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Transnational theories of order and change: heterodoxy in International Relations scholarship

RONEN PALAN*

Abstract. In this article I argue that the very meaning of ‘inter-national relations’ is emerging as a focus of debate in International Relations, particularly among the critical traditions in the discipline. No longer seen as a mere study of peace and war, IR is viewed as a component of general pan-disciplinary theories of order and change. The international sphere is perceived, accordingly, no longer as a system in its own right, but rather as a gigantic transmission belt, and a huge communication device transmitting and diffusing ideas, practices, rules, norms and institutions throughout the world. The article examines the implications of such an approach on IR theory. In addition, the article revisits the works of Hegel, Marx and the French School of Regulation to demonstrate how they developed an empirical theory of international diffusion.

This special issue of the *Review of International Studies* aims to evaluate the impact and likely future direction of the so-called critical tradition in International Relations scholarship. But what precisely is this critical tradition? Is there one tradition, or a variety of traditions? Is it not the case that all theories and approaches are supposed to be critical? And who exactly has the right to proclaim themselves ‘critical’, and in doing so, by default pronounce their intellectual opponents uncritical?

For Robert Cox the critical tradition represents a certain sensibility, a historical awareness of the limitations and content of theory itself – an awareness that is presumably lacking in IR ‘orthodoxy’. In a celebrated reference to the Frankfurt School (a School that is often described as ‘critical theory’) he says: ‘[t]heory is always for someone and for some purpose. All theories have a perspective’.¹ In a similar vein, ‘post-structuralists’ like Richard Ashley, employ techniques drawn from philosophy and literary criticisms such as deconstruction to comb through IR texts in order to ‘reveal’, as they put it, the historical specificity and power assumptions embedded in conventional IR theory.² The not-too-charitable implications are, of

* I would like to thank Anastasia Nesvetailova, Nick Rengger, Ben Thirkell-White and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

¹ Robert W. Cox, ‘Social Forces, States, and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, *Millennium: Journal of International Relations*, 10:2 (1981), reprinted in Robert W. Cox with Timothy J. Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 87. On theories as instrumental knowledge, see Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest* (London: Heinemann, 1978).

² Whether the IR variant of post-structuralism may be considered post-structuralist in the first place is a matter of dispute. See Colin Hoadley, ‘An Archaeology of Post-Structural Intent in

course, that ‘mainstream’ or ‘orthodox’ scholars are either willing servants of power (for what reason? power? money? prestige? In other words, for all the motives that realists tend to associate with some universal human nature! Sic!); or alternatively, are unaware, naïve conformists who fail to question the ‘party line’.

Human failings, lack of curiosity or intellectual mediocrity are not to be discounted, but they are not the exclusive domain of orthodoxy. It is not entirely clear why, for instance, ‘orthodox’ IR scholars, educated as historians, such as Martin Wight, E. H. Carr, or, for that matter, Robert Keohane, ‘an outstanding scholar of remarkably broad erudition’ as Benjamin Cohen describes him,³ should lack basic historical sensibility that seems to come so easily and naturally to those who choose to describe themselves as critical scholars. It is equally not clear why mainstream scholars, and only mainstream scholars, are so blind to their human failings. This is not to say that there are no important differences in approaches. Benjamin Cohen believes that there is a distinct ‘British’ School⁴ which can be described as critical: ‘Least of all did British academics require’, he writes, ‘any encouragement to question authority. So-called “critical” theory, challenging orthodoxies of all kinds, has long found a comfortable home in the country’s universities.’ A respectful and sympathetic observer of the British School, he nonetheless warns, ‘The British school may be fairly criticized for its less rigorous approach to theory building and testing, which makes generalization difficult and cumulation of knowledge virtually impossible’.⁵ I suspect that many IR scholars would readily sign up to this statement.

These conversations and debates are important and must continue. Nonetheless, I argue, they fundamentally miss the main cause for the bifurcation of the IR discipline between orthodoxies and the critical traditions. As Richard Marsden notes, a ‘theory is a cluster of conclusions in search of premises’.⁶ People tend not to choose to be mainstream or critical by patiently sifting through the evidence, examining the quality of research methodologies, historical evidence, and so on – these sorts of criticisms, justified or not, are retrospective. To understand the cause of the bifurcation of the IR discipline we need to enquire into the diverging clusters of conclusions that are currently in search of a premise. This seems to be the core of the debate.

Nor can we truly judge a school, an approach or a theory purely on the basis of material already published. Theories are changing, schools of thoughts are evolving, and traditions often develop in unpredictable ways. Writing in a different context, but in words that are wholly applicable to IR, Colander, Holt and Rosser argue: ‘Standard classifications tend to miss the diversity that exists within the profession,

International Relations’ (Thesis, University of Sussex, 2003); Earl Gammon and Ronen Palan, ‘Libidinal Economies and International Political Economy’, in Marieke De Goede (ed.), *International Political Economy and Poststructural Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2006). Ashley, however, is arguably one of the few to have applied rigorously the deconstruction method to IR texts. See Richard Ashley, ‘The Poverty of Neorealism’, in Robert Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³ Benjamin J. Cohen, *Building Bridges: The Construction of International Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

⁴ Cohen writes specifically about IPE, but his comments may be applied to IR more broadly.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ He continues, theory ‘is not pieced together from observed phenomena; it is rather what makes it possible to observe phenomena as being of certain sort, and as related to other phenomena. Theories put phenomena into systems. They are built up “in reverse” – retroductively.’ Richard Marsden, *The Nature of Capital: Marx After Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 45.

and the many new ideas that are being tried out. They miss the important insight that one can be part of the mainstream and yet not necessarily hold “orthodox” ideas.’ The reality, they continue, ‘is that at any point in time a successful discipline will have hundreds of new ideas being tried out, as new methods, new technology and new information become available. That is what happens at the edge of economics.’⁷

It is, therefore, the edge of the IR discipline that should interest us, not its centre. And what is happening at the edge? One important development, I argue, is that the core meaning of the term ‘inter-national relations’, the very boundaries of the discipline, is emerging as a key area of debate. From the early 1970s onwards the discipline had witnessed an inexorable, if wholly understandable, growth in the number of issues, processes and themes under consideration. No longer seen as merely the study of peace and war, the IR discipline has sought to position itself at the heart of great many debates in the social sciences. This trend has been evident in the development of sub-disciplines such as International Political Economy (IPE), normative theory, gender theory and so on. More so, if IR was dominated by the various schools of ‘realism’ up to say, the early 1990s, a decade or so later the discipline contains a bewildering array of theories and approaches, ranging from – and the list below is by no means not complete – romantic realism, anti-reformation realism, Christian realism, structural realism, neorealism, rational choice realism, legalistic idealism, liberalism, methodological individualism, the interdependence school, structural functionalism, regime theorists, two-level game theory, institutionalists of all variants, post-structuralism, critical theorists, hermeneutics, constructivism (including Weberian constructivism, Wittgenstenian constructivism, symbolic interactionists and few others); Marxism of all sorts and descriptions: Marxists of the world system variants, dependency theorists, Gramscian and neo-Gramscian, derivation school, structural Marxists, Leninists, critical realists, regulationists, Trotskyists; gender theorists, feminist theories, queer theorists and speed theorists; Braudelians, Polanyians, Nietschians, Deleuzians, Foucauldians, Zizekians . . . Followers of Levinas, Rawls and Schmidt . . . and so on and so forth.

