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# 1 | Introduction

SCOTT BURCHILL AND ANDREW LINKLATER

## Frameworks of analysis

From its inception as a separate field of study, International Relations has been a theoretical discipline. Two of the foundational texts in the field, E. H. Carr's, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (first published in 1939) and Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* (first published in 1948) were works of theory in three central respects. Each developed a broad framework of analysis which distilled the essence of international politics from disparate events; each sought to provide future analysts with the theoretical tools for understanding general patterns underlying seemingly unique episodes; and each reflected on the forms of political action which were most appropriate in a realm where the struggle for power was pre-eminent. Both thinkers were motivated by the desire to correct what they saw as deep misunderstandings about the nature of international politics lying at the heart of the liberal project – especially the belief that the struggle for power could be tamed by international law and the idea that the pursuit of self-interest could be replaced by the shared objective of promoting security for all. Not that Morgenthau and Carr thought the international political system was condemned for all time to revolve around the relentless struggle for power and security. Their main claim was that all efforts to reform the international system which ignored the struggle for power would quickly end in failure. More worrying in their view was the danger that attempts to bring about fundamental change would compound the problem of international relations. They believed the liberal internationalist world-view had been largely responsible for the crisis of the inter-war years.

Many scholars, particularly in United States during the 1960s, believed that Morgenthau's theoretical framework was too impressionistic in nature. Historical illustrations had been used to support rather than demonstrate ingenious conjectures about general patterns of international relations. Consequently, the discipline lagged significantly behind the study of economics which used a sophisticated methodology drawn

from the natural sciences to test specific hypotheses, develop general laws and predict human behaviour. Proponents of the scientific approach attempted to build a new theory of international politics, some for the sake of better explanation and higher levels of predictive accuracy, others in the belief that science held the key to understanding how to transform international politics for the better.

The scientific turn led to a major disciplinary debate in the 1960s in which scholars such as Hedley Bull (1966b) argued that international politics were not susceptible to scientific enquiry. This is a view widely shared by analysts committed to diverse intellectual projects. The radical scholar Noam Chomsky (1994: 120) has claimed that in international relations ‘historical conditions are too varied and complex for anything that might plausibly be called “a theory” to apply uniformly’ (1994: 120). What is generally known as ‘post-positivism’ in International Relations rejects the possibility of a science of international relations which uses standards of proof associated with the physical sciences to develop equivalent levels of explanatory precision and predictive certainty (Smith, Booth and Zalewski 1996). In the 1990s, a major debate occurred around the claims of positivism. The question of whether there is a world of difference between the ‘physical’ and the ‘social’ sciences was a crucial issue, but no less important were disputes about the nature and purpose of theory. The debate centred on whether theories – even those that aim for objectivity – are ultimately ‘political’ because they generate views of the world which favour some political interests and disadvantage others. This dispute has produced very difficult questions about what theory is and what its purposes are. These questions are now central to the discipline – more central than at any other time in its history. What, in consequence, is it to speak of a theory of international politics?

### **Diversity of theory**

One purpose of this volume is to analyse the diversity of conceptions of theory in the study of international relations. Positivist or ‘scientific’ approaches remain crucial, and are indeed dominant in the United States, as the success of rational choice analysis demonstrates. But this is not the only type of theory available in the field. An increasingly large number of theorists are concerned with a second category of theory in which the way that observers construct their images of international relations, the methods they use to try to understand this realm and the social and political implications of their ‘knowledge claims’, are leading preoccupations. They believe it is just as important to focus on how we approach the

study of world politics as it is to try to explain global phenomena. In other words the very process of theorizing itself becomes a vital object of inquiry.

Steve Smith (1995: 26–7) has argued that there is a fundamental division within the discipline ‘between theories which seek to offer *explanatory* (our emphasis) accounts of international relations’ and perspectives which regard ‘theory as *constitutive* (our emphasis) of that reality’. Analysing these two conceptions of theory informs much of the discussion in this introductory chapter. In addition, theory now also embraces cognate fields such as historical sociology and international political theory, which are leaving their own distinctive marks on the study of international relations.

The first point to make in this context is that constitutive theories have an increasingly prominent role in the study of international relations, but the importance of the themes they address has long been recognized. As early as the 1970s Hedley Bull (1973: 183–4) argued that:

the reason we must be concerned with the theory as well as the history of the subject is that all discussions of international politics . . . proceed upon theoretical assumptions which we should acknowledge and investigate rather than ignore or leave unchallenged. The enterprise of theoretical investigation is at its minimum one directed towards criticism: towards identifying, formulating, refining, and questioning the general assumptions on which the everyday discussion of international politics proceeds. At its maximum, the enterprise is concerned with theoretical construction: with establishing that certain assumptions are true while others are false, certain arguments valid while others are invalid, and so proceeding to erect a firm structure of knowledge.

This quotation reveals that Bull thought that explanatory and constitutive theory are both necessary in the study of international relations: intellectual enquiry would be incomplete without the effort to increase understanding on both fronts. Although he wrote this in the early 1970s, it was not until later in the decade that constitutive theory began to enjoy a more central place in the discipline, in large part because of the influence of developments in the cognate fields of social and political theory. In the years since, with the growth of interest in international theory, a flourishing literature has been devoted to addressing theoretical concerns, much of it concerned with constitutive theory. This focus on the process of theorizing has not been uncontroversial. Some have argued that the excessive preoccupation with theory represents a withdrawal from an analysis of ‘real-world’ issues and a sense of responsibility for

policy relevance (Wallace 1996). There is a parallel here with a point that Keohane (1988) made against post-modernism which is that the fixation with problems in the philosophy of social science leads to a neglect of important fields of empirical research.

Critics of this argument maintain that it rests on unspoken or undefended theoretical assumptions about the purposes of studying international relations, and specifically on the belief that the discipline should be concerned with issues which are more vital to states than to civil society actors aiming to change the international political system (Booth 1997; Smith 1997). Here it is important to recall that Carr and Morgenthau were interested not only in explaining the world 'out there' but in making a powerful argument about what states could reasonably hope to achieve in the competitive world of international politics. Smith (1996: 113) argues that all theories do this whether intentionally or unintentionally: they 'do not simply explain or predict, they tell us what possibilities exist for human action and intervention; they define not merely our explanatory possibilities, but also our ethical and practical horizons'.

Smith questions what he sees as the false assumption that 'theory' stands in opposition to 'reality' – conversely that 'theory' can be tested against a 'reality' which is already 'out there' (see also George 1994). The issue here is whether what is 'out there' is always theory-dependent and invariably conditioned to some degree by the language and culture of the observer and by general beliefs about society tied to a particular place and time. And as noted earlier, those who wonder about the point of theory cannot avoid the fact that analysis is always theoretically informed and likely to have political implications and consequences (Brown 2002). The growing feminist literature in the field discussed in Chapter 10 has stressed this argument in its claim that many of its dominant traditions are gendered in that they reflect specifically male experiences of society and politics. Critical approaches to the discipline which areas discussed in Chapters 8 and 9 have been equally keen to stress that there is, as Nagel (1986) has argued in a rather different context, 'no view from nowhere'.

