

THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler

Theories of International Relations

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

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

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Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Note on the text</i>	xii
Theory in International Relations	1
MANUELA SPINDLER AND SIEGFRIED SCHIEDER	
Realism	22
ANDREAS JACOBS	
Neorealism	37
NIKLAS SCHÖRNIG	
Interdependence	56
MANUELA SPINDLER	
Regime theory	76
BERNHARD ZANGL	
Neofunctionalism	90
THOMAS CONZELMANN	
New liberalism	107
SIEGFRIED SCHIEDER	
Liberal approaches to the “democratic peace”	130
ANDREAS HASENCLEVER	
The English School	147
CHRISTOPHER DAASE	
World society and globalization	163
INGO TAKE	

vi *Contents*

The theory of imperialism	179
MICHAEL HEINRICH	
World-system theory	198
ANDREAS NÖLKE	
Neo-Gramscian perspectives	214
ANDREAS BIELER AND ADAM DAVID MORTON	
International Political Economy	231
HANS-JÜRGEN BIELING	
Social constructivism	248
CORNELIA ULBERT	
Critical theory	269
CHRISTOPH HUMRICH	
Postmodern approaches	287
THOMAS DIEZ	
Feminist approaches	304
BARBARA FINKE	
Critical geopolitics	321
MATHIAS ALBERT, PAUL REUBER AND GÜNTER WOLKERSDORFER	
<i>Index</i>	337

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Preface

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

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

Siegfried Schieder and Manuela Spindler
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Theory in International Relations

Manuela Spindler and Siegfried Schieder

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 The notion of theory in International Relations

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

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

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

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

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

2.1 Three dimensions of theory: ontology, epistemology and normativity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 *The latest twists and turns in IR theory*

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 The educational concept of the present volume

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

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

3.1 Learning objectives

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

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

3.2 The educational concept informing the chapters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Notes

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

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

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

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

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

Journal of Peace Research
Millennium
Review of International Political Economy
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World Politics
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New liberalism

Siegfried Schieder

1 Introduction

By the 1990s at the latest, a renaissance of liberalism had occurred within the theories of International Relations (IR).¹ The new vigour of the liberal approaches that developed in the context of East–West détente and the rise of peace research in the 1970s (see Czempiel 1972) is closely bound up with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Like no other series of events, the global political upheaval of 1989/90 allowed us to see into the social depths of international politics and confirmed the validity of liberal analyses of international politics (Doyle 1994). In empirical terms, the optimistic vision of a democratic global order – still cherished by many in the early 1990s – collided with countervailing trends: ethno-national conflicts, regional power struggles and the fight against international terrorism. This prompted a number of observers to refer retrospectively to a “liberal moment” (Latham 1997) with respect to the 1990s. From a historical perspective, however, despite the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is beyond dispute that the global political caesura of 1989/90 advanced the domestication and sociation of foreign policy and international politics, allowing us a clearer view of the true, determinative subject of international politics: society.²

But the renaissance of liberal approaches, which long traded under the names of “moralism”, “idealism” or “utopianism” and seemed discredited due to their optimistic faith in progress (Moravcsik 1997: 514) is by no means merely a reflection of real-world historical developments. It is linked above all with a growing dissatisfaction with systemic approaches (see Sterling-Folker 1997).³ Realism’s inability to predict the end of the East–West conflict is an example of this (see the chapter by Niklas Schörnig in this volume). Researchers were increasingly dubious about the fundamental realist assumption that states determine international relations. Key exponents of liberalism such as Ernst-Otto Czempiel, Bruce Russett, Michael Doyle, Robert D. Putnam, Thomas Risse and, not least, Andrew Moravcsik take the view that state action derives from societal structures and interests. As they see it, we must move away from the idea of states as coherent and central actors in the international order and replace it with a historically contingent and dynamic view of world politics (Zacher and Matthew 1995: 118).

Despite these commonalities, the notion of “liberal theories” of international relations is anything but uncontested. We need only look at the range of terms used in the literature to see this: “second image approach” (Waltz 1959; Gourevitch 1978, 2002), “domestic theories of international politics” (Putnam 1988), “theories of ‘state–society relations’ ” (Moravcsik 1993a: 6) or simply “pluralism” (Viotti and Kauppi 2009) – to name but a few. Ultimately, the emphasis on the term “liberal” has taken hold because it was originally

thinkers in the tradition of the European Enlightenment and liberal political theory who thought it possible for international politics to become civilized and for society to progress (Zacher and Matthew 1995: 111–117). If we take parsimony (with respect to basic theoretical assumptions) and distinctiveness (when comparing these basic assumptions with competing theoretical paradigms) as broadly accepted positivist criteria for persuasive theory building, however, then the old liberalism in IR was long deficient.⁴ This has to do, first, with the fact that theorists sharing the same basically liberal stance generated relatively isolated and unsystematic theoretical building blocks. Liberals such as Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Giuseppe Mazzini, John Hobson and Woodrow Wilson, made important inferences in light of their philosophical and political assumptions about the connection between the internal character of the state and its behaviour in the world; and liberal theory within IR explicitly built on these inferences (see Richardson 2001). But they did not manage to bring their insights together to create a coherent theoretical edifice that might have served as the foundation for a cumulative intellectual programme (see Lakatos 1970).⁵ To an even greater extent than realism, because of its rich historical legacy liberalism was long a rather shapeless entity (see Doyle 1986: 1152; Moravcsik 1997: 514–515; Zacher and Matthew 1995: 107). We can identify a number of different strands of liberalism in line with how key influences on states' foreign policies are conceptualized: *republican liberalism* (democratic states behave more peacefully and cooperatively towards the rest of the world than nondemocratic states), *pluralist liberalism* (a balanced distribution of power and negligible struggles over distribution between social groups promote cooperative conduct towards the rest of the world), *sociological liberalism* (transnational relations promote cooperative behaviour by states) and *free-trade liberalism* (open trade relations and interdependence promote cooperation)⁶ – to mention just the most important (Zacher and Matthew 1995: 120–137; Burchill 2009: 57–85).

In addition to its amorphousness, the liberal school was also burdened by a prescriptive view of action. Liberal theory in the tradition of idealism was not content to describe the phenomena of international politics but always attempted to identify ways of changing existing relations of power and domination within societies. This liberalism, then, was always partly concerned to produce social analysis and criticism (Krell 2009: 175–225). The very ambivalence of empirical description and political ideology prevented the development of an analytical approach to the description and explanation of international relations on the basis of key liberal assumptions. We have political scientist Andrew Moravcsik, currently teaching at the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University, to thank for remedying this shortcoming by formulating a “liberal international relations theory in a nonideological and non-utopian form appropriate to empirical social science”, thus advancing the systematization of liberal theory (Moravcsik 1997: 513). Moravcsik both narrows and expands the liberal theoretical tradition. He narrows it by reducing liberalism to “a minimalist classical liberalism” (Long 1995: 499). At the same time he expands the liberal tradition by presenting a more open and less teleological perspective on progress. The present volume aims to examine IR theory scientifically. Moravcsik has probably done more than anyone else to consistently develop a verifiable liberal theory in IR (see Moravcsik 1991, 1992, 1997, 2003b, 2008) as well as formulating and testing his own approach to (regional) European integration on the basis of this theory in the shape of liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1993b, 1988; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009). He therefore serves as my reference theorist in the discussion of new liberalism that follows.

