

International Political Economy

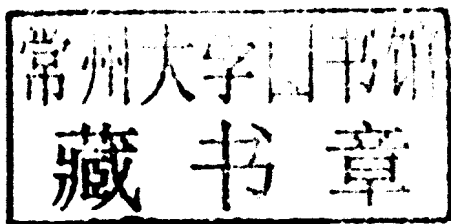
Debating the past, present and future

Edited by
Nicola Phillips and
Catherine E. Weaver

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Introduction

Debating the divide – reflections on the past, present and future of international political economy

Nicola Phillips and Catherine E. Weaver

Intellectual reflection can be a sordid endeavor. In the past few years, many scholars of international political economy (IPE) have engrossed themselves in debate over the state of our discipline. At heart of this discussion is a concern that our field of inquiry, once depicted by Susan Strange (1984: ix) as an ‘open range’, is starting to splinter. Fences have been erected, flags have been planted, and distinct approaches or schools of thought labeled and championed. Worse yet, many scholars fear a growing dialogue of the deaf between silo communities of IPE who doggedly pursue chosen paradigms, epistemologies, and methodologies with little regard to alternative world views. Rather than the end of history, we have realized a clash of intellectual civilizations (Murphy and Nelson 2001; Dickens 2006; Blyth 2009b). Or, then again, perhaps we are imagining communities and constructing divides in our minds that do not exist in reality.

We thus begin this book with a note of caution. Reflecting on academic disciplines can easily devolve into narcissistic distractions or political stock-taking exercises. Worse yet, such reflection can be misinterpreted as a malicious effort by some to tally the score and declare a victor with respect to who has the ‘right’ or ‘superior’ approach to inquiry in the IPE discipline. We must not fall prey to such paranoia. As Albert Camus wrote, an intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself. We are inherently wired as an intellectual community to be introspective and self-critical. As much as we hate the poking, prodding, and occasional drawing of blood, we also know that a thorough diagnosis is the best way to determine the health of the discipline and to make sure we are on the most productive path to the accumulation of knowledge. So what has happened recently that makes us pause and turn our focus inwards? Why do we think that we have perhaps gone astray?

If we were to try to pinpoint the catalyst for the current wave of self-contemplation, it would be Benjamin Cohen’s recent description of the transatlantic divide in IPE (Cohen 2007, 2008a). In Cohen’s (2008) intellectual history, IPE at its founding nearly 40 years ago was a truly pluralist endeavor, initiated by a dynamic group of young scholars, driven by an unfettered curiosity about the nature and dynamics of the world economy, and willing to use whatever disciplinary and methodological tools proved most adept at asking and answering the big questions (Keohane 2009). Today, he argues, IPE – at least in the Anglo-American world – looks very different.

Cohen argues that IPE has split along two tracks: an ‘American’ school, bound by a tripartite allegiance to liberalism, positivism, and quantitative methods, and a ‘British’ school that is more epistemologically agnostic and drawn to normative or critical lines of inquiry. Cohen’s intent in constructing these schools of thought was benign. He meant these to be parsimonious devices to describe the world of IPE and to frame his intellectual history. Yet, much to his surprise, scholars reacted quickly with varying degrees of shock, assent, and ire. To many, Cohen had drawn a proverbial line in the sand. Some took issue with his categorization and labels. Others strongly agreed with his assessment, and sought to explain why we had reached this disjuncture. A nerve had been struck (Cohen 2009: 136).

This book seeks first to capture and reflect upon the lively debate in IPE that has elicited such an emotional response over the past several years. Our goal is to sum up some of the commentary that has been offered on the state of the discipline and the perceived transatlantic divide. Indeed, the discussions have been replete with evocative language: the Magnificent Seven, a knife’s sharp edge, monocultures, torn lovers, split brains, manifest destinies, Moog synthesizers. . . . How do such creative and cathartic images come together to describe IPE today? How are they used to explain how we have reached this state of affairs, and what the consequences are for the future of IPE?

Our second objective in this book is to look forward. We propose ways in which we might mend the transatlantic divide or, at a minimum, get past the debate to pursue research agendas that capture the diversity of intellectual questions and approaches in the field. Quite appropriately, this is coordinated by editors from two IPE journals, one of which is managed in the United States (*Review of International Political Economy (RIPE)*), and the other which is housed in the United Kingdom (*New Political Economy (NPE)*). This book is thus more than just another forum for talking about how we *should* bridge the transatlantic divide. It represents an initial effort to *do* so.

