Is Anybody Still a Realist?

Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik

Realism, the oldest and most prominent theoretical paradigm in international relations, is in trouble. The problem is not lack of interest. Realism remains the primary or alternative theory in virtually every major book and article addressing general theories of world politics, particularly in security affairs. Controversies between neorealism and its critics continue to dominate international relations theory debates. Nor is the problem realism's purported inability to make point predictions. Many specific realist theories are testable, and there remains much global conflict about which realism offers powerful insights. Nor is the problem the lack of empirical support for simple realist predictions, such as recurrent balancing; or the absence of plausible realist explanations of certain salient phenomena, such as the Cold War, the "end of history,"[1] or systemic change in general. Research programs advance, after all, by the refinement and improvement of previous theories to account for anomalies. There can be little doubt that realist theories rightfully retain a salient position in international relations theory.

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1. We agree with much of the analysis in John Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative vs. Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 899–912. But we do not agree, among other things, that balancing behavior per se provides a strong test of realism or that realism is beyond redemption. On various criticisms, see also Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen, eds., *International Relations and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neorealist Theory," in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 421–461; Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen D. Krasner, "*International Organization* and the Study of World Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 670–674; and

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The central problem is instead that the theoretical core of the realist approach has been undermined by its own defenders—in particular so-called defensive and neoclassical realists—who seek to address anomalies by recasting realism in forms that are theoretically less determinate, less coherent, and less distinctive to realism. Realists like E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz sought to highlight the manipulation, accumulation, and balancing of power by sober unsentimental statesmen, focusing above all on the limits imposed on states by the international distribution of material resources. They viewed realism as the bulwark against claims about the autonomous influence of democracy, ideology, economic integration, law, and institutions on world politics. Many recent realists, by contrast, seek to redress empirical anomalies, particularly in Waltz's neorealism, by subsuming these traditional counterarguments. The result is that many realists now advance the very assumptions and causal claims in opposition to which they traditionally, and still, claim to define themselves.

This expansion would be unproblematic, even praiseworthy, if it took place on the basis of the further elaboration of an unchanging set of core realist premises. It would be quite an intellectual coup for realists to demonstrate—as realists from Thucydides through Machiavelli and Hobbes to Morgenthau sought to do—that the impact of ideas, domestic institutions, economic interdependence, and international institutions actually reflects the exogenous distribution and manipulation of interstate power capabilities. Some contemporary realists do continue to cultivate such arguments, yet such efforts appear today more like exceptions to the rule. Many among the most prominent and thoughtful contemporary realists invoke instead variation in other exogenous influences on state behavior—state preferences, beliefs, and international institutions—to trump the direct and indirect effects of material power. Such factors are consistently treated as *more* important than power. We term such an approach "minimal realism," because it retains only two core assumptions—little more than anarchy and rationality—neither of which is distinctively realist. By

Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Realism: Restatements and Renewal* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. xi–xii. For rejoinders, see Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 913–918; Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Progressive Research and Degenerative Alliances," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 899–912; Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Correspondence: History vs. Neorealism: A Second Look," *International Security,* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 182–193; Elman and Elman, "Lakatos and Neorealism: A Reply to Vasquez," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 923–926; Randall L. Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, not Refuting, Waltz's Balancing Proposition," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 927–930; and Stephen M. Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 91, No. 4 (December 1997), pp. 931–935.

reducing realist core assumptions to anarchy and rationality, minimal realism broadens realism so far that it is now consistent with *any* influence on rational state behavior, including those once uniformly disparaged by realists as "legalist," "liberal," "moralist," or "idealist." The concept of "realism" has thus been stretched to include assumptions and causal mechanisms within alternative paradigms, albeit with no effort to reconcile the resulting contradictions.[2] Contemporary realists lack an explicit nontrivial set of core assumptions. Those they set forth either are not distinctive to realism or are overtly contradicted by their own midrange theorizing. In sum, the malleable realist rubric now encompasses nearly the entire universe of international relations theory (including current liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories) and excludes only a few intellectual scarecrows (such as outright irrationality, widespread self-abnegating altruism, slavish commitment to ideology, complete harmony of state interests, or a world state).

