

**Explaining
and Understanding
International Relations**

**MARTIN HOLLIS AND
STEVE SMITH**

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UNIVERSITA KARLOVA v Praze
Fakulta společenských věd
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Preface

Books which bring together International Relations and philosophy are rare enough to call for comment. This one has grown out of joint teaching which began in 1984, and out of many lively discussions in consequence. We would like to thank all the students who have taken Martin Hollis's Philosophy of Social Science course in the period, both those also studying international relations with Steve Smith and those majoring in other areas of social science or in philosophy. Their keen interest and their comments, especially those by Tim Dunne, have helped in many ways, not least by convincing us that issues which are fertile for the social sciences at large are well exemplified in the discipline of International Relations.

The book is aimed chiefly at those engaged in reflecting theoretically on international relations. We hope to show how many of the central questions in such reflection belong to wider debates in the theory and philosophy of the social sciences, and how the discipline can gain from setting them in this wider context. Very little has been written on this subject, the most notable exception being Charles Reynolds's 1973 book *Theory and Explanation in International Politics*.¹ Reynolds's absorbing study is not undermined by more recent developments in the philosophy of science, and its contrast between 'scientific' and 'historical' approaches remains instructive. But whereas his 'historical' explanations are always particular, we have sought to establish a dimension of 'understanding' which permits a range of hermeneutic disputes between individualism and holism. Yet we are not offering simple answers. Indeed, as we explain in the introduction and demonstrate in the dialogue of the final chapter, we are not even offering agreed answers. The theme foreshadowed by our title is that Explaining and Understanding are alternative ways to analyse international relations, each persuasive but not readily

¹ Charles Reynolds, *Theory and Explanation in International Politics* (Oxford: Martin Robertson).

The Growth of a Discipline

International Relations emerged as a separate discipline in the aftermath of the First World War. For centuries previously the subject was a province variously of law, philosophy, history, and other disciplines, each with its own ways of seeing the world. The legacies of these origins have persisted and there has never been agreement on the nature of international affairs, on the proper methods for studying them, or on the range of elements which theories of them must take into account. International Relations began—and, many would say, remains—more of an inter-discipline than a discipline. But its seventy-year history has distinct phases and has been increasingly unified by a self-conscious aim on the part of its practitioners to make it a 'science'. This chapter will trace the rise of the leading approaches and show how disputes within the discipline have helped to create a scientific framework for it. We shall end with a brief survey of the fragmented current scene and a pointed reminder that International Relations is heir not only to a tradition of scientific explanation but also to one of historical understanding.

The chapter risks seeming ethnocentric in its focus on British and then, increasingly, on American works. We will stress now, therefore, that we are describing the growth of a discipline which, although helped by many contributions from elsewhere, has taken shape largely in Britain and America. Especially since 1945, American foreign policy issues have stood high on the International Relations agenda and its key debates have tended to reflect those within the American academic International Relations community. So, although we have of course taken a view of what has been significant, we deny that we have been ethnocentric in our choice of an Anglo-American focus. The focus is the discipline's own.

There is also a risk of making the story too pat. We shall open with an Idealist phase, followed by Realism, Behaviouralism, Neo-Realism and some current alternatives. That may make it

seem as if we thought each had specific dates and a definite content. Ideas can never be packaged so conveniently. Each school of thought has enjoyed constant internal debate about assumptions and methods. Each has always had porous boundaries. Behaviouralism, for instance, has self-consciously hoisted its own flag and been sharply critical of Realism. Yet it has influenced both Realism and Idealism, while seeming to commentators (including ourselves) to be at heart a stricter version of Realism itself. Moreover, as this remark implies, the phases of the story do not end with the demise of their dominant school. Adherents of all of them are active in current debate, and the story is one of proliferation. New phases bring new dominant tendencies, but are not to be regarded as self-contained episodes. It is perhaps worth adding that the phases we have identified are the ones which the self-conscious discipline of International Relations itself regards as significant.

IDEALISM

The emergence of International Relations as a separate field of study was closely related to the approach that first captured thinking about the subject. To understand why Idealism became dominant in the early years one only has to think about the event that led to the establishment of the subject, namely, the First World War. Two points need to be kept in mind. First, there was a widespread view that the overwhelming lesson of the war was that military force could no longer achieve its objectives. If the reason for resorting to war had traditionally been to achieve territorial conquests, to obtain markets and raw materials, or to overthrow leaders of whom one did not approve, then the events of the First World War offered a corrective. Public perception of the war in Europe was of a senseless conflict fought out in the mud and filth of Flanders, with thousands killed each day for the sake of only a few yards of territory soon lost in the next offensive. The war, in short, achieved little tangible reward for either side, involved death *en masse*, and was a war not of manoeuvre and conquest but of stalemate with little prospect of victory in the traditional sense. After this, what purpose could war ever serve again? The likely nature of any future war would, it was felt, be one of attrition and

massive deaths without the possibility of victory. War seemed to have become an unusable tool of statecraft.

But, secondly, this was by no means the only important lesson of the war. The lack of tangible reward for either side after the very heavy losses suffered by both was compounded by the fact that it was seen as a war that no one had actually wanted. This is not to claim that the war was totally unintended, but that national leaders had become caught in an irrational process which led inevitably to war. War had resulted from the separate acts of various leaders, none of whom wanted war as the outcome, and these separate acts so reinforced mutual fears and suspicions that war became, in a sense, unavoidable. The implication was that the slaughter had all been in vain. The lesson of the casualties and the lack of any real gains even to the victors was made harsher by this realization, that for four years Europe had fought a war which no one had wanted. The 1914 analogy remains potent in a nuclear age, where many observers worry about a drift to war resulting from the increasing automation of the battlefield and of command and control systems.

The legacy of the war was a powerful one, both for politicians and for the group of academics who were attempting to study the phenomena of international relations. Four main conclusions were drawn: first, war was a senseless act, which could never be a rational tool of state policy; secondly, the 1914-18 war had been the result of leaders becoming caught up in a set of processes that no one could control; thirdly, the causes of the war lay in misunderstandings between leaders and in the lack of democratic accountability within the states involved; and fourthly, the underlying tensions which had provided the rationale for the conflict could be removed by the spread of statehood and democracy. These views were expressed most succinctly by US President Woodrow Wilson, in his famous Fourteen Points proposal of January 1918.