2 The “positive turn” in the liberal theory of International Relations: Andrew Moravcsik

The roots of liberal theory in IR are to be found in the neofunctionalism of Ernst B. Haas, the bureaucracy model of Graham T. Allison, the transnationalism of Joseph S. Nye and Robert O. Keohane and early studies by James N. Rosenau (see Katzenstein *et al.* 1998: 658ff.). All of them work with a pluralist, “bottom-up” conception of politics. European scholars of foreign policy such as Czempel (1979, 1981), and studies on the mutual influence exercised by states, societal structures and social actors on foreign policy behaviour (e.g. Katzenstein 1976) drew on this theoretical tradition, which was also taken up by younger authors such as Evangelista (1995), Risse-Kappen (1991, 1995a) and recently Narizny (2003a, 2003b, 2007) (for an overview, see Dunn 2010). Since the 1990s, Moravcsik has been primarily responsible for putting liberalism back on the agenda of International Relations.⁷

Based on a positivist conception of knowledge and through critical reflection on systemic approaches, Moravcsik developed a liberal theory fundamentally different from neorealism and institutionalism: “For liberals, the configuration of state preferences matters most in world politics – not, as realists argue, the configuration of capabilities and not, as institutionalists . . . maintain, the configuration of information and institutions” (Moravcsik 1997: 513, see also 2003b: 170; 2008: 234). Through his preference-oriented liberal theory, Moravcsik self-consciously lays claim to the status of a verifiable general theory akin to the other prominent theoretical schools of IR. As he succinctly puts it: “Liberal international theory is a paradigmatic alternative theoretically distinct, empirically coequal, and in certain respects analytically more fundamental, than existing paradigms such as realism, institutionalism, or constructivism” (Moravcsik 2008: 235).

Moravcsik’s liberal theory stands in the tradition of methodological individualism, as it is essentially interested in the action of social individuals (Moravcsik 1992: 4–6). It is true that individuals generally come together to form action-capable social groups such as parties, trade unions, religious or ethnic groups and even states. But the action of groups can always be traced back to the acts of individuals. The corresponding conception of the human being here is that of “homo economicus”, a rational utility maximizer. Moravcsik, however, has a qualified notion of rationality, namely that of “bounded rationality” (Moravcsik 1998: 21–23). It is true that the aggregate of interests represented by the state is not necessarily the same over long periods of time, just as it is not always geared towards material utility. Nonetheless, Moravcsik works on the assumption that every government tries to realize, as rationally and efficiently as possible, “state preferences” (in contrast to “state strategies” or “policy positions”), which develop in liberal fashion via processes of negotiation within states and in the transnational sphere.⁸ The state-internal and transnational social action context, in which state action is embedded, varies substantially both in spatial and temporal terms. “The resulting globalization-induced variation in social demands and state preferences is a fundamental cause of state behavior in world politics. This is the central insight of liberal international relations theory”, Moravcsik tells us (2008: 234).

2.1 Actors, representation, preferences: three basic assumptions of the new liberalism

Moravcsik develops his three core assumptions on the fundamental premise of every liberal theory that state action is substantially moulded by the relations between states and their state-internal and transnational social environments (Moravcsik 1997: 516–521; 2003b: 161–167; 2008: 236–239).

- 1 *The precedence of the social actor and society over the state.* While neorealists and neoinstitutionalists regard states as the key actors in international politics, Moravcsik privileges autonomous, action-capable individuals and social groups, which – in line with their various preferences – realize their material and values-based interests within the state but also within the transnational web of relations (Moravcsik 1997: 516; 2008: 236).⁹ Social groups and individuals are expected to act in a rational and risk-averse manner and to compete for influence on governmental decisions. For Moravcsik, the state is not a fixed variable but always the outcome of very specific social relations. “Society is analytically prior to the state, and domestic state-society relations constitute the central issues of politics” (Moravcsik 1992: 7).

In contrast to systemic IR theories, which privilege states’ exogenous interests and preferences, for liberals such as Moravcsik, both the functional differentiation and definition of the interests of societal and transnational actors are of central theoretical significance. According to Moravcsik (2008: 236), as a result of globalization, social individuals and groups make differing demands of the international political sphere. Liberals reject the idea that there is a harmony of interests within society; for them, society is characterized by ceaseless competition between both individual and group interests (Moravcsik 1997: 517; 2003b: 162). The probability of conflicts within society is high whenever divergent values about life together in society, conflicts over scarce resources or unequal access to the political realm exist within a state (Moravcsik 1997: 517). Conflicts are more likely to arise in cases where there is inequality with respect to social influence because certain social groups have the ability to pass on costs to the rest of society. Where social power is fairly distributed, meanwhile, costs and benefits can be more easily internalized, through legitimized political institutions for example. How competition within society ultimately unfolds and which societal interests and values shape official government policies via the state-internal process of negotiation depend above all on the political system and the relations of power between the competing social actors (Milner 1998: 767–779; see Moravcsik 2003b: 163).

- 2 *Representation within society and the formation of state preferences.* Competition between social actors is determined by state-internal structures and institutions tasked with mediating between the interests of state and society (Moravcsik 1997: 518). States (or other political institutions) represent one part of society and are thus a “transmission belt” for dominant societal preferences, which spill over into a state’s foreign policy. In contrast to realist and institutionalist approaches, however, the state is not viewed as a coherent actor, but as “a representative institution constantly subject to capture and recapture, construction and reconstruction by coalitions of social actors” (Moravcsik 1997: 518). Pluralist liberal theorists assume neither that all individuals and groups have the same influence on governments nor that state institutions are irrelevant. Quite the opposite: every government represents certain groups and individuals more or less comprehensively than others – from Stalinist-style dictatorships to broad forms of democratic participation. It is the specific character of representative institutions – and for Moravcsik, state-internal representation cannot be reduced to the formal characteristics of state bodies, so it includes informal institutions – that is the decisive factor determining which social groups influence the “national interest” (Moravcsik 2003b: 164).

