a core of relevant theory, the study of international politics will be a place of great color and diversity as it pulls in ideas and partial theories from all over the place, but it will also be unfocused, general, unprofessional, and, worst of all, it will risk irrelevance. Hoffmann made this point in the late fifties, but there is no doubt that it is a quintessential statement of the traditional view of the significance of the Discipline. And it is not without its adherents today. Consider the following statement by Jarvis.

Much like an overburdened sea vessel, International Relations is in danger of floundering amid inclement theoretical weather. The thunderclaps of theoretical reinvention, the fog banks of metaphysics, and the winds of the “Third Debate,” are whipping up the seas amid an approaching storm. But rather than batten down the hatches and make ready to ride out bad weather, International Relations continues to fish, reeling in yet more agendas from the depths of the sea. Other ships have headed for fair skies; we, on the other hand, continue to drag our nets, running the risk of losing sight of land altogether and of drifting aimlessly without purpose, direction, and definition. In the process, the streamlined concerns of the disciplinary ship have been transformed into that of a cumbersome barge.³¹

30 Hoffmann, S., (1960), “International Relations as Discipline,” in Hoffmann, S., (ed.), *Contemporary Theory in International Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p.6.

31 Jarvis, D.S.L., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.68.

According to him, the autonomy of the Discipline is central to the health and well-being of the study of international politics. Without it, scholars lack the necessary “purpose, direction, and definition” required to understand what Rudyard Kipling once called the “Great Game.” But such a view smacks of patriarchy. It says to scholars (especially the younger ones) that they are an indiscriminating and doltish lot who need the regimen of a discipline (small “d”) in order to theorize and discuss international politics. Without it, they will be purposeless, directionless, and identityless. Of course, it does not seem to matter that Reinhold Niebuhr had no need of such an institution to arrive at some extremely pertinent insights into the character of international politics. Nor did Kant, Lenin, or Bismarck. And surely no-one would suggest that there is something intrinsically wrong with appealing to Christian thought (instead of the Discipline) in order to speak coherently about such things as foreign affairs, international justice, and world order. The point is that a theological and non-disciplinary framework served Niebuhr quite satisfactorily. Furthermore, when Robert Gilpin says that “in honesty, one must inquire whether or not twentieth century students of international politics know anything that Thucydides and his fifth century compatriots did not know about the behaviour of states,” he demonstrates unwittingly just how historically unimportant the idea of a Discipline has been to the study of international politics in the past, and still is today, despite claims to the contrary.³² Good scholarship, critical thinking, insight, and discrimination do not automatically desert those intellectuals who fail to respect the integrity and boundaries of the disciplinary lore.

At the same time, this argument is not likely to persuade the faithful, if indeed such a feat is possible. Still, the challenge is to show that it is possible to get along nicely without a rationalist

32 Gilpin, R., (1981), *op. cit.*, p.227.

framework, that a lack of consensus is not intellectually debilitating, and that ultimately the study of international politics is better off if (and when) the hold of the Discipline is broken. In other words, it is important to show that the flea-market analogy is not a fair representation of life without International Relations.

One of the complaints which has been levelled against the sort of view I am putting forward is that these sorts of attack on the Discipline are a passing fad which will disappear as quickly as they appeared. It is a fetish younger scholars - and a few wayward and progressive senior ones - have for novelty and newness. But no theory or set of ideas exists, or is created in a vacuum. They are influenced, formed, and developed through a continual process of modification and interaction with other theories, and within a particular historical and social environment. To label something a fad is to dismiss it as lacking in serious content; and somehow illegitimate. It is to dictate what is acceptable and what is unacceptable as international political theory. One is reminded of the Paris Academy's original attitude to impressionist art, or perhaps, the Catholic Church's attitude to Galileo's discovery of Jupiter's eighth moon. New theories and approaches are generally a response to a changing and transforming reality, and even if they fail to capture that reality positively, they may well capture it negatively, as something that shakes scholars out of their theoretical arrogance. If scholars too quickly dismiss an idea or perspective as a fad, they run the risk of not listening to the signs of the times. A field of study which is out of step is of value to anyone.

It may well be that some of the offerings which seek to transcend traditional accounts will not stand the test of time. But only time will tell. The raw material of future theories, approaches and ideas is already manifest today even if only in an embryonic state. And while the "next stage"

of international theory may not be “postmodern” in any recognizable sense, future theories will surely bear traces of the work of scholars who have taken the idea of a “new beginning” seriously. And even if they fail on their own terms, these theories may well inspire more serviceable ones. As Pauline Rosenau notes in the conclusion of her recent book on postmodernism: “it would be an error to dismiss entirely the impact of postmodernism on the social sciences. For even if postmodernism only intensifies tendencies already in effect, it may push the arc of the pendulum further than usual; that might, just possibly, expand horizons in the social sciences.”³³ Arguments, theories, and concepts, should not be judged or derided solely on the basis of newness alone. Indeed, criticism of this sort generally tells us more about the attacker’s political and theoretical profile than adding anything substantial to theoretical debate. To call something a fad is simply a way of avoiding the hard work of understanding an opponent. At the same time, recognition of a changing historical and intellectual environment, does not necessarily mean that we should take the latest trends and approaches at face value. But when derogatory labels take the place of meaningful critical analysis, then the study of international politics is reduced to a quest for intellectual dominance, rather than understanding.

As it stands today, International Relations is not a harmless umbrella term employed to cover a group of scholars who are interested in the political activities of sovereign states. On the contrary, it is an “operative structure” (Onuf) which contains a very specific set of ontological and epistemological assumptions about how international politics should be studied, about what it takes for the Discipline to have a secure and autonomous identity, and for there to be fundamental

33 Rosenau, P., (1992), *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.184.

agreement on the nature and scope of the theoretical enterprise. Interestingly, and somewhat paradoxically for an autonomous discipline, these assumptions dovetail with the broader intellectual and political aspirations of post-war North American political science scholarship.

It should not surprise anyone that the disciplinary experiment has failed. After all, the political turmoil of the early post-Cold War world is hardly the sort of environment which is likely to engender quality deliberation about such important and intellectually challenging matters. What was needed at the time was a great deal more clear-headed, subtle and patient introspection about the idea of a Discipline and what it would entail for International Relations to achieve such a status. Had defenders of the Discipline done this, they might have realized the folly of pursuing consensus at all costs.

My critique of International Relations is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to be. Feminists, culture specialists, and historical sociologists are just three groups who have argued that International Relations does not have the capacity to account for important aspects of international politics. Their list of complaints is familiar. They point to the inherent gender bias of the Discipline, its ethnocentrism, its failure to understand the relationship between social forces and change, its hopelessly inadequate conception of the state, and its almost total ignorance of identity politics, nationalism, post-colonial societies, and Islam.³⁴ A more overarching assessment of the Discipline's failings would have to consider other bodies of literature as well. However, not a lot

34 The literature on this subject is enormous and defies easy summary. Rengger, N.J., (1989), "Incommensurability, International Theory and the Fragmentation of Western Political Culture," in Gibbins, J.R., (ed.), *Contemporary Political Culture: Politics in a Post-modern Age*. London: Sage Publishers, pp.237-250. Also Cox, R., (1986), *op. cit.*, pp.204-254. Zalewski, M., & Enloe, C., (1995), "Questions about Identity in International Relations," in Booth, K., & Smith, S., (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*. London: Polity Press, pp.280-305. Sylvester, C., (1995), *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

more is to be gained by exploring them here. True, their inclusion might add weight to the argument developed here, but there is little point in rubbing more salt into the Discipline's already gaping wounds. The message is clear enough. International Relations is a "dubious Discipline" insofar as its defenders believe that there are grounds upon which a permanent consensus among scholars can meaningfully be established. There are clearly no such grounds available to students of international politics.³⁵

What are the consequences of labelling International Relations a "dubious Discipline"? What should not be forgotten is that to suggest this is not just to make a statement about the present status of the Discipline, it is also to question the very idea that International Relations adds something essential to how the subject is studied. Indeed, I want to suggest in the rest of this chapter that it has had the opposite effect. The "dubious Discipline" has actually stunted theoretical debate in the field. The best evidence of this is the way that the Discipline has left scholars with no other credible option but to declare themselves to be either for or against realism. In other words, it is the Discipline which has set the terms of theoretical debate and, as such, has determined (to a large degree) what constitutes legitimate theoretical debate on the subject. The legacy of the "dubious Discipline" then, has been a degradation in the quality of international theory. The rest of this chapter is devoted to establishing the validity of this argument and, in the

³⁵ My conclusion, then, is somewhat different to that of Yale Ferguson and Richard Mansbach. According to them, "international relations is barely a field and certainly not a discipline." But it is not a question of whether International Relations is or is not a Discipline. This presupposes that it might one day become one. My point is that such claims lack credibility and legitimacy, and always will do. The constant theme running through their writings is that defenders of the Discipline have been unable to achieve their self-stated goals because of their attachment to the natural sciences. But there is more to it than this. In my view, the disciplinary project was a mistake right from the start. Epistemological factors are only a part of the story. Ferguson, Y.H., & Mansbach, R.W., (1989), *The State, Conceptual Chaos, and the Future of International Relations Theory*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p.82.

process, contribute to a clearer understanding of the place of realism in the study of international politics.

Realism: For *or* Against?

At this point, defenders of the Discipline are likely to challenge critics like myself to show how the study of international politics might be revitalized and improved in ways which satisfy them.³⁶ Yet there is something quite bizarre about this challenge. One does not say to the discoverer of a new disease where is the cure. It is generally acknowledged that “Rome was not built in a day” and that any cure may be many years away, despite the urgency of the situation. Why, then, should more be expected from those whose only crime is to show that the disciplinary emperor has not clothes?

Having said this, a growing number of scholars are, like Nicholas Onuf, committed to moving beyond the Discipline and the theoretical framework which accompanies it. Most are motivated by a desire to find better ways to cope with intractable global problems like violence, poverty, overpopulation, crimes against women, and war. The view of Ken Booth is typical in this regard. According to him, human society will be in real trouble if the “commonsense of 1945” cannot be transcended.³⁷ It would be wise, however, to observe the council of Augustus and

36 See Hoffman, M., (1988), “Critical Theory and the Inter-Paradigm Debate,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.16, No.2, Summer, pp.231-249. Lapid, Y., (1989), “Quo Vadis International Relations?: Reflections on the “Next Stage” of International Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, Spring, pp.77-88. Linklater, A., (1992), “The Question of the Next Stage in International Relations Theory: A Critical-Theoretical Perspective,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.21, No.1, Spring, pp.77-98.

37 Booth, K., (1995), “Dare not to Know: International Relations Theory Versus the Future,” in Booth, K., & Smith, S., (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*. London: Polity Press, p.331. On some interesting predictions about social and political life in the next century see Kennedy, P., (1994), *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Vintage Books.

“make haste slowly.” What I said above about the lack of quality deliberation by the early disciplinarians, brought on by the Cold War, also applies to those now seeking to revitalize and reform the study of international politics. It is a mistake to think that all that is required to get beyond the Discipline is a convincing critique of its key assumptions. Clearly this is important, but the task does not end there. No matter how persuasive or insightful such a critique might be, there are a host of other concerns which need to be taken into account.