The plethora of schools of thoughts, and the alarming rate of expansion in the number of theoretical approaches and methodological and epistemological debates, is characteristic of a discipline in a turmoil, in search of an identity. It is worth asking ourselves why IR scholars display such cravings for change? What is the underlying problem, the unresolved issue (or issues) that drive students of IR with such tenacity to seek alternatives? One popular explanation for the proliferation of theories and approaches in IR can be discounted from the outset. There is little doubt that, as in every other field of the social sciences and the humanities, fashions and fads play a role. Indeed, in the 1960s, every field of the social sciences was touched by structuralism, behaviourism and system theories. By now, even ‘hard’ disciplines such as law or accounting boast their own variants of post-structuralism, discourse theories, gender theories, constructivisms and game theories, and IR certainly does not wish to fall behind.⁸ Nonetheless, it is a mistake to attribute the contemporary proliferation of theories to fads and fashions only. The dissatisfaction in and with IR goes, I believe, deeper, much deeper.

⁷ David Colander, Richard P. F. Holt and J. Barkley Rosser, ‘The Changing Face of Mainstream Economics’, *Review of Political Economy*, 16:4 (2004), pp. 485–99, at 487.

⁸ And what about ‘critical pet studies’? Surely, an IR variant will make its appearance at some point. See Heidi J. Nast, ‘Critical Pet Studies?’, *Antipode*, 38:5 (2006), pp. 894–906.

At issue is the manner and the way by which the expansion of the International Relations discipline can take place. The principle contribution of the critical IR theory has been to radically resituate the discipline in relation to the other social sciences. It has done this partly by exposing the weaknesses of mainstream approaches, pointing, for instance, to the plain implausibility of the idea of a timeless unitary state. Even realists had to acknowledge, however reluctantly (as the definition by negation clearly demonstrates), the relevance of ‘non-state actors’, to some degree. The mainstream attempt to expand IR by ‘bolting on’ ideas like ‘interdependence’ or ‘domestic actors’ onto a realist framework was never really going to work. The critical tradition understood that a far more thorough rethinking of the discipline is necessary. It has abandoned, for all intents and purposes, the efforts to constitute IR as a separate, bounded sphere of activity, and sought to locate IR as a component of pan-disciplinary studies of global order and change. The critical tradition also understood early on that IR is unlikely to serve as (what I call) ‘first order discipline’ within the social sciences, but will remain a derivative discipline, drawing more explicitly on other, more fundamental, theoretical claims. What it does do, though, is address a particular aspect of the human condition, which is omitted by the other social sciences.

While the critical tradition in IR has been off the mark earlier on these matters, the mainstream too is rapidly developing credible pan-disciplinary approaches to the study of processes of order and change. At this point of the game the principle theories of IR have already reconstituted themselves as components of what I call general theories of order and change. As a result the key difference between orthodoxy and heterodoxy lies elsewhere – a development that is always articulated with sufficient precision in recent debates. The crucial difference lies between, on the one hand, the rationalism as Helen Milner describes it, of mainstream founded on methodological individualism and a behavioural theory of the subject,⁹ and the non-rationalist perspectives which draw at core on the Freudian conception of the subject.¹⁰ For the one, the subject is a rational advantage-seeking individual operating nonetheless under the principles of bounded rationality. For the other, rationality itself is suspect (or considered historically constituted) as the subject appears to desire their own repression. The one is imbued with liberal optimism about human progress, happiness and the control of nature, and the other takes a more pessimistic view of humanity’s capacity to achieve emancipation and progress.

The article discusses these developments in the field of IR. I begin by arguing that the meaning of ‘inter-national relations’, the very boundaries of the discipline, is emerging as the focus of a debate in the field. This follows with a discussion of the differences between methodological individualism and heterodoxy. I will then outline some of the key methodological and analytical issues pertaining to the conceptualisation of IR as a component of a general theory of order and change. Drawing on the ideas of Goran Therborn, I argue that what a critical theory needs to do is pursue an

⁹ On rationalism, see Helen Milner, ‘Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis Among International, American, and Comparative Politics’, *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 759–86; Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane and Stephen D. Krasner, ‘International Organization and the Study of World Politics’, *International Organization*, 52:4 (1998), pp. 645–85; Amanda Dickins, ‘The Evolution of International Political Economy’, *International Affairs*, 82:3 (2006), pp. 479–92.

¹⁰ See Gammon and Palan, ‘Libidinal Economics’.

approach that is: (a) globally encompassing, (b) historically oriented and (c) focused on political institutions. I conclude this article by sketching out a distinct heterodox approach to IR, found in work of Hegel, Marx and the French School of Regulation, that has been largely ignored so far.

I acknowledge from the outset that as an analysis of a very diverse literature, and as an effort to make sense of what I take to be the implicit, sometimes hidden, issues in contemporary debates, a certain degree of subjectivity is inevitable. Furthermore, due to the enormity of the subject-matter, an article of this size can at best only begin to sketch possibilities for new research.

No longer merely the science of peace and war

Not too long ago, IR was conceived as ‘the science of peace and war’.¹¹ The reason being, E. H. Carr famously explained, was that ‘[w]ar lurks in the background of international politics’.¹² As a science of peace and war, IR was considered a ‘policy-oriented’ discipline whose task was to advise governments on policy in what is taken to be a perilous and treacherous sphere of international affairs.¹³ To achieve these goals, the ‘old’ IR sought to develop a theory of the determinant of policymaking in what was regarded as an anarchical system of states.¹⁴ The discipline of International Relations centred, unsurprisingly, on the dynamics of the relationships of conflict and cooperation among states, or as it was sometimes described, the *politics of international relations*.¹⁵

By the 1970s, however, many scholars had begun to question the narrow remit of IR.¹⁶ Susan Strange lent her voice to the growing dissatisfaction when she wrote: ‘Contemporary literature with certain rare exceptions has been predominantly directed at far too narrow set of questions’.¹⁷ For Helen Milner, the problem with the old IR lies in the neglect of the interaction between domestic and international factors. Milner finds Robert Putnam’s two-level game theory particularly useful.¹⁸ For Robert Cox, in contrast, the problem lies with the ‘distinction between state and

¹¹ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 6.

¹² Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981), p. 109.

¹³ Michael Nicholson, ‘What is the Use of International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 26 (2000), pp. 183–98; William Wallace, ‘Truth and Power, Monks and Technocrats: Theory and Practice in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 22:3 (1996), pp. 301–22.

¹⁴ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order In World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

¹⁵ Northedge, for instance, defines international politics ‘as those mutual dealings of governments representing sovereign states’. Fred S. Northedge, *The International Political System* (London: Faber, 1976).

¹⁶ Robert O. Keohane and John S. Nye (eds.), *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

¹⁷ Susan Strange, *States and Markets: An Introduction To International Political Economy* (New York: Basil, 1988), p. 12.

¹⁸ ‘Although many scholars have recognized the interdependence of domestic and international politics, few have developed explicit theories of this interaction’. Helen V. Milner, *Interests, Institutions and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 4.

civil society'.¹⁹ Cox finds inspiration principally in the work of Gramsci. Hendrik Spruyt demonstrates that the question of origins of the units that make up the international system has become a hot topic in IR. He finds inspiration in Douglas North's variant of evolutionary institutionalism.²⁰ Nicolas Onuf goes further. He believes that 'The way to proceed should now be clear. It is to look for a substantial ensemble of practices, the coherence of which is not reflected in, much less produced by, the constitutive claims of established social sciences disciplines.'²¹ Looking beyond 'established' social sciences, Onuf believes that Wolin's notion of 'political society' is the answer.

