

THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler

Theories of International Relations

This book is a comprehensive guide to theories of International Relations (IR). Given the limitations of a paradigm-based approach, it sheds light on eighteen theories and new theoretical perspectives in IR by examining the work of key reference theorists. The chapters are all written to a common template: the introductory section provides readers with a basic understanding of the theory's genesis by locating it within an intellectual tradition, paying particular attention to the historical and political context. The second section elaborates on the theory as formulated by the selected reference theorist. After this account of the theory's core elements, the third section turns to theoretical variations, examining conceptual subdivisions and overlaps, further developments and internal critique. The fourth section scrutinizes the main criticisms emanating from other theoretical perspectives and highlights points of contact with recent research in IR. The fifth and final section consists of a bibliography carefully compiled to aid students' further learning.

Encompassing a broad range of mainstream, traditional theories as well as emerging and critical perspectives, this is an original and ground-breaking textbook for students of International Relations.

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Siegfried Schieder is Acting Professor for International Relations and Foreign Policy at the University of Trier and teaches International Relations at the German-Chinese Graduate School of Global Politics (GSGP), Free University of Berlin.

Manuela Spindler teaches International Relations and International Relations Theory at the German open Business School (GoBS) and the German-Chinese Graduate School of Global Politics (GSGP), Free University of Berlin.

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Edited by
Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler

Translated by Alex Skinner

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Contributors

Mathias Albert is Professor of Political Science at Bielefeld University, Germany. His publications: 2010 (ed.) *New Systems Theories of World Politics*. London: Palgrave (with Lars-Erik Cederman and Alexander Wendt); 2013 (ed.) *Bringing Sociology to IR: World Politics as Differentiation Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (with Barry Buzan and Michael Zürn).

Andreas Bieler is Professor of Political Economy and Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ), School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, UK. His publications: 2006: *The Struggle for a Social Europe: Trade Unions and EMU in Times of Global Restructuring*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; 2010 (ed.) *Global Restructuring, Labour and the Challenges for Transnational Solidarity*. London: Routledge (with Ingemar Lindberg).

Hans-Jürgen Bieling is Professor of Political Economy and Economic Didactics at Eberhard Karls University, Tübingen, Germany. His publications: 2010: *Die Globalisierungs- und Weltordnungspolitik der Europäischen Union*. Wiesbaden: VS Springer; 2011: *Internationale Politische Ökonomie*, updated and revised 2nd edition. Wiesbaden: VS Springer.

Thomas Conzelmann is Professor of International Relations at Maastricht University, the Netherlands. His publications: 2012: Informal Governance in International Relations, in: Christiansen, Thomas and Neuhold, Christine (eds) *International Handbook on Informal Governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 219–235; 2012: A Procedural Approach to the Design of Voluntary Clubs: Negotiating the Responsible Care Global Charter, *Socio-Economic Review* 10(1): 193–214.

Christopher Daase is Professor of International Organizations at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His publications: 2010 (ed.) *Rethinking Security Governance: The Problem of Unintended Consequences*. London: Routledge (with Cornelius Friesendorf); 2012 (ed.) *Arms Control in the 21st Century: Towards a New Paradigm?* London: Routledge (with Oliver Meier).

Thomas Diez is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Tübingen, Germany. His publications: 2008 (ed.) *The European Union and Border Conflicts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (with Mathias Albert and Stephan Stetter); 2011: *Key Concepts in International Relations*. London: Sage (with Ingvild Bode and Aleksandra Fernandes da Costa).

Barbara Finke is Head of Graduate Programmes at Hertie School of Governance, Berlin. Her publications: 2005: *Legitimation globaler Politik durch NGOs. Frauenrechte, Deliberation und Öffentlichkeit in der UNO*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag. 2005 (ed.) *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft: Konzepte, Akteure, Strategien*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag (with Michèle Knodt).

Andreas Hasenclever is Professor of International Relations and Peace Research at the University of Tübingen. His publications: 1997: *Theories of International Regimes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (co-authored with Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger); 2006: International Institutions Are the Key. A New Perspective on the Democratic Peace, *Review of International Studies* 32 (2006): 3, 563–583 (co-authored with Brigitte Weiffen).

Michael Heinrich is Professor of Economics at Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft, Berlin. His publications: 2013: Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx's Studies in the 1870s, in: *Monthly Review* 64(11), pp. 15–31; 2013: The Fragment on Machines: A Marxian Misconception in the Grundrisse and its Overcoming in Capital, in: Bellofiore, Riccardo, Starosta, Guido and Thomas, Peter D. (eds) *In Marx's Laboratory. Critical Interpretations of the Grundris*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 197–212.

Christoph Humrich is Assistant Professor of International Relations and World Politics at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His publications: 2011: Facts Without Norms? Does the Constitutionalization of International Law still Have a Discourse-theoretical Chance?, in Ungureanu, Camil, Guenther, Klaus and Joerges, Christian (eds) *Jürgen Habermas*. Vol. 2. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 323–338; 2011: Global Governance Through Legislation, in Enderlein, Henrik, Wältli, Sonja and Zürn, Michael (eds) *Handbook on Multi-level Governance*. Cheltenham: Elgar, pp. 343–357 (with Bernhard Zangl).

Andreas Jacobs is Research Advisor, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy. His publications: 2004 (ed.) *Euro-Mediterranean Co-operation: Enlarging and Widening the Perspective*, ZEI Discussion paper, Bonn; 2006: Reformist Islam. Protagonists, Methods, and Themes of Progressive Thinking in Contemporary Islam, KAS policy paper, Berlin.

Adam David Morton is Professor of Political Economy, Department of Political Economy, University of Sydney, Australia. His publications: 2007: *Unravelling Gramsci: Hegemony and Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy*. London: Pluto Press. 2011: *Revolution and State in Modern Mexico: The Political Economy of Uneven Development*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Winner of the 2012 Book Prize of the British International Studies Association (BISA) International Political Economy Group (IPEG).

Andreas Nölke is Professor of International Relations and International Political Economy at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His publications: 2013 (ed.) *The Politics of Financialization*, in *Competition and Change*, 17(3) (special issue, in collaboration with Hans-Jürgen Bieling and Marcel Heires); 2014 (ed.) *Emerging Markets Multinational Corporations: State Capitalism 3.0*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Paul Reuber is Professor of Political Geography at the University of Münster, Germany. His publications: 2012: *Politische Geographie*. Paderborn: UTB; 2012 (ed.) *Die Politik der räumlichen Repräsentationen – Beispiele aus der empirischen Forschung*. *Forum Politische Geographie* 6. Münster: LIT (with Iris Dzudzek and Anke Strüver).

Siegfried Schieder is currently Acting Professor of International Relations and Foreign Policy at the University of Trier and Visiting Scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Shanghai. His publications: 2011: The Social Construction of European Solidarity: Germany and France in the EU Policy towards the States of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), *Journal of International Relations and Development* 14(4): 469–505; 2014: *Neue Sprachbilder und Metaphern für Europa? Grenzen der deutschen Europa- und Integrationspolitik*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Niklas Schörnig is Senior Research Fellow at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Germany, and visiting lecturer at Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. His publications: 2012: Killer Drones: The Silver Bullet of Democratic Warfare? *Security Dialogue* 43(4): 353–370 (with Frank Sauer); 2013 (ed.) *The Militant Face of Democracy: Liberal Forces for Good*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (with Anna Geis and Harald Müller).