Revitalizing the study of international politics, then, is not simply a case of invoking the writings of insightful continental intellectuals. It is also about breaking free of the patterns of debate and discussion which arise out of the disciplinary framework. While it is quite clear that the Discipline rests on a problematic set of assumptions about how international politics should be studied, it should not be forgotten that it also sets the terms of theoretical debate in the field, and has done so since the late 1940s. Strategies which seek to challenge International Relations will fail unless they consider this all important question.

To say that the Discipline sets the terms of theoretical debate in the study of international politics is to suggest that scholars must either affirm or repudiate realism. There are, of course, those who appear to sit on the fence. Stanley Hoffmann probably fits into this category. But, by and large, the dominant theoretical self-image is one which tells the story of the Discipline in terms of “realists” versus the rest. One of the key arguments of the latter group is that they assume that it is possible to kill realism off by repudiating absolutely. I shall refer to these scholars as the “repudiationists.” Jim George, Fred Halliday, Justin Rosenberg, Christine Sylvester, and Cynthia Enloe are all “repudiationists” in this sense.

They continuously castigate for its descriptive inaccuracies, admonished for its inability to

explain what is going on in the world, lampooned for its prescriptive and predictive barrenness, is regarded by feminists as gender-blind, contains a suspect epistemology, has no understanding of the Third World, and is said to promote inter-state war. It has even been implicated in the holocaust. Consider the recent statements of two well known “repudiationists.”

The...general problem I am concerned with in this book is that the whole pattern of thought associated with the realism of the post-World War II period, represents, at best, a dangerous anachronism in the era that has seen AIDS, global warming, and international drug cartels force their way onto the global agenda, alongside the cultural, ecological, and gendered challenges to a “reality” that for so long has defined order, security, and the common good in International Relations.³⁸

There are founding fathers of realism but no founding mothers gazing down from the Mount Rushmore of sacralized progenitors. There are nation-states but there are no households in realist IR. There is national interest, but that is only vaguely and jingoistically related to the interests of “women” inside nations. There is rationality but often only unitary understandings of what that means and of who exhibits it.³⁹

It is hard to imagine two more hostile attacks on an intellectual idea than these. But why has realism endured under the weight of such pervasive and hostile criticism? No matter how many new “anti-realist” tracts appear in print or how potent the criticisms levelled against this idea, forces of opposition always arise to blunt its potential impact. Even the limp attempts at synthesis by the neoliberals can do nothing to disturb the long-standing and entrenched determinations of these opposing forces. In other words, how is it possible to square these views with one’s which argue that it is a “timeless wisdom.”⁴⁰ Or argue, as Robert Keohane does, that the latest variant

38 George, J., (1994), *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press, p.6

39 Sylvester, C., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.7.

40 Buzan, B., (1996), “The Timeless Wisdom of “Realism”?” in Smith, S., Booth, K., & Zalewski, M., (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.47-65.

is “an impressive intellectual achievement: an elegant, parsimonious, deductively rigorous instrument for scientific discovery.”⁴¹ How is it that a doctrine which is regarded as an iniquity by some, still manages to elicit support from otherwise sane human beings? Why, when presented with this sort of evidence, would such a philosophically-attuned scholar as Roger Spegele throw his intellectual weight behind this idea?⁴² It appears that no amount of haranguing, unimpeachable logic, or menacing rhetoric is enough to sway the faithful. For every challenge to its intellectual supremacy, counter manifestos, reinterpretations, and declarations of its historical and intellectual efficacy soon follow. A settlement of damages between the protagonists is no closer today that it was nearly a hundred years ago. Clearly, debates about realism are indeterminate and unresolvable.

This is why the repudiation of realism is an unacceptable strategy for breaking free of the Discipline and offers no better guidance for the future study of international politics than those who stoically defend it. Because the repudiationists are only able to take a stand in opposition, they remain firmly entrenched in its logic. Also, it should not be forgotten that repudiation (in the form of idealism) is the soil which gave rise to the Discipline in the first place, so why should the same strategies prove any more successful this time round? Moreover, as much of the current literature attests, defenders of the Discipline are quite comfortable talking among themselves and ignoring the substance of the repudiationist case. Not only can they claim relevance for their views by refusing to enter onto the terrain of their critics, but they can also point to this or that aspect of realism which demonstrates its value to students of international politics. In the final analysis,

41 Keohane, R.O., (1986), “Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.167-168.

42 Spegele, R., (1996), *Political Realism in International Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

realists and their repudiationist critics simply dance around each other by employing a self-reinforcing and self-justifying logic. Scholars like George and Sylvester then, may well help to perpetuate the very thing they find so disagreeable. In this sense, I agree with Nick Rengger when he suggests that realism is an idea which “has not fared very well at the hands of either its most partisan supporters or its most hostile critics.”⁴³

It is often remarked that the origin of debates about realism is the coming-into-being of the modern state system. Because realism is the theoretical expression of this system, it is natural that all those who regard it with disdain and seek ultimately to transcend it, focus their energies here. The result is a pattern of behaviour which is reproduced again and again during the course of the “Discipline’s” existence. On this view, the only way to get beyond the cycle of affirmation and repudiation appears to be to get beyond the state system itself.

But it is not just a question about the way the world is ordered or structured. When scholars take a stand in relation to realism there are other sociological and political questions which also need to be taken account of. These range from the need to be gainfully employed, get tenure, the teacher-student relationship, the intellectual orientation of the university department one teaches in, peer group pressure, the need for intellectual credibility, where one is located in relation to the North American heartland, one’s cultural and religious predispositions, and so on. This is not to make the cynical argument that affirming or repudiating realism is a matter of self-interest alone, but it is to suggest that the wider social contexts of professional academic life should not be forgotten when we try to understand why scholars feel compelled to take a stand in relation to this

43 Rengger, N., (1996), “Clio’s Cave: Historical Materialism and the Claims of ‘Substantive Social Theory’ in World Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.2, April, p.218.

idea. Clearly, environmental and social context are important factors in the shaping of one's intellectual and political commitments. Moreover, scholars gain a sense of empowerment and belonging by becoming involved in debates about realism. There is strength in belonging to a select group and having an relatively homogeneous identity. By the same token, if one is an "repudiationist" one gets the same sense of belonging, a feeling of making a moral choice as opposed to a utilitarian one, a sense of meaning in one's life by siding with the "underdog," and so on. And finally, depending on one's orientation, realism can also be employed as a handy code-word for something else. Science, truth, violence, war-mongering, and oppression immediately spring to mind. Clearly, there is more going on with this idea than meets the eye. And this has little to do with the world, the rightness or truth of one's principles, or the creation of a better world, although it does not exclude these factors. The point is that the "dubious Discipline" feeds, strengthens, and helps to reproduce the intellectual conditions which allow the cycle of affirmation and repudiation to flourish and dominate theoretical debate. It is all well and good to show that consensus is no longer possible, that positivism is an inappropriate methodology for the human sciences, and that autonomy claims are suspect, but if one merely reacts against realism without calling into question the preconditions of "its" alleged hegemony, then, it is the Discipline which still calls the shots and sets the terms of debate. As I hope to demonstrate in the next chapter, repudiationists have not understood this point very well at all.

But if the terms of debate are denied, then the cycle of affirmation and repudiation can be broken. This does not mean that debate about the meaning and interpretation of this idea will cease. Certainly, it will not. But at least the structure of theoretical debate will not be given ahead of time and scholars will not be forced to choose sides in an unwinnable and unproductive battle.

This is why I disagree with the interpretation of Mervyn Frost and Jim George. They present International Relations as a “backward” Discipline.⁴⁴ But such a description assumes that all that is needed to put things right is a replacement of the stale, unserviceable “content” of the Discipline with a more appropriate one. Coping with the “dubious Discipline” is not the same as renovating a house, however. It is not a matter of leaving the external walls intact, while sprucing up the living area. In this case, the whole structure needs to be razed to the ground and the only way to do this is to refuse to engage in unproductive and pointless debates about whether realism is right or wrong. But what does such a refusal entail and what reasons can be given to support the adoption of such a tactic against the “dubious Discipline?” The answer, I think, lies in treating realism in a very different way than is common among students of international politics. And this is what I want to try to spell out in the rest of this chapter.

The Ghost-Like Quality of Realism: A Basis for Refusal

To “reform” something is to correct previous mistakes, abuses, and misunderstandings in order to change things for the better. This, of course, presupposes that there is something wrong or unsatisfactory with an existing institution, governmental structure, political order, moral code, formulation, theory, set of ideas, mechanism, or whatever. Reforms are usually thought to be necessary when something is internally flawed, out of touch with current thinking, or when some new ideas become available which help individuals to see “things” with more clarity.

That something undergoes reform does not necessarily mean that the results will always be positive, however. Forgetting takes place, and quite often reform actually leads to a result as

44 Frost, M., (1986), *Towards a Normative Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.16.

intransigent and conservative as that which existed prior to reform taking place. In other words, reforming something is not necessarily a guarantee of success, or that things will actually improve. Often the cure is worse than the disease. How many politicians, generals and despots around the world have gained power on reformist platforms, claiming to be the answer to the social and political ills of their people, only to end up being more brutal, unsavory and conservative than their predecessors? And, of course, where one person celebrates reform, another will see only a degradation of standards, a loss of values, and so on.

If the argument of the last chapter is anything to go by, it would seem appropriate to think of realists in this way; that is as reformers and interpreters, rather than as a group of scholars who simply “toe the party line.” After all, realists disagree with the formulations of their colleagues, individualize this idea, accentuate some attributes while pushing others to the background, expect different things from it, and reinterpret it freely. Realism, then, is a concept which is constantly under review by its supporters and, like all ideas, is open to those creative impulses which are such an important part of intellectual life. This accounts for why there are so many versions of this idea to choose from. Realists seem to never be able to rest content with the formulations of their peers. Indeed, with the possible exception of defending it against criticism, reforming and reinventing it is the major preoccupation.

Scholarly judgement is always involved in this process. It depends on variables such as the state of the world, the metaphysical and metatheoretical commitments of the individual scholar, the tone and character of criticism, the creative spirit of the reformer, as well as the particular social, political and historical milieu in which individual realists finds themselves. There is no way to control or arrest this process.. No positivist methodology, no myth of consensus, and no

indoctrination of graduate students can stop the reform of ideas, and realism is no different in this regard.

Anyone coming to the field from outside, and who is searching around for a theoretical and intellectual “home,” must feel decidedly “homeless” in the face of such a diversity of interpretations which carry the realist tag. No-one drives this point home more fully than James Der Derian.

