

# IR theory after the Cold War

GEORG SØRENSEN

The end of the Cold War has prompted a good deal of soul-searching in the academic discipline of International Relations (IR).<sup>\*</sup> Some results of this process are already apparent; the dominant version of realism, neorealism, is developing in new directions in an attempt to address major areas where the theory has been shown to contain weaknesses (e.g. domestic politics, international cooperation, the analysis of change).<sup>1</sup> Liberal IR-theory is becoming less focused on international institutions and has devoted more attention to the larger issues of democracy and democratization, sovereignty, and change in the context of modernization and globalization.<sup>2</sup> Some bodies of established theory are receiving fresh attention, including the International Society (or English) School,<sup>3</sup> and there is a renewed interest in the field of international political economy.<sup>4</sup>

Yet all these theoretical traditions (realism, liberalism, International Society, international political economy) can be seen as enduring perspectives in IR; they build on a long intellectual tradition concerning problems of relations between

\* Many thanks to Kenneth Glarbo, Knud Erik Jørgensen, Michael Nicholson, Steve Smith, and Alexander Wendt for very helpful comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Joseph M. Grieco, 'Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics', in M.W. Doyle and G.J. Ikenberry (eds.), *New Thinking in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, 1997), pp. 163–202; Michael E. Brown *et al.* (eds.), *The Perils of Anarchy. Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge, MA, 1995); John A. Vasquez, 'The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition', and the responses by Kenneth Waltz, Thomas Christensen, and Jack Snyder, Colin and Miriam Fendius Elman, Randall Schweller and Stephen Walt, *American Political Science Review*, 4 (1997), pp. 899–935.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace. Principles for a Post-Cold War World* (Princeton, 1993); Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York/London, 1997); Henry R. Nau, 'Democracy and the National Interest: An American Foreign Policy for the Twenty-First Century', paper for SSRC Conference on U.S. Promotion of Democracy, Washington 1997; Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, 1990); Robert O. Keohane, 'Hobbes's Dilemma and Institutional Change in World Politics: Sovereignty in International Society', in H-H. Holm and G. Sørensen (eds.), *Whose World Order? Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War* (Boulder, 1995), pp. 165–87.

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Jackson, 'International Community beyond the Cold War', in G.M. Lyons and M. Mastanduno (eds.), *Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention* (Baltimore/London, 1995), pp. 59–87; Robert H. Jackson, 'The Political Theory of International Society', in K. Booth and S. Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today* (University Park, PA, 1995), pp. 110–29; Tim Dunne, 'The Social Construction of International Society', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3 (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey D. Underhill (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order* (London, 1994); Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State. The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge, 1996); Philip G. Cerny, 'Plurilateralism: Structural Differentiation and Functional Conflict in the Post-Cold War World Order', *Millennium*, 1 (1993), pp. 27–51.

communities and states including classical literatures from Thucydides and onwards.<sup>5</sup> A major debate in IR after the end of the Cold War involves various critiques of all these established traditions by alternative approaches, sometimes identified as post-positivism.<sup>6</sup> There have always been 'dissident voices' in the discipline of IR: i.e. philosophers and scholars who rejected established views and tried to replace them with alternatives. But in recent years these voices have increased in strength and number. Two factors help explain that development. First, the end of the Cold War changed the international agenda in some fundamental ways. In place of a clear-cut East/West-conflict dominated by two contending superpowers a number of diverse issues emerged in world politics, including, for example: state partition and disintegration; civil war; democratization; national minorities; mass migration and refugee problems, environmental issues; and so forth. Second, an increasing number of IR scholars expressed dissatisfaction with the dominant Cold War approach to IR: the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. Many scholars now take issue with Waltz's claim that the complex world of international relations can be squeezed into a few law-like statements about the structure of the international system and the balance of power. They consequently reinforce and qualitatively expand the anti-behaviouralist critique first put forward by International Society theorists such as Hedley Bull.<sup>7</sup> Many IR scholars also criticize Waltzian neorealism for its conservative political outlook. There is not much in neorealism which can point to qualitative change and the creation of a better world.

The vague label of 'post-positivism' contains a variety of different approaches. I am going to deal with the metatheoretical (in the broadest sense) debate first. Two main points will be argued. First that it is indeed that—a metatheoretical debate—which is helpful in a number of respects but which contains very little about the real issues in IR, the meat of the discipline. Second that the most extreme metatheoretical positions in both positivist and post-positivist directions are less useful for our analytical purposes than those which try to find a middle ground. As will become clear, that middle ground can be found with respect both to epistemology and to ontology.

Hoping to have clarified at least some of the metatheoretical questions, I move on to the substantial debate about the core issues in the discipline after the end of the Cold War. A survey of the major substantial debates combined with my own predilections leads to the identification of three main issue areas. They are: (a) globalization; (b) sovereign statehood; and (c) world order. The core content of each of these issue areas is set forth briefly. In conclusion, I argue that IR is again as close as we are able to get to a state of pursuing 'normal science' in our part of the scientific universe. My attempt to cover both metatheoretical and substantive issues has one obvious downside: there is insufficient space to cover all the important issues and literatures that characterize the period since 1989. So what follows is by no means a comprehensive in-depth treatment; it is rather an introduction of some, but not all, of the most important issues.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robert H. Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *International Relations: Introduction to a Discipline* (Oxford, forthcoming 1999).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism & Beyond* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', in K. Knorr and J. Rosenau (eds.), *Contending Approaches to International Politics* (Princeton, 1969).

## Metatheoretical Issues

It should be noted right away that there are many different ways of presenting the debates between established traditions and post-positivist currents in IR. What follows is no complete account; no attempt has been made to single out all relevant issues and questions. But I do claim to address some of the most important items in the metatheoretical debate. A proper place to begin is in one of the most radical (in philosophy of science terms) and outspoken parts of the post-positivist camp, namely the post-modernists. Post-modernism can aptly be defined as 'incredulity towards metanarratives'<sup>8</sup> even if Lyotard emphasizes that this definition involves 'simplifying to the extreme'. Metanarratives are accounts that claim to have discovered the truth about the social world. In Steve Smith's helpful terminology, metanarratives are theories based on a foundational epistemology, that is, a position according to which 'all truth claims (i.e. about some feature of the world) can be judged true or false'.<sup>9</sup> An anti-foundational epistemology, by contrast, argues that truth claims 'cannot be so judged since there are never neutral grounds for so doing; instead each theory will define what counts as the facts and so there will be no neutral position available to determine between rival claims'.

