CHAPTER 12

Alternative approaches to international theory

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READER'S GUIDE

Following from the preceding five chapters, which very broadly might be described as the new 'mainstream' theories of international relations, this chapter outlines other important contributions to thinking about world politics. The main theories dealt with are: historical sociology, normative theory, feminist theory, post-modernism, and post-colonialism. The chapter begins by establishing some important preliminary distinctions between theories that are explanatory and foundationalist (like Realism, Liberalism, and most Marxism) and those that are constitutive and non-foundationalist. Explanatory/foundationalist theories are termed rationalist. Constitutive/non-foundationalist theories have developed in two broad versions, one is known as social constructivism (dealt with in Ch.11) and the other group is termed for convenience here 'alternative' approaches. The latter theories are the main concern of this chapter. Although both social constructivism and these alternative approaches reject the main assumptions of rationalist theories and see theories as constituting the social world, the alternative approaches are more critical of the mainstream and move beyond it in more far-reaching ways.

Introduction

The previous five chapters have given you overviews of the four most dominant theories of international relations (Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, and constructivism) and the contemporary debate between the two leading mainstream theories, **neo-realism** and **neo-liberalism**. With the exception of social constructivism, which is relatively new, these approaches have governed the discipline for the last fifty years, and the debate between their adherents has defined the areas of disagreement in international theory. The '**inter-paradigm debate**' between Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism has been extremely influential, with generations of students told that the debate between the various elements effectively exhausts the kinds of questions that can be asked about international relations. However, the inter-paradigm debate by no means covers the range of issues that any contemporary theory of world politics needs to deal with. Instead this 'debate' ends up being a rather conservative political move because it gives the impression of open-mindedness and intellectual pluralism whereas, in fact, Realism has tended to dominate. Indeed, one factor supporting the dominance of Realism has been that it seems to portray the world as common-sensically understood. Thus alternative views can be dismissed as **normative** or **value-laden**, to be negatively compared with the so-called **objectivity** of Realism.

In the last decade or so this picture has changed dramatically in two ways. First, there has been a major debate between **neo-realism** and **neo-liberalism** (see Ch.9), known as the **neo-neo** debate or the **neo-neo synthesis**. The second change has been the appearance of a range of new approaches developed to understand world politics. In part this reflects a changing world. The end of the

cold war system significantly reduced the credit-ability of Realism, especially in its neo-realist guise where the stability of the bipolar system was seen as a continuing feature of world politics. As that bipolarity dramatically disappeared, so too did the explanatory power of the theory that most relied on it. But this was not by any means the only reason for the rise of new approaches. There are three other obvious reasons. First, Realism's dominance was called into question by a resurgence of its historical main competitor, Liberalism, in the form of **neo-liberal institutionalism**, as discussed in Ch.8, with this debate now comprising the mainstream of the discipline. Second, there were other changes under way in world politics that made the development of new approaches important, such as the kinds of features discussed under the heading '**globalization**'. Whatever the explanatory power of Realism, it did not seem very good at dealing with issues such as the rise of non-state actors, transnational social movements, and information technology. In short, new approaches were needed to explain these features of world politics, even if Realism still claimed to be good at dealing with power politics. Third, there were major developments under way in other academic disciplines in the social sciences, but also in the philosophy of science and social science, that attacked the underlying methodological (i.e. how to undertake study) assumption of Realism, a position known as **positivism** (discussed below). In its place a whole host of alternative ways of thinking about the social sciences were being proposed, and International Relations simply caught up. Since then a series of alternative approaches have been proposed as more relevant to world politics in the twenty-first century.

Key points

- Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism together comprised the **inter-paradigm debate** of the 1980s, with Realism dominant amongst the three theories.

- Despite promising intellectual openness, however, the inter-paradigm debate ended up naturalizing the dominance of Realism by pretending that there was real contestation.

- In recent years, the dominance of Realism has been undermined by three developments: first, **neo-liberal institutionalism** has become increasingly important; second, **globalization** has brought a host of other features of world politics to centre-stage; third, **positivism,** the underlying methodological assumption of Realism, has been significantly undermined by developments in the social sciences and in philosophy.

Explanatory/constitutive theories and foundational/anti-foundational theories

In order to understand the current situation with regard to international theory it is important to introduce two distinctions. The terms can be a little unsettling, but they are merely convenient words for discussing what in fact are fairly straightforward ideas. The first distinction is between **explanatory** and **constitutive** theory. An explanatory theory is one that sees the world as something external to our theories of it. In contrast, a constitutive theory is one that thinks our theories actually help construct the world. This is actually a distinction adopted in both scientific and non-scientific disciplines. But a moment's thought should make you realize why it is more appealing in the non-scientific world. In a very obvious way our theories about the world make us act in certain ways, and thereby make those theories become self-confirming. For example, if we think that individuals are naturally aggressive then we are likely to adopt a different posture towards them than if we think they are naturally peaceful. However, you should not regard this claim as self-evidently true, since it assumes that our ability to think and reason makes us able to determine our choices (i.e. that we have free will rather than having our 'choices' determined behind our backs). What if our human nature is such that we desire certain things 'naturally', and that our language and seemingly 'free choices' are simply our rationalizations for our needs? This is only the opening stage of a very com-plex but fascinating debate about what it is to be human (Hollis and Smith 1990). However, the upshot, whichever position you eventually adopt, is that there is a genuine debate between those theories that think of the social world as like the natural world, and those theories that see our language and concepts as helping create that reality. Theories claiming the natural and the social worlds are the same are known as **naturalist**.

In International Relations, the more structural realist and structuralist theories dealt with in Chs 7 and 10 tend to be explanatory theories, which see the task of theory as being to report on a world that is external to our theories. Their concern is to uncover **regularities** in human behaviour and thereby explain the social world in much the same way as a natural scientist might explain the physical world. By contrast, nearly all the approaches developed in the last 15 years or so tend to be constitutive the-ories, and interestingly the same is true of some lib-eral thought. Here theory is not external to the things it is trying to explain, and instead may con-struct how we think about the world. Or, to put it another way, our theories define what we see as the external world. Thus the very concepts we use to think about the world help to make that world what it is (think about the concepts that matter in your own life, such as love, happiness, wealth, status, etc.).

The **foundational/anti-foundational** distinction refers to the simple-sounding issue of whether our beliefs about the world can be tested or evaluated against any neutral or objective procedures. This is a distinction central to the branch of the philosophy of social science known as **epistemology** (the study of how we can claim to know something). A foundationalist position is one that thinks that all truth claims (about some feature of the world) can be judged true or false. An anti-foundationalist thinks that truth claims cannot be so judged since there are never neutral grounds for so doing. Instead each theory will define what counts as the facts and so there will be no neutral position available to determine between rival claims. Think for example of a Marxist and a liberal arguing about the 'true' state of the economy, or a feminist and an Islamic Fundamentalist discussing the 'true' status of women. Foundationalists look for what are termed **meta-theoretical** (or above any particular theory) grounds for choosing between truth claims. In contrast, anti-foundationalists think that there are no such positions available, and that believing there to be some is itself simply a reflection of an adherence to a particular view of epistemology.

In many senses most of the new approaches to international theory discussed later are much less wedded to foundationalism than were the traditional theories that comprised the inter-paradigm debate. Thus, **post-modernism**, **post-colonialism**, some **feminist theory**, and some **normative theory** would tend towards anti-foundationalism. However, the **neo-neo debate**, some **historical sociology**, some normative theory, and some **critical theory** would tend towards foundationalism (see Ch.10). Interestingly, **social constructivism** wishes to portray itself as occupying the middle ground (see Ch.11). On the whole, and as a rough guide, explanatory theories tend to be foundational while constitutive theories tend to be anti-foundational. The point at this stage is not to construct some checklist, nor to get you thinking yet about the differences. Rather we want to draw your attention to the role that these assumptions about the nature of knowledge have on the theories that we are going to discuss. The central point at this stage is that the two distinctions mentioned in this section were never really discussed in the literature of International

Relations until very recently. The last 15 years has seen these underlying assumptions brought more into the open and the most important effect of this has been to undermine Realism's claim to be delivering **the** truth.