Realism, Historical, social, philosophical, political, economic, artistic, cinematic, literary, legal realism. Machiavellian, Hobbesian, Rousseauian, Hegelian, Weberian, Kissingerian realism. Optimist, pessimist, fatalist realism. Naive, vulgar, magical realism. Technical, practical, empirical realism. Classical and scientific realism. Structural, structurationist, poststructuralist realism. Minimalist, maximalist, fundamentalist, potentialist realism. Positivist, post-positivist, liberal, neoliberal institutionalist, radical, radical interpretivist realism. Critical, nuclear, epistemic realism. Sur-, super-, photo-, anti-, neo-, post-realism. And now at your local malls and supermarket checkouts, hyper-realism.⁴⁵

Under these circumstances, the suggestion that what binds realists together is more important than what divides them seems patently inadequate. The differences between many of these formulations are not just family squabbles either. Not only are there fundamental metatheoretical differences underpinning the various forms of realism, but they often result in accounts of the character of international politics which have very little in common with each other. Speaking about realism as a unified and homogeneous entity deprives the study of international politics of much of its philosophical diversity and does not come close to being an accurate description of this idea. Furthermore, it is hard to see any of these individual formulations constituting an actual improvement in our understanding of this idea, as if there is

45 Der Derian, J., (1996), “A Reinterpretation of Realism: Genealogy, Semiology, Dromology,” in Beer, F.A., & Hariman, R., (eds.), *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, p.227.

some linear movement or “hidden hand” at work drawing scholars inexorably toward a perfection of this idea. Realism clearly has the capacity for almost endless construction and interpretation.

Having said this, each one of the views of realism articulated in the previous chapter does employ a similar logic in one crucial way. Each one believes that it offers the most propitious interpretation of the meaning of realism possible. But to accept one account is to reject, or at least marginalize important insights in many others. It is not possible, for example, to defend consistently “realism as science,” while also accepting the formulations of Barry Buzan, Tony Porter, or Roger Spegele, all of whom deny the possibility of such an account. Nor is it possible simultaneously to accept “Law of the Jungle Realism” and the views of, say, Hedley Bull. They cannot all be right.

What is really interesting here is that to make a claim of behalf of a particular interpretation is tantamount to rejecting the substance of many of the others. In this sense, interpreters of this idea seek to colonize the terrain of realism and, in the process, trump their intellectual competitor-cousins. Each interpretation claims, within the parameters of its own field of view, a coherence and unity of its own. It is clearly impossible to determine which version of realism is **THE** definitive one. Moreover, there is no criteria which can be employed to adjudicate this question. Where in the conceptual universe would we have to be located even to make sense of it? In essence, realism cannot be interpreted in a non-partisan and unambiguous way. All versions are equally valid and equally contingent. Under these circumstances, what we are left with is a multitude of competing views about the precise nature and character of this idea: all of which are affected by the social, political and ideological disposition of the individuals who interpret it, as well as the historical and philosophical climate in which they locate themselves.

Realism, then, has a rather ghostly and fluid quality about it. To say this, however, is not to suggest that it has disappeared from view or is redundant. After all, a ghost is not only a restless spirit or apparition, it is also something which is very difficult to see or grasp with any precision and clarity. In this sense, a “ghost” has no permanent form or shape. It is both there and not-there. To talk about realism in this way then, is to talk about an idea which is ephemeral, transitory, and exists only in the various interpretations of it. It is also the case that it is always *in the process of* having its meaning fixed. This meaning will (must) always slip through the fingers of each and every interpreter. In other words, realists are always in pursuit of the idea of realism. They are always in pursuit of a ghost. As soon as this idea is formulated and its meaning fixed, other, very different interpretations, fueled by new circumstances and intellectual influences, push this idea in new and unforeseen directions. In this sense, it is a very curious “ism.” It is written about, celebrated, debated, and derided as if its meaning is fixed, clear-cut, and fully comprehensible. But, in fact, its meaning continually eludes everyone who seeks to pin it down.

Two points need to be made here. In the first three chapters of the thesis, I assumed that the meaning of realism was relatively clear-cut. Like defenders of the Discipline, I presented it as a theory of international politics. Indeed, I go so far as to invoke Vasquez’s point about most scholars worked within Morgenthau’s framework. To start with the suggestion that realism is better seen as a ghost would have introduced unnecessary confusion into the early discussion. And in any case, if one is to show that the emperor is naked, it is first necessary show how the emperor sees himself. This is not a sleight of hand on my part. It is something made necessary by the interpretative character of the thesis. In other words, it is only because I have looked at things from the point of view of consensus that this very different understanding comes into view. What

this suggests, and I shall say a little more about it in the following chapter, is that it is necessary to retell the history of the Discipline. Secondly, to speak about realism as having a ghost-like quality about it is a descriptive and a critical insight. I have tried to draw attention to some of the anomalies in the way that defenders of the Discipline have employed this idea. The source of the problem, in my view, is the excessive emphasis on agreement, theoretical parsimony, and homogeneity in the field. To assume that realism has a fixed meaning and that realists are a relatively homogeneous and identifiable group of scholars misses what is really interesting about the way this idea functions in scholarly discourse.

This is something which repudiationists like Jim George also fail to understand. And it is easy to see why. Like their disciplinary opponents, they have to fix the meaning of realism. In other words, they accept that the “orthodox interpretation” is basically sound. Unfortunately for them, I suggest that the “ghost” never stays still long enough for an attack to be definitive and decisive. To amend something I said at the beginning of the last chapter, while there is some commonality among the so-called realists, there is not sufficient commonality among them to be able to dispense with this idea in the interests of a more adequate “theory” of international politics. We can see this already happening in the work of Tony Porter and, more recently, Barry Buzan. The latter, for example, has expressed the view that there is “no reason why much of the post-modern discourse cannot eventually be merged into realism. There are traditions within realism which are receptive to the idea of language as power, and discourse as a major key to politics.”⁴⁶ True, a committed post-modernist would undoubtedly reply that this is still hegemony and put it in the same category as Keohane’s ill-informed comments about the need for post-positivists to

46 Buzan, B., (1996), *op. cit.*, p.59.

devise a testable research programme. They would also probably suggest that Buzan does not understand the character of post-modernism. Be that as it may, the point I am making is that interpretations of this idea will always outstrip the critic's ability to end its existence. Thus, both sides in the debate about the meaning of realism are stuck in a discourse which has no resolution. It is as much an illusion to think that the identity of realism can be stabilized, as it is to think that it can be killed off by a total critique of the sort advanced by the repudiationists.

Of all the self-confessed realists, Buzan comes closest to recognizing this. According to him, one of the main reasons why it has remained such a significant force in the study of international politics is its relative success "in revising and reinventing itself."⁴⁷ A few years ago, it would have been unthinkable to suggest that Buzan, a leading exponent of old-time strategic studies, would one day find common ground on the subject of realism with scholars who are renowned for their radicalism. But, as they say, we live in interesting times. In his book with Charles Jones and Richard Little, he acknowledges that Richard Ashley is one of the first to point out inconsistencies within realist scholarship.⁴⁸ But he distances himself from Ashley's views mainly because the latter has some rather nasty things to say about Waltz and structuralism.⁴⁹ Instead, Buzan is more persuaded by Walker's position, arguing that he offers a "much more

47 *Ibid.*, p.56. Roger Spegele makes a similar point. "For the evaluative political realist, philosophical reflection is needed so that the tradition of political realism can re-evaluate and reform itself in light of new currents of ideas that have emerged to challenge it. This implies that political realism must be open to other conceptions, for it is only out of that openness that more reflective understandings of international relations can be forged." Spegele, R.D., (1996), *op. cit.*, p.xvii.

48 See Ashley, R.K., (1981), "Political Realism and Human Interests," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2, June, pp.204-236.

49 Ashley, R.K., (1986), "The Poverty of Neorealism," in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.255-300.

measured and sympathetic” account of the internal inconsistencies within realism.⁵⁰

Following Walker, then, Buzan suggests that realism is a site of some of the most significant and intractable debates in Western Philosophy. Realism is “more battleground than school.”⁵¹ Thus, for Buzan, there is no necessary intellectual coherence among the realists. By appealing to what Buzan calls a broad consensus, defenders of the Discipline managed to gloss over the tensions within this idea.⁵² According to Buzan, no such consensus exists and this points to the need to go beyond both classical realism and neorealism.⁵³ Neither version provides an adequate foundation on which to build a theory of international politics by itself. As a result, the “foundations of Realism need to be extended.”⁵⁴

Buzan’s overall aim in *The Logic of Anarchy* then, is to develop a realist theory of international politics; one which goes beyond either classical and neorealist forms of this idea. It is understandable, then, that he does not spend a great deal of time on the question of its intellectual cohesion in this work. He clearly has bigger fish to fry.

Yet he is well aware that suggesting that realism is not intellectually coherent raises a number of controversial questions. How, for example, does he deal with the charge that this tactic ultimately fractures the identity of realism and turns this idea into a cacophonous Tower of

50 Buzan, B., Jones, C., & Little, R., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.3. Buzan and co. take their lead from Walker, R.B.J., (1987), “Realism, Change, and International Political Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.31, No.1, March, pp.65-86. See also Walker, R.B.J., (1989), “History and Structure in the Theory of International Relations,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.18, No.2, Summer, pp.163-183.

51 Buzan, B., Jones, C., & Little R., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.3.

52 *Ibid.*, p.4.

53 Whether this is a valid inference is debatable. It is certainly a rather loose interpretation of Walker’s views.

54 *Ibid.*, p.4.

Babel? Or, to put the point slightly differently. How does Buzan stop scholars like James Der Derian exploiting its lack of coherence in order to deconstruct it?⁵⁵ He tries to deal with this issue in a recent essay. Yet I would suggest that his answer is unsatisfactory and neatly highlights why realism is best thought of as a ghost.

According to Buzan, one of the distinctive features of orthodox realism is that it is a discourse or debate about power in international politics. “Indeed, it is perhaps not going too far to say that the *debate* about power in international politics is the core of what realism is about.”⁵⁶ This is why he agrees with Walker that there is no necessary intellectual cohesion within realism. For there is no agreed definition of this concept or what the idea of “power politics” might actually mean. At the same time, the fact that all realists are concerned about the role of power in political life provides this idea with its historical continuity.

It is important that he defend the proposition that there is something about the character of realism which makes it amenable to reform, otherwise he has no real grounds for claiming that his interpretation is an improvement on alternative formulations, let alone superior.⁵⁷ Only after such a “justificatory” argument, is it possible to infuse realism with his own insights and manipulate it to his own ends. In Buzan’s case, it is the significance of institutions and the liberal economic climate of the post-Cold War era which dictates the shape and form of his formulation of Realism. Thus, Buzan’s position resembles a social constructionist one. The meaning he attributes to realism arises out of a special set of social, political and historical circumstances of the late

55 *Ibid.*

56 Buzan, B., (1996), *op. cit.*, p.51.

57 *Ibid.*, p.47.

twentieth century. But it is not at all clear, however, that realism can simply be reduced to or interpreted solely in terms of a debate about power. And second, even if it can, this is a relatively uninteresting and trite observation. After all, this is something which is true of Western thought generally. Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Hegel, Marx, and Mill were all concerned with the problem of power in political life. And if this is all that gives realism historical continuity it is hard to see why this idea should take up the time and energy of intellectuals, and raise the blood pressure of many more.

