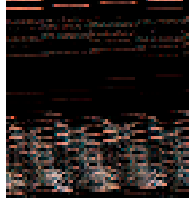


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Chapter

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AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE ORIGINS AND CHANGING AGENDAS OF A DISCIPLINE

Richard Devetak

Introduction

This Introduction begins by outlining what is meant by international relations. Second, it tells the story of how and why the study of international relations emerged when it did in the early twentieth century. Knowing something about the **discipline's** origins does not tell us everything we need to know about international relations today, but it will help us to understand the legacy left by the discipline's original purpose and by older traditions of thought. Third, it sketches the contours of the changing agenda of international relations, a shift that some scholars describe as a transition from international relations to world politics or from the 'traditional' to the 'new' agenda. Although there can be little doubt that as political reality has changed new theoretical and conceptual tools have become necessary to grasp it, we should not assume that the myriad changes to our world have rendered the 'traditional' agenda and its theories obsolete. Far from it; the 'new' agenda, as we shall see, supplements but does not supplant the 'traditional' agenda. It is now more important than ever to consider the relationships between 'traditional' and 'new' theories and issues. This textbook is intended to help you think about these relationships.

What is International Relations?

Every day the global news media carry stories of events involving foreign governments and their populations. Usually featured under the heading of 'international affairs' or 'world news', these stories all too frequently tell of political violence, lives and livelihoods lost, **human rights** violated, infrastructure damaged, and hopes for the restoration of **peace** and prosperity dashed. **War** rather than peace makes the news headlines, and understandably so, because the violent conflict of war so visibly ravages human societies. 'If it bleeds, it leads', as the cynical media adage goes.

For over 2000 years of recorded history humans have been fascinated and frustrated by war and its consequences, so we should not be surprised by its continuing preeminence. But human societies are harmed by so much more than war. Chronic underdevelopment, poverty, human rights violations, environmental degradation and climate change are no less harmful, if less visible. Occasionally, however, the plight of the world's impoverished populations becomes headline news when famines occur or natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis or avalanches strike, compounding already fragile or impoverished political societies. Sympathies will be aroused in faraway places, and celebrities, **humanitarian** organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the **United Nations (UN)** and canny politicians will talk the talk of collective grief, human community and global responsibility. Excitement will die down after a flurry of activity and the poor souls will inevitably be cast back to the margins of international attention as developed countries return to more pressing domestic matters – tax

Figure 0.1 *Graffiti, Sarajevo 2005* by David Kozar (with permission)



cuts, elections, salacious scandals, and so on. And so goes the daily round of international relations – war and peace, poverty and underdevelopment, global attention and global neglect.

This common-sense understanding of international relations only scratches the surface of all that the discipline of International Relations covers (see Box 0.1). So what precisely do we mean by ‘international relations’? To answer this question, let us first say a few things about what it is not, before turning to an account of what it is.

First, the study of international relations is not to be equated with ‘current affairs’. It is important not to reduce international relations to the lead stories of the global news media. News, by its nature, is ephemeral; each day brings a new story to tell. Moreover, news agencies make no attempt at drawing connections between stories. Their concern is not with showing how the stories ‘hang together’ or relate to each other but is solely with reporting the news, so each news item is reported independently of others. International Relations (IR), by contrast, seeks to go beyond the ephemeral and common-sense: to reflect more deeply on events, structures, processes and actors, and to offer explanations, interpretations and **normative** analyses. Second, the study of international relations is not reducible to what happens in particular countries, even though it may include this. Political machinations in other countries, especially powerful ones, always hold particular interest; Washington politics are never far from the headlines. But in IR, any interest in the politics of other countries will be determined by how these impact on or play out in the international sphere or how they are shaped by international forces. Third, IR is not reducible to foreign policy analysis, though once again it includes this within its scope (see Waltz 1979: 121–2 for one explanation).

Turning to a more positive definition of international relations, we can start by saying that it refers to *external relations among nations, states and peoples* – although, as

BOX 0.1: TERMINOLOGY

What are the differences between International Relations and international relations, and international politics and world politics?

It is conventional to differentiate the discipline of 'International Relations' from the subject matter of 'international relations' by the use of upper and lower case respectively. As Chris Brown (1997: 3) puts it, "International Relations" (upper case) is the study of "international relations" (lower case).

International politics is used here as a synonym of international relations. It does, however, have the advantage of highlighting the political dimension of relations that are international.

World or global politics: Insofar as new actors, issues, structures and processes are thought to have emerged in recent decades as a result of **globalisation**, rendering the traditional state-focused agenda incomplete, some scholars prefer 'world' or 'global politics' to 'international relations'. This has prompted some scholars to talk of an historic shift from 'international relations' to 'world politics' or 'global society' (R. B. J. Walker 1995; Barnett and Sikkink 2008).

we explain below, this statement will need to be considerably qualified. The adjective 'international' was coined by the English political philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, in 1780. The neologism's purpose was to capture in a single word *relations among nations* (Suganami 1978). Although 'international' literally means relations among nations, it has for most of its existence referred to relations among **sovereign states**. In Bentham's time 'nation' and 'state' were often used interchangeably, so his meaning was closer to what we should probably call 'interstate' relations. In any case, *international* relations have been distinguished first and foremost from *domestic* politics. Ian Clark (1999) calls this the 'Great Divide' (see Table 0.1).

