

Theoretical Pluralism in IR: Possibilities and Limits

By

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Abstract: This chapter offers a critical assessment of bridge building and pluralism in international-relations (IR) theory. I begin by placing recent moves towards pluralism in context, asking why one saw an upsurge of interest in it only beginning in the mid-1990s. The chapter then offers a net assessment of pluralism in three areas – international institutions, normative theory, and studies of civil war. In each case, the analysis details the ways in which and the extent to which theoretical pluralism has come to define a particular subfield. I argue that contemporary IR does look different – and better - due to such efforts; at the same time, it faces challenges that were not there in the early 1990s and are a direct consequence of the turn to pluralism. In the conclusion, I highlight two such challenges - theoretical cumulation and meta-theory – and argue they should be at the heart of a reinvigorated research program on bridge building, one where theory is taken seriously and epistemological divides are transgressed.

The other chapters in Part 1 of this volume outline and review theories about, approaches to or issues within international relations – postmodernism, historiography, rational choice, normative theory, and the like. This essay takes a different tack, instead asking what happens when we bring insights from two or more theories to bear on a particular problem – a strategy one might call theoretical pluralism or bridge building.¹ Whatever the name, this pluralistic approach has become an IR cottage industry over the past decade. Scholars have combined elements of different social theories (rational choice and constructivism), different research programs (the management and enforcements schools in compliance), and even different types of theory (problem-solving and critical/normative).

Such work has reached a critical mass, as evidence by numerous panels at meetings of professional associations, entire books devoted to the topic (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b), its endorsement by presidents of the International Studies Association (Lake, 2011), and – not least – the endless ways in which the central metaphor of bridge building has by now been deconstructed. What is the bridge spanning? A (theoretical) divide? A (meta-theoretical) chasm? Does it have just one lane, or is ‘traffic’ possible in both directions? Do we build a bridge to understand better what’s on the other side? Or is the goal simply to meet somewhere in midstream?

Metaphorical deconstructions aside, this chapter argues that the bridge builders have largely done their job well. The landscape of contemporary IR looks different thanks to their efforts. We understand more fully the effects of international institutions, the workings of various international regimes (human rights, environmental), the concept of rationality, the role of language in international affairs, the relations between norms and interests, between the material and social worlds – to give just a few examples. At the same time, efforts at pluralism have lost steam in recent years, while criticism of it has increased.

To capture this mixed picture, the chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by placing the move towards theoretical pluralism in context, asking why one saw an upsurge of interest in it

only beginning in the mid-1990s. The chapter then offers a net assessment of these efforts in three areas – international institutions, normative theory, and studies of civil war. In each case, the analysis details the ways in which and the extent to which theoretical pluralism has come to define a particular subfield. I argue that contemporary IR does look different – and better - due to bridge building; yet, at the same time, it faces challenges that were not there in the early 1990s and are a direct consequence of the turn to pluralism. In the conclusion, I highlight two such challenges - theoretical cumulation and meta-theory – and argue they should be at the heart of a reinvigorated pluralist research program, one where theory is taken seriously and epistemological divides are transgressed.

FROM MONISM TO (SEMI-) PLURALISM

Why the explosion of interest in bridge-building only beginning in the mid-1990s? The answer is partly external events (see also Schmidt, in this volume). The end of the Cold War, intensified globalization and deepening integration in Europe placed a premium on capturing – theoretically – complexity. However, equally important were dynamics internal to the discipline, where more and more favoured an end to paradigm wars and embraced an attitude of let's just get on with it.

To appreciate these changes, one needs first to set the stage, by considering IR theory circa 1990. It would not be much of a caricature to say IR - especially in America - was characterised by a world of 'isms' that did not much talk to each other. Partly this was a function of national traditions and geography (Wæver, 1998); however, theoretically monist paradigms played an even more important role.

For sure, this state of affairs had advantages, with one seeing theoretical advance within paradigms. Consider the debate between neorealists and neoliberals. What began as a shouting match became – over time – a nuanced and increasingly rigorous discussion of key

issues separating these scholars – for example, the specific role and scope conditions of relative and absolute gains in world politics (Baldwin, 1993). Within constructivism, one saw a healthy debate over the relation between critical and substantive theory – in particular, the extent to which empirical findings needed to be accommodated within critical/normative approaches (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998).

Yet, such achievements came at a price. Conversation across paradigms was limited, and closed citation cartels dominated. For example, the degree of exchange between constructivists and neorealists/neoliberals could be captured in set-theoretic notation – the null set. Instead, meta-debates and a dialogue of the deaf too often were the norm (Schmidt, in this volume; Wight, in this volume). Moreover, some theorists favored a gladiator approach, where – like a Roman warrior on his chariot - one perspective went forth and slayed all others, with the latter presented in highly simplified form.²

This theoretical monism had real world costs, undercutting efforts to explain better key features of international politics (see also Katzenstein and Sil, 2010a: 412-13). Language is a case in point. It is ubiquitous and in many ways the foundational fabric and medium through which politics works. In the early and mid-1990s, two exciting research programs addressed its role. One viewed language as an act of information exchange or signaling, where social agents stand outside of and manipulate it (Fearon, 1997); the other theorized language as deep structures of discourse and meaning that make agency possible in the first place (Doty, 1993). From a practical perspective, the problem was that such research – by not combining insights – missed a very large part of how language actually did and does work in the international realm, be it through deliberation, persuasion, arguments, rhetoric and the like.

The Change

By the late 1990s, change was afoot, with important publication outlets and key theorists – in both Europe and North America - signaling a turn to pluralism. In 1997, the premier journal of European IR, the *European Journal of International Relations*, published a conceptual essay by a leading international relations theorist (Adler, 1997). It advocated a bridgeable mid-point between rational choice and constructivism; indeed, the article's title – 'Seizing the Middle Ground' – captured well its pluralist instincts.

A little over a year later, *International Organization* – arguably the most prestigious IR journal in North America - published a special issue dedicated to its 50th anniversary. After internal deliberation and debate, it was agreed not to structure the issue around particular substantive theories (realism, say), but around the social theories – rationalism and constructivism – underlying them. Furthermore, it was decided that the special issue would cautiously raise the topic of theoretical pluralism.³ It was thus briefly addressed in the introduction by Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner (1998: 678-82), and in two of the remaining eleven essays (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; March and Olsen, 1998). However, the pluralism on offer had clear epistemological limits. In particular, building connections to more radical forms of constructivism was deemed a bridge too far (Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner, 1998: 677-78).