In offering a liberal formulation of realism, and by this he means a view of international politics which focuses on the role of institutions in bringing about change in the system, Buzan is doing no more than attempting to fix its identity and meaning. He is saying that the particular properties he attributes to realism are the right ones, or, at least, the most appropriate ones given a particular set of factors. In other words, realism is best defined as x, rather than y or z.

At the same time, the moment Buzan tries to fix its meaning - that is, to claim an intellectual space for his liberal version of realism - he cannot help violating the grounds he uses to justify his project in the first place. Realism cannot be both open to multiple interpretations and fixed at the same time. He has to admit that his interpretation is only one of many valid interpretations with no more permanence or universality than another others. Moreover, by attempting to develop realism into a theory of international politics, he is still chasing the Holy Grail of consensus, even though he tacitly acknowledges that such a goal can never be achieved. This is the strange paradox in Buzan's position, and why the metaphor of the ghost is a good one to use. Furthermore, what I am suggesting is that it is ultimately futile for scholars like Buzan to attempt to achieve a consensus where there is none, nor ever likely to be. But this is not to say that these sorts of

undertakings will not continue. Only that such attempts will never be definitive or result in the “real realism.”

It is important to recognize that I am not defending a new version of the idea of realism. This would be to fall into the trap which Buzan has fallen in to. A very different argument is being advanced. I question the way that scholars (affirmationists and repudiationists) have devoted their energies to disciplining an idea which cannot finally be disciplined, without ever questioning the merit of such a consensus-generating strategy. For too long the assumption has been that this is a legitimate practice and the best way to think about this idea. The real problem with the study of international politics over the past few years then, is not theoretical pluralism, globalization, French intellectuals, or youthful and radical academics seeking to overthrow the “old order.” The problem is that the assumption of consensus fails to be convincing. It is a myth. The metaphor of the “ghost” is employed to highlight the anomalous status of the disciplinary reading of realism and places the interpretive emphasis back where it should be: on the diversity of its forms and the impossibility of stabilizing its meaning permanently.

If there are any lingering doubts about the validity of this argument consider once again the case of Norman Angell. Since the end of the Second World War, graduate students have been told that the theory of international politics developed during the inter-war years was partly responsible for the failure to deal appropriately with the Hitler. This liberal theory was idealist and utopian, naive about power and the national interest, moralistic, and barely worth serious scholarly attention. Scholars like Angell were at the forefront of this inter-war movement and bore the brunt of the realist critique. So much so, that the work of these thinkers fell into disrepute. How, then, do we account for the fact that there now seems to be some doubt about whether Angell is

a realist or an idealist. Cornelia Navari, David Baldwin, and J.D.B. Miller all suggest that labelling Angell an idealist is a mistake. According to Miller, his “devotion to the facts, to the realities which could not with safety be ignored, shows him very much a realist.”⁵⁸ Miller’s view is particularly interesting given that he is generally thought to be a leading realist. So someone who is a “realist” scholar is now suggesting that this idealist is better seen as a realist. If there was ever a reason to refuse to accept the terms of theoretical debate it would appear to be this. Not only does it demonstrate how useless abstract labels are if we wish to understand specific writers, they feed intellectual and political prejudices, and lock the field into a system of debates which retard, rather than advance the field. In the final analysis, the only way to deal with the endless cycle of affirmation and repudiation which bedevils the study of international politics is not play by the disciplinary game. This can best be achieved by recognizing that realism is a ghost and refusing to be drawn into the vortex of the politically correct or the safe haven of the *status quo*. The stakes are too important to be seduced by one side or another. Affirmation and repudiation are not our only choices. If they were, “crisis” would indeed be the appropriate term to describe this state of affairs.

Conclusion

There is no objective basis upon which a permanent consensus can be established. This is abundantly clear from the argument thus far. This lack of such a consensus renders realism a highly fluid and ghost-like concept. Thus, attempts to fix its meaning will never succeed. This does not

58 Miller, J.D.B., (1986), *Norman Angell and the Futility of War: Peace and the Public Mind*. London: Macmillan, p.134. See also Baldwin, D., (1980), “Interdependence and Power: A Conceptual Analysis,” *International Organization*, Vol.34, No.4, Autumn, pp.471-506. Navari, C., (1989), “The Great Illusion: The International Theory of Norman Angell,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.15, No.4, October, pp.341-358.

mean that individual realists will not pursue this goal or that critics will not continue to attack this idea. What it does demonstrate, however, is that there will never be a resolution to the problem of realism in the study of international politics. This, unfortunately, is the legacy of the “dubious Discipline.”

Yet it is possible, at least in principle, to break free of the cycle of affirmation and repudiation by refusing to allow the Discipline to set the terms of theoretical debate. The fact that the repudiationists do not adopt this strategy means that they will never be able to free themselves from their intellectual nemesis. They remain eternally caught in the disciplinary web and are essential to the continuance and success of the “dubious Discipline.” Paradoxically, they have a hand in the perpetuation of debates about realism. This conclusion is not likely to please the repudiationists and so I think it is important to show in a little more detail why I think their answer to the problem of the state of the Discipline is no answer at all. And this is something which I want to take up in the next chapter

CHAPTER SIX

THE FAILURE OF RADICAL CRITICS TO ESCAPE THE “DUBIOUS DISCIPLINE”

He could not live without adversaries anymore than a tree can live without soil; like mangrove trees, which make their own soil, he could create enemies from within himself.

Paul Evans on Aristotle Onassis

Introduction

The Irish novelist George Moore once wrote that is the fate of critics to be remembered by what they failed to understand. If this is the case then the radical critics of realism are likely to be remembered for quite some time to come.¹ For it is my contention that they do not understand realism very well at all. First of all, while there are commonalities among various realists, there is not sufficient commonality among them to treat realism as a unified approach to the study of international politics. In the end, they make the same mistake as defenders of the Discipline.

I begin by examining the proposition that “repudiation” is the *only* appropriate strategy for dealing with realism. Before continuing, however, it is important to make the point that this chapter is essentially a defence of the argument developed over the past few chapters. The repudiationist position is the most sustained and potent challenge to the perspective developed in this thesis. It, therefore, deserves close attention. I look at the work of a number of writers of this genre, but regard Jim George as the leading repudiationist.² Consequently, I focus almost exclusively on his writings.

The Strategy of Repudiation

Radicalism means different things to different people. It is a term which can be used to describe those who want to fast track the pace of social change or who hold an idealistic vision for the future which denies any legitimacy to the present social and political order. As a practical

¹ By “radical critics” I mean those who reject post-war “realism” outright as opposed to those critics who seek to reform it in various ways.

² George, J., (1994), *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)introduction to International Relations*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press.

philosophy, it is generally associated with the violent and bloody overthrow of governments, as in 1789 or 1917.

I use the term in a much less dramatic sense to refer to the work of a group of scholars who repudiate realism. Exemplars of this genre are Jim George, Fred Halliday, Christine Sylvester, Justin Rosenberg, Cynthia Enloe, and Marysia Zalewski, among others.³ George neatly captures the thinking of a number of scholars within this group.

To begin to move beyond the narrow and dangerous confines of “Realism as International Relations,” it is necessary to expose it as a particular (interpretive) process of understanding the world and indicate *how this process might be confronted and repudiated and its “reality” challenged, in theory and practice.*⁴

Radical critics, then, do not believe that it is possible or desirable to reform realism. The goal of criticism must be to break free of it altogether. Reforming realism then, is akin to putting out a fire with gasoline. It does nothing to deal with the structural defects of the current system that condemn much of humanity to violence, inequality and misery.

What these critics want to break free of, then, is a world which consists of autonomous territorially discrete states, which treats the national interest as the key determinant of state behaviour, distinguishes between international and domestic politics, views security as the main (if not only) concern of states, considers states to be rational, power maximizers, and regards “peace” to be the exception and “war” the rule.

³ George, J., (1994), *op. cit.* Sylvester, C., (1994), *Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Halliday, F., (1994), *Rethinking International Relations*. London: Macmillan. Rosenberg, J., (1994), *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations*. London: Verso. Zalewski, M., & Enloe, C., (1995), “Questions About Identity in International Relations,” in Booth, K., & Smith, S., (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*. London: Polity. An older form of repudiationism is Beitz, C., (1979), *Political Theory and International Relations*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁴ George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.x. The italics are mine.

These principles are most clearly articulated in the works of post-war Anglo-American scholars. According to the radical critics, these “realists” offer an understanding of state behaviour which has become the intellectual orthodoxy. As a consequence, they seek to challenge this view, treating realism as a relatively homogeneous and coherent philosophy in order to do so.

The criticisms made of realism are fairly wide ranging. For the present it is enough to say that the political agenda of these critics is to change the way that scholars think about international politics by pointing to the numerous weaknesses in realists thinking. Radical critics seek, each in their different ways, to introduce the field to “more adequate” theories of international politics; theories which can actually make a difference to the lives of those on the fringes of the international system. On this view, the object of theory is not just to describe the world, but to change it, or, at least to make it possible for others to change it. Theory is not something that is detached from practice, it is itself a practice. According to these radical critics, this is one of the things which is particularly iniquitous about post-war academic realism. Because realists fail to understand the relationship between theory and practice, they actually inscribe and promote the very behaviour they claim *only* to be observing, describing, and explaining. The emphasis is placed on what Jim George calls the “world-making nature of theory.”⁵ They agree with John Vasquez’s conclusion that “as an image of the world employed by policy makers, power politics promotes certain kinds of behaviour and often leads to self-fulfilling prophecies.”⁶ Or, as George puts it, “the most likely (statistical) outcome of a state-centric, anarchical ‘theory’ in power politics

5 *Ibid.*, p.3

6 Vasquez, J., (1983), *The Power of Power Politics*. New York: Frances Pinter, p.216.

“practice” is war, not peace.”⁷ What radical critics attack, then, is an image of international politics which has become a reality.

Justin Rosenberg offers a good summary of the repudiationist mentality. In the introduction to his recent book, he reports that his aim is to trace “one possible pathway out of realism.”⁸ According to him, This approach is most clearly expressed in the views of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz. He makes some rather strong criticisms of these three thinkers, but realizes that overcoming this powerful intellectual monarch is no easy task. He points to four reasons for the “staying power” of this idea. The first has to do with the state’s unique legal, territorial, and violent aspects. The second is that it “sounds plausible” because it mirrors the state’s self-understanding of its own role in the international arena. The third is the powerful influence of the Discipline and the “sheer weight of numbers, resources, and publications.”⁹ Finally, and most importantly, he thinks that the success of realism has to do with the lack of a clear, well thought out theoretical alternative.

For Rosenberg, a great deal of criticism against realism is self-defeating and ends up reinforcing its dominance. This is especially the case with those views that deny any specificity to the state, for example, and prefer to speak about international politics as an arena of class conflict. Such arguments do little more than reaffirm the need for realist analysis. The only way to defeat realism is to meet it head-on, and recognize that its orthodox status means that any criticism which

7 George, J., (1993), “Of Incarceration and Closure: Neorealism and the New/Old World Order,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.22, No.2, Summer, p.201.

