THE DIVIDING DISCIPLINE

HEGEMONY AND DIVERSITY IN INTERNATIONAL THEORY

K J HOLSTI

The Dividing Discipline

Hegemony and Diversity in International Theory

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Introduction

This essay examines the state of theory about international politics. It focuses on (1) the major substantive debates that presently engage scholars who ponder the condition of our world, and (2) some characteristics of the academic discipline: Who produces the significant work? Is there a global community of scholars, intellectually and temperamentally equipped to take a genuinely universal perspective on international politics? What are the elements of hegemony and pluralism in the theoretical organization of the field? I start from the position that since the middle of the seventeenth century, when the states system of Europe was being organized, there has been a single paradigm that has guided thinking in the field. That paradigm, in which the world is portrayed as an anarchy (meaning political fragmentation), with no overarching authority to organize the fundamental activities of the essential constituents—the nation states—has sustained a long tradition of philosophical and empirical work which has had as its core concern explaining why and how nation states go to war, conduct their diplomacy, construct institutions or customs leading to peace, order, and stability, and how they organize power in pursuit of their objectives. The major insights of Hobbes, Grotius, Rousseau, Morgenthau, Bull, Deutsch, and many others have all been developed within this paradigm. Some commentators have emphasized the differences between these figures, outlining the contours of different "schools" or approaches. I emphasize the commonalities because I am convinced that all have been concerned with essentially the same intellectual questions, no matter what their unique perspectives and answers. Thus, until recently there has been an intellectual hegemony in the sense that a single paradigm has served as the theoretical platform of our field. This hegemony is not necessarily to be lamented, provided that critical questions generated by the paradigm meet certain tests, including isomorphism, logical consistency, the capacity to generate research, and reasonable correspondence with the observed facts of international politics.

Theoretical pluralism—the development of new or competing

paradigms—is to be applauded only where previous formulations are fundamentally flawed in one or more domains, or where *established* international trends and events render them obsolete. There is no automatic virtue in paradigmatic pluralism, as there might be in political faiths. The hegemony of the nation-state system paradigm (here called the classical tradition) may help contribute to our descriptive and explanatory storehouse of knowledge of international politics, while new departures or challenges may lead us to intellectual dead-ends, including the investigation of trivia that have no long-range intellectual payoff. On the other hand, if the classical tradition *is* seriously flawed, then new departures may help us redirect inquiry into the proper channels. A third alternative is that new theoretical formulations may be synthesized with, or grafted on to, the classical tradition. Cumulation would imply modest rectification and/or blending, but not replacement. The succeeding chapters will describe two bona fide challengers to the classical tradition—dependency theory and global society theories—and assess the extent to which they are taking root as the intellectual guideposts of both empirical and theoretical work in international politics. They will also evaluate the possibilities for synthesis. Or must one ultimately supplant the others?

The problem of *what* kind of theories we use to understand and explain the world of international politics is not divorced from *who* does the theorizing. How we see the things in international life that intrigue or depress us depends to a certain extent on our geographical vantage point. No matter how we try to compensate for our cultural biases we can never "know" the real world in its entirety. We will have biases, priorities, and prejudices that are deeply ingrained by our education, national culture, diplomatic history, and the daily headlines—all of which typically express national rather than global perspectives. The various streams of theoretical activity undertaken within the classical tradition deeply reflect the historical experience of the European states system in the past, and the cold war more recently. It would be perfectly legitimate, therefore, for an Indian or African scholar to claim that other historical experiences should help form the basis of theories about contemporary international politics.

Within the classical tradition, such national and limited-historical perspectives have been prominent. Almost all of what we call international theory today has been developed by observers from only two countries, Great Britain and the United

States. Important exceptions exist, of course, but this essay will demonstrate that there is as yet no international community of scholars in the field. There is only an Anglo-American core of "producers" with small appendages in other anglophone countries, Japan, Scandinavia, and Europe. As international relations develops into an academic discipline globally, will lasting theoretical contributions come from a variety of national academic groups, or will the Anglo-American hegemony continue into the indefinite future? The second purpose of the essay is to locate and measure the degree of pluralism in the production and consumption of theoretical knowledge in international politics.