The practical result is that the use of the term "realist" misleads us as to the actual import of recent empirical research. The mislabeling of realist claims has obscured the major—and ironic—achievement of recent realist work, namely to deepen and broaden the proven explanatory power and scope of the established liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist paradigms. The more precise the midrange theories and hypotheses contemporary realists advance, the clearer it becomes that such claims are not realist. Some subsume in a theoretically unconstrained way nearly all potential rationalist hypotheses about state behavior except those based on irrational or incoherent behavior. Others rely explicitly on variation in exogenous factors like democratic governance, economic interdependence, systematic misperception, the transaction cost–reducing properties of international institutions, organizational politics, and aggressive ideology. This is obscured because most realists test their favored explanations only against other variants of realism—normally Waltzian neorealism—rather than against alternative liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories, as they once did. Recent realist scholarship unwittingly throws the realist baby out with the neorealist bathwater.

Our criticism of recent realist theory is not a semantic quibble, an invitation to yet another purely abstract debate about the labeling and relabeling of

2. Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 64, No. 4 (December 1970), pp. 1033–1053. This is another way in which our critique differs from that of Vasquez, who has also charged that the realist paradigm is degenerating. Vasquez argues that "there is no falsification before the emergence of better theory," and that alternative paradigms do not exist. We demonstrate that they do. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm," p. 910.

international relations ideal-types, or a philosophical inquiry into the development of research paradigms. It is a direct challenge to the theoretical distinctiveness of contemporary realism, one with immediate and significant practical implications. Recent realist theory has become a hindrance rather than a help in structuring theoretical debates, guiding empirical research, and shaping both pedagogy and public discussion. It no longer helps to signal the analyst's adherence to specific deeper assumptions implicated in any empirical explanation of concrete events in world politics.

If such complete confusion is possible, some might be tempted to reject realism—and perhaps with it, all "isms" in international relations theory—as *inherently* vague, indeterminate, contradictory, or just plain wrong.[3] This is an understandable response, but it is, at the very least, premature. Although battles among abstract "isms" can often be arid, the specification of well-developed paradigms around sets of core assumptions remains central to the study of world politics. By unambiguously linking specific claims to common core assumptions, paradigms assist us in developing coherent explanations, structuring social scientific debates, considering a full range of explanatory options, defining the scope of particular claims, understanding how different theories and hypotheses relate to one another, and clarifying the implications of specific findings. While realism is not the only basic international relations theory in need of clarification, its long history and central position in the field make it an especially important focus for theory, research, pedagogy, and policy analysis. No other paradigm so succinctly captures the essence of an enduring mode of interstate interaction based on the manipulation of material power—one with a venerable history.[4] And it need not be incoherent. Accordingly, we shall propose not a rejection but a reformulation of realism in three assumptions—a reformulation that highlights the distinctive focus of realism on conflict and material power.

This article proceeds in three sections. We begin by elaborating the desirable qualities of a theoretical paradigm in international relations and, guided by these criteria, propose a formulation of realism that we believe captures its enduring essence. We then document the theoretical degeneration of recent "minimal realist" theory. We conclude by highlighting the practical advantages

3. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm"; and David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).
4. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

for theoretical debate and empirical research of consistently adhering to a narrower and more rigorous reformulation of the realist paradigm.

Realism as a Theoretical Paradigm

Realism, many have observed, is not a single theory but a family of theories—a "paradigm."[5] Nearly all scholars who have voiced an opinion on the subject over the past quarter century agree that what makes it possible and useful to speak about realism as a unified paradigm is the existence of a series of shared core assumptions. In this section, we first discuss desirable attributes of a set of core assumptions, then offer an appropriate reformulation of realism.