Manuela Spindler is Professor of International Politics at the University of Erfurt and Brandt School of Public Policy (until 2013), lecturer in International Relations and International Relations Theory at the German Open Business School and the Graduate School of Global Politics at the Free University of Berlin, Germany. Her publications: 2005: *Regionalismus im Wandel. Die neue Logik der Region in einer globalen Ökonomie*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag; 2013: *International Relations*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Ingo Take is currently Acting Professor of International Governance at the University of Münster, Germany. His publications: 2012: Regulating the Internet Infrastructure: A Comparative Appraisal of the Legitimacy of ICANN, ITU, and the WSIS, *Regulation & Governance* 6(6): 499–523; 2012: Global Governance Put to the Test: A Comparative Study of the Legitimacy of International, Transnational and Private Forms of Governance, *Swiss Political Science Review* 18(2): Special Issue, 220–248.

Cornelia Ulbert is Executive Director of the Institute for Development and Peace (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. Her publications: 2005: Deliberately Changing the Discourse: What Does Make Arguing Effective?, *Acta Politica* 40(3): 351–367 (with Thomas Risse); 2013: How to Hit a Moving Target: Assessing the Effectiveness of Public-Private Partnerships, in Hegemann, Hendrik, Heller, Regina and Kahl, Martin (eds) *Studying “Effectiveness” in International Relations: A Guide for Students and Scholars*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, pp. 101–120.

Günter Wolkersdorfer was a senior lecturer at the Department of Geography, University of Münster, Germany. He died in July 2008. His publications: 2008: Geopolitische Leitbilder als Deutungsschablone für die Bestimmung des “Eigenen” und des “Fremden”, in Lentz, Sebastian, Ormeling, Ferjan (eds): *Die Verräumlichung des Welt-Bildes*. Stuttgart:

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Bernhard Zangl is Professor of Global Governance and Public Policy at LMU Munich, Germany. His publications: 2008: Judicialization Matters! A Comparison of Dispute Settlement under GATT and the WTO, *International Studies Quarterly* 52(4): 825–854; 2012: Between Law and Politics: Explaining International Dispute Settlement Behavior, *European Journal of International Relations*, 18(2): 369–401 (with Achim Helmedach, Alexander Kocks, Aletta Mondré, Gerald Neubauer and Kerstin Blome).

Preface

This textbook is the English translation of the German volume *Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen*, the third edition of which was published by UTB (University Textbooks) and Barbara Budrich Publishers in 2010. The book has been thoroughly revised for the English edition, both to ensure that the individual contributions reflect the current state of the theoretical debate and to incorporate recent titles and publications into the bibliography.

Like the original German text, the English version too owes its existence to a number of individuals and institutions to whom we owe a special debt of gratitude. We are particularly grateful to Alex Skinner for his painstaking and thoughtful translation of the German edition. Beyond that we are – as always – indebted to our authors for their unwavering commitment to this textbook and their thorough revisions of the individual contributions. There would be no English-language edition without the generous support of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the German Federal Foreign Office, the collecting society VG WORT and the German Publishers & Booksellers Association, who collectively awarded the book the “Geisteswissenschaften International” prize. Last but not least we are indebted to Craig Fowlie, Senior Editor at Routledge, and Barbara Budrich, who have made the textbook and its approach accessible beyond the German-speaking world. Our thanks to all of you.

Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler
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Theory in International Relations

Manuela Spindler and Siegfried Schieder

1 Introduction

“Theoretical pluralism” is the term often used to describe the coexisting and generally competing theories, approaches, perspectives and concepts that try to describe, explain and understand international relations.¹ There are three main reasons for this present “state of the art” in international relations theory. The rapid growth in theoretical perspectives can, first, be seen as *the result of cumulative theory building and a process of professionalization* within an academic discipline that can now look back on a history of more than 90 years – if we consider the subject’s “year of birth” to be 1919. Against the background of the Versailles Treaties, it was institutionalized as a science and as an academic discipline through the establishment of the first “chair” in International Relations (IR) – the so-called Woodrow Wilson Chair – at Aberystwyth, University of Wales. The first professorship in IR was devoted to the systematic study of the causes of war and the conditions for world peace.² This aspect of cumulative theory building is particularly pertinent to the discipline of IR. Even today there is no consensus on how best to understand its subject matter in conceptual and theoretical terms or its methods of knowledge production. To put it differently, there is no agreement on what international relations are and how we should study them (see Wæver 2013: 303–315). Consequently, when studying IR theory, students will come across a huge range of different and competing theoretical accounts.

Second, this broad range of theoretical perspectives in IR is the result of a process – one increasingly hard to keep up with – of the *adaptation of insights from related and neighbouring (social) sciences*. It is in fact a key characteristic of IR, in common with all social science disciplines, that it cannot be neatly separated from disciplines such as sociology or political philosophy and theory, nor even from economics, political geography, psychology or law. Drawing on the categories and concepts found in these neighbouring disciplines can often help IR achieve additional insights. This is particularly true when we consider that international relations are becoming increasingly globalized. The object of study no longer fits neatly within the boundaries of a discipline historically devoted to the study of interstate relations. It is only against this background that we can understand why the corpus of contemporary IR theory has branched off into a multiplicity of approaches, such as the huge range of critical, constructivist and postmodern theories that have proliferated since the 1990s. This has dismantled the boundaries between formerly separate academic disciplines and brought to the fore the “social” character of international relations; consequently, IR scholars now need to engage in genuine social theorizing rather than maintaining an exclusive domain of IR theories devoted to the study of interstate relations (see, for example, Albert and Buzan 2013).

Third, and closely related to the second point, because it is a social science, there is always a *close interplay between theory building in International Relations and the discipline's historical and sociopolitical context*. Progress in IR theory is closely linked with events in the “real world” of international politics, such as the development of the bipolar system following the Second World War, the decolonization of large parts of Africa and Asia in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Vietnam War and the global economic crisis triggered by the “oil price shocks” of the 1970s, the rise of emerging powers since the 2000s and what we generally perceive as the “processes of globalization”. Global political upheavals such as the end of the East–West conflict, the shift in the role of sovereign nation states associated with globalization, and the increasing impact of transnational non-state actors rooted in economy and society have exercised and continue to exercise an enduring influence on a whole generation of theory-oriented scholars, doing much to shape their theoretical ideas about international relations. The theory of IR finds itself confronted with new challenges in the light of phenomena such as “failing” or “failed states” and the resulting security and developmental tasks involved in international “state-building”, the emergence of new, globally organized forces of violence resulting from the erosion of the state monopoly of power and, not least, the increasing global economic and political importance of China and other rising powers (such as India, Brazil or Turkey) and of entire world regions (above all Asia) – all of which are highly significant in their effects on the structure of the international system and in their practical political implications. Another demonstration of the link between IR theory and the real world is the increasing number of studies that review and reappraise past theoretical work in light of the global and European crises and the political processes of the “Arab Spring”. While initially the end of the East–West conflict was generally interpreted – with theoretical back-up – as an opportunity to advance world peace (the key terms here being “new world order”, “peace dividend”, “nuclear disarmament”, etc.), events such as “9/11”, the fight against international terrorism, along with new international problems such as securing energy supplies, international climate protection and, not least, turbulence in the international financial and capital markets, have refocused theoretical attention on the ambivalent, transitional and conflictual nature of international politics and global order.

