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The discipline of international relations: still an American social science?

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Abstract

This article reviews the state of the discipline of international relations. It starts from statements made by the editors in their editorial published in the first issue of this journal. The editors noted that there seemed to have been less adherence to positivism in international relations than in other areas of political science and that there was both more opposition to positivism and more methodological and epistemological openness in international relations than in political science generally. The article outlines the current state of the field, focusing on the rationalist mainstream and then on the reflectivist alternatives, before looking at social constructivism, seeing it as the likely acceptable alternative to rationalism in the mainstream literature of the next decade. It then turns to examine whether international relations is still an American social science, before looking at the situation in the United Kingdom. It concludes that the editors' comments were indeed accurate, but that the fact that there is both more opposition to positivism in international relations and more openness in the UK academic community does not mean that the mainstream US literature is anything like as open or pluralist. The UK community is indeed more able to develop theory relevant to the globalised world at the new millennium, but the US academic community still dominates the discipline.

In their editorial in the first issue of the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* the editors made some provocative remarks about the state of the discipline of international relations (IR) in the United Kingdom. In this article I address these comments by examining the state of the discipline at the turn of the millennium. I will focus specifically on the overall character of the discipline, looking at the mainstream and at the

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alternative approaches. My key aims are to assess whether it is still a discipline dominated by the United States, both in terms of its policy agenda and, more importantly, its theoretical orientation, and to see whether the editors' comments about the shape of the discipline are accurate. The editors went out of their way to point to the intellectual diversity in IR with regards to the challenges within that discipline to the dominance of positivism: 'we argue for authors explicitly to acknowledge their positions and for more diversity of epistemological approaches. This issue is perhaps most apposite at present in international relations, where recent theoretical work has focused upon an epistemological critique of international relations realism' (Marsh et al. 1999, 2). Political science, they argue, is dominated both by the lack of an explicit acknowledgement of an epistemological position and by the implicit acceptance of one such position, positivism. I will argue that this assumption is correct, but I will also point out that the fact that there is widespread questioning of epistemological assumptions does not mean that IR is marked by genuine epistemological pluralism: rather, I will argue that positivism dominates, especially in the United States, and dominates to such an extent that other epistemological positions remain peripheral.

The editors also made comments about the relationship between IR and the study of British politics. They argued that, just as the study of British politics had largely ignored the international dimension, so the dominant approach within international relations theory, realism, had argued that the international and the domestic were two separate political spheres. They point out that this picture has changed in recent years as it has become increasingly difficult to maintain such a distinction, especially in an era of globalisation and a structural context for British politics in which the EU is a main feature. They also comment that the study of international relations in Britain was based on the behaviouralist assumptions that dominated British political science, characterising the situation as one where behaviouralism: 'had a much weaker hold on IR in the UK than it has had in the US and, perhaps more contentiously, a weaker hold on IR than on political science in the UK' (ibid., 8). They claim that British work has been particularly innovative in moving beyond positivism, with the result that IR in Britain is: 'much more exciting and original than traditionalist IR and, indeed, traditionalist "British politics"' (ibid., 8). In this article I will wholeheartedly endorse this claim and, indeed, would go so far as to claim that IR is in a far more healthy state in the UK than it is in the US.

This article will proceed in the following way. First, I want to say something about the current state of IR and I will set the context for this by

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commenting on the ways in which the discipline has represented its development. I will then turn to focus on the question of whether the discipline is still one dominated by the US, before concluding with an assessment of where the UK discipline (or sub-field) fits into this overall picture. My main conclusions will be that: the discipline is still dominated by positivism; this is far more the case in the US than in the rest of the world; this comment notwithstanding, the discipline of IR remains an American social science; and in the UK there is a far more pluralistic approach to questions of epistemology and methodology, which results in a much wider set of questions being seen as legitimate. I will conclude that there is a significant contrast between the 'state of the field' in the UK and the US and that the situation in the UK is far more likely to permit the development of an IR discipline relevant to the dominant global questions of the new millennium.

Foundational myths

IR has told a fairly consistent story about its history. The textbooks tell one (or occasionally both) of two main versions of the story. The first tells the story of the discipline's development in terms of chronology (see, for example, Vasquez 1983; Bull 1972), starting with the dominance of idealism in the interwar years, progressing to the dominance of realism after the Second World War and, then, after an interregnum during which a variety of approaches vied for dominance, a period of debate between neo-realism and neo-liberalism in the 1980s—debate which eventually led to the formation of a consensus in the mainstream in the 1990s. Ole Waever has dubbed this new consensus the 'neo-neo synthesis' (Waever 1996, 163–164). The other version of the story is one of debate between competing positions. Here, the main claim is that the discipline has advanced by a series of 'great debates': (see, for example, Maghroori and Ramberg 1982; Lijphart 1974a and 1974b) between idealism and realism in the late 1930s; between traditionalism (realism) and behaviouralism in the 1960s; between state-centric and transnationalist approaches in the 1970s; between three competing paradigms (realism, liberalism and Marxism in the so-called inter-paradigm debate—see Banks 1984; Holsti 1985; McGrew and Lewis 1992; Viotti and Kauppi 1999) in the 1980s; and then the latest debate, between the neo-neo synthesis (also known as rationalism) and a set of alternative approaches (known as reflectivism) since the early 1990s (see Lapid 1989).

The problem with each of these popular readings is that they importantly misrepresent the history of the discipline (see Smith 1995). They

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serve to suggest that there has been far more openness and pluralism than has in fact been the case and that there has been 'progress' as the discipline gets nearer and nearer the 'truth' about international relations. More significantly, they are very much views from somewhere, in that they are used to justify a particular reading of the history of thinking about world politics and to set up the terms of debate about the nature of relevance and appropriateness for current debates over the role of particular approaches. This systematic misrepresentation has been illustrated by the path-breaking work of Brian Schmidt (1998), who has shown that both the chronological and the 'great debates' versions of the history of IR are misleading. Focusing on the work emanating from the US, Schmidt has studied the origins of the distinct discipline of IR (origins that usually start with the formation of the first department of the discipline at Aberystwyth in 1919) and the nature of the scholarly debate within that field in the interwar period. He has found two main misrepresentations. The first is that the subject of IR was studied long before the First World War and, thus, the date usually given for its foundation is wrong. However, it is important to note how convenient it is to claim that the discipline emerges out of the carnage of the First World War: it makes it so much easier to present a (political) reading of the character of this new discipline as idealist, since it naturally focused on how to prevent such events from occurring again. For Schmidt, the work undertaken between 1880 and the outbreak of the First World War: 'is absolutely essential for understanding the interwar discourse of international relations. It was this earlier conversation that provided the most important discursive framework for those who were studying international relations after World War 1' (Schmidt 1998, 231). His second main finding is that there was not a dominance of what is now called idealist work in the interwar years; there were a variety of approaches and most of them were concerned with developing what might be called a 'realistic' account of world politics. As he writes:

> contrary to conventional accounts of the history of the field in which international relations scholars of the interwar period are characterised as 'idealists', the distinctiveness of their contribution lies not in their idealism but in their explicit attempt to mitigate the international anarchy … although [they] may have been optimists, in that they believed something could be done about the existing international situation, they were not idealistic in the sense that they failed to face the real character of international politics (Schmidt 1998, 191).