Whether a paradigm is conceptually productive depends on at least two related criteria, *coherence* and *distinctiveness*.[6] First and least controversial, a paradigm must be logically coherent. It must not contain internal logical contradictions that permit the unambiguous derivation of contradictory conclusions. To be sure, given their breadth, paradigms are likely to be incomplete. The use of differing auxiliary assumptions may thus generate multiple, even contradictory, propositions. But there must be a constraint on such derivations.[7] When theoretical explanation of empirical findings within a paradigm consistently relies on auxiliary assumptions *unconnected* to core assumptions to predict novel facts or clear up anomalies, we learn little about the veracity of those assumptions. When it relies on auxiliary assumptions *contradictory* to underlying core assumptions, our confidence in those core assumptions should weaken.[8]

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5. Or a "basic theory," "research program," "school," or "approach." For similar usage, see Stephen Van Evera, cited in Benjamin Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case," in Frankel, *Realism,* p. xiii; and Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism." We do not mean to imply more with the term "paradigm" than we state.

6. For a fuller account of the desirable criteria, see Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Working Paper Series (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1998). There we also employ these standards to reject paradigmatic definitions of realism based on ideal-typical outcomes (e.g., "pessimism" or "conflict"), vague concepts (e.g., "power and interest"), intellectual history, or outcomes predicted by more than one theory (e.g., "balancing").

7. Our central criticism of recent realism is *not* that the realist paradigm is incoherent or indistinct simply because it generates various, even conflicting, theories and hypotheses. We do not believe that disagreement among realists per se is a sign of degeneration. See Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism," pp. 932–933.

8. See Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs," in Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 131–132.

Second and more important for our purposes here, a paradigm must be distinct. Its assumptions must clearly differentiate it from recognized theoretical alternatives. Paradigmatic formulations must make sense not only on their own terms, but also within the context of broader social scientific debates.[9] Only in this way can we speak meaningfully of testing theories and hypotheses drawn from different paradigms against one another, or about the empirical progress or degeneration of a paradigm over time. The appropriate level of generality, number of assumptions, and empirical scope of a paradigm are not, therefore, qualities intrinsic to any single paradigm, but depend on the scholarly debate in which the paradigm is employed.

Realism coexists in a theoretical world with at least three paradigmatic alternatives for which core assumptions can been elaborated. The first, the *institutionalist* paradigm, contains theories and explanations that stress the role of international institutions, norms, and information. Examples include the transaction cost–based analyses of functional regime theorists and, perhaps, the sociological institutionalism espoused by some constructivists.[10]

The second alternative, the *liberal* paradigm, contains theories and explanations that stress the role of exogenous variation in underlying state preferences embedded in domestic and transnational state-society relations. Paradigmatic liberal assumptions underlie most of what are referred to as "second-image" (and many "second-image reversed") theories. Examples include claims about the autonomous impact of economic interdependence, domestic representative institutions, and social compromises concerning the proper provision of public goods such as ethnic identity, regulatory protection, socioeconomic redistribution, and political regime type.[11]

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9. Fundamental debates are always (at least) "three-cornered," pitting two (or more) theories against the data. See ibid., p. 115.

10. For a statement of core assumptions, see Robert O. Keohane, *International Institutions and State Power* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989); Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

11. For a statement of core assumptions, see Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 513–553. Helen V. Milner, "Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis of International, American, and Comparative Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 759–786; Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 80, No. 4 (December 1986), pp. 1151–1169; Richard Cooper, *The Economics of Interdependence: Economic Policy in the Atlantic Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); and Elman and Elman, "Correspondence," p. 924, all concur that such theories are nonrealist.

The third less, well-articulated, alternative, the *epistemic* paradigm, contains theories and explanations about the role of collective beliefs and ideas on which states rely in calculating how to realize their underlying goals.[12] In contrast to liberal theories (which stress the way the ideas shared or manipulated by groups influence state preferences and policy) and institutionalist theories (which stress the role of formal norms and institutions in providing information to states), the epistemic paradigm stresses exogenous variation in the shared beliefs that structure means-ends calculations and affect perceptions of the strategic environment.[13] Examples include many arguments about culture (strategic, organizational, economic, and industrial), policy paradigms in particular issue areas, group misperception, standard operating procedures, and some types of social learning.[14]

A paradigm is only as powerful and useful as its ability to rule out plausible competing assumptions and explanations about the world. Enduring international relations paradigms have helped to focus our attention on particular core assumptions and causal mechanisms. Debates among realists, liberals, epistemic theorists, and institutionalists have traditionally centered around the scope, power, and interrelationship of variation in material capabilities (realism), national preferences (liberalism), beliefs (epistemic theory), and international institutions (institutionalism) on state behavior. A formulation of realism