One thing emerges clearly from these few examples. It is inherent in the logic of the social sciences that a shift in a discipline's object of investigation, prompted by real-world social and political changes, always goes hand-in-hand with adaptation of its theoretical-conceptual toolkit. So we can understand the development of theory in IR only in light of, and in fact as an integral part of, its historical and political context.

The diversity of the theoretical perspectives in IR is by no means an entirely new phenomenon. As mentioned above, it is a basic feature of theoretical research in the social sciences. In the case of IR, however, it was above all the 1990s that generated an unprecedented theoretical spectrum. This theoretical differentiation was, however, long hidden from view because of how it was presented in the relevant textbooks. The reason for this is the still prevalent “orthodox” historiography of the discipline as a series of so-called “great debates”, and the associated failure to grasp the true complexity of theory building.

“Great debates” have formed the core structure of intellectual discourse in IR and have organized IR as an academic discipline. Through their engagement in such debates, IR scholars define their particular view of the world. These “great debates” are so fundamental to IR that Ole Wæver (1998: 715) reasons that there is no other established means of telling the history of IR. In other words, “great debates” serve to reify the discipline and create a hierarchy of scientifically relevant subjects within it.³ A constitutive feature of these “great

debates” is the contrast between two competing theories or theoretical “camps”; the clash between them is claimed to provide much stimulus for the advancement of International Relations as a sub-discipline of political science. In the academic literature you will usually come across three, and in recent times four, “great debates” (Lapid 1989; Kurki and Wight 2013; Wæver 2013).

The first of these debates, occurring in the 1930s and 1940s, was between realism and idealism (Carr [1939] 1964; for an overview, see Schmidt 2012). The key bone of contention in the first great theoretical debate was the question of whether, and if so to what extent, there can be progress in the relations between states. In light of the experience of the First World War (1914–1918), the idealists cherished the hope of avoiding future wars through the establishment of international institutions such as the League of Nations (Claude 1956). Realists, meanwhile, in view of states’ power politics within a world essentially viewed as “anarchic”, dismissed such hopes as mere wishful thinking and utopianism. The failure of the League of Nations as an instrument for ensuring international peace and the outbreak of the Second World War seemed to indicate that the realists were right.

The argument between realism and idealism was followed in the 1960s by the second “great debate”, that between “traditionalists” (defending a humanistic methodology) and “behaviourists” or “scientists”, emphasizing the importance of methodological rigour to the discipline. In essence, this was a discipline-specific version of the general social scientific dispute over the question of whether human understanding (*Verstehen*) or natural scientific “explanation” should take priority. “Traditionalists” drew on the methods of intuition, experience and textual interpretation characteristic of the humanities to justify their statements about international relations. Their scientist antagonists, meanwhile, working on the premise of the methodological “unity of sciences”, claimed that it was both possible and necessary to take a “natural scientific” approach to understanding the social world. The epistemological goal of a scientific approach is to obtain empirically verifiable statements and universally valid theories of international relations on the basis of systematic description and causal explanation (for a discussion of the key issues, see Kaplan 1966; Knorr and Rosenau 1969; see also Curtis and Koivisto 2010).⁴ The second debate is often thought of as having been won by the “behaviourists”, at least judging from how IR as a discipline is practised in the United States (Kurki and Wight 2013: 18–19). The application of natural scientific methods triggered a period of professionalization that did much to establish IR as a distinct academic subdiscipline.

Narrating theoretical development as a series of “great debates” has clearly facilitated a neat classification of IR theory. This, however, has been increasingly contested, at least since the identification of a “third debate” beginning in the 1980s. The term “third debate” is used for two very different theoretical discourses – the “interparadigm debate” between “realists”, “pluralists” and “Marxist perspectives” on world politics, which originated in the 1970s and continued into the 1980s (e.g. Maghooi and Ramberg 1982; Wæver 1996), and the debate between “explaining and understanding, between positivism and post-positivism, or between rationalism and reflectivism” (Kurki and Wight 2013: 20; see also Lapid 1989; Hollis and Smith 2009) since the mid-1980s. This in itself reveals how poorly the “orthodox” historiography conveys theoretical developments in IR. The debate between positivism and post-positivism alluded to in the above quote is characterized by profound scrutiny of and disagreements about epistemological, ontological, and methodological issues, which have called into question not only many assumptions about the nature of international relations, such as the anarchy of the international system, but also the philosophy of science that underlies social scientific theorizing more generally.

Though the “third debate” – or “fourth debate” according to Wæver (2013) and Kurki and Wight (2013) – has largely run out of steam, ontological as well as epistemological issues remain important to IR (Wendt 2006; Wight 2006; Chernoff 2007; Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008b; Kurki and Wight 2013; see also Spindler 2013). In contrast to the previous discourse, recent debates tend to cut across established currents of research and theory (“grand theories” such as neorealism, institutionalism, liberalism, etc.). According to Wæver (2013: 313), after the mid-1990s the theoretical debate was transformed into a series of debates between the “boundary of boredom” (rational choice) and the “boundary of negativity” (post-structuralism). This transformation has seen the previously dominant rational choice approaches losing their key position in IR (not least due to the waning of the so-called “neo-neo debate” between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism). Social constructivist theorizing, meanwhile, has been increasingly marked by a diffusion of theoretical foci. A process of fragmentation has seen some constructivist authors contribute to the different strands of an intrac-constructivist debate while others have helped develop a post-structuralism that has tended to engage more with specific subjects (for example, migration, racism or postcolonialism) and “less with general theory debates both *vis-à-vis* the establishment and internally” (ibid.: 312).

As a result, theoretical debates within the subdiscipline have proliferated and continue to do so. The “theoretical pluralism” mentioned above looks set to become even more significant. What we find at the core of IR theory, then, is a “debate not to be won, but a pluralism to live with”, as Wæver fittingly puts it (1996: 155). This will make the systematic presentation of IR theory for studying and teaching purposes even more difficult, and represents a challenge to the writing of suitable textbooks geared towards the current state of theoretical development.

2 The notion of theory in International Relations

It is inherent in the logic of the discipline’s development, as outlined at the beginning of this Introduction, that there is neither a generally accepted nor an authoritative theory of International Relations. We will thus search in vain for any generally recognized concept of theory. If, despite this, we wish to clarify what we mean when we talk about theories of International Relations, we must provide at least a broad outline of the subject matter of the discipline – namely, international relations.