The metanarratives attacked by post-modernists are also most often explanatory as opposed to constitutive. Explanatory theories 'sees the world as something external to our theories of it; in contrast a constitutive theory is one that thinks our theories actually help construct the world'.<sup>10</sup>

The IR-theory or metanarrative most strongly attacked by post-modernists is neorealism,<sup>11</sup> in part because of its perceived dominance in the discipline, and in part because of its structuralist parsimony. After all, here is a theory which claims that only a few elements of information about sovereign states in an anarchical international system can tell us most of the big and important things we need to know about international relations. And the theory even claims to reflect the reality of international politics 'through all the centuries that we can contemplate'.<sup>12</sup>

Post-modernist critiques of neorealism emphasize the structuralist quality of the theory. The anarchical structure of the international system confronts individual actors as a given material reality which they cannot change; adaptation is their only option.<sup>13</sup> The theory is ahistorical and that in turn leads to reification, the move whereby historically produced structures are presented as unchangeable constraints given by nature. Individual actors are 'reduced in the last analysis to mere objects who must participate in reproducing the whole or ... fall by the wayside of

<sup>8</sup> J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester, 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Smith, 'New Approaches to International Theory', in J. Baylis and S. Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford, 1997), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Richard K. Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', in R.O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, 1986), pp. 255–301; R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1993); R.B.J. Walker, 'International Relations and the Concept of the Political', in Booth and Smith, *International Relations Today*, pp. 306–28. There are other positivist positions than neorealism, of course, and Kenneth Waltz is not the sole standard bearer of neorealism. But for lack of space, I focus on the critique of Waltz.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', p. 289, and Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p. 123.

history'.<sup>14</sup> It follows that neorealism has big difficulties in confronting change in international relations. Emphasis is on 'structural continuity and repetition',<sup>15</sup> the anarchical structure of international relations remains in place. This leads to poverty of imagination; any thinking about alternative futures remains stuck in forced choice between sovereign statehood and anarchy or the (unlikely) abolition of sovereign statehood and the creation of some world government. 'This certainly provides a powerful and familiar ground on which to argue that because universal human community is not in sight, the world remains more or less the same'.<sup>16</sup>

In Foucauldian terms, post-modernists see neorealism as a 'regime of truth'; 'statements about the social world are only "true" within specific discourses . . . It is for this reason that post-modernists are opposed to any metanarratives, since they imply that there are conditions for establishing the truth or falsity of knowledge-claims that are not the product of any discourse, and thereby not the products of power'.<sup>17</sup> In that way, the severe problems and shortcomings of neorealist theory can be explained primarily through the metatheoretical stance adopted by the theory. In the terms introduced above, it is an explanatory theory based on a foundational epistemology. These are the basic metatheoretical characteristics of positivism.

According to this analysis then, there is a gulf between positivist (foundational and explanatory) IR-theory on the one hand and post-positivist (anti-foundational and constitutive) IR-theory on the other. And the preferable metatheoretical way ahead is the post-positivist one, because it promises to deconstruct any meta-narrative claiming to represent some universally valid truth. For post-positivists, there is no 'truth' outside of power.

### Positivism versus post-positivism

I believe that this is a core metatheoretical debate in IR after the Cold War. Many post-positivists of various colours have contributed to this debate, but it is the work of Steve Smith<sup>18</sup> which has been most helpful in clarifying the points of contention and drawing up the front-lines of the debate. Steve Smith is firmly on the post-positivist side in the debate. His position is premised on the notion of an insurmountable gulf between positivist and post-positivist methodology. The two 'cannot be combined together because they have mutually exclusive assumptions'.<sup>19</sup> I am going to question this position in two ways. First I argue that even if there are problems with positivism, the post-positivist position is also in several respects

<sup>14</sup> Ashley, 'The Poverty of Neorealism', p. 291.

<sup>15</sup> Walker, 'International Relations and the Concept of the Political', p. 309. It is fair to add that reflections on change are not strange to all positivist, systemic theory. See, for example, Ole R. Holsti, Randolph M. Siverson, and Alexander George (eds.), *Change in the International System* (Boulder, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Walker, *Inside/Outside*, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, 'New Approaches to International Theory', p. 181.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford, 1990); Steve Smith, 'Positivism and Beyond', in Smith, Booth, and Zalewski, *International Theory: Positivism & Beyond*, pp. 11–47; Smith, 'New Approaches to International Theory'; Steve Smith, 'Epistemology, Postmodernism and International Relations Theory', *Journal of Peace Research*, 3 (1997), pp. 330–37.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 'New Approaches to International Theory', p. 186.

problematical if taken to the extreme, as is the case in some post-modernist contributions.<sup>20</sup> Second, I argue that the notion of an insurmountable gulf between positivist and post-positivist methodology is incorrect. This is true both in the epistemological sense and in the ontological sense, as will be clarified below. Fortunately, both epistemological and ontological middle-roads are possible and it is those middle-positions which promise the most fruitful roads ahead for IR. What follows is certainly not any sweeping attack on post-positivism; I rather believe that most of those positions associated with positivism (realism, liberalism, some versions of Marxism) as well as with post-positivism (critical theory, historical sociology, normative theory, and several version of post-modernism and feminist theory) can be placed in the productive middle ground between the positivist and the post-positivist extremes. It is the extremes of which I am critical and, by implication, I question the utility of casting this whole metatheoretical debate in terms of (extreme) positivism versus (extreme) post-positivism. That is, if and when there is room for almost everybody in the middle ground, the basic lines of battle should be drawn somewhere else.

Before moving on with these issues it is relevant to note the constructive side of deconstructivism. The 'incredulity towards metanarratives' seems to me to be a relevant element in dealing critically with any theory. In other words, deconstructing any theory can produce helpful insights. The problem only comes in when this is taken to the extreme where everything in the criticized theory is rejected and the possibility of any cross-fertilization between theoretical traditions is denied.

