Political theory and International Relations: promised land or exit from Eden?

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It is a strange desire, to seek power—and to lose liberty
Bacon, *Essays*

For most of the period since the end of the Second World War, International Relations (as a subject of study[2]) did well without the encumbrance of political and social thought, political theory or political philosophy. From time to time, theoretically inclined scholars of world affairs were seen to shake their heads over such a state of affairs, but little changed as a result. In his celebrated essay, 'Why is there no international theory'[3] Martin Wight bemoaned the fact that international theory was marked by 'intellectual and moral paucity' and ten years earlier, in the introduction to *The Anglo-American tradition in foreign affairs*,[4] Arnold Wolfers had urged the 'early remarriage' of political theory and international relations. At the time, seemingly, to no avail.

Since then, however, there has been a growing movement to escape from what Steve Smith has called, in a characteristically provocative rhetorical sally, the 'forty years detour'.[5] This movement has taken a number of different forms; it has emerged in fits and starts and has by no means carried all before it. Nonetheless, seen from the vantage point of the year 2000, the landscape looks very different to that on which Wolfers and Wight had cast such a disapproving eye. A growing number of International Relations scholars have come round to the view that the relative paucity of political and social theorizing has been a

[1] I am grateful for comments on an earlier draft of this essay from Chris Brown, Ian Hall, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, Mitchell Rologas, Caroline Soper and William Walker.

[2] I shall follow the now established convention that 'International Relations' refers to the field of study, whereas 'international relations' refers to the world of events.

[3] Included in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, eds, *Diplomatic investigations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1966).

[4] Arnold Wolfers and Laurence Martin, eds, *The Anglo-American tradition in foreign affairs* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956). A slightly different version of the essay was also published under the same title as this one, 'Political theory and international relations', in Wolfers's collection of his own essays, *Discord and collaboration: essays on international politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

[5] See Steve Smith, 'The forty years detour', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21: 3, winter 1992, pp. 489–506. This is a review, among other things, of the *locus classicus* of the evolution of the new normative theory, i.e. Chris Brown, *IR theory: new normative approches* (Brighton: Harvester, 1992).

weakness for International Relations, as well as for our understanding of international relations, and that what has passed for 'theory' in its absence has been, to say the least, of limited use. More recently still, some in political theory have offered the opinion that it is also a weakness for political theory; that, in the changed and changing circumstances of the 'late modern world', political theory needs also to be *international* political theory (IPT).[6]

As somebody who has benefited from, and sought to contribute to, this development, I naturally support it. In this article, therefore, I want to describe the character of the meeting between political theory and International Relations over the last few decades—a meeting that has created a literature we may now (without embarrassment or apology) call international political theory. In the process, I shall offer a view of where it currently stands, and what trends within it are most influential. I shall then offer some further thoughts as to its likely trajectory over the next few years. Finally, and notwithstanding the fact that I endorse the emergence and growing strength of international political theory, and will suggest that there are also some looming pitfalls in the current situation. I will conclude with some thoughts as to how they might be successfully negotiated.

The past

Background

For much of the past two thousand years, discussions of international politics and discussions of political thought have been intertwined;[7] attempts to suggest otherwise are simply ill informed. The division becomes increasingly marked with the development of separate 'disciplines' in the mid- to late nineteenth century, however. Coupled with the rise in avowedly 'explanatory' and 'scientific' methods in political science in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, this saw the gradual elimination of much of the traditional language of political thought, interpretation and evaluation from the study of international relations, especially in the United States. It should be said, however, that political theory was at least as much to blame. With the gradual emergence of a 'canon' of 'political theorists' that academics in 'politics' were supposed to teach (a canon that had

[6] See Nicholas Rengger, *International relations, political theory and the problem of order: beyond International Relations theory* (London: Routledge, 1999). Chris Brown argues (see p. 834) that, independent of its merits as an argument, the book's intention is to move beyond 'IR theory' to political theory and that through its focus on the relatively conventional literatures of IR theory it fails to do this, and that it perhaps should have discussed some of the new 'combined' literatures that I am tracing in this article. However, among other things, my book suggests that thinking through the problem of order would force us to reconceptualize *both* IR and political theory. Thus moving beyond IR theory would also mean moving beyond the current fashions of contemporary political theory as well. Just what the resulting reconsideration might look like is a story for another occasion, though some hints can be found at the end of this article.

[7] This case is developed, both by argument and by example, in Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nicholas Rengger, eds, *Texts in international relations: from the Greeks to the nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

little to do with specific philosophical power or influence and a good deal more to do with the evolution of 'political science' in its distinctively modern form[8]) political theorists increasingly discussed theory *within* the state and abandoned reflection about international politics. This was made yet worse by the fact that the dominant mode of thought in Anglophone philosophy after 1945—the so-called 'analytic tradition'—discouraged substantial moral and political thought in favour of what was usually termed 'meta-ethics', i.e. discussions about the character of ethical (or, very occasionally, political) language. Thus, neither from within International Relations nor from within political thought was there much opposition to an increasingly rigid demarcation of subject matter.