In terms of a “lowest common definitional denominator”, international relations are understood as a web of relations made up of cross-border interactions between state and non-state actors, interactions generally subdivided into the spheres of international politics and transnational relations. The traditional concept of international politics entails a notion of international relations as a *Staatenwelt*, or world of sovereign states; here, state actors are regarded as the most crucial ones. This notion of a “world of states” is often contrasted with that of a “world society”. Here states continue to play an important role but the emphasis is on cross-border activities by all kinds of social actors such as individuals and social groups, international organizations, diplomacy and international law. Key actors include economic entities (e.g. transnational corporations such as Siemens or Google Inc.), non-governmental organizations (such as Amnesty International), global social movements (e.g. the anti-globalization movements) as well as international organizations such as the United Nations and supranational arrangements such as the European Union. The notion of international relations as a “world of states” or “world society” already indicates that our conception of what international relations are is always embedded in different world-views and perspectives – from which all theory building starts.⁵

But the concept of “international relations” must be differentiated still further. If we adopt the traditional understanding of IR as a subdiscipline of *political science*, the term refers first and foremost to the “political dimension” of international relations and their content. By *politics*, we mean the authoritative distribution of material and non-material values (such as the allocation and distribution of economic wealth among a country’s citizens through tax laws and welfare programmes) through the political system *qua* legitimate state authority (Easton 1965). At first sight, the application of this concept of politics to international relations appears problematic. This is because there is no authority within international relations endowed with a monopoly of power and thus with the authority to sanction (such as a world government) that sets binding rules and norms for all and ensures compliance with them. This feature of international relations is typically referred to as “anarchy”. Despite the lack of such a superordinate authority in international relations, it is clear that actions taken by state and non-state actors within international relations bring about a binding distribution of values, or are at least geared towards such a distribution – and are thus “politically” relevant. The key point here is who gets what: how much security, prosperity, autonomy, etc.⁶ For want of a superordinate authority, the allocation and distribution of values within international relations are mostly enforced by means of power or on the basis of voluntary coalitions anchored in common values, interests or goals – through international organizations, for example. Processes of juridification and legalization of international politics are becoming increasingly important in the allocation and distribution of values (see Goldstein *et al.* 2000).

Also politically relevant to international relations are processes of exchange that are organized primarily via markets and their central actors (above all, economic ones). Exemplary here are the activities of international companies, along with other actors in the sphere of international trade and financial relations such as ratings agencies (e.g. Standard & Poor’s, Moody’s or Fitch), whose assessments of the creditworthiness of companies and states are of great relevance to the allocation and distribution of welfare gains. The current global financial and sovereign debt crisis has made us all painfully aware of this. As a rule, the voluntary coordination of international politics takes place through associations or so-called networks, or may take the form of international non-governmental organizations. International human rights networks can exert pressure to help bring about changes in political systems that violate human rights, thus exercising an impact on the allocation of values (see Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Risse *et al.* 1999). The same applies to the policies of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

In the broadest sense, international relations thus consist of the overall framework of all cross-border interactions between state and non-state actors that result in politically relevant value allocations in the spheres of security, economy, authority and the environment. *Theories* of IR try to conceptualize and make general statements about this web of relations, which is made up of cross-border interactions and the politically relevant actions, geared towards value allocations, taken by the state and non-state actors within it. However, as indicated above, the traditional understanding of IR as a separate academic discipline and subdiscipline of political science is subject to dispute.

2.1 Three dimensions of theory: ontology, epistemology and normativity

It is important to highlight three key dimensions of theories. First, a theory makes statements about the observer’s perspective on the object of investigation. This is the *ontological dimension* of IR theory (“theory of being”). The ontology underpinning a theory, its conception of “the way the world is” or “what the world is made of”, refers to the substantive ideas or

world-view – understood as a system of assumptions and beliefs – that a theory engenders about its object, in this case, international relations. The question here is “What *is*?” or “What is the nature of the subject matter?” In this sense, a theory of international relations formulates general assumptions about international relations, that is, the actors’ sphere of action, the type or “quality” of the key actors, their goals and preferences, as well as the driving forces of international politics and its fundamental problems and developmental prospects.

A few examples may serve to illustrate this ontological dimension of IR theory. Neorealism generates a conception of international relations as relations constituted exclusively by state actors (see Waltz 1979). The emphasis here is on the lack of any superordinate authority that might impose binding norms and rules capable of preventing states from attacking one another. On the basis of material self-interest, the action of states is thus fundamentally geared towards security and power. States’ action is subject to the structural constraints of the international system, which result from the distribution of power among states (see the chapter by Niklas Schörnig in this volume). Institutionalism and liberalism also work on the assumption of anarchy as the basic condition of the international system, but place greater emphasis on the possibility of cooperation in an anarchical environment and the rules of international institutions (see the chapters by Manuela Spindler and by Bernhard Zangl in this volume), and, in the case of liberal approaches, processes of preference formation within states. For liberal approaches, it is not states but individuals and social groups within the state that are assumed to be the key actors within international relations and that therefore influence the allocation of values (see the chapters by Andreas Hasenclever and by Siegfried Schieder in this volume). World-system theorists, meanwhile, take the global capitalist system or “world-system” as the central unit of analysis and starting point of their theoretical reflections (see the chapter by Andreas Nölke in this volume), while social constructivists place great emphasis on social factors such as norms, ideas, identities and discursive learning processes as factors explaining international politics (see the chapter by Cornelia Ulbert in this volume). Other IR perspectives such as postmodern approaches focus on the analysis of texts and other representations of events rather than on the events themselves and adopt a deeply sceptical attitude towards the possibility of an “objective” reality. If what we know about reality is discursively mediated and constructed, then there is more than one version of this reality (see the chapter by Thomas Diez in this volume).

In addition to its underlying world-view or ontology, every theory makes a validity claim about its object of investigation. This brings us to the second dimension of IR theory, the *epistemological dimension* (“theory of knowledge”). This relates to the different ways of obtaining knowledge of the world and the underlying conception of science. The aim here is not to clarify the nature of the world and field of study (ontology), but to explain why we consider something to be a legitimate object of study, what counts as valid knowledge, and to set out how we might obtain scientific findings. Both the epistemological and ontological dimension are often referred to as a “second-order” criterion or “metatheory”.⁷ Epistemological issues, however, are often poorly understood; much of the difficulty here is due to the fact that epistemology cross-cuts the ontological differences between theories. Exponents of one and the same theoretical school, who share many basic ontological assumptions, may profess partially conflicting views on the acquisition of knowledge and on what may lay claim to the status of valid “knowledge” within IR. More specifically, epistemological positions guide, in a fundamental way, how IR scholars theorize and indeed “see” the world.

To begin to get to grips with this problem, it is helpful to divide the theories of IR very roughly into “positivist” and “post-positivist” camps. For *positivist* modes of knowledge

acquisition in the social sciences, the epistemological ideal is natural science.⁸ Theories committed to this ideal conceive of the social reality of international relations as an “object” that can to some extent be investigated from “outside” by an external observer who makes no value judgements. The aim here (and this is regarded as fundamentally possible) is to explain the genesis of structures and the unfolding of processes within international relations on the basis of empirically “proven” causalities, and thus to formulate universally valid theories of international relations. Here the notion of “theory” is used in a strictly delimited way. Positivists always refer to theory building in a (natural) scientific sense, and what they mean by this is a definitive set of general statements about cause–effect relations. As a rule, these are conceptualized as relationships between variables (measured quantities) in accordance with the schema: effect *b*, as a change in the value of the dependent variable, is a result of cause *a*, a change in the independent variable, with *b* temporally following *a*.⁹

From such a positivist epistemological point of view, a theory always refers to a particular field of study, delimiting it and setting out its epistemological stance. Further, a theory puts forward hypotheses, identifies regularities, infers laws or develops structural models. It provides explanations of the regularities that are characteristic of its field of application and, finally, makes predictions about the occurrence of specific phenomena within it. Theories such as neorealism, regime theory, and liberalism explicitly claim to provide “scientific” explanations, up to and including predictions of specific phenomena within international politics (Elman and Elman 2003).¹⁰

Traditionally, the epistemological fault line in the social sciences – though this too is a crude simplification intended to gain us some initial purchase – runs between “explanation” and “understanding”. As indicated above, in IR, this fault line is presented in terms of the debate between scientism and traditionalism (see also Hollis and Smith 2004). Explanatory approaches work on the assumption that knowledge about the social and material worlds can be obtained in the same way, because social phenomena are chiefly determined by objective, empirically discoverable conditions. IR approaches that emphasize the concept of human understanding or *Verstehen* postulate that social phenomena are determined mainly by subjective perceptions and attributions of meaning (see Giddens 1982). The method of obtaining knowledge thus differs as well. On this view, social scientists cannot stand outside of their object of investigation. Social science as a whole is always part of the social realities at issue. This means that for understanding-based approaches social conditions are not “objects” that we might observe from outside. We can understand what actors do within international relations only from the “inside”, in light of a web of social relations, and thus only in hermeneutic and interpretive fashion, in other words, through *Verstehen*. Ultimately, then, social science is always tied to the value judgements of those who practise it.