What, then, are the more general problems with the extreme versions of the post-positivist position? The first problem is that they tend to overlook, or downplay, the actual insights produced by non-post-positivists, such as, for example, neorealism. It is entirely true that anarchy is no given, ahistorical, natural condition to which the only possible reaction is adaptation. But the fact that anarchy is a historically specific, socially constructed product of human practice does not make it less real. In a world of sovereign states, anarchy is in fact out there in the real world in some form. In other words, it is not the acceptance of the real existence of social phenomena which produces objectivist reification. Reification is produced by the transformation of historically specific social phenomena into given, ahistorical, natural conditions.<sup>21</sup> Despite their shortcomings, neorealism and other positivist theories have produced valuable insights about anarchy, including the factors in play in balance-of-power dynamics and in patterns of cooperation and conflict. Such insights are downplayed and even sometimes dismissed in adopting the notion of 'regimes of truth'. It is, of course, possible to appreciate the shortcomings of neorealism while also recognizing that it has merits. One way of doing so is set forth by Robert Cox. He considers neorealism to be a 'problem-solving theory' which 'takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships . . . as the given framework for action . . . The strength of the problem-solving approach lies in its ability to fix limits or parameters to a problem area and to reduce the

<sup>20</sup> Tendencies in that direction can be found, for example, in Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re) Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, 1994); Roland Bleiker, 'Forget 'IR' Theory', paper for the Second Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Paris, 13-16 September 1995; Roger D. Spegele, 'Political Realism and the Remembrance of Relativism', *Review of International Studies*, 21 (1995), pp. 211-36.

<sup>21</sup> As explained in Curt Sørensen, *Marxismen og den Sociale Orden* (Marxism and the Social Order) (Kongerslev, 1976), p. 62.

statement of a particular problem to a limited number of variables which are amenable to relatively close and precise examination'.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, this 'assumption of fixity' is 'also an ideological bias . . . Problem-solving theories (serve) . . . particular national, sectional or class interests, which are comfortable within the given order'.<sup>23</sup> In sum, objectivist theory such as neorealism contains a bias, but that does not mean that it is without merit in analysing particular aspects of international relations from a particular point of view.

The second problem with post-positivism is the danger of extreme relativism which it contains. If there are no neutral grounds for deciding about truth claims so that each theory will define what counts as the facts, then the door is, at least in principle, open to anything goes. Steve Smith has confronted this problem in an exchange with Øyvind Østerud. Smith notes that he has never 'met a postmodernist who would accept that "the earth is flat if you say so". Nor has any postmodernist I have read argued or implied that "any narrative is as good as any other"'.<sup>24</sup> But the problem remains that if we cannot find a minimum of common standards for deciding about truth claims a post-modernist position appears unable to come up with a metatheoretically substantiated critique of the claim that the earth is flat. In the absence of at least some common standards it appears difficult to reject that any narrative is as good as any other.<sup>25</sup>

The final problem with extreme post-positivism I wish to address here concerns change. We noted the post-modern critique of neorealism's difficulties with embracing change; their emphasis is on 'continuity and repetition'. But extreme post-positivists have their own problem with change, which follows from their metatheoretical position. In short, how can post-positivist ideas and projects of change be distinguished from pure utopianism and wishful thinking? Post-positivist radical subjectivism leaves no common ground for choosing between different change projects. A brief comparison with a classical Marxist idea of change will demonstrate the point I am trying to make. In Marxism, social change (e.g. revolution) is, of course, possible. But that possibility is tied in with the historically specific social structures (material and non-material) of the world. Revolution is possible under certain social conditions but not under any conditions. Humans can change the world, but they are enabled and constrained by the social structures in which they live. There is a dialectic between social structure and human behaviour.<sup>26</sup> The understanding of 'change' in the Marxist tradition is thus closely related to an appreciation of the historically specific social conditions under which people live; any change project is not possible at any time. Robert Cox makes a similar point in writing about critical theory: 'Critical theory allows for a normative choice in favor of a social and political order different from the prevailing order, but it limits the range of choice to alternative orders which are feasible transformations of the existing world . . . Critical theory thus contains an element

<sup>22</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', in R.W. Cox with T.J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (London, 1996), pp. 85–124, quote from p. 88.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 'Epistemology, Postmodernism and International Relations Theory', p. 332.

<sup>25</sup> The difficult part is, of course, establishing precisely what those common standards shall be, and post-positivists often complain that the other side wants them to 'do more of the moving' on the continuum between positivism and post-positivism. The quote is from J. Ann Tickner, 'Continuing the Conversation ...', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (1998), p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> Sørensen, *Marxismen og den Sociale Orden*, pp. 68–73.

of utopianism in the sense that it can represent a coherent picture of an alternative order, but its utopianism is constrained by its comprehension of historical processes. It must reject improbable alternatives just as it rejects the permanency of the existing order'.<sup>27</sup>

That constraint appears to be absent in post-positivist thinking about change, because radical post-positivism is epistemologically and ontologically cut off from evaluating the relative merit of different change projects. Anything goes, or so it seems. That view is hard to distinguish from utopianism and wishful thinking. If neorealism denies change in its overemphasis on continuity and repetition, then radical post-positivism is metatheoretically compelled to embrace any conceivable change project.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear, then, that both the static objectivism of extreme positivism and the voluntaristic subjectivism of extreme post-positivism contain serious problems. It is fortunate, therefore, that a middle ground which avoids these extremes can be found. The notion that positivist and post-positivist methodology 'cannot be combined together because they have mutually exclusive assumptions' is misleading. The extreme versions of the two positions may be incompatible, but there is plenty of middle ground. In the simplest epistemological terms, the middle ground is premised on the notion that our ideas and theories about the world always contain elements of both subjectivity and objectivity. The subjective element is tied to our adherence to different values and concepts. The objective element is tied to the fact that we can actually agree about very substantial insights about what the real world out there looks like. All that is solid does not melt into air. At the core of this middle ground is the notion of intersubjectively transmissible knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Such knowledge is bound by standards of documentation and clarity of exposition; put differently, such knowledge is compelled to demonstrate that it is not the result of wishful thinking, guesswork or fantasy; it must contain more than purely subjective valuations.