To be fair, many exponents of the scientific approach recognized this very problem, but they believed that science made it possible for analysts to rise above the social and political world they were investigating. What the physical sciences had achieved could be emulated in social-scientific forms of enquiry. This is a matter to come back to later. But debates about the possibility of a science of international relations, and disputes about whether there has been an excessive preoccupation with theory in recent years, demonstrate that scholars do not agree about the nature and purposes of theory or concur about its proper place in the wider field.

International Relations is a discipline of theoretical disagreements – a ‘divided discipline’, as Holsti (1985) called it.

## Contested nature

Indeed it has been so ever since those who developed this comparatively new subject in the Western academy in the aftermath of World War I first debated the essential features of international politics. Since then, but more keenly in some periods than in others, almost every aspect of the study of international politics has been contested. What should the discipline aim to study: Relations between states? Growing transnational economic ties, as recommended by early twentieth-century liberals? Increasing international interdependence, as advocated in the 1970s? The global system of dominance and dependence, as claimed by Marxists and neo-Marxists from the 1970s? Globalization, as scholars have argued in more recent times? These are some examples of how the discipline has been divided on the very basic question of its *subject matter*.

How, in addition, should international political phenomena be studied: by using empirical data to identify laws and patterns of international relations? By using historical evidence to understand what is unique (Bull 1966a) or to identify some traditions of thought which have survived for centuries (Wight 1991)? By using Marxist approaches to production, class and material inequalities? By emulating, as Waltz (1979) does, the study of the market behaviour of firms to understand systemic forces which make all states behave in much the same way? By claiming, as Wendt (1999) does in his defence of constructivism, that in the study of international relations it is important to understand that ‘it is ideas all the way down?’ These are some illustrations of fundamental differences about the appropriate *methodology* or *methodologies* to use in the field.

Finally is it possible for scholars to provide neutral forms of analysis, or are all approaches culture-bound and necessarily biased? Is it possible to have objective knowledge of facts but not of values, as advocates of the scientific approach argued? Or, as some students of global ethics have argued, is it possible to have knowledge of the goals that states and other political actors should aim to realize such as the promotion of global justice (Beitz 1979) or ending world poverty (Pogge 2002) These are some of the *epistemological* debates in the field, debates about what human beings can and cannot know about the social and political world. Many of the ‘great debates’ and watersheds in the discipline have focused on such questions.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter we will examine these and other issues under the following headings:

- The foundation of the discipline of International Relations
- Theories and disciplines
- Explanatory and constitutive theory
- Inter-disciplinary theory
- What do theories of international relations differ about?
- What criteria exist for evaluating theories?

One of our aims is to explain the proliferation of theories since the 1980s, to analyse their different ‘styles’ and methods of proceeding and to comment on a recurrent problem in the field which is that theorists often appear to ‘talk past’ each other rather than engage in productive dialogue. Another aim is to identify ways in which meaningful comparisons between different perspectives of International Relations can be made. It will be useful to bear these points in mind when reading later chapters on several influential theoretical traditions in the field. We begin, however, with a brief introduction to the development of the discipline.

### **The foundation of the discipline of International Relations**

Although historians, international lawyers and political philosophers have written about international politics for many centuries, the formal recognition of a separate discipline of International Relations is usually thought to have occurred at the end of World War I with the establishment of a Chair of International Relations at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Other Chairs followed in Britain and the United States. International relations were studied before 1919, but there was no discipline as such. Its subject matter was shared by a number of older disciplines; including law, philosophy, economics, politics and diplomatic history – but before 1919 the subject was not studied with the great sense of urgency which was the product of World War I.

It is impossible to separate the foundation of the discipline of International Relations from the larger public reaction to the horrors of the ‘Great War’, as it was initially called. For many historians of the time, the intellectual question which eclipsed all others and monopolized their interest was the puzzle of how and why the war began. Gooch in England, Fay and Schmitt in the United States, Renouvin and Camille Bloch in France, Thimme, Brandenburg and von Wegerer in Germany, Pribram in Austria and Pokrovsky in Russia deserve to be mentioned in this regard (Taylor 1961: 30). They had the same moral purpose, which was to discover the causes of World War I so that future generations might be spared a similar catastrophe.

The human cost of the 1914–18 war led many to argue that the old assumptions and prescriptions of power politics were totally discredited. Thinkers such as Sir Alfred Zimmern and Philip Noel-Baker came to prominence in the immediate post-war years. They believed that peace would come about only if the classical balance of power were replaced by a system of collective security (including the idea of the rule of law) in which states transferred domestic concepts and practices to the international sphere. Central here was a commitment to the nineteenth-century belief that humankind could make political progress by using reasoned debate to develop common interests. This was a view shared by many liberal internationalists, later dubbed ‘idealists’ or ‘utopians’ by critics who thought their panaceas were simplistic. Carr (1939/1945/1946) maintained that their proposed solution to the scourge of war suffered from the major problem of reflecting, albeit unwittingly, the position of the satisfied powers – ‘the haves’ as opposed to the ‘have-nots’ in international relations. It is interesting to note that the first complaint about the ideological and political character of such a way of thinking about international politics was first made by a ‘realist’ such as Carr who was influenced by Marxism and its critique of the ideological nature of the dominant liberal approaches to politics and economics in the nineteenth century. Carr thought that the same criticism held with respect to the ‘utopians’, as he called them.

The war shook the confidence of those who had invested their faith in classical diplomacy and who thought the use of force was necessary at times to maintain the balance of power. At the outbreak of World War I few thought it would last more than a few months and fewer still anticipated the scale of the impending catastrophe. Concerns about the human cost of war were linked with the widespread notion that the old international order, with its secret diplomacy and secret treaties, was immoral. The belief in the need for a ‘clean break’ with the old order encouraged the view that the study of history was an unreliable guide to how states should behave in future. In the aftermath of the war, a new academic discipline was thought essential, one devoted to understanding and preventing international conflict. The first scholars in the field, working within universities in the victorious countries, and particularly in Britain and the United States, were generally agreed that the following three questions should guide their new field of inquiry:

1. What were the main causes of World War I, and what was it about the old order that led national governments into a war which resulted in misery for millions?
2. What were the main lessons that could be learned from World War I? How could the recurrence of a war of this kind be prevented?

3. On what basis could a new international order be created, and how could international institutions, and particularly the League of Nations, ensure that states complied with its defining principles?

In response to these questions, many members of the first 'school' or 'theory' of international relations maintained that war was partly the result of 'international anarchy' and partly the result of misunderstandings, miscalculations and recklessness on the part of politicians who had lost control of events in 1914. The 'idealists' argued that a more peaceful world order could be created by making foreign policy elites accountable to public opinion and by democratizing international relations (Long and Wilson 1995; Chapter 2). According to Bull (quoted in Hollis and Smith 1990: 20):

the distinctive characteristic of these writers was their belief in progress: the belief, in particular, that the system of international relations that had given rise to the First World War was capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order; that under the impact of the awakening of democracy, the growth of the 'international mind', the development of the League of Nations, the good works of men of peace or the enlightenment spread by their own teachings, it was in fact being transformed; and that their responsibility as students of international relations was to assist this march of progress to overcome the ignorance, the prejudices, and the sinister interests that stood in its way.

Bull brings out the extent to which normative vision animated the discipline in its first phase of development when many thought World War I was the 'war to end all wars'. Only the rigorous study of the phenomenon of war could explain how states could create a world order in which the recurrence of such a conflict would be impossible. Crucially, then, the discipline was born in an era when many believed that the reform of international politics was not only essential but clearly achievable. Whether or not the global order can be radically improved has been a central question in the study of international relations ever since.