However, even during the high watermark of behaviouralism in the United States and elsewhere, there were forces of resistance. In the United States, perhaps curiously, the single best known scholar of international relations from the 1940s until the 1960s, Hans Morgenthau, was a consistent opponent of the behaviouralists and of the claim that moral and political thought had no role in the study of international relations. From the publication of *Scientific man versus power politics* in 1947, Morgenthau waged an unyielding (albeit largely unrecognized) war against the dominant trends in the study of politics in general and international politics in particular. Many other leading realists, for example, George Kennan, Reinhold Niebuhr and Walter Lippman, were equally hostile.[9] It is something of a mystery, then, that realism was widely held to be a theory of international relations that completely ignored the normative aspects of politics and suggested there was no place for such concerns in a properly scientific enterprise like 'International Relations theory'.

A second, perhaps even more important site of resistance, at least in the United Kingdom, was the so-called 'English school'.[10] Writers connected with this school, such as Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight, often dwelt on specific aspects of the history of political thought (Wight even gave his famous 'three traditions' names associated with past political thinkers: Machiavellians, Grotians and Kantians[11]) and certain long dormant aspects of the 'political theory of international relations' (such as Just War theory) featured in their work.[12] However, the English school's particular historical focus, and indeed the complexity of their treatment of history (which in the case of Butterfield and Wight especially was heavily influenced by their theological concerns and assumptions), meant that it had almost no resonance in the wider International

[8] For good discussions of this see

[9] See e.g. the discussions in Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Joel Rosenthal, *Righteous realists: responsible power in the nuclear age* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); A. J. H. Murray, *Reconstructing realism* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997).

[10] For the best general discussion extant, see Tim Dunne, *Inventing international society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). See also the discussions in Caroline Kennedy-Pipe's article in this issue.

[11] See especially Martin Wight, *International theory: the three traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press/RIIA, 1991).

[12] Especially in Butterfield's. For a good discussion see Ian Hall, 'Butterfield, history and international relations' (unpublished ms).

Relations debates of the 1960s and 1970s, certainly not outside the United Kingdom.[13]

This neat division of labour began visibly to break down, however, in the 1970s, for two main reasons. The first was renewed interest in the question of the legitimate use of force. The particular occasion for this was the Vietnam war. The second was the (gradual) waning of behaviouralism in political and social science coupled with the rebirth of substantive moral and political philosophy associated with the launch of the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs* in 1971 (itself partly associated with opposition to the Vietnam war) and, most especially of all, with the publication, also in 1971, of John Rawls's massive *A theory of justice*,[14] which, as is widely accepted, provided perhaps the most powerful kick-start to substantive moral and political theorizing Anglophone philosophy had seen for most of the century.

Normative revival

Both of these two processes yielded major works towards the end of the 1970s that may, for current purposes at least, be said to have inaugurated the rebirth of the substantive crossover between political theory and international relations. The first of these was Michael Walzer's *Just and unjust wars*.[15] This book sought, as Walzer put it, to 'recapture the just war for moral and political theory'. As such it was necessarily addressed not just to the academic community but to all interested in the question of the legitimate use of force in the modern world. With a second edition following in 1991 (after the Gulf war) and a third in 2000 (after the NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo), Walzer's book stands as a major treatment of one of the most important areas where political theory and International Relations intersect. It has also given rise to, and often served as, a lightening rod for a huge secondary literature on the ethics and political theory of war since the late 1970s.[16]

[13] It should be noted that the institutional embodiment of the English school, the 'British Committee for the Theory of International Politics', started by Butterfield and chaired successively by himself, Wight, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, did produce some work that effectively combined aspects of political thought with international relations. See e.g. Butterfield and Wight, eds, *Diplomatic investigations* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966). It is also true that offshoots of the British committee helped to keep interest alive and published on the area overlapping the two fields during the 1970s and 1980s, cf. Michael Donelan, ed., *The reason of states* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), James Mayall, ed., *The community of states* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982) and, rather later, Cornelia Navari, ed., *The condition of states* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991). However, again, a good deal of this was primarily concerned with investigating the specific notions developed by the 'school, especially the notion of 'international society' and tended not to engage with other work going on at the time. Similar reasons better the school's relationship with diplomatic history, as Caroline Kennedy-Pipe's article in this issue makes clear.

[14] John Rawls, *A theory of justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

[15] New York: Basic Books, 1977. Second edn 1991; third edn 2000.

[16] The literature is so vast that only a couple of representative examples can be referenced here. Perhaps the best known general survey of Just War theory is James Turner Johnson's trilogy *Ideology, reason and the limitation of war* (Princteon, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), *Just war tradition and the restraint of war* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) and *Can modern war be just?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties beyond borders* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981); Grady Scott Davis, *Warcraft and the fragility of virtue* (Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1992). For a discussion of just and unjust wars and its influence see the symposium on it see *Ethics and International Affairs*, 1997.