The distinctions between explanatory and constitutive theories and between foundational and anti-foundational theories have been brought into the open because of a massively important reversal in the way in which social scientists have thought about their ways of constructing knowledge. Until the late 1980s, most social scientists in International Relations tended to be **positivists**. But since then positivism has been under attack. Positivism is best defined as a view of how to create knowledge that relies on four main assumptions. The first is a belief in the unity of science, i.e. that roughly the same methodologies apply in both the scientific and non-scientific worlds. Second, there is a distinction between facts and values, with facts being neutral between theories. Third, that the social world, like the natural one, has regularities, and that these can be 'discovered' by our theories in much the same way as a scientist does in looking for the regularities in nature. Finally, that the way to determine the truth of statements is by appeal to these neutral facts; this is known as an **empiricist** epistemology.

It is the rejection of these assumptions that has characterized the debate in international theory in the last 20 years or so. Yosef Lapid (1989) has termed this 'a post-positivist era'. In simple terms, traditional international theory was dominated by the four kinds of positivistic assumptions noted above. Since the late 1980s, the new approaches that have emerged have tended to question these same assumptions. The resulting map of international theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century has three main features: first, the continuing dominance of the three theories that together made up the inter-paradigm debate, this can be termed the **rationalist** position, and is epitomized by the **neo-neo debate**; second, the emergence of non-positivistic theories, which together can be termed **alternative** approaches, and epitomized by much **critical theory** (discussed in Ch.10), **historical sociology**, **normative theory**, much **feminist work**, **post-modernism**, and **post-colonialism**,
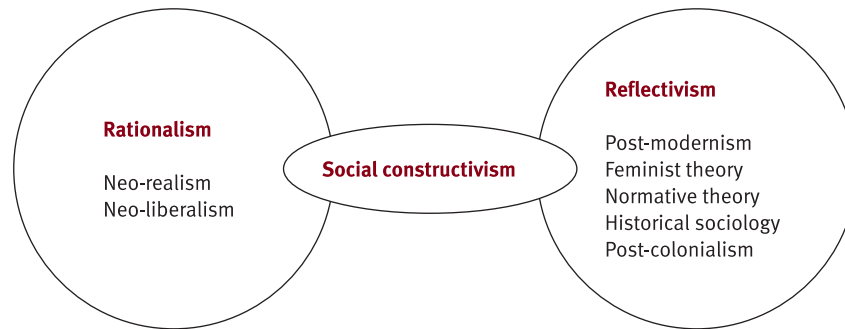
Fig. 12.1 International theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century

to be discussed below; and third, the development of an approach that tries to speak to both rationalist and alternative approaches known as **social constructivism**. Figure 12.1 illustrates the resulting configuration of the theories today.

Note that this is a very rough representation of how the various theories can be categorized. It is misleading in some respects since, as the previous five chapters have shown, there are quite different versions of the main theories and some of these are less rationalistic than others. Moreover, **critical theory**, which is discussed in Ch.10, can seem like quite a radical departure from the mainstream. Similarly, some of the approaches classified as 'alternative' in this chapter are markedly less so than others. For example, work in historical sociology often adopts similar theoretical methods to rationalist approaches, though this is not always the case. Because historical sociology tends to reject the central unit of rationalism, the state, and is compatible with much post-positivism we discuss it in this chapter. In other words, the classifications are broadly illustrative of the theoretical landscape, and are best considered a useful starting point for thinking about the differences between theories. As you learn more about them you will see how rough and ready a picture this is, but it is as good a categorization as any other.

Key points

- Theories can be distinguished according to whether they are **explanatory** or **constitutive** and whether they are **foundational** or **anti-foundational**. As a rough guide, explanatory theories tend to be foundational and constitutive theories tend to be anti-foundational.

- The three main theories comprising the **inter-paradigm debate** were based on a set of positivist assumptions, namely a denial of the idea that social science theories can use the same methodologies as theories of the natural sciences, that facts and values can be distinguished, that neutral facts can act as arbiters between rival truth claims, and that the social world has regularities which theories can 'discover'.

- Since the late 1980s there has been a rejection of positivism, with the main new approaches tending more towards **constitutive and anti-foundational** assumptions.

- The current theoretical situation is one in which there are three main positions: first, **rationalist** theories that are essentially the latest versions of the **realist** and **liberal** theories; second, **alternative** theories that are **post-positivist**; and third, **social constructivist** theories that try to bridge the gap.

- Alternative approaches at once differ considerably from one another, and at the same time overlap in some important ways. One thing that they do share is a rejection of the core assumptions of **rationalist** theories.

Historical sociology

Just as **critical theory** (see Ch.10) problematizes the state and refuses to see it as some kind of given in world politics, so does **historical sociology**. Indeed the main theme of this field is the ways in which societies develop through history. It is concerned with the underlying structures that shape the institutions and organizations into which human society is arranged, including violence, economy, and gender (Hall 1992; Skocpol 1992). Historical sociology has a long history. The first wave, which was a response to the great events of the eighteenth century—the American and French revolutions, the processes of industrialization, and nation building—ran until the 1920s (Smith 1991). The second wave has been of particular interest to international theory, because the key writers, Michael Mann (1986; 1993), Theda Skocpol (1979; 1984), Immanuel Wallerstein (1974; 1984), Charles Tilly (1981; 1990), John Hall (1985; 1994), and Martin Shaw (1984; 2003) have all to various degrees focused their sociological analyses on the relationship between the domestic and the international (Hobden 1998). Tilly has neatly summarized this interest with the statement that 'states made war but war made the state'. In short, the central feature of historical sociology has been an interest in how the structures that we take for granted (as 'natural') are the products of a set of complex social processes.

Thus, whereas **neo-realism** takes the state as a given, historical sociology asks how specific kinds of states have been produced by the various forces at work in domestic and international societies. Historical sociologists show just how complex the state is as an organization, thereby undermining the rather simple view of the state found in neo-realism. They also fundamentally undermine the notion that a state is a state is a state through time and across the world. States differ—they are not functionally similar as neo-realism portrays them. Furthermore, historical sociologists show that there can be no simple distinction between international and domestic societies. They are inevitably interlinked. There is no such thing as 'an international system', as suggested by Waltz, which is self-contained and thereby able to

exert decisive influence on the behaviour of states. Finally, historical sociology shows that international and domestic forces create the state, and that the international is itself a determinant of the nature of the state (Shaw 2000; Hobden and Hobson 2002). This claim, of course, looks particularly relevant to the debate on globalization, since, as discussed in the Introduction to the book, one of its dominant themes is that the international economic system places demands on states such that only certain kinds of states can prosper.

Charles Tilly's work is particularly interesting because it is a clear example of the complexity of the state as an entity. In his 1990 book, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 900–1990*, Tilly poses the following question: 'What accounts for the great variation over time and space in the kinds of states that have prevailed in Europe since AD 990, and why did European states eventually converge on different variants of the national state?' (1990: 5). The answer he gives is that the national state eventually dominated because of its role in fighting wars. Distinguishing between capital-intensive and coercion-intensive regimes (or economic power-based and military power-based systems), Tilly notes that three types of states resulted from the combinations of these forms of power, tribute-making empires, systems of fragmented sovereignty (city-states), and national states. These states were the result of the different class structures that resulted from the concentrations of capital and coercion. Broadly speaking, coercion-intensive regimes had fewer cities and more agricultural class systems than did capital-intensive systems, which led to the development of classes representing commercial and trading interests. Where capital accumulation was high relative to the ability of the state to coerce its citizens, then city-states developed. On the other hand, where there was coercion but not capital accumulation then tribute-making empires developed. As Dennis Smith notes (1991: 83), each of these is a form of indirect rule, requiring the ruler to rely on the cooperation of relatively autonomous local powers. But with the rise in the scale of war, the result was

that national states started to acquire a decisive advantage over the other kinds of state organizations. This was because national states could afford large armies and could respond to the demands of the classes representing both agricultural and commercial interests.