The expansion of the number of topics and issues under investigation represents a critical phase in the maturing of the IR discipline. It poses, however, two sets of interrelated dilemmas. The first dilemma concerns the relationship between an expanded version of the discipline and existing theories. Is it possible to bolt-on new theories and approaches onto existing theories? Or does an expanded IR imply a reordering of theory itself? The second, and related dilemma, is whether the expansion of the field into new areas and topics may compromise the coherence of the field, perhaps to the point of destroying the possibilities for a credible theory in the first place. There is a danger, in other words, that IR would become a place where everything goes – which is the impression sometimes given by some of the more outlandish new theories.

Let us discuss briefly the first concern. Bolt-on theories are normally advanced in recognition that at least some of the existing theories offer something valuable. Knowledge is supposed to be cumulative and we should resist, as far as possible, the temptation to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Such a bolt-on approach to theory is represented, for instance, by Keohane and Nye's interdependence theory. Interdependence, they say, 'affects world politics and the behaviour of states' but 'governmental actions also influence patterns of interdependence'.²² Indeed, they acknowledge in another influential book, that 'a good deal of intersocietal intercourse, with significant political importance, takes place without government control'.²³ Although they assure their readers: 'there would be no point in ignoring the nation-state.'²⁴

What becomes clear is that for Keohane and Nye interdependence does not challenge the fundamentals of world politics as described by realists. They merely seek to bolt on a new concern upon an existing theoretical framework. But what if interdependence is not a late arrival 'affecting' world politics at later stages of capitalism, but a constant feature of world politics? How should we understand world politics in the age of intensified interdependence, or, as it is now called, globalisation? The interdependence school is unable to provide satisfactory answers to these questions because it placed itself under this epistemological straightjacket.

¹⁹ Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 86.

²⁰ Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²¹ Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (University of South California Press, 1989).

²² Keohane and Nye, *Transnational Relations*, p. 5.

²³ R. O. Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics In Transition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1977), p. x.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

The problem with bolt-on theories, in other words, is that they tend to be historically specific and date very quickly. They encourage the use of theory as a ‘toolbox, out of which one can take individual concepts and theorems depending on one’s immediate goals, without having to worry about the rest of the theory’.²⁵ Indeed, quite often bolt-on theories undermine the very theory to which they have been bolted on. Milner, for instance, proposes to ‘relax’ the unitary state thesis – in reality, she abandons the theory altogether.²⁶ Milner’s treatment of the older theories is not an exception, it is the norm.

Susan Strange represents the opposite trend when she calls for wholesale reordering of theory itself. For her the problem with contemporary IR is not with this or that theory, but with the very orientation of the field towards too narrow questions. International Relations (or IPE, as she calls it),²⁷ she avers, is not simply a theory of interstate conflict, as many seem to believe, but ‘a framework of analysis, a method of diagnosis of the human condition as it is, or as it was, affected by economic, political and social circumstances’.²⁸ I believe that Strange captures with these words an important undercurrent in contemporary IR scholarship, speaking for the fledgling heterodoxy in IR.

One of the common, justifiable criticisms of Strange was that she intuited, but never spelled out clearly the full implications of her approach. Her words capture, however, in a condensed form *some* of the fundamentals of the emerging tradition. They consist of three ideas:

1. IR is a framework of analysis or a method of diagnosis;
2. IR is concerned, first and foremost, with the ‘human condition’;
3. In reorienting IR towards the study of the ‘human condition’, Strange reopens the question of the specificity of IR, in other words, she raises the thorny question of the relationship between IR and other academic disciplines which, after all, are equally concerned with the question of the ‘human condition’.

Let us dwell briefly on Strange’s proposals. Strange’s first point, that IR is a framework of analysis or a method of diagnosis, is arguably the least controversial. Robert Cox, for instance, has something similar in mind when he writes that ‘the primary task of theory is . . . to enable the mind to come to grips with the reality it confronts’.²⁹ Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner advance similar ideas, albeit employing a somewhat different jargon when they point out the differences between what they call general theoretical orientations and specific research programmes.³⁰ Their notion of a ‘general theoretical orientation’ is equivalent to Strange’s idea of a framework. They suggest that a fundamental reorientation of the field must take place, first and foremost, at the very general level of theoretical orientation.

²⁵ Schimank as quoted in Alex Viskovatoff, *Foundations of Niklas Luhmann’s Theory of Social Systems*, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 29:4 (1999), p. 81.

²⁶ Milner, *Rationalizing Politics*.

²⁷ Strange expresses disenchantment with IR and hence she speaks of IPE. Susan Strange, ‘International Economics and International Relations: A Case of Mutual Neglect’, *International Affairs*, 46:2 (1970), pp. 304–15.

²⁸ Strange, *States and Markets*, p. 16.

²⁹ Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 87.

³⁰ ‘General theoretical orientations provide heuristic – they suggest relevant variables and causal patterns that provide guidelines for developing specific research programmes . . . and specific research programmes links explanatory variables to a set of outcomes, or dependent variables’. Katzenstein, Keohan and Krasner, ‘International Organization’, p. 646.

Constitutive and derivative theories in the social sciences

What does ‘general theoretical orientation’ mean? How do we apply these ideas specifically to IR? Somewhat schematically, we may distinguish two types of social sciences disciplines: *first order* disciplines may be described as constitutive disciplines; *second order* disciplines may be described as derivative disciplines. First order disciplines are concerned, among other things, with the essential theories of human behaviour, rationality and causation. Second order disciplines derive their ideas about human behaviour, rationality and causation from one or another first order discipline applying them to a specific time-space or thematic context. By describing some disciplines as derivative, I do not wish to denigrate or diminish the merits of these disciplines. I am simply pointing out that certain disciplines and subject-matters are not directly concerned with the fundamentals of human behaviour, but draw their constitutive concepts from order disciplines.

I am not sure whether my list of first order disciplines is complete, but I would say that moral philosophy, political economy, linguistics and sociology have emerged as first order disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Political economy, for instance, seeks to provide a constitutive theory of capital as a totalising force of society. Linguistics emerged in the twentieth century as another constitutive discipline, when the work of De Saussure, among others, inspired the development in literature, structural anthropology, psychoanalysis and so on.³¹ Such first order disciplines do not provide for comprehensive theories of order and change. That is why first and second order disciplines always relate to second order disciplines within pan-disciplinary *general theoretical frameworks*, each of which, I propose, offers what Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner call ‘general theoretical orientation’.

General theories may be defined as *synthetic efforts aimed at providing a credible link between theories of the subject (or individuality), the collective (state, society, nation) and the international (world-economy, civilisation, the transnational arena)*.³² While unsurprisingly, IR theories are centred on the third dimension, it can be easily demonstrated that every reasonably developed IR theory draws upon, and in turn, contributes to, a general pan-disciplinary heuristics, which consists of theories of the three dimensions and the relation between them.³³

Let us take the case of Hobbes as an illustration of a more general proposition.³⁴ Students of International Relations may be somewhat surprised to learn that Hobbes’ great work, *The Leviathan*, begins not with a theory of the state (the commonwealth) or international relations, but with theories of language, thought

³¹ Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983). Broadly conceived, sociology, (including social anthropology), lays the foundations for individualist, structural and systemic theories of society. Sociology, however, can serve as first order and second order discipline concomitantly, as some sociological theories draw their basic insights of human behaviour from other disciplines.

³² The notion of a general theory does not imply a universally accepted unitary, systematic and comprehensive theory of order and change. Obviously, in contrast to the sciences, the social sciences are unable to agree on one dominant general theory on par with say, the dominance of Newtonian mechanics until the advent of relativity theory, and probably never will. Nevertheless, social sciences theories are not isolated islands of thought, but belong, if often very roughly and unwittingly, to pan-disciplinary general theories, or at the very least, an effort to establish theories whose ultimate aim is the establishment of a unitary theory of order and change.