In writing this type of essay, the author always has in the back of his mind a specific audience. As a teacher of introductory and advanced courses in international politics and international theory, I have had to face the problems occasioned by theoretical debates, the blossoming of "new" approaches, and the proliferation of specializations, journals, research communications, jargon, and the like. A teacher in our field increasingly has to make critical choices in selecting materials for students. Given the time constraints of most courses, he or she can no longer hope to provide a genuinely comprehensive offering, including a reasonable introduction to the competing paradigms and the kinds of research they have spawned. If one is going to make rational choices in material selection, some explicit sets of priorities must be developed for guidance. In my view, no such guidelines exist today. A third purpose of the essay is thus to enhance awareness of the problems surrounding intellectual hegemony and pluralism, and to help the reader in coming to his or her own conclusions about priorities and perspectives on the world.

I do not provide answers, although I do outline my own biases and preferences. Many will disagree with them, and if so, I will have accomplished the purpose of making readers sit down and think through what it is about international politics they want to emphasize, why, and if possible, to come to some conclusions about the long-range value of the competing paradigms. If the teacher or graduate student has to contemplate the problems raised in the essay, his or her students will probably benefit in future in terms of increased course coherence, and enhanced appreciation of the intellectual roots of our discipline. To the extent that active research programs are articulated more carefully and their unexplored assumptions or hidden normative purposes come to see the light of day, the essay will have

garnered an additional bonus. I do not preach consensus, but urge those in our field to understand exactly where they are intellectually, and why they are there.

The research and writing took place under the auspices of one of the great fringe benefits of academia, the sabbatical. The locales were ideal. Professor J. D. B. Miller invited me to spend three months as a Visiting Fellow in the Department of International Relations, Research School of Pacific Studies, at the Australian National University. A department of distinguished and intellectually lively people, combined with strong library facilities, provided an excellent venue for the research part of this work. I am also grateful to Professor and Mrs Miller for numerous kindnesses of a nonacademic sort. I wrote the manuscript in a small house, in the town of Mithymna, on the island of Lesvos in Greece. No further comment is required, although I would like to express my thanks to two close friends, Dr Andreas Psomas and Professor Dimitri Constas, both of Athens, who helped in numerous ways. The project was made possible by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Fund for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Committee of the university. I am deeply grateful that in a time of serious academic retrenchment, research of this kind can continue unimpeded. I am also indebted to Alexander George, Denis Stairs, and Mark Zacher, all of whom supported my applications for the research grants.

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Dory Urbano and Izabela Sobieska did all the typing, no easy feat considering the state of my manuscripts.

K. J. HOLSTI
Vancouver
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1

Hegemony and Challenge in International Theory

> Everywhere, it seems, established patterns [in world politics] have either come to an end or been greatly modified. (Rosenau 1980, 13)
> We are now in an era without a paradigm to provide a framework for questions we ask ... or [for] answers we expect to find sufficient as explanations. (Morse 1976, xvi–xvii)

International theory is in a state of disarray. In the past decade, the three-centuries-long intellectual consensus which organized philosophical speculation, guided empirical research, and provided at least hypothetical answers to the critical questions about international politics has broken down. New conceptions and images of the world, and how it works in the diplomatic, military, and commercial domains, have arisen. Scholars have offered trenchant criticisms of the "realist" tradition, which goes back to Hobbes and Rousseau, severely challenging the assumptions and world views upon which it is based. Some have outlined alternatives, not so much because they promise better understanding through methodological innovation, but because they are supposedly more consistent with contemporary realities. The continued underdevelopment of many new states, combined with the startling pace of technological transformation, have raised new kinds of questions about international politics, questions which were not relevant to the kinds of problems contemplated by our intellectual ancestors and most of those working within the realist, or classical, tradition.

The "behavioral revolution" has had little to do with the present debates. In fact, one could write at the end of the 1960s that all was well on the international theory front, once the vigorous quarrels between methodologists had subsided. Researchers had, after all, isolated key areas of inquiry—areas which had commanded considerable attention from the philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were no less than the causes of war and the conditions of peace. But disillusionment with "grand theory," overarching statements about the fundamental (and recurring) structures and processes of international politics, had suggested that greater rewards could be reaped by focusing on more discrete phenomena—alliances, power, integration, and the like—in the hopes that "islands of theory" would eventually emerge (Holsti 1971). Research, whether quantitative, ideographic, philosophical-historical, or comparative, seemed to be concentrating on the critical questions. The linkage between theory and research programs was secure: each fed upon the other.