Through about a 350-year period starting around 1500, national states became the norm, as they were the only states that could afford the military means to fight the kind of large-scale wars that were occurring. States, in other words, became transformed by war. Tilly notes that the three types of states noted above all converged on one version of the state, so now that is seen as the norm. Yet, in contrast to neo-realism, Tilly notes that the state has not been of one form throughout its history. His work shows how different types of states have existed, all with different combinations of class structures and modes of

operating. And, crucially, it is **war** that explains the convergence of these types of states into the national state form. War plays this central role because it is through preparing for war that states gain their powers as they have to build up an infrastructure of taxation, supply, and administration (McNeill 1982). The national state thus acquires more and more power over its population by its involvement in war, and therefore could dominate other state forms because they were more efficient than either tribute-gathering empires or city-states in this process.

The second example of historical sociology is the work of Michael Mann. Mann is involved in a four-volume study of the sources of social power dealing with the whole of human history. (The first two volumes have appeared dealing with the period up to 1914, see his (1986) and (1993).) This is an

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Box 12.1   Mann's IEMP model of power organization

Mann differentiates between three aspects of power:

1. Between distributive power and collective power, where distributive power is the power of *a* over *b* (for *a* to acquire more distributive power, *b* must lose some), and collective power is the joint power of actors (where *a* and *b* can cooperate to exploit nature or another actor, *c*).

2. Power may be extensive or intensive. Extensive power can organize large numbers of people over far-flung territories. Intensive power mobilizes a high level of commitment from participants.

3. Power may be authoritative or diffused. Authoritative power comprises willed commands by an actor and conscious obedience by subordinates. It is found most typically in military and political power organizations. Diffused power is not directly commanded; it spreads in a relatively spontaneous, unconscious, and decentred way. People are constrained to act in different ways but not by command of any particular person or organization. Diffused power is found most typically in ideological and economic power organizations.

Mann argues that the most effective exercise of power combines all three elements. He argues that there are four sources of social power, which together may determine the overall structure of societies. The four are:

1. Ideological power derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices. Control over ideology brings general social power.

2. Economic power derives from the need to extract, transform, distribute, and consume the resources of nature. It is peculiarly powerful because it combines intensive cooperation with extensive circuits of distribution, exchange, and consumption. This provides a stable blend of intensive and extensive power and normally of authoritative and diffused power.

3. Military power is the social organization of physical force. It derives from the necessity of organized defence and the utility of aggression. Military power has both intensive and extensive aspects, and it can also organize people over large areas. Those who monopolize it can wield a degree of general social power.

4. Political power derives from the usefulness of territorial and centralized regulation. Political power means state power. It is essentially authoritative, commanded, and willed from a centre.

The struggle to control ideological, economic, military, and political power organizations provides the central drama of social development. Societies are structured primarily by entwined ideological, economic, military, and political power.

(Mann 1993: 6–10)

enormously ambitious project, aimed at showing just how states have taken the forms that they have. In other words, Mann studies the ways in which the various forms of power have combined in specific historical circumstances. He make a major contribution to our thinking of how states have come into existence and about how they have related to the international political system. In this sense his work is similar to that of Tilly, but the major innovation of Mann's work is that he has developed a sophisticated account of the forms of power that combine to form certain types of states. This is his IEMP model (Ideological, Economic, Military, and Political forms of power). This argument is summarized in Box 12.1 to give you an idea of its potential to shed light on how the state has taken the form that it has throughout history. It should make you think that the version of the state presented by **neo-realism** is very simple, but note also that there is some overlap between the focus of neo-realism on war and the focus of historical sociology on how states, classes, and war interact.

Historical sociology is a method and focus of research. It is possible, therefore, to be both a historical-sociologist and a realist, and a critical theorist, and a feminist concerned with how gender and patriarchy have shaped states and societies (Miller 1998). It is also possible to be a post-modern historical sociologist; for example, Foucault's method of **genealogy** (see Box 12.4) has much in common with the concerns of the field (Dean 1994; Kendall and Wickham 1999). Though Foucault is most famously a 'post-modern' theorist, there is no contradiction between drawing on his understanding of

power and knowledge (discussed later) and approaching questions such as the organization of violence historically (Drake 2001).

Key points

- **Historical sociology** has a long history, having been a subject of study for several centuries. Its central focus is with **how societies develop the forms that they do.**

- Contemporary historical sociology is concerned above all with how the state has developed since the Middle Ages. It is basically a study of the **interactions between states, classes, capitalism,** and **war.**

- **Charles Tilly** looks at how the three main kinds of state forms that existed at the end of the Middle Ages eventually converged on one form, namely the **national state.** He argues that the decisive reason was the ability of the national state to **fight wars.**

- **Michael Mann** has developed a powerful model of the sources of state power, known as the **IEMP model.**

- Like Realism, historical sociology is interested in **war.** But it undercuts **neo-realism** because it shows that the state is not one functionally similar organization, but instead has altered over time.

- The concerns of historical sociology are compatible with a number of the other approaches surveyed in this chapter including **feminism** and **post-modernism.**

Normative theory

The last 15 years or so have witnessed the re-emergence of normative approaches to international theory. For a long time this work was out of fashion as the mainstream fell under the spell of positivism. One of the main claims of positivism is that there exists a clear division between 'facts' and 'values'. It is, therefore, simply not scholarly to spend too much time on debates about what the world should look

like. Instead what is preferred is looking at the way things '**really**' are. From the perspective of normative theory, there are two basic problems with this position. First, it is a very narrow definition of what politics is about. For thousands of years political actors and students have been fascinated with the search for '**the good life**', with the strengths and weaknesses of specific ways of life and forms of polit-

ical arrangement. Thus, defining politics as limited to what 'really' already exists in the social world, as if it had nothing to do with ethics, is a very restricting move. Moreover, it is a very political move designed to support existing political arrangements. After all, if the only thing we can do is to discuss how things operate and not why, then existing power divisions are naturalized. As a result, questions about the origins of power can be immediately delegitimized and dismissed as '**value-laden**' or 'normative'.

A second problem with the marginalizing of normative work is the rather serious objection that all theories reflect values, the only question being whether or not we are explicit about what they are. If we tell you things just 'are the way they are', then this clearly represents our view of what the social world is like and which features of it are fixed and which are not. In our view, all theories have values running throughout their analysis, from what they choose to focus on as the 'facts' to be explained, through the methods they use to study these 'facts', down to the policy prescriptions they suggest. Thus, it is not that normative theory is odd, or optional. All theories have normative assumptions and implications, but in most cases these are hidden. Indeed, ethical assumptions about the world not only shape our theories. Scholars in IR have also begun systematically to address how the process and content of ethical argument actually help construct and constitute the world in which we live (Crawford 2002).

A good survey of normative theory about world politics is by Chris Brown (1992) (see Box 12.2), who

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Box 12.2   Chris Brown's view of normative theory

By normative international relations theory is meant that body of work which addresses the moral dimension of international relations and the wider questions of meaning and interpretation generated by the discipline. At its most basic it addresses the ethical nature of the relations between communities/states, whether in the context of the old agenda, which focused on violence and war, or the new(er) agenda, which mixes these traditional concerns with the modern demand for international distributive justice.

(Brown 1992)

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outlines two main normative positions, **cosmopolitanism** and **communitarianism**. Cosmopolitanism is the view that the central focus of any normative theory of world politics should concentrate either on humanity as a whole or on individuals. On the other hand, communitarianism maintains that the appropriate focus is the political community (usually the state). The terms of this cosmopolitanism/communitarianism debate are whether there is a basis for rights and obligations between states in world politics or whether the bearers of these rights and obligations are individuals, that is, either as individuals, or as a whole in the sense of humanity (also see Ch.32). For example, do states have the right to hold large nuclear stockpiles if these weapons could potentially wipe out humanity? Or, is it acceptable for some cultures to perform 'female circumcision' because 'that is their way of doing things'? Or do the women concerned have rights that are more important than the rights of the community to make its own decision? This leads us into complex questions about intervention, gender, and human rights, but you can quickly see how massive normative debates might ensue when we open up these kinds of discussions.