Since the late 1980s, however, this traditional dividing line between “explanation” and “understanding” has been joined by more radical epistemological perspectives that have strengthened the post-positivist camp. Postmodern and post-structuralist approaches, for example, work on the epistemological assumption that knowledge is contingent, and at least dependent on cultural, historical and ideological contexts. “Reality” is always a social construction that takes on meaning only within a larger framework of communication and discourse. Through the way in which we produce scientific findings, we as researchers do not simply provide a convincing picture of an external world. Instead, by means of our concepts and linguistic metaphors, we depict the world without ever being in a position to know for certain whether it coincides with the “real world” – “we construct worlds we know in a world we do not” (Onuf 1989: 42ff.).

This perspective, referred to as “epistemological constructivism”, distances itself from all attempts to foreshorten our forms of knowledge to a single methodological ideal (see Guzzini 2000). Further, a radical epistemological perspective does not claim to grasp changes in the world directly and thus to be able to investigate them, because knowledge about them is itself a linguistic construction.¹¹ Unlike exponents of epistemological constructivism, social constructivists do not utterly reject knowledge acquisition by means of positivist methods. They merely wish to supplement them with interpretive methods, thus building a bridge between rationalist-positivist and interpretive-constructivist approaches (Adler 1997; Checkel 1998: 327; Guzzini 2001; see also Risse 2002). While rationalist and constructivist theoretical approaches to the study of international relations are commonly taught as mutually exclusive, scholars have explored the common ground between the two and demonstrated that, rather than being in simple opposition, there can be both tension and overlap (Barkin 2010).

Nonetheless, the positivist concept of theory geared towards natural science still dominates, though its exponents face mounting criticisms and their supremacy is beginning to crumble. The 1990s in particular brought forth numerous critical, postmodern and normative approaches with different ontological and epistemological positions, many of them rejecting the positivist conception of science and theory more generally. They are frequently subsumed under the umbrella term *post-positivism*. The term itself indicates that these critical discussions have ushered in an era “after” the formerly predominant positivism, an era featuring a plethora of coexisting ontological and epistemological views. Many IR theorists express their critique of positivism by eschewing from the outset a causal concept of theory that aspires to the status of natural science.

Finally, we can distinguish a third dimension of IR theories, namely their often implicit, seldom explicit, *normative* function and their relevance to *social practice*. For a long time the normative function of IR theories tended to be a peripheral topic in the theoretical literature. We might think of the normative dimension as establishing the “meaning of action” or as a guide to political action. It sets out reasons for how things “ought to be”. The influence of social scientific theories on the actions of political decision-makers is evident, for example, in the implementation of John Maynard Keynes’ ideas through policies designed to manage post-war economic problems in the industrialized West (see Hall 1989).¹² As a practical guide to political action, theories thus take on an importance way beyond the academic field; they not only provide guidance but also help us to reflect on this very action-guiding function, in other words to investigate the “theory-guidedness” of political actors themselves. This aspect is often “forgotten” or left unconsidered, particularly by positivist theories with their primarily explanatory aspirations. These remarks point to the conclusion that the “scientific discussion” of practical policies can never fall back on “science” as a final source of authority, because different bodies of knowledge compete with one another and competing truth claims cannot be resolved in any conclusive way (Lentsch and Weingart 2011; see also Stichweh 2006).

That IR theory has important normative dimensions is also evident in the existence of “normative IR theory” as a distinct field of scholarship (Erskine 2013). More than forty years ago Martin Wight famously claimed that “domestic politics is the realm of the good life; international politics is the realm of survival” (Wight 1966: 17). In his classic article, Wight asked “Why is there no International Theory?”, arguing that under conditions of anarchy there is no place for normative or ethical reasoning. But this position has now been fundamentally rethought (Snidal and Wendt 2009). The claim that international politics is a realm of existential “necessity” is more contested than ever. Scholarship in political theory (e.g.

Rawls 1971, 1999; Walzer 1977; Beitz 1979; Caney 2005), international law (e.g. Koskeniemi 2002; see also Schieder 2009) and IR (e.g. Brown 1992; Reus-Smit 1999; Erskine 2013) increasingly integrates the normative dimension not simply of traditional interstate relations, but of transnational and global politics more generally. The insight that we cannot avoid the ethical dimension of international politics has now attained canonical status. The editors of the *Oxford Handbook of International Relations* hold that the separation of the normative (or ethical) from the empirical is untenable since “all theories of international relations and global politics have important empirical and normative dimensions, and their deep interconnection is unavoidable” (Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008b: 6).¹³

2.2 *The latest twists and turns in IR theory*

Many of the more recent debates between “positivism” and “post-positivism” have been devoted to the search for the “right” ontology for IR theorizing. The current theoretical debate on the ontology of international relations is reflected in various, most often social constructivist works that seek to embed IR theorizing in a scientific or critical realist ontology (Wendt 1999, 2006; Wight 2006, 2013). In contrast to the substantive dimension of IR theories, scientific or critical realism are specific positions within the philosophy of science. At their heart lie ontological issues that ascribe to unobservable entities such as the structure of the international system a status as legitimate object of scientific inquiry (a status that is denied by positivist philosophy of science). Attempts to ground IR theorizing in the ontology of scientific or critical realism have mostly been inspired by the works of Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar 1979; see also Outhwaite 1992) and indicate a general tendency for IR theorizing and social theory to move closer together.¹⁴

The same is true for approaches to theories of practice in IR that revolve around the works of philosophers (such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hubert L. Dreyfus), social theorists (such as Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens), French philosophers (such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida) and theorists of science and technology (such as Bruno Latour). These approaches are often referred to as part of the “cultural turn” (Jackson 2008; Lebow 2008), “practice turn” (Büger and Gadinger 2007) or “pragmatic turn” (Kratochwil 2007; Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009; Hellmann 2009; for an overview, see Bauer and Brighi 2009) in social science because they place “practice” and hence shared, collective, recurring and patterned action at the centre of their analyses.