Leading scholars have for decades defined international relations by opposing the international and domestic realms as if they represented a 'Great Divide'. On what constitutes this 'Great Divide', the most influential realist IR theorist of the late twentieth century, Kenneth Waltz (1979: 103), remarks that '[t]he difference between national and international politics lies not in the use of force but in the different modes of organization for doing something about it'. What, then, are the possible modes of organisation? Waltz offers two, and only two, organising principles: **hierarchy** and **anarchy**. Relations between units (or actors) are either *hierarchical*, involving clear lines of authority and obedience, or they are *anarchical*, involving no such lines of authority and obedience (Waltz 1979: 88). There would appear to be no other possibilities. The key, according to Waltz, is

governance; is there a supreme authority with the right to lay down and enforce the law? If the answer is 'yes', then we must be in the hierarchical realm of domestic politics – politics *within* the state. If the answer is 'no', then we must be in the anarchical realm of international relations – politics *between* states. In any case, the presumed differences between domestic and international politics seem to vindicate Martin Wight's (1966b: 21) observation that '[i]t has become natural to think of international politics as the untidy fringe of domestic politics'. I shall suggest below that while it has indeed become natural to think in these terms, there may be good reasons for casting doubt over the 'Great Divide' as the point of departure for IR today.

According to the 'Great Divide', domestic politics is what takes place on the *inside* of states whereas international relations is what takes place on the *outside*, as if they were two mutually exclusive realms. Domestic politics is premised on the presence of a central authority or government that has monopoly control over the instruments of violence, that can lay down and enforce the law, that establishes and maintains **order**

Table 0.1 The ‘Great Divide’

Domestic	International
Inside	Outside
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Monopoly over instruments of violence	Decentralised instruments of violence
Lawful authority	Self-help
Security	Insecurity/Security dilemma
Justice	Power
Community	Friends and enemies
Peace and order	War

and **security**, and that permits justice and peace to be delivered to the community of citizens. International relations is the negative image of domestic politics. By contrast with the domestic realm, the international is premised on the absence of an overarching authority or government that can lay down and enforce the law because the instruments of violence are dispersed and decentralised. This establishes ripe conditions for insecurity, where injustice and war are permanent potentials and regular actualities for states. It is a world of friends and enemies where **power** rather than justice will determine international outcomes, and where states cannot afford to put their trust or security in others. States are trapped in a ‘**security dilemma**’ where measures taken to enhance their security lead others to take similar counter-measures and in the process generate further mistrust and insecurity.

Perhaps the term that distinguishes international relations more than any other is *anarchy*. Anarchy – meaning the absence of rule, but not necessarily disorder and chaos – has been the core presumption and **constitutive** principle for much of the discipline’s history (Onuf 1989: 166; Schmidt 1998). Richard Ashley (1989) has called IR the ‘anarchy problematique’ – that is to say, a field of knowledge revolving around the organising principle of anarchy.

International Relations as a discipline: traditions, origins and evolution

Universities, as centres of research and learning, have long divided knowledge into different disciplines. This division is heuristic: that is to say, it is meant to help facilitate learning. A discipline comprises a distinctive focus, a set of institutions and traditions of thought. All three are crucial to the development and growth of a field or body of knowledge. But it is worth noting that ‘discipline’ has another, not altogether unrelated, meaning: to bring under control, train to obedience, maintain order. Disciplines thus help to maintain intellectual order by keeping a focus and keeping clear of distracting, extraneous issues.

First, a discipline carves out a branch of learning focused on a relatively distinct subject matter. I say ‘relatively’ because attempts to cordon off one subject from all others are bound to fail or to appear arbitrary. For example, where do we draw the boundaries between international politics, international morality, **international law** and international economics? Politics, morality, law and economics intersect and overlap in so many ways that efforts to draw final boundaries around them would be futile and

possibly unhelpful, since understanding the politics of international relations cannot be separated from an understanding of the moral, legal and economic dimensions of these relations.

Nevertheless, if a discipline implies a subject matter relatively distinguishable from others, it must have questions and topics it calls its own. Though agreement will never be total, the questions and topics to be addressed should meet with broad agreement. Some disagreement about the scope of a discipline is to be expected, but there will always be dominant tendencies – questions and topics that occupy the thought and research of most students and scholars (see Box 0.2). These will define the discipline at any given moment, but there will always be other questions and topics that are neglected or ignored by the mainstream. I return to the question of subject matter in the final part of this Introduction where I sketch contending ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ agendas.

BOX 0.2: DISCUSSION POINTS

A divided discipline?

In the late 1980s International Relations undertook a self-examination. Eminent scholar K. J. Holsti (1985: 1) lamented that ‘International theory is in a state of disarray’. The ‘intellectual consensus’ that guided research and learning for over three centuries had, in Holsti’s opinion, ‘broken down’. No longer was there ‘a consensus on the subjects of inquiry and theorizing. The view that international theory should be organized around the structures and processes of the states system, the activities of the **great powers** and their decision makers, particularly as they relate to war and peace, is no longer accepted by a significant number of scholars’ (Holsti 1985: 2). Holsti’s concern was not so much that the dominant view of the discipline’s focus and purpose had been abandoned – this was reasonable given the fundamental changes that had occurred in the twentieth century – but that the ‘theoretical profusion’ had made coherent dialogue and debate very difficult. His fear, in short, was that the discipline might never regain its focus and sense of purpose. Holsti was not alone. Mark Hoffman (1987) accepted Holsti’s assessment of a discipline divided over purpose, focus or appropriate methodology, but advocated a ‘next stage’ in which Critical Theory (see Chapter 4) would reconstruct and reorient the discipline. Others, such as Yosef Lapid (1989a: 83) questioned whether establishing a ‘new hegemonic orthodoxy’ would be ‘possible’ or ‘desirable’, preferring to celebrate theoretical diversity (see also George and Campbell 1990). For fuller treatment of this approach, see Chapter 1.

Second, disciplines grow within institutions and grow their own institutions. Universities are the most obvious sites for the institutionalisation of the research and teaching of particular subjects, but they are not alone, as we shall see. Departments, schools or centres have been established in universities around the world to study international relations. The first was established in 1919 at the University of Wales, in the seaside town of Aberystwyth, when Welsh industrialist and philanthropist David Davies established the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics. The London School of Economics and the University of Oxford followed shortly after, with the establishment of Chairs in 1923 and 1930 respectively. In the US, the institutionalised study of IR began with the establishment of Georgetown University’s Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in 1919, which was followed by the University of Southern California’s School of International Relations in 1924. The first university dedicated to the study of

international relations was established at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1927.

