

Paradigmatic Faults, or
Why the Divisions in IR Aren't All They're Cracked Up To Be

by

PATRICK THADDEUS JACKSON
School of International Service
American University
4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016-8071
<ptjack@american.edu>

and

DANIEL H. NEXON
Department of Government and School of Foreign Service
Georgetown University
6th Floor, ICC
Washington, DC 20057
<dh2@georgetown.edu>

Paper prepared for the 2004 Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

EXCEPTIONALLY ROUGH DRAFT. DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHORS'
PERMISSION.

Comments extremely welcomed

Scholars increasingly represent Anglo-American international relations (IR) theory as a three-cornered fight between realism, liberalism, and constructivism (Walt, 1998), describing each as “paradigms” or “research programs.” Although the “three paradigms” understanding of IR theory has some heuristic and pedagogical value, that value is outweighed by the costs for cumulative knowledge in the field. Whatever else they may be, realism, liberalism, and constructivism should not be understood through post-positivist models of scientific evolution. One of the key features of both “paradigms” and “research programs” is that they contain distinctive and incommensurate assumptions about epistemology and ontology. Many of the IR theories often placed within each category—realist, liberal, or constructivist—do not take similar stands on theoretical validity, the nature of being, and the like. Similarly, a number of theories associated with *different categories* share significant assumptions that would, under reasonable criteria, qualify them as belonging to the same paradigms or research programs. For example, it makes little sense to treat “liberal” and “realist” theories that share rational-choice analytics as belonging to different paradigms or research programs.

In this article we propose an alternative heuristic for mapping general approaches in IR theory. First, to what degree do theories and approaches hold that anarchy is a fixed constraint on actors in the international system? Second, to what degree to theories and approaches hold that power can be transcended in world

politics? While no simple framework exhausts major differences in the field, our heuristic provides a way of sorting the relationship between a number of approaches to international relations in the context of central disciplinary questions. We provide a means to disaggregate supposed “paradigmatic” debates into a number of key research questions – thus allowing IR theorists to focus not on supposed, and usually fruitless, tests of “research programs” but on concrete issues that arise out of the intersection of a variety of different approaches. Moreover, re-mapping the discipline as we suggests reveals some strange bedfellows. Specifically, it shows that the “three-cornered” debate between realism, liberalism, and constructivism is, at minimum, a “four-cornered” fight in which variants of constructivism share *at least as much in common with realist theories as with liberal and other constructivist approaches.*

This article proceeds as follows. First, we review the concepts of “paradigm” and “research programme” and show why the basic operational division in mainstream Anglo-American IR theory between the “isms” fails to fit such post-positivist reconstructions of scientific progress. We then provide examples of some of the disputes in IR theory that might plausibly constitute paradigmatic divisions, most notably between what Brian Barry calls “economistic” and “sociologistic” approaches to human behavior (Barry, 1970). These divisions, however, are almost never congruent with the supposed “paradigms” of international relations. Second, we put forth our own alternative, and discuss how it sorts positions on key questions in the field. We also illustrate the alternative mapping by showing, through a hypothetical genealogy of

the field, how various strands of constructivist thought could just as plausibly be placed within the realist tradition of international relations. Finally, we discuss the advantages of using our map to disaggregate the paradigmatic debate into a series of key research questions.

Paradigms and Research Programmes

Ole Wæver points out that the triangular conception of IR as a field marked by debates between three incommensurable positions¹ is both misleading and detrimental: misleading inasmuch as it fails to capture the actual dynamics of work in the field, and detrimental inasmuch as it freezes a particular configuration of debates as though it were timeless (Wæver, 1996: 175). In fact, there cannot be “a real, normal ‘debate’” between positions conceptualized as incommensurable paradigms, since these positions do not “speak the same language” (*ibid.*: 158); hence thinking about positions with IR as paradigms actually *eliminates* the possibility of meaningful discussion between alternatives. Although Wæver rightly emphasizes the impact of Kuhn’s work on this conception of the field, it is important to note that Lakatos’ notion of a “research programme” – which is arguably the predominant currency of contemporary debates about schools of thought in IR – incorporates substantial aspects of this notion of

¹ In what Wæver identifies as the inter-paradigm debate of the 1970s and 1980s, the three contenders were realism, liberalism, and radicalism/Marxism (Wæver, 1996: 150-154).

incommensurability. A shift from Kuhn to Lakatos will not, therefore, solve the problems or even address the criticisms that Wæaver has advanced (Wæaver, 1998: 693).

Family resemblances between “paradigms” and “research programmes”

When considering Lakatos’ methodology for appraising scientific progress, one must keep in mind the specific problems that it was designed to address, and in particular the importance of Thomas Kuhn’s identification of “revolutionary” moments of scientific change to Lakatos’ thinking (Dessler, 2003: 381). Based on careful empirical studies of how practicing physical scientists conducted their work, Kuhn argued that the changes in the history of science between sets of fundamental assumptions about the world and how to study were akin to “change[s] in visual gestalt” whereby something that previously appeared one way to a research community subsequently appears in a different way (Kuhn, 1970b: 85). Further, Kuhn suggested that these changes in fundamental worldview arose neither from unvarnished empirical refutations of extant hypotheses nor from explicit and conscious deliberative procedures, but rather from “a relatively sudden and unstructured event” by which perceptions are reordered (*ibid.*: 122). Perceptions are thus always and already theory-laden, and do not form some kind of neutral substrate of data upon which interpretation and theorizing can subsequently commence (*ibid.*: 195). Hence, “no

exclusively logical criteria can entirely dictate the conclusion” that the scientist “must draw” from particular empirical observations (Kuhn, 1970a: 19).

It is important to note that this Kuhnian challenge could have been met in a number of ways. Popper, for example, attempted to meet it by pointing to the “genuine progress” manifested in the sciences: “we know more than we did before,” he asserts, arguing from this that “a critical comparison of the competing theories, of the competing frameworks, is always possible” (Popper, 1970: 57). Although Popper admits that observations are theory-laden, he denies the implication that particular structured sets of observations are incommensurable with one another; all scientific theory ultimately has as its goal the production of a more accurate correspondence with an externally existing real world, and on this basis the “verisimilitude” of rival theories can always be calculated (Popper, 1979). But this is not Lakatos’ solution. Rather, Lakatos *accepts* much of Kuhn’s critique, particularly the notion that adherents of a particular paradigm can always provide explanations in the face of discrepant evidence that remain consistent with their fundamental assumptions—the evidence does not demonstrate anything on its own (Lakatos, 1978b: 119). Thus Lakatos “concedes to Kuhn...that there are no logically compelling grounds on which to prevent theory reformulation, but he offers a decision rule that he argues is reasonable” given this concession (Vasquez, 2003: 421). Far from representing “different epistemologies” or “incompatible...metatheories,” (Elman and Elman, 2003: 59) Lakatos is actually quite

close to Kuhn on the issue of whether scientific paradigms are in some fundamental way incommensurable.

Indeed, Lakatos' terminological and conceptual shift from "paradigm" to "research programme" is *precisely* designed to meet this challenge—but *not* by denying the existence of discontinuous jumps in the history of science. Rather, Lakatos agrees that these jumps happen and then looks for a "normative philosophy of science" that will allow researchers to assess the character of those jumps for the development of science as a whole (Lakatos, 1978a: 121). If there were a simple, empirical way to evaluate which of two theories explained more about the world—in other words, if there were a theoretically neutral substratum of "facts" against which the two theories could be measured—there would be no need for discontinuous jumps, and science would proceed simply through the accumulation of more and more empirical facts (inductivism), or through the successive testing of hypotheses against the facts (falsificationism). Against both of these points of view, Lakatos "borrows...from conventionalism...the license rationally to accept by convention not only spatio-temporally singular 'factual statements' but also spatio-temporally universal theories" (*ibid.*: 110) and thus accepts that the arbiter of scientific truth on a day-to-day basis will be institutional practices rather than a firm grounding in some set of empirical facts. "Popper's great negative crucial experiments" — which were supposed to have falsified theories — "disappear: 'crucial experiment' is an honorific title, which may, of course, be

conferred on certain anomalies, but only *long after the event*, only when one programme has been defeated by another one" (*ibid.*: 111).

The retrospective character of judgments about the progressive or degenerating character of a particular problemshift is, in our view, critical to an understanding of Lakatos' project. Although some interpreters of Lakatos argue that the notion of progressive problemshifts between and within research programs "can be used to advise scholars on how to respond to degeneration" (Elman and Elman, 1997: 925), we suggest that this represents a misunderstanding of Lakatos' goals and of the utility of the concept of a "research programme." Lakatos was critical of Kuhn and others for "conflat[ing] *methodological* appraisal of a program with firm *heuristic* advice about what to do" (Lakatos, 1978a: 117), so it seems unlikely that he would agree with the attempt to derive recommendations from his rational reconstructions of the history of science. Lakatos distinguishes between the "internal" and the "external" history of a research program, arguing that "*normative* reconstructions" that provide an internal history "may have to be supplemented by *empirical* external theories to explain the residual non-rational factors.