The assumption that a state’s behaviour is the expression of the aggregate of social actors’ preferences, which are realized through a complex process of interest mediation

and decision-making, has important implications for how states behave within the world. From a liberal perspective, governments do not automatically seek to maximize security and power, because social actors do not generally strive to uphold any *raison d'état*. Instead their basic motive is obtaining welfare gains. This, however, does not exclude the possibility that power politics, in the sense of the maximization of state autonomy and influence, may lie in the interest of influential social groups and that they may successfully pursue such power politics (Freund and Rittberger 2001: 77). Snyder (1991), for example, has elaborated the central role of elites in mobilizing the population to achieve imperialist goals; in articles on party conduct with respect to rearmament and the political economy of security strategies, Narizny (2003a, 2003b) has shown that

a nation's grand strategy rarely serves the best interests of all its citizens. Instead, every strategic choice benefits some domestic groups at the expense of others . . . As a result, the overarching goals and guiding principles of grand strategy, as formulated at the highest levels of government, derive from domestic coalitional interests.

(Narizny 2007: 3)

So in contrast to the goal of action always postulated by realists, namely "national interest", because of state-internal party competition, "national security may not be present to the necessary and possible extent; a problem unknown to realism in this form" (Hasenclever 2001: 88).

- 3 *International environment and the interdependent ordering of preferences.* Exponents of liberal IR theory do not doubt that the international environment provides important stimuli for action. But they turn the realist perspective on its head by regarding action options within the international environment as a function of the state-internal and society-internal process of preference formation. For pluralist liberals, patterns of action within international politics do not arise from the international distribution of power or international institutions. Instead, "what states want is the primary determinant of what they do" (Moravcsik 1997: 521).

The theoretical connection between state preferences and states' behaviour towards the rest of the world is established through the concept of so-called "policy interdependence" (Moravcsik 1997: 520; 2003b: 165–166). Moravcsik understands this to mean

[the] distribution and interaction of preferences – that is, the extent to which the pursuit of state preferences necessarily imposes costs and benefits upon other states, independent of the "transaction costs" imposed by the specific strategic means chosen to obtain them.

(Moravcsik 2008: 239)

While realist approaches presuppose conflictual relations between states, Moravcsik argues that the ordering of interdependent preferences imposes very specific restrictions on how states behave towards the rest of the world. States' willingness to spread their resources or, alternatively, to make concessions in negotiations, is thus primarily a function of state preference formation rather than being determined by an independent portfolio of political power. States are "rarely prepared to mortgage their entire economy or military capabilities in pursuit of any single foreign-policy goal. Few wars are total, few peaces Carthaginian" (ibid.: 239–240).

Moravcsik distinguishes between three kinds of the distribution of interdependent preferences. If the specific preferences of different states are compatible, or if they converge, this produces strong incentives for negotiations and international cooperation. Divergent state preferences, meanwhile, bring about tensions and conflicts between states. This leads to zero-sum constellations that leave little space for mutual cooperation because the dominant social groups within a country attempt to realize their preferences through state policies, and these policies inevitably mean costs for other important social groups in other countries. In the case of complementary national preferences, meanwhile, there are sufficient incentives for international negotiations, concessions and forms of international policy coordination (Moravcsik 1992: 10–11; 2008: 239–240).

2.2 Three theoretical variants: ideational, commercial and republican liberalism

From his three core assumptions about the nature of actors and the demands they make of international politics, the nature of states and of the international system, Moravcsik derives three specific theoretical variants: *ideational, commercial and republican liberalism* (Moravcsik 1997: 524–533; 2003b: 167–176; 2008: 240–246). Each of them emphasizes different influencing factors and causal mechanisms lying between national preference formation and state behaviour: identity, interest and institutions.

- 1 *Ideational liberalism.* The first source of state preference formation comprises state-internal conceptions of social order and social identities. With reference to liberals such as Mill, Mazzini, Wilson and Keynes, Moravcsik assumes that foreign policy preferences are determined by social identities and values regarded as legitimate within the state. Social identity includes

[a] set of preferences shared by individuals concerning the proper scope and nature of public goods provision, which in turn specifies the nature of legitimate domestic order by stipulating which social actors belong to the polity and what is owed them.

(Moravcsik 1997: 525)

Liberals highlight national identity, political ideology and the regulation of socioeconomic welfare as the key sources of legitimacy of state-internal social orders (Moravcsik 1997: 525; 2003b: 168–171).¹⁰ Depending on how highly developed these political, social and socioeconomic identities are within a state, we may derive various hypotheses about how states will behave towards other states. Converging state-internal preferences regarding ideational interests foster cooperation with other states, while divergent ideational foreign policy preferences lead to international tensions and conflicts. With reference to a number of examples from European and international politics, Moravcsik tries to show empirically that

substantial prior convergence of underlying values is a necessary prerequisite for cooperation in regulatory issue areas like environmental and consumer protection, . . . social policies, immigration, and foreign policies, as well as for significant surrenders of sovereign decision making to supranational courts and bureaucracies.

(Moravcsik 1997: 528)

- 2 *Commercial liberalism.* A second source of liberal preference formation within the state is economic in nature. Commercial liberalism explains the individual and collective conduct of states by examining the market incentives with which domestic and transnational economic actors such as corporations find themselves confronted. How states behave towards the rest of the world is dependent on the gains and losses of social actors as a result of transnational economic exchange relations (Moravcsik 1997: 524; 2003b: 171; 2008: 242–244). The more producers and consumers benefit from the international division of labour, the more they will work to achieve open markets and stable economic relations and reject protectionism, which endangers their advantageous trade relations. Conversely:

The more costly the adjustment imposed by the proposed economic exchanges, the more opposition is likely to arise. The resulting commercial liberal explanation of “relative gains-seeking” in foreign economic policy is quite distinct from that of realism, which emphasizes security externalities and relative (hegemonic) power, or that of institutionalism, which stresses informational and institutional constraints on optimal interstate collective action . . . Liberal IR theory . . . employs market structure as a variable to explain both openness and closure.

(Moravcsik 2003b: 171f; see also Keohane and Milner 1996)

Commercial liberalism has important implications for security policy. Governments are aware of the fact that wars, sanctions and other coercive military policies are far more costly than the transnational exchange of goods and services. Consequently, there is a strong economic incentive within society for states to behave cooperatively towards other states and forgo aggressive self-help strategies.

- 3 *Republican liberalism.* While ideational and commercial liberalism view preference formation as the outcome of specific patterns of social identities and economic interests, republican liberalism foregrounds the procedures of state-internal representation. The aim here is to explain which social groups are able to incorporate their interests into the process of foreign policy preference formation. The relevant authors thus examine the ways in which social interests are aggregated through political institutions. Moravcsik refers to the way in which certain groups “capture” the state (Moravcsik 1997: 530–533; 2003b: 173–174; 2008: 244–246).