Taken together, the Adler article and the *International Organization* fiftieth-anniversary issue heralded an important change. Most important for my purposes, a window was now ajar for those in favor of promoting theoretical pluralism. Indeed, in 2002, two prominent IR theorists returned to and elaborated on the theme of pluralism. Writing in the first edition of this *Handbook*, James Fearon and Alexander Wendt (2002) analyzed a number of concepts and issues – logics of action, norms, preference formation – where both rationalism and constructivism could be applied. Their conclusion is worth quoting at length, as it nicely captures the gist of bridge building.

This prompts a concluding suggestion: that the rationalism-constructivism issue be seen not as a debate but as a conversation

... Rather than a dialogue of the deaf in which each side tries to marginalize or subsume the other in the name of methodological fundamentalism, the challenge now should be to combine insights, cross boundaries and, if possible, synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68).

Due to both the quality of their arguments and positions within the field, the theorists surveyed above largely set the parameters for how IR would tackle the issue of pluralism. In this regard, it is worth highlighting two points. First and perhaps understandable given the agenda-setting nature of these early commentaries, most attention was on legitimating the idea of pluralism. An empirically oriented bridge builder could read Fearon and Wendt's inspiring words, but at the same time get precious little advice on how actually to do it. What exactly would be the result when one 'combines insights' and 'crosses boundaries'? To do this well, were particular methods or research designs necessary?

Second, questions of epistemology and meta-theory received little attention. More carefully put, epistemology was controlled for in that most of these early proponents of pluralism subscribed to some form of positivism. While this shared starting point allowed scholars to develop ideas about theoretical bridge building without having to worry about meta-theory, it also had unfortunate side effects. For one, it means the 'conversation' proposed by Fearon and Wendt has overwhelmingly been between proponents of rational choice and one particular form of constructivism - the conventional type - that subscribes to positivism; missing are the interpretive variants (Adler, in this volume; Zehfuss, in this volume; Tickner and Sjoberg, in this volume). And given the dominance of conventional constructivism in the US, efforts at pluralism have taken on a decidedly American flavor (Checkel, 2007a).⁴

More important, this bracketing of meta-theory has led bridge builders to neglect foundational issues. Are there philosophical limits to the exercise? If the goal is to gain more analytic leverage on the world around us, is there any obvious stopping point in an epistemological sense? On the one hand, all would agree that efforts at pluralism combining a deeply anti-foundational perspective with game theory make little sense (see also Zehfuss, in

this volume). Yet, short of this extreme, what guidance or rules do we have to structure a bridge-building exercise that might transcend epistemological divides?

Summary

Since the mid-1990s, one has seen an increase in the theory and practice of pluralism. Bridge building submissions to key publications have grown – for example, from zero to 10% at *International Organization* - while journals have devoted entire special issues to the topic (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille, 2003a; Checkel, 2007b).⁵ A further testimony to this interest is a growing literature that explicitly criticizes bridge building along a number of dimensions – disciplinary, practical and meta-theoretical (Guzzini, 2000; Nau, 2011; Roundtable, 2009; Smith, 2003; Zehfuss, 2002).

Yet, such trends must be kept in perspective. The heading for this section, after all, was ‘From Monism to (Semi-) Pluralism,’ and that semi- needs to be stressed. Entire IR research programs have shown little interest in building theoretically plural arguments – consider work on open economy politics within American IPE scholarship (Oatley, 2011) or on discourse and textual analysis in the UK and continental Europe (Milliken, 1999; Hopf, 2007). It is also not clear to what extent – if at all - such topics are covered in graduate seminars or upper-level undergraduate courses.

The TRIPS survey - Teaching and Research in International Politics – developed and conducted by the College of William and Mary offers additional evidence in support of this mixed picture. In its 2008 edition, 44% of the respondents – 2,700 IR scholars from 10 different countries - felt that rationalism and constructivism should remain distinct explanations, while 40% thought they could be ‘usefully synthesized to create a more complete IR theory.’ Moreover, in their ranking of the most influential IR theorists of the past 20 years, only one

bridge builder – Peter Katzenstein of Cornell University – made it into the top ten, and then only in ninth place (Jordan, *et al*, 2009: 42-44).

More recently, the scholars associated with the TRIPS project have supplemented their surveys with an analysis of articles published in twelve leading IR journals between 1980 and 2007.⁶ This is an important extension, for if surveys capture what we say, examining journal publications reveals what IR as a community *does*. Yet, this turn to actual practice does not change the picture sketched above.

Despite a growing enthusiasm in IR for synthesis or ‘eclectic theorizing’ ... only a small number of articles advance theories that explicitly marry elements of two or more distinct paradigms. The overwhelming majority of articles engage in competitive theory testing, where hypotheses derived from two or more competing theories are pitted against each other to see which better explains an empirical pattern (Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 448).

Putting this in numerical terms, 163 out of 2806 total coded articles – or 6% - qualified as attempts at theoretically plural bridge building.⁷

PLURALISM AND BRIDGE BUILDING IN PRACTICE

Whatever inroads it has made in the field, has bridge building delivered? The current section addresses this issue and does so by first conducting a net assessment of such efforts in two subfields – international institutions and normative theory - detailing the ways in which and the extent to which theoretical pluralism has come to define them. The issue is value added: Would we be worse off if there had been no such efforts? In counterfactual terms, would contemporary IR theory look any different absent this turn to pluralism? To avoid oversampling on my ‘dependent variable,’ the section also considers a vibrant contemporary research program – on civil war – where bridge building has not been the norm. What has it gained – and lost – in comparison to the bridge builders?

I set the stage for my assessment by first defining theoretical pluralism in more detail and then offering two strategies for carrying it out.

Theoretical Pluralism: Concept and Strategies

To define theoretical pluralism, it is helpful to delimit its scope. It is not about subsumption, where one theory is parasitic on and a special case of another; nor is it about synthesis, where one puts together different entities (theories, in this case) to make a whole that is new and different (see also Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b: 17).⁸ Yet within these broad bounds, there is quite some scope for specification. I thus define theoretical pluralism as an explicit effort to utilize insights and variables from two or more theoretical approaches to make better sense of a real-world problem. ‘To utilize insights’ means to borrow explanatory variables from different theoretical approaches and bring them together in a single explanation, with ‘theoretical approaches’ including both specific theories (say, offensive realism) as well as the underlying toolkits (instrumental rationalism, say) upon which broader families of theories are built. ‘To make better sense’ means to capture a greater amount of the analytic/causal complexity at work in a given puzzle or problem than would be the case if a single theory was used.