The history of science is always richer than its rational reconstruction....External history either provides non-rational explanation of the speed, locality, selectiveness, etc. of historic events as *interpreted* in terms of internal history; or, when history differs from its rational reconstruction, it provides an empirical explanation of why it differs. But the *rational* aspect of scientific growth is fully accounted for by one's logic of scientific discovery (*ibid.*: 118).

Both the rational reconstruction of a research programme and the empirical historical account of the twists and turns that it factually took require hindsight, as the rational contents of a research programme may not be identical with any of the practitioners' individual specifications of the research programme: "Prout never articulated the 'Proutian programme': the Proutian programme is not Prout's programme" (*ibid.*: 119). Indeed, the specification of a research programme has a great deal in common with Weber's procedure of studying historical events by abstracting and oversimplifying social practices in order to produce "a synthesis which we could not succeed in attaining with consistency without the application of ideal-type constructs" (Weber, 1949: 96). Lakatos' argument that "no set of human judgments is completely rational and thus no rational reconstruction can ever coincide with actual history" (Lakatos, 1978a: 131) also has a decidedly Weberian flavor, and thus further militates against trying to use Lakatos' criteria to conduct anything other than what would in effect be a singular causal analysis of the historical progress of a research programme.²

Retrospective reconstruction is also central to Lakatos' approach because of his acceptance of a measure of Kuhnian incommensurability. Discussing the clash between Galilean and Aristotelian conceptions of the cosmos, Lakatos points out that "it was not Galileo's – pure, untheoretical – *observations* that confronted Aristotelian *theory* but rather Galileo's 'observations' in the light of his optical theory that confronted the

² On "singular causal analysis" as standing near the core of Weber's methodology of social explanation, see Ringer, 1997.

Aristotelians' 'observations' in the light of their theory of the heavens" (Lakatos, 1978b: 98). The problem is that there is an irreducibly "conventional element" in deciding whether a particular experimental trial represents the falsification of the substantive theory in question or whether it merely represents the falsification of the observational theory embodied in the apparatus used to conduct the test in the first place (*ibid.*: 107). In retrospect, one or the other may appear to have been the case, but this cannot possibly be ascertained at the time – contemporary researchers can always fall back on one or the other of these kinds of theory in order to defend their presuppositions. "One can be 'wise' only after the event" (Lakatos, 1978a: 113) – that is, only *after* the scientific community has resolved the issue in practice, at which point judgments about whether the resolution was progressive or degenerating can be advanced.

Hence, what Lakatos calls the "hard core" of a research programme consists not merely of substantive claims, but also contains commitments to particular kinds of observational theory – particular notions of how measurement works, how terms are to be defined, and how auxiliary hypothesis derived from the theory's hard core are to be evaluated. The genius of the Newtonian research programme, he suggests, came not merely from its substantive assumptions about motion, but also from its novel way of "doing science," which involved the subsumption of empirical anomalies under a simple set of laws (*ibid.*: 133). Similarly, Bohr's production of a novel account of light emission involved a relaxation of the standard of theoretical consistency in the short-term so that new phenomena could be predicted (*ibid.*: 141-142). This necessarily means

that Lakatos' account is focused on the "theoretical" progress made by research programmes, and not as much on empirical or "historical" progress. Because the "hard cores" of research programmes contain such divergent ways of apprehending the empirical world, "historical" or empirical progress would not meet Lakatos' criteria:

Unless we can identify, for any research program under examination, a *complete, unambiguous and unchanging* hard core, it will be impossible to distinguish *ad hoc* from non-*ad hoc* developments of a theory, and hence between progressive and degenerating problem-shifts. For under these conditions there will be little to stop researchers from tweaking the hard core in order to immunize a new hypothesis against the charge of being *ad hoc* (Dessler, 2003: 404).

Determining whether a research programme is making progress requires a specification of its theoretical core in a way that does not downplay the elements of incommensurability that Lakatos retains from Kuhn. A set of empirical propositions is insufficient for this purpose. The "hard core" of a research programme contains not merely a list of variables that adherents believe to be relevant to their explanations, and not merely a set of favored techniques for gathering and evaluating empirical data, but also contains epistemological and ontological standards that frame the "world" grasped by the research programme. In the absence of these elements, the language of "research programmes" can be only metaphorically applied to a field of study.

Problems of application

It is this metaphorical application that we think characterizes extant efforts to apply Lakatosian or Kuhnian criteria to the various schools of thought in IR. To be blunt, *no school of thought in IR rises to the level of a “paradigm” or a “research programme.”* This is because IR schools of thought do not have the requisite philosophical contents as parts of their hard cores, but consist instead of a series of substantive assumptions that can, in principle, be tested against one another in a relatively straightforward manner. Whether or not democracies go to war with other democracies, to select only one example of a school of thought that has been claimed as a Lakatosian research programme (Ray, 2003), is merely an empirical proposition, and has very little in common with (say) Prout’s contention that the atomic weights of pure chemical elements are whole numbers, or with Planck’s calculation of an indivisible unit of action at the subatomic level (the Planck constant). These latter represent contentions about how to do science – about what kinds of evidence “count” for or against a theory – in a way that the notion of a democratic peace simply does not.

It is indeed true that Lakatos offers few clear criteria for the demarcation of a research programme’s “hard core” (Dessler, 2003: 383; Elman and Elman, 2003: 61-62). But such a hard core cannot consist simply of empirical propositions without vitiating the need for the methodological apparatus of “research programmes” in the first place. A perusal of recent attempts to assess “progress” in the field on Lakatosian grounds, however, reveals that this is precisely what most IR scholars have done. “States are the

primary actors in world politics” (Keohane and Martin, 2003: 73) and “the fundamental actors in international politics are rational individuals and private groups” (Moravcsik, 2003: 161) and similar statements contain no special philosophical content that would prevent them from being empirically tested in a straightforward manner, as long as “primary actors” and “fundamental actors” were defined in an empirically falsifiable way. Indeed, statements like this seem more like definitions of scope than they do like “hard core” research programme components: saying “states are the primary actors in world politics” signals that the scholar is going to be concerned with inter-state interactions to the exclusion of other kinds of interactions. If pressed, adherents of these schools of thought *could* give empirically grounded reasons for their assumptions; it is just that they have chosen not to.

Alternatively, consider Vasquez’s attempt to delineate a “research program on balancing” of power between states in the international system (Vasquez, 1997: 903). The “hard core” of this research programme appears to be simply the proposition that states balance rather than bandwagon under conditions of anarchy. But this should not be regarded as a “hard core” assumption any more than “objects fall to the ground when dropped” should be regarded as a “hard core” assumption of the Newtonian research program. Rather, both empirical statements are, at best, auxiliary hypotheses derived from “hard cores” having to do with the nature of empirical inquiry and the specific character of the phenomena under investigation. “Balancing” – like

“falling” – is a consequence of the application of broader assumptions, not an assumption itself (Elman and Elman, 1997: 925).

Similarly, the distinction between “logic of consequences” and a “logic of appropriateness”, which is sometimes placed at the heart of the debate between schools of IR, does not, at least in most forms (see below) involve assumptions of rival research programs.³ Rather, logics of consequences and logics of appropriateness are competing empirical specifications of a single decision-making logic: that the combination of values and beliefs produces action. As James G. March and Johan P. Olsen argue, “any particular action probably involves elements” of both logics; in principle, one ought to be able to investigate the interaction between the two subsets of voluntaristic decision-making (March and Olsen, 1998: 952).⁴

The above discussion should make clear a basic point: the “isms” of IR are neither Kuhnian paradigms nor Lakatosian research programmes. There is *no correlation* between the boundaries of any of the variants of realism, liberalism, and constructivism and any incommensurate assumptions. For instance, consider Randall Schweller’s and William Wohlforth’s discussion of the “first principles” of realism.

Realist first principles assert that: (1) humankind cannot transcend conflict through the power of reason to discover a science of peace; all self-described realists, therefore, “share a skeptical attitude toward schemes for pacific international order;” (2) politics are not a function of ethics; morality is instead the product of power and material interests; and (3) necessity and

³ For discussions, see Kahler, 1998; Risse, 2000; Sending, 2002.

⁴ Both Max Weber (Weber, 1949) and Talcott Parsons (Parsons, 1949) would have been comfortable with this position.

reason of state trump morality and ethics when these values conflict (Schweller and Wohlforth, 2000: 69).

All three of these “core” assumptions can easily be cast in empirically testable terms. There is, in principle, no reason why one cannot evaluate whether or not any of these propositions are true. The first and second core claims—“humankind cannot transcend conflict through the power of reason” and “morality...is the product of power and material interests” – would find plenty of agreement among constructivists who take their cues from, for instance Michael Foucault (1977; 1978), Pierre Bourdieu (1992), Antonio Gramsci (1971), or Friedrich Nietzsche (1967).⁵ The “reason of state” assumption is more problematic, but one could easily imagine constructivists embracing it as applicable under certain circumstances.