Brown uses the distinction between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism to examine three main focal points of normative international theory: the moral value to be assigned to state autonomy (Beitz 1979; Frost 1996; and Nardin 1983); the ethics of inter-state violence, otherwise known as **Just War Theory** (Walzer 1977, Elshtain 2003), and the issue of international justice with specific regard to the obligations that the richer states of the world have to poorer countries (Rawls 1971; Barry 1989). As you can imagine, cosmopolitans and communitarians have rather different views on these issues. To take the first question, cosmopolitanism clearly rejects the notion that states have a right to autonomy if it allows them to undertake actions that conflict with the moral rights of either individuals within the state or humanity as a whole. Communitarianism on the other hand opposes any restrictions on autonomy that do not arise out of the community itself. Similarly, cosmopolitans and communitarians will differ over when it is right for states to intervene in the affairs of others and over how we should evaluate calls for a more just distribution of economic

resources. Two particularly good overviews of the main debates can be found in Cochran (1999) and Hutchings (1999).

Normative questions have become more 'policy relevant' in the last few years as governments have felt the need to justify their positions in moral terms. This has led to a renewed interest in normative theory and an increasing dissatisfaction with theories that (proudly) claim to be non-normative or 'realistic'. Particularly powerful examples of this new normative agenda are the debates over **humanitarian intervention** (see Ch.25), and the moralistic rhetoric of George W. Bush's administration in the United States. The former example led to explicit discussions about the 'right' moral stance to take, for example over the wars in former Yugoslavia, or over Western intervention in Somalia or East Timor (Lang 2002). A related question is whether international institutions have **moral responsibilities** (Erskine 2003). This became a central question around debates about the failure of the West, including the UN, to prevent the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Also consider the normative assumptions behind US President Bush's justifications of the conduct of his war on terror. He has not hesitated to frame his foreign policy in religious terms as a battle between 'good' and 'evil'. In this sense, normative theory is more obviously relevant to foreign policy than it has been for several generations. And note the consequence, which is that those theorists who claim that theory should NOT be normative may be unable to debate central issues of foreign policy.

Key points

- Normative theory was out of fashion for decades because of the dominance of positivism, which portrayed it as 'value-laden' and 'unscientific'.

- In the last 15 years or so there has been a resurgence of interest in normative theory. It is now more widely accepted that all theories have normative assumptions either explicitly or implicitly.

- The key distinction in normative theory is between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. The former sees the bearers of rights and obligations as individuals; the latter sees them as being the community (usually the state).

- Main areas of debate in contemporary normative theory include the autonomy of the state, the ethics of the use of force, and international justice.

- In the last two decades, normative issues have become more relevant to debates about foreign policy, for example in discussions of how to respond to calls for humanitarian intervention and whether war should be framed in terms of a battle between good and evil.

Feminist theory

Chapter 30 details some of the main varieties of feminisms and gender issues in world politics. Here we offer an overview of five main types of feminist theory, which have become common since the mid-1980s. These are liberal, socialist/Marxist, standpoint, post-modern, and post-colonial. We also refer you to the very brief discussion of gender and constructivism in Ch.11. Although this section is titled 'feminist theory' it is both a deliberate and misleading heading. It is deliberate in that it focuses on the socially constructed roles that 'women' occupy in world politics. It is misleading because this question has to be understood in the context of the construction of differences between women and men and contingent understandings of masculinity and femininity. In other words, the focus could more accurately be on **gender** rather than on 'women' because the very categories of 'women' and 'men', and the concepts of masculinity and femininity, are highly contested in much feminist research. Similarly, the distinctions of liberal/socialist, etc., are slightly misleading for as you will discover below these categories do not exactly correspond to the diverse work of feminist scholars, especially in

contemporary work in which elements from each 'type' are often integrated.

The term gender usually refers to the social construction of difference between 'men' and 'women'. Some of the theories covered in this section assume natural and biological (e.g. sex) differences between men and women. Some of the approaches do not. What all of the most interesting work in this subfield does, however, is analyse how gender both affects world politics and is an effect of world politics; in other words, how different concepts (such as the state or sovereignty) are gendered and, in turn, how this gendering of concepts can have differential consequences for 'men' and 'women' (Steans 1998). It is important to note that feminists have always been interested in how understandings of gender affect men's lives as well as women. Indeed, there is also a field of research known as **men's studies** that models itself after, and was made possible by the emergence of, 'women's studies' (see Seidler 1989; Brittan 1989; Connell 1995; Carver 1996; for a feminist discussion see Zalewski and Parpart (eds) 1998).

Feminist theory in international relations originally developed in work on the politics of development and in peace research. But by the late 1980s a first wave of feminism, **liberal feminism**, was more forcefully posing the question of 'where are the women in world politics?'. The meaning of 'liberal' in this context is decidedly NOT the same as that the meaning of the term in Ch.8. In the context of feminism, the term starts from the notion that the key units of society are individuals, that these individuals are biologically determined either men or women, and that these individuals possess specific rights and are equal. Thus, one strong argument of liberal feminism is that all rights should be granted to women equally with men. Here we can see how **the state** is gendered in that rights, such as voting rights, right to possess property, etc., were predicated solely on the experiences and expectations of men— and, typically, a certain ethnic/racial class of men. Thus, taking women seriously made a difference to the standard view of world politics. Liberal feminists look at the ways in which women are excluded from power and prevented from playing a full part in political activity. They examine how women have been restricted to roles critically important for the functioning of things (such as reproductive economies)

but that are not usually deemed to be important for theories of world politics.

To ask 'where are the women?' was at the time quite a radical political act, precisely because women were absent from the canonical texts of international relations, and thus appeared invisible. Writers such as **Cynthia Enloe** (1989; 1993; 2000) began from the premise that if we simply started to ask 'where are the women?' we would be able to see their presence and importance to world politics, as well as the ways in which their exclusion from world politics was presumed a 'natural' consequence of their biological or natural roles. After all, it was not that women were actually absent from world politics. Indeed, they played absolutely central roles, either as cheap factory labour, as prostitutes around military bases, or as the wives of diplomats. The point is that the conventional picture painted by traditional international theory both ignored these contributions and, if recognized, designated them as less important than the actions of states-'men'. Enloe demonstrated just how critically important were the activities of women to the functioning of the international economic and political systems. She illustrated exactly how crucial women, and the conventional arrangements of 'women's and men's work' were to the continued functioning of international politics. Most specifically, Enloe documented how the concepts and practice of militarization influenced the lives and choices of men and women around the world. 'Militarization', she writes, 'is a step-by-step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas' (2000: 3; also see Elshtain 1987; Elshtain and Tobias 1990). Enloe is an example of a scholar who begins from a liberal premise, that is that women and men should have equal rights and responsibilities in world politics, but draws upon socialist feminism to analyse the role of economic structures and standpoint feminism to highlight the unique and particular contributions of women.

A second strand of feminist theory is **socialist/Marxist feminism**, with its insistence on the role of material, primarily economic, forces in determining the lives of women (see Ch.10). This approach is also sometimes known as materialist feminism (Lise 1995; Hennessy and Ingraham 1997). For Marxist

feminism, the cause of women's inequality is to be found in the capitalist system; overthrowing capitalism is the necessary route for the achievement of the equal treatment of women (Sargent 1981). Socialist feminism, noting that the oppression of women occurred in pre-capitalist societies, and continues in socialist societies, differs from Marxist feminism in that it introduces a second central material cause in determining women's unequal treatment, namely the patriarchal system of male dominance (Braun 1987; Gottlieb 1989). For Marxist feminists, then, capitalism is the primary oppressor, for socialist feminists it is capitalism plus patriarchy. For socialist/Marxist feminists the focus of a theory of world politics would be on the patterns by which the world capitalist system and the patriarchal system of power lead to women being systematically disadvantaged compared to men. The approach, therefore, has much in common with **post-colonial feminism** (discussed below); both are especially insightful when it comes to looking at the nature of the world-economy and its differential advantages and disadvantages that apply to women. But post-colonial feminism critiques socialist/Marxist feminism for presuming the 'sameness' of patriarchy throughout the world and across time; rather than seeing the ways in which patriarchy both falsely presumes a universal experience of male domination and obscures the intersections of oppression of both men and women of colour.