How, then, might one recognize a theoretically plural argument if it were to walk through the door? It would be an argument seeking to explain and understand a real-world problem by combining explanatory variables from two or more theoretical approaches to capture complexity. Consider a real-world problem of the early years of the new millennium: the ongoing civil conflict in and around the Democratic Republic of Congo. One puzzle - for both theory and policy - was the continuing ability of rebel groups to (re-)mobilize in this conflict. An important part of the answer was the civil war there was anything but an affair internal to Congo; it had critically important transnational dimensions. Thus, a theoretically plural

argument seeking to capture the causal complexity behind rebel group mobilization might combine socialization variables from transnational theories (Wood, 2010) with control and hierarchy variables stressed in principal-agent accounts (Gates, 2002).

Several comments on the above are in order. First, the definition leaves important issues unaddressed – what ‘combining’ means in an operational sense and what kind of theory results from such an argument. Second, it builds upon the ambitions articulated so nicely in Fearon and Wendt’s agenda-setting essay in the first edition of this *Handbook*: to ‘synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality’ (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68). Third, my understanding of theoretical pluralism is consistent with those offered by other scholars seeking to promote it – including the ‘analytic eclecticism’ of Katzenstein and Sil (2010b: 10, 19) or of Lake (2011: 466, 472), or the ‘theoretical synthesis’ of TRIPS (Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 448).⁹

At the end of the day, though, we do – as IR *theorists* – need to ask what kind of theory results from pluralism. Given its emphasis on analyzing complexity, the logical choice would seem to be middle-range theory, as it captures causal complexity – usually invoking several independent variables – over a spatially or temporally delimited frame (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; George, 1993). Recently, proponents of bridge building have indeed explicitly embraced this theoretical goal (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010a: 415; Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b: 21-22; Lake, 2011; see also Bernstein, Lebow, Stein and Weber, 2007: 234-35).

This is both a progressive and troubling move. It is progressive because bridge builders now have a clear theoretical goal. It is troubling because pluralists use the term in much the same way as many others in contemporary scholarship – as a buzz phrase lacking operational content. As a result, weaknesses associated with middle-range theory – over-determined outcomes, non-cumulating lists of causal mechanisms (see also Bennett, 2010) – are not addressed, points to which I return in the chapter’s last section.

Turning from the end point of bridge building – middle range frameworks – to the actual construction of these theoretically plural bridges, we need to give operational content to the phrase ‘combining explanatory variables from two or more theoretical approaches.’ In this context, what does combine mean? Here, there is less clarity in the literature. For some, combine simply denotes ‘conscious bridge building between or among the theories’ (Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 448). Of course, this begs what ‘conscious bridge building’ entails. For Katzenstein and Sil (2010b: 10), it means to examine how diverse mechanisms from differing theories ‘might interact with each other, and how ... they can combine to affect outcomes.’

These quotes have clear intuitive appeal. After all, the idea of pluralism is – at some level – about combinatorial possibilities and interaction effects. The devil, though, is in the details, for these same quotes do not tell the aspiring bridge builder how actually to do it. However, two operational strategies for building theoretically plural frameworks do emerge from earlier work: domain of application and temporal sequencing (Caporaso, Checkel, Jupille, 2003b: 21-23).

The domain of application strategy strives for a minimal pluralism in the sense that, while two theories might appeal to completely independent explanatory factors, when combined they could increase our ability to explain the empirical world. Any theory has scope conditions – when and under what conditions do we expect it to be applicable. The domain strategy works by identifying the respective turfs and ‘home domains’ of each theory, by specifying how each explanation works, and finally by bringing together each home turf in some larger picture. Each theory is specified independently and the result is an additive theory that is more comprehensive than the separate theories.

Scholars have advanced a number of domain-of-application propositions. For example, we might imagine that high substantive stakes invite rational calculation, while relatively low stakes allow for non-calculative decision making (March and Olsen, 1998: 952-53). Or we might postulate that the more routine the behavior, the more easily it is institutionalized

(backgrounded). In organizational theory and general systems theory, for example, those parts of the environment that can be mapped in some stable sense are hardwired into the organization and become part of its lower (administrative) functions. Less stable, less easily mapped aspects of the environment remain on the strategic agenda.

The key to this strategy is properly to specify the scope conditions of each theory, what its domain is, and how it relates to other theories. If one theory provides some value-added to the other, we can improve our efforts by this approach. Admittedly, this works best when multiple theories focus on similar explananda, when explanatory variables have little overlap, and when these variables do not interact in their influence on outcomes.

A second strategy relates closely to the first, but adds a time dimension, suggesting that each theory depends on the other temporally to explain a given outcome. Where domain-of-application approaches posit different empirical domains within one frame of time, sequencing means that variables from both approaches work together over time to explain a given domain. Legro's (1996) cooperation two-step, in which a culturalist account of preference formation precedes a rationalist account of conflict and cooperation, provides a clear example (see also Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner, 1998: 680-81; March and Olsen, 1998: 953).

One problem with such division-of-labour arguments is that the pluralism on offer is even weaker than in the domain-of-application strategy. Each theory works in isolation from the other, at a particular point in time. The possibilities of intellectual-theoretical cross fertilization are minimal if not nil; each theory and scholar does what he/she does, and then passes things on to the next (see also Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 64).

With these conceptual and operational nuts and bolts in hand, the important question to ask is how a turn to theoretical pluralism has enriched international relations.

International Institutions

The study of international institutions and organizations (IO's) has been a central IR concern since the early years after World War II (Martin and Simmons, 1998). The literature here is rich and deep, ranging from sociological/organizational studies of IO learning (Haas, 1990), to the rational-choice/contractualist approach of neo-liberal institutionalism (Keohane, 1984), to contemporary studies that apply credible commitment theory to the International Criminal Court (Simmons and Danner, 2010). Much of this research is excellent and has provided the IR community with a trove of insights on the multiple roles institutions and IO's can play in world politics (Acharya and Johnston, 2007; Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, for example). Neo-liberal institutionalism in particular is a model of a progressive research program, with scholars coherently and cumulably building upon earlier work.

At the same time, work in this subfield made few efforts to build plural arguments on IO's. Instead, scholars might speculate on dynamics not captured by their theories, such as state interests changing over the long term (Keohane, 1984), or report un-theorized empirical findings inconsistent with their approach. On the latter, Wallander's book (1999) on institutions and Russian/German security cooperation is exemplary, reporting results (changing interests, non-strategic behavior) inconsistent with her rational-choice framework. In neither case, however, is there any effort to build a plural framework that captures this causal complexity.