All the major traditions in social science, be they liberal, conservative, or Marxist, embrace this middle ground of combining subjective understanding and objective explanation. It is contained already in Max Weber's definition of sociology as a subject: 'Sociology . . . is a science which attempts the *interpretive understanding* of social action in order thereby to arrive at a *causal explanation* of its course and effects'.<sup>30</sup> It is apparent in Marx's ideas about the dialectic between *verhalten* and *verhältnisse* where *verhalten* is the subjective element tied to human perceptions and values and *verhältnisse* is the objective element tied to the existence of a real world, independent of human perceptions.<sup>31</sup> It is set forth in David Easton's definition of a datum: 'a particular ordering of reality in terms of a theoretical interest'.<sup>32</sup> Even neorealists admit that their way of theorizing is merely one among several possible ways: 'Realist theory by itself can handle some, but not all the problems that

<sup>27</sup> Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders . . .', p. 90.

<sup>28</sup> The post-positivist counterclaim is that the grounds for proposing change are to do with normative judgements anyway. Many post-positivists are very concerned with change, and are often involved in normative projects. Post-positivists 'simply reject the notion that there is any clear epistemological warrant for these [normative] choices'. I owe this point to a conversation with Steve Smith.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Brecht, *Man and His Government* (New York, 1963), pp. 113–16.

<sup>30</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York, 1964), p. 88.

<sup>31</sup> As developed in detail in Sørensen, *Marxismen og den Sociale Orden*.

<sup>32</sup> David Easton, *The Political System* (New York, 1953), pp. 52–55.

concern us'.<sup>33</sup> which is another way of saying that neorealism holds no monopoly over truth; this indicates that some post-positivist critiques have pushed neorealism further into the positivist extreme than is actually warranted.

In sum, IR is no more than other areas of social science compelled to a cruel choice between extreme versions of positivism or post-positivism. It can proceed on a metatheoretical middle ground, as argued by several authors.<sup>34</sup> I would add that the major theoretical traditions in IR, including variants of realism, liberalism, and Marxism as well as most of the theoretical currents grouped by Steve Smith under the label of post-positivism/reflectivism, are all placed somewhere in the territory covered by this middle ground.

Yet it is also relevant to emphasize that intersubjective understanding does not emerge automatically; it requires a measure of goodwill by the parties in the conversation. The radical post-modernist interpretation of knowledge is not always conducive to the production of intersubjectivity. That is because knowledge is treated as a text which can, in principle, be interpreted in any which way by the reader. The readers can make of the text 'whatever they want of it and no one can say which interpretation is correct, or even better, for that matter'.<sup>35</sup> What is lacking here is what Habermas calls 'verständigungsorientiertes Handeln', that is, behaviour oriented towards reaching mutual understanding.<sup>36</sup> Habermas has specified the elements of such behaviour and also its preconditions. My premise here is that 'verständigungsorientiertes Handeln' is possible, both among IR theorists and among practical actors in international relations. It should be noted that this premise is being questioned (and labelled 'idealistic' and 'utopian') by prominent post-modernists.<sup>37</sup>

The ontological debate concerns the nature of the social world. The extreme version on the objectivist side is purely materialist or naturalist, i.e. the social world of international relations is a world shaped by the material structure of the international system;<sup>38</sup> the extreme version on the subjectivist side is idealist, arguing that the social world is, more than anything else, constituted by our language, ideas, and concepts—the social world is 'what we make it'.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, 'Reflections on *Theory of International Politics*: A Response to My Critics', in Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*, p. 331.

<sup>34</sup> See John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity* (London, 1998); see also Robert O. Keohane, 'Beyond Dichotomy: Conversations Between International Relations and Feminist Theory', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (1998), pp. 193–99; and Ole Waever, 'The Rise and Fall of the Inter-paradigm Debate', in Smith, Booth, and Zalewski (eds.), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, pp. 149–86. For a sceptical view of the 'middle ground' idea, see J. Ann Tickner, 'Continuing the Conversation . . .', *International Studies Quarterly*, 42 (1998), pp. 205–10.

<sup>35</sup> Kal Holsti, 'Along the Road of International Theory in the Next Millennium: Three Travelogues', paper for the joint Japan Association of International Relations-International Studies Association Conference, Makuhari, Japan (1996), p. 5. See also Spegele, 'Political Realism and the Remembrance of Relativism . . .', p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> See Thomas Risse, "'Let's Talk!'" Insights from the German Debate on Communicative Behavior and International Relations', paper for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington DC (1997), p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> For this point, see Risse's paper and also: Michel Foucault, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse', pp. 53–72 in G. Burchell et al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality* (London, 1991); Jürgen Habermas, *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Frankfurt, 1985); Nancy Love, 'Foucault and Habermas on Discourse and Modernity', *Polity*, 22 (1989), pp. 269–73.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, John Mearsheimer, 'A Realist Reply', *International Security*, 20 (1995), p. 91. See also John Mearsheimer, 'The False Promise of International Institutions', *International Security*, 19 (1994/5), pp. 5–49.

<sup>39</sup> Steve Smith, 'The Self-Images of a Discipline: A Genealogy of International Relations Theory', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds.), *International Relations Theory Today*, p. 27.

This is an important debate; but it is significant that the real extremes in the debate hardly exist in IR (or in social science) today. One would be hard pressed to find examples of theorists who would argue that the social world is purely materialist or purely idealist. In other words, the real debate is about the proper mix, about what matters relatively most. The ontological middle ground is therefore huge, encompassing almost all theories on either side of the objectivist and the subjectivist divide. When some constructivists claim that they occupy a 'middle ground' in this debate<sup>40</sup> they are certainly right, but they are by no means alone in doing so.

In sum, the casting of an ontological gulf between all positivists on the one side and all post-positivists on the other side is not warranted. Almost all of the theoretical approaches that we employ in IR think in terms of some combination of materialism and idealism. The debate about what matters most and how the two aspects should be precisely combined is a recurrent theme, not only in social science in general, but also in IR. I am most sceptical of those approaches which move toward either extreme (e.g. materialist neorealism or idealist post-modernism). And I find most promise in those who attempt more balanced combinations (e.g. Coxian Marxism and Wendtian constructivism). The reason for this ought to be clear: the objectivist extreme leads towards a structuralist reification because of the emphasis on 'structuralist continuity and repetition'; the opposite extreme leads towards a freewheeling, voluntaristic subjectivism. The merits of the 'balanced combination' literatures such as those inspired by Robert Cox and Alexander Wendt should be emphasized; first, they have a productive way of holding on to the insights produced by theories leaning towards the positivist extreme, including neorealism; second, they avoid the relativism which is a danger inherent in extreme post-positivist theories; and finally, they have a better grip on the analysis of change than theories at the positivist and at the post-positivist extremes.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the point here is not to argue in favour of any specific approach. The point is to argue against the creation of a basic divide between positions and in favour of thinking about the relative merits of different forms of combination. It is noteworthy that some of the major debates within the theoretical traditions in IR (e.g. classical realism versus neorealism; different currents of the International Society school; different schools within Marxism and within liberalism) concern precisely this issue of the proper combination.<sup>42</sup> I consider this to be the major metatheoretical issue in current IR; it is around this issue that the most productive and interesting debates about metatheoretical problems revolve. Constructivists have

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Emanuel Adler, 'Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3 (1997), pp. 319–64. Adler argues that social constructivism seizes a middle ground in both epistemological and ontological terms.