³³ For a similar point see Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 91.

³⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

and rationality. The Leviathan, literally a whale in Hebrew, represents the commonwealth to Hobbes. The commonwealth is depicted therefore as the largest mammal on earth, as for Hobbes the commonwealth was the equivalent of an artificial organism, a work of art. The concept of art, which is epistemologically at the origins of the notion of ‘artificiality’, was understood differently at the times of Hobbes. In Hobbes’ words, ‘For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE (in Latin, CIVITAS), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul’.³⁵

Hobbes’ Leviathan is narrated in the form of deduction from first principles. Hobbes begins his great work by outlining a theory of subjectivity, rationality and desire. The first chapter is entitled ‘of sense’, the second, ‘the imagination’. From general propositions about the nature of the senses, language and abstract thought, Hobbes develops a theory of discourse, speech, writing, reason and knowledge. These concepts are then employed as the building blocks of a theory of desire, including the desire for power. ‘The power of a man, to take it universally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good, and is either original or instrumental’.³⁶ From this Hobbes arrives at his famous deduction (interestingly, he understood it as a component of a theory of manners), ‘So that in the first place, I put for a general inclination of all mankind a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.’³⁷ The Hobbesian theory of the state and inter-state relationship has been developed explicitly within the framework of a general theory of order and change.³⁸

In sum, all IR theories establish, whether explicitly or implicitly, a relationship with a general theory in the social sciences and social philosophy. That does not mean, unfortunately, that IR theories do so systematically. Nonetheless, all the familiar concepts we employ in IR such as state, power, actors, rationality, hegemony, interest, balance, equilibrium and so on, as well as the various metaphors and analogies that inform and shape our thinking in IR, are drawn from one or another general theory in the social sciences.

Towards a general theory of order and change

Considering the link between IR and general theoretical frameworks, Strange’s second point, concerning nothing less than the human condition itself, provides an important insight. For Strange strives to identify the underlying ‘problematique’ that

³⁵ Ibid., Introduction, capitalised in the original.

³⁶ Ibid., ch. x, ‘of Power, Worth, Dignity, Honour and Worthiness’.

³⁷ Ibid., ch. XI, ‘Of the Difference of Manners’.

³⁸ Within the discipline of IR, Hans Morgenthau comes closest to Hobbes when he argues that ‘The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power. This concept provides the link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood. This is reminiscent of Hobbes’ theory of desire which translates into a theory of desire for power. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th edn. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 5.

links critical and heterodox theory to a general theory of the social. She believes she had found it in the notion of human condition ‘as it is, or as it was, affected by economic, political and social circumstances’.³⁹

Where does the concept of the human condition come from? The concept of the human condition is reminiscent of Heidegger’s description of sociology as ‘a general theory of man and his human relations’.⁴⁰ Or Weber who identifies two disciplines, history and sociology (or the cultural sciences).⁴¹ For Strange, it appears, IR is part of a pan-disciplinary *sociological* tradition which seeks to investigate the nature of order and change in society. It may be argued that one of the great forces for change in the IR field is motivated by the conviction that the international arena adds a vital, often missing, dimension to the study of the processes of order and change in society. A conviction that implies, in turn, that International Relations as a discipline should be integrated into the broader field of investigation of the nature of order and change in the contemporary world.

This raises a third question. If IR is no longer merely the study of peace and war, but should be oriented towards existential questions such as the human condition, why have a field of study called International Relations in the first place? This is a very good question. In fact, the concept of ‘inter-national relations’ offers an important clue to a bias in the discipline, alluding to one of the leading heuristics in the field – classical realism. The term ‘inter-national’ is an historical overhang from a period in the history of state formation, around the late eighteenth century, when the nation began to be considered as an ‘actor’ in its own right in world politics.⁴² Inter-national relations, as it implies, is the study of the relationship between nations or people in the world, constituted as it were, as personalities.⁴³

Contemporary thinking, however, considers the nation in very different light. The nation is a constructed identity, a product of historical encounters. The nation, therefore, cannot be considered the primary unit of ‘inter-national relations’, nor indeed, is the state the primary unit – particularly as some begin to think about a post-state scenarios which they call ‘globalisation’. If the nation is not the main ‘actor’ in world-politics, then the very meaning of inter-national relations becomes problematic. The heterodox tradition, however, may not be satisfied to replace one set of actors with another; it seeks to question the very idea of privileging an ‘actor’ in the first place. That is exactly what Strange is aiming for with her notion of the ‘human condition’.

³⁹ Strange, *States and Markets*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore J. Kisielime (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁴¹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2 vols., edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1978), p. 19.

⁴² For discussion of the emergence of the nation as a force in world politics, see Gérard Mairat, *Le Principe de Souveraineté: Histoires et Fondements du Pouvoir Moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

⁴³ A point that was already clear to Heinrich von Treitschke in the nineteenth century: ‘Treat the State as a person’, says Trietschke in a typical classical realist fashion, ‘and the necessary and rational multiplicity of States follows . . . Just as in individual life the ego implies the existence of the non-ego, so it does in the State. The State is power, precisely in order to assert itself as against other equally independent powers. War and the administration of justice are the chief tasks of even the most barbaric States.’ Heinrich von Treitschke, *Politics* (London: Constable, 1916), p. 19. The use of the concept of ‘ego’ in a pre-Freudian manner is exemplary of my point about a general theory. Classical realism evolve out of a general theory of the subject and the collective to arrive at a theory of international relations.

Methodological individualism vs. heterodoxy

We encounter at this point an important dispute in the social sciences between two sets of heuristics, methodological individualism (or rationalism) and heterodoxy. They each yield radically different conceptions of the international. Arguably, the most important exponent of contemporary methodological individualism was Max Weber.⁴⁴ Weber was an important contributor to late nineteenth century philosophical debate on the relationship between the sciences and the social sciences.⁴⁵ He took from the sciences an important methodological point: scientific advance could be achieved only on the basis of commonly observable phenomena. Some fashionable theories of his time, which attributed cause or volition to unobservables such as God, the nation or the working-classes, were therefore considered by Weber unscientific.

Weber argued that the only possible solid scientific basis for the cultural sciences was meaningful individual action. In his words, '[a]ction in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behaviour exists only as the behaviour of one or more individual human beings.'⁴⁶ Thus Weberian action-based methodology privileges the notion of the 'actor'. The commonly heard reference to states as 'actors' or, worse, to 'non-state actors', is, therefore, essentially misguided. The notion of actor is reserved by Weber (and other methodological individualists) to the individual. This is why Helen Milner, for instance, prefers to describe states as 'agency', a more appropriate terminology from a methodological individualistic perspective.⁴⁷

There are, however, two significant points of dispute between methodological individualism and the heterodox approach. While methodological individualists presume the rationality of the subject (bounded rationality or not), and hence centre on the concept of preferences and choice, heterodox approaches in the social sciences are founded on a radically different theory of the ego. Rather than assuming that people chose what is best for them, and then puzzle over those cases that patently contradict such assumptions. It was the genius of Deleuze and Guattari to have noticed that the subject of methodological individualism 'presupposes a fantastic repression' – largely self-repression of the subjects ostensibly by they themselves.⁴⁸ The key question for heterodoxy, they argue, is 'how could the masses be made to desire their own repression?'⁴⁹ To be somewhat schematic, orthodoxy asks how people

⁴⁴ Richard Miller defines methodological individualism as 'the doctrine that social phenomena must be explainable in terms of the psychologies and situations of the participants in those phenomena.' Richard W. Miller, 'Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation', *Philosophy of Science*, 45:3 (1978), pp. 387–414, at 387. Kenneth Arrow credits Menger as the originator of methodological individualism. Kenneth Arrow, 'Methodological Individualism and Social Knowledge', *American Economic Review*, 84:2 (1994), pp. 1–9, at 2. Others believe the methodology goes all the way back to Hobbes. Joseph Agassi, 'Methodological Individualism', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 11:3 (1960), pp. 244–70. For recent criticism of methodological individualism, see Barry Hindess, *Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1970); Andrew Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁵ For a good discussion, see Guy Oakes, *Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Cultural Sciences* (Cambridge, MA, MIT, 1988).