The institutionalisation of academic areas of study is vital because it provides housing for teaching and research. Both teaching and research, the two preeminent tasks of university departments, are crucial to the accumulation, expansion and transmission of bodies of knowledge. Teaching passes on knowledge and modes of analysis from one generation to the next in the classroom. Research, of course, needs to be published, so that findings and analyses can be widely disseminated and tested, not only from one generation to the next but to contemporary teachers and students as well. Journals, periodicals, books, conferences and workshops are sites for debate, the exchange of ideas, and the sharpening of arguments, all of which reproduce and revise a discipline's body of knowledge.

Disciplines also grow their own institutions such as academic journals and professional associations. I have listed some of the relevant journals in the 'Further reading' section at the end of this chapter. Added to journals are professional bodies such as the British International Studies Association (BISA) and the American-based International Studies Association (ISA), which not only organise conferences but publish journals: the *Review of International Studies* (since 1975) and *International Studies Quarterly* (since 1957, although it was published under the name *Background on World Politics* until 1970) respectively. In Australia, the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* has been published since 1946 (originally under the title *Australian Outlook*). Think tanks have also made a long-standing contribution to the advancement of learning, and are an integral part of the discipline's landscape. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was established in 1910; the Royal Institute of International Affairs was established in 1920, and its antipodean offshoots, the Australian and New Zealand Institutes of International Affairs, in 1933 and 1934 respectively.

Third, a discipline draws upon traditions of thought that have developed and evolved around the subject matter. Although the first university department was not established until 1919 it would be a mistake to believe that the study of international relations began at that point. When departments were being established, scholars and students were not inventing a discipline out of thin air; they had over two millennia of recorded words, thoughts and actions to draw upon. Cognate departments such as Government, Law and History also provided useful resources (Schmidt 1998). But so too did thinkers subsequently drafted into the International Relations canon.

Thucydides (c. 460–406 BC), **Machiavelli** (1469–1527) and Grotius (1583–1645), for example, may not have taught in universities, but they wrote about the actors and events that shaped the 'international relations', as we now call it, of their day. Care must be taken here, however, because the actors and events they described and analysed are vastly different to the ones that now animate international relations. Moreover, none of these great thinkers limited himself to the external relations of actors, whether city-states, empires or sovereign states. Indeed, it is closer to the truth to say that they discussed what we would call IR either indirectly or only in occasional passages of their classic texts. So we need to be careful when discussing the past not to commit the sin of *anachronism* – discussing one historical epoch in terms of language, concepts and understandings borrowed from another. In other words, we risk anachronism when we speak of these great thinkers writing about 'international relations' because, in fact, they did not neatly distinguish international relations from domestic politics or international

Table 0.2 Realism and liberalism compared

	Realism	Liberalism
Main actor	States	Individuals
Contextual focus	Anarchy	Institutions
Fundamental value	Security	Liberty
Elemental behaviour	Conflict	Cooperation
Outlook	Pessimism	Optimism
View of history	Recurrence and repetition	Progressive change

law or morality in the way the discipline of IR has done since its inception. Neither the ‘Great Divide’ nor the ‘anarchy problematique’ underpinned their thinking.

Traditions of thought

What are the traditions of thought that have influenced the study of international relations? How one answers this question depends on which classificatory scheme one uses, and there are several such schemes. During the discipline’s early years, the dominant classificatory scheme was of **idealism** or **liberalism** on the one hand and **realism** on the other (see Table 0.2); this was how E. H. Carr (1946) presented the field of study. Arguably this scheme still dominates the discipline today in the USA – albeit in revised form as a debate between **neoliberalism** and **neorealism** (see Baldwin 1993). It is vital to come to grips with these two dominant IR theories, as they have largely set the parameters of the discipline, shaping its core assumptions and key questions.

Realists argue that states exist in a condition of anarchy that compels them to seek and to balance power to ensure their survival and security (see Chapter 2). They paint international relations as a tragic realm of **‘power politics’** where **‘national interests’** clash and moral claims hold little sway. For realists, the character of international relations remains unchanged through history. Marked by what Kenneth Waltz (1979: 66) calls ‘a dismaying persistence’ of war, international relations is, in Wight’s (1966b: 26) words, ‘the realm of recurrence and repetition’. Thucydides, the great Athenian historian of *The Peloponnesian War*, brilliant Florentine diplomat and writer, Niccolò Machiavelli, and towering English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (intellectually and physically towering – he was almost six foot tall, well above average height in the seventeenth century) are canonical names in realism’s hall of fame. They not only provided insights into their own times, but also offered wisdom and insight that realists believe transcend time. In the realist view, if Thucydides or Hobbes were transported to our own time they would observe nothing different other than the names of the actors (Waltz 1979: 66; Wight 1966b: 26).

Liberals take a more optimistic view. If realists see history as static or cyclical, liberals see it as progressive. They tend to emphasise humanity’s capacity to improve: they are committed to ideals of technological and economic as well as moral, legal and political progress (see Chapter 3). That the world is anarchical and war-prone is as true for liberals as it is for realists, but the former believe it is possible and necessary for humankind to escape the **Hobbesian** ‘state of war’ – a condition in which states are insecure and constantly preparing for war. Strategies of ‘peace through law’ and ‘peace through commerce’ are the dominant liberal approaches. In international relations they

see the gradual development and strengthening of international trade, international law and international organisations as the key to world order (Suganami 1989). Names in the liberal pantheon include great English political philosophers John Locke and John Stuart Mill, and the superlative philosopher of Königsberg (now called Kaliningrad), Immanuel **Kant**.