Indeed, if there has been one central strand that has linked otherwise diverse contributors to the melding of political theory and International Relations since the 1970s, it has probably been the exigencies of war and conflict. In addition to the explicit literature on the ethics of force, however, other work theorizing the character of war and its impact has emerged which straddles both areas (as well, often, as several others). Perhaps the most influential work of this kind (and certainly one of the most attractively written) is Jean Elshtain's *Women and war.*[17] Subsequent to this book, Elshtain has become one of the most prominent scholars who constantly crosses the boundaries of political theory and International Relations.[18]

The second book that pioneered the crossover was more restricted in its appeal but has exerted a profound influence in social and political theory, and increasingly in International Relations. This was Charles Beitz's book *Political theory and International Relations*.[19] This book is a direct inheritor of Rawls's, in that the last third of the book is devoted to the question of international distributive justice. This issue, largely untouched until the 1960s, has increasingly become one of the central questions of analytical political philosophy and is obviously a major question for international relations (see my discussion in the last section of this article). In as much as Beitz's book was the first that considered the question at length and with great sophistication and philosophical élan, it has been seen, rightly I think, as a path-breaking work.[20] Perhaps still more significantly, however, Beitz's book was the first recent contribution that self-identified, following Kant, as a 'cosmopolitan' work of political theory, meaning that it sought to suggest that there were universal norms that were applicable to contemporary world politics irrespective of (for example) cultural difference. I return to this debate below.[21]

Once the dam had been breached, the slow trickle of works that bridged the two areas began to gather pace. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this particular bridge was a normative one: the principal concerns that linked political theory and International Relations here were moral and/or ethical. The growth of the field of 'international ethics' or 'ethics and international affairs' is largely the consequence of this. Over the past 30 years, this area has greatly expanded and many philosophers, political theorists and IR scholars have contributed to it. From a focus on questions of the use of force and, to a lesser extent,

[17] New York: Basic Books, 1998.

[18] She has offered her own reflections on the relationship in her contribution to Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds, *International relations theory today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) and has returned to it constantly. See e.g. her most recent book, *New wine and old bottles: international politics and ethical discourse* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

[19] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. A second edition appeared in June 1999.

[20] Subsequent influential treatments of the topic, or ones related to it, would include Henry Shue, *Basic rights: subsistence, affluence and US foreign policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 2nd edn, 1996; Onora O'Neill, *Faces of hunger* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); and John Rawls, *The law of peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a good general discussion see Chris Brown, 'Review essay: theories of international justice', *British Journal of Political Science* 27, 1997, pp. 273-97.

[21] For discussions see Chris Brown, *International Relations theory*, and Janna Thompson, *Justice and world order* (London: Routledge, 1992). The most recent general debate on the topic can be found in Martha Nussbaum, et al., *For love of country* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

international justice, the list of topics now being discussed by 'normative' theorists has grown exponentially. The normative status and significance of refugees, environmental aspects of world politics, citizenship, self-determination, nationality: all have had substantial and sustained consideration and the list grows longer almost by the day.

History of ideas

This brings me, however, to a second area where political theory and International Relations have increasingly overlapped. This is the area usually termed the 'history of political thought'. There has been a consistent, if relatively small, interest in the history of international political thought over the last few decades, contributed to by a range of scholars from numerous disciplines (chiefly, of course, philosophy, law, history and politics and International Relations). However, as the interest in the normative overlap of political theory and International Relations grew, so did the interest in the intellectual history of aspects of international political thought. While there were some essays of this sort in the 1960s,[22] again it was the 1970s that saw the first real fruits of this in terms of books, with an collection of major texts in the history of international thought edited by Peter Savigear, Maurice Keens-Soper and Murray Forsyth appearing in 1970,[23] Brian Midgely's exhaustive (and exhausting) account *The natural law tradition and the theory of International Relations*[24] appearing in 1975.[25] In the 1990s especially, this trend has increased dramatically with substantial works by political theorists such as David Boucher,[26] Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdorf[27] and Richard Tuck[28] joining those of International Relations scholars such as Stanley Hoffmann,[29] Torbjorn Knutsen[30] and others.[31]

Evolution

It was inevitable that these two aspects of a largely common agenda should begin to merge, at least on occasion, and two of the most important general developments in International Relations theory in the 1980s displayed this double

[22] E.g. F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the pursuit of peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Kenneth Waltz, 'Kant, liberalism and war', *American Political Science Review*, 1962; Stanley Hoffmann, 'Rousseau on war and peace', in *The state of war* (New York: Praeger, 1965).

[23] London: Allen & Unwin, 1970. It is worth pointing out the connections between this book and the English school. Keens-Soper had been a member of the British Committee, Savigear had been a student of Butterfield's.

[24] London: Elak Press.

[25] See also the debate this sparked between Midgely and Hedley Bull in the *British Journal* (later *Review*) *of International Studies* in 1976.

[26] *Political theories of international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[27] *Justice among nations: the struggle for power and peace* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1999).

[28] See *The rights of war and peace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[29] See Stanley Hoffmann and David Fiedler, eds, *Rousseau on international relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[30] *A history of international relations theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 2nd edn, 1998.