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12. An "episteme" or "system of understanding" implies a collective mentality and should be distinguished from purely psychological approaches about individual perceptions and personality traits, although these may share similarities. Our use of the word seeks to situate the paradigm between deep constitutive connotations of "social episteme" in John G. Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization,* Vol. 47, No. 4 (Winter 1993), p. 157, and interest-group focus of "epistemic community" in Peter M. Haas, "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization,* Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 1–35.

13. On the role of beliefs in rationalist theory, see Jon Elster, "Introduction," in Elster, ed., *Rational Choice* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 1–33; and Arthur Denzau and Douglass North, "Shared Mental Models: Ideologies and Institutions," *Kyklos,* Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 3–31.

14. John Odell, *U.S. International Monetary Policy: Markets, Power, and Ideas as Sources of Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Paul Egon Rohrlich, "Economic Culture and Foreign Policy," *International Organization,* Vol. 41, No. 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 61–92; Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Peter Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 25, No. 3 (April 1993), pp. 275–295; Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms, Identity, and World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

that subsumed all the core assumptions underlying these other theories would be a misleading guide to theoretical debate or empirical research. Perpetually underspecified, perhaps internally contradictory, such a formulation would evade rather than encourage potentially falsifying theoretical counterclaims, thereby defeating the basic purpose of grouping theories under paradigms in the first place. Surely realism, with its enduring commitment to the statesman-like manipulation of conflict and power, is more than just a generic form of rationalism. Realism must therefore remain distinct from its liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist counterparts.

realism as a paradigm: three core assumptions

Many among the most prominent contemporary forms of realism lack both coherence and distinctiveness. To see precisely why and how this is so, however, we must first demonstrate that a coherent, distinct formulation of the core assumptions underlying the realist paradigm is possible, practical, and productive. Three "core" assumptions are necessary and sufficient for this purpose. Our formulation comprises the essential elements of a social scientific theory, namely assumptions about actors, agency, and structural constraint.[15] Though few if any formulations in the realist literature are identical to this one, many overlap.[16]

assumption 1—the nature of the actors: rational, unitary political units in anarchy. The first and least controversial assumption of realism concerns the nature of basic social actors. Realism assumes the existence of a set of "conflict groups," each organized as a unitary political actor that rationally pursues distinctive goals within an anarchic setting. Within each territorial jurisdiction, each actor is a sovereign entity able to undertake unitary action. Between jurisdictions, anarchy (no sovereign power) persists. Realists assume, moreover, that these sovereign conflict groups are rational, in the conventional sense that they select a strategy by choosing the most efficient available means to achieve their ends, subject to constraints imposed by environmental uncertainty and incomplete information.[17]

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15. James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).
16. Randall L. Schweller and David Priess suggest this definition, although they neglect it in their midrange theorizing. Schweller and Priess, "A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions Debate," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 41, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1–32. Walt comes close in Walt, "The Progressive Power of Realism," p. 932. For an all-inclusive definition including many of these elements, see Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case."
17. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 94; Stephen D. Krasner, *Structural Conflict: The Third World against Global Liberalism* (Berkeley: Univer-

What is essential to the logic of realist theory is not the particular scope of the actors, but the ability to draw a sharp distinction between anarchy among actors and hierarchy within them. As Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin, and many others have noted, under other historical circumstances one might replace states with tribes, domains, principalities, city-states, regional political unions, or whatever other conflict group enjoys a monopoly of legitimate force within territorial jurisdictions. In modern international relations, the state is generally accepted as the dominant form of political order able to pursue a unitary foreign policy.[18]