IPE, past and present

The origins of this book lay in a series of events that started in May 2007, when *RIPE* published an essay by Benjamin Cohen entitled ‘The Transatlantic Divide: Why Are American and British IPE So Different?’ (Cohen 2007). *RIPE* was immediately flooded with requests to respond to Cohen’s depiction of the IPE field and his arguments regarding the implications of the divide (see, e.g. Ravenhill 2008; Higgott and Watson 2008; Patomaki 2009; Leander 2009). Then, in November 2007, at the second annual meeting of the International Political Economy Society at Stanford University, Daniel Maliniak and Michael Tierney presented their research on the American school of IPE. Their paper tested Cohen’s characterization of the American school using original survey results from international relations faculty in the United States and Canada as well as data gathered from the 12 leading international relations journals on the paradigms, epistemologies, methodologies, and other characteristics of IPE work from 1980 to 2006. Their findings strongly supported Cohen’s portrayal of the field.

The reaction of the packed audience at the International Political Economy Society meeting ranged from muted celebration to great concern. *RIPE* quickly moved to assemble a special issue to comment on Maliniak and Tierney's findings and to speculate on the causes and consequences of American IPE's current state of affairs. The resulting essays, reprinted here in Part I, were written by some of the most prominent scholars in the field, representing a variety of paradigmatic, epistemological, and methodological perspectives as well as geographical and demographical positions. They tackled four key questions. First, are the depictions of the American school of IPE accurate, as offered by Cohen (2008) and Maliniak and Tierney (2009)? In other words, as Peter Katzenstein, Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore, Kathleen McNamara, and others suggest, have we missed a large part of the field by focusing on what has been published in the mainstream journals and forgoing other publication venues, such as books? Have we conflated the American school with something else, such as the Open Economy Politics (OEP) approach as described by David Lake, or the Harvard school, as described by Randall Germain? Or, as Nicola Phillips, Robert Wade, and Germain propose, does the 'shackling' of IPE to the discipline of international relations in the United States lead us to an anemic depiction of the American school that obscures the diversity that still thrives in our field?

Second, if the prevailing depictions of the American school are correct, how did we get here? Lake argues, and Robert Keohane largely agrees, that the current prominence of OEP in the United States simply reflects a consensus on OEP's ability to provide more rigorous and persuasive explanations of social phenomena than approaches that adopt contrary epistemologies. Others suggest instead that the American school as we see it is the product of social processes or the exercise of professional power. For example, Phillips and Germain both argue (and Katzenstein disputes) that the character of the American school is to some extent the result of editorial control over the leading journals. McNamara, Finnemore, and Farrell (and later Cox, Underhill, and Weaver in the *NPE* special issue) emphasize that this has deeper roots in graduate school training and professional incentive structures in the job market and tenure processes.

Third, what are the consequences of the current state of affairs for the health of the IPE discipline in the United States (and anywhere else that emulates the American-school model)? Not all agree that the divide is *ipso facto* a bad outcome, as long as it avoids the fate of becoming intellectual monopolies (Lake) or monocultures (McNamara). At the same time, IPE scholars in the United States should temper their eagerness to emulate the discipline of economics. As Wade warns, American IPE is in danger of suffering the same fate as the neoclassical economic orthodoxy, whose obsession with formalization and quantification made it insular, static, and increasingly disconnected from the 'real economy'.

Finally, what is the future of the American school of IPE? Nearly all of the contributors to the *RIPE* special issue (and later the *NPE* issue) call for greater methodological, epistemological, and paradigmatic pluralism within the American school, as well as more effort to bridge the divide. Likewise, they call for

such pluralism and bridge-building to be broached via greater pragmatism, analytical eclecticism, and a focus on more problem-driven research.

In September 2009, *NPE* published a parallel issue on the British school, reprinted in Part II of this volume. The first objective of the *NPE* special issue was to expand the discussion started in *RIPE* by taking the so-called 'British school' as the point of departure. This seemed especially fitting not only as a way to balance *RIPE*'s attention to the American school, but also because Cohen's characterization of British-school IPE has so far provoked some of the most indignant critiques of his *Intellectual History*. The *NPE* special issue assembled people associated (or who associate themselves) with what might be called a 'British school', as well as scholars who stand further outside it. Like the *RIPE* issue, the collection of essays on the British school aimed in this way to reflect the diversity of perspective and opinion that currently exists within our field, and foster a constructive and instructive engagement between often quite stridently divergent positions in the debate.