Since the start of the new millennium, this state of affairs has changed. Several theorists and research projects – taking a problem-driven approach to the study of international institutions – have sought to capture their multiple roles through bridge-building efforts. Far from an afterthought, theoretical pluralism has been a guiding principle from the start. In this case, it meant capturing both rationalist understandings of institutions (as strategic environments where instrumentally rational actors bargain in defense of existing interests) and constructivist views (institutions as social environments where communicatively rational actors argue and learn new interests).

The role institutions play in changing core properties of states and state agents – specifically through socialization – has been a theme in the literature for over 30 years. In 1979, Kenneth Waltz invoked socialization as a mechanism via which states responded to system imperatives (Waltz, 1979); the English School often spoke of the socializing power of international society (Alderson, 2001); more recently, constructivists accorded socialization a central role in their studies (Price, 1998).

Building upon this work, Checkel (2007b) and collaborators sought to build theoretically plural arguments on socialization. Using international institutions in Europe as their laboratory and a domain of application bridge-building strategy, they theorized the mechanisms of institutional socialization – *from the start* – as a product of both rational-choice and constructivist dynamics. Contributors theorized scope conditions for particular socialization mechanisms – when and under what conditions they expected them to be applicable. Thus, Alexandra Gheciu, in a study of NATO, deduced conditions (noviceness, insulation, teacher-pupil relation) when persuasion ought to be successful; their absence then indicated when rationalist mechanisms such as cost-benefit calculations would be at work (Gheciu, 2005; see also Checkel, 2003; Johnston, 2008).

The end result was a study that captured causal complexity and provided more complete explanations of how international institutions could socialize states and individuals (see also Kelley, 2004). Theoretical pluralism was achieved via a strategy that stressed the development of scope conditions. Compared to either a pure rationalist or constructivist argument, there was value added - both theoretically and empirically.

Theoretically, the project demonstrated that socialization – once broken down into its component mechanisms – required insights from both rationalism and constructivism to be properly understood. Empirically, it showed that international socialization – even in the most likely case of contemporary Europe – was trumped by national dynamics. And those national variables were only fully captured by the use of both rational choice and constructivist

theorizing. In sum, and to employ Fearon and Wendt's criteria, Checkel and collaborators had delivered, providing 'more compelling answers and a better picture of reality' (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68).

What kind of theory emerges from such an exercise, however? How do others build upon these findings in a cumulative way to advance the theoretical frontier? To ask – and begin to answer – such questions, alerts one to a trade-off. Acquiring a 'better picture of reality' complicates the development and refinement of theory. At issue here is not that old warhorse parsimony. Rather, it is what body of theory emerges from mid-range bridge building work? Checkel and collaborators (2007b) theorized three causal mechanisms with certain scope conditions. Others might then follow by theorizing additional causal mechanisms, or by testing their mechanisms on different empirical material (outside Europe), or by refining the scope conditions. These are all plausible ways to proceed, but it is not clear how the parts add up to a whole.

A second example of an explicit bridge-building effort in the area of international institutions is a project on human rights led by Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink (1999). It sought to develop a generalizable model explaining the process through which international norms have effects at the national level. More important for my purposes, the model was conceived from the beginning as a plural one integrating insights from both rational choice and social constructivism.

To accomplish the latter, Risse, *et al*, employed a temporal-sequencing bridge building strategy, with the common domain being the domestic impact of international norms. Their five-stage model works as follows. Its starting point is a situation where elites in rights-violating states are entrapped by a vise of transnational and domestic pressure generated by a broad array of agents. In phase 2, norms further mobilize such actors, who engage in processes of shaming and moral consciousness-raising. During the early parts of phase 3, compliance with human-rights standards occurs - if at all - through tactical concessions, that is, shifts in the

behaviors and strategies of state elites; their preferences do not change. Towards the end of this third phase, however, the interaction between state officials and social actors shifts. The former now rethink their core preferences as they engage (phase 4) in argumentation and dialogue with the latter. Finally, during phase 5, these newly learned preferences become internalized.

Put differently, it is the combination of different theoretical approaches, working at different times, that explains the outcome. Instrumental adaptation predominates during phases 1, 2 and part of 3; argumentative discourse comes to the fore during phases 3 and, especially, 4; and institutionalization dominates Phase 5. In more formal terms, a change occurs from the instrumental rationality preferred by rational choice, to the Habermasian argumentative rationality of constructivists, and then, finally, to the rule-governed behavior of institutional theory.

Using this theoretically plural frame, the volume's empirical studies provide structured and rich evidence that compliance with international prescriptions is not just about learning new appropriate behavior, as many constructivists might argue. Nor, however, is it all about calculating international or domestic costs. Rather, by combining these insights, Risse and collaborators provide scholars with a richer picture of the multiple causal pathways through which norms matter. The resulting explanation is complex, while at the same time not degenerating into a kitchen sink argument where everything matters (see also Keck and Sikkink, 1998). It is a middle-range account incorporating interactions among multiple mechanisms and logics – what Katzenstein and Sil (2010b: 19) label a central marker of eclectic scholarship.

The value added here comes from the theoretically plural starting point. It allowed Risse, *et al*, to advance a multi-causal model that mapped very closely into the real world of international human rights, where even the most casual observer will appreciate that change comes from both arm-twisting and threats *and* the normative power of the ideals of human dignity. Prior to the publication of this book, academic scholarship had tended to stress one side of the story or the other.

Whether the five-stage model is generalizable is another matter. Large and economically powerful states with poor human-rights records such as China and Russia seem immune to the dynamics sketched by Risse, *et al* (Mendelson, 2002). In the first decade after its publication, few studies sought to replicate the volume's approach. Moreover, recent work hailed as the cutting-edge on international institutions and human rights avoids complicated, theoretically plural models, instead offering a largely rationalist take on the subject matter (Simmons, 2009).¹⁰ None of this is to diminish the accomplishments of Risse and collaborators; rather, it is again to point to an apparent tradeoff between theoretical pluralism and theoretical cumulation.

Two final comments are in order regarding these examples of bridge building. For one, meta-theory is not an issue. There may be some bridge building at the level of social theory – between rational choice and conventional constructivism – but at the more foundational level of epistemology, no bridges are crossed. Positivism or its close relation scientific realism (Wight, in this volume; Wight, 2006) is the philosophical starting point for all involved.

In addition and as noted earlier, IR has not done a good job theorizing the multifaceted ways in which language shapes international politics. We had one group of scholars talking about signaling and another about discourse. Now, however, and as a direct consequence of the theoretically plural efforts outlined above, IR has a vastly richer set of tools for studying language's multiple roles, including work on persuasion (Johnston, 2008), arguing (Risse, 2000), rhetorical action (Schimmelfennig, 2003), social learning (Checkel, 2001) and social influence (Johnston, 2001).