[31] And, it should be mentioned, the present author. See Brown, Nardin and Rengger, eds, *Texts in international relations*.

overlap at work. The first was the emergence in the early to mid-1980s of what was usually termed (then) as 'critical international theory'. This body of thought was strongly influenced by a range of European philosophical thought, which had previously been entirely absent from the largely Anglophone dominated discussion of international relations, but as it developed two general strands within it could be observed.[32]

One strand was influenced by what is usually termed post-structural thought—increasingly influential during the 1980s in literary studies and social theory. Originally at least, this had less to do with political theory as conventionally understood in the English-speaking world but it shared a critique of mainstream, officially non-normative, 'positivistic' (as it was often termed) International Relations theory. Its hallmark was a desire to subvert, invert and generally disrupt what its advocates saw as unnecessarily stable or hegemonic ways of thinking about, writing about and practising international relations.[33] As far as the current context is concerned the most significant book has been Rob Walker's *Inside/outside: international relations as political theory*.[34]

The second strand was strongly influenced by the German social theory of the so-called Frankfurt school, especially its most important modern representative, Jürgen Habermas. However, it also grew out of older, Marxist traditions of thought, which, in the context of the rather narrow Marxist tradition, had of course kept a link between political theory and International Relations alive.[35] The first major book to develop this line of argument was an explicit melding of historical and normative theory with international relations: Andrew Linklater's *Men and citizens in the theory of International Relations*. He has remained the leading advocate of this position, as his most recent book makes clear.[36]

The second area where the historical/normative agendas met was in the development of what is now usually called the 'liberal' (or sometimes the 'democratic') peace thesis. This claim—that liberal democracies are very unlikely ever to make war against other liberal democracies—has become one of the most hotly debated claims in world politics, especially since the end of the Cold War. In its modern form Michael Doyle gave it the most influential articulation in two articles first published in 1983 and 1986.[37] In both he traced

[32] For detailed discussions of these tendencies see Brown, *International relations theory*, ch. 8 and Nicholas Rengger, *International relations, political theory and the problem of order: beyond International Relations theory*, chs 4, 5.

[33] See especially Rob Walker, *Inside/outside: international relations as political theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James Der Derian, 'Post theory: the eternal return of ethics in international relations', in Michael Doyle and John Ikenberry, eds, *New thinking in international relations theory* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

[34] Rob Walker, op. cit. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[35] See e.g. V. Kublakova and A. A. Cruikshank, *Marxism-Leninism and the theory of International Relations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

[36] Andrew Linklater, *The transformation of political community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

[37] See Doyle, 'Kant, liberal legacies and foreign affairs, parts 1 and 2', in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, parts 3 and 4, summer and fall 1993, pp. 205–54, 323–53; 'Liberalism and world politics', *American Political Science Review* 80: 4, 1986, pp. 1151–69. Doyle has updated the argument of this latter article periodically. See also his excellent melding of the historical and the normative, *Ways of war and peace* (New York: Norton, 1997).

the idea to a conception of Immanuel Kant and sought to demonstrate its validity both conceptually (philosophically and textually) and empirically as a claim about the contemporary world. This body of work also has resonance with wider debates about the character of democracy and its implications for IR, as well as an obvious link with the wide and burgeoning literature on human rights and international law.

Where are we now?

The liberal peace thesis and its implications alerts us to the final reason as to why political theory and International Relations are increasingly overlapping. Among the most pressing questions, across a vast range of scholarship and practice, now are questions about the extent to which 'traditional' patterns of world politics are changing as a result of interdependence, globalization, technological change and related phenomena. Such concerns have led to a general explosion of work on questions such as 'global governance' or the 'impact of new technology'[38] and inevitably political theory has got caught up in the excitement. In particular, the extent to which these changes force political theorists (and citizens in general) to rethink the character of democracy and political community, to see if democracy can perhaps be 'globalized', has made International Relations very aware of democratic theory and vice versa. The best known *attempt* to sketch out what a 'cosmopolitan democracy' would look like is that associated with David Held[39] and some of his colleagues, but scholars of International Relations too are asking questions about the character of democracy and what it means for world politics.[40]

These features of the contemporary scene are amplified by a more general willingness among International Relations scholars to consider assumptions, methods and theories drawn from a much wider range than was the case between the 1940s and the 1980s. One illustration of this has been the growth of so-called 'constructivist' theory within International Relations over the last few years.[41] Often linked with 'critical' international theory, this development actually has a rather different source—sociology and social theory more generally—but it displays the increasing willingness of many in International Relations to look beyond the conventional, economistic and positivistic assumptions that have tended to dominate the field.

[38] See the articles by Craig Murphy and James Der Derian in this issue.

[39] Held's most influential statement of his views to date is in his *Democracy and the global order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). However, see also David Held and Daniele Archibugi, eds, *Cosmopolitan democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Archibugi, Held and Kohler, eds, *Reimaging political community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); and Held, McGrew, Perraton and Goldblatt, *Global transformations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

[40] See e.g. the most recent book by John Mueller, *Capitalism, democracy and Ralph's pretty good grocery*.