Others have posited a tripartite scheme. One of the most common is the tripartite scheme of realism, liberalism and **Marxism**, or variations thereof (Doyle 1997; Holsti 1985; Walt 1998). This extends and complicates the realism/liberalism debate by adding a Marxist tradition of thought. This tradition shifted emphasis away from states to the historical development of the capitalist system and the class conflict it generated (see Kubálková and Cruickshank 1985; Linklater 1990). It redirected the focus to an examination of how the twin logics of capitalist development and geopolitical rivalry interacted. It is worth noting here that Marxism played a vital role in stimulating the Critical Theory pioneered by Robert Cox (1981) and Andrew Linklater (1990), because Marx critically analysed the tensions between hopes of universal freedom and concrete realities of inequality and oppression (see Chapter 4).

In his famous lectures at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the 1950s, Martin Wight (1991) also distinguished three traditions of thought, but rather eccentrically called them realism, **rationalism** and **revolutionism** (also see Bull 1976). If realism was the tradition associated with power politics and ‘the blood and iron and immorality men’, as Wight called them (Bull 1976: 104), revolutionism was associated with the perpetual peace of liberal internationalism *and* the **revolutionary** internationalism of Marxism – ‘the subversion and liberation and missionary men’. Rationalism was a ‘middle way’ that sought to avoid the extremes of realism and revolutionism. It is a tradition of thought most closely associated with seventeenth-century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (who, by contrast with Hobbes, was barely five feet tall!), and eighteenth-century Swiss lawyer, Emer de Vattel – ‘the law and order and keep your word men’, to use Wight’s description (Bull 1976: 104). Rationalists accept the realist premise that states exist in a condition of anarchy (where no state has the authority to lay down and enforce the law), but deny that this condition is bereft of rules and **norms**. Rather, they argue that, to use the felicitous phrase of Wight’s foremost protégé, Hedley Bull (1977), states exist in an ‘anarchical society’. States tend to form international societies where order is maintained through mechanisms such as international law, diplomacy, balances of power, great power management and occasionally war (Bull 1977; see also Chapter 17). This ‘middle way’ continues today under the name of the **English School** (see Dunne 1998; Linklater and Suganami 2006), and has some affinities with neoliberal **institutionalism** (Hurrell 1995) (see Chapter 3).

In Wight’s hands, the three traditions (the ‘three Rs’) were not meant to be watertight containers, but more like ‘streams, with eddies and cross-currents, sometimes interlacing’ (Wight 1991: 260). To continue the metaphor: in practice, canonical thinkers tend to cross and sometimes straddle streams rather than soak their feet permanently in one. Wight’s purpose was merely to present the traditions as historically embodied styles of thought handed down by scholars and practitioners alike.

Needless to say, there are various classificatory schemes, each as arbitrary as the next. What matters is not so much the historical veracity of the scheme as the analytical tools it serves up. Traditions of thought, whichever scheme we choose to employ, provide us with the premises, tenets and concepts without which we could not intelligibly

discuss and analyse international relations. Traditions are the source of our lexicon, the common vocabulary we use to study our subject – even if, as Renée Jeffery (2005) contends, the very idea of a ‘tradition of thought’ is questionable.

We have to depart from somewhere (there is actually no point outside all tradition), so we start with what the competing traditions leave to us. But traditions are not given and homogeneous. They are ‘invented’, which is not to say that traditions are false or arbitrarily fabricated, only that the inheritance must be selected and interpreted before it can be received. Traditions are also heterogeneous, comprising multiple strands and legacies. What we believe they leave to us depends on how we sift through, select and interpret the tradition’s inheritance (see Box 0.3). As Jim George (1994: 196) rightly points out, ‘the “great texts” of International Relations can be read in ways entirely contrary to their ritualized disciplinary treatment’. Which is why IR has in recent years witnessed an ‘historiographical turn’ (Armitage 2004, Duncan Bell 2001, Keene 2005) – reflecting on the aims and methods of writing history, particularly intellectual history or the history of ideas. In keeping with this historiographical turn, this Introduction, and the textbook as a whole, aims to encourage and cultivate what Herbert Butterfield (1955: 17) called ‘historical-mindedness’.

BOX 0.3: DISCUSSION POINTS

Was Thucydides a realist?

As an illustration of how traditions depend on interpretation, consider the tendency of realists and others to assign Thucydides uncritically to the realist tradition. Behind this assignation lies the supposition that the realist tradition is centred around the concept of material or military power and that Thucydides is a realist par excellence. The one episode in his account of the Peloponnesian War that is always invoked is ‘The Melian Dialogue’. According to Thucydides’ (1972: 402) narrative, the Athenian envoy says to his Melian counterpart, ‘the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept’. Captured in this remark is one of the most powerful expressions of realism’s emphasis on material power determining international outcomes – which is why it is realism’s favourite hymn, and why Thucydides is viewed as the first great realist. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Thucydides subscribes to this realist view, since he is simply retelling the story. In fact, much else in his narrative suggests that Thucydides would be out of place in the realist tradition, not least because he places a good deal of emphasis on normative standards for assessing conduct and moral responsibility. Furthermore, the Athenian empire’s reliance on military force and war proves insufficient to prevent eventual collapse. We can conclude, therefore, that how traditions are understood and who is included in them is indeed a matter of selection and interpretation.

To summarise, as Wight has suggested, and as R. B. J. Walker (1993: chapter 2) and Jim George (1994: 192–7) have amply demonstrated, traditions of thought are never as internally coherent or self-enclosed as they appear. Common though it may be to bundle Machiavelli and Hobbes together in the realist tradition, they actually differ considerably on many key points, especially on how they view time and change in politics, with the Florentine seeing politics as permanently in flux and the Englishman holding to a more static and spatial conception that is perhaps more consistent with some aspects of the ‘Great Divide’.