Normative Theory

Normative theory is about ought and not necessarily the why of substantive, problem-solving approaches. Bridge building means to 'synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining

more compelling answers and a better picture of reality' (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68). Yet, normative theory is not always about reality. Moreover, as previously noted, bridge building has gained its most forceful advocates in the US, while normative theory has deeper roots in Europe (Hurrell and Macdonald, in this volume; Waeber, 1998).

At first glance, then, arguments about theoretical pluralism and normative theory might seem misplaced. Yet, the rise of an empirically oriented constructivism since the mid-1990s has led to a situation where the interests of a growing number of scholars with substantive research foci intersect with the concerns of normative/ethical/critical theory (Price and Reus-Smit, 1998; Reus-Smit, 2008). If – above - the bridge building was in the context of shared research interests – the role of international institutions in global politics, say – here it is between different types of theory: normative/critical and problem solving.

In this latter case, bridge building has not resulted in specific operational strategies for gaining a better picture of reality. Rather, it is about utilizing empirical, problem-solving theory 'to think through the normative-empirical gap, thereby offering an avenue for grounding ethical claims in an additionally rigorous way' (Price, 2008a: 199; see also Price, 2008b: *passim*). Such a bridge building exercise would have benefits in both directions – also alerting empirical theorists of their underspecified use of insights from normative-ethical theory.

As an example, consider Habermas' work on deliberation and discourse ethics and its influence in contemporary IR. In a conceptual and normative sense, this impact has been wide ranging, from the role of deliberation in global and European governance (Eriksen and Fossum, 2000), to new normative criteria for identity and democracy in a globalized/Europeanized world (Eriksen, 2009), to the power of arguments in global politics (Mueller, 2004; Risse, 2000) and international negotiations (Risse and Kleine, 2010). Yet, to paraphrase Price, 'an empirical-normative gap' has appeared in the more operational applications of Habermasian insights.

This gap is seen in numerous ways. Some scholars worry that – empirically – it is almost impossible to measure the role that arguments play in the real-world of diplomacy

(Deitelhoff and Mueller, 2005). Others suggest that Habermas' proposals on post-national citizenship and democracy simply fall short when integrated with a world where politics still (often) works via conflict and tough, self-interested negotiation (Castiglione, 2009).

Still others claim that when one studies deliberation empirically, it is not – contra Habermas – arguments that play a central role; rather, arguing is an underspecified concept that is parasitic on deeper, underlying social mechanisms such as persuasion (Checkel, 2001, 2003; Johnston, 2001). The latter problem seems pervasive in the IR literature seeking to apply Habermas empirically. An all too typical pattern is to start the analysis with a reference to Habermas and his discourse theory, and then to operationalize the argument by turning to the concept of persuasion (Deitelhoff, 2009: 35, *passim*, for example).

The response to such concerns should not be a collective IR dismissal of Habermasian theory and concepts. Rather, it should be to engage in bridge building, in two different senses. From a normative-ethical-critical perspective, such gaps demand greater attention to 'what additional ethically justifiable strategies might be available' to augment 'the elusive ideal speech situation' (Price, 2008a: 202). For empirical scholars, the bridge to be built involves integrating the social theory of Habermas with research methodologies (process tracing, discourse analysis, agent-based modeling) and substantive, empirical theory (social-psychological work on persuasion; constructivist work on identity). This will allow them to offer operational arguments that, while no longer susceptible to the label 'utopian' (Price, 2008a: 200-203), deliver far more than standard strategic choice accounts.

Holzscheiter's work on the rights of children in international politics is a good example of the payoff of such a move. Noting that discourse and arguing have become 'the catchiest of catchwords' in contemporary IR (Holscheiter, 2010: 6), she goes on to develop a theoretically plural argument combining (structural) discourse and (processual) arguing. More important, it is an operational and empirical framework that draws upon the methodology of critical discourse analysis to capture how language – in various forms - played a key role in

shaping the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (Holscheiter, 2010: chapters 1-3). Holscheiter's argument is anything but utopian – largely because its decidedly operational nature leads it to depart quite significantly from the core of Habermasian theory.

In sum, with normative theory, one sees less concern with or efforts at bridge building. It is worth briefly addressing possible reasons for this state of affairs. Earlier, I argued that bridge building in this area means to integrate insights from normative and problem-solving theory. This is correct, but it actually understates what is occurring, as these two types of theory rest on differing philosophical foundations. The former is interpretive in a critical sense, while the latter has long been associated with positivism (on these distinctions, see Wight, in this volume).

Bridge building then means not just developing scope conditions for when, say, rationalist or constructivist mechanisms prevail, but translating across very different philosophical commitments (Reus-Smit, 2008: 70-81). Consider again the case of Habermasian theory. It is really any surprise that his insights are not amenable to easy empirical operationalization? After all, this is Juergen Habermas, a founder of the Frankfurt School of critical social theory. Further complicating efforts at bridge building, many scholars who draw upon his insights, although they occasionally make reference to the empirical, are at heart deeply committed to a critical project that promotes progressive change in global politics (Eriksen, 2006; Sjursen, 2006, for example). There is nothing wrong with such engagement; however, it does severely circumscribe the possibility of or interest in bridge building.

Civil War

Civil war has become the dominant mode of organized violence in the post-Cold War international system. Depending upon the counting rule employed, such wars have afflicted from a third to a half of all nations; this type of warfare is not just extremely common, it is

persistent, with 20% of nations experiencing at least ten years of civil war since 1960 (Blattman and Miguel, 2010: 3-4; see also Walter, in this volume). If one did nothing more than read newspaper coverage of such conflicts, the possibilities for theoretical pluralism would seem limitless. The casual reader would quickly discover that civil wars are: caused by the strategic calculations of manipulative political elites; the result of deeply embedded social and cultural norms; all about greed and looting; all about emotions; driven by senses of community that transcend state borders; inflamed by external actors seeking materially to weaken one side in the conflict; and dominated by rebel groups who maintain their cohesion by socializing recruits, or by terrorizing them, or through the exercise of charismatic leadership.

Despite such headlines, this is an academic subfield where bridge-building arguments are notable mainly by their absence. Leading proponents of pluralism in the abstract adopt – for reasons unclear – a position of theoretical monism when writing on civil war (compare Fearon and Wendt, 2002, with Fearon and Laitin, 2003, 2011). In addition, the constructivist turn that has opened possibilities for bridge building in other IR subfields has received little play among students of civil war.