[41] See Nicholas Onuf, *World of our making: rules and rule in social theory and internationa lrelations* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules norms decisions: on the conditions of practical and legal reasoning in international relations and domestic affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John Gerard Ruggie, *Constructing the world polity: essays on international institutionalization* (London: Routledge, 1997); Alexander Wendt, *Social theory of international politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

International political theory is far too broad and diverse an area to allow for much simplification. But in the early twenty-first century perhaps the most influential set of debates, and certainly the most significant for the future trajectory of the field, is that between so-called cosmopolitans and their (various) critics.[42] These debates take place over a wide variety of issues, both moral and political; examples would be the justification of the use of force (in Bosnia, or Kosovo, for example), the character and implications of intercultural meetings and dialogue, the character and requirements of international justice (new institutional structures or not after major financial crises) and the desirability and possibility of large-scale political transformations, for example the changing character of the state or the possibility of institutional reform in world politics such as a move towards cosmopolitan democracy.

Such cosmopolitanism is not monolithic. The most usual distinction is that between *moral* cosmopolitans, who see moral principles as universally valid but as not mandating any specifically cosmopolitan form of political organization, and *political* cosmopolitans, who are usually also moral cosmopolitans but who see that institutional change is also required.[43] However, there are different approaches within each broad school.[44] Moreover, the critics of cosmopolitanism are an extremely variegated bunch. Some realists,[45] supporters of the 'morality of states' position,[46] so-called 'social liberals',[47] post-structuralists[48] and a range of others[49] would all be critical of cosmopolitanism, both on specific issues and, usually, in general. It is worth noting, however, as Kim Hutchings has done recently, that cosmopolitan theory, for all that it is greatly criticized, is very much setting the agenda for international political theory at present.

Indeed, in as much as 'international ethics' holds what we might call the 'commanding heights' of IPT, it is cosmopolitan international ethics that is

[42] Earlier overviews tended to see this as a debate between cosmopolitans and so-called 'communitarians'. See Chris Brown, *International Relations theory* and Thompson, *Justice and world order*. 'Communitarian' critics of cosmopolitanism, though real enough, are only one variant of a range of 'particularist' criticisms.

[43] I have borrowed these terms from Kim Hutching's excellent *International political theory* (London: Sage, 1999). They echo the earlier terminology of Charles Beitz, who referred to 'moral' and institutional cosmopolitans.

[44] Consequentialists (such as Singer) and Kantians (such as O'Neill and Doyle) are moral, but not political cosmopolitans. There are also less well-discussed versions of cosmopolitanism in international political theory. For example, the Christian humanism of the current Pope as reflected in his encyclicals and apostolic letters is an interesting and powerful form of cosmopolitanism with a profound contemporary influence, yet it has been little discussed in contemporary international political theory in comparison to the more 'academic' consequentialist and deontological forms. A good discussion can be found in George Weigel, *Witness to hope: the life of John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

[45] Chiefly those realists who share the normative standpoint of classical realists like Morgenthau.

[46] This would include English school writers such as Wight and Bull and political communitarians such as Michael Walzer and Mervyn Frost. See, in addition to works already mentioned, Frost's *Ethics in international relations: a constitutive theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[47] I have borrowed this term from Charles Beitz. See his 'Afterword' in *Political theory and international relations*, 2nd edn. See also his essay 'Social and cosmopolitan liberalism', *International Affairs* 75: 3, July 1999. The principal social liberal for Beitz, and in his view the most prominent critic of cosmopolitan liberalism, is John Rawls, as he articulates his (social) liberal theory in *The law of peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[48] See the critiques of Michael Shapiro, David Campbell and Rob Walker especially.

[49] E.g. Elshtain.

leading the charge. Even in areas like Just War theory or humanitarian intervention, where the default position has often in the past been a version of particularist or situational ethics (as for example in Walzer's *Just and unjust wars*), it is now the case that cosmopolitans are making the running. This development, I believe, is likely to continue.

The future?

For those who have long considered world politics to be one area where the craft of political theory might be plied as happily as any other, these developments have been extremely welcome. While it would certainly not be true to say that the integration of political theory and International Relations is complete, much has been achieved.[50] Yet it is necessary to question whether these developments will continue, or whether more problems will be discovered.

The rapid expansion of the links between the two fields is likely to continue and to grow and it will be increasingly significant both for international relations and International Relations. The reason for this partly lies in an observation about the likely character of international relations over the next few decades and partly in an observation about an intellectual trend which is not limited either to International Relations or international relations but is very well represented in both.

The perceived character of world politics since the end of the Cold War has shifted in ways that at the very least make it important to reflect on many of the understandings of international relations that had evolved during the Cold War. At the same time, as noted above, globalization, state collapse, the revolution in military affairs (RMA), ethnic tensions and new technologies all push at the levels of knowledge and understanding and all portend, potentially at least, considerable changes in world politics. Inevitably, therefore (the argument runs) new—at least adapted—theoretical tools will be needed to make sense of this new(ish) world will be needed. Edward Teller once remarked that we need theory when we do not understand how the world hangs together, not when we do. Of course there are many kinds of theory, but it is certainly the case that traditional political theorizing can play its part in seeking to understand these phenomena and their implications.