The third version of feminist theory is **standpoint feminism** (Zalewski 1993*a*; Hartsock 1998). This variant emerged out of socialist feminism and the idea of a particular class system. The goal was to try to think about how women as a class might be able to 'envision' or see politics from a perspective denied to those who benefited from the subordination of women. Radical feminism was premised upon the unique qualities and individuality of women. Drawing upon socialist feminist interpretations of structure, standpoint feminism began to identify how the subordination of women, as a particular class by virtue of their sex rather than economic standing (although the two were related) possessed a unqiue perspective—or standpoint—on world politics as a result of their subordination. This first insight was later developed to consider also how the knowledge, concepts, and categories of world politics were predicated upon a norm of masculine behaviour and masculine experiences and, therefore, represented not a universal standard—but a highly specific, particular standard. Standpoint feminists argue that seeing the world from the standpoint of women radically alters our understanding of that world. Standpoint feminism has undergone dramatic changes since its first articulation to incorporate the critiques of women of colour who argued that, like socialism, it presumed that class identity (or in this case, sex identity) was the primary affiliation of all women and, accordingly, the single source of their oppression. The standpoint position also runs the risk of essentializing and fixing the views and nature of women, by saying that **this** is how women see the world (Gioseffi 2003). Nonetheless despite these dangers, standpoint feminism has been very influential in showing just how male-dominated the main theories of world politics are—in part because it is grounded in a simple premise. In an important early essay, for example, **J. Ann Tickner** (1988) reformulated the famous 'Six principles of political realism' developed by the 'godfather' of Realism, Hans Morgenthau. Tickner showed how the seemingly 'objective' rules of Morgenthau in fact reflect male values and definitions of reality, rather than female ones. As a riposte Tickner reformulated these same rules taking women's (as opposed to men's) experiences as the starting point.

The fourth version is post-modern feminism, which develops the work of post-structuralism (especially that of Foucault and Derrida) to analyse specifically the concept of gender. Therefore, it might help to read the following in conjunction with the section on post-modernism below. Essentially, post-modern feminism critiques the basic distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' that earlier feminist theories found so useful in thinking about the roles/lives of men and women in world politics and in analysing the gendered concepts of world politics itself. This distinction between sex and gender was useful because it allowed feminists to argue that the position of women and men in the world was not natural, but highly contingent and dependent upon the meaning given to biological differences. Yet, while extremely useful, the acceptance of the sex–gender distinction retained the binary opposition of male–female, and presumed that while gender was

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Box 12.3   V. Spike Peterson on the global political economy and the sex/gender distinction

In her book on the global political economy, feminist V. Spike Peterson focuses upon two roughly simultaneous occurrences—the 'explosive growth in financial markets that shape business decisionmaking and flexible work arrangements' and the 'dramatic growth in informal and flexible work arrangements that shapes income generation and family well being'. She notes that 'informalization reaps higher profits for capital, depresses formal wages, disciplines all workers and through the isolation of informalized workers impedes collective resistance' while 'flexibilization *feminizes the workforce*: an increasing number of jobs require few skills and the most desirable workers are those deemed to be unorganized, docile, but reliable [and] available for part time and temporary work and willing to accept low wages'. Taken together, Spike Peterson argues, these developments render 'women, the poor, migrants, and recent immigrants the prototypical workers of the informal economy and arguably the future of all but elite workers worldwide'.

'It is here that the distinction between (positivist) sex and (constructivist) gender is crucial. In contrast to positivist notions of sex (as a biologically natural binary of male–female) gender is a systematic social construction that dichotomizes . . . As a social construct, gender is not "given" but learned (and therefore mutable). Most significantly, gender is not simply a trait of individuals, but an institutionalized structural feature of social life . . . In short, gender is not simply an empirical category (referring to embodied men and women) but an analytical one, such that all social life is *gendered* . . . [Gender] structures divisions of power and authority, which determine whose voices and experiences dominate culturally and coercively . . . and it structures divisions of labor which determine what *counts as work, who does what kind of work and how different kinds of work are valued.*'

(V. Spike Peterson 2003: 1, 111, 31)

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constructed, sex was wholly natural. However, as a number of scholars demonstrated, what we understood sex to be, what biological differences were, was heavily influenced by our understanding of gender—that is, that sex was as constructed as gender (Fausto-Sterling 1992; 2000; Haraway 1989; 1991; Fox-Keller 1985; Longino 1990). Thus as Helen M. Kinsella argues, 'it is an increasingly difficult position to defend that sex is prior to gender. The more one searches for the brute reality of sex, the more one finds that is gendered—that is, that the understanding of sex as a fact is itself a "cultural conceit" (Haraway 1991: 197). In other words, this understanding of sex and sex difference is paradigmatic for a way of thinking about difference—as binary, as complementary, as given in nature. What are obscured, then, is the relations of power and politics which produce, distinguish, and regulate these concepts of "gender" and of "sex" ' (2003: 295). This does not mean that our biological bodies or 'the determination of sex' is not important. Rather it suggests that 'understanding this process leads to questions concerning how sex and gender operate to create the reality through which bodies materialize as sexed, as sexualised . . . as objects of knowledge and subjects of power' (Kinsella 2003: 296).

In questioning the sex–gender distinction, in argu-ing that sex is not the origin of gender but an effect of gender, post-modern feminists introduced the concept 'gender performativity' (Butler 1990). Performativity is itself a tricky concept, and one that is easily misunderstood. However, a good place to begin is thinking about an act that is repeatable, yet alterable, and an act or a production that can only make sense within a larger social construct of agreed-upon norms. To think about gender performativity is to think about gender as not given or rooted in sex, but as something that is enacted and produced in social relations. In Judith Butler's famous phrase 'gender is a doing'. This is still a difficult concept in feminist theory, and it is highly contested as well. Nonetheless, the concept of gender peformativity opens the sex–gender distinction to analysis while, simultaneously, displacing the subject of 'woman' from the centre of feminist theorizing and introducing the question of identity. For, rather than presuming women are the subjects of feminism, Butler asks how subjects are produced. To try to understand this process in world politics is to ask, to put it simply, how world politics produces certain kinds of 'soldiers,' certain kinds of 'workers,' certain kinds of 'states' that are not simply men or women, male or female, but complexly positioned states that seem, to us, completely natural.

The final form of feminism to mention is **post-colonial** feminism. There is some overlap between this approach and what is discussed under the heading 'Gender in the global political economy' in Ch.30. In addition, it might help to read the following in conjunction with the discussion of post-colonialism in this chapter. Post-colonial feminists work at the intersection of class, race, and gender on a global scale and especially analyse the gendered effects of transnational culture and the unequal division of labour in the global political economy. From this perspective, it is not good enough to simply demand (as liberal feminists do) that men and women should have equal rights in a Western-style democracy. Such a move ignores the way in which poor women of colour in the global South remain subordinated by the global economic system; a system that liberal feminists were slow to challenge in a systematic way. In other words, the concerns and interests of feminists in the West and those in the rest of the world may not, therefore, so easily fit. Post-colonial feminists are also critical of Western, privileged academic intellectuals (men and women) who claim to be able to 'speak for' the oppressed, a form of cultural imperialism with important material effects. Perhaps the most influential post-colonial feminist scholar in this vein is Gayatri Spivak who combines **Marxism, feminism**, and **deconstruction** (discussed below) to interpret imperialism, past and present, and ongoing struggles for decolonization. In an influential 1988 essay 'Can the **Subaltern** Speak?' Spivak acknowledged the ambiguity of her own position in a privileged Western university and argued that elite scholars should be wary of homogenizing the 'subaltern' and try to speak *for* them in their 'true' voice (what she calls a form of 'epistemic violence'). The concept of the subaltern is discussed below, but it essentially refers to subordinated groups and in this instance to underprivileged women in the global South. In not recognizing the **heterogeneity** of experience and opinion of these diverse women, seemingly benevolent and well-meaning academics are at once patron-izing in their desire to redeem them and unwittingly complicit in new forms of colonialism. Some post-modernists have also been criticized along similar lines for being too Western-centric and gender-blind. The combination of colonialism and **patriarchy** has made it doubly difficult for the resistance and agency of the subaltern to be heard and recognized.

Key points

- **Liberal** feminism looks at the roles women play in world politics and asks why they are marginalized. It wants the same opportunities afforded to women as are afforded to men.

- **Marxist/socialist** feminists focus on the **international capitalist system**. Marxist feminists see the oppression of women as a by-product of capitalism, whereas socialist feminists see both capitalism and **patriarchy** as the structures to be overcome if women are to have any hope of equality.