Other scholars have recently questioned rationalist, positivist research by emphasizing the role of emotions in international politics (Bleiker and Hutchinson 2008; Mercer 2010; Linklater 2011). Studies demonstrate that emotions such as fear and hope (Lebow 2005), humiliation (Fattah and Fierke 2009; Fierke 2012), friendship (Berenskoetter 2007) or solidarity (Boltanski 1999; Coicaud and Wheeler 2008; Schieder *et al.* 2011) offer better explanations of political decision-making than rational calculation. For example, Dominique Moïsi has investigated the far-reaching emotional impact of globalization after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, showing how contemporary geopolitics is characterized by a “clash of emotions” (Moïsi 2010). With a focus on the emotional aspects of meanings and practices in international and transnational politics, which are bound up with specific historical-political periods and contexts, this literature has contributed to a vibrant debate in IR on the significance of cognitive-psychological concepts that might be read as a nascent “emotional turn” (Crawford 2000; Wolf 2011, 2012). The same is true of the incorporation of sociological concepts into the study of world politics in line with a recent “sociological turn” (Guzzini 2000; Guzzini and Leander 2001).¹⁵

In addition, there have been attempts to rethink IR by reinvigorating the rich tradition of systemic thought in order to analyse the structure and dynamics of the international system, drawing on the pioneering work of Karl W. Deutsch and more recently of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (e.g. Albert *et al.* 2010). The literature includes recent works that aim to bring sociology to IR (Albert *et al.* 2013) or formulate a “sociology of the international” (Kessler 2009; see also Albert and Buzan 2013). Based on Luhmann’s theory of autopoietic social systems, a new holistic ontology has emerged that underlines the “connectivity of communication” at the heart of international relations (Kessler 2009), while other authors more generally emphasize the need to take account of the “social whole” in the study of international relations (Albert and Buzan 2013).¹⁶ All these recent works share an understanding of IR theory as part of a broader social theory, rejecting the idea that IR is separable from other social science disciplines; in fact, they view “international relations” as inseparable from the “social” more generally.

What is striking is that these more recent discussions tend to emphasize the crucial importance of the ontological dimension to theorizing while taking a rather relaxed view of epistemological questions (see, for example, Wendt 1999, 2006, 2010, also Wight 2006). Wendt and Wight openly declare that their main theoretical interest is in ontological matters. As Wendt has emphasized, “going into the epistemology business will distract us from the real business of IR, which is inter-national politics” (Wendt 1998: 115). Without doubt, ontological issues are of prime importance. Nevertheless, epistemological issues have also been key to the development of IR as an academic discipline (Kurki and Wight 2013: 15). Both epistemological and ontological debates are likely to become not only more pluralist but also more intense in the near future.¹⁷ The whole notion of science as a culturally embedded system of knowledge may well lie at the centre of future debates. Wendt has recently shifted focus in an attempt to develop a “quantum social science” (Wendt 2006, 2010, 2014 forthcoming). Based on the naturalist belief that all social science must conform to the natural sciences, above all physics, the goal of this endeavour is to explore the implications of quantum physics for the social sciences. So far, Wendt’s new meta-physical transfer from the world of quanta to IR has been discussed only hesitantly in the IR literature (Keeley 2007; Kessler 2007; Spindler 2013). It might, however, form part of a broader discussion on the limits of IR theorizing, which has traditionally been based on the ideal of “Cartesian” science.¹⁸

In addition, we can expect further fragmentation of the discursive landscape as a result of Western IR researchers’ increasing interest in non-Western theoretical traditions of International Relations (see Acharya and Buzan 2010), and the emergence of new IR theories embedded in ontologically different perspectives on politics, economics and society, such as recent attempts to construct IR theories with Chinese characteristics or attempts to formulate Indian and Arab theories of politics and economics (see, for example, Chan 1999; Tickner and Wæver 2009; Tickner and Blaney 2012; Ling 2013). This debate will enable a fresh perspective on the embeddedness of IR theory in Western science and the cultural foundations on which any system of knowledge production rests (see, for example, the special issue of the *European Journal of International Relations* in 2013).¹⁹

3 The educational concept of the present volume

The way in which knowledge about theories of International Relations is organized is a decisive factor determining the quality of textbooks; it is therefore a key criterion in choosing the “right” book. This volume has the character of a compendium that provides an introduc-

tion to important and productive International Relations theories. In addition, the book is a kind of map showing the “coordinates” of contemporary theories. In this sense it provides a “compass” indicating possible theoretical paths that theories of International Relations may go down in the near future. We thus saw it as useful and necessary to include a relatively large number of recent so-called post-positivist (or better, non-positivist) theories and approaches in all their diversity, theories that have gradually reshaped the discipline of International Relations over the last few years and will continue to do so.

3.1 Learning objectives

This volume should help readers achieve two learning goals. First, we aim to sensitize students to the theoretical pluralism of International Relations while encouraging them to reflect on what theory is and what it can and ought to achieve. Second, though, students need a comprehensive knowledge of the theories of International Relations themselves. Acquisition of this broad knowledge through the individual chapters in this volume is the second learning goal. Each chapter builds on the same educational concept, which we will now explain in detail.

In the shape of the “theories” assembled in this volume, we present theories, approaches, perspectives and concepts that make general statements about international relations in the broadest sense. The dimensions of theory set out above can also be identified in the case of concepts such as “interdependence”, “world society” or “globalization”, despite the fact that there is no theory of interdependence or globalization in the narrow sense, but at most theoretical reflection on the problems associated with increasing internationalization and globalization. Often, concepts are important “building blocks” for subsequent theoretical developments.²⁰

3.2 The educational concept informing the chapters

The present volume aims to set out the most important International Relations theories to facilitate an overview of the various theoretical models and theorists, while avoiding any tendency to think in simplistic categories. These aims cannot be realized by the dominant view of theories, outlined at the beginning, as “sides” within “great debates”. Such a perspective leads to ideal typical constructions of two distinct “rivals” or even opponents, each of which has its own theoretical views and epistemological interests, which we may then “compare”. Yet it is the very process of “construction” that generates the notion of the “other”, such as idealism, traditionalism or positivism – generally with the aim of legitimizing a particular perspective while delegitimizing others (Dryzek and Leonhard 1988).²¹

We take a different approach in the present work in order to avoid this view of the discipline, which tends to obscure rather than illuminate. In presenting theories we are guided by the idea of a *reference theorist*.²² The advantage of this is that students are confronted with an internally consistent theoretical core, rather than with a general account of so-called “grand theories” such as realism, liberalism or institutionalism, which include a large number of “internal” subdivisions. It is easier, we think, to approach the nuances and debates internal to a given theory after having first been introduced to a coherent theoretical model, and this we facilitate by presenting the ideas of a key reference theorist. As a result we pay less attention to the internal subdivisions of a given theoretical current, but we believe this is justified – vital, in fact – with respect to our primary target readership of beginning students. Our decision to organize this book around reference theorists rather than

established paradigms makes it possible to address a plethora of important new theoretical currents within International Relations, currents that are not amenable to a paradigm-based approach and that are not represented, or only marginally so, in popular textbooks. This applies, for example, to the broad spectrum of critical approaches such as Critical Theory, feminism and postmodern approaches, which are all too often lumped together in the relevant textbooks, as well as theories and perspectives from the field of International Political Economy.