The case of interventions across state boundaries is an example of this. Of course, states have intervened for many reasons across recorded history. Both political theorists[51] and, more recently, International Relations scholars[52] have speculated about such interventions and international law, from the seventeenth

[50] The establishment in 1995 of an 'International Ethics' section in the International Studies Association is an indication of this, though there is also a danger in such developments, as Chris Brown has noted, and as I discuss below. For Brown's warning see his 'International ethics: fad, fantasy or field', *Paradigms* 8: 1, summer 1994, pp. 1–12.

[51] Though he is not usually considered 'a political theorist' let me cite Thucydides in support here. See his discussion of *inter alia*, Corcyra, Corinth and Melos in his *History*.

[52] For a good, and largely typical modern example, see Hedley Bull, ed., *Intervention in world politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

century onwards, and developed a clear understanding of the character and assumptions behind intervention predicated upon an assumption of the primacy of non-intervention.[53] However, for the first time in this long story, politicians, scholars, activists and others are talking about intervention for *humanitarian* motives. However serious one takes this to be, however sincere (or not) the protestations, it clearly represents a potential change in the international system of the highest order; a move from the assumption of non-intervention, to a claim that under certain conditions intervention might be legitimate or even required. The course of interventions—or the lack of them—in the 1990s and early twenty-first century has made it all the more obvious that we need to reflect hard on this topic and its implications.[54] The assumptions on which the international system rests will hardly remain unchanged if this change became institutionalized, and thus theorizing about the likelihood and the desirability of this will, of necessity, be a central requirement for International Relations scholarship, as well as for the practice of international relations. In as much as it seems likely that such interventions will become more, not less, common as the twenty-first century proceeds, then such theorizing and its implications will become progressively more important in both.

This does not, however, dictate what manner the political theory of 'interventions' will take. There are many ways in which such topics could be investigated; historically, for example (offering an account of how the thinking about interventions of differing political or ethical traditions has evolved and is evolving[55]), or in terms of the assumptions and practices governing interventions in particular situations. However, there is also a second reason for supposing that a certain kind of normative political theory will become significantly more important. The chief reason for this is the dominance of a particular intellectual fashion, both within contemporary social science and, more importantly and more broadly, in the world of practice as well.

Its most distinguished opponent has called this fashion 'rationalism'[56] and, well known though it is, a brief recapitulation is perhaps in order. As Michael

[53] See e.g. R. J. Vincent, *Non intervention and the international order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[54] For representative sample works see Walzer and Hoffmann cited above; Ian Forbes and Mark Hoffmann, eds, *Political theory, international relations and the ethics of intervention* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); Michael Ignatieff, *The warriors honour: ethnic war and the modern conscience* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998); Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving strangers: humanitarian intervention and international society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[55] Many of the publications of the 'Ethikon institute' engage in this sort of activity—though it often has a contemporary rather than a historical focus. See e.g. Tarry Nardin, ed., *The ethics of war and peace: religious and secular perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[56] See Michael Oakeshott, 'Rationalism in politics', *Rationalism in politics and other essays* (London: Methuen, 1962). With 'International Relations theory' as it is usually conceived, there is another and very common usage of 'rationalism'. This term, initially coined by Robert Keohane, is largely meant as a methodological designator, referring to methods that draw their inspiration from economics, e.g. rational choice theory and a range of related quantitative approaches. Keohane uses it to distinguish his chosen methodologies from those (he calls them 'reflectivists') that dispute these methods—principally constructivists, critical theorists, post-structuralists and some feminists. As I understand it, Keohane's rationalism is merely one recent and currently influential version of the general intellectual fashion that Oakeshott is describing, but Oakeshott's rationalism comes in many other guises as well.

Oakeshott described it, 'the conduct of affairs for the rationalist is a matter of solving problems…the politics it inspires may be called the politics of the felt need… political life is resolved into a series of crises each to be surmounted by the application of "reason"…(rationalist politics) are the politics of perfection and they are the politics of uniformity…the rationalist cannot imagine a politics that does not consist of solving problems or a political problem of which there is no rational solution…(and while) there may not be one universal remedy for all political ills…the remedy for any particular ill is as universal in its application as it is rational in its conception'.[57] This fashion has, at its root, Oakeshott tells us, a doctrine about human knowledge. This doctrine elides or confuses the two requirements of the practice of any human skill. These are technical knowledge —'knowledge of…rules which are, or may be, deliberately learned, remembered and…put into practice'—and practical knowledge—'knowledge (which)… exists only in use, is not reflective and (unlike technique) cannot be formulated into rules'. In rationalism these two are collapsed into one; technical knowledge: 'The sovereignty of reason', for Oakeshott, 'means the sovereignty of technique'.

It is not neither my intention and nor is it necessary, to argue the rights and wrongs of the specifics of Oakeshott's case here—I accept that it is controversial.[58] However, without necessarily accepting all of Oakeshott's argument, it could be said that that he put his finger on *one* of the most significant aspects of a particular way of thinking about the relationship between knowledge and politics, one which has grown in influence across both the academic and the 'practical' world since he was writing. As anecdotal evidence for this, we might note the range of other writers who have touched on something like this over the years, though they have for the most part used their own terms rather than Oakeshott's.[59] Over the years the fashion has become yet more protean still, so in its new guise, it could be called 'hyper-rationalism'.