The critics' reaction to this liberal internationalism dominated the discipline's early years. Carr (1939; 1945; 1946: Chapter 1), who was one of the more scathing of them, maintained that 'utopians' were guilty of 'naivety' and 'exuberance'. Visionary zeal stood in the way of dispassionate analysis. The realist critique of liberal internationalism launched by Carr immediately before World War II, and continued by various scholars including Morgenthau in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, led to the so-called first 'great debate'. Whether this

debate actually occurred has been contested by recent scholars (Wilson 1998); however the myth of a great debate between the realists and the idealists gave the discipline its identity in the years following World War II. Interestingly Carr (1939; 1945; 1946), who criticized the utopians for their 'naivety' also turned his guns on the realists, accusing them of 'sterility' and 'complacency'. Theories acquire dominance in any discipline for different reasons, such as the extent to which they prevail in debates with their adversaries (sometimes more imagined than real). They can also be the beneficiary of widespread beliefs that they are right for the times or more relevant to the dominant events of the day than are other perspectives. The '20 years' crisis' culminating in World War II and followed by the Cold War era led in any case to the dominance of realism.

The purpose of theory in the early years of the discipline was to change the world for the better by removing the blight of war. A close connection existed between theory and practice: theory was not disconnected from the actual world of international politics. This was true of the liberal internationalists who believed 'the world to be profoundly other than it should be' and who had 'faith in the power of human reason and human action' to change it so 'that the inner potential of all human beings [could] be more fully realized' (Howard 1978: 11). It was no less true of the realists who thought that theory had a stake in political practice, most obviously by trying to understand as dispassionately as possible the constraints on realizing the vision which the 'utopians' had been too anxious to embrace. It was the realist position in the dispute about what could and could not be achieved in a world of competing states which gave the discipline its identity in the 1950s and 1960s.

## Theories and disciplines

Over 40 years ago, Wight (1966a) posed the question, 'Why is there no International Theory?'. His reason for the absence of traditions of international theory ('speculation about the society of states, or the family of nations, or the international community') which even begin to match the achievements of political theory ('speculation about the state') was as follows. Domestic political systems had witnessed extraordinary developments over the centuries including the establishment of public education and welfare systems. But in terms of its basic properties, the international political system had barely changed at all. Wight called it 'the realm of recurrence and repetition' which was 'incompatible with progressivist theory'. Whereas political theory was rich in its characterizations of 'the good life', international theory was confined to questions of 'survival'. The language of political theory and law which was a language 'appropriate to

man's control of his social life' had no obvious use for analysts of international affairs (Wight 1966a: 15, 25–6, 32).

At first glance Wight sided with the realists in their debate with those with a utopian temperament. But in an influential set of lectures given at the London School of Economics in the 1950s and 1960s, Wight (1991) protested against the reduction of thinking about international relations to two traditions of thought. What was lost in the division of the field into 'realism' and 'idealism' was a long tradition of inquiry (the 'rationalist' or 'Grotian' tradition) which regarded the existence of the society of states as its starting point. This perspective which has come to be known as the English School (Chapter 4) has been influential especially in Britain, and also in Australia and Canada. Its distinguishing quality is that international relations are neither as bleak as realists suggest nor as amenable to change as utopians ('revolutionists', in Wight's language) believe. There is, members of the English School argue, a high level of order and cooperation in the relations between states, even though they live in a condition of anarchy – a condition marked by the absence of a power standing above and able to command sovereign states.

Four decades on, we can no longer refer, as Wight did, to the 'paucity' of international theory. As this volume will show, there are now many rich strands of international theory, many of which are not constrained by the problem of state survival or by the apparent absence of a vocabulary with which to theorize global politics. How did this change come about, and where does it leave earlier discussions about the possibility of progress in international relations?

We can begin to answer these questions by noting that the 1960s and 1970s saw the rapid development of the study of International Relations as new academic departments and centres appeared not only in the United States and Britain but in several other places. This period also saw the rapid proliferation of approaches to the field. The preoccupation with war and conflict remained, the nuclear age leading to the rise of a new sub-field of strategic studies in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the boundaries of the discipline expanded, in the period now under discussion, to include foreign policy analysis, itself divided into several divisions, one aiming for a predictive science of foreign policy behaviour which might lead to better 'crisis management' (Hill 2003). The 1970s witnessed the rise of study of international interdependence – or, rather, its re-emergence, because liberal internationalists such as Zimmern had identified the expansion of international trade as a crucial level of analysis. Liberal theories of interdependence and the later 'neo-liberal institutionalist' analysis of international regimes argued that the economic and technological unification of the human race required new forms of international cooperation. To those influenced by the socialist tradition,

however, international interdependence was a misnomer. The reality was a system of global dominance and dependence which divided the world between 'core' and 'periphery'. The phrase, 'the inter-paradigm debate' was used in the 1970s and 1980s to show that an early consensus about the nature of the discipline (which was always incomplete) had been replaced by a broad spectrum of contending approaches, a condition that survives to this day (Banks 1985; Hoffman 1987). Only some of these approaches (neo-realism being by far the most important – see Chapter 2) continue to regard the international system as a unique 'anarchic' domain which can be analysed in isolation from social and economic developments within and across societies. The influence of other disciplines and cognate fields is now pronounced in the subject, and many strands of International Relations theory deny that the subject has a distinctive subject matter or can proceed without borrowing heavily from languages of inquiry in other fields of investigation. The import of various ideas from social and political theory is one development which has become increasingly prominent in the 1980s and 1990s.

In the course of this volume we will examine a number of the more influential theories, including liberal internationalism, realism, neo-realism and the English School, as well as less influential approaches such as Marxism and newer perspectives such as constructivism, feminism and green political thought. We will also consider the established field of international political theory, and the emerging interest in linkages between historical sociology and International Relations which advocates (in ways that will be of special interest to students of Marxism, constructivism and the English School) focusing on long-term processes of change in international or world politics.

In this way, we hope to provide a snapshot of contemporary debates about the nature and purposes of International Relations theory. We have chosen to call them 'theories', but in the literature over the years they have also been referred to as 'paradigms', 'perspectives', 'discourses', 'schools of thought', 'images' and 'traditions'. What they are called is less important than what they set out to do, and how they differ from one another. The following descriptions of theory capture some of their diverse purposes:

- Theories explain the laws of international politics or recurrent patterns of national behaviour (Waltz 1979).
- Theories that draw on history and historical sociology, not least in order to suggest that claims about the recurrent nature of international politics should be treated with suspicion and to show that the nature of contemporary events will remain elusive unless they are analysed in conjunction with long-term processes of development.

- Theories attempt either to explain and predict behaviour or to understand the world ‘inside the heads’ of actors (Hollis and Smith 1990).
- Theories are traditions of speculation about relations between states which focus on the struggle for power, the nature of international society and the possibility of a world community (Wight 1991).
- Theories use empirical data to test hypotheses about the world such as the absence of war between liberal-democratic states (Doyle 1983).
- Theories analyse and try to clarify the use of concepts such as the balance of power (Butterfield and Wight 1966).
- Theories criticize forms of domination and perspectives which make the socially constructed and changeable seem natural and unalterable (critical theory).
- Theories reflect on how the world ought to be organized and analyse ways in which various conceptions of human rights or global social justice are constructed and defended (international political theory or global ethics).
- Theories reflect on the process of theorizing itself; they analyse epistemological claims about how human beings know the world and ontological claims about what the world ultimately consists of – for example, whether it basically consists of sovereign states or individuals with rights against and obligations to the rest of humanity (constitutive theory).