8 Rosenberg, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.8.

9 *Ibid.*, p.32.

does not offer an alternative or “replacement” cannot possibly succeed in supplanting it. Rosenberg thinks that he can do this by articulating a historical materialist social theory.¹⁰

Rosenberg’s view that a special strategy is necessary in order to break free of realism is one shared by all those who I have labelled as repudiationist.¹¹ Thus, it is no surprise that Jim George concludes a recent essay by claiming that his viewpoint makes “a contribution superior (yes superior) to that made by a mainstream which, for so long, and at such intellectual and political cost, has represented its idealist metaphysic as ethical reality, primarily in terms of the egoism-anarchy thematic.”¹² Nor should it surprise us that Cynthia Enloe and Marysia Zalewski urge that students of international politics go beyond realism because issues of identity cannot be handled within its framework. “As to the possibility of epistemological space for theorizing about identity, we would argue that the positivist underpinnings of realism foreclose *any space that might feasibly be there.*”¹³ Yet there is no doubt that Jim George is the leading spokesperson for anyone seeking to move beyond realism. His work offers a powerful challenge to the position developed here. At the same time, by highlighting some of its weaknesses, the case for thinking about realism as a ghost becomes clearer.

10 *Ibid.*, p.39. See also Rosenberg, J., (1994), “The International Imagination: IR Theory and “Classic Social Analysis,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.23, No.1, Spring, pp.85-108.

11 Although they all agree that an alternative must be put forward, I am not saying that they all agree on the nature of this alternative. Clearly, Rosenberg and Halliday are inspired by Marxism, while Jim George and others, seek their “solutions” in post-structuralism.

12 George, J., (1995), “Realist ‘Ethics’, International Relations and Postmodernism: Thinking Beyond the Egoism-Anarchy Thematic,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.24, No.2, pp.222-223.

13 Zalewski, M., & Enloe, C., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.296.

Jim George: Crusader Against Realism

George is a critic of war who has openly declared war on realism. Certainly, Richard Ashley now appears to represent the voice of moderation in comparison to George.¹⁴ One writer has observed that George is a leading figure in a new phase of incivility which is sweeping through International Relations.¹⁵ Indeed, his recent book is a polemic in every sense of the word. Consider the following litany of sins which George levels at realism. It is “narrow and dangerous,” “a preposterous essentialism,” “a grotesque general theory,” a “moribund but lethal theory,” a “banality” which promotes human suffering, silences marginal voices, and thwarts meaningful global political change. Consequently, it is said to be a key factor in most of the iniquities of the twentieth century, a doctrine which fosters a war mentality and deprives us of the opportunity to develop a more “sensitive, sophisticated, and critically attuned perspective on global political life.”¹⁶

For George, scholars who accept and defend such a pernicious doctrine are war-mongers and purveyors of death, violence and misery. They are literally on the same level as arms dealer and assassins. George does not say why apparently modest and congenial individuals who have families and friends, keep pets, socialize, belong to community groups, and help the needy would want to be associated with such a doctrine. Even a leading malfasant like Robert Gilpin defends “liberal” values. However, once they step onto the grounds of a university, don their academic

14 Ashley, R.K., (1986), “The Poverty of Neorealism,” in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.255-301.

15 See Holsti, K.J., (1996) “Three Travelogues.” Unpublished Paper. The University of British Columbia.

16 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.4.

garb, and interact with the policy community, they become complicitious in a historical conspiracy of enormous proportions. The lives of realists must be like that of the *mafioso* who kills, robs, and extorts during the week, but is a good partner and father in the evenings, attends church each Sunday, and donates money to the local orphanage. The only explanation for this schizoid behaviour appears to be that they are innocent victims, blind to the consequences of their own misguided beliefs.

George's attitude toward realism has undergone substantial transformation in recent years. Indeed, in the late 1980s he embraces it quite openly, employing Robert Keohane's definition as a starting point for reflections on the character of the Australian Discipline.¹⁷ Although he does not deny the issue of the diversity of forms of realism, like most other realists he plays down its significance. For him, there is little difference either between the traditional realists perspective and the scientific one popular among North American scholars or between the realism of the English School and that of the North Americans. And the same can be said for the distinction between the Australian realists and their Anglo-American counterparts.

What it suggests is that the distinctions between the two major strains of realist thought are of an essentially rhetorical nature. They do not, in other words, represent the epistemological, methodological, theoretical or paradigmatic "ruptures" that a constant stream of analysts have signified for the relationship in the years since the great debates of the 1960s.¹⁸

Thus, while George is mindful of the differences in style, emphasis and tone among

¹⁷ Realism is summed up in three familiar propositions: (i) states are the most important actors; (ii) the behaviour of states is calculated in rational terms; (iii) states seek power and define their interests as the pursuit of power. Keohane, R.O., (1986), "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond," in Keohane, R.O., (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp.164-165.

¹⁸ George, J., (1988), "The Study of International Relations and the Positivist/Empiricist Theory of Knowledge: Implications for the Australian Discipline," in Higgott, R.J., (ed.), *New Directions in International Relations? Australian Perspectives*. Canberra: The Australian National University Press, p.71.

realists, and especially among the Australian contingent, a realist is a realist is a realist.¹⁹

George's early reflections on realism are focused on the positivism of Australian scholars such as Hedley Bull, Coral Bell, T.B. Millar, and J.D.B. Miller.²⁰ I have already spoken at length about positivism in chapter two, but it is worth pointing out that George spends a great deal of time speaking about the distinction that realists allegedly draw between an external world of fact and the theorized knowledge which is derived from that world. The "end result" is "the power politics 'realism' of the Cold War era."²¹ George sees this dualism reflected in different ways in the writings of most of the major international political theorists over the past fifty years, and continues, in one way or another, today. Hans Morgenthau's defence of objective laws of politics is a good example of the influence of positivism on International Relations. As is Michael Sullivan's claim that critiques of realism are problematic because the picture of the world they generate differ radically from the observed facts.²²

One of the interesting arguments in his 1988 essay is that realism can be detached from its positivist framework. He makes the point that "philosophies are underpinned by particular epistemologies that inform them."²³ But once the weaknesses of positivism are demonstrated, the

19 *Ibid.*, pp.70-71.

20 For a more in-depth look at the positivism in Hedley Bull's work see George, J., (1992), "Some Thoughts on the Givenness of Everyday Life in Australian International Relations Theory and Practice," *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.27, No.1, March, pp.31-54.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Sullivan, M., (1978), "Competing Frameworks and the Study of Contemporary International Politics," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.7, No.2, p.108.

23 George, (1988), *op. cit.*, p.68. He draws on Barry Hindess here. See Hindess, B., (1977), *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press.

provinciality of the Australian Discipline can be overcome and scholars will be able to re-energize the potential hidden within realism.²⁴ George concludes by saying that he:

offers no full blown alternative to the traditional realist approach which dominates in Australia. The problems are too complex for such a facile response. It recognizes that the realists are undoubtedly correct in pointing to the state as a major actor in the modern world. It acknowledges, moreover, that much of the alternative literature concerned with issues of consciousness, ideology and models of behaviour, does not take seriously enough the cognitive, behavioural and ideological impact upon modern peoples of three centuries or more of living in states...The first step in the reconstruction of realism though in this regard is to acknowledge the problems it faces at the theoretical level.²⁵

It is hard to reconcile this position with his more recent attacks on realism. In his post-1990 writings, he collapses the distinction between the epistemological base and the philosophical superstructure and writes of International Relations being incarcerated in a "positivist-realist framework."²⁶ Here there is no question of rekindling any hidden intellectual potential within this idea. Realism no longer has any. It is a prison which has "closed off our capacity to ask 'different' and more profound questions, and to construct genuinely alternative interpretations about global life in the last part of the twentieth century."²⁷ What has changed in the past few years which has led George to make such a striking conversion?

Although he never actually addresses this anomaly in any of his more recent offerings, it is clear that he places a great deal of significance on the end of the Cold War. Realism is no longer relevant. It may well have served the interests of the policy community during the Cold War when

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.131-132.

²⁶ George, J., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.205.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

simple concepts and strategic scenarios were required, but this is no longer the case. A great many new issues have forced themselves onto the global agenda which have now made realism redundant. The important point for George is that realism continues to inform the thinking of the policy community even though the Cold War is well and truly over. Not only does this mean that opportunities (whatever they are) for creative global change are lost, but it could also have highly dangerous consequences as decision-makers misread important political situations and miss opportunities for effective political action. He cites Stanley Hoffmann's complaint that the war fighting policy of the United States in the Persian Gulf was not developed with a subtle appreciation for the issues at hand, but came "primarily from the doctrines of realism centred on traditional balance of power dictates and a pragmatic reformulation of collective security themes."²⁸ There is a gap, then, between the reality to which realism once applied and the current reality in international politics. This doctrine, then, is out of sync with the present and this makes it exceedingly dangerous.

In an emerging age of great dangers, complexities and opportunities there is a need to go beyond the simple, ritualized re-presentation of traditional theory and practice and begin seriously to question that which for so long has evoked certain irreducible images of "reality" for the policy and intellectual communities in International Relations.²⁹

It is important that we are not left in any doubt about his intentions with regard to realism. This idea must be abandoned in favour of a non-realist postmodern alternative. The choice for George is a simple one. Realism stands for endemic global violence, intractable global problems, and the marginalization of important sections of humanity. Postmodern "non-realism" is an

²⁸ George, J., (1993), *op. cit.*, p.200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

important step beyond the horror and violence of the present international system. It offers hope for the future, the possibility of more creative decision-making, and allows us to cope with the complexities of the present in a “more tolerant, inclusive and sophisticated” fashion.³⁰

Of course, no-one would deny the historical significance of the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the reunification of East and West Germany. There is no doubt that “realists” are placed on the back foot as a result of these occurrences. One only has to consider the following passage from Waltz’s famous text to see just how much of a chink these events have put in the orthodox armour. “Few states die; many firms do. Who is likely to be around 100 years from now - The United States, the Soviet Union, France, Egypt,, Thailand or Uganda” Or Ford, IBM, Shell, Unilever, and Massey Ferguson? I would bet on the states, perhaps even on Uganda.”³¹

Clearly, Waltz loses this bet and must, along with many other “realists,” feel a sense of embarrassment at the failure of a scientific theory to predict the demise of one of the world’s most powerful states.³² But whether this is a sufficient reason for George to change his mind so drastically in the space of a few short years is debatable. Still, without direct confirmation from him on this issue, one can only think that he has been profoundly affected by the events of 1989 that it has led him to a rethink his intellectual position. Just as the beginning of the Cold War opened

30 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.ix.

31 Waltz, K.N., (1979), *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, p.95.

32 On this theme see Kratochwil, F., (1993), “The Embarrassment of Changes: Neorealism and the Science of *Realpolitik* Without Politics,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, January, pp.63-80. See also Jervis, R., (1991/1992), “The Future of World Politics: Will it Resemble the Past?” *International Security*, Vol.16, No.3, Winter, pp.39-73. Gaddis, J.L., (1992/93), “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol.17, No.3, Winter, pp.5-58.

up a “thinking space” for the likes of Hans Morgenthau, its demise now offers George a similar opportunity. One thing is for sure, when framed this way, the stakes are exceedingly high. There is no acceptable middle-ground. Repudiation is the only acceptable option.