Generally speaking, the more a social group is represented within the key decision-making bodies, and the more effectively these can be sealed off from other influences, the greater its political influence will be (Moravcsik 1997: 530; 2003b: 174–175). A more nuanced perspective on the mechanisms of aggregation of social preferences emerges if we examine the influence of particularist interests (“rent-seeking”). If political influence in society is exercised by a small number of groups with specific interests, liberals generally expect a confrontational rather than cooperative foreign policy. Confrontation and state expansionism rarely involve net benefits for society as a whole. The opposite is more likely to apply. So if political influence within society is distributed equally, there is a greater tendency for states to embrace cooperation in order to avoid conflicts. If influence is concentrated in a small number of groups, meanwhile, these have greater opportunities to shape and enforce expansionist or confrontational policies in such a way that the material and ideational benefits accrue mainly to them. The risks and costs, meanwhile, are disproportionately borne by the under-represented rest of society.¹¹ But because most individuals and social groups tend to behave in a risk-averse manner, in cases of broad political representation there will be a lack of

support for a conflictual and cost-intensive foreign policy. Moravcsik comes to the conclusion that aggressive behaviour towards other states is most likely to occur in authoritarian regimes and dictatorships because here it is relatively simple for privileged individuals to pass the consequences of international conflicts and wars on to the rest of society. Democratic states, meanwhile, are far less likely to engage in conflictual conduct as influence on political decisions lies in the hands of a broad group of decision-makers and these must ultimately bear the costs as taxpayers. Moravcsik puts the fact that democratic states sometimes wage wars against authoritarian regimes down to the willingness of political decision-makers to take risks or to rent-seeking. "There is substantial historical evidence that the aggressors who have provoked modern great power wars tend either to be extremely risk-acceptant individuals, or individuals well able to insulate themselves from the costs of war, or both" (Moravcsik 2003b: 175).

2.3 *How progressive and effective is Moravcsik's research paradigm?*

With his new liberalism, Moravcsik claims to have developed a "systemic theory" (Moravcsik 2008: 246), thus establishing its superiority in the context of possible theoretical syntheses with realism or institutionalism.¹² He explicitly extends the explanatory reach of his liberal research programme to the systemic level, that is, to interaction *between* states. Here his ambitions go well beyond those of the liberal IR theory founded in Germany by Czempel and deployed in numerous studies on liberal German and US foreign policy since the 1990s (see, for example, Medick-Krakau 1999; Ikenberry 2007). Building on David Easton's system theory, Czempel soon developed a complex model for the liberal explanation of the connections between action within the political system, social environments and international environment, for which he coined the term "asymmetric, fragmentary grid" (Czempel 1981). In his book *Friedensstrategien* ("Peace strategies"), with reference to this model, he attempts to bring out the effect of structures of domination and systemic structures on actors' internationalizing politics (Czempel 1986). He has frequently pointed out, however, that (as yet) political science lacks the theoretical tools to adequately depict interactions *between* interdependent states (ibid.: 362). It is this shortcoming of liberal theory building that Moravcsik has remedied in his liberal theory of *international* relations.

If the new liberalism wishes to be taken seriously as a "systemic theory", it must be applicable to *all* states, regardless of whether they are totalitarian, authoritarian or democratic. In contrast to the theory of inter-democratic relations, preference-oriented liberal theory in IR is not tied to the presence of historically contingent state forms. Particularly when it comes to explaining conflict and cooperation, the growth of an international legal framework and, not least, the "democratic peace", the liberal research programme has proved its value empirically (see Moravcsik 2000; Wolf 2002; Narizny 2007; see also the chapter by Andreas Hasenclever in this volume and the literature on the "democratic peace" cited there). Particularly in comparison to the realist research programme, its liberal counterpart emerges as more progressive: realism was unable to remedy existing shortcomings and anomalies (Legro and Moravcsik 1999; for a critical evaluation of the liberal research programme, see Rathbun 2010). At present, the real challenge to liberal theory is not so much the realist as the constructivist research paradigm. The extent to which the new liberalism can assert itself against the background of the "constructivist countermovement" ultimately depends on its empirical explanatory power. In the shape of liberal intergovernmentalism, Moravcsik himself has made an exemplary contribution in this regard that underlines the openness of the liberal research programme to theoretical syntheses.¹³

2.4 Empirical application and criticisms: liberal intergovernmentalism

In the late 1980s, based on his study of the dynamics of European integration, Moravcsik began to develop liberal intergovernmentalism (LI), according to which the deepening and expansion of the European integration process can be explained as a result of the convergence of member states' national preferences (Moravcsik 1991, 1993b, 1998; Moravcsik and Vachudova 2003; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009). He first adopts the premises of "classical" or realist intergovernmentalism (Hoffmann 1966, 1982), which explains the dynamics of the integration process as an outcome of international negotiations. At the same time, however, Moravcsik goes beyond neorealist integration theory by introducing to this approach a "principal-agent" model of domestic political decision-making processes in order to explain the liberal development of state preferences (Moravcsik 1993b: 474).¹⁴ Finally, in *The Choice for Europe* (Moravcsik 1998), which provides the clearest theoretical explanation of LI, Moravcsik proposes a three-stage model to explain European integration. Here, very much in line with the kind of theoretical synthesis he has propagated, each of the three stages is associated with a middle-range theory (for an overview, see Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2005: 23–31).

In the first stage, with the help of the liberal theory of preference formation, Moravcsik asks how governments' preferences take shape (Moravcsik 1993a: 481; Moravcsik and Schimmelfennig 2009: 69–70). In order to identify the dominant social actors, Moravcsik draws on the theory of the logic of collective action put forward by Olson (1965). On this view, whether social groups gain access to government decisions does not depend on a high degree of representation or large organizations' special capacity to achieve mobilization. Instead, the smaller the group, the greater the degree of mobilization. It is above all clearly defined groups who have a lot to gain and to lose who exercise the greatest influence on government action. If the government has to weigh up the interests of small and well-organized groups (such as producers or lobbying groups) and the more general, often rather "latent" interests of diffuse groups (such as taxpayers or consumers), it will usually prioritize the former (Steinhilber 2005: 178–180).

At the second stage, preferences are realized through international negotiations. This is explained through a theory of negotiation or bargaining within international cooperation (see Putnam 1988; Moravcsik 1993a). Here the realist element of LI comes into play. Once the national process of preference formation with respect to a specific issue is completed, the preferences of the social group are assumed to be stable until the conclusion of the negotiations. If the demand for international cooperation defines national preference formation, it is international negotiations that determine the capacity for coordination. A number of assumptions are associated with the introduction of the negotiation theory of international cooperation (Moravcsik 1998: 60ff.): joint decisions by governments are made at the negotiating table on a voluntary basis, without the threat of force. Further, the governments have a wide range of knowledge about the implications of the various policy options and plenty of information about their negotiating partners' preferences and the room for manoeuvre within the negotiations. States are not dependent on international or supranational institutions in order to negotiate effectively (Moravcsik 1998: 7). Ultimately, the outcome of negotiations depends on governments' relative negotiating power and the potential for different issues to be linked together. Moravcsik (ibid.: 62) puts this down to the intensity of state-internal preferences.