Echoing the remit of the *RIPE* special issue, the *NPE* issue addressed four central themes. First, is there such a thing as a 'British school', as identified by Cohen, and is this a useful device for thinking about how our field is currently organized? Is there, as suggested by Mark Blyth, Catherine Weaver, and others, a very clear divide which operates largely along the axis identified by Cohen, especially in terms of methodological approach? Or is such a characterization distinctly Anglo-American-centric, to the extent that the field of IPE and scholarship within something called the 'British school' are misrepresented? Robert W. Cox, Craig Murphy, Helge Hveem, and others all worry about the voices that are excluded as a result of this categorization of a 'British school', as well as a 'transatlantic divide', and argue for the much greater future incorporation of scholarship from outside the narrow world of Anglo-American scholarship. Geoffrey Underhill argues that the European origins of both the American and British schools, as conceived by Cohen, are underplayed and obscured, to the extent that the notion of a 'transatlantic divide' misrepresents the genesis of the field and its primary influences. But many are willing to accept *as a starting point* the contention that there is something that can be called a 'British school', and reflect critically on the field, its accomplishments, and its future challenges, even while there is lively disagreement about what the field looks like and how it should be understood.

Second, if it is accepted, is Cohen's characterization of the 'British school' accurate? Again, the essays reflect a real divergence of perspective. Murphy, supported by others, takes issue with the accuracy of Cohen's depiction of the pioneering influences on the field in his questions about the 'left out', and Eric Helleiner and Hveem both find it difficult to recognize the field depicted by Cohen from their vantage points in, respectively, Canada and continental Europe. Underhill and Blyth are the most trenchant in their critique of the British school, both emphasizing what they see as its penchant for 'template theorizing', in Underhill's words, but at the same time engaging equally critically with the tendencies of American-school scholarship. Ronen Palan is keen to stress the

achievements of the 'British-school' approach, especially in understanding the global financial crisis of the late 2000s: the proof of the pudding, he argues, is in the eating, and at that moment the British school emerges triumphant. Later, in Part III, Apeldoorn *et al.* echo some of these sentiments in their defense of the body of 'critical IPE' which is often taken to be emblematic of the 'British school'.

Third, what is the relationship of British- and American-school IPE? Aside from objections to the Anglo-American-centrism of this categorization, not all agree that the divide is quite as deep as many suspect. Helleiner, Blyth, Underhill, Weaver, and others all struggle either to see such a clear separation, including in their own intellectual outlook, or to agree with the notion that there is such a thing as a homogeneous 'British school' or 'American school' which can be constructed against one another. Many, such as Palan, also take the cue to think about how a more constructive form of engagement – perhaps even bridge-building – might be undertaken.

Finally, what is its likely future trajectory? Where are the key advantages of and difficulties with the 'British-school' approach? What, if anything, does it have to gain from an exercise in 'bridge-building', especially with American-school scholarship? Nearly all of the contributors see the need for a greater level of interest and curiosity about different approaches in the field, many emphasizing in a constructive sense what each can learn from the other, and offering different perspectives on what these lessons might be. But many also point directly to the advantages for IPE as a whole of being more open to voices outside the Anglo-American context and thereby developing a more globally inclusive field of study.

The future of IPE

For Part III of this book, we solicited new essays from five prominent IPE scholars to comment on the future of the IPE beyond the transatlantic divide debate. As a set, these essays warn against becoming too deeply entrenched in disciplinary reflection. In turn, they offer suggestions on how we might progress both in terms of bridge-building between the American and British school as well as substantive agendas for research within these schools.

Jason Sharman, speaking from an Australian perspective, begins with a cautionary note: as an intellectual community, we need to be more careful in our call for greater dialogue and bridge-building, lest the 'repeated public protestations of the desire to bridge the gap between the American and British school IPE scholars might not amount to much'. Moving past the inward-looking debate and closing the divide, he suggests, requires clear benchmarks through which we hold ourselves to account. But more importantly, we also need to recognize the pragmatic constraints to establishing dialogue given the profound differences between pedagogical and professional foundations of the IPE disciplines across different countries. For example, Sharman argues, if we want British IPE and its 'Antipodean intellectual offshoots' to pay more attention to American IPE and

vice versa, we need to recognize that one barrier is methodological training. In other words, it may be lack of math requirements at both undergraduate and graduate levels that inhibits young British-school scholars from attaining the statistical fluency to read the bulk of IPE in the United States. Likewise, a lack of philosophical and qualitative training that may impede third-generation American IPE scholars from understanding British-school scholarship. That said, we are already seeing progress on both shores. The United Kingdom is moving toward a Canadian model for compulsory methods training and the United States is becoming more pluralist through the Perestroika movement and the establishment of new training forums such as the Institute for Qualitative Research Methods (IQRM).