What is inherently radical about George’s position is, first of all, the view that it is possible for scholars to free themselves from a whole range of questions; that there really is a better way to approach the study of international politics. And second, his unwillingness (at least in his latest offerings) to entertain the possibility that realism is capable of reform or revision. Thus, when he speaks about “the two dimensions of contemporary neo-Realism,” he is not simply denying Keohane’s claim that Neoliberal Institutionalism is a significantly different animal to its Waltzian cousin, he is also fiercely preserving the integrity of the repudiationist position, framed as it is in terms of a Realist/non-Realist dichotomy.³³

George thinks that he can demonstrate “how it is possible to think and act beyond orthodoxy.”³⁴ And despite his qualifications about there being no easy answers or alternative grand “theories” which will instantly make the world a better place, we should at least expect to finish up on intellectual terrain which is beyond realism. After all, this is the whole point of his rejection of this idea. But it is hard to see how this tactic can ever meet with success.

For George, the important challenge facing specialists in international politics at the end of the Cold War is “how to establish more creative, inclusive and less dangerous ways of thinking

33 See George, J., (1997), “Australia’s Global Perspectives in the 1990s: A Case of Old Realist Wine in New (Neoliberal) Bottles,” in Leaver, R., & Cox, D.,(eds.), *Middling, Meddling, Muddling: Issues in Australian Foreign Policy*. St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, p.13. Also Keohane, R.O., (1995), “Institutional Theory and the Realist Challenge After the Cold War,” in Baldwin, D., (ed.), *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.269-300.

34 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.x.

and acting.”³⁵ Yet he is remarkably silent about the actual mechanics of this challenge. There is the odd platitude about enriching the global agenda by allowing non-Western, non-white, non-elite, and non-Christian voices to be heard, about helping others to speak for themselves, and about recognizing that “we as modern peoples are intrinsic to the problem as well as crucial to any solution.”³⁶ But surely all those who are incarcerated in the closed positivist world of International Relations are entitled to more than this. Does he expect mainstream scholars simply to abandon their traditional ways of thinking about international politics on the strength of a radical critique and a handful of statements about the marginalized and the politically silenced? This is naive. And given that his post-1994 work has not advanced beyond the point of repudiating realism, mainstream scholars are right to continue on their way. There is nothing in George’s work to convince the recalcitrant scholar of its intellectual superiority.

There are so many questions which need to be answered. He counsels us to embrace postmodernism because it “is the most exciting and least dangerous way of understanding and participating in a changing world.” Of all the available theoretical options, only postmodernism is tolerant enough and sensitive enough to make a genuine difference to the fate of those on the fringes of the international system. But even if scholars shift the focus of their intellectual energies and follow him down this path, who will be the eventual architects of this redirection? Who will lead the way? State leaders, the United Nations, capitalists, men and women on the street, the underprivileged, the marginalized themselves, academics, students, social movements, or an as yet unannounced group of postmodern grass roots activists? How is the consensus necessary to

35 George, J., (1997), *op. cit.*, p.12.

36 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.231.

achieve such a dramatic redirection to be achieved? What are the strategies which will successfully transform the present international system into a less dangerous one? How can I help the marginalized and the silenced? Do I, for example, go forth armed with George's book and preach his message of deliverance directly to those on the fringes of the international system? How do I get the self-interested to act differently? How do I go about showing them that there really is a better way? How do I deal with those dictators, fascists, and elites in the Third World who continue systematically to exploit their people and show no sign of giving the "wretched of the earth" any voice at all, let alone democratic privileges? Furthermore, how is demilitarization possible? How does George suggest the international politics community go about getting the Chinese Central Committee to allow the marginalized in Tibet to speak for themselves? Who are to be the agents of effective global change and what sort of powers would be necessary to bring it about?

The violent, dangerous and war-prone character of the present international system is something which concerns George greatly. And rightly so. The world is a cruel and unforgiving place where, more often than not, human dignity is crushed under the heel of tyrannous leaders, warrior states and greedy self-serving elites. But surely the problem of violence is not banished from the international arena once the global stranglehold of realism is broken. It is important to try to determine the levels of violence which might be expected in a non-realist world. How is internecine conflict to be managed? How do postmodernists like George go about managing conflict between two marginalized groups whose "voices" collide? It is one thing to talk about the failure of current realist policies, but there is absolutely nothing in George's statements to suggest that he has more of an idea about how to handle things in Bosnia and the Middle East than anyone

else. Indeed, it is interesting that, in one place, he gives conditional support for the actions of the U.S in Haiti and Somalia “because on balance they gave people some hope where there was none.”³⁷ Yet these are hardly foreign policy “hard cases” in the same way that Bosnia and the Middle East are. And second, the Americans pulled out of Somalia as soon as events took a turn for the worse and, in the process, received a great deal of criticism from the international community. Would George have done the same thing? Would he have left the Somalians to wallow in poverty and misery? Would he have been willing to sacrifice the lives of a number of young men and women (American, Australian, French or whatever) to subdue Mohammad Farah Aidid and his minions in order to restore social and political stability to Somalia? Indeed, I wonder how much better off the international community would be if Jim George was put in charge of foreign affairs. This is not a fatuous point either. After all, he wants to suggest that students of international politics are implicated in the trials and tribulations of international politics. We should, therefore, be willing to accept such a role, even hypothetically. However, I suspect that were George actually to confront some of the dilemmas that policy makers do, he would find that teaching the Bosnian Serbs about the dangers of modernism, universalism, and positivism, and asking them to be more tolerant and sensitive would not meet with much success. True, it may not be a whole lot worse than current realist approaches, but the point is he has not demonstrated how his views might make a real difference. Saying that they will is not enough given that the outcomes of such strategies may cost people their lives. I am not asking him to develop a research project either. I am asking him to show how his position can make a difference to the “hard cases” in international politics. And clearly, this still awaits us. My point is really a simple one. Despite

³⁷ George, J., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.219.

George's pronouncements, there is little in his work to show that he has much appreciation of the kind of moral dilemmas which Augustine wrestled with in his early writings and which confront human beings every day. Otherwise, he would not have painted such a black and white picture of the study of international politics.

George holds to a view that thinking makes it so. If the outcome of realism has been the transmutation of reality into a war system, then it follows that postmodern thinking, with its emphasis on tolerance, emancipation, and equality, would help to transform this system into one which is dignified, peaceful, and substantially "less dangerous." But whatever one says about radical human agency it always involves some degree of social engineering. The agents of global change, whoever they might be, have to force some individuals and groups to do their bidding. In the end, they must legislate and force some individuals to be free.³⁸ Moreover, in situations where entrenched cultural and historical values do collide, and this is a likely possibility in a theory which seeks to "help others speak for themselves," then some degree of violence must be tolerated, or at least factored into the theory itself. George ignores these questions. Do the advocates of the postmodern values take up arms against those who are unwilling to let "others" speak for themselves? If they do not, their case has no real teeth. If they do, they must, at some stage, sanction the use of force. I do not have an answer to this conundrum, but it seems to me that this is an issue which George needs to tackle. For clearly he wants to defend the proposition that his "new world order" will be less dangerous than the new/old one of George Bush and the realists. He needs to show how postmodernism can avoid the intrusion and corruption of its schema by

³⁸ George's comment about the "superiority" of his own peculiar brand of "Postmodernism" seems to me to be moving in this direction. See George, J., (1995), *op. cit.*, pp.222-223.

violence or else justify its use under certain circumstances. He does neither.

There are also a host of technological and logistical questions to be considered. Through what medium are those on the fringes of the international system going to speak to the world? While it may be true that the third world is now part of the global network of communications and access to libraries, computers, electricity, and email is possible, those on the fringes have little use for this sort of infrastructure. When one's existence is spent just surviving, there is little time left to develop the skills and conditions necessary to be able to be meaningfully heard in the global arena. Social, political, and individual autonomy is not at a premium in these parts of the world. An intellectual approach as controversial as postmodernism is, is never likely to achieve the sorts of goals which George foreshadows. He is all too vague on matters which are really central to the overall success of his argument. What needs to be remembered is that this is a theory of international politics for theorists and interested intellectuals. George's audience, therefore, is a very limited one. But the question has to be asked whether a senior scholar in the intellectual heartland of Australia who undoubtedly has a comfortable middle-class existence can do anything of real substance to aid the plight of the marginalized and the oppressed. It is simply not true that the computer keyboard is mightier than the sword.³⁹ Moreover, it is hard to see how a small group of scholarly individuals is ever likely to generate the sort of political momentum necessary to allow those on the fringes to speak and be heard.

There is more to the question of letting those of the fringes of the system speak and be heard, however. For such a posture presupposes that states and individuals want to listen, and will

³⁹ It is perhaps worth making the point that the last intellectual who believed that the subject of international relations has to be practiced out in the real world was Joseph Kruzel and he was unfortunately killed by a stray bullet in Bosnia.

listen to what the marginalized and the oppressed have to say. But there is little evidence to suggest that “listening” is something that the advanced capitalist countries do very well at all. Certainly, there are some agencies and individuals who are sensitive to the need for the “marginalized” to have a voice and to control their own destinies. Even the most optimistic reckoning, however, these are a minority within the First World and are not able to do any more than scratch the surface of this tragic and endemic state of affairs. Hyper-individualism, consumerism, advertising, Hollywood, fashion, the trade in arms and materials of war, global finance, and a whole range of other activities conspire to undermine George’s vision of the character of the “space beyond International Relations.” George seems to have little appreciation of the structural impediments to the sort of radical change he advocates. Many individuals simply do not have the time, the inclination, or the moral and mental capacity to concern themselves with anyone beyond themselves, their family, and their closest friends. And how does one convince companies like Nike that there is something intrinsically wrong with paying an Indonesian labour force a few cents a week to manufacture shoes for the global market? How does one convince them that they should stop paying millions of dollars a year to Michael Jordan and Michael Johnson to advertise their product and use the savings to improve the living standards and work conditions of their Third World labor force? How does he get the CEO’s of multinational corporations, stockbrokers, accountants, factory-workers, and the unemployed to stop thinking about themselves and listen to the homeless and destitute in their own countries, let alone in places they have never visited and are never likely to visit? In other words, George’s position requires a theory of “listening.” He needs to show how the social, political, psychological, and moral structures which define the parameters of existence for the many millions of ordinary citizens in

the First World and which deflects attention from the marginalized and the oppressed can be broken down. There is little evidence that he has thought very much about this. This is not to say that it cannot be done. It is difficult to see how George's affirmation of postmodernism is likely to make much of a difference. He cannot even get the mainstream to see the wisdom of his logic. And given that a key feature of the study of international politics at present is a lack of consensus, I doubt that he will ever get far in his crusade against realism. Moreover, all of this would be very disturbing for those already incarcerated in the backward Discipline. Waltz, Gilpin, Krasner and others are being asked to give up on their lifelong beliefs and theories on the strength of a set of very underdeveloped, vague, and open-ended propositions. Without a clear plan of how to get from "incarceration and closure" to intellectual freedom, creativity, and openness, it is quite understandable that they are, as yet, unwilling to step out their individual caves and into the clear light of the postmodern day.