Put starkly, these “first principles” only imply incommensurability with constructivism (and with most contemporary variants of liberalism) if we elevate them beyond the realm of empirical assessment by some act of *fiat* and if we ignore the degree to which various constructivists and contemporary liberals can find themselves in agreement with them. Similar points can be made about all of Schweller’s and Wohlforth’s “three fundamental assumptions” that “distinguish realism from all other international relations perspectives.” The claim that “*conflict groups are the key actors in world politics*” is little different from the “states” and “individuals” distinction discussed above, and would not exclude many forms of constructivism or even, contra Schweller

⁵ See Barkin, 2003; Weldes, Laffey and Duvall, 1999.

and Wohlforth, Marxism.⁶ The claim that “*power is the fundamental feature of international politics*” is both capable of being adjudicated through empirical evidence *and* shared by some constructivists, as is the argument that the “*essential nature of international politics is conflictual*” (Schweller and Wohlforth, 2000: 70-2)

Moreover, Schweller and Wohlforth (2000: 70) note a number of positions *not* shared by realists that are, at least in some specifications, better candidates for incommensurable content, such as “strong assumptions about rationality.” They do not discuss disagreements within realism between individualists and structuralists, which also could plausibly be elevated to the level of incommensurably if they were taken to be ontological statements such as “society does not exist” or “individuals only exist by virtue of social relations.”

Other alignments also suggest that the “isms” are not paradigms or Lakatosian research programmes. Debates between neoliberals and neorealists about relative and absolute gains, the fungibility of power, and the consequent likelihood of lasting international cooperation (Axelrod and Keohane, 1993; Baldwin, 1993; Grieco, 1993) are not even remotely akin to the dispute between Aristotelians and Galileo over what constituted evidence and argument for different models of the universe. The very fact that Ole Wæver (1996: 162-164) could plausibly identify a “neo-neo synthesis” provides strong evidence for this point, as there could never have been an “Aristotelian-Galilean

⁶ “Classes” are, after all, a “conflict group” in Marxist theory, and few Marxists would rule out the proposition that other axes of conflict may be important to specific outcomes in international politics.

synthesis." Similarly, attempts to carve out a realism that centers on interests looks a great deal like domestic-political liberalism, and it is hard to see how even the importation of some of the disagreements purportedly lurking at the core of realism and liberalism could locate these two approaches in different paradigmatic boxes (Legro and Moravcsik, 1999; Narziny, 2003; G. H. Snyder, 2002: 172).

One last thread is worth pursuing on this point: the vaunted "agent-structure debate." Surely, one might argue, radically different conceptions of the relationship between social determinism and individual free will, subjectivity and objectivity, and other features of the agent-structure debate amount to incommensurable assumptions about the social and political world. For example, David Dessler (1989: 444) explicitly invokes Lakatosian (as well as scientific realist) criteria for choosing between Kenneth Waltz's "positional model" and Dessler's own "transformational model" of the agent-structure relationship. For Dessler, these different models amount to differences in ontology: "the substantive entities and configurations [a] theory postulates." Moreover, he argues that the transformational model derives from the "philosophy of scientific realism," and if different epistemologies and ontologies do not constitute an incommensurate "hard core," it is difficult to understand what would. Similarly, Alexander Wendt's (Wendt, 1987: 339) early article on the agent-structure problem suggested that different approaches to the issue represent different "ontological" and "epistemological" stances, although he now argues that it is possible for IR theorists to reconcile their ontological stances (Wendt, 1999).

Certainly, different stances on the agent-structure problem *can* involve incommensurable claims. There is no way to test arguments to the effect that agents have no existence outside of social relations, or that social structures are phantasms of a researcher's imagination. Epistemic realist arguments that we can abductively infer the existence of structures if our theories of them display causal efficacy really are incommensurate with the classical positivist rejection of the existence of unobservables (Chernoff, 2002; Patomäki, 1996; Wendt, 1999). But upon closer examination, many of the disputes over the proper way to conceptualize agent-structure relations in IR are only contingently related to such incommensurable claims.

Thus, Dessler (1989: 449) argues that in Waltz's "ontology...the unit precedes the system and through action generates the structure," because Waltz argues that systems come into being whenever a sufficient threshold of unit interaction is crossed. But one could also read Waltz as simply arguing that, logically, international systems only exist once units interact with one another—a rather unobjectionable point. This indicates *nothing*, in and of itself, about whether or not agents actually precede structure, or whether the nature of agency is, at least in part, a product of social relations (Waltz, 1979: 90). In fact, it is entirely possible to read Waltz's theory as accepting agent-structure co-constitution, but taking the *analytical* stance that agents and structures should be treated as rigidly autonomous for the purposes of studying their interaction (Chernoff, 1998; Goddard and Nexon, forthcoming). The reading of Waltz's theory as

incommensurable with agent-structure co-constitution on ontological grounds is thus far from unproblematic.

Indeed, while different approaches to the agent-structure problem may involve a variety of incommensurable epistemological and ontological assumptions, they can be frequently re-conceptualized as different analytical postures that *share* common commitments to the co-constitutive nature of agents and various incarnations of structure. The very nature of the debates over whether their frameworks better capture processes of agent-structure co-constitution and interaction *depends* upon shared core commitments (Alexander, 1988; Alexander, 1998; Jackson and Nexon, 2001).⁷ And here's the rub: *even if we accept that these positions on the agent-structure problem are incommensurable, they do not bear out the claim that the major approaches to IR are paradigms or research programmes.* After all, it is within constructivism (broadly understood) that we find the greatest proliferation of metadepates about the agent-structure problem, as well as the greatest variety of opposing ontological and epistemological claims (Carlsnaes, 1992; Doty, 1999; Jackson and Nexon, 1999; Wight, 1999; Wight, 2000). If "constructivism" were a paradigm or a research programme, we should not expect to find this level of diversity within it.

⁷ For example, compare Archer, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Giddens, 1984; Parsons, 1951; White, 1992.

Actual Paradigms in IR

One irony of applying the language of “paradigms” and “research programmes” to IR schools of thought is that it obscures the fact that there *are* divisions in the field that are effectively incommensurable. These divisions cut across the schools of thought in IR, but are effectively hidden from view by the focus on empirical assertions as a way of distinguishing between approaches to world politics. We will briefly⁸ discuss two: the divide between “scientific” and “critical” ways of producing knowledge, and the split between “economists” and “sociologists” on where to locate causal mechanisms that produce social outcomes.

Science and criticism

Robert Cox’s (1996) distinction between “problem-solving” and “critical” approaches to the study of world politics—and, implicitly, between two different kinds of knowledge about world politics that one might produce—represents something close to a genuinely paradigmatic division. Cox suggests that problem-solving approaches take the parameters of a particular problem as largely fixed and exogenous, and attempt to find a solution within those parameters; critical approaches question the parameters and historicize them, seeing both to understand how they came to be in the first place and to disclose latent tensions within them. These clearly represent different *attitudes*

⁸ All-too-briefly. What follows is horribly sketchy, for which we apologize.

towards the study of world politics, but they also represent very different *philosophical ontologies* underpinning divergent goals for inquiry. In this respect, problem-solving theory and critical theory are as different from one another as Newtonian physics is from quantum mechanics.

The basic difference underpinning critical and problem-solving theory involves the relationship between the observer and the world. Where problem-solving theory is *dualist*, and rests on an assumption that the world has a character external to the researchers that can be more or less straightforwardly grasped if certain defined (“scientific”) procedures are followed, critical theory is *monistic*, and rests on the assumption that the observer is always an active participant in the making of the world that she or he apprehends. This ontological division is linked to variations in epistemology and methodology. Problem-solving theory looks to “correspondence” – the correspondence between a statement and the world – as its standard of truth and proceeds in terms of efforts to falsify or refute statements en route to greater verisimilitude. Critical theory is more hermeneutic in orientation, seeking to make sense out of a situation by applying interpretive frameworks derived from historical and theoretical practice (or praxis) and doing so in full awareness of the fact that the resulting order revealed is largely a function of the framework applied. Problem-solving theory works within an already existing world; critical theory works to (re)produce or to challenge the boundaries of a world.