To ensure that each chapter fulfils the demands of an introduction, the content of each adheres to a consistent structure, in which the crucial account of the given reference theorist is embedded. Each consists of five components:

- 1 The first part is the *introduction*. The aim here, first of all, is to give the reader a basic understanding of how a given theory came into being by locating it within an *intellectual tradition*. We provide systematic support for this goal by including cross-references to other theories presented in the volume. Second, we pay a generous amount of attention to the *historical-political context*: as in all social scientific disciplines, theory building in International Relations is closely bound up with actual historical events (such as global economic crises and military conflicts), the social environment of specific universities and research institutions and the peculiarities of academic discourse.
- 2 The second section *reconstructs and elaborates the theory developed by the selected reference theorist*. What is the reference theorist's basic understanding of international relations? Which issues and problems are central to the theory? How does (s)he construct her or his explanations, in other words, which explanatory factors does (s)he cite, on what analytical level and deploying which model of actor? What does the theorist see as the "laws of motion", the crucial "driving forces", of international relations?
- 3 In the third section, following the description of a theoretical core, we take account of the varieties and variants of theories by making space for a discussion of the *subdivisions of a given theory and conceptual overlap, further developments and internal critique*. As a rule, theory building within International Relations does not occur in isolation; theoretical innovations tend to build partly on what has been handed down. The specific theoretical currents that we link with a particular reference theorist cannot always be clearly distinguished from one another. Often, rather than being rivals, theoretical concepts and ideas are complementary. An account that set out to "review" clearly distinguishable approaches and rival theories would fail to convey much of the interest, and much of the impetus, of contemporary theory building in International Relations, which has increasingly "frayed edges" and whose internal theoretical dividing lines are becoming increasingly blurred.
- 4 The fourth section provides an *account and reception of external criticisms*. What are the key points of critique emanating from other theoretical currents? What is the relevance of this theory to present-day debates and how innovative is its research programme? To what extent does the theory provide points of contact for recent findings in International Relations? As a rule, when we portray or attempt to build on a given theoretical approach, we can distinguish between "external" critique that disputes a theory's basic assumptions and "internal" critique. The latter, while remaining within a given theoretical current and thus sharing its basic assumptions, identifies shortcomings and differs significantly from the reference theorist in terms of its own theory building. But there are also cases in which the line between "internal"

and “external” criticisms cannot always be clearly drawn, because the internal differentiation and development of a reference theorist’s ideas are often a response to external critique. In such cases we summarize the reference figure’s response in Section 4.

- 5 The fifth and final section provides a *bibliography designed with specific educational goals in mind*. It is intended to encourage readers to add depth to their knowledge and develop their own interests by explicitly identifying the most important primary and secondary texts.

Every systematic assessment of the modern theoretical landscape – whether it centres on paradigms or reference theorists – is in some sense subjective and thus fundamentally contestable. Our perspective on the 18 International Relations theories, approaches, perspectives and concepts presented in this book, a good knowledge of which we consider essential, must also be seen against this background. We chose these 18 theories because they are expounded and debated with particular frequency and intensity within academic discourse. There is no particular reason for the order in which the contributions appear. Each chapter is a self-contained unit linked with the other contributions through cross-references, enabling readers to get to grips with the theories in systematic fashion. In principle, then, readers may begin with any chapter. We do have one piece of advice that arises from the ordering of the various chapters on theory, particularly in the case of beginning students or readers who are not studying the book as participants in a theoretical seminar and thus as an element of a seminar programme. We recommend that readers tackle International Relations theories in four “groups”: (1) realism, neorealism, interdependence and regime theory; (2) neofunctionalism, new liberalism, approaches centred on the “democratic peace”, the English School, world society and globalization; (3) theories of imperialism, world-system theory, neo-Gramscian perspectives and International Political Economy; and (4) social constructivism, Critical Theory, postmodern approaches, feminism and critical geopolitics.

The first group of contributions are traditional state-centred approaches; the explanations they provide primarily emphasize the rational pursuit of the national interest. The second group of contributions covers the broad spectrum of society-focused theories of international relations. The third group comprises International Political Economy approaches, which focus on the relationship between state and market in the broadest sense.²³ The final group brings together more recent International Relations theories, which challenge the rationalistic approaches of the 1960s to 1980s with postmodern, (de)constructionist and critical ideas.

The theories of IR make up a fascinating field in which there is much to discover. We hope you will enjoy this book; feel free to contact us with any feedback.

4 Notes

- 1 When we refer here and in the subsequent chapters to “International Relations” (capital letters), we mean the academic discipline. When we refer to the discipline’s subject matter, we use the term “international relations” (without capitals).
- 2 Of course, theoretical-philosophical reflection on international relations (history of ideas) stretches back much further in history and is associated with names from political theory and philosophy such as Thucydides, Aristotle, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant. On the history of International Relations from a history-of-ideas perspective, see, for example, Knutsen (1997) or Jackson (2005). For an overview of the institutionalization of International Relations as an academic discipline and as a science, see Wæver (2013). A brief overview is given in Spindler (2013: Chapter 1).

- 3 For an overview of the great debates and associated conceptual frameworks, we recommend, for example, Wæver (1998) and Katzenstein *et al.* (1998). On the current state of the great debates, see Wæver (2013) and Schmidt (2013).
- 4 The dispute over “understanding” and “explanation” later underwent a revival within the epistemological debate on “rationalism” and “constructivism” in the 1990s and hence as part of the positivism-post-positivism debate (see Hollis and Smith 2009).
- 5 On world society, see, for example, the “Stanford School” (Boli and Thomas 1997; Meyer, *et al.* 1997; Meyer 2010; see also the chapter by Ingo Take in this volume) or the English School (see the chapter by Christopher Daase in this volume).
- 6 In line with the classical definition of politics as “who gets what, when, and how” by Harold Lasswell (1958: 13).
- 7 Kurki and Wight (2013: 15) explain metatheory as follows:

Meta-theory does not take a specific event, phenomenon, or series of empirical real world practices as its object of analysis, but explores the underlying assumptions of all theory and attempts to understand the consequences of such assumptions for the act of theorizing and the practice of empirical research. One way to think about this is in terms of theories about theories.
- 8 Positivism, first formulated by French philosopher Auguste Comte, works on the premise that only the real, factual and thus “positive” (observable) elements of experience lead to knowledge. Traditionally, because it seeks to emulate natural science, this view has also been referred to as “scientism”.
- 9 This relationship is also called the “Humean account of causality” – drawing on the philosophical empiricism of Scottish philosopher David Hume.
- 10 A prime example of this conception of theory is the new liberalism developed by Andrew Moravcsik (1997, 2003); see also the chapter by Siegfried Schieder in this volume). For an overall survey, see Pittioni (1996).
- 11 The notion of the linguistic construction of reality was nourished by the so-called “linguistic turn” within the philosophical discourse of modernity. The essential insight here is that language constructs what reality *is*. Language no longer functions merely as a transparent medium of discourse; instead it is a reality within which knowledge itself arises. This insight not only changes traditional epistemology but also the concept of knowledge itself. For an account of the fundamental issues here, see Rorty (1967).
- 12 Other examples are the politics of interdependence and multilateralism – based on the policy advice of the neoinstitutionalist/neoliberal institutionalist research programme (see the chapter by Manuela Spindler in this volume) or the politics of democratization resting on the inter-democratic peace paradigm. The same is true for realist “Realpolitik” or balance of power politics (above all in international security) with theoretical back-up from neorealist theory (see the chapters by Niklas Schörnig and Andreas Jacobs in this volume).
- 13 To be fair, normative concerns were long present among representatives of the English School and in the rich tradition of Critical Theory. In fact, they have their roots in the work of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant, George W.H. Hegel and Karl Marx. Normative theory preceded the evolution of modern IR but was “temporarily obscured by the birth and ascendance of ‘scientific’ approaches to the study of international relations” (Erskine 2013: 41); see also Smith and Light (1992; Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008b and the chapters by Christopher Daase and Christoph Humrich in this volume).
- 14 In line with our view that the disciplinary borders within the social sciences are becoming increasingly blurred (see Section 1), it is important to note that the metatheoretical debate between positivist and scientific realist positions is present in other social sciences as well.
- 15 In recent debates, the notion of “turns” seems to be the typical categorical frame used to indicate perceived trends and directions that theory building might take in future. The multitude of proclaimed turns indicates a discipline in search of “directions” and lends additional support to our argument that we will likely have to live with increasing theoretical pluralism.
- 16 We recommend that readers take a closer look at the contributions in the journal *International Political Sociology*.
- 17 We are aware that different ontological and epistemological positions are closely tied to different methodological positions. It is beyond the scope of this Introduction to provide a detailed account of these methodological implications.