<sup>41</sup> There are very large literatures connected with these two positions; they cannot be introduced here. The most recent comprehensive statement by Cox is *Approaches to World Order*; the influential articles by Wendt include: 'The Agent–Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organization*, 41 (1987), pp. 335–50; 'Collective Identity Formation and the International State', *American Political Science Review*, 88 (1994), pp. 384–96, and 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), pp. 391–425. Recent overviews of the literatures connected with the positions are: Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory', *World Politics*, 50 (1998), pp. 324–48; Robert J. O'Brien, 'International Relations and International Political Economy: Apprentice as Teacher?', in John McMillan and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *New Directions in International Relations* (London, 1995).

<sup>42</sup> As emphasized by Smith, 'The Self-Images of a Discipline'.

been helpful in emphasizing this, but they are continuing a very old debate rather than opening up a new one.

These brief reflections make up no grand solution to all metatheoretical problems, of course. To the contrary, the middle ground opens a large agenda of new problems, but even if these are complex and difficult, they are much to be preferred to the unpleasant extremes of either positivism or post-positivism.

### **Substantial issues after the Cold War**

Let me move on to the substance of international relations, the most pertinent issues after the end of the Cold War. It is clear that the metatheoretical debate in itself tells us next to nothing about substance, the most important areas of study. But even if this is the case, the metatheoretical points made above are not absent in what follows. The substantial issues discussed here are all based on scholarly contributions which try to avoid the extreme versions of positivism and post-positivism; that is, they occupy that middle ground which was identified earlier as the most attractive ontological and epistemological position.

There is no straightforward way of identifying the current core substantial issues in international relations. One approach is to examine what the various theoretical approaches inside and outside of mainstream have to say about this. Another approach is to survey a number of relevant journals and make an inventory of the issues that they take up. I am going to do neither. The starting point adopted here is that the core issues of world politics are the big questions of war and peace, conflict and cooperation, wealth and poverty. I readily admit that this lends a certain traditionalist, even statist, flavour to what I consider the most important issues. The intention is by no means to exclude other issues based on other identities, be they gender, class, culture, or civilization. Yet the premise is surely that ours remains a world of sovereign states; it is clear that this premise can be questioned and there is no doubt that scholars of both positivist and post-positivist leaning will disagree with my way of talking about substance. This is merely to emphasize that what follows is more a personal view of what is substantially important in current IR than it is an attempt to speak on behalf of the scholarly community.<sup>43</sup>

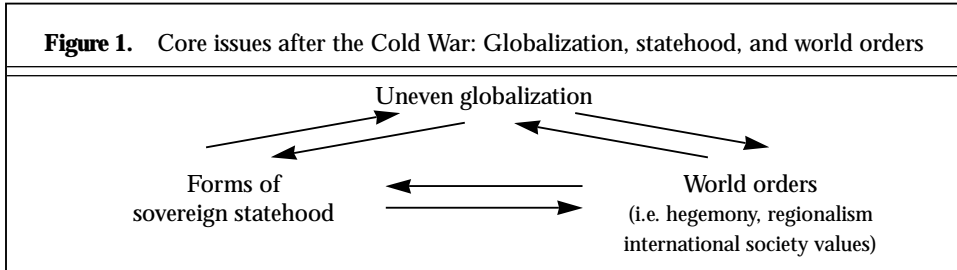
My premise indicates that the sovereign state is the single most important macrostructure determining the lives that people live. Several scholars have recently argued that in order to analyse security problems for people nowadays we need to turn away from the state and to understand instead 'the global flux of social relations within which the international system floats, and to explore the manifold dimensions of these relations'.<sup>44</sup> My claim is that even when our main focus is on security for people as individuals, sovereign states continue to be 'the single most important macrostructure'.<sup>45</sup> And this is true not only for security. Sovereign states are the main providers of the basic social values of security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare.<sup>46</sup> A number of weak states in the system do not provide those values for

<sup>43</sup> Insofar as such an entity as 'the scholarly community' exists nowadays! For reflections on this, see Holsti, 'Along the Road of International Theory . . .'.

<sup>44</sup> See Martin Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 113.

<sup>45</sup> Georg Sørensen, 'Individual Security and National Security', *Security Dialogue*, 4 (1996), p. 374.

<sup>46</sup> Jackson and Sørensen, *International Relations: Introduction to a Discipline*, ch. 1.



their citizens; they even sometimes put their people in danger including mortal danger. People that are stateless or people that live in weak or failed states<sup>47</sup> are in serious jeopardy compared to people that live in well-functioning states which provide for these basic values. Given the importance of the sovereign state, a measure of statism, i.e. analytical focus on the sovereign state, is thus warranted in the study of basic problems of international relations. This is true even when our main concern is the life and well-being of individuals.

The question, then, is what can we say about the big issues of war and peace, conflict and cooperation, and wealth and poverty after the end of the Cold War? Figure 1 presents a suitable entry point for discussing this question.

This approach is inspired by (but not identical to) the work of Robert Cox.<sup>48</sup> The idea is that the core issues of war and peace, conflict and cooperation, wealth and poverty can be suitably approached in their post-Cold War format through the study of the entities and relationships expressed in Figure 1. It will appear from what follows that this approach builds on the metatheoretical middle ground identified above; in particular it stresses the need to analyse material as well as non-material aspects of social reality.