Today, no such sense of well-being or satisfaction exists. There is no longer a consenus on the subjects of inquiry and theorizing. The view that international theory should be organized around the structures and processes of the states system, the activities of the great powers and their decision-makers, particularly as they relate to war and peace, is no longer accepted by a significant number of scholars. Newer theoretical variations propose different problematics,[1] and entirely different conceptualizations of the world. The thrust of the new work has centered on "grand theory" and the ultimate philosophical problems of a discipline: How should we look at the universe we wish to describe and explain? Are our models of international politics reasonably consistent with realities? Who are the significant actors and units of analysis in international politics? Should we continue to ignore economic processes and actors? Do fundamental economic structures, on a global scale, determine the main outlines of states' external policies? What are the critical normative problems in the field? Indeed, some have asked whether it is possible to generate reliable knowledge of present realities if the assumptions we have held as self-evident for more than three hundred years no longer hold. Do we really want to study alliances, integration, decision-making, and the rest when critical questions about the continuing relevance of traditional concepts such as power and the states system need to be raised first?

Before examining the dimensions and character of the new theoretical activity, we should first delineate the boundaries of the field, international theory. By this field, I mean descriptive and explanatory statements about the structure, units, and processes of international politics that transcend time, location, and personality. This is a crude definition, but it helps exclude from the discussion the thousands of books and articles that deal with discrete phenomena and events. Grotius and Hedley Bull are theorists of international politics because they advance descriptive generalizations about the sources of war and the comparative effectiveness of various norms, procedures, and institutions in muting international conflict and establishing order and stability. Their purpose is to discover commonalities, central tendencies, or essential characteristics of states in their international behavior. To the extent that their analyses also account for the genesis, change, or termination of war, or the network of norms, institutions, and procedures in the states system they move from description to explanation. Similarly, Rousseau and J. David Singer are theorists because they are commonly concerned with the sources of crises and wars, across time and space.

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye were among the first[2] to criticize the classical paradigm for ignoring transnational processes and nonstate actors. By locating new agents of action and their mutual relations, they vastly expanded the boundaries of the field. And in proposing that issues other than war/peace/security/order should command attention, they challenged a consensus among international theorists that stretched from Hobbes and Rousseau to Ernst Haas and Raymond Aron.[3] But while Keohane and Nye wanted basically to add the possible influence of nonstate actors to more traditional conceptions of international politics, subsequent critics have taken a further step by claiming that the whole nation-state paradigm is fundamentally unsound and inadequately consistent with present-day realities. It is not just a question of adding new types of actors to analyses, but of reconceptualizing both actors and processes in international life. For example, in 1974 Donald Puchala and Stuart Fagan argued that the "prevailing security politics paradigm has become overly restrictive," and that "a number of us . . . sense that international politics have changed structurally, procedurally, and substantively in the last ten years" (Puchala and Fagan 1974, 249). Edward Morse's view, quoted at the opening of this chapter, provides an even more

critical stance, echoed in Rosenau's claim that the "conduct of foreign relations and the course of international affairs seem so different from the past as to justify an assumption of fundamental structural change" (Rosenau 1980, 83).

The works culled for these quotations represent only a sample of the recent critical literature in international theory. There is much more evidence of theoretical ferment in the field. Academic journals such as *International Organization* have been recast to include many articles dealing with new types of phenomena in international politics, new perspectives on old problems, and extensive analyses of concepts such as international regimes (a new idea, perhaps, but one with strong roots in the Grotian tradition). Several important collections of essays appeared in England[4] during the 1970s, offering arguments supporting the continuing relevance of the classical paradigm, or extolling the virtues of newer perspectives, such as dependency theory. In North America almost every academic conference and journal in the field has had sessions or articles devoted to new conceptions of a "global society," or to dependency studies where exchange, exploitation, world capitalist system, and center and periphery replace the language of traditional international theory. To summarize the competing claims for theoretical novelty or primacy, anthologies such as Maghroori and Ramberg's *Globalism versus Realism: International Relations' Third Debate* (1982) have appeared. That title suggests that the sides are drawn up, the issues neatly dichotomized, and as in the Realism versus Idealism, and Traditionalism versus Behavioralism debates of the 1950s and 1960s, one side is likely to emerge victorious.