One irony of this position is that scientific realism, often upheld as a more “critical” approach to IR in virtue of its refusal to take surface-level manifestations of deeper structural forces as exhausting the potentials for action within a given context (Patomäki and Wight, 2000; Wendt, 1987), is just as much of a “problem-solving” approach as many of the theories that its advocates criticize. Digging “below the surface” to find some deeper reality does *not* represent a fundamentally different approach than, for example, neoliberal institutionalism’s disclosure of potentials for Pareto-improving bargaining solutions or in the neorealist criticism of states for ignoring emerging threats to their security. All three of these are “sciences” in the classical sense, resting their claims on the idea that their conclusions are more firmly based in the way that things really are (*independently* of any human observer) than alternative accounts. All work within given parameters in an effort to reach more or less determinate solutions, even though the precise *contents* of those parameters vary.⁹

Contrast these “sciences” with the interpretive stance of ethical scholars who base their account of extant social and political institutions on a purely normative understanding of how things *should* be, or with the “phronetic” (Flyvbjerg, 2001) social researcher who critically develops the categories utilized by her or his subjects in order to critique modes of practice. Or contrast the “sciences” to Cox’s own argument that the

⁹ Frankfurt School critical theory, ironically, also falls victim to this problem to the extent that it claims to be a “science.” But in the absence of this claim, its emancipatory project would simply be one (contextually-based) option among others, an outcome that more recent Frankfurt School scholars like Habermas are decidedly uncomfortable with inasmuch as it seems to embrace relativism Geuss, 1981. The other solution is to transmute the emancipation promised by this approach into a purely normative claim, an option not available to Habermasians and others (like Bhaskar) who reject the fact/value dichotomy as part of their critique of “positivism” (in the broadest possible sense).

categories used in a critical analysis are contingent and specific to the situation at hand, and represent no transcendent insights into the character of “reality,” or to the Weberian stance that conceptual analytical tools are ideal-typical oversimplifications of empirical situations according to the cultural values which the researcher is bringing to bear on the project (Weber, 1949). Or consider ethnographic and participant-observation techniques of generating knowledge of specific social situations (Geertz, 2000). All of these approaches have a conception of how to “do” empirical work that is radically different from that espoused by dualistic “sciences,” and all contain a different set of epistemological and methodological recommendations that center on *participating* in the situation under study in various ways.

These are radically different ways of proceeding, and as such merit the designation “paradigms.” The kind of world that is apprehendable through dualistic “scientific” techniques is quite literally a different world than that apprehendable through monistic interpretive techniques: each approach sees and appreciates things that the other cannot. Combining these two approaches into a single stance would involve doing immense violence to one or both of them; they can be complementary, but cannot be fused.

Note also that one can belong to any of the “schools” of contemporary IR theory while engaging in either of these practices. There are dualistic realists (Mearsheimer, Schweller, Wohlforth) as well as monistic/analytical ones (Waltz); problem-solving liberals (Keohane, Moravcsik) as well as critical ones (Latham); “scientific”

constructivists (Price, Reus-Smit, Wendt) as well as interpretive ones (Lynch, Guzzini, Neumann). This further demonstrates that the “schools” in IR aren’t paradigms, as members of the same school can vary so radically on these fundamental issues.

Economists and sociologists

Another division that merits the label “paradigmatic” is the distinction between “economists” and “sociologists.” Brian Barry (1970) used this distinction over three decades ago to discuss the broad division within the social sciences between those scholars who were studying individual choices and their effects on social order (the economists) and those scholars who were studying broader social patterns—social norms, in particular—and their impact. Barry suggested that the sociologists had been at least temporarily defeated by the economists, inasmuch as the sociologists hadn’t come up with a good response to charges of functionalism and oversocialization: lacking adequate microfoundations, the Parsonsian sociological project was folding before Olsonian notions of collective action, Downsian understandings of electoral democracy as involving not norms but individual rational interests, and revolutions in the study of cognition. But he did leave open the possibility of a sociological comeback in the future.

Barry’s distinction is a helpful one precisely because the issues at stake are often misunderstood in IR. The central problem is that the economist/sociologist divide is

often mis-characterized as a division between “rationalists” and “constructivists” (Fearon and Wendt, 2002; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner, 1998), as though the central issue involved the decision-making mechanism that individuals used in choosing between options—sometimes phrased as a “logic of consequences” versus a “logic of appropriateness” (March and Olsen, 1998: 953). There is not a small amount of irony here in the fact that *this is, in fact, an economist’s interpretation of the division* and not a sociologist’s interpretation.

The economic view of social reality depends first and foremost on the proposition that no explanation is complete until it has specified the individual-level processes that sustain broader social formations by providing incentives and parameters for individual decisions. This is more substantial than the proposition that individuals are the primary actors in social life, which could in principle be evaluated empirically given an adequate operationalization of the basic terms involved; rather, the position involves a specific admonition about how to do social analysis and what “counts” as a sufficient explanation. So for an economist, *of course* the division between economists and sociologists has to depend on some logic of individual decision-making, because that is part of the definition of what constitutes a good explanation.

But for a sociologist, it is not necessary to specify such individual-level incentives and processes. Instead, sociological theory is non-individualist, in that it does not begin with individual actors but with transactional flows out of which actors and the actions that are subsequently attributed to them emerge. Individual people are perhaps

methodological lenses through which these unowned, intersubjective processes can be glimpsed most effectively, but this is very different from the economist's individualistic point of view (Jackson, 2002). Again, the issues here are conceptual and methodological, involving the proper location of causal mechanisms in the construction of sufficient social explanations; economists demand individual-level decision-making logics while sociologists prefer to focus on intersubjective social mechanisms and their concatenation.

It is also striking that attempts to "bridge the rationalist-constructivist divide" (Checkel, 1997) begin by defining constructivism in economist's terms as a decision-making logic (a logic of appropriateness). There are accounts in IR that operate without individual-level decision-making logics—Waltz's account of the international system, world-systems accounts of the dynamics of global order, relational accounts of inequality and actor-hood—but no one tries to "bridge" the gap between these and rationalism because they cannot be easily recoded in economist's terms. Once again, actual paradigmatic divisions are obscured by the pervasive and misleading tendency to treat IR schools of thought as though they were really incommensurable.

An Alternative Formulation

If the real paradigmatic differences (and research programmes) intersect with the Anglo-American "isms" in IR, but do not map cleanly onto them, then how should we conceptualize the "isms"? We argue that the differences between realism, liberalism,

and constructivism are best understood as *wagers* rather than as incommensurable differences. Their disagreements are *provisional judgments* about two broad and significant issues in the study of world politics: the degree to which anarchy places fixed constraints upon actors, and the degree to which power can be transcended in political interactions (see Figure 1).

There is nothing novel about our identification of these two issues. As we have already seen, Schweller and Wohlforth consider specific answers to these questions to be among the core claims of realism. However, they are usually collapsed in practice, since structural realists (and many so-called “neo-classical realists”) consider anarchy to be the primary reason, or at least one of the major reasons, why power cannot be transcended in international politics. Disaggregating them helps make sense not only of the different wagers associated with, for instance, neorealism and neoliberalism, but also elucidates central disagreements within constructivism—between what we term “liberal-constructivists” and “realist-constructivists.”¹⁰ Moreover, it allows us to identify key “linking debates” across the “isms” and holds out the possibility that at least some of these debates can be empirically adjudicated.

¹⁰ J. Samuel Barkin (Barkin, 2003) has recently mounted a comprehensive argument for the existence of a “realist constructivism.” We prefer realist-constructivism for reasons outlined in our response to his article (Jackson and Nexon, forthcoming).

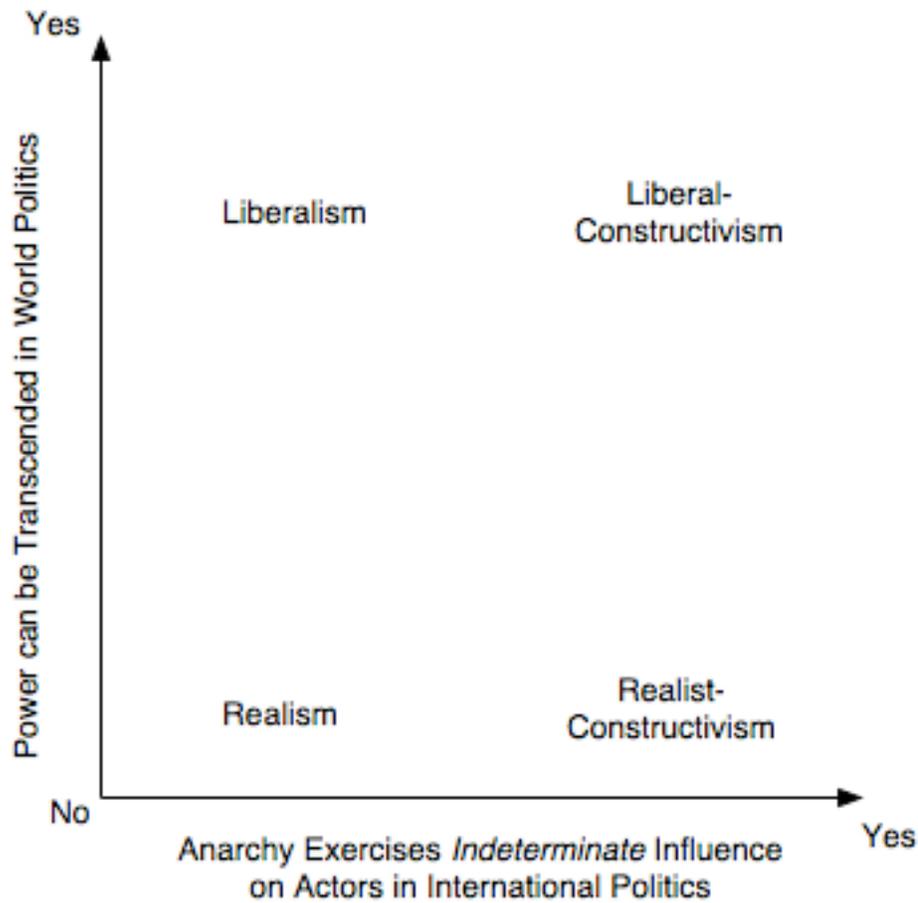


Figure 1: An Alternate Mapping of the Field

Anarchy as fixed constraint

The concept of anarchy—the absence of a common authority to make and enforce rules—has long been central to the discipline of IR. One can plausibly trace the development of “international theory” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to attempts to understand what differentiates relations between sovereigns from relations within states; one of the most enduring solutions has been to associate the former with