Finally, the third stage is centred on the choice of European institutions. Here Moravcsik draws on a functional theory of international institutions (see Pollack 2003; Franchino 2007).

He argues that nation states pool or delegate sovereignty and enter into institutional arrangements at the EU level only in order to credibly commit to cooperation (Moravcsik and Nicolaïdis 1999). European institutions, however, can help improve the conditions for cooperation by reducing transaction costs and may contribute to the resolution of so-called “second-order” problems of international cooperation (monitoring of compliance by the EU Commission, legal sanctions imposed by the ECJ or the distribution of gains from cooperation) (Wolf and Zangl 1996). The transfer of national authority or the creation of new loyalties on the European level, meanwhile, recedes into the background (see the chapter by Thomas Conzelmann in this volume).¹⁵

It is in *The Choice for Europe* that Moravcsik has gone furthest in applying his LI empirically (Moravcsik 1998).¹⁶ The aim of Moravcsik’s historical analysis is to “explain why sovereign governments in Europe have chosen repeatedly to coordinate their core economic policies and surrender sovereign prerogatives within an international institution” (ibid.: 1). To this end, he examines the key treaty negotiations during the founding era of what would later be the EU (Messina 1955) up to the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992. According to Moravcsik, none of the typically mentioned motives for integration were central to the decisions made with respect to these treaties. Technocratic incentives as envisaged by neofunctionalists, the geopolitical considerations so beloved of realists, European idealism or attempts to save the European welfare state (Milward 2000) – none had much impact on these decisions. Instead, the milestones of European integration arose from the rational calculations of governments. The convergence of three factors was crucial here: “patterns of commercial exchange, the relative bargaining power of national governments, and the incentives to enhance the credibility of interstate commitments”. Most fundamental of these was commercial interest. “When such interests converged, integration advanced” (Moravcsik 1998: 3). Moravcsik ascribes no crucial influence on the outcome of negotiations to European institutions, and is particularly dismissive of their leading officials (ibid.: 479–485).

While the LI has clear explanatory advantages over the teleologically fixed federalist and neofunctionalist theories of integration, Moravcsik has been criticized from a number of angles.¹⁷ I can mention only the most important criticisms here.

- 1 Moravcsik focuses his attention on the major historical treaty negotiations, thus overlooking important aspects of the everyday reality of EU integration. The various processes of communication and decision-making by the Commission, Council and Parliament are linked with one another in such a complicated way that the unintended consequences of so-called day-to-day politics for the integration process are not immediately apparent (see, for example, Wincott 1995; Tsebelis and Garrett 2000).
- 2 Mainly from an institutionalist perspective, critics have suggested that Moravcsik underestimates the dynamics and self-interest of European institutions, which are far more than member state-controlled instruments for reducing transaction costs and supervising decisions (Gehring 2002; Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 2004; Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2005: 78–80).
- 3 The LI fails to recognize the logic of functional “spill-over” effects, which were significant determinants of the “rationality” of national governments during the transition from the customs union to the single market and from the single market to economic and monetary union (see the chapter by Thomas Conzelmann in this volume).
- 4 Moravcsik traces the process of European integration primarily back to material economic interests within societies, thus failing to take account of effects produced by socialization and European learning processes (see Risse 2009).

- 5 Finally, Moravcsik's assessment of the problem of legitimacy within the EU is flawed: he sees the democratic deficit in a crude and one-sided way as a fundamental source of the success of integration (see, for example, Føllesdal and Hix 2006). Yet it is only since Maastricht, critics argue, that the democratic deficit has become a key challenge to European integration.¹⁸

3 Internal theoretical differentiation

Moravcsik's efforts to bring order to the analytical confusion of liberal theories and to relate them to one another in a systematic way undoubtedly led to greater integration in liberal theory building in IR in the 1990s. Nonetheless, a broad spectrum of complementary liberal approaches continues to exist. In addition to Moravcsik's preference-oriented liberal theory, it was above all the so-called two-level approaches that became established in the 1990s.¹⁹ The key impulse for the integration of the international and national levels came from Robert Putnam (1988) (see also Evans *et al.* 1993). He and associated theorists responded, first, to the shortcomings of explanations structured around the *domestic* dimension (Freund and Rittberger 2001), and, second, to the need for international policy coordination, which had become increasingly pressing since the 1970s. With his metaphor of the "two-level" game, Putnam assumes that the governments of states play at two tables at the same time: with the international negotiators of other states and with domestic political actors and interest groups. Political decisions can be made and implemented only if they are accepted and implemented both on the international level and in all relevant national decision-making arenas (Putnam 1988: 433–441).

Analyses of domestic political constellations have shown that not all the relevant interest groups have the same influence. First, the organizational capacity and size of interest groups have a decisive influence on their political efficacy. Empirical studies on US trade policy have shown that small and well-organized groups have a greater than average ability to promote their interests through national processes of negotiation (see, for example, Destler 2005). Second, the formal institutions of the political system and the organization of parties have an impact on the constellation of veto players,²⁰ whose agreement is necessary for transnational policy coordination. On the basis of the domestic constellation of political actors, Bernhard Zangl has suggested that there is a connection between the game structure on the international level and the interplay of state actors and social actors within the framework of international negotiations, thus building a bridge between neoinstitutionalism, liberalism and social constructivism (Wolf and Zangl 1996; Zangl 1999: 91–114).

As helpful as the two-level metaphor has proved to be in the practical analysis of international politics, when it comes to the development of governments' preferences – as Gourevitch has correctly noted – the model as a whole has remained theoretically deficient:

We do not have very good theories to handle what happens when both are in play, when each influences the other, when the domestic politics of one country interact with the domestic politics of other, an interaction which itself helps define a system that reverberates back on the parts. We have good metaphors, but not clear research programs.

(Gourevitch 2002: 321)

While Putnam's main conclusion is that, as the nation's chief negotiator, the executive strives to "get its hands tied" domestically in order to strengthen its position within international negotiations, in his political resource approach Moravcsik turns this conclusion on its

head. According to Moravcsik, social groups' capacity to control the executive with respect to foreign policy depends on whether, by procedural means, they can control the political agenda (initiative) and influence the decision-making process (institutions), whether they have enough information about the executive's action options and whether they can convince other state-internal groups of the value of their political objectives (ideas) (Moravcsik 1994: 4). So the relations of power between executive and social groups are crucially important. International cooperation, however, gives governments greater room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis domestic political and societal actors because they have the upper hand with respect to foreign policy (Moravcsik 1994: 43). Further, however, the executive can also manipulate the influence of societal groups by changing formal or informal ratification procedures or the domestic balance of power through compensatory funding, increased party discipline or the selective mobilization of political groups (Moravcsik 1993a: 24–27).