⁴⁶ Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 9. The behavioural 'revolution' took a step further and pronounced the idea of meaningful or individual subjective meaning to his or her action redundant.

⁴⁷ Milner, 'Rationalizing Politics', p. 4.

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv. They continue '[t]his is a question which the English and Americans are reluctant to deal with directly', p. xiv.

achieve what is good for them; heterodoxy asks why people desire what is bad for them. This starting point leads orthodoxy to a radically different conception of the subject, history, social institutions, causality and indeed rationality. It brings us back and clarifies further Strange's point about the 'human condition' as the core problematic of the social sciences.

One of the ironies of contemporary research is that while orthodoxy assumes a rational subject, and ends up frequently with theories of systemic irrationality; heterodoxy assumes the irrationality of the subject, but often ends up with theories of systemic rationality. Heterodoxy seems to have been attracted to some totalising reductionist theories of world order, in which the entire human experience is reduced to one overwhelming structure aimed at maintaining exploitation, alienation and poverty – in short, we are back to the 'moral' sciences. Growing interest in evolutionary epistemology in the social sciences is aimed precisely at overcoming such normative presumptions. In addition, we should note that heterodoxy does not contradict the theory of the utility-maximising individual, it merely suggests that such subjectivity is historically constituted. There are, not surprisingly, many 'border-crossers' among these two general types of theorising.

My second point concerns the area where the two approaches differ significantly. It is in the way they understand the relationship between different fields of enquiry. Methodological individualists posit different spheres of meaningful action. (Hence, presumably, the approach is considered 'positivist' and even 'empiricist' by IR scholars – although it is often recognised that rationalist methodologies tend to be deductive and hence, strictly speaking, non-empiricist.)⁵⁰ From such a perspective the IR discipline is defined as a distinct sphere of activities, interstate relationships. However as John Wilkinson points out, methodologically individualistic approaches have 'no use for interdisciplinary collaboration, since by definition no one actor can influence the behaviour of another and preferences and technology represent an exogenous 'state of the world'.⁵¹ Orthodoxy assumes that similar dynamics prevail in different spheres of action, so that in principle, we can employ neoclassical concepts such as utility, collective choice, transaction costs in sociology, political science and so on.⁵² Wilkinson contrasts methodological individualism with heterodoxy in which 'activity is socially constructed and maintained and historically determined by individual and collective actions expressed through organisations and institutions.

⁵⁰ I am using 'tend' and 'often' because it is increasingly difficult to make categorical statements.

Kathleen Thelen writes about the different schools of institutionalism 'Each of these three schools in fact represents a sprawling literature characterized by tremendous internal diversity, and it is often also difficult to draw hard and fast lines between them. The differences that have been identified amount to tendencies that apply unevenly across particular authors within each school of thought. The walls dividing the three perspectives have also been eroded by 'border crossers' who have resisted the tendencies toward cordoning these schools off from each other and who borrow liberally (and often fruitfully) where they can, in order to answer specific empirical questions.' Kathleen Thelen, 'Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999), pp. 369–404, at 370. Thelen is correct: 'Border crossers' make it difficult and unnecessary to make such categorical statements.

⁵¹ John Wilkinson 'A New Paradigm for Economic Analysis?', *Economy & Society*, 26:3 (1997), pp. 309.

⁵² Gerlad M. Meier, 'Trade Policy, Development, and The New Political Economy', in Ronald W. Jones and Anne O. Krueger (eds.), *The Political Economy of International Trade: Essays In Honor of Robert E. Baldwin* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

The analysis . . . becomes a collective endeavour of economics, sociology, history, organisation theory and political philosophy'.⁵³

Heterodoxy and the constitution of the field of International Relations

If an analysis is a 'collective endeavour,' as Wilkinson suggests, what is the distinctively international dimension of these pan-disciplinary efforts? Goran Therborn summarises succinctly heterodoxy under what he calls, 'a three-dimensional approach'. An holistic investigation, he says, is 'globally encompassing in a sense meaningful to actors in the world; historically oriented, with an eye both for concrete processes and for broad, connecting, epochal interpretation; and . . . having a clear focus on political institutions'.⁵⁴ The three-dimensional approach is a good summary of heterodox methodology. And it reads like a theoretician's nightmare, particularly to one who aspires for parsimony! For how can a credible theory come out of this? Let us go over the three points, they are interrelated:

1. Globally encompassing research agenda

The notion of a 'globally encompassing' research agenda implies a number of things.

First, heterodoxy encourages a geographically expansive perspective, and takes, in effect, the entire planet as its subject matter. For Waltz, for instance, small states are nearly 'washed up' as economic entities and 'pose no problem for international-political theory', I have argued, in contrast, that some of the smallest and least powerful countries in the world, the tax havens, played a crucial role in globalisation and forced changes upon larger states.⁵⁵ Equally, Cox considers one of the advantages of Marxism to 'add a vertical dimension of power to the horizontal that dimension of rivalry'.⁵⁶ While readily acknowledging asymmetries in power and capabilities, heterodoxy sees no particular reason for privileging certain states or regions in the world *a priori*.

Second, in principle, heterodoxy is sympathetic to comparative research. Yet, comparative research is of value up to a point because many mechanisms and processes do not necessarily correspond to the political boundaries of the nation-state. By its very nature, comparative research is incapable of appreciating such mechanisms and processes, and may either exclude them from the outset or misinterpret them. Third, the notion of a globally encompassing research implies an expansion of the number of issues under investigation. The discipline of International Relations should concern itself, according to this view, not only with interstate

⁵³ Wilkinson, 'A New Paradigm', p. 310.

⁵⁴ Goran Therborn, 'The Right to Vote and the Four World Routes through Modernity', in Rolf Torstendahl (ed.), *State Theory and State History* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 63.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 94; Ronen Palan, *The Offshore World: Sovereign Markets, Virtual Places, and Nomad Millionaires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 95.

relationships and not only with the dynamics and forces of capital, but with the entire range of trans-border communications and exchanges.

2. *Historically oriented approach*

‘Critical theory’, writes Robert Cox, ‘is theory of history in the sense of being concerned not just with the past but with a continuing process of historic change’.⁵⁷ Critical theory takes, in other words, an historical perspective on the present. Roughly speaking, there are three models of historical change: universalistic, cyclical and evolutionary theories. Universalistic theories, associated with orthodoxy, are described by Charles Tilly as ‘covering laws’: ‘In covering law accounts, explanation consists of subjecting robust empirical generalizations to higher- and higher-level generalizations, the most general of all standing as laws. In such accounts, models are invariant – they work the same under all conditions’.⁵⁸ Krasner represents such an approach when he says: ‘The fundamental problems of international politics and international political economy are enduring, so are the theoretical perspectives that we use to understand them’.⁵⁹ Krasner appears to suggest that certain theories are equally applicable to vastly different historical epochs and geographical contexts. Such universalistic or non-historical theories tend to treat the past as if it consisted of a set of isolatable events that may be used to support some general propositions.