ASSUMPTION 2—THE NATURE OF STATE PREFERENCES: FIXED AND UNIFORMLY CONFLICTUAL GOALS. The second realist assumption is that state preferences are fixed and uniformly conflictual.[19] Interstate politics is thus a perpetual interstate bargaining game over the distribution and redistribution of scarce resources. Much of the power of realist theory, leading realists like Carr, Morgenthau, and Waltz consistently maintained, comes from the assumption that state preferences are fixed. It is this assumption, they argue, that releases us from the "reductionist" temptation to seek the causes of state behavior in the messy process of domestic preference formation, from the "moralist" temptation to expect that ideas influence the material structure of world politics, from the "utopian" temptation to believe that any given group of states have naturally harmonious interests, and from the "legalist" temptation to believe that states can overcome power politics by submitting disputes to common rules and institutions.[20]

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sity of California Press, 1985), p. 28; Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 7–8; Robert Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," in Frankel, *Realism,* p. 7; and Robert O. Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism, and the Study of World Politics," in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 1–26. This rationality can be bounded; the precise level of calculating ability is inessential to our purposes here, as long as miscalculations are random; if they are not, then other theories may take over.

18. Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist"; and Kenneth N. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," in Robert L. Rothstein, ed., *The Evolution of Theory in International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 37.

19. Preferences should remain clearly distinct from strategies. State preferences are defined over states of the social world and are therefore "prestrategic," that is, they remain uninfluenced by shifts in the strategic environment, such as the distribution of power. Preferences are akin to "tastes" that states bring to the international bargaining table, although they themselves may of course result from forms of international interaction other than those being studied, as do national preferences resulting from economic interdependence. See Robert Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate," *International Organization,* Vol. 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994), pp. 313–344; and Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously."

20. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* pp. 2–12; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* pp. 18–37; and Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," pp. 21–37.

Despite their general agreement on the assumption of fixed preferences, realists display far less agreement about the precise nature of such preferences. Most assume only that, in Waltz's oft-cited phrase, states "at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination"—an elastic assumption much criticized for its vagueness. Such an imprecise assumption negates the explanatory value of assuming fixed preferences.[21] From game theorists like Robert Powell to constructivists like Alexander Wendt, there is broad agreement that this does not constitute a sharp enough assumption about the nature of the state—that is, of its state-society relations and resulting state preferences—on which to build explanatory theory. In a world of status quo states and positive-sum interactions, for example, traditional realist behaviors may well not emerge at all. Lest we permit the entire range of liberal, epistemic, and institutional sources of varying state preferences to enter into realist calculations, a narrower assumption is required.[22]

We submit that a distinctive realist theory is therefore possible only if we assume the existence of high conflict among underlying state preferences—what John Mearsheimer labels a "fundamentally competitive" world and Joseph Grieco sees as one dominated by relative gains seeking (a high value of k).[23] Only then does a rational government have a consistent incentive to employ costly means to compel others to heed its will. Only then, therefore, should we expect to observe recurrent power balancing, the overriding imperative to exploit relative power, and (in extreme cases) concern about survival and security, as well as other realist pathologies.[24] In short, realists view

21. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* p. 118.

22. Powell, "Anarchy in International Relations Theory," p. 315; Alexander Wendt, "Social Theory of International Politics," unpublished manuscript, Dartmouth College, 1998, p. 309; Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" in Frankel, *Realism;* Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously"; Jeffrey W. Legro, "Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-step," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 90, No. 1 (March 1996), pp. 118–137; Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and John Gerard Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," in Krasner, *International Regimes.*

23. John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security,* Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5–56; and Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization,* Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1988), pp. 485–507. Grieco maintains that states seek both absolute and relative gains. The relative importance of relative gains is given by the coefficient k. The higher the value of k, Grieco maintains, the stronger the incentives for relative-gains seeking and the more pronounced the tendency to engage in "defensive positionalist" realist behavior. For a more detailed analysis, see pp. 25–27 below.