This list shows that practitioners in the field do not agree about what is involved in theorizing international relations. When we compare theories we are comparing different and seemingly incommensurable phenomena. There is no agreement about what counts as the best line of argument in any theory, and no agreement about whether their principal achievements can be combined in a unified grand theory. Post-structuralist theory – or theories, since its advocates would deny there is a single approach to which all faithfully adhere (Chapter 9) – rejects the possibility of one total theory of international relations. More basically, and as already noted, there is a good deal of overlap between different theories but no consensus about what the term, ‘international relations’, actually signifies. Its most obvious meaning is the analysis of relations between nations – more accurately, states, but this is the approach taken by realists and neo-realists and rejected or substantially qualified by exponents of competing perspectives, some of whom think the term ‘global politics’ or ‘world politics’ is a better term for describing what the subject should study in the contemporary age (Baylis and Smith 2005).

Though far from exhaustive, the following list summarizes some disciplinary preoccupations in recent times:

- *Dominant actors* – traditionally this was the sovereign state but the list now includes transnational corporations (TNCs), transnational classes and ‘casino capitalists’, international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, new social movements including women’s and ecological movements, and international terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda.
- *Dominant relationships* – strategic relations between the great powers traditionally, but also in recent years trade relations between the advanced industrial societies, the ‘liberal peace’, relations of dominance and dependence between the core and periphery in the capitalist world economy and forms of solidarity within ‘global civil society’.
- *Empirical issues* – the distribution of military power, arms control and crisis management but also globalization, global inequality, identity politics and national fragmentation, the universal human rights culture, the plight of refugees, gender issues, environmental conservation, transnational crime and the global drugs trade and HIV/AIDS.
- *Ethical issues* – the just war, the rights and wrongs of humanitarian intervention, the case for and against the global redistribution of power and wealth, duties to nature, to future generations and to non-human species, respect for cultural differences and the rights of women and children.
- *Issues in the philosophy of the social sciences* – methodological disputes about the possibility of a science of international politics, competing epistemological and ontological standpoints, the nature of causation and the idea of historical narrative.
- *The prospects for multidisciplinary* – recasting the discipline by using liberal and radical approaches to develop international political economy was the most significant shift towards interdisciplinarity in the 1980s and 1990s. Building links with social theory, historical sociology, international political theory and ‘world history’, and dismantling barriers between International Relations, Political Theory and Ethics have been leading developments since the 1990s.

Quite how to deal with such a rich diversity of themes is one of the central questions every theory of international relations must address. Theories have to rely on some principles of selection to narrow their scope of inquiry; they discriminate between actors, relationships, empirical issues and so forth which they judge most important or regard as trivial. Waltz’s neo-realist theory is one of the most debated illustrations of

this process of selectivity. Waltz (1979) maintained that theory must abstract from the myriad forces at work in international politics while recognizing that in reality ‘everything is connected with everything else’. But theory must ‘distort’ reality – and Waltz offers a complex argument about the philosophy of social sciences and the achievements of economics to explain this – if it is to explain what Waltz regards as the central puzzle of world politics: the ‘dismaying persistence’ of the international states-system and the recurrence of the struggle for power and security over several millennia. Waltz argued that international economic relations, international law and so forth are undoubtedly interesting phenomena but they must be ignored by a theory with the purposes he sets for it.

It is useful to compare this argument with Cox’s (1981; 1983) claim – influenced by Marxism – that a theory of international relations has to deal with social forces (including class relations), states and world order if it is to understand the nature of global hegemony and identify ‘counter-hegemonic’ movements which are working to promote realizable visions of a better form of world order. In this approach, the question of what is most important in world politics is not answered by providing a list of the most powerful actors and relationships but by inquiring into the causes of inequalities of power and opportunities between human beings and by identifying the political movements which are spearheading the struggle against these asymmetries – movements which are not as powerful as states but, in Cox’s analysis, more important than them *because of the values they are trying to realize* (for further discussion, see Chapters 6 and 8).

In Cox’s argument – and this is a position common to the various strands of radical scholarship in the field, the question of what is important in international relations is not an empirical problem which can be solved by looking at what is ‘out there’ in the ‘real world’; it is fundamentally a political question, one that begins with the issue of whose interests are protected and whose are disadvantaged or ignored by the dominant political and economic structures. Such matters are not resolved by empirical inquiry – first and foremost they are ethical matters which have crept to the centre of the field over the last 20 or so years (see Chapter 12).

This raises important issues about how theories acquire disciplinary dominance or hegemony. The post-positivist turn has made such matters prominent in the field, but they have a more ancient lineage. Since the 1960s, for example, radical scholars in the United States such as Yergin (1990) and Chomsky (1969) have analysed the close connections which have often existed between the academic study of International Relations and the world of government, especially in the United States (for an

appraisal of Chomsky's work, see the Forum on Chomsky, *Review of International Studies* 2003). They have stressed how the dominant political needs of the time, as defined by government, have favoured some theories over others so that one perspective acquires hegemony while others make dissenting claims on the margins of the field. Strategic Studies is a case in point, as many radical scholars stressed its close connections with the 'military-industrial complex' in the 1960s. Realism was the dominant ideology of the US political establishment in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Nixon Administration broke with the Cold War ideology which had impeded the development of amicable relations with the Soviet Union and China (Henry Kissinger, Nixon's National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State, had been a leading realist academic prior to 1968). Since the 1980s, the dominant ideology has been neo-liberal economics, which has had enormous influence through the 'Washington Consensus' in promoting the deregulation of world markets (see Chapter 3). A fascinating illustration of the changing political fortunes of academic theories is that realism has come to have a dissenting role with respect to recent US foreign policy while remaining one of the dominant traditions in the American academy. The phenomenon of 'realists against the war' (many leading realist scholars published their opposition to the prospect of war against Iraq in *The New York Times* in 2002) is an example of how dominance in one domain may not be converted into dominance in the other.

It is necessary to stress the politicized nature of the discipline because the politics of International Relations can determine how broad the spectrum of 'legitimate theoretical opinion' can actually be. For example, Marxist scholars have highlighted the limits of expressible dissent in the discipline's attempt to uncover the cause of World War I. They have pointed to the conceptual and ideological parameters beyond which the investigators into war causes could not, or would not, proceed. For opinion to be considered legitimate it had to fall between the poles of 'idealism' at one end of the spectrum and 'realism' at the other. According to these Marxists, certain facts were axiomatically excluded as not belonging to the inquiry at all. Tensions within society, such as class struggles and economic competition between colonial powers – during this period a popular Marxist explanation of the origins of war – were not considered seriously within the discipline at this time. One commentator has suggested that the theory of imperialism was deliberately excluded because, by locating the causes of war within the nature of the capitalist system, it posed a direct threat to the social order of capitalist states: 'this false doctrine had to be refuted in the interest of stabilizing bourgeois society . . . the [historians] acted and reflected within the social context of the bourgeois university, which structurally

obstructed such revolutionary insights' (Krippendorf 1982: 27). Feminists have made a similar claim about the exclusion of their presence and perspectives from the concerns of international relations, arguing that the organization of the academy was designed in ways that occluded inquiry into masculine power.