Cyclical theories assume recurrence of certain large-scale structural historical patterns. Despite professing to do the opposite,⁶⁰ cyclical theories are often non-historical in orientation in the sense that they tend to adopt systemic explanations which ‘consist of specifying a place for some event, structure, or process within a larger self-maintaining set of interdependent elements and showing how the event, structure, or process in question serves and/or results from interactions among the larger set of elements’.⁶¹ Wallerstein’s theory of hegemonic cycle is a typical cyclical theory of history.⁶² Certain variants of dependency theory also adopt a cyclical approach: they take the historical patterns of international division of labour that was typical of the period between 1930 and 1970 as a general theory of capitalism.⁶³ Cyclical theories are often functionalist, but are not necessarily so.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Cox, ‘Social Forces’, p. 130.

⁵⁸ Charles Tilly, ‘Mechanisms in Political Processes’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), pp. 421–41, at 423. See also Wilkinson, ‘A New Paradigm?’

⁵⁹ Stephen Krasner, ‘International Political Economy: Abiding Discard’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:1 (1994), p. 3.

⁶⁰ ‘Capitalism is first and foremost a historical social system’, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. I: *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), p. 13.

⁶¹ Tilly, ‘Mechanisms’, p. 23.

⁶² Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘The Three Instances of Hegemony in the History of the Capitalist World-Economy’, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 24 (1983), p. 100–8.

⁶³ Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles: The Crisis of Global Fordism* (London: Verso, 1987).

⁶⁴ ‘It is probably in theories of international relations that the tendency to lapse into functionalism or even finalism . . . is most obvious, and that it inflicts most damage . . . Ricardo and the supporters of the Heckscher–Ohlin–Samuelson theorem seem, for instance, to believe that the international division of labour is the result of some world conference at which brilliant economists explained to an admiring gallery of politicians’. Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, p. 16. See also Tilly, ‘Mechanisms’.

Many neo-Gramscians may find it somewhat disconcerting to discover that Robert Cox's theory of hegemony adopts almost word by word what Tilly says about systemic explanation:

For the purpose of the present discussion, the method of historical structures is applied to the three levels, or spheres of activity: (1) organization of production, more particularly with regard to the *social forces* engendered by the production process; (2) *forms of states* as derived from the study of state/society complexes; and (3) *world orders*, that is, the particular configurations of forces with successively defined the problematic of war on peace for the ensemble of states. Each of these levels can be studied as a succession of dominant and emergent rival structures.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the careful language and caveats employed by Cox ('for the purpose of the present discussion . . .' and so on),⁶⁶ not only does the Coxian analytical scheme assert a relationship between the three categories, but also emphasises that *the relationship between the three categories is the key to the understanding of human history*. In other words, there are large-scale structural historical patterns which ultimately repeat themselves.⁶⁷ The method by which Cox reaches this conclusion, whether through deductive or inductive reasoning, is not entirely clear.⁶⁸

In contrast to systemic and covering laws theories, evolutionary theories adopt the Darwinian principle of cumulative causation. In its pure form, 'Darwinian evolution has no foreordained goal, but a continuity of cause and effect without any trend, any final term, or consummation. It is 'blindly cumulative causation'.⁶⁹ Charles Tilly calls such an approach a mechanism – and process-based explanation: 'process-based explanations aim at modest ends – selective explanation of salient features by means of partial causal analogies'.⁷⁰ So that, for example, the study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism is important and informative, but generalisations are difficult because transitions are unlikely to repeat themselves.

From an evolutionary perspective concepts such as states, nation, power, are treated as historically specific – a point of agreement between evolutionary thinkers and Gramscians. However, if for Marxists capitalism is an historical system that undergoes changes and evolution, then for evolutionary economists such as Veblen and Commons, not only capitalism evolves, but capital itself undergoes evolution – a point that Marxists do not take into account.⁷¹ Such deep evolutionary method tends to assume that IR is not only what happens when nation-states have been constituted, but is a field of study that encompasses within itself the evolution and

⁶⁵ Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, p. 100, italics in the original.

⁶⁶ Indeed, Cox distinguishes between his and the structural Marxist explanation which he regards as ahistorical, *ibid.*, p. 92. It can be argued, however, that Poulantzas' work is far more historicist than Cox has given credit to.

⁶⁷ Hence, for instance, Gramsci's theory of hegemony is considered of use to IR. See Cox, p. 100: 'The very notion that Gramsci developed a general theory of hegemony – a very doubtful proposition – is a product of such a structural theory of history'.

⁶⁸ This approach is very different to Braudel, who is often confused for a world-system theorist. Braudel adopts an evolutionary approach and says very clearly that he does not believe in the universality of any analytical scheme: 'I do not for instance believe in the permanent and unchallenged superiority of political history and the sacrosanct primacy of the state', he writes, 'sometimes the state is well-nigh all-important, at other times it has little or no influence'. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th–18th Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 460.

⁶⁹ John Commons, *Institutional Economics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 128.

⁷⁰ Tilly, 'Mechanisms', p. 24.

⁷¹ Commons, *Institutional Economics*.

change in every aspect of life. States, nations, societies, the ‘international system’ are historically constituted within the very context that IR theory should help explain. Whereas for Cox the evolution of ‘state form’ is explained primarily in terms of production and world order, for the evolutionary approaches, there could be a much greater variety of explanations.

3. *Political institutions*

Although it remains one of the most cited articles in IR, a key point in Ruggie’s critique of hegemonic stability theory has been somewhat overlooked. ‘Efforts to construct international economic regimes in the interwar period’ he writes ‘failed not because of the lack of a hegemon. They failed because, even had there been a hegemon, they stood in contradiction to the transformation *in the mediating role of the state* between market and society, which altered fundamentally the social purpose of domestic and international authority’.⁷² Ruggie alludes here to a third approach, more prevalent in sociology and political science, which regards the state as a key societal institution mediating between different social spheres. The difficulties of the 1930s, he believes, were not due to the failure of hegemony, but rather to the lack of an adequate state form to mediate between market and society. For Ruggie, the state, and other political institutions, serve primarily as mediating institutions between the international arena and domestic politics.

Let us take another example to clarify this notion of mediation. The Marshall plan, typically a key piece of evidence for the hegemony thesis, is significant, argues Michael Hogan, on two counts. There are those – let us call them conventional IR – who view the European recovery programme together with the NATO alliance and other ‘instruments’ of the Cold War as ‘evidence of America’s assumption of world leadership after the Second World War’.⁷³ However more recent works, he notes, ‘have portrayed twentieth-century developments as part of a larger historical process by which Americans adjusted their economic and political institutions to the profound transformations brought on by industrialization’.⁷⁴

This is a crucial point that Hogan himself fails to pursue to the full. For he points out two diametrically opposed paradigms of the relationships between IR theories and the broader theories of order and change. The former, associated with the so-called ‘realist’ approaches (but which could also be subsumed under certain radical approaches), assumes from the outset that leadership and power is a value in itself, and hence, it concludes, once the US found itself in a position of power, it assumed the role of leadership in the world. According to the second position, the ‘US’ consists of a medley of organisations and institutions, with more or less a degree of coherency between them. The state is less of a volitional ‘actor’ or a mere arena mediating conflicting interests, it is more of a product of its own institutional arrangement which structures its ways of behaving in the world.

⁷² John G. Ruggie, ‘International Regimes, Transactions and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order’, *International Organization*, 36 (1982), pp. 397–415, at 397. Emphasis mine.