### *Uneven globalization*

Globalization increasingly defines the context for economic and social development in the world. It is therefore a core issue in the analysis of wealth and poverty. The content of globalization can be clarified through two major distinctions. The first is between globalization as a primarily *economic* process involving, e.g., production, distribution, management, and finance,<sup>49</sup> and globalization as a broader *sociological* process involving all aspects of social activity, including, e.g., culture, reproduction, communication, ideology, etc.<sup>50</sup> The second major distinction is between ‘Globaliz-

<sup>47</sup> Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-states: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge, 1993); Georg Sørensen, ‘Individual Security and National Security’.

<sup>48</sup> Robert W. Cox, ‘Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge, 1996); Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York, 1987); Robert Boyer and Daniel Drache, *States Against Markets. The Limits of Globalisation* (London/New York, 1996); Jeremy Howell and Michelle Wood (1993), *The Globalisation of Production and Technology* (London/New York, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, 1990); Martin Albrow, *The Global Age* (Cambridge, 1996).

<b>Figure 2.</b> Dimensions of globalization		
Type of globalization	Consequences of globalization	
	‘Globalization sceptics’	‘Globalization believers’
Narrow: economic	Economic interdependence; nothing new	Globalized economic system. Qualitative shift
Broad: comprehensive social change	Interconnectedness increases; nothing new	Globalized societies redefine conditions of life for individuals and groups

ation Believers’ and ‘Globalization Sceptics’. According to the former, globalization is changing or has already changed both the economic and the social world in fundamental ways.<sup>51</sup> On this view, we are entering a qualitatively new reality where national economies are subsumed by a globalized economic system, and where individuals and groups face radically different conditions of existence in a globalized world where sovereign states have lost most of the power they used to have.

According to ‘Globalization Sceptics’, nothing much is new.<sup>52</sup> The processes under the globalization label have been at work for many decades. There was a high level of economic interdependence between countries already before the First World War; and in broader terms, the increasing interconnectedness between societies at social, cultural, and political levels began a very long time ago. In short, globalization is not new; it has been around for a long time. The two distinctions can be summarized as shown in Figure 2.

I find it misleading to make a clear choice between these four positions in the globalization debate. The point is that all four aspects of globalization can be found in the real world. Furthermore, the distinction between a narrow and a broad concept of globalization is analytical, meaning that the choice between them depends on what one wants to analyse. As far as the debate between ‘believers’ and ‘sceptics’ is concerned, this is yet another version of the discussion about whether the glass is half full or half empty. The real world is an uneven mixture of traditional interdependence and interconnectedness on the one hand, and new elements of globalized economic systems and societies on the other. The interesting question is to find out about the concrete substance of that mixture in different specific countries and regions.

Uneven globalization redefines the context for economic development and thus for the welfare of people. It presents new opportunities for dynamic development

<sup>51</sup> Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations. Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism* (New York, 1992); Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World* (London, 1990); Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-state: The Rise of Regional Economies* (London, 1995); John Stopford and Susan Strange with John S. Henley, *Rival States, Rival Firms: Competition for World Market Shares* (Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> E.g. several contributions in Boyer and Drache, *States Against Markets*; Paul Hirst, ‘The Global Economy—Myths and Realities’, *International Affairs*, 3 (1997), pp. 409–25; Robert H. Jackson, ‘Continuity and Change in the States System’, in R.H. Jackson and A. James (eds.), *States in a Changing World. A Contemporary Analysis* (London, 1993).

but also new obstacles. The greatest problem may be that the weak states in the periphery of the world economy are losing out in the globalization race. Such states face two kind of problems. On the one hand, access to the world economy is increasingly difficult, not primarily because of trade barriers but due to lack of demand. Industrialized countries have a decreasing need for the weak states, be it as sources of raw materials, as markets, or as cheap labour.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, in order to reap maximum benefits of any world market integration, domestic political and economic reform is needed in many countries, and it may not be forthcoming, not even as a result of fragile democratization.<sup>54</sup> Several scholars have demonstrated the decisive importance of domestic preconditions for successfully facing external challenges and for seizing opportunities.<sup>55</sup> In an increasingly globalized world, such lessons are acutely relevant.

In sum, what I foresee as a result of uneven globalization is a world tied closer together in the sense that autarchic development (e.g. North Korea) is less and less feasible. But it is also a more fragmented and hierarchical world in the sense that a number of weak states will be unable to reap the potential benefits of uneven globalization. A complete answer to the question about the effects of globalization requires an analysis of the reciprocal relationships in Figure 1 as they are played out in the present historical conjuncture. Let me turn to the next major item, forms of sovereign statehood.

### *Forms of sovereign statehood*

It is relevant to begin with an outline of the two major analytical positions in the debate about sovereign statehood. The dominant theoretical position in IR theory, realism, considers the state an unproblematic given. The state is seen as a sovereign, territorially based unit run by a government which enjoys a high level of autonomy in both domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>56</sup> On this view, that is really all we need to know about the state; we do not need to analyse statehood as such, because all states are basically 'like units', i.e. they have to perform similar functions of government and they all enjoy sovereignty. The only interesting difference between states is their power capabilities; some are strong, some are weak.

This 'fixed' view of the state is most often combined with a 'sceptic' view of the consequences of globalization. Globalization does not challenge the sovereign state in basic ways. Statehood is not in decline: the institution of sovereignty is more popular than ever and the new challenges to the state, such as an increasingly globalized economy, must be seen in the context of the state's increased capacities

<sup>53</sup> Kari Levitt, 'Debt, Adjustment and Development: Looking to the 1990s', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 21 (1990). Oil and a few strategic raw materials are exceptions from this trend.

<sup>54</sup> Georg Sørensen, *Democracy and Democratization. Processes and Prospects in a Changing World* (Boulder, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Dieter Senghaas, *The European Experience: A Historical Critique of Development Theory* (Leamington Spa/Dover, 1985).

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *'Theory of International Politics'* (Reading, MA, 1979); see also Mark V. Zacher, 'The decaying pillars of the Westphalian Temple: Implications for International Order and Governance', in J.N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (eds.), *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 58–102.

for response. In terms of domestic extraction of surplus and regulation, the state is stronger than ever; in terms of the external environment, the long-term trend has been toward more, not less autonomy.<sup>57</sup>

Against this mainstream view of the state in IR-theory stands a growing number of analysts who argue that the state is basically in decline, not least due to the forces of globalization. The 'declinists'<sup>58</sup> first and foremost argue that globalization is challenging the state in fundamental ways. Economic and ecological interdependence decrease state autonomy. Democratization erodes the domestic autonomy of state elites. The information revolution has made communication much less bound by time and place.<sup>59</sup> Together with increasing individual skills this challenges the state from below.<sup>60</sup> The argument of the 'declinists' is that all these developments seriously weaken the sovereign state.