## **Explanatory and constitutive theory**

One aim of studying a wide variety of International Relations theories is to make international politics more intelligible – to make better sense of the actors, structures, institutions, processes and particular episodes mainly, but not only, in the contemporary world. At times, theories may be involved in testing hypotheses, in proposing causal explanations with a view to identifying main trends and patterns in international relations – hence the claim that they are *explanatory* theories.

But why study international relations in this way? Is it obvious that the student of international relations needs theory at all? Is it not more centrally important to investigate the facts which are already out there? Halliday's three answers to this last question are instructive:

First, there needs to be some preconception of which facts are significant and which are not. The facts are myriad and do not speak for themselves. For anyone, academic or not, there needs to be criteria of significance. Secondly, any one set of facts, even if accepted as true and as significant, can yield different interpretations: the debate on the 'lessons of the 1930s' is not about what happened in the 1930s, but about how these events are to be interpreted. The same applies to the end of the Cold War in the 1980s. Thirdly, no human agent, again whether academic or not, can rest content with facts alone: all social activity involves moral questions, of right and wrong, and these can, by definition, not be decided by facts. In the international domain such ethical issues are pervasive: the question of legitimacy and loyalty – should one obey the nation, a broader community (even the world, the cosmopolis), or some smaller sub-national group; the issues of intervention – whether sovereignty is a supreme value or whether states or agents can intervene in the internal affairs of states; the question of human rights and their definition and universality (Halliday 1994: 25).

In this view, theories are not 'optional extras' or interesting 'fashion accessories'. They are a necessary means of bringing order to the subject matter of International Relations. Theories are needed to conceptualize

contemporary events. As Doyle (1983) argues in his writings on the liberal peace, an explanation of the absence of war between liberal states for almost two centuries has to begin by discussing what it means to describe a state as 'liberal' and what it means to claim there has been 'no war'. As Suganami (1996) has argued, an explanation of what causes war or what makes peace possible between societies, will be unsatisfactory unless it deals with the question of what it means to say that 'x' causes 'y'. Conceptual analysis – an inherently philosophical activity – is a necessary part of any attempt to explain or understand world politics.

International relations comprise a plethora of events, issues and relationships which are often enormous in scale and bewildering in their complexity. Theories can help the observer to think critically, logically and coherently by sorting these phenomena into manageable categories so that the appropriate units and level of analysis can be chosen and, where possible, significant connections and patterns of behaviour identified.

To the scholar of the 'international', theories are unavoidable. After all, the interpretation of 'reality' is always contingent on theoretical assumptions of one kind or another. To reiterate the point, the events and issues which comprise international relations can be interpreted and understood only by reference to a conceptual framework. The theory of international relations provides us with a choice of such frameworks.

The process we undertake when theorizing is also in dispute and, as Bull insisted, critical, reflective examination is always required. Gellner (1974: 175) asks whether it is possible or meaningful to distinguish 'between a world of fact "out there" and a cognitive realm of theory that *retrospectively* (our emphasis) orders and gives meaning to factual data'. If, as some post-structuralists maintain, there is no Archimedean standpoint which makes objective knowledge about an external reality possible, then the very process of separating 'theory' from 'practice', or the 'subject' from the 'object' it seeks to comprehend, is deeply problematical. Indeed, the very process of using positivist social science to acquire 'objective knowledge' may be deeply ideological. Far, then, from rising above the 'particular' to produce 'universal' truths about the social world, analysis may simply reflect specific cultural locations and sectional interests and reproduce existing forms of power (George and Campbell 1990).

These questions lead to a second category of theory, *constitutive* international theory. Everyone comes to the study of international relations with a specific language, cultural beliefs and preconceptions, as well as specific life-experiences which affect their understanding of the subject. Language, culture, religion, ethnicity, class and gender are a few of the factors which shape world views. Indeed it is possible to understand and interpret the world only within particular cultural and

linguistic frameworks: these are the *lenses* through which we perceive the world. One of the main purposes of studying theory is to enable us to examine these lenses to discover just how distorted and distorting any particular world-view may be. This is why it is important to ask why, for example, realists focus on specific images which highlight states, geopolitics and war while remaining blind to other phenomena such as class divisions and material inequalities.

As noted earlier, in the theory of international relations it is important to be as concerned with how we *approach* the study of world politics as we are with events, issues and actors in the global system. It is necessary to examine background assumptions because all forms of social analysis raise important questions about the moral and cultural constitution of the observer. It is important to reflect upon the cognitive interests and normative assumptions which underpin research. The point here is to become acutely aware of hidden assumptions, prejudices and biases about how the social and political world is and what it can be. According to various 'critical' perspectives, it is futile or unrealistic to attempt to dispense with these assumptions. Indeed, post-structuralist approaches have called for the celebration of diverse experiences of the world of international relations while maintaining that all standpoints should be subject to forms of critical analysis which highlight their closures and exclusions (George and Campbell 1990). We can best do this by developing an awareness of the diversity of images of international relations. The task of constitutive international theory is to analyse the different forms of reflection about the nature and character of world politics and to stress that these forms of knowledge do not simply mirror the world, but also help to shape it.

### **Inter-disciplinary theory**

Although at the outset conceived as a separate discipline, International Relations has always been influenced by cognate fields of study. In recent times it has been shaped by inter-disciplinary studies which are not easily categorized as either explanatory or constitutive theoretical approaches. Nor are they obviously normative or empirical. Two of these fields, international political theory and historical sociology, are germane to so many theoretical discussions about global politics today, that they have been given separate chapters in this volume.

Sometimes regarded as empirical theory, international political theory considers a range of philosophical and historical questions raised in domestic settings, for the international environment. Though not normatively prescriptive, international political theory seeks to understand the

grounds on which a range of ethical and normative choices in international politics are made. Issues such as just-war theory, global justice and humanitarian intervention now occupy a central place in the theory of international relations. What is the basis of a good international society? When do our obligations to people in other political communities – and to humanity generally – supersede our duties to fellow nationals? These subjects and questions contain moral and philosophical assumptions, but they are unavoidably political issues as well. International political theory reflects on the presuppositions and the politics which lie in the foundations of these discussions. It also reminds us that international thought has a history which deserves serious consideration by all scholars who deploy theoretical arguments without always being fully aware of how those theoretical tools were forged.

As its title suggests, historical sociology is concerned with identifying and understanding long-term patterns and processes of change in international relations. These include the changing configurations of power in global politics, the changing shape and functions of political communities, and the effects of economic forces on bounded communities and their societies. Historical sociology is also concerned with how ideas have carved the ethical and cultural contours of international politics over time.

Like international political theory, historical sociology has many different strands and traditions. Some embrace grand historical narratives with an eye to uncovering distinctive patterns and themes, while others can be considered an antidote to ‘presentism’ – providing historical context to ensure that the analysis of supposedly unique contemporary events takes account of their relationship with processes that may stretch back decades or centuries, and in some cases even millennia. Phenomena such as the globalization of capitalism and its implications, democratization after the Cold War, the history of states-systems and the moral development of the species are just a few of the subjects upon which historical sociologists have reflected and significantly contributed to our knowledge of global politics.