the “state of nature” that exists in the absence of a sovereign authority (Hobbes, 1951 [1651]; Locke, 1960; Tuck, 1999). Indeed, the assumption that anarchy leads to different forms of interaction than those found in other political contexts provides the central justification for IR as a distinctive discipline (Little, 1999; Schmidt, 1998).

The claim that anarchy is a fixed constraint on actors in international politics is most closely associated with realism (Schweller, 2001; Schweller and Wohlforth, 2000; J. Snyder, 2002; Walt, 1985). This position has been most forcefully articulated by Waltz, who argues that anarchy has a spare set of *determinate* consequences for patterns of relations in the international system: self-help, sensitivity to relative power, the lack of a robust division of labor between actors, and the formation of recurrent balancing equilibria (Waltz, 1979; Waltz, 1986; Waltz, 2000).

The major disagreements with contemporary realism hinge not on whether anarchy is a fixed constraint, but on precisely what the implications of anarchy are for state-level and systemic outcomes (Taliaferro, 2000/2001). Defensive realists argue that anarchy inclines states to privilege security over other considerations (Snyder, 1991; Walt, 1987), while offensive realists argue that anarchy inclines states to maximize power (Gilpin, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001; Schweller, 1996). Realists may also argue that domestic politics and state interests lead to greater variation in international outcomes than many structural realists do, but they agree that anarchy strongly conditions the range of state behavior (Krasner, 1999; Schweller, 1994; Schweller, 2001; Sterling-Folker, 2002b).

Adherents to one of the two main forms of contemporary liberalism, neoliberal institutionalism, also agree that anarchy is a fixed constraint with relatively determinate consequences for state interaction. However, they contend that the range of possible patterns of behavior under anarchy includes far more forms of cooperation than realists suppose, and that such cooperation is more durable than realists admit (Axelrod and Keohane, 1993; Baldwin, 1993: 4-5; Stein, 1993). Although we disagree with his restricted understanding of liberalism, Moravcsik nicely describes how neoliberalism shares common wagers with realism vis-à-vis anarchy: “institutionalism takes state preferences as fixed or exogenous, seeks to explain state policy as a function of variation in the geopolitical environment...and focuses on the ways in which anarchy leads to suboptimal outcomes” (Moravcsik, 1997: 536). This basic similarity between realist and neoliberal views of anarchy—that it carries with it a fixed set of deterministic consequences, although the parties to the debate differ about precisely what those determinate consequences are—makes possible discussion of a “neo-neo synthesis” in Anglo-American IR theory, particularly a synthesis that suggests that the differences between the implications of anarchy for behavior are situational and can be empirically specified (Powell, 1994).¹¹

Constructivists do not agree that anarchy is a fixed constraint with a spare set of determinative consequences. Constructivism, at its heart, is the claim that some

¹¹ The shared “economism” of neoliberal institutionalism and much of contemporary realism also makes this synthesis possible, since—as we discussed above—“economism” is a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense.

phenomenon “X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable” (Hacking, 1999: 6).¹² This has two implications. First, viewing anarchy as a social construct implies that it is more amenable to transformation by agents. It necessarily follows that, whatever logics one associates with anarchy, anarchy operates as less of a fixed constraint than it does in (neo)liberal and realist theory (Biersteker and Weber, 1996; Dessler, 1989; Hall, 1999; Hall and Kratochwil, 1993; Onuf, 1989).

Second, most IR theories involve some level of commitment to the proposition that international politics are socially constructed. Almost no theorist believes that international political outcomes are the inevitable consequence of the nature of things rather than subject to historical and agentic contingency (Guzzini, 2000). The naïve materialist belief that objective material conditions overdetermine all political outcomes and the strong sociobiological claim that the most significant parameters of international politics are determined by immutable characteristics of human nature have few adherents in IR.¹³ For most constructivists, anarchy actually *stands in* for natural necessity.

For example, Wendt (1999) argues that anarchy is an “empty structure” and that structural variations in the culture of anarchy – whether it is Hobbesian, Lockean, or

¹² Note that this definition of constructivism includes a wide variety of schools of IR, not simply “constructivism” proper. This point is important. Many post-structuralists and critical theorists reject the label “constructivism,” which they associate with “normal science” approaches to IR. We are more catholic, for reasons that should become abundantly clear in the next section.

¹³ But see the qualified variants offered by Sterling-Folker, 2002a; Thayer, 2000.

Kantian—are actually what determines the logics of anarchy (Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1996). Similarly, Ian Hurd (1999) argues that anarchy is sustained by normatively oriented behavior, and that shifts in the nature of international legitimacy can transform the ordering principle of world politics. The rejection of anarchy as a fixed and determinative constraint, autonomous from the language, discourse, norms, identities, or other practices of international actors, implicitly or explicitly cuts across all forms of constructivist scholarship, whether critical, post-structural, or mainstream (Debrix, 2003; Fierke, 2002; Fierke and Jørgensen, 2001; Goddard and Nexon, forthcoming; Katzenstein, 1996; Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996).

Power and its transcendence

The second “big question” in IR concerns the degree to which power can be transcended in world politics. The dispute about whether or not power can be overcome in international relations was the primary marker of the so-called “first debate,” and can be traced back *at least* to Machiavelli’s criticism of Christian ethical interpretations of political processes (Machiavelli, 1994).

The position of realists on this point is straightforward: power is the *ultima ratio* of international relations. Not only cannot it be transcended, but attempts to limit the importance of power and capabilities in world politics through law, institutions, or regimes may very well prove counterproductive to state interests and the goal of

generally peaceful interstate relations. To the extent that regimes, law, and institutions are controlling in international politics, that is because they are sustained and enforced by hegemony or a temporary confluence of interests among powerful states (Buzan, 1996; Gilpin, 1981; Guzzini, 1998; Krasner, 1999; Mearsheimer, 1993/1994; Schweller, 2001; Schweller and Wohlforth, 2000; Waltz, 1999).

Liberals, for their part, argue that it is possible to establish international cooperation, institutions, and regimes that limit the salience of power in world politics. Indeed, one of the core wagers of philosophical liberalism is that the *proper design* of governing institutions, whether domestically or internationally, can restrict arbitrary power such that actors are free to pursue their interests and values (Hobbes, 1951 [1651]; Johnston, 1994; Locke, 1960).

Neoliberalism can thus be understood as accepting the first wager of realist theory—that anarchy operates as a more-or-less fixed constraint—but rejecting the second wager: that anarchy makes power impossible to transcend. Neoliberals argue that, given the right distributions of interests and strategies, anarchy does not preclude the formation of rule-based institutions and regimes. No neoliberal contends that power can be completely transcended in world politics, but most argue, at least implicitly, that the salience of power can be reduced in certain issue areas despite, or because of, the parametric conditions imposed by anarchy on state behavior (Baldwin, 1993; Keohane, 1982; Keohane, 1984; Keohane, 1989; Keohane, 2001; Keohane, 2002; Martin, 1993; Stein, 1993).

As we have argued, constructivists share, to some significant degree, the wager that anarchy is not a fixed, deterministic constraint on actors in international politics. However, they disagree about the degree to which power can be transcended in international politics. For liberal-constructivists, the diffusion of the right norms and identities can orient states away from power-political concerns (Checkel, 1998; Checkel, 1999; Flynn and Farrell, 1999; Tannenwald, 1999). Some stress the ability of principled transnational movements and interest groups to produce normative environments that privilege values over power (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), while others study the emergence of “security communities” within which power and the threat of force are less salient considerations for decision makers (Adler and Barnett, 1998). The recent turn towards Jürgen Habermas’ (1984) notion of communicative rationality epitomizes the liberal-constructivist impulse; some liberal-constructivists argue that, to the degree that contextual factors (such as institutional design) approximate Habermas’ “ideal speech condition,” then power can be displaced from interactions in world politics (Risse, 2000).