Moravcsik's main argument is that national executives can deploy the logic of the two-level game to realize domestic political goals as well. Governments instrumentalize international cooperation in order to deny social groups control over critical power resources (initiative, institutions, information and ideas) so that they are no longer in a position to exercise a positive or negative influence on government policy. For Moravcsik, this explains states' rational motivation for engaging in international processes of cooperation and integration despite the associated loss of sovereignty (Moravcsik 1994: 1). In *Die Neue Staatsräson* ("The new *raison d'état*"), Klaus Dieter Wolf (2000) has expressed similar views. With the help of two-level analysis, he shows that, during periods of globalization, states may quite consciously deploy international cooperation and make commitments that limit their power in order to regain their autonomy vis-à-vis their societies, though at the price of undermining the democratic legitimacy of policies. Along with other authors, meanwhile, Moravcsik has asserted that state integration into multilateral organizations (MLOs)

can enhance the quality of national democratic processes, even in well-functioning democracies . . . by restricting the power of special interest factions, protecting individual rights, and improving the quality of democratic deliberation, while also increasing capacities to achieve important public purposes.

(Keohane *et al.* 2009: 2)²¹

Helen Milner (1997, 1999) has developed a theory akin to preference-oriented liberalism that draws on the "two-level game".²² In *Interests, Institutions, and Information*, with reference to key international negotiations on the establishment of post-war international economic institutions, she investigates the conditions under which states cooperate in particular political fields. International cooperation depends less on relative gains from cooperation than on the "domestic distributional consequences of cooperative endeavors" (Milner 1997: 9; see also Keohane and Milner 1986). Cooperation creates winners and losers within a country, which in turn means that some will support cooperation while others will oppose it. It is domestic political competition and the struggle between these groups that create the conditions of possibility for international cooperation, which Milner traces back to three key domestic political factors: "the structures of domestic preferences, the nature of domestic political institutions, and the distribution of information internally" (Milner 1997: 234). Milner's liberal theory is in some respects more detailed than its predecessors, but loses much of its acuity as soon as it is applied to anything other than the economic relations between (liberal) democracies (Wolf 2002). While she argues that the interests of societal

actors are determined by material expectations, Moravcsik does not rule out the possibility that social groups with ideational interests and values may “capture” the state (Moravcsik 2008: 240–242).

4 External criticisms

Moravcsik’s paradigmatic renewal of the liberal theoretical tradition prompted a number of different reactions. There is no space here to examine all the criticisms, so I shall limit myself to three crucial ones. First, exponents of traditional systemic approaches perceived preference-oriented liberalism as a particular challenge. Second, constructivists rejected Moravcsik’s rationalistic ontology and rigorous methodological conception. Third, and finally, a number of authors made criticisms from a normative or ideological standpoint.

- 1 Exponents of systemic theories criticized the liberal theory of IR for being “too complex” to provide a “systemic” analysis of international politics, as it always cites different state-internal factors to explain states’ behaviour towards the rest of the world. Keohane therefore suggested turning to domestic political factors to explain anomalies only if a state’s behaviour in the world cannot be explained with reference to systemic factors (Keohane, quoted in Moravcsik 1993a: 9; see also Schweller 2006). Further, neoinstitutionalists claimed that while institutions within national political systems influence the interaction between the different groups within a state, institutions within the international system have little impact on the interaction between different states. For rationalist institutionalists, Moravcsik’s fundamentally different assessment of structures on the subsystemic and systemic levels is quite implausible (Zangl 1999: 55; see also Keohane 1994). Other critics asserted that every conception of the state as the mere mirror of powerful economic or civil society interests is inadequate (Freund and Rittberger 2001). Instead, as in the bureaucracy model (Allison and Zelikow 1999), we must also take account of actors and their preferences within the state apparatus as part of the political-administrative system.
- 2 Social constructivists put forward a rather more fundamental critique of new liberalism.²³ While Moravcsik argues that institutions within national political systems mould the identities of states and their processes of preference formation, he suggests that institutions within the international system have little impact on the identities of states. A number of studies, however, have shown how important international institutions are in the formation of identities. The process of European integration, for example, not only entails the redistribution of state-internal power resources as goal-oriented actors seek to maximize their utility and exchange fixed preferences through strategic interactions; it also involves the development of new community norms and the formation of identities. EU membership “matters”, in other words, actors’ rationality is always context-dependent and socially constructed. Norms, ideas and identities facilitate appropriate social action by providing shared meanings and expectations (on the basic issues at stake here, see Wendt 1999). On this view, then, institutions are not determined exclusively by actors but in fact help constitute actors’ preferences and thus have an impact on the identities of individual member states. Because Moravcsik ignores the ways in which social actors and social structures are mutually constituted and the socializing effect of international institutions, he ultimately fails to grasp the fundamental driving forces of European integration.

A significant amount of evidence suggests that, as a process, European integration has a *transformative* impact on the European state system and its constituent units. European integration itself has changed over the years, and it is reasonable to assume that in the process agents' identity and subsequently their interests and behaviour have equally changed. While this aspect of change can be theorized within constructivist perspectives, it will remain largely invisible in approaches that neglect processes of identity formation and/or assume interests to be given exogenously.

(Christiansen *et al.* 1999: 529, original emphasis)

Moravcsik has responded to constructivist criticism by discerning a "characteristic unwillingness of constructivists to place their claims at any real risk of empirical disconfirmation". "*Hardly a single claim . . . is formulated or tested in such a way that it could, even in principle, be declared empirically invalid*" (Moravcsik 1999b: 670, original emphasis).²⁴ First, according to Moravcsik, constructivists have failed to develop distinctive hypotheses and subject them to wide-ranging empirical tests. Second, they lack suitable methods to test their hypotheses against alternative middle-range theories (Moravcsik 1999b: 670).²⁵ For their part, constructivists have retorted that Moravcsik privileges rationalistic explanations *per se*, attempting to impose hegemonic control on theoretical discourse by demanding higher empirical and methodological standards for constructivist approaches than for his own (Risse and Wiener 1999: 777–781; see also Risse 2009 and Diez 1999). Yet, of all things, it is research on Europe that has now shown that "most empirical work from a constructivist perspective does engage alternative explanations and demonstrates its claims against competing hypotheses. Thus, social constructivist research on the EU has quickly entered the realm of 'normal social science' " (Risse 2009: 158). Post-modern authors have gone even further in their criticisms, rejecting Moravcsik's liberal research programme with its devotion to hypothesis-testing and falsification (see, for example, Diez 1999).