### **What do theories differ about?**

Although this volume identifies major perspectives, the authors do not want to give the impression that schools of thought are monolithic and homogeneous theoretical traditions. Although they may share some basic assumptions, the exponents of any perspective can have widely differing and even conflicting positions on the issues raised earlier. Feminism and Marxism are examples of very broad ‘churches’ which

display great diversity – and can on occasion seem as different from each other as the main perspectives in the field. Realism has its internal variations; so has the English School, the many branches of critical theory and so on. To someone who is new to the field, this diversity can be frustrating but there is nothing abnormal about differences of perspective within the same broad theoretical tradition. Heterogeneity is a strength and an obstacle to ossification.

It is possible to compare and contrast sub-schools of International Relations because they do have much in common. It is possible to focus on what they generally agree are the issues worth disagreeing about, on what they think are the principal stakes involved in understanding the world and in creating more sophisticated modes of analysis. Here it is necessary to proceed with great caution because no account of the main stakes can do justice to the many debates and controversies in the field. There is bound to be some arbitrariness in any attempt to make sense of the discipline as a whole. However, with that caveat, we believe it is useful to consider what the main perspectives have concluded about the following four issues: certainly a brief summary of where these theories stand on these issues may enable newcomers to chart a path through the thicket of major controversies in the field.

### *Object of analysis and scope of the enquiry*

The first is the *object of analysis and the scope of the enquiry*. Debates about the object of analysis have been especially important in the discipline since the ‘level of analysis’ debate (Singer 1961; Hollis and Smith 1990: 92–118). One of the best illustrations of what is at stake here is Waltz’s discussion of the causes of wars. In *Man, the State and War*, Waltz (1959) argued that three different levels of analysis (or three ‘images’) had been explored in the literature on this subject: (a) human nature; (b) the structure of political systems; and (c) the nature of the international system. Waltz showed how many psychologists have tried to explain war by looking at the innate aggressiveness of the species; many liberals and Marxists maintained that war is the product of how some political systems are organized. Liberals maintained that war was the result of autocratic government; Marxists saw it as a product of capitalism. From each standpoint, war was regarded as a phenomenon which could be abolished – by creating liberal regimes in the first case, and by establishing socialist forms of government in the second. According to students of the third level of analysis, war is a product of the anarchic nature of international politics and the unending competition for power and security. Waltz argued for the primacy of this ‘third image of international politics’, which stressed that war is inevitable in the context of

anarchy (while claiming that the other two levels of analysis also contribute to the study of war origins).

Thinking back to an earlier part of the discussion, we can see that the dominance of realism was in large part a consequence of its argument about the most important level of analysis for students of the field. We can also see that some of the main changes in the discipline have been the result of discontent with the realists' concentration on the problem of anarchy and its virtual exclusion of all other domains of world politics. When feminists argue for bringing women within the parameters of discussion, or the English School argues for focusing on international society, when constructivists urge the importance of understanding the social construction of norms, ideas and so on, they are involved in fundamental disciplinary debates about the correct *object* (or level) of analysis.

### *Purpose of social and political enquiry*

They are also involved in crucial debates about the *purpose of social and political enquiry*. Returning to Waltz, in his account of the causes of war (and later in his classic work, *Theory of International Politics*, 1979), he maintained that the purpose of analysis is to understand the limits on political change, more specifically to show that states are best advised to work with the existing international order rather than to try to change it radically. Above all else, they should ensure as far as they can the preservation of a *balance of power* which deters states from going to war although it cannot always prevent it. Ambitious projects of global reform are, on this analysis, destined to fail. Members of the English School do not deny the importance of the balance of power but they stress the need to attend to all the phenomena that make international order possible including the belief that the society of states is legitimate and, in the aftermath of Western colonialism, willing to be responsive to claims for justice advanced by 'Third World' states. Other perspectives include the liberal argument that the purpose of analysis is to promote economic and social interdependence between individuals across the world and, in the case of many radical approaches to the field, to create new forms of political community and new forms of human solidarity.

For the neo-realist, the purpose of the analysis is defined by the fact that international anarchy makes many of these visions utopian and dangerous. For many opponents of neo-realism, its purpose of inquiry is too quick to resign to what it regards as unchangeable; one of the main purposes of international political inquiry is to resist the perceived fatalism, determinism and conservatism of this position. In this context, the emergence of critical approaches to international relations (whether derived from Marxism and the Frankfurt School or located within

developments in French social theory) has been especially important. Their purpose is to criticize neo-realist claims about the 'knowable reality' of international politics. Post-structuralists, for example, maintain that 'reality' is discursively produced (that is, constructed by discourse): it is 'never a complete, entirely coherent "thing", accessible to universalized, essentialist or totalized understandings of it . . . [it] is always characterized by ambiguity, disunity, discrepancy, contradiction and difference' (George 1994: 11). It can never be contained, in other words, within one grand theory or reduced to one set of forces which are judged more important than all others. For the post-modernist, neo-realism is just another construction of the world, one that should be challenged because it does 'violence' to reality and because it has the obvious political consequence of maintaining that efforts to change that world are futile.

Critiques of the neo-realist purpose of inquiry have had huge implications for the scope of inquiry mentioned earlier. One consequence has been to make questions of ontology more central to the field. As Cox (1992b: 132) argued, 'ontology lies at the beginning of any enquiry. We cannot define a problem in global politics without presupposing a certain basic structure consisting of the significant kinds of entities involved and the form of significant relationships among them.' He added that 'ontological presuppositions [are] inherent in . . . terms such as "International Relations", which seems to equate nation with state and to define the field as limited to the interactions among states' (Cox 1992b: 132). Cox displayed a preference for focusing on how domestic and international dominant class forces, states and powerful international institutions combine to form a global hegemonic order. Debates about the 'basic structure of international politics' are not just about what is 'out there' and how we come to know 'reality' (more on this later); they are also inextricably tied up with different views about the purposes of political inquiry. Cox (1981: 128) emphasized this point in the striking claim that 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose'.

In one of the most influential distinctions in the field, Cox claimed that neo-realism has a 'problem-solving' purpose, its main task being to ensure that existing political arrangements 'function more smoothly' by minimizing the potential for conflict and war. Of course, Cox did not underestimate the importance of this endeavour, but he challenges its sufficiency. The main problem, as he saw it, is that neo-realism assumes that the world is frozen in particular ways and ultimately unchangeable through political action. But the consequence of taking 'the world as it finds it . . . as the given framework for action' is that neo-realism confers legitimacy on that order and the forms of dominance and inequality which are inherent in it. (There is a direct parallel here with one of the

central themes in post-structuralist thought – ultimately derived from Foucault’s writings – on how forms of knowledge are connected with forms of power (Chapter 9.) On the other hand, critical theory, Cox (1981, 1992b) maintained, had a broader purpose which is to reflect on how that order came into being, how it has changed over time and may change again in ways that improve the life-chances of the vulnerable and excluded. A broadly similar critical purpose runs through all the main radical approaches to the field, including feminism, green political theory and ‘critical constructivism’. All are actively libertarian in that they are broadly committed to the normative task of exposing constraints upon human autonomy which can in principle be removed.