The subject of International Relations grew out of this intellectual and political setting; and it bore the birthmarks of its origins. First of all, the discipline originated in two countries which were essentially satisfied powers following the First World War. This meant that the subject was developing in a specific type of state with a specific view of the main features of international society. The USA and the UK were, crucially, status quo powers, with

interests firmly committed to allowing as little change to the new international order as possible. One of the main problems for the subject in the inter-war period was that it became increasingly identified as a status quo subject.

Secondly, the imprint of the First World War, with its wholesale destruction and loss of life, stamped the survivors with a strong conviction that such a war must never happen again. It had been a 'war to end all wars'. Accordingly, the subject that studied such phenomena took on a strongly normative, prescriptive character. International Relations had to be concerned with devising ways to prevent such wars from occurring.

Thirdly, the way the war had broken out stamped the assumptions of the subject. Just as generals always seem to be planning for better ways to fight the last war, so the study of international relations has often reflected the concerns of the previous generation. The accepted view was that, since the war had occurred through misunderstanding, the task of International Relations was to devise ways to reduce misunderstandings in the future. This had implications for the organization of both domestic and international societies. Domestically, it was necessary to prevent 'sinister interests' from dominating the political process—the world that had been made safe for democracy had to be kept safe by democracy. Internationally, the emphasis was on developing mediation processes and organizational structures within which leaders could perceive more accurately the (non-aggressive) aims of their potential adversaries. Together these alterations in domestic and international societies would make wars like the First World War impossible.

Underlying this approach was a liberal view of human nature; good men and women would never want war, which must therefore result only from either mutual misunderstanding or the dominance of uneducated or uncivilized minds in the political process. Individuals were rational, and war was not a rational tool of foreign policy, since it could no longer be used to achieve the goals traditionally associated with it. Hence, the First World War had simply been dysfunctional. The new subject of International Relations must find the best ways of making leaders aware of the dysfunctional nature of war, or, if it failed in this, appeal directly to the populations concerned. The subject had a mission, just as the international organization that was created by the peacemakers,

the League of Nations, had a mission to the international political system.

This first approach to studying international relations has become known as Idealism, although this was not a term that the academics working in the subject at the time used themselves. As Hedley Bull has commented:

The distinctive characteristic of these writers was their belief in progress: the belief, in particular, that the system of international relations that had given rise to the First World War was capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order; that under the impact of the awakening of democracy, the growth of the 'international mind', the development of the League of Nations, the good works of men of peace or the enlightenment spread by their own teachings, it was in fact being transformed; and that their responsibility as students of international relations was to assist this march of progress to overcome the ignorance, the prejudices, the ill-will, and the sinister interests that stood in its way.¹

Accordingly, the subject during the inter-war period concentrated on issues like the outlawing of war and the establishment of an international police force, until the events of the 1930s challenged its basic assumptions. Its response to these events was to see the sinister interests represented by the challenge to the international order as being peculiar to the revisionist states, Italy, Japan, and Germany. At this point the interests of powers such as Britain, France, and the United States were identified with those of humanity as a whole. Thus, in the mid-1930s, the discipline was once again identified with representing the interests of the status quo powers in the international system.

REALISM

This identification was one factor which provoked a major attack on the practice of International Relations which helped usher in a new way of thinking about the subject. This attack was mounted by the British historian E. H. Carr in a book published in 1939.²

¹ H. Bull, 'The Theory of International Politics, 1919-1969', in B. Porter (ed.), *The Aberystwyth Papers: International Politics 1919-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 34.

² E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1946).

The Twenty Years' Crisis was a sustained critique of the way in which utopian thought had dominated international relations in the inter-war years. As Carr commented, utopianism

took its rise from a great and disastrous war; and the overwhelming purpose which dominated and inspired the pioneers of the new science was to obviate a recurrence of this disease of the international body politic. The passionate desire to prevent war determined the whole initial course and direction of the study. Like other infant sciences, the science of international politics has been markedly and frankly utopian. It has been in the initial stage in which wishing prevails over thinking, generalisation over observation, and in which little attempt is made at a critical analysis of existing facts or available means. In this stage, attention is concentrated almost exclusively on the end to be achieved . . . The course of events after 1931 clearly revealed the inadequacy of pure aspiration as the basis for a science of international politics, and made it possible for the first time to embark on serious critical and analytical thought about international problems.³

Idealism, then, simply did not look as if it had much to say about the major events in international relations in the 1930s. In its place, Carr proposed an approach that saw international relations as they were, rather than as they might be. This approach had to be able to explain the way in which events since 1930 had unfolded—a matter, said Carr, of analysis rather than normative commitment. He wrote:

The impact of thinking upon wishing which, in the development of a science, follows the breakdown of its first visionary projects, and marks the end of its specifically utopian period, is commonly called realism. Representing a reaction against the wish-dreams of the initial stage, realism is liable to assume a critical and somewhat cynical aspect . . . it places its emphasis on the acceptance of facts and on the analysis of their causes and consequences. It tends to depreciate the role of purpose and to maintain, explicitly or implicitly, that the function of thinking is to study a sequence of events which it is powerless to influence or to alter.⁴

The approach became known by the term coined by Carr in the quotation: Realism. He was clear that International Relations was a science, brought into existence by a perceived need to rid the international system of an evil—war—but dominated by a concern with eradicating the evil before it had been properly understood.

³ Ibid. pp. 8-9.

⁴ Ibid. p. 10.

What was needed was a dispassionate focus on the root of the problem, and this meant that the subject had to lose its normative character.

Realism, claimed Carr, is a well-established way of thinking about the world: witness, for instance, Machiavelli, 'the first important political realist'.⁵ He argued that Realism is based on three foundation stones, all to be found in the writings of Machiavelli. They are, first, that history is a sequence of cause and effect, whose course is to be grasped not by imagination but by intellectual effort; secondly, that theory does not create practice but is created by practice; and thirdly, that politics is not a function of ethics, but rather, that ethics is a function of politics, and morality is the product of power.⁶ Carr used these three foundation stones to construct an attack on the utopians, contending that their faith in a timeless moral code merely reflected the specific interests of one set of satisfied powers after the First World War. In this light, Idealism embodies only a particular notion of morality, reflecting not even the interests of particular nations, but more specifically the interests of a particular class within the states concerned. Carr commented that 'as soon as the attempt is made to apply these supposedly abstract principles to a concrete political situation, they are revealed as the transparent disguises of selfish vested interests.'⁷

Although Carr produced the most sustained attack on the assumptions of Idealism, it was Hans Morgenthau who did most to popularize the new approach of Realism. In his textbook, *Politics among Nations*, first published in 1948,⁸ Morgenthau proposed that international relations be studied by means of a Realist scientific approach. He reduced this approach to six principles, which make a good summary of the essentials of political Realism. Although there are many other strands involved in Realism generally, Morgenthau's work has been so influential that it seems sensible to start with it.