Yet it is clear that neither the 'declinists' nor the 'strong state' adherents can win this debate for the simple reason that both have a valid point. Sovereign states have been both strengthened and weakened in complex ways since the end of World War II. What we need, then, is an approach that can accommodate both 'declinist' and 'strong state' elements. Such an approach focuses on *changes* in statehood that can lead to both stronger and weaker states. A suitable way of initiating this analysis is through the identification of main types of state in the present international system.

In more concrete terms, I would argue that processes of uneven globalization under the conditions of the post-World War II world order has led to the creation of three main types (i.e. Weberian ideal types) of state.<sup>61</sup> They are: (a) the modern 'Westphalian' state, a consolidated nation-state with its own structural dynamic and relative autonomy; (b) the post-colonial state, that is, the weak and unconsolidated state on the periphery, often in an ongoing state of entropy; and (c) the 'post-modern' state, a complex, transnationally interpenetrated entity immersed in globalization and multi-level governance. The EU-members are the major examples of this last-mentioned type of state.

Space does not allow a full elaboration of these main types of state here. Figure 3 provides a summary of the major characteristics of the three types. The point worth stressing here is that the state typology provides a preliminary answer to the crucial question about how globalization in the present world order affects the state. This discussion has hitherto been dominated by the unfruitful dead-end debate of 'decline of state' versus 'continued strength of state'. By focusing on change of statehood (in the direction of both stronger and weaker states) and combining this with the notion of different main types of state, this debate can move forward in a much more fruitful way.

<sup>57</sup> Janice Thompson and Stephen D. Krasner, 'Global Transactions and the Consolidation of Sovereignty', in E-O. Czemiapl and J.N. Rosenau (eds.), *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges: Approaches to World Politics for the 1990s* (Lexington, MA, 1989), pp. 195–221.

<sup>58</sup> James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Princeton, 1990); Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-state: The Rise of Regional Economies*; Susan Strange, 'Wake up, Krasner! The World has Changed', *Review of International Political Economy*, 2 (1994), pp. 209–19; Zacher, 'The Decaying Pillars of the Westphalian Temple'.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., William H. McNeill, 'Winds of Change', *Foreign Affairs*, 69 (1990), pp. 162–72.

<sup>60</sup> See Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*.

<sup>61</sup> Georg Sørensen, 'An Analysis of Contemporary Statehood: Consequences for Conflict and Cooperation', *Review of International Studies*, 3 (1997), pp. 253–69.

**Figure 3.** States in the present international system: Three ideal types

	'Post-Colonial'	'Westphalian'	'Post-Modern'
Sovereignty	Juridical, negative, formal	Substantial, internal and external state autonomy	Operational, shared with supra-national institutions
Economy	Dependent, structural heterogeneity	Self-sustained, no specialization, a coherent national economy	Globalized, some specialization, part of larger welfare community
Polity	Personal rule, weak institutions	Polyarchy, strong institutions	Plurilateral: emerging transnational policy network
Nationhood?	No	Yes	Yes, but challenged by competing identities

Furthermore, the state typology provides a framework for analysing future prospects for conflict and cooperation, peace and war. The standard security problem in IR concerns the external threat of violent conflict between sovereign states in an anarchic international system. The security problem in post-colonial states is qualitatively different. The most significant difference is that the serious threat to security in terms of large-scale violent conflict is internal, not external. Lack of developed statehood presents many post-colonial states with a perennial problem of domestic security. Such states are not internally pacified. In the post-Cold War world, the large majority of violent conflicts are domestic conflicts in post-colonial states.

In globalized post-modern states, on the other hand, economic and social integration has led to the formation of a tightly knit security community. In other words, violent conflict between consolidated liberal states in the North is no longer on the cards. The security community is based on four liberal elements: the republican element, stressing peaceful cooperation between democracies; the commercial element, emphasizing networks of economic interdependence; the sociological element, underscoring the intense transnational linkages between countries; and the institutional element which emphasizes the importance of common institutions facilitating cooperation. There is a mutually reinforcing synergy between these different aspects of liberalism.<sup>62</sup>

The liberal issues of democracy and democratization and of international institutions have been the subject of large debates after the end of the Cold War,

<sup>62</sup> Robert O. Keohane *et al.*, *After the Cold War. International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe 1989-91* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); Georg Sørensen, 'Det Liberale Fredsperspektiv i Teori of Praksis', *GRUS*, 53 (1997), pp. 7-27.

especially in North American IR.<sup>63</sup> The position taken here is that these issues should be tied in with the larger subject of the development and change of sovereign statehood. Democratization is not likely to bring peace to weak states in the Third World; it will frequently spark more intense conflict. The involvement in international institutions will hardly have far-reaching consequences in countries where domestic institutions are extremely weak and fragile. At the same time, institutional development and democratic governance is developing in new ways in the context of globalized, highly integrated, post-modern states.

In sum, violent conflict between post-modern states is highly unlikely. But there are large zones of conflict in the Third World where domestic conflict in weak, post-colonial states is prevalent. And in consolidated liberal states, new forms of (non-violent) threat appear to be on the rise, due to the 'risk-society' created by globalization. Further exploration of these patterns of conflict and threat is an important element on the post-Cold War IR-agenda.

### *World order*

The third and final leg in the analytical framework in Figure 1 is 'world order'. Defined as the configuration of forces which define the systemic context for any concrete ensemble of states,<sup>64</sup> I conceive of world order as containing the following main elements: (a) hegemony; (b) regionalism; and (c) international society values. Space only allows brief comments on each of these items.