Examples of the hold this fashion exerts in contemporary politics and International Relations are legion. One might almost go so far as to say that the entire rhetorical, if not always the actual, structure of world politics is shaped by it. The notion of a 'global community' (for example) is, as it is generally used, clearly a 'rationalist' one, but on a scale undreamed of by Oakshott (hence hyper-rationalism). The tendency within contemporary post-industrial societies to see government as a provider of goods and services (and thus necessarily a 'solver of problems') is another. However, in the current context, perhaps the most telling testimony to its power is the unacknowledged hold it has on major contemporary institutional and political actors. An example is the 1998/9

[57] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in politics,* pp. 4–6.

[58] See Rengger, 'Modernity, practical reason and the moral life: two pathways'. Keynote lecture to the Modernity and Moral Identity conference organized by Helsinki University and the Finnish Academy in August 2000 (publication forthcoming).

[59] See, for particularly apposite and recent examples, James Scott*, Seeing like a state* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis* (Chicago.,IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992). They would not necessarily agree with Oakeshott nor he with them, except on the narrow point about the relationship between knowledge and politics.

World Development Report of the World Bank, entitled *Knowledge for development*. This suggests that the problems of development be examined from the 'perspective of knowledge'. While it is accepted (in a throwaway remark) that 'there are many types of knowledge', the focus of the report is on two types. These two are called 'knowledge about technology' (which the report calls 'technical knowledge' and suggests, as examples, nutrition, birth control, software engineering and accountancy) and 'knowledge about attributes' (such as the quality of a product, the diligence of a worker or the creditworthiness of a firm). It is obvious that there are great disparities in the provision of the former in contemporary world politics and they call such disparities between and within countries 'knowledge gaps', while incomplete knowledge of attributes are referred to as 'information problems'. The report suggests various ways in which all societies, but especially developing societies, can tackle knowledge gaps and information problems, and treats such knowledge therefore as a 'global public good'.[60] It goes on to suggest what 'international institutions can do', as well as 'what governments can do', and to emphasize that obviously a great deal remains to be done in such a virgin field. 'There is ongoing controversy' about how to measure knowledge: 'Without a standard measure we cannot determine whether knowledge gaps are growing or shrinking'. Overall, however, the report emphasizes how much we know and how much we can do with what we know.

The point is not to agree or disagree with the specifics of what the authors or the report are saying here. Rather, it is to point to the assumptions about knowledge that lie behind them. Practical knowledge (in Oakeshott's sense) does not appear at all: the whole emphasis of the report assumes that technical knowledge and knowledge of attributes are the central requirements of sound 'development', the classic hallmark of the rationalist cast of mind. Indeed, one might suggest that 'development' itself—certainly in its dominant modes—is a quintessential product of the rationalist *mentalité*.

The dominance of rationalism suggests that the growing recognition of the need to bring philosophical and theoretical tools to bear on the growing problems of world politics will certainly encourage the continuing growth of international political theory, but that this is likely to result in a *certain kind* of international political theory, a kind which emphasizes problem solving—in other words, the hyper-rationalist normative theory. Indeed, this is already manifest. It is present in the view that theory *should* be, in some sense at least, an 'intervention' in practice that is very widespread across very divergent forms of international political theory.[61]

[60] The phrase actually used in the report is 'international' public good. But it is clear that the context is global. For an excellent, though clearly hyper-rationalist, discussion of this idea in general, see Inge Paul, Isabella Grunberg and Marc Stern, eds, *Global public goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[61] To use an example I have referred to before (in *International Relations, political theory and the problem of order* pp. 180–81), both Stephen Krasner, in criticizing what he refers to as 'postmodernism' in IR theory, and David Campbell in defending what he calls 'political criticism', argue that their work represents a way of intervening in debates about policy choices. Different ways of course, but nonetheless both see their work as a contribution to the world of practice.

This brings me back to the comopolitanism discussed at the end of the last section. Recognizing again that cosmopolitanism comes in many forms, the essence of contemporary cosmopolitanism in a thoroughgoing universalism, ethical and epistemological. Yet such universalism is resolutely timebound. The 'truths it holds to be self-evident' are, curiously enough, the truths 'we' have discovered. And this 'we', by the way, need not simply mean the West. As I understand the term, both Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, perhaps especially the latter, are hyper-rationalists. Both see politics as having a fundamental 'task' and both, especially Huntington, offer us a 'crib' for understanding its essence (the role of democracy, for Fukuyama, the character of civilization for Huntington) and on the basis of this 'politics of the book' they lay out for us what we should do.