Morgenthau begins with a sentence worth pausing to consider: 'This book purports to present a theory of international politics.'⁹ For Morgenthau there are two ways in which politics can be approached. One stresses that a rational and moral order can be

created from a universally valid set of moral principles. This view is premised on the essential goodness of human nature, seeing all failures to live up to this goodness as attributable to defects in the way that international society is arranged. The second and opposing view treats political events as the result of forces inherent in human nature. To understand international relations it is necessary to work with these forces, not against them. Morgenthau argues, as did Carr in his critique of Idealism, that universal moral principles do not apply to the analysis and practice of international relations. The Realist approach, he remarks, gets its name from precisely this point: that it deals with human nature as it is and not as it ought to be, and with historical events as they have occurred, not as they should have occurred. Moreover, the approach was trying to create a science of international relations. This made it an essentially Positivist way of analysing events, since it relied on a notion of underlying forces producing behaviour. Although somewhat hazy about the precise nature of these forces, Morgenthau was clear that the subject needed to be elevated to a science; otherwise its radical message for American policy would be undermined by the wishful thinking of those wanting to return to a pre-war policy of isolationism.

Here we must pause to acknowledge that Morgenthau does not always advocate a scientific approach as he did in *Politics among Nations*. Elsewhere he writes of the need to oppose those who see politics as a science, which would let Reason transcend the political. This has led some writers to place him within the interpretative tradition. Yet *Politics among Nations* is the book which made him a major figure in the discipline and its message is as we have described it. Its core is a claim that there are forces determining international relations, and his thesis falls apart if this claim is removed. Although he relies on assumptions about human nature, he seeks to treat its inherent tendencies scientifically. Meanwhile, the discipline itself, especially in the United States, has resolved to regard him as a leading advocate of scientific method and by subscribing to this interpretation we have at least avoided causing confusion. But readers may wish to be aware that there is more room for dispute than our sketch suggests.

Morgenthau's science of international politics reflected three factors historically specific to the USA just after the Second World War. First, there was the emergence of the USA as the major

⁵ Ibid. p. 63.

⁶ Ibid. pp. 63-4.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 87-8.

⁸ H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th edn. (New York: Knopf, 1973).

⁹ Ibid. p. 3.

world power. American politicians were turning to the academic community to provide the intellectual justification for confronting Soviet power. This was no easy task, given America's recent history of non-involvement in international affairs. Secondly, there was the general reverence for science in the USA, especially in the academic community. Science had guided the USA in 'conquering' nature; so why could not scientific method help it control international society? The social sciences took up the challenge and, importantly for the development of International Relations, paraded economics as an exemplary application of scientific method to human affairs. Thirdly, it happened that virtually all of the Realists in the early years were immigrants from Europe. They shared a common concern to explain the events that had changed the lives of themselves and their families, and came from an intellectual tradition that stressed causes and the analysis of social events at the macro level. The time was ripe for an approach that promised to apply the methods of natural science to the international environment.

Morgenthau's Realist theory was, as we have said, based on six principles, outlined in an introductory chapter added only in the second edition of the book; this fact may explain why the six principles do not deal explicitly with two of the three concepts that are central to the remainder of the book, namely 'national interest' and the 'balance of power'. The six principles, though, do outline the basis of his theory. The first of these was that politics was governed by 'objective laws that have their roots in human nature The operation of these laws being impervious to our preferences, men will challenge them only at the risk of failure.'¹⁰ This implied that it was possible to construct a rational theory based on these objective laws. As Morgenthau put it: '[Realism] believes . . . in the possibility of distinguishing in politics between truth and opinion—between what is true objectively and rationally, supported by evidence and illuminated by reason, and what is only a subjective judgment, divorced from the facts as they are and informed by prejudice and wishful thinking.'¹¹ The laws governing politics, says Morgenthau, have not changed through the years, and they enable the Realist to ascertain the rational thing for a national leader to do in any circumstances. In short, objective laws

of human nature, combined with an assumption that actors are rational, can give us a map for explaining international relations.

Secondly, Morgenthau says that what is needed to find our way by this map is the concept of interest, defined in terms of the concept of power. The concept of international power demarcates international politics as an autonomous sphere of action, and implies that ethical considerations are of little use in understanding the actions of states:

We assume that statesmen think and act in terms of interest defined in terms of power That assumption allows us to retrace and anticipate, as it were, the steps a statesman—past, present, or future—has taken or will take on the political scene. We look over his shoulder when he writes his dispatches; we listen in on his conversation with other statesmen; we read and anticipate his very thoughts. Thinking in terms of interest defined as power, we think as he does, and as disinterested observers we understand his thoughts and actions perhaps better than he, the actor on the political scene, does himself.¹²

The concept of power, then, enables us to understand the actions of all statesmen and women, regardless of their views and intentions. 'A realist theory of international politics, then, will guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences.'¹³ Motives are very difficult to uncover, and, even if we could know them, they would reveal little about the likely course of foreign policy. Ideological preferences are similarly of little use, since they may simply be the way in which politicians present their views in order to gain public acceptance. Yet Morgenthau grants that actual foreign policy behaviour will not always be as rational, in the sense of self-interested, as the second principle assumes. This does not worry him, since he takes political Realism to be a limiting case whose usefulness has less to do with describing the actual conduct of foreign policy than with providing a way of explaining it. 'Far from being invalidated by the fact that, for instance, a perfect balance of power policy will scarcely be found in reality, it assumes that reality, being deficient in this respect, must be understood and evaluated as an approximation to an ideal system of balance of power.'¹⁴ He thus seems to doubt the realism of his own Realism—an apparent quirk which we shall return to in Chapter 4, when

¹⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 8.

discussing the relation of realistic description to methods of understanding by means of ideal types.

Thirdly, Morgenthau contends that the form and nature of power are not fixed but vary with the environment in which power is exercised. The key concept, then, is really interest, the perennial component of politics, and the one which is unaffected by time and place. Treating power as a fluid category allows Realists to envisage different forms of international relations, and even the ultimate transformation of the states-system. The objectivity of interest can serve as a universal starting point for understanding events. Here too there are suppressed assumptions about the proper methods of science which will concern us in the next chapter.