What reinforces these sentiments is the fact that George's book and recent collection of articles have almost nothing to say about the world itself. To be sure, there are a few brief remarks about Bosnia and the Gulf War at the beginning of his book. And toward the end he argues that:

the deep, multifaceted problems of the Middle East region, of warlordism and famine in the Horn of Africa, of exploding ethnic hatreds in the Balkans, of culture, gender, transmigration, and global economic crisis cannot be solved by recourse to crude power politics dogma, nor even the most fear-inspiring display of contemporary technorationalist savagery...⁴⁰

Unfortunately, this is as close as George brings his reader to the real issues of international politics. Whatever one might say about "realism," whatever truth there might be in the mountain

40 *Ibid.*, 221.

of criticism that is leveled at it, one thing is certain, most “realists” engage in discussion *about* international politics. Hans Morgenthau was not only a theorist but wrote extensively about the issues and problems which faced Europe and the United States after 1945, war, Korea and Vietnam, institutions, nationalism, and so on. The same can be said for George Kennan, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Lippmann, and Kenneth Waltz. But there is none of this in any of George’s writings. He concludes his book by suggesting that none of us can detach ourselves from a global political existence, and in saying this he is probably correct. Yet, in truth, his book really has little, if anything interesting to say about the “real” world. This, perhaps, accounts for the other-worldly character of many of his arguments and the lack of attention he has paid to the numerous structural impediments to meaningful and significant global change. Even if the range of issues concerning the “space” beyond International Relations are put aside, his approach must be judged a failure. For the strategy of repudiation which informs it is a mistaken one. Indeed, it actually helps to perpetuate the orthodox reading of international politics.

Repudiation: No Exit From Realism

“Debate” is generally considered to be at the heart of intellectual life. It is the dynamic which allows scholars to locate themselves intellectually within their field of study, allows them to express an opinion in a communal environment, and, in the best of all possible worlds, functions as a catalyst for the generation of new insights and ideas. Without debate, intellectual life would wither away.

The study of international politics is no different in this regard. It flourishes when debate flourishes, and all the better when there is multiplicity of perspectives on a subject being expressed. Yet often debates are cast in such a way that there appears to be only two options: a

right answer or a wrong one, depending on which side of the fence one sits. The science/relativism issue is a good example of this. Neorealists cast relativists in a totally negative light, painting the relativists as an evil nemesis only too willing to destroy the fabric of academic life. The neorealists are like crusaders battling against a powerful and ever present foe. In opposition to this, relativists flaunt their antipathy toward science and adopt relativism as a way of gaining maximum leverage against their opponents. They know that this is their Achilles heel. The important point is that among the protagonists there is no attempt to transcend the cyclic structure of the debate. As I noted in the previous chapter, a critical stand is taken *in opposition*. In this case, debate seems pre-ordained to become bogged down in the cycle of affirmation and repudiation as scholars line up according to that side which best captures their personal view of the nature of things.

The lesson we can learn from this is that extreme viewpoints generate, and generally perpetuate, equally extreme viewpoints. The absolute faith they have in the “truth” of their own views makes it impossible for them to see merit in what others have to say and this tends to foster the sort of radical rejectionism we see in the work of scholars like Rosenberg and George. Moreover, they do not see how the way they frame certain issues determines how others respond to them.

This logic informs much of the debate about realism. On the one side, are “partisan supporters” who continue to affirm its value, defend its principles, and speak as if it is uncontested and uncontroversial. At the other extreme, are radical critics who repudiate it unequivocally, denying it any credence at all. What is interesting about this cleavage is not the strengths and weaknesses of each side, but the fact that both are caught in a cycle. Each side paints its opponent in the worst possible light, while reinforcing the legitimacy of its own position by denying the

legitimacy of the arguments of the other. Thus, there are certain limits to what can be accomplished with criticism. What is often forgotten is that ideologies and political positions are not held solely on account of their logic.

Repudiationists draw such a sharp distinctions between themselves and their realist opponents that it appears as if they are captivated, if not entirely mesmerized, by them. So much of the credibility of the arguments of these critics relies on the existence of this opposing force. This probably accounts for the fact that the repudiationists are never able to stop attacking realism, despite the alleged superiority of their alternative. In light of this, George's view that although the realist horse may be lame, it is "certainly far from dead," sounds like an admission of his failure to be able to break free of realism.⁴¹ Indeed, a cynic might be tempted to respond by pointing out that a lame horse is a much easier target than a swift-footed stallion and this suits George's literary purposes quite nicely. Indeed, whatever one thinks about George's work, there is no doubt that realism empowers him, gives his arguments credibility, and is the source of the legitimacy of his particular brand of radicalism. The important point is that for all the forcefulness of their attack on the epistemological foundationalism of the realists, in a way realism itself is a kind of "foundational" argument. It is an idea which radical critics simply cannot do without. Indeed, it is hard to see what George's understanding of international politics is without realism as its backdrop and primary reference point. For all the verbal pugilism and flashy intellectual argument which the repudiationists fire against realism, it is hard to be convinced that they can get beyond the idea of realism *via* a totalizing critique. The alternative they offer, and the way they approach the orthodox study of international politics, is still very much commanded by the doctrine which

41 George, J., (1995), *op. cit.*, p.196.

they hold in such contempt.

The source of this problem is the dichotomous mentality of the repudiationists. For them, the central problem which the theorist must contend with is how to establish non-realist approaches to the study of international politics. It makes no difference to my argument that they interpret non-realism in ideologically and philosophically different ways. The point is that the realism/non-realism split orders their thinking. It is their perception of the structure of the theoretical landscape. Steve Smith calls it a “self-image.”⁴² But, in reality, it is an interpretive framework, a lens through which these scholars understand the goal and purpose of theoretical intervention into the lurid world of international politics.

What is interesting is that someone like George, who writes so passionately against the dichotomous view of international politics which arises out of the mainstream’s endorsement of positivism, should himself fall victim to a version of the same dreaded disease.⁴³ The realism/non-realism split provides him with an orientational logic. It is as central to his particular brand of theorizing as the inter-paradigm debate is to Michael Banks and Michael Doyle, the communitarian/cosmopolitan divide is to Chris Brown, and the “Three Rs” are to Martin Wight and Hedley Bull. Yet it is a logic which leaves the theoretical *status quo* intact.

42 Smith, S., (1995), “The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory,” in Booth, K., & Smith S., (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*. London: Polity Press, pp.361-37.

43 In this sense, it fosters an attitude quite reminiscent of the neo-Marxist literature of the 1960s. A good example of this literature is Magdoff, H., (1966), *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Monthly Review Press. A more recent neo-Marxist example is Sweezy, P., (1991), “Pox Americana,” *The Monthly Review*, Vol.43, No.3, July-August, pp.1-13. There is an interesting study to be done on the impact of this literature on the post-modern thinking of scholars like Richard Ashley and Jim George. My impression is that those who argue that the new post-modernists are those neo-Marxists who lost faith in the original cause are probably correct. For an interesting discussion of this issue from a philosophical viewpoint see Bloom, A., (1987), “The Nietzscheanization of the Left or Vice Versa,” *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp.217-226.

George demands that the intellectual space beyond International Relations should be a “non-realist” one, but he must eventually resurrect this idea in one form or another to give credibility and legitimacy to his own views. As he acknowledges:

reality is never a complete, entirely coherent “thing,” accessible to universalized, essentialized, or totalized understandings of it.... *political realism*, consequently, is one that above all recognizes its limitations in this regard and acknowledges its partial, problematic, and always contestable nature.⁴⁴

What George seems to be suggesting is that his own post-modern approach is more adequate to reality than that peddled by the Anglo-American mainstream. But if such a thing as an “adequate political realism” is possible, then, how can he claim also to offer a way out of this idea? He is unclear about this. But what it amounts to is that he offers only a way out of a particular reading of realism, rather than a way out of the idea itself. James Richardson is absolutely right, therefore, to suggest that many radicals present their views as a general critique of the idea of realism, when they are, in fact, challenges to particular species of it.⁴⁵

Just because the vast majority of scholars in the field have accepted uncritically the philosophy of rationalism as the basis for their understanding of international politics, does not automatically mean that the idea of realism cannot be thought of in ways which are not rationalist. Nor does it mean that scholars who have attempted to develop the idea of realism into a rationalist theory of international politics have some pre-ordained monopoly on its character and scope. The reason they do this is precisely because they are locked into the “dubious Discipline.” It is perhaps

44 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.11.

45 Richardson, J.L., (1991), “The State of the Discipline: A Critical Practitioner's View,” in Higgott, R.L., & Richardson, J.L., (eds.), *International Relations: Global and Australian Perspectives on an Evolving Discipline*. Canberra: The ANU Press, p.27.

interesting that the scholars who most seeks to bring their creative impulses to the study of international politics, have such a narrow view of the significance of this idea in theoretical discourse. Ultimately, George cannot escape from this idea by casting the field in terms of a tussle between realism and non-realism.

To the extent that the realists believe that they have a monopoly on they meaning of realism, they are deluded. Cast in terms of a general theory of international politics, realism is an intellectual aberration which tells us more about the sociology of the academy in North America than about the nature of international politics. George is certainly right to criticize this view, but wrong to think that attacking and rejecting realism is enough to dispose of it. The repudiationist is as tied to the idea of realism as its most ardent supporter. Thus, repudiationists like George are actually dupes of the “dubious Discipline” because they end up promoting and perpetuating an intellectual debate which they claim to want to transcend.

In any period of upheaval it is commonplace to hear pronouncements of the death of the old and the birth of the new, of the clear superiority of the latest ideology, moral code, revolutionary government, philosophical system or theory. Western intellectual history is littered with such examples. The need for a “new beginning” is a constant refrain in intellectual life. The logic behind them is often seductive and compelling. The past is a repository of flawed ideas, dangerous moral and social codes, superstitions and illusions. It is a millstone around the neck of the present, a brake on understanding. To continue to privilege and idealize the past, not only distorts present thinking and retards practice, but hampers our ability to deal effectively with current political problems. By casting off the chains of the past, we will come to see the present in a new light, and look forward to a better, brighter future. At the heart of views of this sort is an

overwhelming desire for liberation and freedom.

But reality is rarely this clear cut. Claims of the need for a radical solution to the problems associated with the past, of the need for a “clean sweep,” are often met with vigorous opposition, revolutions have a tendency towards recidivism, and social and political theories, philosophies and ideologies, often out last the forces which herald their demise. During the 1970s, Hegel enjoyed a period of revival, even though a hundred years earlier his thought was regarded by the neo-Kantians as a paradigm example of how not to philosophize. Aristotle's and Plato's ethical doctrines are now gaining support with novel treatments by Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, and others, and the resurgence of interest in idealist internationalism, militate against the possibility of completely breaking with the past. There is, of course, something intrinsically exciting about the possibility of entering an open future unconstrained by the intellectual debris and prejudices of the past. The promise that the terrain of the future will be more fruitful, more insightful, and positively less harmful than that of realism, is one which cannot help but wet the appetite of anyone whose faith in the traditional canon has begun to wane.