Contemporary studies of civil war are thus an interesting case for contextualizing my arguments on pluralism. What have these scholars gained and what have they lost by being more the gladiator than the bridge builder? I begin the analysis with a brief review of this literature, and then focus on an aspect of civil war particularly relevant for IR – its transnational and international dimensions; in both instances, my concern is the presence or absence of efforts at pluralism.

By contemporary, I refer to the vibrant research program on civil conflict that emerged in the mid-1990s, after the end of the Cold War. Scholars working in this area have researched all phases of civil wars, the various factors and actors that influence their conduct, and the role of the international community in post-conflict peace building (Blattman and Miguel, 2010;

Tarrow, 2007, for overviews). The research has been progressive and cumulative, with later work building upon earlier findings, methods, or data.

For example, after realizing that early data collection efforts were cast at too aggregate a level – thus missing the key role of many sub-state variables – scholars devoted considerable effort to developing new geo-referenced datasets (Buhaug and Gates, 2002; Buhaug and Rød, 2006). In another instance, a leading scholar criticized work on civil war for its excessive reliance on quantitative methods (Sambanis, 2004); researchers responded by adding a rich qualitative, case-study component to subsequent work (Autesserre, 2010; Weinstein, 2007; see also Wood, 2003).

A book by Stathis Kalyvas (2006) is emblematic of the progressive nature of this research program. In a literature that too often measured cause via correlation and statistical techniques, Kalyvas sought to capture the causal mechanisms of violence and their (varying) roles in civil war. He theorized them at a micro-level, and then tested the argument on a wealth of data drawn from the Greek civil war. The book has rightly been praised as a major advance in our understanding of the dynamics of civil war (Tarrow, 2007).

At the same time, Kalyvas makes no pretense that his book is a work of theoretical pluralism. Instead, it is solidly anchored in a rational-choice framework, one that at best makes a weak nod to the role of social factors. As Kalyvas notes, because his ‘theory uses a rationalist baseline, its predictive failures may be a way to grasp the work of noninstrumental factors, such as norms and emotions’ (Kalyvas, 2006: 13).

In later work, Kalyvas again turns to the role of socially constructed factors in civil war, in this case, identities. Despite a passing reference to constructivism, there is no real engagement with it, and the overall analysis is limited by its theoretical monism (Kalyvas, 2008). On the one hand, Kalyvas should be commended for making identity a variable, one that is endogenous to civil conflict – moves that had long been resisted by most others working on civil war. On the other, his failure to theorize in a plural way results in a very truncated

understanding of exactly how identity is constructed.¹¹ To be fair, Kalyvas is in good company, as researchers across the civil war literature have shown little interest in developing plural frameworks to explain its dynamics (Annan, *et al*, 2009; Blattman, 2007; Fortna, 2004; Gates, 2002; Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2006; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007; Toft, 2007; Weinstein, 2007).

Exploring the transnational aspects of civil war is another area where one sees progress and value added. In early work, there was an inclination ‘to treat civil wars as purely domestic phenomena’ and a consequent neglect of ‘transborder linkages and processes’ (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch, 2009: 404). More generally, the analytic starting point was a closed polity approach, where individual states were treated as independent entities (Gleditsch, 2007; Salehyan, 2009: 8).

Cognizant of this limitation, several scholars spearheaded a move to develop more disaggregated databases, where the attributes of non-state conflict actors are coded (Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2006). This has allowed them to document the impact of new actors and interactions across state boundaries in a wide array of cases. Work of this sort is important, not only advancing the civil-war research program, but also – by adopting an open polity perspective – aligning itself with the bulk of IR scholarship. It has allowed scholars to offer a more nuanced picture of civil conflict, including its transnational dimensions (Salehyan, 2009).

Yet, like the broader civil-war literature, this work on its transnational dimensions shows little interest in developing theoretically plural frameworks. The social theory on offer is rational choice, with transnationalism typically only viewed through the lens of cost/benefit calculations, bargaining games or strategic interaction (Gleditsch, 2007; Salehyan, 2009: *passim*). Moreover, very few connections are made to the rich and varied literature on transnational relations in world politics (Cederman, Girardin and Gleditsch, 2009; Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2006; see also Risse, in this volume). This matters because it deprives the civil-war

transnationalists of a ready made roster of causal mechanisms – both instrumental and noninstrumental – for theorizing the transnational-local nexus (Bob, 2005; Cooley and Ron, 2002; Price, 1998; Shain and Barth, 2003; see also Checkel, 2012). As Cederman, *et al*, argue ‘additional research is needed on the details of the border-transgressing bond, especially as regards the nature of the actor-specific mechanism’ (Cederman, Girardin, Gleditsch, 2009: 433).

In sum, students of civil war have not been bridge builders. In spite of this fact or more likely *because of it*, cumulation – theoretical and otherwise – is clearly evident, with scholars building upon each other’s insights in nontrivial ways to advance the knowledge frontier. Consider perhaps the most important actor in civil conflicts: rebel groups. If early work constructed a ‘black box’ around them, the opposite is the case today, with theorists advancing increasingly sophisticated political economy (Gates, 2002; Weinstein, 2007) or sociological accounts (Wood, 2003, 2010) to explain their behavior.

Yet, there is a trade off involved in these theoretically monist advances, especially at the level of explanatory richness. As seen, work on international institutions – because of a focus on bridge building – has offered increasingly rich, multi-causal explanations that advance scope conditions for the multiple roles they play in global politics. The same is not evident in studies of civil war. Above, I used examples that demonstrated what this research lost by failing to theorize non-instrumental dynamics. In fact, a smaller group of scholars theorizes the latter, but then fails to build bridges to instrumental mechanisms.

Consider two examples. Autesserre (2009, 2010) advances an intriguing argument on how discursive frames shape the way in which international actors intervene in the wake of civil wars. While she briefly addresses instrumental and materialist variables (Autesserre, 2009: 272-75), these are treated as alternative explanations that are shown to come up short in her case. There is nothing wrong with this strategy, and it is quite the norm for the journal – *International Organization* – where she published. However, more ambitiously, she could have theorized the scope conditions for her argument, as a part of a domain-of-application bridge building exercise.

Are there locales, settings and times when frames do not matter and instrumental dynamics come to the fore?

Elisabeth Wood examines an earlier point in civil conflict, asking what leads to group mobilization in the first place. Her argument is that norms and emotions play a central role (Wood, 2003). Thus, like Autesserre, she sees non-instrumental dynamics as key. However, also like Autesserre, she does not develop a plural theoretical argument, instead treating instrumental dynamics as alternative explanations that fail to explain fully the outcome at hand (Wood, 2003: 10-16, 243-46, Appendix).