Fourthly, Realism accepts that political acts have moral significance, but only in a sense which relates to the interests of the political agent and which has more to do with prudence than with traditional ethics. 'Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation.'¹⁵ While an individual may have a duty to act in the defence of moral principles, the same cannot apply to the state, since the state's action has to be judged by a different criterion: that of national survival.

There can be no political morality without prudence; that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence—the weighing of the consequences of alternative political actions—to be the supreme virtue in politics. Ethics in the abstract judges action by its conformity with the moral law; political ethics judges action by its political consequences.¹⁶

Fifthly, Realism denies that there is a single shared morality applicable to all states, as Idealism had maintained. States formulate their policies in a moral language only when it suits them and only in whatever form best cloaks and serves their interests. Behaviour which is hard to explain, if one is looking for moral consistency, makes underlying sense, if one thinks in terms of power. Questions about the distribution and change of power can be answered objectively by reference to a model of power relationships, which also has implications for the rational choice of foreign policies.

Sixthly, Morgenthau is adamant about the autonomy of the

¹⁵ Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

political sphere. By defining interest in terms of power, Realism gives primacy to political considerations. Economists may think of the interests of nations in terms of wealth, and lawyers in terms of adherence to legal rules working to one's advantage. Such approaches have their uses. Indeed, even a moralistic approach, as in Idealism, may have something to contribute. But in Realism all must be subordinate to a political analysis. Just as an economist can grant that religious beliefs have a bearing on market behaviour but will not allow that they are a primary force, so Realism insists that power is the key. According to this view, Idealism had made the mistake of subordinating political considerations to moral considerations.

Overall, the crux of this six-point programme is the claim that Realism is a *scientific* way of thinking about international relations. The second chapter of *Politics among Nations* is devoted to explaining and justifying this claim. Realism aims to 'detect and understand the forces that determine political relations among nations, and to comprehend the ways in which these forces act upon each other and upon international political relations'.¹⁷ It is worth distinguishing between Morgenthau's general view of the proper conduct of a science and his specific account of international relations, conceived scientifically. There has been much criticism of Morgenthau on the latter score, as we shall point out in a moment. But his general view of science is also open to challenge and, in our view, any student of international relations needs to think very deeply about the nature of science, as we shall make clear in later chapters.

Realism can fairly be called *the* dominant theory in the history of International Relations. It became known as 'the power-politics model', because of its stress on the power-political situation of a state as the central determinant of its interests. Its dominance was not confined to the academic world; indeed, it became the intellectual creed of US foreign policy in the late 1940s and 1950s. As Robert Rothstein has commented, Realism was popular with politicians because it 'encapsulated what they took for granted, especially after the failures of the 1930s and during the height of the cold war'.¹⁸ Crucially, Realism provided a justification for the

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 16.

¹⁸ R. Rothstein, 'On the Costs of Realism', *Political Science Quarterly*, 1972, 87(3), p. 348.

kind of foreign policy which the leaders of the USA felt that they had to undertake in the period immediately after the Second World War. There was a need to keep the US public involved in great power politics, in marked contrast to what happened after the First World War. Realism offered a way of showing why the USA had to be so involved. To quote Rothstein again, Realism became 'the doctrine which provided the intellectual frame of reference for the foreign policy establishment for something like twenty years . . . it did determine the categories by which they assessed the external world and the state of mind with which they approached prevailing problems'.¹⁹ The great advantage of Realism was that it could justify both accommodation and the building up of armaments in the name of a balance of power. As such it was, claims Stanley Hoffmann, 'nothing but a rationalization of cold war politics'.²⁰

BEHAVIOURALISM

Realism has held sway in International Relations for the last forty years. This remark will seem preposterous to many who work in the subject, because Realism has been the target of severe criticism and most scholars now claim to be working with another approach altogether. Before justifying our claim, however, we wish to say something about the main criticisms levelled at Realism. To understand them it is necessary to recollect that the period immediately after the publication of Morgenthau's book was one in which a new behaviourist wave of thinking about the social sciences was sweeping the US academic community. When it surfaced in *International Relations* in the mid-1950s, its advocates called themselves 'Behaviouralists'.

Realism was anathema to Behaviouralists, because their view of how to create theory broke with the particular brand of Positivism that underlay Morgenthau's Realism. For Behaviouralists, the path to knowledge was via the collection of observable data, regularities within the data were to lead to the framing and testing of hypotheses, from which theories would be constructed. These theories were to be constructed inductively, without relying, as

Realism did, on a priori assumptions. Specifically, Realists relied on a priori assumptions about human nature, and human nature was beyond all possible observation. For Behaviouralists, the path to theory started with what was observable, and strict Behaviouralists held that there should be no non-observable elements in the theory at all. The guiding light in the search for theory was the methods of natural science (usually equated with physics), construed in strictly observational terms. The social sciences were conceived as a realm of enquiry to which the transfer of these methods was essentially unproblematic. Embarrassment at the lack of results was brushed off by pointing out that the social sciences were new, and therefore could not be expected to achieve the theoretical power of the natural sciences straight away.

Behaviouralism criticized not only the role of untestable assumptions in the Realist view of the world, but also the Realist desire to make normative statements about the international scene. Behaviouralists drew a sharp distinction between normative and scientific statements, and made it the hallmark of science to avoid the normative. It thus seemed as if there was a significant dispute between the Realist and Behaviouralist camps, and for much of the 1950s and 1960s this dispute was carried on in the pages of the professional journals. Indeed, those in the Behaviouralist camp saw themselves as working within an intellectual framework altogether different from that inhabited by the Realists.

The central criticisms levelled against Realism related to its definition of terms, especially the three terms that did most work—power, the balance of power, and the national interest. In essence, the problem was that none of these terms could be defined 'objectively'. The debate on the definition of power is a long-running one in the social sciences, and we shall not go into it in detail here. The point is that Morgenthau needed to be able to define the terms 'objectively'; otherwise there was no way in which the power-politics model could be applied. If power was so defined that the observer had a subjective latitude in applying the concept, then there could be no neutral standard whereby the observer could judge the actions of statesmen and women. Morgenthau could not rest content with defining power in a way consistent with the rest of his theory, because the theory needed anchoring by means of an objective definition of its key concepts. Similar arguments apply to the other terms and, at bottom, unless there

¹⁹ Rothstein, 'On the Costs of Realism'.

²⁰ S. Hoffmann, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus*, 1977, 106(3), p. 48.

is a way of uncovering the objective laws of human nature, Morgenthau's approach loses the essential scientific quality which he claims for it.