Origins and evolution of the discipline

The origins of the discipline are to be found in one crucial historical moment: World War I (1914–18) as we know it now, but the ‘Great War’ as it was known before World War II. It was the most intense and mechanised war yet experienced, with new technologies, including the advent of air power, allowing for new heights of destruction to be reached. The unprecedented destructiveness prompted calls for the eradication of war; it was indeed often referred to as the ‘War to End All Wars’. The traumatic experience of the Great War for Europeans was perhaps compounded by the fact that the years preceding it were relatively peaceful and stable, witnessing marked increases in ‘the number of multilateral conferences, institutions, and organizations’ (Reus-Smit 1999: 133). In particular, significant strides were taken regarding the laws of war with the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, which seemed to vindicate liberal optimism for international reform.

After the war, an understandable tide of anti-war sentiment surged through Europe – the continent that had witnessed so many terrible wars over the centuries. It was not only war’s destructiveness that fuelled anti-war sentiment, it was also its apparent futility. As an instrument of foreign policy, war appeared to many to be ineffective and counterproductive (see Angell 1912).

We might think such sentiments to be a natural reaction to war. But until the eighteenth century, while war had always been lamented, it was rarely viewed as eradicable. This is why English jurist Sir Henry Maine (cited in Howard 2001: 1) observed in the middle of the nineteenth century, ‘War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention’. It was only with the initiation of ‘plans for perpetual peace’ in the eighteenth century, drafted most famously by the Abbé Saint Pierre and Immanuel Kant, that thinkers and scholars put their minds to determining how peace might permanently prevail over war in a system of states. But only after the Great War did a widespread ‘peace movement’ arise with the intention of eliminating war for all time.

To this sentiment were added practical, institutional measures, including the establishment of the League of Nations at Geneva in 1920 and, in accordance with the League’s Covenant, the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague in 1922 (originally the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as established under the 1899 Hague Conference). According to Chris Reus-Smit (1999), a new *legislative* principle of procedural justice emerged at this time which found concrete expression in these new institutions. Two precepts informed this new legislative justice: ‘first, that only those subject to the rules have the right to define them and, second, that the rules of society must apply equally to all’ (Reus-Smit 1999: 129). Reus-Smit (1999: 123–54) traces the origins of these ideas back to the eighteenth century – to the **Enlightenment** and to the American and French revolutions; but it is arguable that it was only in the aftermath of the Great War that a new diplomatic and legal order took shape based on contractual international law and **multilateralism**. The war not only marked a break with the previous peace, it brought about a different kind of peace, one where permanent international institutions were designed ‘to promote international co-operation and to achieve peace and security’, as expressed in the League of Nations Covenant (printed in Claude 1964: 409).

This is the general context in which the discipline of International Relations was established. It was a period of progressive institutionalisation of liberal–constitutional

principles as a reaction to war (see Chapter 3). This ‘desire ... to prevent future wars’, says William Olson (1972: 12), ‘must never be forgotten’ when assessing the discipline’s origins. More than just the study of the causes and conditions of war and peace, the study of international relations was, from the outset, guided by a purpose: to develop theories aimed at preventing or eliminating war. It would do so by focusing on states and their interactions in the states-system, but also by bringing liberal tenets to bear on the prevailing bellicose system. Liberals such as Sir Norman Angell and US President Woodrow Wilson believed that a lasting peace could only be achieved by overcoming the **balance of power** and secret diplomacy; they argued for developing a new diplomatic and legal order around international organisations based on practices of **collective security** and open diplomacy (see Ashworth 1999; Woodrow Wilson 1918). ‘The distinctive characteristic of these writers’, says Hedley Bull (1972: 34), was their belief in progress: ‘the belief, in particular’, he continues,

that the system of international relations that had given rise to the First World War was capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order; that under the impact of the awakening of democracy, the growth of ‘the international mind’, the development of the League of Nations, the good works of men of peace or the enlightenment spread by their own teachings, it was in fact being transformed.

Liberal–constitutional values and ideals thus set the agenda for the discipline in the inter-war years, the agenda against which E. H. Carr aimed his withering criticism. First published in 1939, Carr’s *The twenty years’ crisis, 1919–1939* (1946) has had a massive influence on the discipline of International Relations. Carr’s book is a brilliant polemical attack on the liberal thinking associated with Angell, Wilson, Alfred Zimmern and others, which he characterised as a hollow sham (Carr 1946: 89). Carr believed **utopianism** (for which you can substitute liberalism) utterly failed to take account of power in its analysis of international relations; it ignored Machiavelli’s injunction to deal with what *is* the case, rather than what *ought to be* the case (Carr 1946: 63). The structure of Carr’s masterpiece revolves around the dichotomy between realism and liberalism. In fact, he helped create the impression that the newly established discipline was dominated by a debate between realism and liberalism. This subsequently became known as the ‘first great debate’, though – as Peter Wilson (1998) and Lucian Ashworth (1999) have shown – no debate actually occurred, if by that we mean that a series of exchanges took place between realists and liberals. Indeed, recent work suggests that the very idea of narrating the discipline’s history as a series of ‘great debates’ is questionable. Even so, it is important for students to learn and appreciate the stories the discipline has told about itself, which is why I persist with the narrative.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s when scholars began to reflect more on the origins and evolution of the discipline, it has become conventional to narrate the discipline’s history through a recounting of ‘great debates’. The ‘second great debate’ is said to have been a methodological quarrel in the 1960s and 1970s between ‘behaviouralism’ and ‘traditionalism’; at stake was the question, ‘what is the most appropriate way of pursuing and acquiring knowledge in international relations?’ Bull (1966) frames the debate in terms of ‘scientific versus classical’ methods. He identifies two broad criticisms of the scientific approach, which wants to emulate the methods of the natural sciences in its attempts to explain international politics. First, that it cannot live up to its aspirations and must fall back on non-scientific (read ‘classical’) methods. Second, that it is an

inappropriate method for studying many of the central issues in international relations, because even empirical questions are not susceptible to pure observation, but depend upon 'intuition or judgment' (Bull 1966: 367), and because many questions are in part normative. Essentially, Bull thinks the 'scientific' approach removes students and scholars too far from the stuff of international relations – 'as remote from the substance of international politics as the inmates of a Victorian nunnery were from the study of sex' (Bull 1966: 366). Bull defends the 'classical' approach which, he contends, is interpretive, more historical and better attuned to normative judgments.