Jonathan Kirshner, a US-based IPE scholar, takes a more direct swing at the American school and what it bodes for the future of IPE. The central problem, he argues, is that American scholarship has recently turned from IPE to IpE. In other words, the problem is the disappearance of politics and a current obsession with quantitative methods as the ends, rather than the means, of intellectual inquiry. The immediate task for IPE in the United States, he argues, is to abandon its rigid adherence to 'Hyper-rationalism, Individualism, and Materialism [HIM]'. Like Sharman and others in this volume, Kirshner argues that this requires a return to a truly interdisciplinary approach in the professional training and socialization of graduate students in the United States (and elsewhere) that embraces not just economics, but also sociology, history, and cultural studies.

Louis Pauly, a Canadian IPE scholar and current co-editor of *International Organization*, takes a more optimistic tone. The transatlantic divide, he argues, is more imagined than real, the current state of the discipline is not as unhealthy and monocultural as some might claim, and we should not be so easily alarmed by a perceived hegemonic bid by the American school or third-generation of US IPE scholars. Nonetheless, like others in this volume, Pauly advocates ontological and epistemological pluralism and analytic eclecticism. He argues that a healthy future for IPE requires a return to past – specifically the 'magnificent seven' of Susan Strange's tenets for studying and producing scholarship in IPE. To do this, one step we could take is to facilitate scholarship outside of the United States and United Kingdom to integrate non-Anglo-American voices into the lead journals and book presses. We also need to increase dialogue and collaboration via funding for international research partnerships and provide more travel grants and post-doctoral research opportunities outside the Anglosphere.

The last two essays in Part III comment more on substantive agendas for future IPE research. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn, Ian Bruff, and Magnus Ryner start by reminding us that there is in fact a 'third way' in IPE. This is the critical theoretical approach that is distinct from what is widely seen as an 'American' rational-institutional approach and a 'British' constructivist-institutionalist perspective. They view critical IPE, too often conflated with the British school (especially by American audiences), as oriented around the interpretation of social reality and well positioned to ask the big, normative questions called for by Cohen, Keohane, Palan, and others. More importantly, the critical theory

approach is already inclusive of non-Anglo-American voices. Thus, the future of IPE in their minds need not be wedded to notions of dialogue or analytical eclecticism; instead we need to recognize and appreciate alternatives to the American and British schools of thought that have been regrettably neglected in the current disciplinary debate.

Layna Mosley and David Singer, both US scholars mainly working in the American-school tradition, offer a set of prospective research questions. Like Palan in Part II, Mosley and Singer argue that IPE specifically needs to focus on three issues that have become more salient since the recent global financial crisis: (1) the complex determinants of cross-national variation in financial regulation; (2) the rise of new forums of economic decision-making and governance, such as G20, G7, and the Financial Stability Forum (FSF), and the role of emerging market countries in them; and (3) the interplay between individual firms-as-political-actors and public policy outcomes. Whereas Kirshner argues that the discipline's ability to address contemporary problems requires a renewal of the 'P' in IPE and Keohane (in Part I) calls for a return to the 'I' (more attention to international or structural processes underpinning political economy), Mosley and Singer argue that the future of IPE requires more emphasis on the 'C'. Namely, they claim, scholars need to be more willing to blur the lines between comparative and international political economy. Epistemologically and methodologically, their prescription is much like others' support for pluralism and eclecticism, with more tolerance for empirical research driven by problems rather than methodological agendas.

At the end of the day, we claim neither a representative sampling nor a definitive end to the discussions on the past, present, and future of IPE. Rather, our modest goal in this volume is to raise a provocative set of questions and arguments that will help us to reflect on how we have thus far approached our field of inquiry and how we might proceed in the near future.

It thus seems fitting to give the last word to Benjamin Cohen, who started us down this path with his prescient *Intellectual History*. Cohen aptly sums it all up by suggesting that perhaps, finally, we have worked our way through the four key stages of 'grief' and reached a point of acceptance. What we have 'accepted' is not any kind of consensus on what our field actually looks like, how we got there, or where we should be going, but rather the notion that greater inclusiveness, openness, and dialogue should be part of our collective endeavor and can open up imaginative new directions in the future of IPE.

Part I

Perspectives on the 'American school' of IPE