Morgenthau's approach was also criticized for ignoring the domestic environment of states, for failing to specify whether human nature was the determining or merely one potential cause of political action, and for being unable to account for mistakes (if human nature is based on objective laws, then how can individuals make mistakes?²¹). An early challenge to the Realist view came in 1957 from Morton Kaplan.²² Kaplan offered an alternative conceptualization of the international system, one without Morgenthau's reliance on the unobservable but crucial notion of a fixed human nature. This might be called a constructive attack, since it implied that Morgenthau's notion of a determining system might be strengthened by dropping the contentious and unprovable notion of human nature. A more radical attack came with the work of Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, who claimed that Morgenthau had adopted an overly rational account of human behaviour.²³ To understand the behaviour of states, they contended, it was necessary to re-create the views of those who took the decisions. Reconstructing the participants' definition of the situation would allow the analyst to explain their reasons for action, and this would be far more realistic than an assumption that the actors acted rationally. In fact this criticism, which was very powerful in undermining the claims of Realism, was open to a retort that it missed the point, since Morgenthau claimed only that rationality assumptions were being used as economists use them, to establish a limiting case or ideal type by which actual behaviour could be evaluated.

Criticisms such as these were so widely deemed effective that by the middle of the 1960s Realism was popularly held to have been superseded as the dominant approach in the discipline. Yet the attacks conflated a difference in methodology with a difference in theoretical assumptions. Thus Realism was strongly attacked by

²¹ See, for example, S. Hoffmann (ed.), *Contemporary Theory in International Relations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), and I. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962).

²² M. Kaplan, *System and Process in International Politics* (New York: Wiley, 1957).

²³ R. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and B. Sapin (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

the Behaviouralists, but almost exclusively on methodological grounds. For example, a famous debate, which started with an exchange in the pages of the scholarly journal *World Politics* in 1966,²⁴ was ostensibly an across-the-board one between Behaviouralists and Realists (or Traditionalists as they were there called). Yet, although both sets of protagonists had much to say about how a scientific theory should be constructed, neither said much about the substantive assumptions that underlay inquiry or the types of questions with which the study of international relations in particular should be concerned. This was not a debate between theories, but one within a single theoretical orientation and about how to conduct enquiry within that approach. The two main protagonists, Hedley Bull and Morton Kaplan, shared a more similar view of the international political system than their location on the two opposing sides of the debate would suggest.

This confusion has been examined by John Vasquez in a book entitled *The Power of Power Politics*,²⁵ in which he claims that the Behaviouralists never really challenged the theoretical assumptions of Realism. Vasquez argues that the work carried out by Behaviouralists was based on three central assumptions of Realism, which together put them in the same broad camp.

- (a) Nation-states or their decision-makers are the most important actors for understanding international relations.
- (b) There is a sharp distinction between domestic politics and international politics.
- (c) International relations is the struggle for power and peace. Understanding how and why that struggle occurs and suggesting ways for regulating it is the purpose of the discipline. All research that is not at least indirectly related to this purpose is trivial.²⁶

Vasquez looked at a large sample of Behaviouralist work in International Relations and found that the vast majority of it worked within these three key assumptions. As was argued in an earlier research report by Vasquez and others:

²⁴ For the basic arguments of the so-called 'Great Debate' see M. Kaplan, 'The New Great Debate: Traditionalism vs Science in International Relations', and H. Bull, 'International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach', in K. Knorr and J. Rosenau (eds.), *Contending Approaches to International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 39-61 and 20-38 respectively.

²⁵ J. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18.

Reviewing the literature of the 1960s, we find a number of schools which appear to challenge the Morgenthau paradigm because they use different concepts. However . . . all . . . must be considered elaborations of the initial paradigm . . . In effect the international relations literature of the 1960s was a set of variations on the Morgenthau paradigm.²⁷

For this reason, Vasquez called his argument the 'coloring it Morgenthau' thesis.

Even if Behaviouralism in truth attacked Realism for its method rather than its assumptions, the attack did nevertheless have serious consequences for the development of the subject, making its practitioners at least much more conscious of the importance of methodological issues; and this has been reflected in continuing debates about methodology since the mid-1950s. The focus on studying behaviour also led to much dispute over the appropriate level at which to try to explain that behaviour. It was one thing to accept the assumption that the state was the dominant actor, but quite another to agree to how best to explain that unit's behaviour. This was most famously pointed out in an article by David Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations', published in 1961.²⁸ Singer introduced *International Relations* to a vexed topic, familiar to other social sciences, to do with relating explanation couched at the systemic level (the international system) to explanation couched at the unit level (nation states). This will be a central concern of Chapter 5. Meanwhile, the general point stands that Behaviouralists, for all their dramatic talk of a 'Behavioural Revolution', were really arguing only about method within a basic theoretical approach shared with Realism. That is why we feel justified in saying that Realism has held sway for the last forty years. Up to the start of the 1970s, there had really been only two approaches: Idealism and Realism.

TRANSNATIONALISM AND INTERDEPENDENCE

The 1970s, however, produced a third approach: Transnationalism, which claimed that the state was no longer the dominant actor it

²⁷ J. Handelman, J. Vasquez, M. O'Leary, and W. Coplin, 'Color it Morgenthau: A Data-Based Assessment of Quantitative International Relations Research', unpublished manuscript, Syracuse University, 1973, p. 31.

²⁸ J. D. Singer, 'The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations', in K. Knorr and S. Verba (eds), *The International System: Theoretical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 77-92.

had once been. This challenge to the state-centric outlook shared by Idealism and Realism (and Behaviouralism) was not a novel one, but the world of the 1970s gave it a new strength.

Before the 1970s, the dominance of the state had undergone three distinct challenges. First, there had been the challenge posed by the calls for an international working-class opposition to the First World War. According to this view, the working classes had more to unite them than divide them, and the separateness of states was a piece of mystification which helped to perpetuate capitalism. This claim was thoroughly undermined by the events of 1914, however, as in state after state the working class rallied to its national flag and volunteered to fight the Great War. Internationalists had their explanations for that, of course, but these failed to carry conviction in the face of the facts.

The second challenge came in the 1950s, when it became fashionable to speak of the demise of the nation state as a result of the development of nuclear weapons. These, it was argued, had exploded the state's claim to be able to protect its population. According to the leading proponent of this view, John Herz, the nation state was being undermined by four factors: its susceptibility to economic warfare; the rise of international communications and the consequent permeability of national frontiers; the development of air warfare, which could take war directly to a nation's population; and nuclear weapons, which threatened the very survival of states and their populations.²⁹ The state was therefore, he argued, unlikely to remain the dominant unit of international society for the future.