Chris Brown (1997: 36–7) is probably right to describe the second debate as a 'minor skirmish' rather than a 'great debate', since it was in fact 'something of a non-event' at the time. Having said that, it was the first time the study of international relations opened itself up to theoretical self-reflection. Though little was resolved by the debate, it highlighted the importance of reflecting on inescapable questions related to how we acquire knowledge. Knowledge does not fall from the heavens fully formed, so clarifying how to pursue or acquire knowledge is essential – it helps us discriminate between competing descriptions or analyses of international relations. Indeed, this unresolved question feeds into the 'third great debate', which, according to Yosef Lapid (1989b), pits **positivism** against post-positivism. In this debate, the mainstream approaches of neorealism and neoliberalism defend themselves against a variety of 'critical' theories. Steve Smith (1996: 11, 13), in a most valuable account of what is at stake in the 'third debate', accuses positivism of restricting our understanding of 'what kinds of things [exist] in international relations' and of narrowly limiting ethical and practical possibilities. The theoretical profusion associated with the 'third debate' can be usefully linked to the changing agenda of international relations.

Changing agendas: theory and practice

Since its inception International Relations has continued to evolve, largely in reflection of changing political circumstances. In this final section I want to outline some of the ways that the study of international relations has changed over time. First, I set recent developments in international relations theory in the context of what has been referred to as the 'third debate'. My purpose is not to provide a comprehensive account of the theoretical scene (that is provided in Chapter 1), but merely to indicate how the theory chapters in Part 1 relate to the 'traditional' and 'new' agendas comprising Parts 2 and 3 respectively. Second, I sketch the 'traditional' and 'new' agendas of international relations. My argument is not that the 'new' agenda displaces or renders obsolete the 'traditional'; rather, the two agendas exist alongside one another, intersecting in complex ways that require further study.

The 'critical turn' against the 'Great Divide'

The mainstream approaches of realism and liberalism have been instrumental in shaping the 'traditional' agenda (see Chapters 2 and 3). This should come as no surprise given the discipline's liberal origins and realism's rise to prominence during the **Cold War** (see Chapter 20).

The first point to note is that both realism and liberalism tend to accept the terms of the 'Great Divide', and to naturalise the 'anarchy problematique'. They view the

domestic and international realms as distinct and mutually exclusive. Both also tend to take the state for granted as a form of political community, even if liberals are more likely to acknowledge the threat states pose to their own citizens. Liberalism, after all, emerged as a critical intervention against the disturbing concentration of state power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Liberalism and realism diverge, however, over questions of war and law. Realists and liberals both deplore war as a tragic and destructive phenomenon, but how they explain war varies. Realists see war as an inevitable and ineradicable part of international relations insofar as the condition of anarchy prevails (Waltz 1959). Liberals accept this description, but believe that change is possible. They argue that institutional change at the level of the state and the **international system** will release potentials for eradicating, or at the very least considerably limiting, war. In essence liberals argue that the key to achieving perpetual peace is to transform the international realm so that it comes to resemble the domestic realm. Realists reject this 'domestic analogy' (see Suganami 1989), being sceptical that international anarchy can be transformed into an international hierarchy where some kind of global sovereign exercises power *and* authority. Liberals, on the other hand, believe the spread of liberal **democracy** will result in the strengthening of international organisations and the rule of international law, which will mitigate the worst aspects of anarchy and contribute to the 'domestication' of the global system.

The 'critical turn' in international relations posed a challenge to both realism and liberalism for taking the world more or less as it is, 'with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given frame of action' (Cox 1981: 128). One of the pioneering scholars of Critical Theory, Robert Cox identified liberalism and realism (especially in their 'neo' versions) with 'problem-solving' theory. Problem-solving theories work within the present limits of the system to smooth over instabilities or problems (Cox 1981: 129); they tend to work in favour of stabilising prevailing structures of world order and their accompanying inequalities of wealth and power. Cox's main point is that problem-solving theories like realism and liberalism fail to reflect on the prior framework within which they theorise (see Box 4.2). The upshot is that they tend to be conservative, notwithstanding their claims to objective or value-free analysis.

By contrast, critical theories (including for the moment Marxism, **feminism**, postmodernism, Critical Theory and sometimes **constructivism**; see Chapters 4–7) start from the premise that 'theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' (Cox 1981: 128). All knowledge, according to critical theorists, is coloured by social, cultural and ideological influence, and it is vital to reveal the effect of this conditioning. Critical theories of international relations, then, seek to bring to consciousness latent assumptions, interests or purposes that give rise to and orient thinking about international relations. Refusing to take the present system as normal or natural, they explore the possibilities of **emancipation** by forming more inclusionary political communities committed to principles of dialogue and procedural justice (see Linklater 1998 and 2007). To put the point slightly differently, critical theories are constructivist insofar as they take the prevailing structures of world order to be human creations sustained through patterned social practices. If they are constructed, then they can be transformed into less violent, more just structures of world order. Critical theories, with the possible exception of constructivism (see Shapcott 2000: 154), place emancipation at the centre of their

approach. They are all, to that extent, children of the Enlightenment, as are theorists of global justice (see Chapter 8). The knowledge they seek makes no claims to being objective or value-free. Instead, they offer a politically and ethically charged account of international relations, one aimed at expanding human freedom and global justice by radically transforming the prevailing structures of world order (see Table 4.1).

In questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, critical theories compel us to reflect on the 'Great Divide'. There is broad agreement among Marxism, Critical Theory, feminism, constructivism, postmodernism and global justice theories that the distinction between inside and outside, hierarchy and anarchy is by no means natural or necessary. It is, rather, a socially and historically constructed device for organising political life in a particular way; one that, in empowering sovereign states to pursue self-interest through power politics, disempowers and renders invisible social classes, women and the excluded in general. The 'Great Divide' also functions to reproduce the logics of self-help and power politics in international relations. As Alexander Wendt (1992) has persuasively argued, however, 'anarchy is what states make of it' (see Box 7.1). His point is that anarchy (the absence of an overarching authority) does not occur naturally or independently of states and their practices. If anarchy resembles a self-help, power-political system it is because states choose policies that make it so.

From states, war and law to globalisation and global governance

The 'Great Divide' sets up the study of international relations in a particular way – it points us towards certain issues and assumptions, and away from others. In particular, it points us towards the 'traditional' agenda of 'high politics' where diplomatic and strategic issues take centre stage. States become the principal actors and focus is concentrated on issues pertaining to their external relations: issues of **nationalism**, security, **arms control**, war, **diplomacy** and great power relations (see Chapters 9–14 and 18–20). But law has always been an important part of the traditional agenda too. From the discipline's founding, realists and liberals have long studied the relationship of states to international law (see Chapter 16), with liberals tending to put their faith in law as a force for peace, and realists tending to be sceptical of the idea that a law not backed by force can make a difference. For realists, international law may lack coercive force, but it is important nonetheless because, as the great French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([c. 1756] 1917: 125) noted, 'on every side the strong [are] armed with the terrible powers of the Law against the weak'. In other words, law (domestic or international) serves political functions and can be manipulated in precisely this manner by powerful actors. The branch of international law concerned with war has also been a constant feature of the traditional agenda (see Chapter 15), and is even more important in the current context of the global 'war on terror' (see Chapter 29).

We should not conclude, therefore, that the subject matter of the 'traditional' agenda is in any way obsolete. It will only become obsolete when sovereign states disappear and when war is eradicated. So long as these conditions are not in prospect, we would do well to reflect on the continuing relevance of states, war and law. The key question, as prompted by the 'critical turn', is whether the traditional agenda contains all the necessary intellectual resources to make sense of the contemporary politics of states, war and law in international relations. Does the traditional agenda

pose all the right questions, or is it necessary to rethink and re-pose some of these questions, perhaps by drawing on intellectual resources afforded by the ‘critical turn’?

In any case, what is excluded from the traditional agenda is everything associated with ‘domestic’ or ‘low politics’, everything that does not fit neatly into the agenda of states, war and law. Issues relegated to the margins include economics and the environment, morality and religion, and a range of **non-state actors** from refugees to terrorists, from multinational corporations (MNCs) to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Incorporating such issues and actors into the traditional agenda would effectively collapse the ‘Great Divide’; it would dissolve international relations into world politics. Critical Theorists and postmodernists have argued for just this move (R. B. J. Walker 1995); they tend to reject or at least cast doubt on the ‘Great Divide’. From their perspective the task is not to maintain disciplinary insularity, but to reflect on whether it is tenable any longer to suppose a ‘Great Divide’. Especially in the context of globalisation, it has become more urgent to ask if it is still adequate to conceive of international relations as a completely separate realm of politics from domestic politics (Clark 1999).

Part 3, The New Agenda: Globalisation and Global Governance, covers many topics that do not sit comfortably with the ‘Great Divide’. These topics can be generally included under the heading ‘globalisation and global governance’. Both these topics have spawned large industries of scholarly research, especially globalisation. An essentially contested term, globalisation has been defined by David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathon Perraton (1999: 15) as the ‘widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness’ made possible by new information, communication, and transportation technologies. As a multidimensional phenomenon, globalisation holds different, sometimes contradictory, implications for international relations (Devetak 2008). At the same time as it promises global interconnectedness, cosmopolitan community and secular modernity (see Chapter 23), it results in the fracturing of states and the rise of virulent forms of ethno-nationalism and religious **fundamentalism**. At the same time as it enables prosperous individuals to travel across the globe, it casts asylum seekers into a precarious ‘frontierland’ (Bauman 1998), sometimes even beyond the safety of international law (see Chapter 33). At the same time as it promises prosperity and peace, it also enables transnational terrorists to deploy violence to their own ends (see Chapter 29).

Globalisation has also given rise to actors and institutions concerned to regulate world politics through a combination of ‘public’ and ‘private’ organisations. Global governance is not the same as global government; it refers, as James Rosenau (1992: 4) says, to a global system of rule that rests on a blend of formal and informal authorities, officially sanctioned laws and tacit norms. On the formal side we have international organisations like the United Nations (UN) (see Chapter 21) and the **World Trade Organization**. On the informal side we have ‘private’ authorities (such as credit-rating agencies), which operate at the global level to monitor and regulate financial activities of states (see Chapter 26), and international **non-governmental organisations** (INGOs), which also operate at the global level in assisting states and international organisations in the provision of ‘global public goods’ (see Chapter 22).

Crucial elements in the contemporary architecture of global governance are global economic institutions (GEIs) like the **World Bank**, **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** and World Trade Organization, which generally lie outside the traditional

parameters of realist theories of international relations because they are thought to be marginal to the ‘high politics’ issues of strategy and diplomacy. Yet GEIs continue to exercise, controversially, a great deal of influence over countries of the global South (see Chapters 24 and 27). Debate continues about the power of these institutions to regulate the global economy and in whose interests they do so. These debates feed into more general discontent with globalisation (Chapter 28).