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Schmidt's main claim is that these misreadings are important to the subsequent history of the discipline because they have led to a 'foundational myth', which portrays realism as replacing idealism and this myth has structured debate about IR through to the present day.

The discipline therefore has a very specific, and crucially misleading, story to tell about its origins. This story centres on the notion that there is such a thing as a separate discipline of IR, which had its origins in 1919 and which therefore 'must' have a specific field of study. This foundational and institutional move is extremely important in its impact on contemporary debates about the nature of the discipline and its field of study. The most important of these is that the discipline gets defined as one founded on the problem of inter-state war and, thus, explaining this specific problem becomes the litmus test for international theory. Note just how important this is in the disciplining of the discipline: those approaches that do not treat inter-state war as the core problem to be explained by the discipline run the risk of their work being deemed 'irrelevant' or 'not IR'. The point is not that inter-state war is unimportant, far from it, only that the way that the discipline has set up the terms of the debate has allocated power within it to those theories that focus on, and offer explanations for, inter-state war. It is very difficult to challenge that definition of the core problematic of the discipline without placing oneself *outside* the discipline. Thus, those approaches that do not start with both *inter-state* relations and with *war* are axiomatically placed in a defensive position with regards to their fit within the discipline. This move has been of massive influence in the process by which the mainstream has dominated the discipline. Thus, writers who want to look at deaths by economics rather than death by politics, to quote Ken Booth's phrase, are in danger of being seen as not really 'doing IR'. Maybe their work is economics, maybe it is development studies, but somehow the discipline of IR does not seem to include it. Similarly, those who want to look at actors other than the state are seen as dealing with issues of essentially secondary importance. Non-state actors may be of interest to IR, but, so the argument goes, they are usually only important in so far as they affect the behaviour of state actors.

However, the main impact of the story of the development of the discipline has been that it has supported claims of the exceptionalism of IR. IR can be portrayed as separate from political science or history or economics and this is commonly accompanied by the claim that it has a distinctive methodology. Here lies the importance of Schmidt's comments about the role of the foundational myth within the discipline, because the dominance of realism within the US IR community since the Second World War

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can easily be seen as vindication of a specific theoretical approach, one that is accurate regardless of time and space: realism is *the* theory of international relations and it remains so no matter which historical system is being discussed and no matter what the internal make-up of the societies and cultures that form the states of that international system. The very fact that realism can be 'shown' to have replaced idealism, that it was a theory that more accurately captured the 'realities' of international politics, becomes a foundational myth in another sense: only realism can produce knowledge about the world of international relations that is scientific. Other approaches, most notably idealism and Marxism, cannot do this, so the story goes, because they are infused with values and thus are not approaches that fit within the social scientific canon. I will return to this claim later in this article.

Contemporary international relations: rationalism

I want to turn now to look at the main features of the discipline of IR at the turn of the millennium. I am going to concentrate on international relations theory because I believe that it is that sub-field that determines the main intellectual fault-lines of the discipline as a whole. There is, of course, considerable variety among the sub-fields but the impact of the core theoretical debates reverberates throughout all of them. The approach that has dominated the discipline of IR has, of course, been realism. In my view this is still the case, not so much in self-consciously theoretical work, but certainly in the ways in which it is taught in North America. It is worth remembering that the so-called cutting edge of international theory has little impact on what happens in the 2,000 or so institutions that teach IR in the US, and most certainly not until after a long lag. As someone who works in IR theory it is very tempting to think that the debates that seem so central to theorists are also central to those who work in the areas of strategy (if not security studies), foreign policy analysis, international organisation, area studies, international law, international history and international political economy. This assumption by theorists is often accompanied with a kind of 'me-clever-you-stupid' mentality, which implies that these debates really are central to all other parts of the discipline in all parts of the world. Leaving aside the problems of this intellectual imperialism, it none the less remains the case that the debates within IR theory are the long-term determinants of the main schisms of the discipline at large. To put it another way, I believe that the discipline is far more realist, far more state-centric and far more unquestioning of the dominance of realism and positivism than is the case within IR theory.

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The current scene can most usefully be divided into two: first, a mainstream comprising neo-realism and neo-liberalism (Waever's neo-neo synthesis) and, to an increasing extent, much of the most-cited work within social constructivism. There are many names for this mainstream, the most common one being *rationalism*, although I find the label 'explanatory theory' helpful since it accurately links the approaches to the wider debates in the philosophy of the social sciences. I will discuss the main features of the rationalist mainstream presently. Second, the other approaches are united only by an opposition to this rationalist mainstream and are usually grouped together under the title of *reflectivism*, although again I prefer the generic social science label of 'constitutive theory'. The main elements of reflectivism are critical theory, post-modernism, feminist theory, post-colonial theory, normative theory, peace studies, anthropological approaches and historical sociology. As is obvious from this list, the differences between these approaches are enormous and, in many cases, the approaches are fundamentally incompatible. None the less, they share a fundamental opposition to the main claims of rationalism and thus the label is useful for the purposes of an initial discussion of the main features of the discipline. Again, although it is a broad generalisation, it is the case that these basic divisions can be found in most, if not all, of the sub-fields of IR, so that one has, for example, post-modern, critical, feminist (and so on) international history, security studies and international political economy.