- 3 Finally, Moravcsik's new liberalism has been criticized from a normative perspective. David Long has argued that

[E]ach of Moravcsik's propositions involves a significant narrowing . . . of liberal political thought. On the one hand, there is a reduction to a minimalist classical liberalism. On the other, there is a bad positivism that dispenses with liberal philosophy. . . . The result is a distortion of liberalism and a misnaming of a theory of international relations.

(Long 1995: 499)

Christian Reus-Smit has also highlighted the fact that Moravcsik's reformulation of liberal theory undermines its political character:

The ideational and material preferences of individuals, which are the bedrock of his liberal understanding of the world, are forged in a pre-political realm, and thus fall outside of the explanatory purview of his theory. It is only when we come to the secondary tier of preferences – the state preferences derived from ascendant individual or group preferences – that his theory comes close to taking preferences seriously.

(Reus-Smit 2001: 584)

On this view, by neglecting the genuinely political and working with a “thin” conception of preferences, Moravcsik removes normative reflection from the sphere of serious social scientific research (ibid.: 574).

This non-political conception of liberal theory, which takes no account of the social character of international and European politics, has also been criticized from a Marxist perspective. The relevant authors here suggest that Moravcsik simply assumes the continuance of the existing international order in an ahistorical manner. He does take account of the pluralistic competition of interests within nation states, “but he fails to consider the fundamental mechanisms of power and domination and the relative political strength of different forces” (Steinhilber 2005: 188). In a number of places, Moravcsik himself points out the parallels between liberal and Marxist theory and considers the non-teleological assumptions of Marxism – “the centrality of domestic economic interests, the importance of transnational interdependence, the state as a representative of dominant social forces” – as entirely compatible with the premises of his reformulated liberalism (Moravcsik 1997: 522). He rejects the normative perspective of Marxism and its ideological critique, however, as incompatible with a positive liberal theory of IR.

Against Moravcsik’s aspiration to produce a nonideological liberal theory of international relations, meanwhile, Beate Jahn describes Moravcsik’s new liberalism as “deeply ideological” (Jahn 2009: 409). In an article entitled “Liberal Internationalism: from Ideology to Empirical Theory – and Back Again” in the journal *International Theory*, she not only criticizes the normative assumptions inherent in Moravcsik’s empirical research programme, but casts doubt on new liberalism’s claim to be a distinct theory of international relations.²⁶ Ultimately, for Jahn, liberal theory has undesirable political implications because it helps further the spread of the liberal narrative in a nonliberal world. Referencing Richard Wagner’s *Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, Moravcsik responded with an article characteristically entitled “Wahn, Wahn, Überall Wahn” (Moravcsik 2010a – “Folly, folly, everywhere folly”). Moravcsik not only accuses Jahn of intellectual dishonesty and misrepresentation but also firmly rejects the criticism that every attempt to formulate a generalizable theory in the social sciences is inherently ideological. Jahn (2010) responded with equal vehemence in an article entitled “Universal Languages?”, prompting Moravcsik (2010b: 172) to respond:

She [Beate Jahn] has spent dozens of pages tilting at paradigmatic windmills rather than doing the hard empirical and mid-range work required to establish her argument vis-à-vis those of other scholars who have invested in the topic. This isolates her work intellectually.

This recent debate between Moravcsik and his critics recalls earlier ones over the assumed methodological unity of the sciences. It is interesting and instructive in the sense that liberal theoretical approaches within International Relations would do well to reflect on the normative as well as positive dimensions of their subject. Clearly, as scientists, we must not confuse the two. But we cannot hope to avoid normative issues by focusing exclusively on the positive aspects of political topics. Recent introductions to the theories and subject matter of International Relations take it for granted that empirical and normative issues must both be taken into account and that it is therefore worthwhile rendering explicit the implicit normative content of the new liberalism (Simpson 2008).

5 Notes

- 1 On the renaissance of the liberal theoretical perspective, see, for example, the review articles by Zacher and Matthew (1995), Gourevitch (2002) and Schultz (2013); for an overview of liberalism as a tradition of political theory, see Richardson (2001).
- 2 “Sociation” means the increasing participation of social interest groups in the foreign policy decision-making process (Czempiel 1994; see the early contribution by Krippendorff 1963). Because these are predominately transnational in character, foreign policy changes as well (on the essentials, see Risse-Kappen 1995b). “Domestication”, meanwhile, refers to a process in which domestic political actors attempt to tie democracies’ foreign policy behaviour to particular internal norms (see Harnisch and Schieder 2006; Harnisch 2009).
- 3 The core ideas of liberalism are already inherent in idealism as one of the two “primordial theories” of IR.
- 4 On the positivist orthodoxy, see King *et al.* (1994).
- 5 A scientific research programme should offer a guide to research, both in positive and negative terms. Drawing on the theorist of science Imre Lakatos, Moravcsik (2003b) sees a scientific research programme as entailing a “hard core” surrounded by a “protective belt” of auxiliary hypotheses. The “hard core” consists of a research group’s basic beliefs; they regard this core as indispensable and non-falsifiable. Around this core a fringe of auxiliary hypotheses takes shape that – in contrast to the core – can be tested against experience and may potentially be falsified.
- 6 Keohane (1990) has also referred to *regulatory liberalism*. But this is a foreign body within liberalism as it explains enduring progress and peace not primarily in “liberal” but in institutionalist terms.
- 7 His first attempt to establish a liberal theory came in 1992 (Moravcsik 1992). In the oft-cited essay “Taking Preferences Seriously” (Moravcsik 1997), he set out his ideas in more detail. For an assessment of his liberal research programme, see Moravcsik (2003b, 2008).
- 8 It is important to distinguish between interests, preferences and strategies. Interests represent the basic goals of actors. They are relatively stable and change little over time. “State preferences”, meanwhile, are seen as the comparative evaluation of different action alternatives. In contrast to strategies and tactics, preferences are formed regardless of the international environment or the interests of other states (Moravcsik 1993b: 519; Frieden 1999). In Moravcsik’s words (2010a: 116):

State preferences . . . comprise a set of fundamental interests defined across “states of the world”. Preferences are thus *by definition* causally independent of and analytically prior to specific interstate political interactions, including external threats, incentives, manipulation of information, or other tactics – at least in the short term. By contrast, strategies and tactics are policy options defined across intermediate political aims, as when governments declare an “interest” in “maintaining the balance of power”, “containing” or “appeasing” an adversary, exercising “global leadership”, or “maintaining imperial control”.