Yet in an article published a decade later, Herz reassessed his claims and retracted his thesis that the state was on the way out.³⁰ The increasing number of states, and the rising legitimacy of states resulting from the increasing democratization of governments (as it appeared in 1968) were important reasons for this development, but the major reason was the new impossibility of actually using force in international relations. Nuclear weapons were so destructive that those states which possessed them had to be very careful about getting involved in any conflicts, whether with other nuclear

²⁹ J. Herz, *International Politics in the Atomic Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

³⁰ J. Herz, 'The Territorial State Revisited—Reflections on the Future of the Nation-State', *Polity*, 1968, 1(1), pp. 11-34.

states or with their allies. Force, which had long been used to conquer territory and to gain markets and raw materials, could no longer be used for these purposes. With force becoming less attractive, the states-system was likely to stay in place, since the available means to overthrow it were too destructive to use.

The third challenge was posed by moves towards economic integration, especially in Europe from the early 1950s. There had been earlier moves towards international integration, but the 1950s saw a new impetus and with it a new school of thought emerging to claim that the sovereignty of the state was being eroded. This view was most closely associated with the work of Ernst Haas, who proposed a 'neo-functional' approach to understanding international integration.³¹ Essentially, states could no longer ensure economic growth unless they integrated with other similar economies. Success in one area of integration would spill over into others, and eventually there would be a need to co-ordinate and collectively govern the hitherto separate economic organizations: so economic integration would lead to political integration. This view had clear implications for the state as actor, but the events of the 1960s showed that it had made a false assumption. Leaders turned out not to be willing to give up sovereignty over 'low-level' political issues; not, when they did, were they thereby more inclined to integrate in 'high-level' politics.

The challenge of the 1970s, then, had its precedents; and it too failed to prove the necessary demise of the state as the dominant actor, at any rate in the immediate future. But it did offer a rather different view of international relations, based on the two related themes of transnationalism and interdependence. Transnationalism makes the point that there are actors other than states which play a central role in international events, the obvious examples being multinational corporations and revolutionary groups.³² Interdependence makes the point that the increasing linkages among national economies have made them more than ever sensitive and vulnerable to events in other countries.³³ Together, these two

points suggest that the state is losing its control over events. Furthermore, the state-as-actor view of international relations is called into question by the involvement of other actors in the conflicts of the 1970s. The international environment therefore cannot be explained by looking at states alone. Transnationalism and interdependence challenge the three assumptions of Realism noted by Vasquez. States are not the only actors; the distinction between domestic and international societies is less clear-cut than before; and international politics looks to be influenced increasingly less by military factors and more and more by economic issues. Some authors writing in this vein have spoken of a fundamental change in international politics resulting from the rise of these 'new forces in world politics'.³⁴

Not surprisingly, a counter-attack has come from those who believe that the state is still the dominant actor in international relations. Northedge claims that the transnationalist approach is simply an 'American Illusion', the result of developments in the USA's international situation.³⁵ In the crucial areas of international relations the state still dominates and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Hedley Bull argues that the state has demonstrated a formidable capacity to withstand challenges from other types of actors, and that it will continue to be able to withstand them.³⁶ This is because the state is expanding as the unit of international society, and is being called on to take responsibility for the welfare of its citizens in a wider range of areas. Furthermore, the state can still rely on the loyalty of its population, and still possesses the monopoly of legitimate force in international society. Finally, the state sets the rules of the international system, and all other actors have to work within them.

There has thus been a significant debate about the extent to which the state still dominates in international relations. We shall not take sides here. But we do wish to point out how sharply the transnationalist challenge breaks with the other approaches that have dominated the subject. It introduces non-state actors and so

³¹ E. Haas, *The United of Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958).

³² See R. Keohane and J. Nye (eds.), *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).

³³ See, for example, E. Morse, *Modernization and the Transformation of International Relations* (New York: Free Press, 1976) and R. Cooper, *The Economics of Interdependence* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968).

³⁴ The phrase comes from the title of S. Brown's book, *New Forces in World Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974).

³⁵ F. Northedge, 'Transnationalism: The American Illusion', *Millennium*, 1976, 5(1), pp. 21-7.

³⁶ H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977), part iii.

belongs to a new pluralism in International Relations. Admittedly, the events of the 1980s have renewed a concern with the military aspects of inter-state relations and so re-emphasized the state. None the less, the state may have to pay a price to get its own way. Transnational actors and growing economic interdependence result in a world where states retain their legal sovereignty but at the price of a loss of autonomy. According to Mansbach and Vasquez, power politics have been replaced by 'issue' politics, where actors group and regroup at the intersections of political and economic issues.³⁷

NEO-REALISM

The transnational view undeniably has a point, as do other recent views which we shall mention in a moment. But before taking stock of the current scene, we shall introduce one more variant of Realism. It is known as Neo-Realism. Although it is partly a response to the claims of transnationalism and hence of recent birth, Neo-Realism belongs firmly to the Realist tradition, as its name suggests. The key text is Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, published in 1979.³⁸ Although it is too early to say what impact it will have on the discipline, it has stimulated a powerful line of thought, and one which will concern us in later chapters.

The essence of Neo-Realism is a more theoretically refined systemic or structural account of international relations. As its name implies, it has affinities with Realism, while rejecting its simpler canons. There are two main areas of concern. The first is an attempt to rectify Realism's inability to deal with economic issues. Writers such as Robert Keohane, in his 1984 study *After Hegemony*, and Stephen Krasner, in his work on international regimes and in his 1978 book *Defending the National Interest*, argue that a modified version of Realism, or what Krasner calls 'structural Realism', can help in explaining international economic

issues.³⁹ Morgenthau has long been criticized for ignoring or underplaying economic factors. Notions of 'hegemony' and 'regimes' are introduced as a corrective. Neo-Realists see states as able to control international economic transactions in a way that restores explanatory power to Realist assumptions about the role of the power-maximizing state. International economic regimes are embodiments of structural power in the international system, and their existence allows states to control one area of the international agenda that eluded Realism.

The critical mechanism employed by Neo-Realism is termed 'hegemonic stability' ('hegemony' meaning 'domination', from the Greek *hegemon*, a leader). If an economic power can sufficiently dominate the international economy, it can provide a hegemonic stability which enables other states to co-operate with it and with one another. This suggests an answer to a question which has troubled international political economists since the early 1970s: what happens when the hegemon needed for hegemonic stability begins to decline? The answer is that the stability will persist in the form of regimes which continue to promote the economic interests of the hegemon (specifically the USA), as, for example, in areas such as telecommunications and finance. Realism thus becomes able to address issues of international economics after all: hence 'Neo-Realism'.