Rationalism dominates the mainstream literature of the discipline, especially in the United States. Even the most cursory glance at the leading US journals shows this to be the case, though commonly the papers may not explicitly acknowledge their theoretical perspective. Although there are significant differences between neo-realism and neo-liberalism, they basically share the same view of the world (ontology) and, crucially, the same view of what counts as reliable knowledge about that world (epistemology). Thus, although Charles Kegley has argued that the debate between realism and liberalism is 'the hottest topic in international relations theory today' (Kegley 1995, 1), he ultimately argues for an amalgamation of the two. In a fascinating discussion of the main features of realism and idealism, Kegley (1995, 3–17) concludes that, despite their different assumptions about human nature, the possibility for improvement, the nature of war and the character of international society, the two approaches are basically similar. He advocates: 'hybrid combination of both realist and liberal concepts around which a new paradigm might be organised … [one] that integrates the most relevant features of both theoretical traditions' (1995, 17). A similar point emerges out of Robert

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Powell's detailed critique of the differences between neo-realism and neo-liberalism (Powell 1994). Powell argues that: 'The three issues at the center of neorealist–neoliberal debate are the meaning and implications of anarchy, the problem of absolute and relative gains, and the tension between cooperation and distribution' (1994, 329). These constitute 'a core of common issues' (ibid., 344). In other words, the two approaches are so similar that they in effect differ only on a small number of issues.

David Baldwin's (1993) collection on the 'debate' provides a further illustration of this finding. In his introductory chapter, Baldwin summarises the six main areas of debate between neo-liberalism and neo-realism as:

- The nature and consequences of anarchy: 'in general, neorealists see anarchy as placing more severe constraints on state behavior than do neoliberals' (1993, 5).
- International co-operation: 'neorealists view international cooperation as "harder to achieve, more difficult to maintain, and more dependent on state power" than do the neoliberals' (1993, 5).
- Relative versus absolute gains: 'neoliberals have stressed the absolute gains from international cooperation, while the neorealists have emphasized relative gains' (1993, 5).
- Priority of state goals: 'Neoliberals and neorealists agree that both national security and economic welfare are important, but they differ in relative emphasis on these goals … neorealists tend to study security issues and neoliberals tend to study political economy' (1993, 7).
- Intentions versus capabilities: neorealists 'are likely to emphasize capabilities more than intentions' and criticise neoliberals for 'overemphasizing intentions, interests and information and underemphasizing the distribution of capabilities' (1993, 7).
- Institutions and regimes: neorealists 'believe that neoliberals exaggerate the extent to which institutions are able to "mitigate anarchy's constraining effects"' (1993, 8).

However, having outlined the differences between the two approaches, Baldwin goes on to note four issues over which they are in agreement. Firstly, 'the current debate does not revolve around techniques of statecraft', notably the role of military force. Secondly, 'both sides argue from assumptions that states behave like egoistic value maximisers. Moral considerations are hardly mentioned.' Thirdly, 'both sides treat states as the primary actors.' Fourthly, 'this is not a debate between conflict theorists

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and cooperation theorists ... both sides have moved beyond the simple dichotomy between cooperation and conflict that characterized earlier discussions' (1993, 9). Taking the differences and the similarities into account, Baldwin suggests that the two approaches can together contribute to a 'better understanding of the conditions that promote or inhibit international cooperation' (1993, 22). In the concluding section of his introductory chapter, he notes three areas for further debate between neo-realism and neo-liberalism. The first concerns international co-operation and he summarises six hypotheses that need more investigation: the relationship between reciprocity and co-operation; the relationship between the number of actors and co-operation; the relationship between actors' expectations about future interactions and co-operation; the difference that international regimes make to co-operation; the role of epistemic communities in fostering co-operation; and the effect of the distribution of power among actors on co-operation. He contends: 'These six hypotheses provide a rich research agenda for both neoliberal and neorealist scholars' (1993, 22–23). The second area for further debate is the role of domestic politics in international relations. The third is the need for empirical research into the relative utility of various tools of statecraft, notably military force and economic statecraft. He ends with a plea for synthesis between neo-realism and neo-liberalism.

In my view, the main points to note from these self-portrayals of rationalism are that the core differences between neo-realism and neo-liberalism concern the extent to which institutions can mitigate the effects of international anarchy and whether the main actors in international politics (states) pursue absolute or relative gains. The main areas of agreement concern the nature of international politics: it involves states as actors; it focuses on patterns of co-operation and conflict: actors are unitary and rational; and state interests, determined by the state's position in the international political system, drive foreign-policy behaviour. These ontological similarities matter considerably, since they mean that both neo-realists and neo-liberals see essentially the same world of international politics. Their differences are not unimportant—after all, it is important whether institutions matter and whether it is possible to get states to pursue absolute gains—but I strongly believe that this results in a very limited view of what international politics is and can be. It serves to rule out of consideration an extensive set of political, social and economic questions, notably those that focus on actors other than the state, on issues other that inter-state war or economic co-operation and on interests and identities other than those given exogenously by the rationalist world-view. What strikes me most is

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just how narrow a view of politics (and even economics) is involved in this mainstream definition of international relations and how much, and how effectively, the discipline is disciplined by this move.

But, as I have argued elsewhere (Smith 1995, 1996 and 1997) I believe an even more important consequence follows on from the epistemological assumptions that dominate rationalist IR. Indeed, I believe that, increasingly, it is these assumptions that perform the leading role in moves to reject much of the work of reflectivist scholars. The main epistemological assumptions are those of positivism, by which I mean: a belief in naturalism in the social world (that is to say that the social world is amenable to the same kinds of analysis as those applicable to the natural world); a separation between facts and values, by which is meant both that 'facts' are theory-neutral and that normative commitments should not influence what counts as facts or as knowledge; a commitment to uncovering patterns and regularities in the social world, patterns and regularities that exist apart from the methods used to uncover them; and, finally, a commitment to empiricism as the arbiter of what counts as knowledge. It is important to point out that virtually no rationalist scholar will accept that his or her work is based on these assumptions and at conference after conference in the United States I am told that my view is outdated, that I am referring to a kind of naive positivist who no longer exists. I leave it to readers to assess this claim by turning to any recent issue of the journal of the US International Studies Association, *International Studies Quarterly*. The important point to note is that most articles do not explicitly subscribe to any one theoretical position, that is to say they do not announce that they are based on a neo-realist or a neo-liberal approach; rather, their theoretical assumptions are contained implicitly in their methodological (usually quantitative) and epistemological (nearly always empiricist) commitments. In this sense, most of the US literature is not explicitly rationalist, but is so implicitly. Ontologically, the literature tends to operate in the space defined by rationalism; epistemologically, it is empiricist and, methodologically, it is positivist. Together these define 'proper' social science and thereby serve as the gatekeepers for what counts as legitimate scholarship.