⁷³ Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Another example of state mediation theory is found in David Lake's work. Lake argues that contemporary efforts at establishing institutions of global governance are:

Reflected in the persistence of the early industrializing model in the United States . . . [and are] premised upon a large private sector that reflected the early American economy, the constitution left large residual rights of control to individuals and the states.⁷⁵

For Lake, contemporary American policy is not the product of some 'national interest', nor can it be reduced to the interplay of competing social forces; the American polity is an inherited complex institutional structure which tends to be to some extent a prisoner of its own evolution.

The two positions may appear the same. They are not. According to the first, states are volitional 'rational actors' that seek to shape their environment to serve their national or vested interests. To the latter, state mediation theory, 'hegemony' is viewed more as a gravitational field, a product of inherited institutional and social forces that shape not only states behaviour in the world, but also their 'structural power', as Susan Strange calls it.⁷⁶ The crucial point is that these gravitational forces evolve in processes that are not independent of the state system. States do not undergo transformations independently of the international system, as realist IR has it. Nor are the internal processes of state formation mere reflections of exogenous forces, as world system theorists, for instance, appear to believe. Consequently, what is interpreted as hegemony, leadership, struggle for world hegemony and so on, often considered as an expression and manifestation of the tactics and strategies of states – may have been brought about by 'domestic' realignment of forces, as they seek to cope with circumstances and dynamics that may be beyond their control.⁷⁷ Indeed, often under closer scrutiny such 'domestic' forces turn out to be of international origins and vice versa.

But what then, is a better way of conceptualising the complex interaction between the internal and the international? Although this question appears to have arisen in IR only very recently, paradoxically one possible answer can be found in some of the most familiar texts in the social sciences. Only that apparently, we never really paid attention. The rest of this article aims to illustrate how the basis of an alternative, evolutionary approach to world order can be found, among others, in the works of Hegel, Marx and the French School of Regulation.

Hegel's diffusionist theory of world spirit

It may come as a surprise to find that Georg Hegel intuited some of the basic parameters of what is described here as an evolutionary-institutional theory of international orders. Hegel's ambition was to develop a holistic theory of world society, a theory that brings together a theory of subjectivity and rationality with a theory of world history. For Hegel, reason is not an abstract ahistorical set of rules

⁷⁵ David Lake, 'Global Governance: A Relational Contracting Approach', Aseem Prakash and Jeffery A. Hart (eds.), *Globalization and Governance* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 345.

⁷⁶ Strange, *States and Markets*.

⁷⁷ See R. Palan and J. Abbott, *State Strategies In The Global Political Economy* (London: Pinter, 1996).

and norms, 'revealed' to humanity through the grace of God. Reason is evolutionary; it emerges through interaction, and history is the judge of truth. His interest is in what today we consider as IR follows on from his observation that reason matures in world historical conditions, that is, within the context of the international arena.

For Hegel, the emergence of the nation was a critical moment in the evolution of the human spirit. In words that hark back to the origins of the concept of international relations,⁷⁸ he writes, 'The nations are the concepts which the spirit has formed itself'.⁷⁹ The rational, he believed, 'assumes varying shapes; but in none of them is it more obviously an end than in that whereby the spirit explicates and manifests itself in the endlessly varying forms which we call nations'.⁸⁰ But, he warns, 'world history takes account only of nations that constituted themselves into states'.⁸¹

In light of the momentous significance of the nation-state, Hegel had to consider also the significance of the relationship between states. He notes that:

[i]t is as particular entities that states enter into relations with one another. Hence their relations are on the largest scale a maelstrom of external contingency and the inner particularity of passions, private interests and selfish ends, abilities and virtues, vices, forces, and wrong.⁸²

But, he argues, the maelstrom of external contingency and inner particularity can generate from time to time, by sheer accident or otherwise, historical moments whereby some states' internal structure happens to correspond most perfectly to the structural flow of history. Such states emerge at these junctures as the most powerful and successful states in the world. In his words:

If we stop for a moment to consider the political implications – that a state will be well constituted and internally powerful if the private interest of its citizens coincides with the general end of the state, so that the one can be satisfied and realized through the other. . . . But for the state to achieve this unity, numerous institutions must be set up and appropriate mechanisms invented, and the understanding must go through prolonged struggles before it discovers what is in fact appropriate . . . the moment at which the state attains this unity marks the most flourishing period in its history, when its virtue, strength, and prosperity are at their height.⁸³

Hegel had the recent experience of revolutionary France in mind. In developing this theory, Hegel expresses the 'problematic' of International Relations for nineteenth century Prussian thinkers: rivalries, wars and competition among states brought the modern world to Prussia. Rivalry and wars are, therefore, not all bad. On the contrary, these are the unwitting processes of history by which states could potentially achieve their coveted unity, the internal harmony of institutions, norms and spirit. Furthermore, rivalry and competition ensured the diffusion of the most recent evolution of the human spirit and rationality in the world – they were positive forces of change in history.

⁷⁸ See discussion above.

⁷⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 51.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁸² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. and notes by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), para. 340, p. 215.

⁸³ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, p. 73.

Here we find hints of an alternative conception of the international, and indeed, an alternative conception of the role of hegemony in the international orders, a theory more closely aligned to Hogan's institutionalist interpretation of the Marshall plan. Hegel stresses a view of the state as an historical juncture, a product of contingent confluence of internal and external forces, whereby when a harmony is achieved between ends and means, such a state proves particularly influential. The state is important in Hegel's theory as an institutional framework through which 'the universal which emerges and becomes conscious within the state' manifests itself.⁸⁴ But the universal is revealed in the state through the agency of an interactionist order.

Marx, 'primitive accumulation' and succession of hegemonies

Marx famously 'inverted' Hegel's argument to show that what Hegel called 'reason' and 'spirit' were nothing but the spirit of the capitalist world economy. Marx agreed, however, with Hegel on specifics: the role played by international rivalries in the development of capitalism. If for Hegel, the rational emerges and becomes conscious within the state, Marx says capitalism emerges and becomes conscious – that is, a reality, within the state. In his words:

The different moments of primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in a more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the 17th [century] in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection.⁸⁵

According to Marx, each of these 'hegemonies' – a word he did not use – introduced institutional innovations which proved important to future capitalist accumulation. For instance, 'the system of public credit i.e. of national debts, the origins of which are to be found in Genoa and Venice as early as the Middle Ages, took possession of Europe as a whole during the period of manufacture'.⁸⁶ Genoa and Venice introduced, therefore, an innovation which was diffused throughout Europe. Once the system of public credit was in place, it was developed further elsewhere: 'the colonial system, with its maritime trade and its commercial wars, served as a forcing-house for the credit system. Thus it first took root in Holland. The national debt – whether despotic, constitutional or republican – marked the capitalist era with its stamp the public debt becomes one of the most powerful levers of primitive accumulation'.⁸⁷

'Thus the villainies of the Venetian system . . . formed one of the secret foundations of Holland's wealth in capital? There is a similar relationship between Holland and England? The same thing is going on today between England and the United States'.⁸⁸ Capitalism, as it appears in these pages, is not an abstract or universal 'mode of production'; capitalism is a specific institutional form that develops within an interactionist order constituted by the state system. Marx has not

⁸⁴ Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, p. 97.

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (London: Penguin, NLB, 1970), p. 914.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 919.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 919.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 920.

made much of the competition between states as a method of diffusion of the institutional gain. But he clearly adopts Hegel's idea that the hegemonic state is a product of a confluence of forces, some internal, some external. Hegemony, in turn, diffuses its institutional innovation throughout the international system by competition or force. In doing so, hegemony is the product of certain historical circumstances, able to shape the future direction of the world capitalist economy. The world economy as a whole evolves through a succession of hegemonies.