- **Standpoint** feminists, such as **J. Ann Tickner**, want to correct the male dominance of our knowledge of the world. Tickner does this by re-describing the six 'objective' principles of international politics developed by **Hans Morgenthau** according to a female version of the world.

- **Post-modernist** feminists are concerned with gender as opposed to the position of women as such. They look into the ways in which **masculinity** and **femininity** get constructed, and are especially interested in how world politics constructs certain types of 'men' and 'women'.

- **Post-colonial** feminists, such as Gayatri Spivak, work at the intersection of gender, race, and class on a global scale. They suggest that liberal feminists and others have ignored the interests and opinions of women in the global South, often preferring to speak on their behalf. This is a form of cultural imperialism with important material effects.

Post-modernism

Post-modernism has been a particularly influential theoretical development throughout the social sciences in the last 25 years. It reached international theory in the mid-1980s, but can only be said to have really arrived in the past 15 years. Nonetheless, it is probably as popular a theoretical approach as any discussed in this chapter and overlaps with a number of them. Part of the difficulty, however, is precisely defining post-modernism. This is in addition to the fact, of course, that there are substantial theoretical differences within its various strands. One useful definition is by Jean-Franois Lyotard: 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define *post-modern* as incredulity towards metanarratives' (1984: xxiv). Incredulity simply means scepticism; 'metanarrative' means any theory that asserts it has clear foundations for making knowledge claims and involves a **foundational** epistemology. Post-modernism, then, is essentially concerned with **deconstructing** and distrusting any account of human life that claims to have direct access to 'the truth'. Thus, Marxism (including critical theory), Freudian psychoanalysis, and standpoint feminisms are all suspect from a post-modern perspective because they claim to have uncovered some fundamental truth about the world.

Three central themes in post-modern work will be briefly discussed: the power-knowledge relationship, the performative nature of identity, and various textual strategies used by post-modern thinkers. Work on the **power-knowledge** relationship has been most influenced by **Michel Foucault** (1977; 1978; 1984; 1994). (Note, however, that this relationship is also a key concern of **critical theory** (see Ch.10.).) Foucault was opposed to the notion dominant in **rationalist** theories and **positivism** that knowledge is immune from the workings of power. Instead, Foucault argued that power in fact **produces knowledge**. All power requires knowledge and all knowledge relies on and reinforces existing power relations. Thus, there is no such thing as 'truth' existing outside of power. To paraphrase Foucault, how can history have a truth if truth has a history? Truth is not something external to social settings but is instead part of them.

Accordingly, post-modernists look at what power relations are supported by 'truths' and knowledge practices. Post-modern international theorists have used this insight to examine the 'truths' of international relations theory to see how the concepts and knowledge claims that dominate the discipline in fact are highly contingent on specific power relations. Three recent examples on the concept of **sovereignty** in the history and theory of international politics are by Cynthia Weber (1995), Jens Bartelson (1995), and Jenny Edkins *et al.* (1999). In each book the concept of sovereignty is revealed to be both historically variable despite the attempts of mainstream scholars to imbue it artificially with a fixed meaning, and itself caught up in the practice of sovereignty by producing the discourse about it.

How do post-modernists study history in the light of this relationship between power and knowledge? Foucault's approach is known as **genealogy**, which is to undertake a 'history of the present' and turn what we accept as natural into a question. Box 12.4 reproduces Richard Ashley's (1987) summary of this. The central message of genealogy is that various **regimes of truth** merely reflect the ways in which through history both power and truth develop together in a mutually sustaining relationship. The way to uncover the workings of power is to undertake a **detailed historical analysis** of how the practices and statements about the social world are only 'true' within specific **discourses**. Accordingly, post-modernism is concerned with how some discourses and therefore some truths dominate others in very concrete ways (see, for example, Edwards 1996). It is for this reason that post-modernists are opposed to any metanarratives, since they imply that there are conditions for establishing the truth or falsity of knowledge claims that are not the product of any discourse, and thereby not the product of power.

A second theme is how post-modernists view identity not as a fixed 'thing' but as a **performative** site (you may with to refer back to the discussion of post-modern feminism in the previous section). One way to approach this is to make a comparison with how

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Box 12.4   Foucault's notion of genealogy

First, adopting a genealogical attitude involves a radical shift in one's analytical focus. It involves a shift away from an interest in uncovering the structures of history and towards an interest in understanding the movement and clashes of historical practices that would impose or resist structure. . . . with this shift . . . social enquiry is increasingly disposed to find its focus in the posing of 'how' questions, not 'what' questions. How . . . are structures of history produced, differentiated, reified, and transformed? How . . . are fields of practice pried open, bounded and secured? How . . . are regions of silence established?

Second, having refused any notion of universal truth or deep identities transcending differences, a genealogical attitude is disposed to comprehend all history, including the production of order, in terms of the endless power political clash of multiple wills. Only a single drama is ever staged in this non-place, the endlessly repeated play of dominations. Practices . . . are to be understood to contain their own strategies, their own political technologies . . . for the disciplining of plural historical practices in the production of historical modes of domination.

Third, a genealogical attitude disposes one to be especially attentive to the historical emergence, bounding, conquest, and administration of social spaces . . . one might think, for example, of divisions of territory and populations among nation states . . . one might also think of the separation of spheres of politics and economics, the distinction between high and low politics, the differentiation of public and private spaces, the line of demarcation between domestic and international, the disciplinary division between science and philosophy, the boundary between the social and the natural, or the separation of the normal and legitimate from the abnormal and criminal . . . a genealogical

posture entails a readiness to approach a field of practice historically, as an historically emergent and always contested product of multiple practices . . . as such, a field of practice . . . is seen as a field of clashes, a battlefield . . . one is supposed to look for the strategies, techniques, and rituals of power by which multiple themes, concepts, narratives, and practices are excluded, silenced, dispersed, recombined, or given new or reverse emphases, thereby to privilege some elements over others, impose boundaries, and discipline practice in a manner producing just this normalised division of practical space.

Fourth, what goes for the production and disciplining of social space goes also for the production and disciplining of subjects. From a genealogical standpoint there are no subjects, no fully formed identical egos, having an existence prior to practice and then implicated in power political struggles. Like fields of practice, subjects emerge in history . . . as such, the subject is itself a site of political power contest and ceaselessly so.

Fifth, a genealogical posture does not sustain an interest in those noble enterprises—such as philosophy, religion, positive social science, or the utopian political crusade—that would embark on searches for the hidden essences, the universal truths, the profound insights into the secret identity that transcends difference . . . from a genealogical standpoint . . . they are instead resituated right on the surface of political life. They are seen as political practice intimately engaged in the interpretation, production, and normalisation of modes of imposed order, modes of domination. They are seen as means by which practices are disciplined and domination advances in history.

(Ashley 1987: 409–11)

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identity is understood in mainstream constructivism in International Relations (see Ch.11). David Campbell has summarized the approach to identity by a leading constructivist Alexander Wendt: 'identity is said to come in two basic forms, one of which is "those [deemed] *intrinsic* to an actor . . .". As an instance of this, [Wendt] claims that "being democratic . . . is an intrinsic feature of the U.S. state relative to the structure of the international system." It is not difficult to appreciate that a position that regards certain identities as "intrinsic," and includes among the[m] highly contestable concepts such as "democracy," is reductionist in its representation of polit-

ics' (1998: 279). Campbell is suggesting that in mainstream constructivism identity is regarded as a kind of object or substance that can be observed and measured. But for post-modernists, identity ought to be conceived as having 'no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (Campbell 1992: 9). In contrast, stressing the performative make-up of identity and the constitutive nature of **political agency** reveals culture as 'a relational site for the politics of identity, rather than a substantive phenomen[on] in it's own right (Campbell 1998: 221; also see Campbell 1992; 1993). Constructivism, then, while appropriating some of

the labels and terms of post-modernism, only vaguely destabilizes the dominant discourse about identity.