The end result for students of civil war is theoretical progress, but it is largely *within* research paradigms, be the starting point political economy or sociology/constructivism. Their designs are meant to facilitate competitive theory testing, and not the construction of theoretically plural arguments. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this work. And, indeed, scholars like Autesserre and Wood are in good company within IR, where 'the overwhelming majority of articles [continue to] engage in competitive theory testing' (Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 448).

Summary

The answer to the counterfactual posed at the beginning of this section is thus a cautious 'yes, contemporary IR does look different due to bridge building.' We have more nuanced and richer explanations for a number of actors and factors in global politics – from the role of international institutions and organizations, to the relation between critical-normative and substantive theory. In quite a change from the early 1990s, one now sees a good bit of productive discussion and exchange between rationalists and (conventional) constructivists (Zuern and Checkel, 2005, for example). Scholars have thus risen to the challenge posed by early proponents of bridge building; we do now have a better picture of reality.

At the same time, it is clear that developing and empirically testing theoretically plural arguments is nowhere near the norm among IR scholars. Moreover, its practice and execution over the past 15 years have created a new set of challenges and dilemmas, ones that need to be addressed in any future bridge-building efforts.

BUILDING BETTER BRIDGES

If bridge building is not to become another IR fad whose time has passed, then two issues need further attention: theoretical cumulation and meta-theory. The first points to limitations in the current practice of pluralism, while the second highlights the potential of a future, bolder form of it.

Taking Theory Seriously

To begin, it is useful to recall Fearon and Wendt's rallying cry for bridge building: 'to combine insights, cross boundaries and, if possible, synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68). Here, theory – those 'specific arguments' – is clearly at the service of empirics, giving us better answers that map closer into the world as it really is. This rank ordering makes sense, given the context and disciplinary history to which bridge builders were responding.

Yet, as my review indicates, it is not clear what kind of theory results from efforts at pluralism. At best, one gets a middle-range argument, where several variables, in combination, explain an outcome. In principle, there is nothing wrong with such theory; it has long had influential advocates, from Robert Merton in the early years after World War II to Alexander George in recent decades (George, 1993). However, middle-range theory has three potential

drawbacks about which bridge builders should be aware. I illuminate these by returning to work on international institutions, an area where we have seen considerable efforts at pluralism.

First, middle-range theory - of international institutions, in this case – will often be over-determined. That is, with several independent variables in play, it is not possible to isolate the causal impact of any single factor. For example, in their work on international institutions and socialization, Checkel and collaborators theorized and convincingly documented three different variables producing socializing outcomes at the state-individual levels (Checkel, 2007b). However, as critics noted (Zuern and Checkel, 2005), they had much more difficulty parsing out the independent causal role of each one.

One way to address and minimize this problem is by emphasizing research design at early stages of a project (Johnston, 2005). This may sound like ‘Grad Seminar 101’ advice, but it needs nonetheless to be stressed. Many of those interested in bridge building are seeking to understand better a particular problem by bringing together analytic tools from different theories or paradigms. Yet, to combine theories and causal variables quite clearly puts a premium on carefully crafted research designs. Absent this effort, there is a danger that the aspiring bridge builder will produce eclectic mush.

Second, when large parts of a research program are characterized by bridge building, the production of cumulative theoretical knowledge may be hindered (see also Bennett, 2010). Again consider work on international institutions, where the various middle-range efforts described above are not coalescing into a broader theoretical whole. Instead, we have proliferating lists of variables and causal mechanisms. Contrast this with neo-liberal institutionalism – a paradigm-based, non-plural body of theory on the same topic, international institutions (Keohane, 1984). Here, there has been theoretical advance and cumulation, as later efforts build upon earlier work – for example, by adding process and domestic politics variables while still keeping a rational-choice core (Martin, 2000; Martin and Simmons, 1998; Simmons, 1993; Wallander, 1999).¹²

Third, there is a tendency with middle-range approaches to adopt a micro-focus, where one theorizes (interacting) causal mechanisms in some temporally or spatially delimited frame (Haas, 2010: 11). The danger is then to miss the macro-level, where material power and social discourses - say - fundamentally shape and predetermine the mechanisms playing out at lower levels. This is precisely the trap into which Checkel and collaborators fell in their project developing theoretically plural, middle-range theories of European-level socialization. A global search of the resulting volume reveals virtually no hits for either ‘power’ or ‘discourse’ (Checkel, 2007b: *passim*). More generally and as Nau has argued, middle-range theories ‘inevitably leave out “big questions” posed from different or higher levels of analysis’; they may thus ‘not get rid of “isms” [but] just hide them and make it harder to challenge prevailing ones’ (Nau, 2011: 489-90).

To be fair, prominent advocates of pluralism show growing awareness of these problems. For example, Katzenstein and Sil argue that theory cumulation deserves more attention as a next step, following the arguments articulated in their 2010 volume on analytic eclecticism (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b). In particular, once IR has a critical mass of plural/eclectic scholarship, the goal should be ‘to compare eclectic middle-range theories in terms of how plausible the interconnections between general mechanisms are, and how consistently the combined effects of a particular configuration of mechanisms are evident in a given context or environment’ (Katzenstein and Sil, 2011: 20). Perhaps this is sufficient. For the time being, IR should downplay theory development/cumulation and instead ‘speak to concrete issues of policy and practice’ (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010a: 412).

A different response is to embrace this turn to policy and practice, but *also* to argue that we can do better theoretically. Here, one promising possibility is typological theory, or theories about how combinations of mechanisms interact in shaping outcomes for specified populations. Compared to middle-range approaches, this form of theorizing has several advantages. It provides a way to address interactions effects and other forms of complexity

(missed, for example, in Checkel, 2007b); stimulates fruitful iteration between cases, the specification of populations, and theories; and creates a framework for cumulative progress. On the latter, subsequent researchers can add or change variables and re-code or add cases while still building on earlier attempts at typological theorizing on the phenomenon (Bennett and George, 2005: chapter 11).¹³

Taking Meta-Theory Seriously

My analysis confirms Ole Wæver's (1998) finding, but now at the level of bridge building: There is no global community of IR bridge builders. Rather, with important exceptions in Canada and Germany, the debate over pluralism has largely been an American one. Perhaps this is no surprise. For several decades, much of American IR has been organized around paradigms and 'isms' (Lake 2011); it was thus primed for a debate over pluralism. Consistent with this fact, my review of efforts at theoretical pluralism has emphasized questions at the core of American social science - causation, causal mechanisms, and theory development. Put differently, the divide being bridged is theoretical – and not meta-theoretical. The latter, it would seem, is a bridge too far.