Contemporary international relations: reflectivism

As argued above, reflectivist approaches tend to be more united by their opposition to realism and positivism than by any shared notion of what should replace it. As can be immediately understood, any label that includes the range of approaches noted above contains some of the major disputes

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within the philosophy of social science. Indeed, it is amazing and frightening that the entire range of approaches can be so easily dismissed by combining them together and then announcing that they are not serious social science! Perhaps part of the problem is that writers such as myself have used this label 'reflectivist' as a useful way of summarising these approaches to rationalism. None the less, the important point to note is that there are a rich variety of approaches that offer a series of alternatives to both the ontological and epistemological commitments of rationalism. Thus, to choose just one example, feminist approaches to IR will see a very different set of actors, structures, processes, relations and issues to those featured in rationalist accounts. The clearest example of this is found in the work of Cynthia Enloe, who, in three path-breaking books (1990, 1993 and 2000), has painted an entirely different picture of the 'real' world of international relations to that offered by either neo-realism or neo-liberalism. The first and last chapters of her 1990 book, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, set out her position extremely clearly. Enloe wants to paint a *more* realistic picture of international politics by asking the simple question 'where are the women' and, thus, showing how: 'Paying serious attention to women can expose how *much* power it takes to maintain the international political system in its present form' (1990, 3). By looking at where women actually are in international politics (as diplomatic wife, as prostitute around a military base, as a western tourist, as a marketing symbol for bananas, as a domestic servant or as a worker in a sweat-shop), Enloe argues that these 'maneuvers' in the private sphere construct the public sphere: just as the personal is international so, she claims, is the international personal—'governments depend upon certain kinds of allegedly private relationships in order to conduct their foreign affairs' (1990, 196). International politics is therefore much more complicated than traditionally portrayed. Looking at international politics from the viewpoint of women:

> also exposes how much power it takes to make the current international political system work … an exploration of agribusiness prostitution, foreign-service sexism and attempts to tame outspoken nationalist women with homophobic taunts all reveal that in reality it takes much *more* power to construct and perpetuate international political relations than we have been led to believe. Conventional international-politics commentators have put power at the center of their analysis … but they have under-estimated the amount and varieties of power at work (1990, 197).

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However, Enloe is not only concerned with women: she is interested in how both femininity and masculinity get constructed: 'International politics has relied not only on the manipulation of femininity's meanings but on the manipulation of masculinity … understanding the international workings of masculinity is important to making feminist sense of international politics' (1990, 199–200). My point in citing Enloe at length is to illustrate just how fundamentally her work challenges the core assumptions of rationalism. It is difficult to see how her view of international politics can be reconciled with that of either neo-realism or neo-liberalism. A very similar conclusion would be reached by looking in detail at the world-views of the approaches subsumed under the reflectivist label. Of course, some would have considerable overlaps with rationalist approaches (notably international political economy and historical sociology), but many simply see a different world of international politics to that seen by rationalism.

But, again, although these differences are significant, the epistemological differences are probably more important in determining the treatment of reflectivist approaches in the profession of IR. Precisely because reflectivist approaches do not share the commitment to the form of foundational positivism found in rationalist approaches, they are increasingly criticised for not being social science and, thereby, not counting as reliable knowledge about the world. Reflectivists are thus presented by the mainstream as operating outside of the acceptable realm of academic study; they are not intellectually legitimate. This tendency has increased during the last decade, as reflectivist work was first ignored, then seen as irrelevant to the concerns of the 'real' world of international politics. So, at present they are attacked for the even more heinous crime of not being part of the social science enterprise. I think it is very difficult for academics based in the UK (or the rest of Europe) to appreciate the impact of this move on careers, publication prospects and, of course, the development of the discipline in the US. As I will argue later, I think the academic communities in the UK and Europe are far more open to a variety of approaches and epistemologies than is the case in the US. Given that reflectivist work is dismissed as intellectually weak, as illegitimate, then it is not surprising that reflectivist scholars are therefore not well entrenched in North America, the homeland of the mainstream of the discipline.

To illustrate the political power of this epistemological move, I will look at three examples of the claim that reflectivist work is not legitimate scholarship. The first chronologically was that made by Robert Keohane in his 1988 address as President of the International Studies Association. Keohane stressed the importance of studying international institutions, given their

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role in fostering international co-operation. Having discussed the main features of what he termed 'rationalistic' international theory, he identified another group of scholars whom he termed 'reflective': 'since all of them emphasize the importance of human reflection for the nature of institutions and ultimately for the character of world politics' (Keohane 1989, 161). Anyone interested in international institutions should evaluate the rival research plans of these two approaches. Whilst he accepted that rationalism has its deficiencies, the reflectivist critique was: 'not devastating, since no social science theory is complete … A research program with such a record of accomplishment, and a considerable number of interesting but still untested hypotheses about reasons for persistence, change, and compliance, cannot readily be dismissed' (ibid., 173). In contrast, reflectivism, although it could criticise rationalism, had as its greatest weakness:

> the lack of a clear reflective research program … Until the reflective scholars or others sympathetic to their arguments have delineated such a research program and shown in particular studies that it can illuminate important issues in world politics, they will remain on the margins of the field, largely invisible to the preponderance of empirical researchers, most of whom explicitly or implicitly accept one or another version of rationalistic premises (ibid., 173).

What was needed was for reflectivist scholars to develop 'testable theories', without which 'it will be impossible to evaluate their research program' (ibid., 173–174). The most significant point about this challenge was that it was, not surprisingly, made on the epistemological terrain of rationalism: it is frankly impossible to see just how reflectivist accounts could conceivably provide answers that Keohane would accept, given the gap between their epistemological starting points.

A more recent example of this delegitimisation of reflectivist approaches comes in Stephen Walt's review of the state of international relations theory. Walt argues that, although the key debate in international relations theory has been, and continues to be, that between realism and liberalism, there is a third approach which he sees as the main alternative to these two. The important point is that this approach is not reflectivism, nor any of the many approaches commonly placed under that label: the alternative approach is constructivism. What interests me about his argument is not so much its rejection of reflectivism—indeed, the only mention of this approach in the article involves his characterisation of the 'deconstruction' approach as taking on the mantle from a failing

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Marxism to criticise the mainstream: 'because these scholars focused initially on criticizing the mainstream paradigms but did not offer positive alternatives to them, they remained a self-consciously dissident minority for most of the 1980s' (Walt 1998, 32). Rather, I wish to focus upon the fact that he sees constructivism as dealing with the issues commonly seen as the core concerns of reflectivist approaches. Walt sets out the main features of these three 'paradigms' (realism, liberalism and constructivism) in a figure representing a classical Graeco-Roman building with three pillars. Under the heading of constructivism he lists its 'unit of analysis' as 'individuals' and its 'main instruments' as 'ideas and discourse'. Its 'post-cold war prediction' is 'agnostic because it cannot predict the content of ideas' and its 'main limitation' is that it is 'better at describing the past than anticipating the future'. My point is not that this is embarrassingly superficial about constructivism, but that constructivism is portrayed as the approach that deals with things such as individuals, ideas, discourse and identities. Note just how delegitimising this is of reflectivist work and how it polices the boundaries of the discipline. It is also worth noting that it is also incredibly dismissive of constructivism, which, although not my own orientation, is surely rather less an adjunct to the liberalism and realism than Walt's final sentence allows: 'The "compleat diplomat" of the future should remain cognizant of realism's emphasis on the inescapable role of power, keep liberalism's awareness of domestic forces in mind, and occasionally reflect on constructivism's vision of change' (ibid., 44). By way of contrast, Walt argues that 'realism is likely to remain the single most useful instrument in our intellectual toolbox' (ibid., 43).