George declares himself to be a post-modernist. In making such a declaration, he stands opposed to the intellectual assumptions of modernity. He rejects grand theories and large-scale historical narratives which treat human existence as a journey from darkness to enlightenment. There is no recurrent pattern of events, no natural laws of politics, no hidden-hand, no second-coming, and certainly, no utopia at the end of the social and political rainbow.

When presented this way the gulf between the post-modernist understanding of reality and that of the modernist one could not be wider. Yet George has a great deal of difficulty in maintaining the “purity” of this distinction. In some places, he seems to reject everything to do

with modernism, but in others he says that we are all “products of modernity.” He speaks about the “critical potentials” hidden within the writings of Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Popper, yet these thinkers have done more to shape the dualistic philosophies of the last four hundred years than anybody else. He shows some sympathy for the work of Jurgen Habermas, Robert Cox, and others writing out of the Gramscian tradition, while also speaking of Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva in glowing terms. It is no wonder, then, that toward the end of the book a certain ambivalence creeps into his postmodernism.

Lingering doubts remain about much Critical Theory analysis in this regard, but there is much, in sophisticated Habermasian and neo-Gramscian approaches in particular, that deserves analytical respect and critical exploration....Postmodernist perspectives have most to offer in that space beyond international Relations.⁴⁶

But once he casts his vote in favour of postmodernism, how can he have analytical respect for Habermas and Cox?⁴⁷ Postmodernism, as I understand it, is a complete rejection of the project of critical theory. One only needs to remember Habermas’s mad rush in the early 1980s to demonstrate that his work did not entail a commitment to relativism or read Alex Callinicos and Peter Dews to see the truth of the first point.⁴⁸ From the perspective of the postmodernist, the critical theorist still clings misguidedly to the emancipatory dream of the Enlightenment.

It seems quite difficult, then, to have analytical respect for modernist critical theory when

46 George, J., (1994), *op. cit.*, p.232.

47 Habermas, J., (1987), “Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again,” in *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, pp.266-293.

48 The charge of relativism was first levelled at Habermas in Thompson, J.B., & Held, D., (1982), *Habermas: Critical Debates*. London: Macmillan. See also Callinicos, A., (1989), *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*. London: Polity Press. Dews, P., (1987), *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London: Verso.

it is essentially cut from the same post-renaissance, post-Enlightenment cloth as realism. True, critical theory is more contextually oriented, is historically sensitive, and better understands the limits of reason, and scholars like Cox certainly do offer an impressive array of criticisms of this idea. The difference, however, appears to be one of degree, rather than kind. It is, I think, significant that Cox generally lets realism be. He recognizes that there is a place for problem-solving theory in the study of international politics.⁴⁹ George does not. But he cannot have it both ways and remain consistent. He cannot employ postmodernism in his fight against realism, and also have sympathy for modernist views which recognize that realism has a place in the study of international politics, albeit a more modest one to what Waltz and Gilpin think. The point is that if George is the postmodernist he claims to be, he would not treat realism in black and white terms. If reality is always in flux, unstable, and subject to change, then surely this must also apply to the idea of realism. James Der Derian is right, then, to point out that:

realism comes in many flavors, and everyone has their favorite. Yet in international relations the meaning of realism is more often than not presented as uniform, self-evident, and transparent - even by those critics who in debates great and not-so-great have questioned its historical relevance, political function, or heuristic value.⁵⁰

The fact that George must eventually revive this idea in some form is proof of this. The mainstream treat realism as a stable entity with a fixed, knowable meaning. The problem is that George also buys into this interpretation. In his desire to kill off realism, he has simply reacted

⁴⁹ “The strength of the problem-solving theory approach lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination.” Cox, R., (1986), “Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” in Keohane, R.O. (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.210.

⁵⁰ Der Derian, J., (1996), “A Reinterpretation of Realism: Genealogy, Semiology, Dromology,” in Beer, F.A., & Hariman, R., (eds.), *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, p.277.

against it, without working through the deeper issues at stake. Realism simply does not have the intellectual coherence which George and other repudiationists attribute to it.

The problem can be traced back to George's ambivalence towards modernism/postmodernism. Ultimately, the repudiationist strategy is one which arises out of the Enlightenment, especially from the counter-Enlightenment and Hegelian-Marxism. In this sense, Rosenberg and Halliday, with their absolute antipathy toward the postmodern, are much more consistent than George.⁵¹ The appropriate postmodern response to the reality of realism is not to buy into the cycle of affirmation and repudiation, but to understand that it is a ghost; that in the flux and instability of reality, realism means (and will always mean) different things to different scholars. It is an idea, the meaning of which can never finally be stabilized or settled, despite points of commonality among its different versions. One suspects, although I have no evidence to substantiate this claim, that George is one of those scholars who has lost faith in the old Marxist message of emancipation, but has not quite managed to transcend its mindset of opposition and reaction. It is worth pointing out here that not all radical scholars have fallen into this trap. Richard Ashley, for example recognizes the paradox involved in trying to kill off the ghost. As he argues:

there is just no continuous presence to political realism - there is no there there. There is no hermeneutic of realism, and so there are neither right interpretations nor wrong. There are no absolute boundaries that separate realists from non-realists, and so there is no question of being inside or out....Political realism is as unrepresentable as the paradoxical sites in which it moves."⁵²

Despite the fact that George's position is an unsatisfactory one, I agree with him on one

⁵¹ See Halliday's critique of postmodernism. Halliday, F., (1994), *op. cit.*, pp.37-46.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.65.

score. There is a need to retell the history of International Relations. Unfortunately, his particular “reintroduction” represents only a continuation of the old traditional story. I suggest that the retelling of the history of this field of study is not something which should be told in terms of great debates, of evolution and involution, of well-being and disarray, or of the heroic struggle against an entrenched and dangerous political philosophy. Rather, it is the story which should focus on how defenders of the Discipline failed to understand the pluralistic character of international political theory, the hopelessness of trying to discipline realism, about how the early defenders erected an organizational framework which begged just about all the important philosophical, epistemological, and ontological questions of political theory, because of an over-ambitious consensual urge, and, finally, about how the repudiationists were unable to see the part they played in perpetuating this long and unproductive passion play.

CONCLUSION

AGAINST LEGISLATION IN THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The idea that the role of theory is to settle questions once and for all - to reach conclusions - is fundamentally mistaken, the product of a misreading of the nature of science and a misapplication of this misreading to the social sciences... Good conversation does not involve the reaching of conclusions.

Chris Brown

The premise of this thesis is that theoretical pluralism can and should be defended. I argued that the “problem of the divided self” means that pluralism is the only basis upon which the study of international politics can be ordered. If this is the case, then the emphasis which defenders of the Discipline place on generating a consensus on the subject is misplaced. I argued that this is enough to warrant a critical inquiry into International Relations which looked specifically at the idea of consensus. The ability to achieve a consensus on the “subjects of inquiry and theorizing” is often said to be the most outstanding achievement of post-war scholarship. Defenders of the Discipline believe theoretical pluralism undermines this achievement. It leads to relativism, a loss of standards, and intellectual chaos. Against this view, I argued that the main reason why International Relations has fallen on hard times has little or nothing to do with questions of relativism or a loss of intellectual standards. Rather, it has to do with the fact that there are no independent criteria upon which a permanent consensus can be established. In other words, the problem with the Discipline is a problem of its own making. As a result, International Relations is a very “dubious Discipline.”

One of the things which emerged from the discussion is the extent to which the Discipline continues to inform much of theoretical debate today. I argued that the only way to break free of International Relations is to give up the mindset of having to either defend or repudiate realism. This is possible because realism is not a homogeneous idea with a fixed meaning. In the final chapter, I defended my interpretation against those whom I labeled repudiationists.

This thesis has a very simple message. It says to both defenders of the Discipline and to their radical critics: “a plague on both your houses.” Thus, I suggest that Kenneth Waltz is no more convincing than Jim George. The views of each are symptomatic of the influence of the

“dubious Discipline” on the study of international politics. From Hans Morgenthau through to Kenneth Waltz and Jim George, there is a tendency among theorists to try legislate for the field as a whole. By this, I mean the activity of providing a grand design or framework which others are urged to adopt. We are continuously being told how best to study the subject, which questions are central and which are peripheral, which philosophers should be read and taken notice of, where the boundaries of the field are, and so on. There is far too much of this among students of international politics. It comes, I think, from the obsession with achieving consensus. The view seems to be that if the criticisms are good enough, the logic faultless, and the arguments sound, then this should be enough to generate agreement and therefore, a more productive and adequate field of study. Legislation assumes that everyone is at least as rational and as reasonable as the legislator. But the fact is that the “problem of the divided self” cannot be escaped and this will always ensure that universal legislative proposals, whether they be for the Discipline or for the world itself, will always be partial, contested, and invite opposition. The ideological dimension cannot be side-stepped or overcome.

Of course, there is a place for legislation and prescription in the field. I am not denying that. In a sense, every argument contains a legislative moment. But the problem with the study of international politics at present is that legislation is all-encompassing, despite what some post-modernists say. Whether it be in asking others to put forward research projects, in denunciations of particular “isms,” in promoting a particular theory as the answer to the world ills, in claims about what the “next stage” of theorizing will be, these all presuppose that agreement is possible. This debilitating and fruitless assumption needs to be abandoned, if the field is to mature. Agreement is not structural or natural. If anything, it is accidental and contingent. The point is that

all scholars have different agenda, different interests, different influences, and different priorities. Unless those who engage in theoretical debate begin to accept this premise with conviction and understand its implications, there will be very little meaningful dialogue in the field, and certainly no progress. The study of international politics will continue to be a blind clash of individual wills and remain in its present state of immaturity. This thesis is intended as a contribution to this maturing process. It may be countered, of course, that I am also legislating as well. This is certainly not my intention. Rather, this thesis should be read as an investigation into what happens when a field becomes dominated by legislators.

One final point. This thesis has put forward an argument which is highly sceptical of the capacity of students of international politics to generate a consensus on the “subjects of inquiry and theorizing.” This does not necessarily mean that scholars should not pursue agreement at other levels of discourse. It is only to suggest that manufactured agreement is really no agreement at all and that “the subjects of inquiry and theorizing” will be something which students of international politics will never agree upon. It is fanciful to imagine that such an outcome is either possible or desirable. But this does not mean that agreement should not be sought on other matters. Most importantly, it should be sought over the nature of the difficulties which give rise to international politics. The problem I have with defenders of the Discipline is they have sought agreement on the answers, without really knowing the nature of the problem. The place to start is with the problem of the divided self, the relationship between identity and territory, and the significance of citizenship in human existence. here, at least, it might be possible to make some headway. One thing is sure, the study of international politics would benefit immeasurably from such a shift in focus.

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