This state of affairs leads to three observations. First, it means we build bridges where we can control for epistemology. For an American international relations community with a strong – and apparently growing (Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 455-56) – commitment to positivism, this has meant that the debate over theoretical pluralism has largely ignored possible contributions from interpretive IR. Thus, one unintended consequence of bridge-building may be theoretical closure (Zehfuss, 2002: chapters 1, 6), as interpretivists are effectively placed outside the debate and conversation over pluralism. For example, in the most comprehensive stock taking of theoretical pluralism to date, none of the 15 works reviewed are interpretive (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b: chapters 3-5). Indeed, the tools of interpretive IR – discourse

analysis, narratives, textual approaches, practice, genealogy – are notable mainly by their absence.¹⁴

Second, despite the imbalance seen in this chapter, it *is* possible to build theoretically plural bridges over meta-theoretical divides. Earlier, I reviewed Price’s tentative efforts to do so in the realm of ethical/normative theory (Price, 2008a, b); here, I provide one other example. In a masterful work on Soviet and Russian foreign policy, Hopf (2002) combines interpretive textual analysis - to recover inductively Soviet/Russian identities - with case studies employing causal process tracing - to show how those identities influence the choice of foreign allies. Essentially, he operationalizes theoretical pluralism via a temporal sequencing strategy, where factors from different approaches work together over time to explain a given domain – Soviet/Russian foreign policy in his case. Hopf is clearly ‘synthesiz[ing] specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68). Why then is a book like this the exception that proves the rule, with theoretically plural arguments that transcend the positivist-interpretive divide so rare?’¹⁵

This leads to a third and final observation. Proponents of theoretical pluralism can no longer bracket and put aside philosophy. It is true that such efforts typically lack ‘the kinds of epistemic norms and uniform standards that enable research traditions to evaluate individual contributions and proclaim some degree of internal progress.’ And developing ‘cross-epistemic judgments’ to address this problem is surely the best way forward (Katzenstein and Sil, 2010a: 425). Yet, the magnitude of the latter task should not be underestimated, especially given the often narrow nature of graduate training in philosophy of science and methods (Bennett, *et al*, 2003) and professional incentive structures that, at early career stages, militate against pluralism (Lohmann, 2007).

In arguing that students of IR pluralism need to return to questions of meta-theory, my purpose is not to reinforce and reify (antagonistic) philosophical positions that are in principle not bridgeable. Rather, to develop ‘cross-epistemic judgments’ requires operational knowledge

of both positivism and interpretivism, and of alternative philosophical positions more amenable to the pluralist enterprise. Here, I have in mind the renewed interest in scientific realism with its mandate of epistemological pluralism (Chernoff, 2002; Wight, 2006) and efforts to revitalize a pragmatist ethos that minimizes reliance upon rigid foundational principles (Hellmann, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Katzenstein and Sil, 2008).

The point of this meta-theoretical bridge building should be two-fold. First, it should articulate and justify the analytic utility of a conceptual middle-ground between strong versions of positivism and interpretivism. Second, it should reflect on the theoretical and empirical application of this middle ground to develop *clear, operational standards* for what counts as rigorous, plural IR research that occupies it. The first issue is in fact now receiving increasing attention (Jackson, 2010; Katzenstein and Sil, 2010b: 43-48). However, to avoid charges that the move to pluralism promotes eclectic mush and an attitude of anything goes, the standards issue requires attention as well. As Hurd has noted, the move to pluralism does not resolve problems of philosophy and epistemology, but reflects a bet that they can – temporally – be put aside. But this very same bet ‘carries the obligation to eventually return to these questions and reflect on what the research says about them’ (Hurd, 2010: 182).

At a practical level, this exercise will not be easy and will require familiarity with and training in theories and methods from diverse philosophical traditions. Yet, the payoff – that ‘better picture of reality’ – would be high. It would reinvigorate efforts at pluralism, spurring IR scholars to link interpretive practice and causal process in security policy (Pouliot, 2010); to theorize how ethnography and causality can be linked to produce better theories of conflict and power (Wood, 2003; Schatz, 2009); to connect process tracing, discourse analysis and counterfactuals through common evaluative criteria (Lupovici, 2009); and more generally to explore the interface between interpretive and positivist IR (Hopf, 2007).

The result would be a literature on theoretical pluralism both richer and more challenging to execute – one deeply indebted to the pioneering efforts of the scholars reviewed

above. For despite the many critical observations in this chapter, it is thanks to them that paradigm wars, gladiator approaches, and dialogues of the deaf are far less dominant forces in the discipline. And that is very good news indeed.

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¹ I use these two terms inter-changeably in what follows.

² Thanks to Michael Barnett for suggesting the gladiator metaphor.

³ Personal Communication, Peter Katzenstein, June 2010.

⁴ Decidedly but not entirely. Several German IR scholars – Gunther Hellmann, Harald Mueller and Thomas Risse - have played important roles in the debate over pluralism.

⁵ Personal Communication, Emanuel Adler, Co-Editor, *International Organization*, June 2010. Checkel, 2007b was originally published as a special issue of *International Organization* 59 (4).

⁶ For a list of the journals, see Maliniak, *et al*, 2011: 441.

⁷ These TRIPS numbers are especially insightful in my case, as they operationalize theoretical pluralism in the same manner as this chapter. See below.

⁸ Thanks to Walter Carlsnaes and Andy Mack for discussions on these points.

⁹ Synthesis is the word used by the TRIPS team. For reasons noted earlier, its use in this particular context is unfortunate.

¹⁰ Among other achievements, Simmons' book was awarded the 2010 Stein Rokkan Prize for Comparative Social Science Research of the International Social Science Council.

¹¹ For excellent and pluralist overviews of the multiple ways identity can be theorized, see Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, McDermott, 2009; and - specifically in the context of civil war - Wood, 2008.

¹² Of course, the same trade off as noted earlier is at work here. The neo-liberal institutionalists can claim theoretical advance and cumulation, but it is the bridge builders who have captured causal complexity.

¹³ Bennett, 2012, applies these insights to transnationalized civil war, demonstrating that typological theorizing is one way to promote cumulation, even in the hard case of mid-range, theoretically plural accounts.

¹⁴ I am not criticizing Katzenstein and Sil for their choice of cases. Rather, it simply demonstrates that bridge building – to date – has largely been a positivist-inspired enterprise.

¹⁵ I know of only two other works advancing theoretically plural arguments that are also meta-theoretically plural – and one is again by Hopf (2012). See also Holzscheiter, 2010.