Indeed, the constructivist turn in IR has been closely associated with liberalism, whether in the form of Onuf’s (1989) emphasis on how agents make rules in order to govern themselves, or Adler’s (1997) arguments about how “cognitive evolution” can produce a more just and equitable world order, or in Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) discussion of how transnational social movements can “civilize” world politics by enforcing human rights norms against recalcitrant state leaders. Indeed, in an early

programmatically, Wendt (1992) called for an alliance between “strong liberals” and constructivists on the precise grounds of their shared rejection of the realist argument that self-help behavior was inevitable. Other-regarding behavior—which Wendt (Wendt, 1999: 359-360) later characterizes as “self-restraint”—can pave the way for a different way of behaving in inter-state relations, effectively transcending power and coercion in favor of something more cooperative. But this affinity between liberalism and constructivism is, we suggest, more a matter of historical contingency than it is the consequence of any kind of controlling paradigmatic assumptions embedded within constructivism. There could easily be another kind of constructivism, one that shares the general constructionist emphasis on contingency without accepting the notion that power and coercion could be in effect constructed out of world politics; indeed, many of the foundational authors of IR constructivism (among them Onuf, Kratochwil, and Ruggie) would arguably not agree with the liberal-constructivist stance on this issue.¹⁴

Sociological liberalism

Why has IR constructivism developed as, in effect, a form of sociological liberalism? Andrew Abbott’s (2001) observations on the unfolding of disciplinary debates seem to us to provide part of the answer, particularly in his disclosure of a

¹⁴ If time permitted, it would be possible to support this point with numerous illustrative quotations. But for the time being we will simply assert this, hoping to provide textual support in a later revision.

tendency for disciplinary debates to “fractalize” over time—after a major split is articulated intellectual life, subsequent debates *within* the camps formed in the initial split tend to repeat the same division on a smaller scale. This is the case, for example, with discussion about generalizing “science” versus particularizing “history”; while the initial split in the early part of the 20th century produced the academic disciplines of sociology/political science and history respectively, subsequent debates *within* each of these disciplines produced a kind of historical social science as well as a form of scientific history. The point is that no academic debate is ever fully settled, and the distinctions that animated one generation often recur within the next generation of scholars—albeit in a more localized manner.¹⁵ While this raises problems for efforts to evaluate “progress” in Lakatosian terms, we believe that it presents a more accurate picture of how our discipline actually operates.

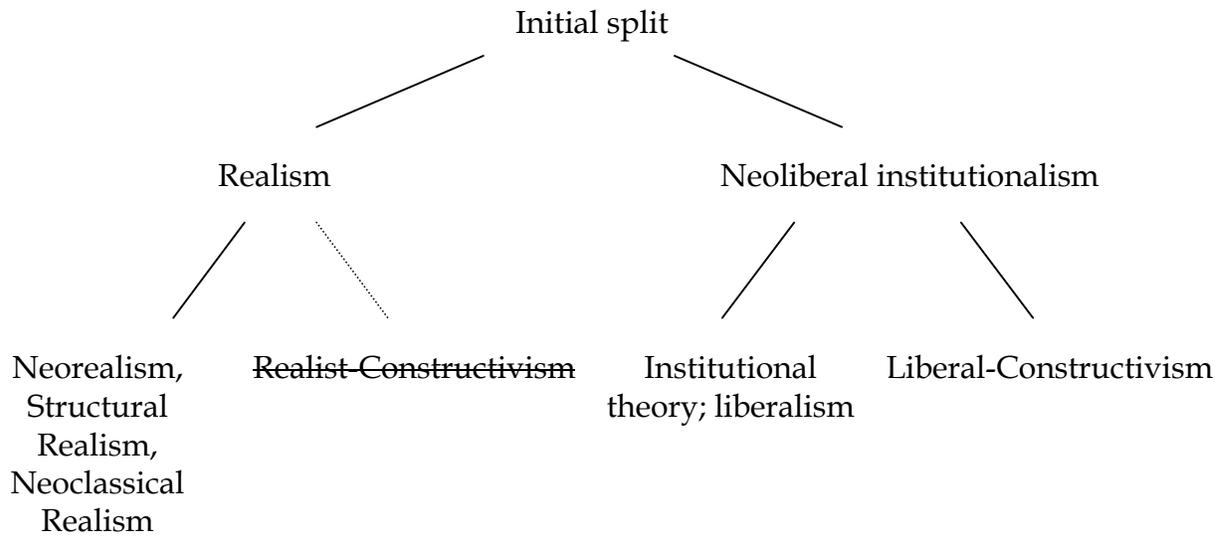
If we take the realist-liberal split to revolve fundamentally around the question of whether power can be transcended in world politics, we can identify at least two¹⁶ manifestations of this distinction. The first is the articulation of a transnational liberalism in the 1970s in opposition to realist notions about the supremacy of power politics and the ultimate irrelevance of international institutions in the absence of great power backing. This produced two camps: realists who continued to emphasize

¹⁵ “Social Science History,” which emerged out of debates within the social sciences, is still more “scientific” in its aspirations and procedures than “scientific history,” as the latter emerged from debates within history proper. The distinctions that recur at each level of the hierarchy are similar rather than identical—hence Abbott’s (correct) use of the term “fractalization.”

¹⁶ And possibly more, depending on how one reads the “realist-idealist debate” of the inter-war period. We set this question aside to focus on the more recent articulations.

polarity and the balance of power, and neoliberal institutionalists who pointed to the ways that international organizations made other forms of inter-state relations possible. But then the debate about the transcendence of power recurred within the neoliberal camp, producing in effect a kind of neoliberalism that was even more optimistic about transcending power than the initial neoliberals had been: liberal-constructivism. In comparison to liberal-constructivism, liberal institutional theory seems highly focused on the constraints of power and interest—although in comparison to realism, both branches of neoliberalism are more about transcending power through institutional design.

Graphically, this fractalization looks like this:



We have crossed out “realist-constructivism” to indicate the striking fact that the debate that took place within neoliberalism has not, until very recently, taken place within realism; the discussions of offensive vs. defensive realism and neoclassical realism vs. neorealism have all taken place on the left-hand branch of the fractal tree. Scholars inclined to utilize social constructionist insights have generally begun by criticizing the supposed materialism of IR realism, and have thus ended up on the right-hand branch of the fractal tree to begin with.¹⁷ In addition, the wider context of IR theoretical debates has generally been American, meaning among other things that the liberal assumptions strongly encoded into American political culture {Dienstag, 1996 #722} have been implicated in these discussions. In effect, the default position is to

¹⁷ See Ashley, 1986 and Ruggie, 1986 for early attempts to move in this direction.

move towards the right-hand side of the diagram: it is easier to be a liberal in America than it is to be a realist, and easier to argue that right reason can transcend power than it is to argue that power will always infect and subvert noble liberal intentions (Shimko, 1992). The classical realists—Carr, Morgenthau, Kennan, Niebuhr—understood this very well about American political culture, and self-consciously devoted themselves to trying to place limits on the liberal optimism of their readers and students. Inasmuch as realists spoke of naturalistic constraints as a way to shore up those limits, social constructionist insights appeared to have a natural affinity with liberalism—hence the virtual absence of a debate within realism about these matters.

If we rethink realism slightly, so that it is less concerned with “materialism” and more concerned with the limits of rational action broadly understood, we can perhaps begin to see the contours of what a realist-constructivist alternative would look like. Realist-constructivists would share with other realists a deep skepticism about the prospects for “civilizing” world politics or for transforming it in a more normatively “rational” direction.¹⁸ But they would root this skepticism not in externally existing material constraints on social action, but rather in features endogenous to social action itself: the plurivocality of meaning, the inherently creative character of action, and the relational character of the power that inheres in *all* social relations. As a result, “stability” in social life is a problem to be addressed, not an assumption to be

¹⁸ Max Weber, himself more of a “realist” about world politics and about politics in general, famously argued that there were as many forms of rationalization as there were starting-points from which to rationalize; hence there could be no objectively “best” way to rationalize *any* political practice, let alone an entire *domain* of practice like inter-state relations.

maintained (Jackson and Nexon, 1999); the stability of identities and interests on which neoliberal approaches to world order are founded cannot be presumed, but has to be explained as the consequence of power-laden social action. Realist-constructivists differ from classical realists in that they do not root this relational and processual flux in some defect of human nature, and from contemporary neorealists in that they do not root it in the continual competition to survive under conditions of anarchy (Sterling-Folker, 2002a), but they agree with both of these camps in their skepticism about liberal reform projects.¹⁹

Conclusion: Debates About Wagers vs. Paradigmatic Clashes

Our proposed re-visioning of the field, which does not rely on what we have argued are dubious applications of Kuhn and Lakatos, is in our view a more philosophically consistent way to discuss schools of thought in IR. But beyond this meta-theoretical criterion, we also feel that our re-visioning has another important feature to recommend it: namely, that it envisions room for actual empirical debate between schools instead of the restatement of presumptively “hard core” assumptions bolstered by somewhat selective readings of the available evidence characteristic of an “inter-paradigm debate.” Commentators from Hirschman (1970) to Lapid (2003) have argued that a rush to firm up putatively “paradigmatic” boundaries can easily be a

¹⁹ Time does not permit us to flesh out the contours of this realist-constructivism in more detail here, but see Jackson and Nexon, forthcoming.

detriment to dialogue and discussion of all kinds; Wæaver (1996: 171-172) even notes the similarity between visions of IR as a field characterized by multiple incommensurable paradigms and 19th century romanticism, in which dialogue is replaced by efforts to shore up putatively “closed cultures.”