The French regulation theory and evolutionary international political economy

The French School of Regulation is arguably the direct follower of Hegel and Marx. An evolutionary theory of international orders can be teased out in a close reading of some of the texts of this school of thought, particularly once the acknowledged over-structural tendencies of the theory are laid to rest. The French School of Regulation was originally a Marxist approach that emerged in the 1970s partially in order to explain the continuing robustness of the world capitalist economy. The crisis of the 1930s, which according to Marxist theory was the major and potentially cataclysmic crisis predicted by Marx, should have resulted in the collapse of the world capitalist system. Instead, following the twenty years which witnessed a global-spanning great depression, the rise of extreme right movements such as Nazism and Fascism and a major world war, a new order has emerged based on the universalisation of the New Deal principles among the advanced capitalist countries. The regulationist answer to the Marxist conundrum – after all capitalism was supposed to collapse – pointed out the ability of the state to generate systematic, if ultimately contradictory, countervailing conditions to the natural crisis-prone tendencies of capitalism. The new order, known as a Fordist mode of accumulation, which is very similar to Ruggie's idea of 'embedded liberalism', did not only resolve the crisis tendencies, but also contributed to an unprecedented rate of economic growth among the advanced industrialised countries. The question, then, is how and why capitalism is able to regenerate itself and how and why such propitious regimes of accumulation arise.

In answering these questions, Alain Lipietz, who is keenly aware of the structural and (hence functional) tendencies of regulation theory, goes out of his way to soften the edges and dispel any lingering notions of structural inevitability. Regime of accumulation, he says, emerges in an evolutionary process reminiscent of Hegel and Marx' theory.

The important point, however, is that the emergence of a new regime of accumulation is not a *pre-ordained part of capitalism's destiny, even though it may correspond to certain identifiable 'tendencies'* . . . Regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation are *chance discoveries* made in the course of human struggles . . . So *the history of capitalism is full of experiments which led nowhere: aborted revolutions, abandoned prototypes and all sorts of monstrosities.*⁸⁹

In a similar fashion, Michel Aglietta argues: '[t]here is no royal road where the most abstract concepts magically command the movement of society. There is rather a

⁸⁹ Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, p. 15. Emphasis mine.

two-way process marked by frequent mishaps'.⁹⁰ Here, Hegel's idea of the maelstrom of internal and external conditions is marshalled in order to explain the appearance of successful states. Like Hegel and Marx before them, the regulationists argue that a system founded on competing sovereignties ensures, to quote Lipietz, that the 'history of capitalism is full of experiments'. State sovereignty makes certain that each state of whatever size and constitution develops a somewhat different combination of institutions and policies in response to changes in the environment of accumulation. Often these changes, 'experiments' in regulation, have led, he notes, to aborted monstrosities. But the sheer diversity of states of varying size, history and location, creates possibilities otherwise absent in the capitalist system as a whole.

Regulation theory suggests, therefore, that wholesale changes in the nature of capitalism impact in a variety of ways upon social formations, producing a plethora of outcomes. Most of these 'outcomes', modes of regulation, prove to be 'aborted revolutions'. But in some cases, and for reasons that are difficult to predict or anticipate, these outcomes prove propitious to capitalist accumulation. Successful experiments pull such states ahead. In the history of capitalism, economically powerful states, particularly if they were sufficiently sizeable and militarily powerful, have tended to serve as models for emulation to others. Considering that historically states have emulated each other by adopting successful techniques of governance and control,⁹¹ the modern state is a product of such systemic emulation and innovation.⁹² When that happens, we recognise the emergence of a new regime of accumulation with a corresponding mode of regulation. However, we should not confuse cause with effects: rather than assuming that such regime of accumulation is a necessary historical outcome, 'at best, we can adopt a posterior or almost metaphoric functionalism'.⁹³

Regimes of accumulation emerge, therefore, in the interaction between the general capitalist tendencies, which are forces operating at a transnational level, and the specific configuration of institutions and forces within each society. The international realm ensures diversity and experimentation which creates the possibilities for positive outcomes. That is why Aglietta maintains that that '[s]uch a study [i.e. regulationism] demands knowledge of the general tendencies of capitalist development within the different nations, and careful attention to the relations between states'.⁹⁴

In a typical evolutionary manner, Aglietta chose the US example to study the rise of Fordism. But, he warns, there was nothing inevitable about the rise of the US and its place in the world after World War II. On the contrary, the foundations of the US success were laid down in the nineteenth century and were largely internally generated: 'The US experienced a capitalist revolution from the civil war onwards, the extension of the wage relations brought about a unification of the nation by its own internal dynamic alone'.⁹⁵ In time, however, the US emerged as a major

⁹⁰ Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London: NLB, 1979), p. 66.

⁹¹ For discussion, see Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965).

⁹² John U. Nef, *War and Human Progress* (London: Routledge, 1950). C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States In Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁹³ Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, p. 16.

⁹⁴ Aglietta, *Capitalist Regulation*, p. 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

capitalist power and began to shape the development of global capitalism. It was only after World War II, that the US government launched a concerted and active policy aimed at the 'universalisation of its structural forms'⁹⁶ and adopted hegemonic policies. The hegemon, according to this perspective, is more of a product of historical confluence of the international order than the originator and organiser of an international order.

Conclusion. Towards a heterodox theory of international orders

This article has sought to identify the underlying shared premise, the cluster of conclusions that are currently in search of a premise, that make up critical and heterodox IR. I have argued that the critical tradition in IR is no longer concerned only with the nature of peace and war, but rather has shifted towards a broader conception of IR as a component of a transdisciplinary study of order and change. The shift raises a number of important methodological points.

First, as a derivative discipline, IR scholars should develop greater awareness of first order theories. This suggests, for instance, that we should put greater emphasis on teaching our students the basic sociological theories of power, state, agency as well as first order theories of political economy, linguistics and so on.

Second, as components of general theories of order and change, the different theories and approaches in IR must make clear whether their contribution to the general theories are theoretically plausible. Attempts to 'bolt on' new themes or processes upon an existing theoretical framework are likely to fail. Equally, theory that may appear entirely plausible in IR, such as the realist theory, but which makes extraordinary demands on state theory, is suspect. As indeed, are some of the radical theories that assign an extraordinary degree of unity and purpose to the disparate members of the 'ruling classes', often brushing aside legitimate concerns about the difficulties of 'collective action'.

Third, I have argued that IR should adopt Goran Therborn's ideas for a good research agenda and pursue an approach that is globally encompassing, historically oriented, and focused on political institutions. Lastly, I have tried to demonstrate that an evolutionary-institutionalist theory of global order, founded on these three principles, is already on offer albeit in a rather rudimentary format in the social sciences.

What, then would an international dimension of a critical general theory of order and change be? It appears to me that heterodoxy does not perceive the international sphere as a system constituted in its own right, but tends to view it as a gigantic arena, or a transmission belt, a huge communication device. The international dimension is important, first and foremost, because it facilitates the transmission and diffusion of ideas, practices, rules, norms and institutions throughout the world. It contributes today, as it always has, to the *transmission and diffusion of modernising practices* throughout the world.

The key theoretical question posed by such a perspective is whether the transmission of modernising practices throughout the world amounts to mere stochastic

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

processes, or alternatively, operates according to certain patterns. How does a state system – if indeed it is a system – mediate the diffusion of modernising practices in the world? What is the relationship between the sedimented, inherited institutions of our time; primarily state and capital on the one hand, and power and politics, on the other? These are the sort of questions that, it seems to me, should constitute the core occupation of the discipline of International Relations today.