The other main concern of Neo-Realism is the development of a more thoroughly and rigorously structural account of international relations. Kenneth Waltz in particular has proposed a new, uncompromising 'systems' account. Waltz contends that Morgenthau and all the other so-called systems theorists were not truly basing their accounts on systems but rather on the capabilities of the units comprising the system. To use the term common in the literature, they were 'reductionist' accounts. Waltz insists on explaining the behaviour of states solely at the level of the international system. There is to be no appeal to the intentions or capabilities of states, or to the human nature of their leaders. This

³⁷ R. Mansbach and J. Vasquez, *In Search of Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

³⁸ K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

³⁹ R. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); S. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and US Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and S. Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

stark view of what really matters has touched off a spirited debate⁴⁰ and will occupy us in Chapter 5.

THE CURRENT SCENE

International Relations at the start of the 1990s is thus a subject in dispute. There is no dominant theory. Instead, there are several schools, each with its own set of special assumptions and theories—international political economy, foreign policy analysis, strategic studies, peace research, and integration studies, among others. But, despite this fragmentation, strong shared assumptions exist about the character of the discipline overall and we shall risk claiming that they yield only three distinctive approaches.

These three approaches are usually called Realism, Pluralism, and Structuralism, or, to put it more graphically, the billiard-ball, cobweb, and layer-cake models. This classification has become widely accepted in the discipline, and virtually all discussions of the subject deal with this trio.⁴¹ Each has a different notion of the actors, of the processes, and of the outcomes involved. The Realist perspective remains broadly the one described in this chapter. It defines the actors as states and sees the main processes in international relations as constituting a search for security. States are monoliths with interests, and the main interest of each is the maximization of its power. A world in which these actors and processes are at work is marked by a constant struggle for dominance. The result is an international system where war is an ever-present possibility, held at bay by a mixture of international law, informal conventions, and the operation of the balance-of-power mechanism.

In the view of the Pluralists, the state remains an important actor, but must increasingly deal with a world where other, non-state, actors penetrate its territory and reduce its autonomy. These other actors, subnational, supranational, and transnational, have

⁴⁰ R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁴¹ See, for good discussions of these approaches, M. Banks, 'The Evolution of International Relations Theory', in M. Banks (ed.), *Conflict in World Society* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1984), pp. 3-21 and M. Smith, R. Little, and M. Shackleton (eds.), *Perspectives on World Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), especially their introduction, pp. 11-22.

specific areas of interest, where they can challenge the dominance of the state. The resulting processes are very different to those postulated by the Realists. The very notion of a foreign policy process changes, as the issues and actors involved challenge the distinction between domestic and international environments. The processes are characterized by a wide range of policy concerns with no obvious hierarchy of dominance. Foreign policy becomes less to do with ensuring the survival of the state, and more to do with managing an environment composed of newly politicized areas and a variety of actors. This results in an international system where there is no obvious hierarchy, no dominant issue, and a shifting set of relevant actors. It is commonly called 'the mixed actor system'. The focus is on managing the effects of interdependence by the construction of institutions, formal and informal. This international system has multiple centres of power and states are increasingly sensitive and vulnerable to the effects of interdependence.

The more recent Structuralist perspective looks at international relations from the perspective of the less-developed nations. Indeed, its main proponents have come from outside the Anglo-American academic communities, often from Latin America or Africa, and from the peace movement and development studies parts of the subject. According to the Structuralists, the state is still a dominant actor in international relations, but in a very specific sense, which is that of representing a set of economic interests. This recalls the Marxist theme that the state is the tool of the dominant economic class in society. But the role of the state is limited or conditional, since the dominant class will cease using it if it cannot manage their interests. Hence there are actors other than the state, and their precise role in international society depends on the interests of international capital. The real actors are classes, and the location of the state within the global network of capitalism is crucial. This is usually discussed in terms of centre-periphery relations, both within and between states. It is the structural nature of centre-periphery relations that explains the nature of international politics and economics. The processes characterizing international relations are those of exploitation, imperialism, and underdevelopment; the outcomes are essentially those of the continuing exploitation of the poor by the rich. The Pluralist concern with management is, for the Structuralist, simply

another means of ensuring the continued dominance of the rich. The only way in which this could be changed is by a revolution in the system of global inequality. Yet, according to Structuralists who adopt a historical approach, notably those associated with the world-system approach of Immanuel Wallerstein,⁴² the central feature of the international capitalist system has been its capacity to maintain patterns of economic domination.

At the start of the 1990s, then, International Relations offers a number of competing views on how to explain the central events of the international system. They are not simply comparable, since they describe rather different worlds. Each approach sees certain problems as the most important, because there are different types of actors and processes involved. Each differs in the outcomes which it selects as the most important ones to be studied. Just as the First World War set the stage for the development of International Relations as a separate discipline, so now the subject is studied in a way which reflects an implicit view of what are the most important events and trends. As we noted at the start, the policy concerns of the country in which academics work are an important factor in determining the kind of International Relations that they will study.

Attempts are made to compare and contrast the different perspectives, but there is no agreement on which is the most powerful theoretically. A recent survey of the international relations literature in the English-language academic journals conducted by Alker and Biersteker revealed that the vast majority of those articles were based on Realist (including Neo-Realist) assumptions.⁴³ About two-thirds of the articles were Realist, with only some 10 per cent falling into a 'structuralist' (or, as they called it, 'dialectical') category. The subject in the USA is, therefore, still implicitly dominated by one major theoretical perspective, and given the dominance of US scholars in the literature at large, Realism can be said to be *the* major current approach. But this shows only that International Relations has become an American

⁴² See I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System II* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

⁴³ H. Alker and T. Biersteker, 'The Dialectics of World Order: Notes for a Future Archeologist of International Savoir Faire', *International Studies Quarterly*, 1984, 28(2), pp. 121-42.

dominated discipline, and readers should firmly make up their own minds about the best way to understand and explain the international scene.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the main phases in the history of International Relations as a discipline and has thereby set an agenda for the rest of the book. The agenda might be termed 'classical' in the sense that it addresses problems raised by Idealism, Realism, and other approaches whose focus is on the state as the crucial unit in the international system. That may seem perverse, given what we have just said about the current scene, especially since we do not ourselves believe that states are the only important actors in international relations. But we have both a general reason for setting a classical agenda, and two particular ones.