Re. (a): Hegemony concerns the distribution of power. The end of the Cold War has started a comprehensive debate about the relative distribution of power in the international system following the decline of the Soviet Union. Neorealists characterize the present system as 'bipolarity in an altered state'.<sup>65</sup> Bipolarity continues because militarily Russia can take care of herself and because no other great powers have emerged. Yet with the waning of Soviet power, the United States is no longer held in check by any other country or combination of countries; the system leans towards unipolarity with the U.S. as the unipolar power. Against neorealism liberals argue that a qualitative change is under way, towards an international system characterised by interdependence, democracy, and liberal institutions.<sup>66</sup> They argue that in such a world, power is more diffuse, less tangible, and the non-material 'soft power' is of increasing importance.<sup>67</sup>

My starting point on this issue is the Coxian notion of hegemony which contains material as well as non-material aspects of power. Hegemony is a 'fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order (including certain norms) and a set of institutions which administer the order . . .'.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> As evidenced in leading North American journals, such as *International Security*, *World Politics*, *International Organization* and *American Political Science Review*.

<sup>64</sup> The definition is a modified version of the one appearing in Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory'.

<sup>65</sup> Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics'.

<sup>66</sup> An overview of the liberal arguments appears in Sørensen, 'Det Liberale Fredsperspektiv i Teori of Praksis'.

<sup>67</sup> See Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*.

<sup>68</sup> Cox, 'Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', p. 103.

The undisputed U.S. hegemony of the post-World War II era is a thing of the past, but a new hegemony has not been established. There is international governance in the form of various regimes and institutions, but there is no apparatus to deal comprehensively with either global economic crisis (as it threatens, for example, due to the present downturn in Asian economies) or global security problems (e.g. state failure in Africa and elsewhere). There is no clear hegemony in the present period. Cox speculates that we may be entering a 'post-hegemonic' world because the forces of globalization have led to a transformation of statehood which mitigates against a new hegemony.<sup>69</sup> Yet a more likely prospect appears to be an order based on an alliance between the three regional clusters led by the EU in Europe, the United States in America, and Japan/China in East Asia.

Re. (b): Regionalism. There has been a proliferation of regional cooperation in recent years, from NAFTA and MERCOSUR in America, ASEAN in East Asia, and the EU in Europe. Several analysts argue that we are well on the way towards a regionalized world.<sup>70</sup> It appears that regional cooperation is in important respects the answer given by states to the challenges of globalization. Economic globalization has increasingly restricted the national autonomy of many states. Increased supranational cooperation is thus partly an attempt to regain some of the regulatory influence lost in the national political space owing to the very success of the modern state in organizing transnational economic development during the post-World War II era.

Yet it is crucially important to emphasize that the type of regional cooperation is not uniform. There is qualitative variation: only the EU has moved towards forms of cooperation with clear consequences for the sovereignty of member states. Both the United States and Japan appear to respond to the challenges to states with more conventional forms of regional cooperation. Therefore, while regionalism is on the increase, we are in important respects *not* moving towards a world of regions.<sup>71</sup> Most forms of regional cooperation are of a rather loose and open kind. It will be an important issue on the IR-agenda to further analyse regional cooperation in comparative perspective.

Re. (c): International society values. The end of the Cold War also meant the end of the Communist challenge to liberalism. There is now an extensive debate about new possible cultural and ideological challengers to modern, liberal society. It is becoming clear that the popular notion of a coming 'clash of civilizations' is a misleading approach.<sup>72</sup> A more appropriate point of departure is the English School notion of an 'international society', that is, the society of sovereign states with common institutions and common rules and norms. Following Jackson,<sup>73</sup> there can be varying degrees of society between states, from very limited contact and interaction at one extreme, to comprehensive interaction in a highly institutionalized setting at the other extreme, sustained by common norms and rules. Against this background, it can be argued that there is 'more society' in the post-Cold War

<sup>69</sup> Robert W. Cox, 'Global Restructuring. Making Sense of the Changing International Political Economy', in Stubbs and Underhill (eds.), *Political Economy and the Changing Global Order*, pp. 45–60.

<sup>70</sup> For an overview, see B. Hettne and A. Inotai, *The New Regionalism* (Helsinki, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> For a similar view, see Miles Kahler, 'A World of Blocs: Facts and Factoids', *World Policy Journal*, 1 (1995), pp. 19–28.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs*, 3 (1993), pp. 22–50.

<sup>73</sup> Jackson, 'The Political Theory of International Society'.

international system. There is more agreement about liberal values, including human rights, and there is more preparedness to act in coalition when the basic values of international society are violated (e.g. the Gulf War, humanitarian intervention in failed states). At the same time, processes of globalization can lead to confrontation between modern and traditional values,<sup>74</sup> but even if it is a fragile and stepwise process, I would argue that the accent is presently on integration and stronger common values, instead of fragmentation and clashes between different values.

## **Conclusion**

The IR community has reason to be pleased with the metatheoretical and the substantial debate triggered by the end of the Cold War. The metatheoretical tools have been sharpened; there is much more clarity about the ontological and the epistemological bases for the various theoretical approaches. That service has, in the main, been provided by post-positivists. Even if it is true that the debate recapitulates many elements from earlier debates, including the debates between behaviouralists and traditionalists<sup>75</sup> and the debates between Marxists and non-Marxists,<sup>76</sup> every discipline needs a metatheoretical inventory and house-cleaning from time to time, because it always produces a number of fresh insights.

As for the substantial issues, there has been a healthy shake-up as well. I have argued that the core issues of the discipline: peace and war; wealth and poverty, conflict and cooperation, involve a certain amount of statism, i.e. focus on sovereign states. But this does not exclude issues based on other identities, including gender, class or culture. In sum, there is more clarity about what we know and about what we don't know. And there is more sound humility towards the magnitude of the task we face, both methodologically and substantially. Combined with a healthy pluralism in both areas, that is all for the best. There is also a constructive trend towards opening up the discipline of IR to other areas of human and social science, including comparative politics, sociology, economics, and the humanities. Both in substantive and in methodological terms there should be much to gain from living less isolated. Getting thus far has involved a number of battles and controversies, some of them more productive than others. This is all business as usual. Social science cannot and should not attempt to achieve the paradigmatic 'normal science' of the natural sciences, where there is much more agreement about basic assumptions concerning metatheoretical premises and scientific habits.<sup>77</sup> But we do have a common ground of intersubjectively transmissible knowledge.

<sup>74</sup> See Albrow, *The Global Age*.

<sup>75</sup> Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach'.

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Georg Sørensen, 'A Revised Paradigm for International Relations', *Cooperation and Conflict* (1991), pp. 85–116.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Arend Lijphart, 'The Structure of the Theoretical Revolution in International Relations', *International Studies Quarterly*, 1 (1964), pp. 41–75.