While Wendt’s “via media” (Wendt, 2000) promises a way out of this mutual stand-off, it does so largely by imposing a scientific realist ontology on all practitioners of IR. But as we argued above, scientific realism and the ontological dualism on which it is based *is* a genuinely paradigmatic issue. Hence Wendt’s “via media” replicates elements of the “paradigmatic” approach to the field, although it tries to fit the field into a single paradigm in order to promote debate between schools. But in order for Wendt’s approach to work, all practitioners still have to accept the ontological notions of scientific realism, a task that we feel will be more difficult than Wendt suggests *precisely because* doing so involves genuinely paradigmatic issues about the relationship between thought and world and the nature of our knowledge of the social.²⁰ Where Wendt wants to put these differences to rest by articulating a minimum common ground on which all practitioners can agree, we suggest that a better way to promote dialogue and debate on empirical grounds is simply to side-step issues of fundamental ontology altogether in favor of a renewed focus on substantive concerns.

²⁰ The critical and poststructural reaction to Wendt’s project (cites) seem to indicate that the scientific realist assumptions that Wendt advocates may not be as acceptable to all parties as he might think that they should be. By contrast, post-structural and critical scholars should be able to locate their work on our chart more easily, as no strong ontological and epistemological commitments are required in any quadrant. (We suspect that much post-structural work belongs in the realist-constructivist quadrant, and much critical-theoretical and ethical work belongs in the liberal-constructivist quadrant, but this is only a suggestion.)

We do not believe that any strongly shared agreement on fundamental ontological and epistemological issues is required for IR scholars to engage in debates along the two axes that we have identified: whether power can be transcended in world politics, and whether anarchy has determinate consequences for the behavior of actors in world politics. Indeed, disagreements about ontology and epistemology can probably be more usefully addressed in the course of debates about these issues than they can be addressed in the abstract. After all, IR scholars are not philosophers by training, and philosophers wrestling with these questions in relatively abstract ways have yet to reach consensus; what makes *us* think that we will do any better? Instead, we should be considerably more pragmatic about things, and recognize the ideal-typical character of *any* of our philosophical assumptions: they are deliberate oversimplifications of a complex world for the purpose of explaining particular things, and should be evaluated as means towards that end—and not as ends in themselves (Weber, 1949: 79-80). We will only be able to do so as a field if we all devote our efforts to *using* our conceptual tools to explain empirical phenomena, and refrain from trying to build incommensurable fortresses around our preferred points of view.

Our re-visioning of the field emphasizes issues that both divide and unite particular scholars and particular pieces of scholarship. From our Figure 1 we can easily identify four avenues of debate: between realists and liberals on the consequences of anarchy for rational institutional design; between liberals and liberal-constructivists on the extent to which interests are exogenous to social process; between liberal-

constructivists and realist-constructivists on the limits to progress through social construction; and between realists and realist-constructivists on whether constraints on rationality are exogenous or endogenous to political and social action. Along each of these avenues, alliances can be formed with camps not directly implicated in the debate in question: realists can call on realist-constructivist scholarship to aid them against liberals, while liberal-constructivists can call on liberal scholarship to help them press their case against realist-constructivists. Coalitions are thus fluid and contingent under our conception of the field, and lively debates will turn on empirical matters rather than getting stuck in the philosophical ether.

Will there be “progress”? Will these divisions be transcended in favor of some new synthetic theory of world politics? Our approach at least leaves the possibility of such a synthesis open in a way that the “paradigmatic” approach does not. By focusing on what divides extant IR scholarship in a way that leaves those divisions open for further empirical exploration, we explicitly preserve the idea that those divisions are contingent and are amenable to change in the future as more empirical research is done. By focusing on extant divisions instead of on overarching extant similarities, we promote debate about all manner of analytical issues rather than foreclosing it—and also give that debate an empirical focus. Against those who would try to “discipline the discipline” by enforcing widespread agreement on ontological, epistemological, or methodological matters *in advance* of empirically-grounded debates, we advocate putting all of these issues into play in the course of debates and discussions centered

around issues of substance. Thus, pragmatically, we can further the task of the social sciences: to promote critical reflection on the assumptions with which actually existing society is imbued.

References

- Abbott, A. (2001) *Chaos of Disciplines*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Adler, E. (1997) Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics. *European Journal of International Relations* 3:319-63.
- Adler, E., and M. Barnett. (1998) "A Framework for the Study of Security Communities." In *Security Communities*, edited by E. Adler and M. Barnett, pp. 29-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alexander, J. (1988) *Action and its Environments*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Alexander, J. (1998) *Neofunctionalism and After*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Archer, M. (1988) *Culture and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ashley, R. (1986) "The Poverty of Neorealism." In *Neorealism and its Critics*, edited by R. O. Keohane, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Axelrod, R., and R. O. Keohane. (1993) "Achieving Cooperation Under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions." In *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, edited by D. A. Baldwin, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Baldwin, D. A. (1993) "Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics." In *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, edited by D. A. Baldwin, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Barkin, J. S. (2003) Realist Constructivism. *International Studies Review* 5:325-342.
- Barry, B. (1970) *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy*. London: Collier-Macmillan.
- Biersteker, T., and C. Weber, eds. (1996) *State Sovereignty as Social Construct*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., and L. J. Wacquant. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Buzan, B. (1996) "The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?" In *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, edited by S. Smith, K. Booth and Z. Marvsia, pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Carlsnaes, W. (1992) The Agent-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis. *International Studies Quarterly* 36:245-270.

- Checkel, J. T. (1997) International Norms and Domestic Politics: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide. *European Journal of International Relations* 3:473-95.
- Checkel, J. T. (1998) The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory. *World Politics* 50:324-48.
- Checkel, J. T. (1999) Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe. *International Studies Quarterly* 43:83-114.
- Chernoff, F. (1998) Positional Versus Transformational Theory in International Relations: Lessons from the Philosophy of Science? In *International Studies Association*. Minneapolis, MN.
- Chernoff, F. (2002) Scientific Realism as a Meta-Theory of International Politics. *International Studies Quarterly* 46:189-207.
- Cox, R. (1996) "Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." In *Approaches to World Order*, pp. 85-123. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Debrix, F., ed. (2003) *Language, Agency, and Politics in a Constructed World, International Relations in a Constructed World*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Dessler, D. (1989) What's at Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate. *International Organization* 43:441-73.
- Dessler, D. (2003) "Explanation and Scientific Progress." In *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 381-404. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Doty, R. L. (1999) A Reply to Colin Wight. *European Journal of International Relations* 5:387-390.
- Elman, C., and M. F. Elman. (1997) Lakatos and Neorealism: A Reply to Vasquez. *American Political Science Review* 91:923-926.
- Elman, C., and M. F. Elman. (2003) "Lessons from Lakatos." In *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 21-68. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fearon, J., and A. Wendt. (2002) "Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View." In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse and B. A. Simmons, pp. 52-72. London: Sage.
- Fierke, K. M. (2002) Links Across the Abyss: Language and Logic in International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly* 46:331-354.
- Fierke, K. M., and K. E. Jørgensen, eds. (2001) *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation, International Relations in a Constructed World*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Flynn, G., and H. Farrell. (1999) Piecing Together the Democratic Peace: The CSCE, Norms and the Construction of Security in Post-Cold War Europe. *International Organization* 53:505-536.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001) *Making Social Science Matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality, Volume One*. Translated by R. Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- Geertz, C. (2000) *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. third ed. New York: Basic Books.
- Geuss, R. (1981) *The Idea of a Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Gilpin, R. (1981) *War and Change in World Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Goddard, S., and D. H. Nexon. (forthcoming) Paradigm Lost? Reassessing *Theory of International Politics*. *European Journal of International Relations*.
- Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith. New York: International Publishers.
- Grieco, J. (1993) "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism." In *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, edited by D. A. Baldwin, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Guzzini, S. (1998) *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold*. New York: Routledge.
- Guzzini, S. (2000) A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations* 6:147-182.
- Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Translated by T. McCarthy. II vols. Vol. I. Boston, MA: Beacon.
- Hacking, I. (1999) *The Social Construction of What?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hall, R. B. (1999) *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hall, R. B., and F. Kratochwil. (1993) Medieval Tales: Neorealist 'Science' and the Abuse of History. *International Organization* 47:479-91.
- Hirschman, A. (1970) The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding. *World Politics* 22:329-43.
- Hobbes, T. (1951 [1651]) *Leviathan*. New York: Penguin.
- Hurd, I. (1999) Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics. *International Organization* 53:379-408.
- Jackson, P., and D. Nexon. (2001) Whence Causal Mechanisms? A Comment on Legro. *Dialogue-IO* 1:1-21.
- Jackson, P., and D. Nexon. (forthcoming) Realist Constructivism or Constructivist Realism? *International Studies Review*.
- Jackson, P. T. (2002) Rethinking Weber: Toward a Non-Individualist Sociology of World Politics. *International Review of Sociology* 12:439-68.