My final example comes from the major review of the state of the field written for the 50th anniversary issue of the journal *International Organization* by three rationalist scholars, and former editors. In their article, Peter Katzenstein, Robert Keohane and Stephen Krasner trace the development of international theory during the journal's life. They characterise the current situation as one of a new debate between rationalism and constructivism: 'rationalism … and constructivism now provide the major points of contestation for international relations scholarship' (Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner 1998, 646). They see a sociological or constructivist turn as having taken place in IR in the last decade and they note three strands of that turn, conventional, critical and post-modern. These are defined as follows:

> Conventional constructivists insist that sociological perspectives offer a general theoretical orientation and specific research programs that can rival or complement rationalism (ibid., 675).

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> [Critical constructivsts focus on] identity issues that include, besides nationalism, subjects such as race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality … [they] … also accept the possibility of social scientific knowledge based on empirical research (ibid., 676).

As such, rationalist scholars can debate with both conventional and critical constructivists, since their research programs are open to rationalist critiques. As can be predicted, the problem is with post-modern constructivists: 'What separates critical constructivism and post modernism is not the shared focus on discourse, but the acknowledgement by critical constructivists of the possibility of a social science and a willingness to engage openly in scholarly debate with rationalism' (ibid., 677). Thus, it follows that the journal has published little post-modern IR work:

> since *IO* [*International Organization*] has been committed to an enterprise that postmodernism denies: the use of evidence to adjudicate between truth claims. In contrast to conventional and critical constructivism, postmodernism falls clearly outside of the social science enterprise, and in IR research it risks becoming self-referential and disengaged from the world, protests to the contrary notwithstanding (ibid., 678).

It is in this light that they see the 'new debate' as that between rationalism and constructivism. Indeed, they note that: 'both conventional and critical constructivists have positioned themselves quite self-consciously between rationalist theoretical orientations, such as realism or liberalism, and postmodernist orientations' (ibid., 678). The last section of their review of the field outlines the possible nature of future debate between rationalism and constructivism. They conclude that:

> Neither perspective is adequate to cover all aspects of social reality … The core of the constructivist project is to explicate variations in preferences, available strategies, and the nature of the players across space and time. The core of the rationalist project is to explain strategies, given preferences, information, and common knowledge. Neither project can be complete without the other (ibid., 682).

What comes through increasingly clearly from these three discussions of the state of the field is how, over the last decade or so, the ratchet has been getting tighter and tighter as to what counts as legitimate social science.

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The concern was evident in Keohane's comments from 1988, but by the time of the Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner paper in 1998 the border between legitimate and illegitimate scholarship was much clearer. In effect, one version of what they termed constructivism was deemed illegitimate and the other two versions would be the second pole to rationalism in the great IR debate of the future. I will now turn to look at the rise and rise of social constructivism and will end this discussion by reiterating just how much policing goes on at the dangerous border of the social-science enterprise.

Social constructivism

In one sense, the picture painted by Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner is accurate, in that they imply that there is a division within constructivism, with two of the three elements self-consciously positioning themselves between rationalism and reflectivism. In that sense, I agree with their prediction that the main debate in the discipline for the next decade will indeed be between rationalism and constructivism. But, in a more important sense, it is a misleading picture, because it does imply that constructivism is positioned between the two approaches: I think that some of the most cited authors are not at all positioned between the two, but instead are really part of rationalism. I would go so far as to say that social constructivism in its dominant (mainly North American) form is very close to the neo-liberalist wing of the rationalist paradigm. This is precisely why it is seen by Walt and by Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner as acceptable. For these writers, it is acceptable because it accepts both the ontology, but, much more importantly, the epistemology, of the mainstream.

Interestingly, some of the leading constructivists also want to locate constructivism as a middle way between rationalism and reflectivism. I will mention just three examples. The first is Alexander Wendt, whose self-proclaimed aim is to build a bridge between the two IR traditions of rationalism and reflectivism by developing a constructivism that builds on the shared features of the liberalist wing of the rationalist tradition and the modern constructivist wing of the reflectivist tradition (Wendt 1992, 393–394). In his 1999 book he states his intention as wanting to defend a 'moderate', 'thin' constructivism against two positions: on the one hand, he wants to argue against those in the mainstream who reject social constructivism as being tantamount to post-modernism; on the other, he is opposed to those 'more radical' constructivists who want to go much further than he does. He wants to develop a 'philosophically principled

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middle way' between these positions (Wendt 1999, 2). Secondly, Emmanuel Adler sees constructivism, rather than any alternative such as the neo-institutionalist focus on the role of ideas (see Goldstein and Keohane 1993), as the 'true middle ground' between rationalist and relativist (Adler's wording) approaches (Adler 1997, 322). Finally, Jeffrey Checkel, in his survey of 'the constructivist turn' in international relations theory, claims that: 'Constructivists thus occupy a middle ground between rational choice theorists and postmodern scholars' (Checkel 1998, 327).

All three of these writers want to differentiate constructivism from reflectivism and, crucially, the litmus test is, yet again, a commitment to 'the social science enterprise'. The most extensive justification of this position is to be found in the work of Wendt (see Wendt 1987; 1992, 393–394, 422–425; 1994; 1999). As he put it in a, by now, infamous comment made in an article he co-wrote with Ronald Jepperson and Peter Katzenstein: 'The term *identity* here is intended as a useful label, not as a signal of commitment to some exotic (presumably Parisian) social theory' (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996, 34). In his 1999 book *Social Theory of International Politics*, Wendt spends much time discussing issues of epistemology. One quote gives an idea of the horse he is trying to ride: 'Epistemologically, I have sided with positivists … our best hope is social science … [but] … on ontology—which is to my mind the more important issue—I will side with post-positivists. Like them I believe that social life is "ideas all the way down" (or almost anyway …)' (Wendt 1999, 90). He is, he states, 'a strong believer in science … I am a positivist' (ibid., 1999, 39). Indeed, I believe that the inconsistency between wanting it to be 'ideas all the way down' and, at the same time, wanting to be a social scientist is the key tension running through his recent book (for a detailed discussion of this tension, see Smith 2000). Adler is also explicit in distinguishing between constructivism and reflectivist (or as he terms them, relativist) approaches (Adler 1997, 330–337). These approaches are, he claims, based on 'untenable' assumptions that essentially deny the separate existence of both foundational truth and an independent reality. Finally, for Jeffrey Checkel: 'It is important to note that constructivists do not reject science or causal explanation: their quarrel with mainstream theories is ontological, not epistemological. The last point is key, for it suggests that constructivism has the potential to bridge the still vast divide separating the majority of IR theorists from postmodernists' (Checkel 1998, 327).