The general reason is that the book aims to show why a philosophical question about Explaining and Understanding matters for theories of international relations. For this purpose we need a set of developed and well-articulated theories to work with. That means looking to the mainstream history of the discipline, rather than to current alternatives, which are at present partial and incipient. We do so without embarrassment, since the mainstream theories are still flourishing and occupy the bulk of the current International Relations literature.

The particular reasons are more contentious. The first is that we do not see how states could possibly be regarded as merely one kind of actor among several on the international scene. In specific issue-areas there may be other more important actors, such as transnational companies, some of whose budgets are larger than those of many states, or international financial institutions. But the theoretically distinctive feature of international society is its anarchical structure, as we remarked at the start. This feature relates solely to the characteristics of the states comprising the membership of international society and is essential to explaining and understanding the international arenas where non-state actors operate. However powerful or disruptive other actors become, the theoretical framework is still set by what states decide about

guidelines or, in a systems perspective, what states are pressured into deciding by the demands of the system.

Secondly, the central problem which we want to discuss, being common to all social sciences, is not avoided by demoting states from their position as principal actors. The problem is that of Explaining and Understanding and it applies no less to transnational companies, world finance, and revolutionary groups. Whatever the unit, its activities can be explained from without or understood from within. Every unit has a decision-making process. Those making the decisions are influenced from outside and from inside. Influences are a matter both of level, with top-down theories at odds with bottom-up theories, and of approach, with scientific explanation at odds with interpretative understanding. If this is granted, then we need labour no further to justify a focus on the most studied and, anyway, unavoidable actor, the state.

The central problem emerges readily from this chapter. Idealism saw the international world largely from within. Its message was that wars occur through misunderstanding, ignorance, and foolishness, all preventable if leaders and citizens will only reflect on the likely unintended consequences of their actions. Even if not everyone means well, leaders of goodwill can organize their relations so that goodwill prevails. There are, no doubt, structural questions too, for instance about the workings of a balance or imbalance of power, but they arise from the combined effects of national decisions and can be controlled by organization and agreement. Idealism, then, was an account that focused on how to maximize the free flow of information and remove barriers to accurate perception. As Chapter 4 will make clear, Idealism as a theory relies on Understanding.

Realism rests squarely on a contrary view, both in substance and for purposes of method. Recall Morgenthau's six principles. Politics is governed by objective and timeless laws, with roots in universal facts about human nature. The moving force is power, in a variety of forms, all of which relate to 'interests'. There is no similarly universal morality, if that means moral principle, since the 'morality' of states is, and indeed can only be, an expression of their interests. Politics is an autonomous realm, to be studied by the methods of science. Behaviouralist critics, who found these principles inconsistent, responded by pressing what they took to

be the claims of scientific method, thus moving still further into Explanation and away from Morgenthau's residual gestures to human nature as an interpretative posit. That is why we could treat them as more Realist than the Realists. The underlying structure of the international system, crucial for Neo-Realism, is offered as an *explanation* of behaviour so strong that it no longer matters how, or even whether, the actors understand the world about them.

Since this last point can also be made about some of the 'billiard-ball', 'cobweb', and 'layer-cake' approaches now current, for instance where the demands of 'capitalist accumulation' are taken to be impersonal and determining, it is fair to describe the mainstream story as one from outside. There is a dispute about which units matter, or even whether units matter at all except as dependent variables. But there is large-scale agreement that the aim is explanation by applying the methods of natural science. Idealism apart, this long chapter has made strikingly little mention of individual motives or decisions. In contrast to historians' accounts of international events, or indeed the actors' views of their own contribution as recorded in their autobiographies, International Relations theories have usually put most emphasis on impersonal units and forces. Yet the obvious question stands: do the men and women who formulate the policies, make the decisions, and try to implement them really matter so little?

The two kinds of reason for saying that they do not matter need to be kept distinct. Theorists who aspire to make International Relations a 'science' have no reason to exclude historical actors. But they admit individual agents only on the terms on which a natural scientist admits individual and particular objects. What quite this comes to is a topic that will be addressed later, but it is safe to say now that they are not terms suited to actors' autobiographies, nor terms easily accepted by historians. Although we have tried to express these scientific impulses fairly, we hereby give notice that we intend to question them in later chapters.

The other kind of reason is the substantive one. The demands of science, however conceived, can never be the ultimate reason for a system-centred or state-centred approach to international relations. The final reason for ignoring human actors can only be that they do not matter. Here a system-centred version of Realism is in conflict with one which retains Morgenthau's propositions about

human nature. In so far as economics is offered as a model of explanation, a theory of individual behaviour is likely to be a component of International Relations theories as much as of theories of microeconomics. For the moment, however, we adjourn discussion until we reach the topic of Bureaucratic Politics in Chapter 7. Meanwhile, we give notice that we mean to bring the individual actors back from the wings later, because we believe that states and systems do not account for everything important in international relations. As noted in the introduction, we are not fully agreed about how much these actors matter, or why. But we make common cause in attaching more significance to them than do the theories (except perhaps for Idealism) discussed so far. We also believe that the issue is one that leads to a number of problems that are fundamental to the social sciences.

3

Explaining

The growth of International Relations as a discipline has been much influenced by ideas of science. Realism, as described in the last chapter, is essentially a call for the application of scientific method. Carr and Morgenthau rejected the prescriptive and utopian elements in Idealism for the sake of a science which sees the world as it is. A shared concept of scientific explanation is a unifying theme among Realists (and Neo-Realists) who are otherwise divided on, for instance, whether to pitch the explanation at the level of the system or its units. When Behaviouralists objected to the presence of unobservables in Realist theories, they did so in the name of science and the same basic idea of what science demands. (That is why we refused to treat them as a separate school.) Even current theories, which break with the mainstream over non-state actors, usually retain the claim to offer *scientific* explanations.

This potent theme needs exploring not only for its past influences but also because it affects what sort of theories are thought worth considering in current debates. At the same time we must stand back from it. The shared concept of scientific explanation was always contestable and has of late been radically contested. What 'science' demands is a very open question, and we need to be as clear about it as we can before broaching the claims of 'Understanding' in the next chapter. In this chapter we shall trace some leading ideas in the history and philosophy of science and shall identify those most influential in International Relations. Then we shall stand back and ask what notion of scientific explanation best suits the attempt to apply the methods of natural science to the world of international relations.

THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

By applying scientific method, Realists hoped to locate causes and laws of behaviour which Idealists were too starry-eyed or