- Jackson, P. T., and D. H. Nexon. (1999) Relations Before States: Substance, Process, and the Study of World Politics. *European Journal of International Relations* 5:291-332.
- Johnston, D. (1994) *The Idea of a Liberal Theory: A Critique and Reconstruction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kahler, M. (1998) Rationality in International Relations. *International Organization* 52:919-941.
- Katzenstein, P., R. O. Keohane, and S. D. Krasner. (1998) International Organization and the Study of World Politics. *International Organization* 52:645-685.
- Katzenstein, P. J., ed. (1996) *The Culture of National Security*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Keck, M., and K. Sikkink. (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Keohane, R. O. (1982) "The Demand for International Regimes." In *International Regimes*, edited by S. D. Krasner, pp. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Keohane, R. O. (1984) *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Keohane, R. O. (1989) *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Keohane, R. O. (2001) Governance in a Partially Globalized World. *American Political Science Review* 91:1-14.
- Keohane, R. O. *The Globalization of Informal Violence, Theories of World Politics, and the 'Liberalism of Fear'* 2002 [cited April. Available from http://mitpress.mit.edu/journals/INOR/Dialogue_IO/keohane.pdf.
- Keohane, R. O., and L. L. Martin. (2003) "Institutional Theory as a Research Program." In *Progress in International Relations Theory*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 71-107. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Krasner, S. D. (1999) *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1970a) "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?" In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, pp. 1-23. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (1970b) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakatos, I. (1978a) "History of Science and Its Rational Reconstructions." In *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, edited by J. Worrall and G. Currie, pp. 102-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakatos, I. (1978b) "The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, pp. 91-196. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lapid, J., and F. Kratochwil, eds. (1996) *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

- Lapid, Y. (2003) Through Dialogue to Engaged Pluralism: The Unfinished Business of the Third Debate. *International Studies Review* 5:128-131.
- Legro, J. W., and A. Moravcsik. (1999) Is Anybody Still a Realist? *International Security* 24:5-55.
- Little, R. (1999) Historiography and International Relations. *Review of International Studies* 25:291-300.
- Locke, J. (1960) *Two Treatises of Government*. Edited by P. Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Machiavelli, N. (1994) *Selected Political Writings*. Translated by D. Wooton. Cambridge: Hackett.
- March, J. G., and J. P. Olsen. (1998) The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders. *International Organization* 52:943-969.
- Martin, L. L. (1993) "The Rational State Choice of Multilateralism." In *Multilateralism Matters*, edited by J. G. Ruggie, pp. 91-124. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. (1993/1994) False Promise of International Institutions. *International Security* 19:5-49.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Moravcsik, A. (1997) Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics. *International Organization* 51:513-554.
- Moravcsik, A. (2003) "Liberal International Relations Theory: A Scientific Assessment." In *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 159-204. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Narziny, K. (2003) The Political Economy of Alignment: Great Britain's Commitments to Europe, 1905-1939. *International Security* 27:184-219.
- Nietzsche, F. (1967) *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by W. Kaufmann. New York: Random House.
- Onuf, N. (1989) *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Parsons, T. (1949) *The Structure of Social Action*. Vol. I. New York: Free Press.
- Parsons, T. (1951) *The Social System*. New York: Free Press.
- Patomäki, H. (1996) How to Tell Better Stories About World Politics. *European Journal of International Relations* 2:105-33.
- Patomäki, H., and C. Wight. (2000) After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism. *International Studies Quarterly* 44:213-37.
- Popper, K. (1970) "Normal Science and its Dangers." In *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, edited by I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, pp. 51-58. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Popper, K. (1979) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Revised ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Powell, R. (1994) Anarchy in IR Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate. *International Organization* 48:313-44.

- Ray, J. L. (2003) "A Lakatosian View of the Democratic Peace Research Program." In *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 205-243. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ringer, F. (1997) *Max Weber's Methodology: The Unification of the Cultural and Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Risse, T. (2000) "Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics. *International Organization* **54**:1-39.
- Ruggie, J. G. (1986) "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis." In *Neorealism and its Critics*, edited by R. O. Keohane, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schmidt, B. C. (1998) *The Political Discourse of Anarchy: A Disciplinary History*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Schweller, R. L. (1994) Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In. *International Security* **19**:72-107.
- Schweller, R. L. (1996) Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma? *Security Studies* **5**:90-121.
- Schweller, R. L. (2001) The Problem of International Order Revisited: A Review Essay. *International Security* **26**:161-186.
- Schweller, R. L., and W. C. Wohlforth. (2000) Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War. *Security Studies* **9**:60-107.
- Sending, O. J. (2002) Constitution, Choice and Change: Problems with the 'Logic of Appropriateness' and its Use in Constructivist Theory. *European Journal of International Relations* **8**:443-470.
- Shimko, K. (1992) Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism. *Review of Politics* **54**:281-301.
- Snyder, G. H. (2002) Mearsheimer's World -- Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security. *International Security* **27**:149-173.
- Snyder, J. (1991) *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Snyder, J. (2002) Anarchy and Culture: Insights from the Anthropology of War. *International Organization* **56**:7-45.
- Stein, A. (1993) "Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World." In *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, edited by D. A. Baldwin, pp. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sterling-Folker, J. (2002a) Realism and the Constructivist Challenge: Rejecting, Reconstructing, or Rereading. *International Studies Review* **4**:73-97.
- Sterling-Folker, J. (2002b) *Theories of International Cooperation and the Primacy of Anarchy: Explaining U.S. International Monetary Policy-Making After Bretton Woods*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Taliaferro, J. W. (2000/2001) Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited. *International Security* **25**:128-161.
- Tannenwald, N. (1999) The Nuclear Taboo. *International Organization* **53**:433-468.

- Thayer, B. (2000) Bringing in Darwin: Evolutionary Theory, Realism, and International Politics. *International Security* **25**:124-151.
- Tuck, R. (1999) *The Rights of War and Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vasquez, J. (1997) The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition. *American Political Science Review* **91**:899-912.
- Vasquez, J. (2003) "Kuhn versus Lakatos? The Case for Multiple Frames in Appraising International Relations Theory." In *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field*, edited by C. Elman and M. F. Elman, pp. 419-454. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wæver, O. (1996) "The Rise and Fall of the Inter-Paradigm Debate." In *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, edited by S. Smith, K. Booth and M. Zalewski, pp. 149-185. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wæver, O. (1998) The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations. *International Organization* **52**:687-727.
- Walt, S. M. (1985) Alliance Formation and the Balance of Power. *International Security* **9**:2-43.
- Walt, S. M. (1987) *The Origins of Alliances*, *Cornell Studies in Security Affairs*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Walt, S. M. (1998) International Relations: One World, Many Theories. *Foreign Policy*:29-45.
- Waltz, K. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Waltz, K. (1986) "Reflections on Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics." In *Neorealism and Its Critics*, edited by R. O. Keohane, pp. 322-346. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Waltz, K. (1999) Globalization and Governance. *PS: Political Science and Politics* **32**:693-700.
- Waltz, K. (2000) Structural Realism after the Cold War. *International Security* **25**:5-41.
- Weber, M. (1949) "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy." In *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, edited by E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch, pp. 49-112. New York: The Free Press.
- Weldes, J., M. Laffey, and R. Duvall, eds. (1999) *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wendt, A. E. (1987) The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory. *International Organization* **41**:335-70.
- Wendt, A. E. (1992) Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics. *International Organization* **46**:391-425.
- Wendt, A. E. (1996) "Identity and Structural Change in International Politics." In *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, edited by Y. Lapid and F. Kratochwil, pp. 47-64. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

- Wendt, A. E. (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wendt, A. E. (2000) On the Via Media: a response to the critics. *Review of International Studies* **26**:165-80.
- White, H. C. (1992) *Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Wight, C. (1999) They Shoot Dead Horses Don't They? Locating Agency in the Agent-Structure Problematique. *European Journal of International Relations* **5**:109-142.
- Wight, C. (2000) Interpretation All the Way Down? A Reply to Roxanne Lynn Doty. *European Journal of International Relations* **6**:423-430.