In my view, most constructivist work is far closer to rationalism than it is to reflectivism, because it shares methodological and epistemological assumptions with rationalism (most obviously, with neo-liberal

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institutionalism). By contrast, the gap between social constructivism and reflectivist work is fundamental. These constructivists can agree with rationalists that states are the main actors and that social science is the method of study. With reflectivists, these scholars can agree that ideas matter more than is represented by the neo-institutionalists. But, as long as the method of study is to be social science, the linkage with rationalism is much stronger and this is why it will in all likelihood be the main debate within the US mainstream for the next decade.

Of course, not all constructivism will be so close to rationalism and many constructivists will want to disassociate themselves from the kind of linkages to social science proposed by Wendt. There are many classifications of constructivism, one of the most useful being that of Ruggie (1998, 35–36), who distinguishes between three variants of social constructivism: *neo-classical*, based on intersubjective meanings and derived from Durkheim and Weber; *post-modernist*, based on a decisive epistemological break with modernism and derived from the work of Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida; and *naturalistic*, based on the philosophical doctrine of scientific realism, derived from the work of Bhaskar. A more straightforward one is to distinguish between the kind of constructivism developed by Wendt and that of two of the other earlier founders of the approach, Nick Onuf and Freidrich Kratochwil (see Onuf 1989 and 1998; Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Kratochwil 1989). The essence of this distinction concerns the form of theory appropriate for analysing the social world. Wendt is fundamentally a positivist and a naturalist on questions of knowledge and this means that analysis is limited to certain kinds of things in the social world and these things can be analysed by using the same methods as those used in the natural sciences. The problem with all this is that there is an important intellectual tradition that sees these worlds as distinct, requiring distinct and different analytical approaches and this tradition is the one that is the basis of the form of constructivism preferred by Onuf and Kratochwil. Thus, the crucial distinction is that, whereas Wendt ends up painting a world that seems very similar to that painted by rationalists, the social worlds seen by Onuf and Kratochwil are very different to those of the rationalists. The Onuf/Kratochwil form of constructivism sees a very different kind of social world to that seen by Wendt. It is a world in which actors, whoever they are, are governed by language, rules and choices. This view of the social world has its intellectual roots in the work of writers such as Wittgenstein and Winch and, thus, it is a view that does not subscribe to the naturalism of Wendt.

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This distinction between fundamentally different forms of constructivism fits with my long-stated claim that there are always at least two stories to tell about the social world (see Hollis and Smith 1990). In this light the fact that Wendt and Onuf/Kratochwil have very different forms of social theory underlying their constructivism is not surprising, since they are, despite Wendt's comments to the contrary, on different sides of the explaining/understanding divide. Confusingly, Wendt places himself in the north-east quadrant of the matrix produced by the divisions between holism/individualism and materialism/idealism: he sees himself as a holist/idealist. The problem is that this is exactly where Winch and Wittgenstein are located as, not surprisingly, are Onuf and Kratochwil. Despite his protests, then, I see Wendt as ultimately depending on social theorists who work in the north-west quadrant (materialism/holism) and my central critique of his work (see Smith, 2000) is that his social theory ultimately has to fall on the explaining side of the line, hence his concern to develop causal analysis and to see constitutive analysis as secondary to it. Having said all of which, it is *precisely* this fact that makes his form of social constructivism so appealing to the rationalist mainstream.

Still an American social science?

I now want to turn to examine whether IR remains an American social science. In his 1977 article, Stanley Hoffmann famously argued that the discipline of IR developed not in the UK (where the first university department had been founded in 1919), but in the US in the aftermath of the Second World War. He noted that this was because of the confluence of a specific circumstance and three causes. The key circumstance was 'the rise of the United States to world power' (Hoffmann 1987 [1977], 6) and the causes were: 'intellectual predispositions, political circumstances, and institutional opportunities' (Hoffmann 1987 [1977], 7–8).

He notes three intellectual predispositions: firstly, that problems can be solved by the scientific method and that this will result in progress; secondly, that IR as a social science benefited from the prestige accorded both to the natural science and to economics; and thirdly, the impact of European scholars who had emigrated to the US, and who, coming from a very different intellectual tradition to that of IR in the US, tended to ask much larger questions, about ends rather than means, about choices rather than techniques, and ask about them more conceptually than their US counterparts (ibid., 8–9). The political circumstances, especially the fact that the US's role in world affairs was undergoing a fundamental

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transformation, meant that political scientists in the US interested in power had the biggest power struggle in the world on their doorstep, namely the US—Soviet confrontation. It also meant that policy-makers were interested in precisely the kind of expertise and opinions that the developing IR community were willing to offer. As Hoffmann puts it: 'What the leaders looked for, once the cold war started, was some intellectual compass … "Realism" … precisely provided what was necessary' (ibid., 10).

Finally, there were three sets of institutional opportunities which Hoffmann argues did not exist anywhere else in the world other than the US: the link between the scholarly community and government, which meant that academics and policy-makers moved back and forth between universities and think-tanks and government; the existence of wealthy foundations, which linked the 'kitchens of power' with the 'academic salons' and, thus, could create a 'seamless pluralism' to link the policy concerns of government to the academic research community; and the fact that the universities were flexible and operated in a mass education market, which allowed them to innovate and specialise in their research activities—in short, they were able to respond to the demands of government in a way that was impossible in the European university sector of the time.

This view of US dominance was backed up by Kal Holsti in his 1985 survey of the state of the field. Holsti, having looked in detail at the discipline in eight countries, concludes that: 'Most of the mutually acknowledged literature has been produced by scholars from only two of more than 155 countries the United States and Great Britain. There is, in brief, a British—American intellectual condominium' (Holsti 1985, 103). But, even here, the picture is one of a US-dominated condominium: in his survey of texts, he found that only 11.1 per cent of references were to British scholars, compared with 74.1 per cent to US scholars. On the basis of his survey, he concludes that there is a: 'reliance solely on Americans to produce the new insights, theoretical formulations, paradigms, and data sets of our fields … the trends are operating in the direction of greater concentration' (ibid., 128).