A third post-modern theme concerns **textual strategies**. The main claim is that, following **Jacques Derrida** (1976), the very way in which we construct the social world is textual. For Derrida the world is constituted like a text in the sense that interpreting the world reflects the concepts and structures of language, what he terms textual interplay. Derrida has two main ways of exposing these textual interplays, **deconstruction** and **double reading**. Deconstruction is based on the idea that seemingly stable and natural concepts and relations within language are in fact artificial constructs. They are arranged hierarchically in the case of opposites in language where one term is always privileged over the other. Therefore, deconstruction is a way of showing how all theories and discourses rely on artificial stabilities produced by the use of seemingly objective and natural oppositions (such as public/private, good/bad, male/female, civilized/barbaric, right/wrong). Double reading is Derrida's way of showing how these stabilizations operate by subjecting the text to two readings. The first is a repetition of the dominant reading to show how it achieves its coherence. The second points to the internal tensions within a text that result from the use of seemingly natural stabilizations. The aim is not to come to a 'correct' or even 'one' reading of a text, but instead to show how there is always more than one reading.

In international theory, Richard Ashley (1988) has performed exactly such a **double reading** of the concept of **anarchy** by providing first a reading of the anarchy problematique according to the traditional IR literature. He then undertook a second reading showing how the seemingly natural opposition between anarchy and sovereignty in the first reading is in fact a false opposition. By disrupting the first reading Ashley shows just how arbitrary is the 'truth' of the traditional assumptions made about anarchy and the kind of logic of state action that it requires. In a similar move, Rob Walker (1993) looks at the construction of the tradition of **Realism** and shows how this is only possible by ignoring the major nuances and complexities within the thought of the key thinkers of this tradition, such as Machiavelli and Hobbes. James Der Derian (1987; 1992;

2001) suggests that the revolution in surveillance **technology** and information gathering has rendered the media presentation of world politics virtually as important as 'real' events on the ground to the extent that we have lost the capacity to distinguish 'reality' from simulation, existence from make-believe. And, as a final example, Jenny Edkins (1999; 2000; 2003) has used post-modern insights to look at famine and practices of aid, and also the way in which the experience of trauma, from the world wars to 11 September, shapes and re-shapes politics. As you can see from this brief survey, post-modernism is taking apart the very concepts and methods of our thinking. It helps us think about the conditions under which we are able to theorize about world politics and for many is the most appropriate theory for a globalized world.

Key points

- **Lyotard** defines **post-modernism** as **incredulity towards metanarratives,** meaning that it denies the possibility of foundations for establishing the truth of statements existing outside of **discourse.**

- **Foucault** focuses on the **power-knowledge relationship** and sees the two as mutually constituted. It implies that there can be no truth outside of **regimes of truth.** How can history have a truth if truth has a history?

- **Foucault** proposes a **genealogical** approach to look at history, and this approach uncovers how certain regimes of truth have dominated others.

- **Derrida** argues that the world is like a text in that it cannot simply be grasped, but has to be interpreted. He looks at how texts are constructed, and proposes two main tools to enable us to see how arbitrary are the seemingly 'natural' oppositions of language. These are **deconstruction** and **double reading**.

- **Post-modern** approaches have been accused of being 'too theoretical' and not concerned with the 'real world'. They reply, however, that in the social world there is no such thing as the 'real' world in the sense of a reality that is not interpreted by us; they have done a great deal of work on important empirical questions such as war and famine.

Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism has been an important approach in cultural studies, literary theory, and anthropology for some time now, and has a long and distinguished pedigree. Founding texts arguably date back as far as the first oral histories and journals of freed African slaves in the United States (Gates 1987) and the political writing of W. E. B. DuBois, the leading African-American intellectual of his generation (1993 [1903]). Despite such ancestry, post-colonial scholarship has only recently begun to make an impact in the discipline of IR. This might seem especially odd given that the diverse subject matter of post-colonialism is intimately connected to the structure and processes of world politics—the transnational flows of peoples and identity constructions, issues of nation and nationalism, the effects of **cultural chauvinism**, how culture makes **imperialism** possible, and the cultures of **diasporas** to name just a few. A diaspora is the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions.

Despite this overlap of subject mater, post-colonial approaches have been largely ignored in IR given its **state-centrism** and **positivism**. But this is now changing, not least because old disciplinary boundaries are breaking down and since the attacks of 11 September scholars in IR are beginning to understand how the histories of the West and the global South have always been intertwined (Barkawi 2004). Post-colonialism, given its interdisciplinary origins, has made a significant contribution to the destruction of these disciplinary boundaries. And as a result, IR scholars have begun to see the world in new 'post-colonial' ways, also making use of both traditional and non-traditional sources for understanding the world such as literature, poetry, and film (Holden and Ruppel 2003).

As with the other approaches surveyed in this chapter there is no one satisfactory definition of post-colonialism. For a start, the prefix 'post' might seem to imply the end of colonial practices. This would be a mistake. **Colonialism** is 'the political control, physical occupation, and domination of people over another people and their land for pur-

poses of extraction and settlement to benefit the occupiers' (Crawford 2002: 131). In many ways, of course, this **juridical** practice of controlling territory and peoples has ended. And a number of post-colonial scholars have looked at how this major transformation altered the politics and society of both the metropole (e.g. Britain) and the former colony (e.g. India) (Hall 2002). But much post-colonial scholarship also highlights the important degree of **continuity** and **persistence** of colonial forms of power in contemporary world politics. For example, the level of economic and military control of Western interests in the global South is in many ways actually greater now than it was under direct control—a form of **'neo'-colonialism** (Grovogui 1996; Duffield 2001). So although the era of formal colonial imposition by force of arms is apparently over (with the exception of the US occupation of Iraq in 2003–4), an important starting point for post-colonial scholarship is the issue of vast inequality on a global scale, the forms of power that make this systematic inequality possible, and the continued domination of **subaltern** peoples. The term subaltern was originally used by **Gramsci** to describe the classes dominated under **hegemony** (see Ch.10). More recently, feminist post-colonial scholars such as **Gayatri Spivak** (1987; 1988; 1998) have used it to describe poor rural women in the global South. Spivak's work was briefly discussed in the feminist theory section (above), but note again how she writes at the intersection of three literatures, **Marxism**, feminism, and post-modernism.

In fact, for many, the 'post' is actually more indicative of the **'post-positivist'** assumptions of the field. Most post-colonial scholars reject the assumptions of the explanatory and foundational theories described earlier in this chapter because they obscure how identities are not fixed and essential but are produced through essentially social processes and practices. Homi K. Bhabha writes, for example, that 'Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced **performatively**. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits

set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize **cultural hybridities** that emerge in moments of historical transformation' (1994: 2). Hybridity is the idea that the identities of the colonized and colonizers are constantly in flux and mutually constituted. This is missed in positivist IR scholarship. Indeed, positivist assumptions, post-colonial writers claim, are not neutral in terms of race, gender, and class but have helped secure the domination of the Western world over the global South (Doty 1996). For example, in his influential book *Orientalism*, Edward Said argued that knowledge and material power could not be separated; Western culture (literally in the form of novels, etc.) was fundamentally entwined with imperialism and specifically the domination of the Islamic world of the Middle East (1979; 1993). Orientalism, for Said, refers to the hegemonic ways of representing 'the East' and its people from the beginning of 'Western' civilization. These **representations** have been absolutely crucial to the success of the economic and military domination of the West over the East and the construction of identities (be it race, class, or gender) in both.

Thus, an important claim of post-colonialism is that global hierarchies of subordination and control, past and present, are made possible through the social construction of racial, gendered, and class differences (Spivak 1987; 1998; Bhabha 1990). As other chapters in this volume suggest, International Relations has been slightly more comfortable with issues of class (Chs 10, 14, 29) and gender (Ch.30). But the issue of race has been almost entirely ignored. This is even though race and **racism** continue to shape the contemporary theory and practice of world politics in far-reaching ways (Doty 1993; Castles 2000; Vitalis 2000; Persaud 2002). As an international institution, racism has historically been part of the emergence of humanitarian norms sanctioning obligations as a kind of colonial mission. But racism may also help explain the lack of 'humanitarian' action by the West in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. It has been an important factor in garnering support for the increased militarization of Western **immigration policies** (Simon 1998). And the unprecedented increase in US prison growth in recent years, which has overwhelmingly relied on racist assumptions about crime and conviction rates, is intimately connected to structural adjustments in the domestic economy associated with globalization (Gilmore 1998). In 1903, W. E. B. DuBois famously argued that the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the 'colour-line'. How will transnational racism continue to shape the twenty-first?