### *Appropriate methodology*

Debates about the purpose of international political enquiry lead to a third point of difference between approaches which revolves around the *appropriate methodology* for the discipline. Key questions are best approached by recalling that politically motivated scholarship is deeply controversial and often anathema to many scholars. The main issue is the status of normative claims. Is it possible to provide an objective account of why human beings should value autonomy and rally around a project of promoting universal human emancipation? Exponents of scientific approaches have argued that objective knowledge about the ends of social and political is unobtainable; post-structuralists have argued that the danger is that any doctrine of ideal ends will become the basis for new forms of power and domination. In the 1990s, debates about what constitutes the ‘knowable reality’ of international relations (ontological questions) were accompanied by increasingly complex discussions about how knowledge is generated (epistemological questions). Of course, the ‘great debate’ in the 1960s was very much concerned with epistemological issues, with the advocates of science such as Kaplan and Singer supporting quantificationist techniques and hypothesis-testing while ‘traditionalists’ such as Bull defended the virtues of history, law, philosophy and other classical forms of academic inquiry as the best way to approach international politics. As noted earlier, this was a debate (with its origins in the late eighteenth century) about the extent to which the methods of the natural sciences can be applied the study of society and politics. It was also a debate about the possibility of a neutral or ‘value-free’ study of international relations.

Such debates are far from being resolved – or, at least, there is no consensus in the field as to how to resolve them. Various forms of critical theory joined the critique of scientific approaches, claiming (as Horkheimer and Adorno had done in the 1940s) that they are inseparable

from efforts to create new forms of social and political power. However, scientific approaches continue to have the upper hand in the American study of International Relations. They have been central to studies of the liberal peace (see Doyle 1983), and one analyst has claimed that the observation that there has been no war between liberal states for nearly two centuries is the nearest thing to a law in world politics (Levy 1989). It is also important to note the increasing prominence in the United States of ‘rational choice’ or ‘game-theoretical’ approaches as applied to studies of cooperation between ‘rational egoists’ (see Keohane 1984).

### *Distinct area of intellectual endeavour*

A fourth point of difference between perspectives revolves around the issue of whether the discipline should be conceived as a *relatively distinct area of intellectual endeavour* or considered as a field which can develop only by drawing heavily on other areas of investigation, such as historical sociology and the study of world history (see Buzan and Little 2001, who call for closer ties with the study of world history). The more the analyst sees international politics as a realm of competition and conflict, the stronger the tendency to regard it as radically different from other academic fields. Here, its anarchic character is often seen as separating the study of International Relations from other social sciences, and the relevance of concepts and ideas drawn from outside the discipline is assumed to be limited. We have already encountered this theme in Wight’s (1966a) paper, ‘Why is there no International Theory?’

Neo-realism is also associated with the view that, like most of the states it studies, International Relations has sharply defined boundaries. Waltz (1979) is explicit on this point, claiming that the international political system should be regarded as a ‘domain apart’ – although he looks beyond the field to economics and to developments in the philosophy of science to develop his thesis about international anarchy. The more dominant tendency in recent international theory has been to embrace multidisciplinary as a way of escaping the perceived insularity of the field. Many theorists have looked to developments in European social theory, post-colonial thinking and sociology more generally to explore new areas of investigation; some look to studies of ethics and political theory for insight. Many of the questions which have fascinated feminist scholars – about patriarchy, gender identity, etc. – can be answered only by going outside classical disciplinary boundaries. This is also manifestly true of much recent thinking about green politics which necessarily looks beyond the conventional discipline (Chapter 11). The most recent phase in the history of globalization has led many to deepen this move towards multidisciplinary (Scholte 2000). The upshot of

these developments is that the boundaries of International Relations have been keenly contested and in many sub-fields substantially redrawn. This does not mean the end of International Relations as an academic discipline, although the extent to which it borrows from other fields without having much influence on the wider humanities and social sciences is, for some, a real cause for concern (see Buzan and Little 2001). On the other hand, cross pollination from cognate fields can also enrich the study of international relations. All theories of international relations have to deal with the state and nationalism, with the struggle for power and security, and with the use of force, but they do not deal with these phenomena in the same way. Different conceptions of the scope of the inquiry, its purpose and methodology mean that issues of war and peace which formed the classical core of the subject are conceptualized and analysed in increasingly diverse ways.

## Evaluating theories

We probably should not expect too much from any empirical theory. No single theory identifies, explains or understands all the key structures and dynamics of international politics. International historians such as Gaddis (1992–93) stressed that none of the major traditions of international theory predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union and its immediate consequences for Europe and the rest of the world. But many theorists do not believe that their purpose is prediction or concede that theories should be assessed by how well they can predict events. An assessment of different theories cannot begin, then, by comparing their achievements in explaining international political reality ‘out there’.

What we have tried to show in this introduction, and the other chapters demonstrate, is that some of the most interesting debates revolve around the question of *what it means to provide a good account* of any dimension of international politics. We do not claim that this volume provides an exhaustive survey of the field at the current time, and we do not deny the claims of other perspectives which lack representation here. But we do believe that a comparison of the nine main theories considered in this volume, and the two interdisciplinary studies, will show why the nature of a good account of international political phenomena is keenly contested and why *debates about this matter are important*. This is why the great proliferation of theoretical approaches should be applauded rather than lamented as evidence that the discipline has lost its way or has collapsed into competing ‘tribes’. One can begin to decide if one has a good account of any international political phenomenon only by engaging with different theories. In this way, analysts of international relations

become more self-conscious about the different ways of practising their craft and more aware of omissions and exclusions which may reflect personal or cultural biases. This theme is crucially important if those of a critical persuasion are broadly right that all forms of inquiry have political implications and consequences, most obviously by creating narratives which privilege certain standpoints and experiences *to some degree*.

There is one final point to make before commenting briefly on the chapters that follow. Here, it is necessary to return to a comment made at the start of this introduction, namely that the realists and the liberal internationalists have been involved in a major controversy about the forms of political action that are most appropriate in a realm in which the struggle for power and security is pre-eminent. It is also worth recalling Steve Smith's claim that theories 'do not simply explain or predict, they tell us what possibilities exist for human action and intervention; they define not merely our explanatory possibilities, but also our ethical and practical horizons' (1996: 113). Now the analyst of any dimension of international politics may not be concerned with the possibilities for 'human action and intervention'; and many theorists of international relations would deny that this is what theory is essentially about. There is no reason to suggest an agenda that all good theories should follow. But to look at the main perspectives and at the debates between them is to see that the issue of whether or not the international political system can be reformed is *one* recurrent question which concerns all of them. For those who think global reform is possible, other questions immediately follow. How are different visions of international political life to be assessed, and what are the prospects for realizing them? We suggest these questions provide one measure of a good account of world politics. Others will disagree. To decide the merits of different positions on the possibilities for 'human action and intervention' – whether large or small – one needs to be familiar with at least the perspectives which are considered in this volume.