- 18 The term “Cartesian science” (derived from the scientific world-view of French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes) usually refers to the ideal of empirical natural science (with classical physics at its core) typical of the modern Western world.
- 19 For an early account of the Western dominance of International Relations in general and the theoretical debate in particular, see, for example, Stanley Hoffmann, who already declared theoretical research in International Relations an “American social science” in the 1970s (Hoffmann [1977] 1987).
- 20 Regime theory, for example, is based on the prior conceptualization of “interdependence”.
- 21 On the idealism–realism debate, see, for example, Thies (2002). On the critique of the “orthodox” perspective in general, see Schmidt (2002).
- 22 Wæver’s “Figures of International Thought: Introducing Persons instead of Paradigms” (Wæver 1997) provided valuable impetus for our textbook concept. See also Andreatta (2011).
- 23 This account of International Political Economy perspectives is by no means exhaustive; to provide a systematic and comprehensive survey would require a book in its own right. This is largely due to the special rivalry between International Relations and International Political Economy and their claims to be “independent” academic disciplines. In any case, we believe International Political Economy perspectives should be included in a volume on International Relations theory.

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Alternatives

- American Political Science Review*
- British Journal of International Relations*
- Cooperation and Conflict*
- European Journal of International Relations*
- International Organization*
- International Security*
- International Studies Quarterly*
- International Studies Review*
- International Theory*
- Journal of Conflict Resolution*
- Journal of International Political Sociology*
- Journal of International Relations and Development*

Journal of Peace Research
Millennium
Review of International Political Economy
Review of International Studies
World Politics
Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen

5.4 Other texts

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Realism

Andreas Jacobs

1 Introduction

If you had asked, as late as the 1970s, what was the most frequently quoted theoretical text on international politics, the answer would inevitably have been Hans J. Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948. By now Morgenthau's classic has been eclipsed by other theoretical contributions. Yet *Politics Among Nations* has lost none of its importance as one of the central planks of *realism*, which has long been regarded as one of the foundation stones of International Relations theory. Most subsequent attempts at theory building either expanded on Morgenthau's realism or – rather more often – were formulated in contradistinction to it. Serious criticisms were made of early realist theory building in general and Morgenthau's realism in particular. So it is not surprising that, since the late 1970s at the latest, realism seems to have been relegated to the status of respected and carefully preserved exhibit in the “museum of IR theory”. But this impression is misleading. The increasing *postrealist* interest in Morgenthau and the other realists is clear evidence that the legacy of Morgenthau's realism for IR amounts to more than certain basic questions and intellectual stimuli, along with the demand that we see the world as it really is.

Morgenthau saw his theoretical reflections in *Politics Among Nations* only as laying the ground for a theory, while the exponents of realism did not subsequently develop any unified, internally coherent theory of international politics. There is therefore some confusion about what the term *realism* actually means within International Relations theory. This has much to do with the fact that the ideas about the nature and understanding of international relations formulated by Morgenthau and the other realists were part of a long tradition of philosophical writings and historical treatises on the coexistence of nations and polities, and these ideas have often undergone subsequent modification and development. So when discussing Morgenthau's ideas and those theorists close to him both temporally and in their world-view, the literature generally refers to the *realist school* or *classical realism* in order to distinguish these ideas from more recent theoretical developments. In what follows, *realism* is used as a collective term for the theoretical approaches developed under this rubric between the 1930s and 1950s to explain international relations. I refer to ideas that go beyond this as *realist thought*.

While the emergence of realism in the 1930s and 1940s was due to specific circumstances and crises, realist thought stands within a long intellectual tradition whose leading historical exponents are generally identified as Thucydides and Niccolò Machiavelli, along with Thomas Hobbes, Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Weber. In the first major historical work in Western history, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides (460–400 BCE) identified the increase in the power of Athens (Book 1.23) as the key reason for the military

conflicts between the Greek city-states. Here, for the first time, power was viewed as the key constitutive and regulative factor in politics. Thucydides understood politics, meanwhile, as the eternal conflict between ideal principles and the application of power and force to further one's own interests (Book 5).

Power also played a significant role in Machiavelli's (1469–1527) political thought. But beyond the emphasis on the dimension of power, a number of other ideas set out in his magnum opus, *The Prince*, place him within the intellectual tradition of realist thought (Machiavelli [1532] 2005). The primary example here is his conception of history as a series of causal connections that can be understood and analysed (*The Prince*: Dedication). In addition, Machiavelli works on the assumption that practice gives rise to theory, but not the other way around (ibid.: 6). Inherent in this idea is the later realist method, when reflecting on politics, of eschewing the assumption that actors are pursuing a pre-given order and instead focusing on the actual circumstances of political action. Ultimately, Machiavelli views ethics as a function of politics rather than politics as a function of ethics (ibid.: 15). Morality and ethical sentiments do play an important role in his thinking, but for him they can do so only if based on effective authority (ibid.: 17). Machiavelli's advice to his prince to get to grips with the way things actually are rather than dwelling on ideal scenarios emerges as the guiding analytical principle of the later realism.

So key assumptions inherent in realist thought were already in place. But the emergence of the theory of realism can be understood only within its specific political and historical context. Realism has often been described as a counter-movement to a political world-view that conceived of history as a process of redemptive advance. This latter idea, whose popularity peaked after the First World War, was linked to the increasing spread of American intellectual thought. On an *idealist* foundation, in other words, one indebted to liberalism and pacifism, this world-view worked on the premise that the shortcomings of the international system could be remedied through systematic evaluation of their causes. Confident that human reason would eventually hold sway, exponents of such views believed that institutions such as the League of Nations would ensure that in future the international community would act collectively to sanction any case of state aggression.

In view of events from the 1930s on, and above all after the Second World War, this faith in progress began to crumble. The failure of the League of Nations and the global economic crisis had already made it clear that securing world peace could not be viewed merely as an organizational problem. Existing global problems could not be solved, critics now began to suggest, solely through the development and entrenchment of international organizations. But the rejection of utopian or idealist notions of international politics – now emerging under the banner of realism – went further still. Beyond the claim that idealists had fallen prey to illusions about the social reality of international relations and failed to understand the true nature of political action, realists accused them of downplaying the realities of politics and ignoring its violent aspects. The quintessence of this critique, then, was that idealist approaches to explaining international politics are not just false but also counter-productive (Frei 1993: 198–200).

Because of the United States' secure geographical position, its rise to the status of world power and its self-generated prosperity, key thinkers there had long been in thrall to illusions about the realities and possibilities of international politics. As a result of the experience of the Second World War and incipient Cold War, however, the question of how to limit and contain power became increasingly central to thinking about politics. Realism was thus partly a response to a type of political thought that declares the pursuit of power the ultimate aim of all politics.