One obvious result of this dependence on the US IR community is that certain kinds of insights, theories, paradigms and data sets dominate the IR literature. Alker and Biersteker's 1984 survey revealed that the US literature is concentrated upon one kind of methodology and one kind of theory. They looked at 17 reading lists from main US universities and coded the literature into traditional, behavioural and dialectical strands. The findings were that 70 per cent of the literature was behavioural, slightly over 20 per cent was traditional and less than 10 per cent was dialectical.

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The methodological concentration was very clear, but there was a similar ontological concentration: of the behavioural literature, 72 per cent was neo-realist and, of the traditional literature, 82 per cent was realist (Alker and Biersteker 1984, 129–130). Their survey also supported Holtsi's claims about the parochial character of US IR. The implication of these findings is that the discipline in the US was then (and is still, I would argue) both parochial and focused on a specific methodology and ontology. Together, these meant that not only did US theory dominate IR but so did the specific US commitment to a realist/neo-realist view of the world and a commitment to studying that world behaviourally.

This concern has been a theme of my own work over the last 20 years (for examples see Smith 1985; 1987; 1993 and 1994, 10–15) and I strongly believe that this remains the case today. The effect is to skew the discipline towards the policy concerns of the US and to ensure that the available theories for studying these concerns are theories that fit the US definition of 'proper' social science. This trend is exacerbated by two further considerations: first, the sheer size of the US IR community compared to those in the rest of the world and, secondly, the role of the main (US-based) academic journals in both setting the theoretical agenda and in prestige terms. The result is a global IR community that has historically followed the lead of the US IR community, which has played the central role in defining the discipline.

This issue has been dealt with extensively in an excellent recent paper by Ole Waever (1998). Waever starts by noting that there is ambivalence as to whether the special issue of the journal *International Organization,* to which he is contributing, is reporting on the state of US IR or of IR. He refers to an issue with which I was involved, when, in the late 1980s, the ISA (the US International Studies Association) wrote to all the other national IR organisations (including the British International Studies Association) asking for them to submit an annual report to the ISA! I was on the BISA executive at the time and this incident caused some hilarity, but also a great deal of annoyance and resentment. The point is that there remains an ambiguity about the role of the ISA: is it a North American professional organisation or the world body for IR? This, in short, is a microcosm of the problem of US IR. Waever's central argument is that there is US hegemony in IR and that it is currently centred on the extension of rational-choice theory to examining questions of international relations. Of course, it is rational-choice theory that is the paradigmatic rationalist tool of analysis.

Waever's article outlines a three-layer explanatory model to develop a comparative sociology of IR: he argues that the ways in which IR has

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evolved in different societies is a result of the interaction of three sets of issues, the nature of the society and the polity (including the intellectual style, traditions of political thought, state–society relations and foreign policy), the state of the social sciences (the general conditions and definitions of social science, and the pattern of academic disciplines) and the intellectual activities within IR (the social and intellectual structure of the discipline, and the theoretical traditions). Waever applies this model to four countries (Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States) and shows, to my mind very convincingly, why the IR communities in these countries have developed as they have. But, the main point for the purposes of this article is that Waever concludes that it is mistaken to think that other IR communities will develop in the same way as the US community has developed: this is because they differ from the US in terms of the three layers discussed in his model. The situation, then, is one in which:

> The internal intellectual structure of American IR explains both the recurring great debates and why American IR generates global leadership. It has a hierarchy centered on theoretical journals, and scholars must compete for access to these. This they have not had to do in Europe, where power historically rested either in sub-fields or in local universities, not in a disciplinary elite. American IR alone generates an apex that therefore comes to serve as the global core of the discipline (Waever 1998, 726).

His prognosis for the future is that the US IR community will tend towards 'national professionalization', focused on rational-choice theory, but that these methods will not travel well to the different types of IR communities in, for example, Germany, France and the UK. At the same time, these three IR communities are developing more in the way of national identities and also combining more to form a European IR community. Together these two trends will lead to: 'a slow shift from a pattern with only one professional and coherent national market—the United States, and the rest of the world more or less peripheral or disconnected—toward a relative American abdication and larger academic communities forming around their own independent cores in Europe' (ibid., 726).

Before turning to look at the situation in the UK, I want to point to some of the data that Waever cites to back up his claims about US dominance. He looked at eight leading IR journals (four US and four European) from 1970–1995 and found that in the four US journals American-based authors comprised 88.1 per cent of the total; in the four European journals

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the picture was much more balanced, with about 40 per cent American based and 40 per cent European based. He notes that, in the natural sciences, US journals tend to have about 40–50 per cent American authors, whilst in the social sciences it is typically over 80 per cent, with the two highest figures found in two political science journals (*American Political Science Review* 97 per cent; *American Journal of Political Science* 96.8 per cent) (Waever 1998, 697). Turning to the content of the journals, Waever looked at two from the US (*International Organization* and *International Studies Quarterly*) and two from Europe (*European Journal of International Relations* and *Review of International Studies*) to see what kind of IR they published. He coded the articles into six categories, three 'rationalist', two 'reflectivist' and one 'other', which mainly included historical or policy articles. Note that one of his reflectivist categories was for 'non-postmodern constructivism', which, I have previously argued, is in fact much closer to rationalism than the other reflectivist category and, therefore, the data somewhat overestimate the figures for reflectivist work. None the less, the data revealed a clear contrast. The three rationalist categories accounted for 77.9 per cent of articles in *International Studies Quarterly* and 63.9 per cent in *International Organization*, compared to 42.3 per cent in *European Journal of International Relations* and only 17.4 per cent in *Review of International Studies*. The figures for the two reflectivist categories were, respectively, 7.8 and 25 per cent for the two American journals and 40.4 and 40.6 per cent for the two European journals (ibid., 699–701). The data on post-modern, Marxist and feminist work are, again respectively, 2.6, 4.2, 15.4 and 18.8 per cent (ibid., 727). In my view, these data provide overwhelming support for the claim that the discipline remains a US-dominated one and also for the assertion that the form of IR that dominates the US IR community is very specific; it is a theory that emerges out of the particular relationship between political science, IR and the wider social sciences which is found in that country, but in virtually no other.