It is absolutely crucial to bear in mind that for post-colonial scholars imperial and other forms of power really operate at the **intersection** of **gender**, **race**, and **class**. Consider, for example, how it is possible for nations in the West to perceive of themselves as '**civilized**' and their enemies as '**barbaric**'. As a way to justify imperial rule in India the British employed both racist and sexist assumptions in pointing to the 'uncivilized' way woman were being treated by Indian men. The enlightened (white) British males would bring civilization to (dark) India at the same time as they exploited the country economically. The issue at stake, however, was not so much the freedom of women in either Victorian Britain or India, as effective strategies of imperial rule (Metcalf 1997).

Box 12.5   Edward Said on Orientalism

Unlike the Americans, the French and British . . . have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling Orientalism, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.

(Said 1979: 1).

Post-colonial scholars do not only focus on issues of domination, though this surely is important. For example, Franz Fanon used **psychoanalytical** theory to suggest how colonialism and Western stereotypes warped the psyche of colonized subjects (1967*a*). But post-colonial scholars also look at how forms of power have been resisted in both violent and non-violent ways. Antonio Gramsci argued that even though powerful ideologies (hegemony) subordinated some classes of people there would always be counterhegemonies of **resistance** (see Ch.10). In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967*b*), Fanon, who was a revolutionary during the Algerian independence struggles against France, identified what he saw as the inherent **violence** in struggles for decolonization. But resistance has also taken more peaceful forms, with some arguing that post-colonial scholarship itself is an example of effective dissidence (Chowdhry and Nair 2002). Post-colonial scholars, therefore, also investigate the multiple and diverse forms of resistance to colonizing ideologies and offer strategies of empowerment and not only critique.

Key points

- Given the state-centrism and positivism of IR, post-colonial approaches have been largely ignored until recently as old disciplinary boundaries are breaking down.

- Post-colonialism essentially focuses on the persistence of colonial forms of power in contemporary world politics, especially how the social construction of racial, gendered, and class differences uphold relations of power and subordination.

- Most post-colonial research rejects positivism, given its claims to produce knowledge devoid of race, gender, and class-power hierarchies.

- Racism, in particular, continues to operate in both obvious and sometimes subtle ways in contemporary world politics but this is not captured in traditional approaches to international theory.

- Post-colonial research seeks to offer positive resources for resistance to imperial and other forms of power and not just critique.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarized the main alternatives accounts of world politics to the dominant **rationalist** mainstream of international theory. Each has clear strengths, and probably the best place for you to start thinking about which is most useful is to cast your mind back to the Introduction of the book and to Chapter 1 on Globalization. Crucially, you now need to think about which of the theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter gives you the best overview of the globalized world we have been discussing.

The **rationalist** perspective, and particularly the **neo-neo synthesis**, as discussed in Ch.9, dominates the literature in the discipline of International Relations. That is the theoretical debate you will find in most of the journals, particularly in the USA. It focuses on the kinds of international political relations that concern many Western governments, particularly the debate about the future security structure of the international system and economic foreign policy. But do you think that it is wide enough a perspective to capture what are to you the most important features of world politics? You might think that we need theories that define the political realm rather more widely, to take in identity, ethnicity, and culture. You might also think that the alternative theoretical perspectives outlined here are actually even better than rationalist accounts for thinking about security and economics.

Alternative theories obviously differ enormously with regard to what they are 'alternative' about. As noted above they are really very different, but they were put together in one category because they all reject the central concerns of rationalism. Do you think that any one of them gives you a better understanding of the main features of world politics than that provided by the rationalist mainstream? Or do you think that they are not really dealing with what

are 'obviously' the most important features of world politics? Of course, these alternative theories do not cohere to one theoretical position in the way that the rationalist theories do. In some important ways, if you are a liberal feminist then you do not necessarily agree with post-modernism or some forms of normative theory. More fundamentally still, you cannot be **both** a post-modernist and a normative-communitarian. In short, some theories gathered under the 'alternative' here have a set of mutually exclusive assumptions and there is no easy way to see the theories being combined. Some combinations are possible (a feminist post-modernism, or a normative historical sociology) but the one thing that is clearly correct is that the whole lot cannot be added together to form one theoretical agenda in the way that the neo-neo debate serves on the rationalist side. Moreover, some of these alternative theories do not have the same idea of how to construct knowledge as the rationalists, and therefore often reject the notion of coming up with testable hypotheses to compare with those provided by the rationalist position (see Keohane 1989*a*). This means that the prospect of a rationalist—post-modern debate, for example, is very low. The two sides simply see world politics in very different ways. You have to decide which side (or which subdivision) you think explains world politics most effectively.

There is no one theory of world politics that is right simply because it deals with the **truth**. What you should take from the theoretical positions outlined here is scepticism any time a theorist tells you that she is dealing with 'reality' or with 'how the world really is'. This is where the values of the theorist (or lecturer, etc.) can be smuggled in through the back door. World politics in an era of globalization is very complex and there are a variety of theories that try to account for different parts of that complexity. You should work out which theories both explain best the things you are concerned with and also offer you the chance to reflect on their own assumptions. One thing is for sure: there are enough theories to choose between and they paint very different pictures of world politics. Which theory paints the picture that you feel best captures the most salient features of world politics?

For further information and case studies on this subject, please visit the companion web site at **www.oup.com/uk/booksites/politics**.

QUESTIONS

1. Why do the post-positivist theories reject positivism?

2. What does it mean to say that the main difference between theories is whether they are explanatory or constitutive?

3. Why have alternative theoretical approaches to realism become more popular in recent years?

4. What are the main implications of historical sociology for the study of world politics?

5. Is normative theory anything more than an optional extra for the study of world politics?

6. Which variant of feminist theory, or any combination of them, seems to capture most accurately the way 'gender makes the world go around' (Enloe)?

7. What might adopting a genealogical approach to the history of the present do for our understanding of world politics?

8. Why has IR ignored issues concerning race for so long? What does post-colonialism have to say on the subject?

9 What is it about some of the theories outlined in the chapter that makes them incompatible with others and why are some theories often used together?

10 Which of the main alternatives discussed in this chapter do you think offers the best account of world politics? Why?

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

General

S. Burchill and A. Linklater (1996), *Theories of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan). This is a very good survey book dealing with contemporary international theory.

S. Smith, K. Booth, and M. Zalewski (eds) (1996), *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). A key text in the movement in IR away from positivism towards the theoretical approaches covered in this chapter.

Historical sociology

Stephen Hobden and John M. Hobson (2002), *Historical Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). An excellent survey of opinion on the connections between the two fields.

Michael Mann (1986, 1993), *The Sources of Social Power*, vols 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Two monumental texts of historical sociology.

Normative theory

C. Brown (1992), *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf). A good introductory guide to the main strands of normative thinking in IR.

M. Frost (1996), *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). A slightly more advanced analysis of normative theory, which offers its own Hegel-derived ethical theory, constitutive theory for world politics.

Feminist theory

C. Enloe (1989), *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: Pandora). This was the classic text charting the way forward for feminist IR.

Post-modernism

R. B. J. Walker (1993), *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). An important early contribution to post-modern IR theory, which challenged some of the central categories of the discipline.

D. Campbell (1998), *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, rev. edn). This important book shows how the identity of the United States is constructed through perceptions of danger in foreign policy discourse.

Post-colonialism

Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair (eds) (2002), *Power, Post-colonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class* (London: Routledge). An edited volume looking at how the intersection of race, class, and gender structure much of world politics.

Edward Said (1979), *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage). A seminal post-colonial text showing how colonial literary and artistic texts create the 'other' with devastating material consequences.

Paul Gilroy (1993), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press). A look at the unique racial and cultural identity of those black people forced to move from their native countries to the West and how Europeans were also affected by this cultural exchange.

WEB LINKS

www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/index2.cfm The InfoTechWarPeace Project site, which examines the impact of information technology on world politics, often from a post-modern perspective.

www.postcolonialweb.org/index.html A collection of definitions, essays, and commentaries on and about post-colonialism.

www.bartleby.com/114/ W. E. B DuBois' influential 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, can be accessed online here.