In Chapter 2, Jack Donnelly analyses classical realism which dominated the field for at least the first 50 years of its existence and which remains highly influential in the discipline today. The writings of early realists such as Carr and Morgenthau remain key reference points in contemporary debates more than five decades after their first publication. Interestingly, as explained in Chapter 2, neo-realism which emerged in the late 1970s and which was at the heart of most debates during the following two decades, was one of the main challenges to classical realism. However, neo-realism is largely concerned with the critique of liberal approaches (as well as Marxist and other radical approaches to the field) which it thinks guilty of exaggerating the ability of global economic and social processes to change the basic structure

of international politics. In Chapter 3, Scott Burchill discusses the development of the liberal tradition, noting in particular how many contemporary neo-liberal accounts of the world market and the defence of free trade, resonate with ideas promoted by economic liberals in the nineteenth century. However, contemporary liberalism contains much more than a particular conception of how freeing trade and global markets from the hands of the state can promote material prosperity and establish the conditions for lasting peace. Other features of the perspective which have been influential in recent years include the defence of the universal human rights culture and the development of international criminal law, the study of ‘cooperation under anarchy’ associated with neo-liberal institutionalism and the immensely important discussion of the liberal peace. These features of recent liberal thinking about international relations will also be discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Andrew Linklater analyses the English School and Marxism. Neither has enjoyed the global influence of realism/neo-realism and liberalism/neo-liberalism, although the English School has been particularly influential in British International Relations. The years since 1998 have seen renewed interest in the English School theory of international society and in its position as a ‘third way’ between the pessimism of realism and the more idealistic forms of liberalism and various radical perspectives including Marxism. Chapter 4 pays particular attention to the contribution of Wight, Vincent and Bull to the discipline, and notes their special relevance for contemporary discussions about human rights, humanitarian intervention and the use of force in international affairs. Chapter 5 turns to Marxism, which has often been criticized by neo-realists and members of the English School although neither anchored its critique in a careful interpretation of one of its main theoretical adversaries. Whether the rejection of Marxism overlooked its ability to make a significant contribution to the field is a question that Chapter 5 considers in detail. Particular attention will be paid to Marx’s writings on globalization, to Marxist analysis of nationalism and internationalism, and to reflections on the importance of forms of production – and specifically the development of modern capitalist forms of production – for global politics. The ‘critical’ dimensions of Marxism – its interest not only in explaining the world, but in changing it – are also noted in this chapter.

In Chapter 6 Andrew Linklater explains how important trends within historical sociology have started to influence theoretical debates within International Relations. Historical sociology identifies patterns and processes of change in the broader sweep of history – over the long term. The evolution of the states system, the spread of capitalism and the changing nature of political communities are just three key themes examined by

historical sociologists which are central to contemporary debates within International Relations. The provision of historical context to the contemporary discussion of global politics makes historical sociology an indispensable tool in the hands of theorists in the field.

Marxism provided the intellectual background for the development of critical theory as developed by members of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1930s, and by Habermas, Honneth and others in more recent times. In Chapter 7, Richard Devetak explains the central aims of critical theory and their impact on various theorists such as Ashley in the early 1980s, and on Ken Booth (1991a, b) and Cox who have defended a version of international politics committed to the idea of human emancipation. Although the term ‘critical theory’ was initially associated with the Frankfurt School which derived many of its ideas from a dialogue with orthodox Marxism, it is also strongly associated with post-structuralism, a perspective which is deeply suspicious of the emancipatory claims of classical Marxism. In Chapter 8, Richard Devetak explains the post-structural turn in the social sciences by considering the writings of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, and analyses its influence on International Relations since the 1980s. Its critique of the ‘Enlightenment project’ of universal human emancipation is an important element of this chapter, as is the stress on the critique of ‘totalizing’ perspectives which are judged to be a threat to the flourishing of human differences.

Constructivism, which Christian Reus-Smit discusses in Chapter 9, has emerged as a powerful challenge to orthodox perspectives in the field, most crucially to theories which assume that states derive certain interests from their location in an anarchic condition. In a famous challenge to those approaches, Alexander Wendt (1992) argued that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’. The claim was that anarchy is socially constructed, that it is shaped by the beliefs and attitudes of states; it is not an unchanging structure which imposes certain constraints on states and compels all to participate in an endless struggle for power and security. Constructivism which has focused particularly on the relationship between interests and identities encompasses several competing approaches. Some are influenced by post-structuralism, others by critical theory in the Frankfurt School tradition; some share the neo-realist focus on analysing relations between states in isolation from other processes (systemic constructivism) whereas others see the states-system in connection with a range of national and global cultural and political phenomena (holistic constructivism).

In Chapter 10, Jacqui True sheds light on a subject which first came onto the International Relations agenda in the mid-1980s, namely feminism. This perspective is not reducible to a study of the position of

women in the global order, although many feminists such as Cynthia Enloe did set out to explain how women are affected by war and by developments in the global economy, including structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s. The invisibility of women in mainstream approaches and in many critical alternatives was one reason for the development of the feminist literature. However, feminist perspectives have been no more homogeneous than other theoretical standpoints. Some feminists, such as Christine Sylvester (1994a, 2002), have used post-structuralist approaches to question 'essentialist' accounts of women, their interests and rights. One concern has been to question claims that the dominant Western conceptions of 'woman' are valid for women everywhere. Other feminists, such as Steans (1995), have been influenced by the Marxist tradition. It is important to repeat that feminism is not simply interested in the place of women in the global political and economic order. It is also preoccupied with constructions of gender including constructions of masculinity, and with how they affect forms of power and inequality and, at the epistemological level, knowledge claims about the world.

Matthew Paterson discusses developments within green political thinking in Chapter 11. Environmental degradation, transnational pollution and climate change have had a significant impact on the study of global politics. These issues have featured in studies of 'international regimes' with responsibility for environmental issues. Questions of global justice have been at the heart of discussions about the fair distribution between rich and poor and about moral responsibilities to reverse environmental harm. Obligations to non-human species and to future generations have been important themes in environmental ethics. Green political thought has criticized the dominant assumptions until the 1960s about infinite economic growth and the faith in the virtues of unbridled capitalism. Questions about the prospects for 'ecologically responsible' states and global environmental citizenship which have been discussed in recent green political thought have special relevance for students of international relations. These are some of the ways in which green political thought and practice have tried to reconfigure the study of international relations so that more attention is devoted to the long-term fate of the planet and the different lifeforms which inhabit it.

Finally in Chapter 12, Terry Nardin considers the recent impact of international political theory on contemporary theoretical debates in the theory of international relations. Drawing on debates within 'domestic' political theory, international political theory examines the political, philosophical and ethical basis of key concerns within international relations, including assumptions which underwrite the discussion of global justice, debates over what constitutes a just war, as well as disputes about

the merits of humanitarian intervention. International political theory also reminds us about the history of international thought and the broader intellectual connections between political philosophy and international politics which have not always been properly acknowledged.

Most of the authors in this volume identify with one or other of the perspectives analysed in this book, but none argues that any one theory can solve the many problems which arise for theorists of international relations. We see merit in all the approaches surveyed, and we certainly believe it is essential to engage with all theoretical perspectives from the 'inside', to see the world from different theoretical vantage-points, to learn from them, to test one's own ideas against them and to think carefully about what others would regard as the vulnerabilities of one's perspective, whatever it may be. Those who teach the theory of international relations are sometimes asked 'what is the correct theory?'. We hope our readers will conclude there is no obviously correct theory which solves all the problems listed in this introduction and considered in more detail in the pages below. Some may concur with Martin Wight (1991) that the truth about international relations will not be found in any one of the traditions but in the continuing *dialogue and debate* between them. This is almost certainly the right attitude to adopt when approaching the study of international theory for the first time, and it may still be the best conclusion to draw from one's analysis.

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