Consequences of Theoretical Profusion: Dialogue or Confusion?

But the debate cannot be simply between two sides; and it is not merely a question of which picture or model of the world is more consistent with realities. More fundamental questions are involved; they concern questions of the appropiate or crucial units of analysis, of the core and peripheries of the field, and most important, of the proper subject of study. The stakes in the debate are immense: if the debates lead to an authoritative outcome or consensus, the research agenda of the future may change profoundly.

Can a debate be conducted when we are not certain whom to include among the participants? Globalism versus Realism suggests only a single cleavage in international theory, while most who have tried to classify the various schools or paradigms in the field come up with at least three categories, and often more. A brief review of some of the efforts to create taxonomies of contemporary international theory reveals the considerable theoretical confusion that reigns today, making it difficult to organize a coherent debate, much less a dialogue leading to constructive synthesis or to the emergence of a "super paradigm" that will once again authoritatively guide inquiry, help organize research agendas, be substantively accurate, and provide criteria for developing reading lists for undergraduate and graduate students.

Contemporary writers in international theory do not agree on the means of classifying the contending approaches: each uses somewhat different criteria so that we do not have even a roster of schools, persuasions, or paradigms. Ralph Pettman suggests that today there are two main paradigms, the pluralist and the structuralist. These correspond roughly with the traditional state-centric international politics model, with a multitude of states of unequal capabilities, each pursuing its perceived national interests, and often engaging in war. A structuralist perspective, on the other hand, "confronts global politics in terms of the horizontally arranged hierarchies that run across geographical boundaries, throwing into high relief the patterns whereby 'overdeveloped' states reproduce characteristic socio-economic and political forms within the underdeveloped ones in terms of the uneven spread of the industrial mode of production, the uneven and complex character of the class systems that have grown up in its wake, and the current global division of labour" (Pettman 1979, 53–4). But Peter Willetts suggests that there are really *three* paradigms commanding attention in international theory: the realist, which is the traditional state-centric model; the functionalist, which employs models characterized by a multiplicity of actor types and issue areas (with corresponding variations in typical behavior); and the Marxist, the major concern of which is the origins, character, and consequences of economic exchange in a world capitalist system (Willetts 1981, 100). Christopher Mitchell likewise formulates a triad of contending schools, but his differs from Willetts's. Behavioralism, which in his view has been confined largely to North America, is predominant, followed by traditionalism, a preserve of British

academics, and the Marxist approach, which has been most influential in West Germany and Scandinavia, drawing its inspiration from the Frankfurt School that rejects the positivist philosophy guiding behavioral research (Mitchell 1980, 43–4). Rosenau also outlines three "major approaches to world politics" (state-centric, multi-centric, and global-centric) but his categories are based on criteria different from those used by Pettman, Willetts and Mitchell (Maghroori and Ramberg 1982, Foreword).

With a better sense of the historical antecedents of contemporary international theory and with an appropriate scepticism regarding the contention that every innovative "paradigm" is really new, Martin Wight outlined *four* main traditions in the field, each of which is based on a different model of the world: Hobbesian anarchy; a global community of mankind, following the Stoic, Roman, and medieval Christian traditions; a Kantian model of world society; and the traditional Grotian notion of a society of states (Wight 1966, 38). Hugh Collins (1982) has also defined four theoretical "clusters" in the field. And so the list of taxonomies goes on, to a record of twenty-four types of theory that Kulbakova and Cruickshank identify in their own classification (1980, 273). Such numbers suggest substantial confusion in the field, lack of a commanding methodology, and no uniform philosophical basis for academic inquiry.