(original emphasis)

- 9 Moravcsik (2003b: 162) views the idea that social groups develop preferences on the basis of material interests and ideas as far less controversial than the literature might lead us to expect:

Neither the assumption that individuals pursue their preferences instrumentally, nor the assumption that the formation of such preferences is exogenous to interstate politics, implies that individual preferences are atomistic. Cultural or sociological arguments that privilege collective social beliefs, either domestic or transnational, as sources of such social preferences, are not excluded. Some metatheoretical discussions between “constructivists” and “rationalists” obscure this potential complementary between rationalist and cultural explanations.

- 10 There are countless affinities here between ideational liberalism and constructivist studies, which also underline the significance of social, legitimate orders, collective identities and the social origins of socialization processes (Moravcsik 2008: 214). See the chapter by Cornelia Ulbert in this volume.
- 11 A number of studies have shown that under conditions of oligarchy or imperialist state structures, privileged groups see little reason to accept any curtailment of their objectives. Dominant groups

are far more likely to attempt to amalgamate their confrontational objectives to produce a basically antagonistic programme (“log-rolling coalitions”), not least because risks and costs can be passed on if there is no decision-making body superordinate to these elites and accepted by all of them (see Moravcsik 1997: 532; 2003b: 175). On the liberal theory of war, which is inspired by republican thought, see, for example, Snyder (1991), Wolf (2002), Narizny (2007) and the chapter by Andreas Hasenclever in this volume.

- 12 According to Moravcsik, for a liberal theory to be of use to empirical studies, four criteria must be met. First, it must be simple and generate a broad spectrum of previously unconnected hypotheses about phenomena that cannot be explained by available theories; second, it must clearly define its own conceptual boundaries; third, it must highlight anomalies and methodological weaknesses in available theories and empirical studies; and, fourth, it must demonstrate how it can be rigorously combined with other theories in order to produce coherent multicausal explanations (Moravcsik 1997: 533). Moravcsik has critically examined the liberal theory of IR with reference to three key criteria identified by Lakatos for evaluating scientific research programmes – “strict temporal novelty”, “the heuristic definition of novelty” and “background theory novelty” – and shown that liberal IR theory may be considered an innovative research paradigm (Moravcsik 2003b: 160ff., 177–196). While Lakatos’s scientific standards play into the hands of liberal theory, Moravcsik has qualified their significance to IR and called instead for theoretical synthesis (Moravcsik 2003a):

Yet Lakatos’s focus on the scope of theories might encourage scholars to advance “universal” and mono-causal claims when it is inappropriate to do so. More appropriate may be a clear specification of proper empirical limits or more subtle theoretical syntheses. Overall, a more pragmatic “problem-solving” approach based on Larry Laudan’s philosophy of science seems more appropriate than one based on strict Lakatosian criteria.

(Moravcsik 2003b: 196, 204)

- 13 Moravcsik (2008: 246) has repeatedly highlighted three key implications of liberal theory building: “its unique empirical predictions, its status as systemic theory, and its openness to multitheoretical synthesis”.
- 14 According to this economic model, societal “principals” delegate or limit the power of the “governmental agent”. They can do so because in democracies governments ultimately depend on the support of a broad “coalition” of voters, parties, interest groups and bureaucracies.
- 15 In contrast to neofunctionalism or supranationalism, LI concedes to supranational authorities such as the EU Commission at most the role of an agent within international negotiations (Moravcsik 1991, 1999a).
- 16 See also the symposium “The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht” in *Journal of European Public Policy* (Wallace *et al.* 1999) with a reply from Moravcsik. *The Choice for Europe* has been translated into a number of languages.
- 17 Since the 1990s, the theoretical debate between LI and neofunctionalism has been largely played out in three journals: *International Organization*, *Journal of Common Market Studies* and *Journal of European Public Policy*.
- 18 In the past few years, the key disputes have been over whether and if so to what extent the EU suffers from a “democratic deficit”. In a number of contributions, Moravcsik has consistently denied this (e.g. Moravcsik 2002, 2006, 2008).
- 19 One important liberal current is the theory of the “democratic peace”. See the chapter by Andreas Hasenclever in this volume.
- 20 Veto players are those individuals and collective actors whose consent is necessary to achieve a change in a given political field. For a detailed account, see Tsebelis (2002).
- 21 A controversy over this argument and in subsequent criticism (Gartzke and Naoi 2011) and response (Keohane *et al.* 2011) exists about the ‘right’ conception of democracy, the decision-making process of MLOs and the distributional effects of MLOs. Whereas Gartzke and Naoi (2011: 589) argued that the influence of multilateral organization “can be detrimental to democracies not because MLOs are distant, elitist, and technocratic but precisely because MLOs are highly political”, Keohane, Macedo and Moravcsik (2011: 599) insisted on their position and rejected the conventional wisdom that “MLOs are necessarily democracy-degrading simply because they are not directly participatory.” According to Keohane *et al.* (ibid.: 600), Gartzke and Naoi “misstate . . . how multilateralism affects democracy; fail to engage with our multidimensional conception of democracy; overlook the distinction . . . between interest groups that support the general interest

124 *Siegfried Schieder*

- and those that do not; and overgeneralize from existing research". In one respect, however, Keohane, Macedo and Moravcsik (ibid.: 603) agree with their critics – namely, that MLOs can have “distributional impacts, making them likely subjects of special interest pressure or influence”.
- 22 On this liberal school of theory, which is chiefly concerned with the state-internal preconditions for international trade agreements, see Mansfield *et al.* (2007).
- 23 See the 1999 special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy*, “The Social Construction of Europe”, edited by Thomas Christiansen, Knut E. Jørgensen and Antje Wiener, with articles by, among others, Jeffrey T. Checkel, Thomas Diez and Thomas Risse. In 2001, these articles were published in book form.
- 24 Moravcsik (1999b: 669) gave his critique the provocative title, “Is Something Rotten in the State of Denmark? Constructivism and European Integration”, alluding to the “Copenhagen School”, from which “the force of continental constructivist theories” seems to radiate. See also the dispute between Checkel and Moravcsik (2001).
- 25 Moravcsik rejects the allegation that rationalist explanatory approaches assume that actors are devoid of ideas.

Collective ideas are like air; it is essentially impossible for humans to function as social beings without them. In this (trivial) sense there is little point in debating whether “ideas matter.” *Existing rationalist theories claim only something far more modest, namely that ideas are causally epiphenomenal to more fundamental underlying influences on state behavior.*

(Moravcsik 1999b: 674, original emphasis)

- 26 Jahn (2009: 419) asserts that “the liberal paradigm does not fulfil the criterion of distinctness. Moravcsik’s general assumptions are shared by a host of other ‘approaches’” – an interpretation Moravcsik rejects, claiming that Jahn fails to properly understand his work (Moravcsik 2010a: 115).

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