A final example might be the work of Amartya Sen and others in developing what is usually called the 'capabilities' approach to development and international ethics.[62] They have produced a remarkably sophisticated and extremely interesting body of work explicitly addressing certain key problems in social and political organization by focusing on what Sen calls 'development as freedom'. By this he means the capability of people to function effectively in elaborating their own life plans, through the progressive enhancement of their 'informational base'. Only someone blind to the richness of Sen's work could fail to see it as an important and potentially powerful contribution to cosmopolitan international political theory. It offers clear and powerful answers to a range of difficult issues in contemporary world politics and does so in ways that seemingly respect human difference and yet do not give up on the claim to universality that is cosmopolitanism's most obvious characteristic. Yet it is also, clearly, rationalistic: problem-solving in orientation and dependent on an account of knowledge (the discussion of 'informational bases') that elides the dual basis of skill, technical and practical. Though controversial, it has received growing attention both in the academic literature of international political theory[63] and in policy debates in international institutions and beyond.[64] In addition to its intrinsic merits, its power in the late modern world is partly derived from its rationalism. For all that it is critical of much of the political and moral infrastructure in which rationalism is so deeply embedded, it speaks in the accent of the hyper-rationalist mainstream, and so cannot be ignored.

[62] Sen introduced the notion of capability in his 1979 Tanner lectures at Stanford (Equality of what?) and has elaborated subsequently across a range of works in economics and philosophy and public policy. He has been joined in this by a number of scholars, the most prominent of whom is probably Martha Nussbaum. See especially Sen, *Choice, welfare and measurement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982); *The standard of living* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and 'Justice: means versus freedoms', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19, 1990. See also Sen and Nussbaum, eds, *The quality of life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Sen's recent *Development as freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[63] See David Crocker, 'Functioning and capability: the foundations of Sen's and Nussbaum's development ethic', in Nussbaum and Johnathan Glover, eds, *Women, culture and development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[64] Sen's original lectures, on which *Development as freedom* was based, were originally given at the invitation of the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn.

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But that, of course, is the problem. The risk is that international political theory will become as 'rationalist' (though in different ways) as existing mainstream 'IR theory' and the social sciences more generally is very real. It will become seduced by the lure of thinking that it can 'help'. For philosophers especially (though certainly not only for them) the greatest temptation has always been what we might call the Platonic temptation (and whether or not Plato was actually guilty of it). The desire 'to be a king and ride through Persepolis' is perhaps containable, but the desire to give advice to such a king—or indeed to oppose him—rarely is. And, of course, the extent to which rationalism has already eaten into the soul of modern communities suggests that 'political theory' (whether in the domestic or international spheres) should fundamentally be about 'solving problems'—or at least *addressing* problems. As we have seen, much international political theory is already couched in this way and much of the initial impetus to theorize reflectively about international politics stemmed from practice itself (opposition to the Vietnam war, for example). This does not necessarily bespeak a rationalist temper, but it can very easily be converted into one, and the development of the social sciences as 'policy sciences' points very clearly in this direction.

It should be emphasized that the assumption that political theory should mainly (or indeed exclusively) focus on 'problems', *itself* a child of rationalism, does not mean that non-rationalist political theory does not also sometimes address problems. It would be, after all, a curious political theory that did not, at least from time to time, address political problems. Rather it is merely to say that focusing on 'problems' cannot be its '*main*' task: political theory does not really have a 'task', but takes a number of different forms, some of which may indeed start from contemporary problems (though may not do so in order to help 'solve' them) but some of which have a very different provenance. A historical focus has been the most common, a concentration on major political thinkers or traditions from past centuries, and this has indeed been an important component of the emergence of international political theory. However, the historical voice is especially vulnerable to the rationalist temper and the real exploration of the history of thinking about relations between communities has barely begun. The danger, then, must surely be that if international political theory becomes rationalist in general orientation, this form of the 'normative' will squeeze out not only other possible normative orientations but also the 'historical' voice.[65]

This would be a great loss even for those who believe that the fundamental tasks of international political theory are normative. For if we focus solely (or even largely) on the problems of the moment we are likely to become prisoners

[65] At some level this has already happened in political theory more generally. See, for a slightly exaggerated but good discussion, Janet Coleman's Henry Tudor memorial lecture, reprinted in *History of political thought*, 1999.

of the assumptions of the moment, some of which may well have created the problems in the first place. Yet this is the most damaging aspect of rationalism as Oakeshott presents it; that it progressively closes off alternative modes of understanding. As he puts it, 'the [rationalist] first turns off the light and then complains that he cannot see'.[66]

Surely one of the best ways of 'addressing' our moral and political problems (only a fool would deny that we have many such) is to *distance* ourselves from them, to see how people distant in time or space or both sought to identify and grapple with *their* problems. Yet to grasp this is most emphatically not to be 'problem-driven' or 'problem-solving' in our approach, because it is to understand that very often we recognize our 'problems' as such only on our way to other kinds of understanding, and it is the pursuit of such understanding that is the appropriate disposition of political theory.

International political theory needs to be aware of what we might term the hyper-rationalist temptation and avoid it as best we can, difficult though that will inevitably be. We must ensure that as it develops, international political theory allows space for historical voices, for those philosophical voices critical of rationalism and for other voices—aesthetic or poetic, for example. If we can succeed in this, then we will not only have properly understood the idea of international political theory as a scholarly pursuit, but we stand a far better chance of actually being able to recognize and understand the real political and international problems of the twenty-first century; and thus we may be better able to confront them.

[66] Oakeshott, op. cit. p. 32.