If, as Arend Lijphart has claimed (1974, 49), a single image of the world, or paradigm—defined as a model or vision from which springs a "coherent tradition . . . of scientific research"—unified the field until the advent of behavioralism, then clearly we have seen a significant change. We now appear to have many traditions, but it is not easy to tell how many because commentators cannot agree upon the criteria to use in making the critical distinctions between them. Rosenau, for example, uses a single criterion, the main units of analysis; but Mitchell employs a combination of methodological, geographical, and philosophy of science underpinnings, implying that these will determine what we see and what we want to study. Collins is on safer ground with his notion of clusters, because he comes close to defining approaches or schools in terms of the *object or subject of study*. But despite this merit, his taxonomy cannot be compared to Pettman's because the latter employs a broad criterion, types of essential actors in the system, to distinguish between schools.

Thus, who will participate in the debate? How many will be

invited? Can all "realists" really be lumped into a single Hobbesian tradition, particularly when some of Hobbes's ideas on international politics have been misunderstood? Can a member of a Marxist school or approach speak on behalf of a global-centric model of the world? In some ways, the answer is yes, but non-Marxist globalists would probably prefer to speak for themselves. Is an advocate of the study of transnational relations really speaking on behalf of a competing paradigm?

As succeeding chapters will try to demonstrate, there is not much chance of achieving an authoritative outcome of *any* debate. But in an attempt to create a little more order out of the confusion that presently reigns, let me propose three criteria for distinguishing among genuine paradigms. They have little to do with methodologies or conceptual tinkering. They are ultimately important because they help identify the *subject matter* of international theory. To develop theory, before we can discuss technique, there must be some consensus on what we want to examine. This is the heart of the matter. Such a consensus has reigned in the field until very recently. Hence, we can talk of a classical tradition. The serious challenges today come not from those who want to add or subtract types of "essential" actors, or those who argue that not all of international politics can be characterized as a "struggle for power." The most serious onslaught against the classical tradition comes from those who would change the core subjects of the field. This is essentially a normative rather than scientific question.

Guidelines to Inquiry in the Classical Tradition

Rousseau and Morgenthau, Hobbes and Bull, Bentham and Haas disagree on a number of matters; but they are also joined by a common set of questions or problems that, implicitly or explicitly, establish the boundaries as well as the core of the field. International theory has traditionally revolved around three key questions, the first of which is absolutely essential, the raison d'être of the field, with the other two providing the location for solutions to the problem. While the criteria are not easily delineated, with some overlap between them and some conceptual fuzziness at the edges, they have provided the guidelines for more than three hundred years of inquiry in the field. They are:

(1) the causes of war and the conditions of peace/security/order; an essential subsidiary problem is the nature of power;
(2) the essential actors and/or units of analysis;
(3) images of the world/system/society of states.

The first question (or criterion for a taxonomy of approaches in the field) provides the rationale for the study of international politics. While some may argue that we have organized a field called international relations/politics because the phenomena are "there," the truth is that we study them because of a deeply held normative concern about the problem of war. Virtually every writer who has helped develop the field has been animated by this concern, including Hobbes, Grotius, Erasmus, Vattel, Saint-Pierre, Rousseau, Kant, and all the moderns. Each has made some sort of implicit or explicit statement about the causes of war and, perhaps more prolifically, has proposed some sort of solution to the problem (although Rousseau, having made his proposal, rejected it as impractical). Why this concern? Most nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors have lamented the human and institutional costs of war—lives lost, destruction of productive facilities, moral degeneration, and political upheaval. With the advent of nuclear weapons the problematic becomes even more compelling. It is *the* problem of universal import. But it was not always so.

For example, Greek and Roman writers pictured war as a normal activity of political communities, ever present and always to be anticipated rather than prevented. Some German and English writers of the nineteenth century, and some writing in the Marxist tradition, have portrayed war as a progressive motor of history, an opportunity for proletarian revolution, or a device for weeding out the unfit and weak. But for the rest, from Hobbes and Grotius to the moderns, war is the problem to be analyzed, and at least equal energy must be devoted to outlining avenues of escape from this endemic problem, whether through a confederation of states, international integration, disarmament, foolproof deterrence, or some combination of them.

War is also the central concern of international theory because it has been a major source of historical change, a profound determinant of *all* political life. To quote Hedley Bull,

> war appears as a basic determinant of the shape the system assumes at any one time. It is war and the