International relations in the United Kingdom

Finally, I want to turn to look at the situation of the discipline in the United Kingdom. I will make five points. First, there is a significant difference between the IR academic community of the UK and that of the US. The discipline in the US is usually part of political science and, as Ole Waever points out, US IR scholars are just as likely to see APSA as their professional body as ISA; in the UK, it is clear that BISA is the main body for IR

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(Waever 1998, 714). In the UK, IR is seen as having a number of strong intellectual connections with other disciplines (for example, economics, history, sociology, politics, philosophy, gender studies, anthropology and post-colonial studies); there is simply not the same lagged adherence to what is going on in political science (and I mean science) as occurs in the US. Disciplinary links are, therefore, more extensive than in the US and the result is that UK IR has many more intellectual influences acting on it. A paradoxical effect of this is that some in the UK try to establish IR as a separate discipline, whilst others are more comfortable to see IR operating at the intersection of a number of disciplines. These two perspectives of course share a common rejection of the US tendency to see IR as intimately linked (especially methodologically) to political science. Of course, there are some scholars in the US who wish to make the same, wider, linkages as is more commonly the case in the UK, but these individuals are both very much in the minority and very much on the periphery of the main power centres of the discipline.

Second, as a result of the different professional setting of IR in the UK, there is also a much greater intellectual pluralism in the field. This manifests itself in the fact that there is no one theoretical orthodoxy in the UK profession. Waever's data strongly support this assertion (Waever 1998, 696–701, 727). I am not implying that there is no gate-keeping, only that I think that UK journals and book series do try to publish good work from a variety of theoretical and normative positions. That situation is decidedly not found in the US. I am not claiming that there is a level playing field for work from every persuasion, but I do think that even a cursory look at the main UK journals reveals a much wider range of material being published than is the case in the comparable US journals. I would particularly point to the role of *Millennium* and *Review of International Studies* in publishing innovative and non-mainstream work over the years. The only comparison in North America is with journals such as *Alternatives* and *World Policy Journal*, but note that the first is edited in Canada (and, from 2000 onwards, in the UK) and the other is mainly a policy journal. In my view, the UK is far more open to new ideas and to a variety of methods and epistemological positions than is the US IR community. The UK community has strong centres of IR with very different specialisms and intellectual orientations and I feel that there is no attempt to judge these according to any one theoretical or methodological standard. This is a key difference; I think it is very hard indeed to imagine any UK-based academic, let alone past editors of the main journal, making the kind of statements made by Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner about what is legitimate social

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science. Legitimacy in the UK is more to do with the acceptance of work by the standards of the sub-field of IR than it is to do with fitting into a discipline-wide model of 'proper' social science.

Third, I think there is a much greater awareness in the UK community of the importance of history and the generic problems of transhistorical generalisations. UK IR never really followed the US in accepting behaviouralism and positivism has historically been much less established in the UK than in the US. There has always been resistance to the attempts of US IR to create a 'science' of IR, as Hedley Bull and Fred Northedge famously argued in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, the UK community is much more likely to analyse IR through detailed historical study. Again, I do not mean to imply that there are no international historians in US IR, only that the profession there is increasingly moving to seeing history as a database for the incremental testing of the dominant theories. In the UK positivism has never had such a hold on IR.

Fourth, the UK IR profession has a very ambiguous relationship with the development of a European IR community. On the one hand, there are those who want to create a counter-hegemonic IR in Europe; on the other, there are those who do not want to go down this road precisely because it threatens the cohesion of the Anglo-American intellectual tradition by involving other very different intellectual communities and traditions. There is also the important question of language: there is a very noticeable tendency to want to join with other European IR communities for regular conferences and workshops, but the expectation is that English will be the language used. An associated worry, which mirrors the European dilemma for many in civil society, is where exactly this leaves the non-European, non-English-speaking and less-developed world.

Fifth, the result of these differences is that the UK IR community is, in my view, in a far healthier state than is the profession in the United States. Not only do I think this is true intellectually, but I also think it is a factor that relates to the role of the universities in civil society. The very pluralism of the UK community, the very lack of one overriding theoretical model, the lower pressure towards intellectual conformity means that the UK community is much more likely to be able to respond to demands and pressures of globalisation than will be the case in the US. The kinds of problems thrown up by globalisation for the student of IR can be answered in many different ways, but the US community will do so from within one very narrow model of international relations. In addition, given the linkages between the academic and the policy worlds in the US, the academic debate is very likely to be steered by the policy needs of the US.

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I think that the pluralism within the UK IR community offers some protection against the debate in the academic world being only one step removed from the debates of the policy world and that that policy world is much more likely to be defined in the UK in terms of civil society; in the US it tends to be defined in terms of what the US government should do.

Conclusion

In my view IR remains an American social science both in terms of the policy agenda that US IR exports to the world in the name of relevant theory and in terms of the dominant (and often implicit) epistemological and methodological assumptions contained in that theory. This latter dominance is far more insidious than the former, especially because it is presented in the seemingly neutral language of being 'the social science enterprise'. The US IR community dominates the study of the subject through its sheer size and its role in producing theory. At present, the US IR community adheres to one dominant theory, rationalism, which is engaged in debate with a form of constructivism. Other, reflectivist, approaches receive little attention in US journals, textbooks or syllabuses. That picture is not found in the UK, where IR is a far more pluralist subject, with no one theoretical approach dominant. UK IR remains sceptical of the merits both of positivism and the associated belief that there is one standard to assess the quality of academic work: a much wider range of work is seen as legitimate in the UK than in the mainstream US literature. This results in a far more lively, vital and exciting IR community, one that can offer a variety of responses to the major problems and features of the contemporary global political system. In the US the central feature is the dominance of rationalism, with an emerging consensus around rational-choice theory as a method and this has the powerful effect of defining what counts as acceptable scholarship. This is simply not a feature of UK IR. But the fact that the UK IR community is more open and less conformist than the US does not significantly undermine the claim that IR remains an American social science. As the evidence of Holsti, Alker and Biersteker and Waever shows, the US continues to be hegemonic in the discipline, just as the US is hegemonic in the international political and economic systems. Waever may be right that the most likely development is for US IR to become less dominant as it becomes more fixated on rational-choice theory (an approach which he claims does not travel well) and as European IR develops more powerful national (and European) communities; but at the turn of the millennium Hoffmann's assertions about IR as an American

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social science remain accurate. The challenge for UK IR is to decide whether to stick to the Anglo-American analytic intellectual tradition or whether to throw its lot in with those in the rest of Europe who want to create a distinctive European IR community. As to this, of course, only time will tell, but I hope that I have established the strength and vitality of IR in the UK and indicated just why it both challenges, and yet is ultimately dependent on, the American discipline of IR. Just as UK foreign policy-makers face choices about the UK's relationship with Europe and the US, so, in an interesting twist of fate, does the UK's IR community.

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