If the traditional agenda focuses on the system of states, the new agenda recognises the growing influence of global or transnational actors, structures and processes. If the traditional agenda downgrades ideas and norms to material considerations of power, the new agenda frequently plays up the power of ideas and norms. This is clear in the rising prominence of religion, human rights, **refugees** and the environment on the agenda of global politics (see Chapters 23, 32–35); all are issues of global scope (transnational issues that cross state borders), all are irreducible to material sources of power. These issues also tend to raise moral considerations (what are our obligations?). It is on this basis that **humanitarianism** has flourished in recent decades. Organisations such as Oxfam, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) and the International Committee of the Red Cross make it their business to assist humans in need around the globe. Since the 1990s arguments have even been made that humanitarianism must be prepared to use force if suffering strangers are to be saved (see Chapter 31).

It is arguable that the ‘critical turn’ and the rise of a ‘new’ agenda have turned the world of international relations into a different place. It is not only that the ‘furniture’ of the world is different (state as well as a variety of non-state actors, the states-system as well as transnational networks populate this world); our understanding of these actors, networks, structures and processes also changes. They are no longer seen as clearly defined or fixed objects in an external world of material power relations; rather, they are seen as contested objects constructed by a range of material and non-material (‘ideational’) social, political, legal, economic and religious practices. The things of this world are imbued with meaning and value by humans and their social relations, and insofar as they are socially constructed, they are susceptible to modification and change (see Chapters 4 and 7). But change need not involve large-scale violence. The Cold War ended peacefully, and authoritarian regimes across Eastern Europe (Georgia’s 2003 ‘Rose Revolution’, Ukraine’s 2004–2005 ‘Orange Revolution’) and the Arab world (Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011) have been overthrown through largely peaceful popular uprisings.

Indeed, change itself has become a more prominent feature of International Relations. It is not just that change emanates from the new agenda, however; traditional agenda issues such as war are equally disposed to change as actors (other than states’ armed forces) engage in organised violence, adopting tactics of **guerrilla warfare** and **terrorism**, and applying new technologies that can transform war. In the context of some **civil wars** in the 1990s scholars such as Mary Kaldor (1999) argued that ‘new wars’ had arisen in places like the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone which did not fit the usual understanding. In the context of the global ‘war on terror’ the US has argued for changes to international law and the laws of war in order to fight terrorism more effectively.

These examples suggest that the ‘Great Divide’ is not nearly as clear cut as formerly imagined. Domestic hierarchy and the state’s monopoly over the instruments of violence

Figure 0.2 Anti-government demonstrations during the 2010–11 Tunisian uprising



Source: Wikimedia commons.

have been undone, leaving citizens insecure and uncertain of who their friends are when wars of ethno-nationalism break out. In some respects, the domestic comes to acquire traits of the international realm. At the same time, the gradual development and consolidation of global governance suggests that international relations may be approximating the domestic realm in some important respects. In the final analysis, the

rise of the new agenda and the critical turn suggest that the 'Great Divide' should not be taken for granted.

Conclusion

This Introduction has tried to show the fascinating history and the complex dynamics that continue to shape international relations, making it such an exciting area to study. Continuity and change, traditional and new agendas define International Relations today. It is important to note, however, that the 'new' agenda does not replace or supplant the 'traditional' agenda, it *supplements* it. The traditional agenda is necessary, if insufficient, to understanding or explaining international relations *or* world politics today. True, the prevention or elimination of war remains as urgent today as it was in 1919, but the character of war has changed dramatically since then and we must study these and other differences as well as the things that remain the same.

The two agendas (traditional and new) exist alongside each other; though not without tension. The task for IR students today is to come to a better understanding of how these agendas interact. This textbook is designed to introduce you to both agendas and to show you the continuing vitality of some dimensions of the traditional agenda and the emergence of novel features of the new agenda that demand different theoretical approaches. Coming to terms with the main features of both traditional and new agendas should enable you to attain a deeper understanding of the issues covered in the global news media. It should also alert you to the tremendous range of intellectually exciting and politically urgent questions that define the study of International Relations today.

QUESTIONS

1. What should be studied under the heading 'international relations'?
2. Should the discipline's founding premises and purposes still govern the study of international relations? What, if anything, should be the purpose of studying international relations?
3. Does what Ian Clark calls the 'Great Divide' still hold today?
4. Does the 'new' agenda adequately capture the changes in recent international relations?
5. Which theory or theories can provide most insight into past and present international relations?

FURTHER READING

Doyle, Michael 1997, *Ways of war and peace: realism, liberalism and socialism*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Impressive account of realism, liberalism and socialism's intellectual contributions to the study of international relations.

George, Jim 1994, *Discourses of global politics: a critical (re)introduction to international relations*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. Most important book published in the context of the 'third great debate'; captures the complexity of the discipline.

Griffiths, Martin (ed.) 2005, *Encyclopedia of international relations and global politics*, London: Routledge. Indispensable resource with entries on all major and minor topics.

Reus-Smit, Christian and Snidal, Duncan (eds), 2008, *The Oxford handbook of international relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Major reference book that provides an invaluable account of the 'state of the art' of IR.

Smith, Steve, Booth, Ken and Zalewski, Marysia (eds) 1996, *International theory: positivism and beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Still valuable overview of the discipline on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Department of Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Journals

There are also a number of academic journals you should acquaint yourself with. I mention only a few of the most important ones here. *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly* and *World Politics* from the US; *Review of International Studies* and *International Affairs* from the UK; *European Journal of International Relations* based in Europe; *Australian Journal of International Affairs* from Australia. There are also some important theory journals that reflect the 'critical turn', including the London School of Economics-based *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (UK), *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (Canada/India), and the new journal, *International Theory* (US).