24. Schweller puts this well: "If states are assumed to seek nothing more than their own survival, why would they feel threatened? . . . Anarchy and self-preservation alone are not sufficient. . . . Predatory states motivated by expansion and absolute gains, not security and the fear of relative

the world as one of constant competition for control over scarce goods. This explicit assumption of fixed and uniformly conflictual preferences is the most general assumption consistent with the core of traditional realist theory. Governments may conflict over any scarce and valuable good, including agricultural land, trading rights, and allied tribute, as in the time of Thucydides; imperial dominion, as observed by historians from Ancient Rome through the Renaissance; religious identity, dynastic prerogatives, and mercantilist control, as in early modern Europe; national and political ideology, as in most of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; or purely economic interests, for, as Waltz himself observes, "economic and technological competition is often as keen as military competition."[25]

Note that, in addition to its generality, this assumption is more permissive than it might appear at first glance, for three reasons. First, it does not deny that in world politics zero-sum conflict nearly always coexists with positive-sum conflicts (or tractable collective action problems). This is in fact implied by our proposed realist assumption that in world politics states face bargaining problems, because conventional bargaining theory commonly disaggregates negotiations into distributional and integrative elements.[26] The assumption insists only that the explanatory power of realism is limited largely to the distributive aspect of such mixed-motive interstate bargaining. Explaining integrative aspects requires a nonrealist theory.

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losses, are the prime movers of neo-realist theory. Without some possibility for their existence, the security dilemma melts away, as do most concepts associated with contemporary realism." Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias," pp. 91, 119. Somewhat perversely for a realist, he cites Fukuyama, *The End of History,* pp. 254–255. See also Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously"; Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy;* and Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies,* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 153–154.

25. Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security,* Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), p. 57; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics;* Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Michael Mastanduno, "Do Relative Gains Matter? America's Response to Japanese Industrial Policy," in David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

26. Disaggregating the interactions between two may be empirically and theoretically challenging, but the conceptual distinction between the two dimensions of preferences remains unavoidable. Howard Raiffa, *The Art and Science of Negotiation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982); James D. Morrow, "Social Choice and System Structure in World Politics," *World Politics,* Vol. 41, No. 1 (October 1988), pp. 75–97; and Stephen D. Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power: Life on the Pareto Frontier," in Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism,* pp. 234–249. These theorists do not, of course, concede to a theory based on material resources the *sole* ability to explain the outcome of conflict-prevailing beliefs; asymmetrical interdependence or preference intensity, institutional context, and various process-level theories may also play a role.

Second, this assumption does not exclude most variants of so-called defensive realism—in which states are assumed to have a preference for security. This is because the assumption of fixed, uniformly conflictual preferences need not mean that every set of state preferences *actually are* conflictual. It is consistent also with the view that—as even Mearsheimer and others commonly thought of as "offensive realists" contend—state preferences are *on average* conflictual. In the latter case, governments must make worst-case assumptions, acting "as if" preferences were fixed, uniform, and conflictual, if high uncertainty prevents governments from distinguishing true threats.[27] Either way, we may assume for the purposes of analysis that preferences are conflictual.

Third, we assume only that underlying preferences are fixed and conflictual, not that the resulting state policies and strategies or systemic outcomes (the dependent variables of any theory of world politics) are necessarily conflictual. Observed political conflict may be deterred or dissuaded by domination, bribery, threats, or balancing. For most realists, the fundamental problem of statecraft is to manage conflict in a world where state interests are fundamentally opposed. Indeed, even if underlying preference functions generate zero-sum conflicts among substantive ends (or are randomly distributed behind a veil of uncertainty), it might reasonably be assumed that all states have a fixed, uniform preference to minimize the political costs of bargaining itself—the blood and treasure squandered in warfare, sanctions, and other forms of coercion. Under such circumstances, we maintain, states have a strong incentive to bargain efficiently and to avoid futile endeavors. This is the basis of the consistent realist concern, from Thucydides to Morgenthau, for moderation in statecraft.

ASSUMPTION 3—INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE: THE PRIMACY OF MATERIAL CAPABILITIES. The first two assumptions—namely that states (or other hierarchical conflict groups) are unitary, rational actors in international politics and that they hold conflicting preferences—imply that realism is concerned primarily with the determinants of distributive bargaining among states. These assumptions, however, remain insufficient to distinguish realist theory, for two related reasons. First, they characterize only agents, but not the structure of their interaction. We still know nothing, even in principle, about how the outcomes of interstate bargaining in anarchy are determined. Second, the two assump-

27. John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy*, p. 337; Eric Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Summer 1997), pp. 1–49; and Robert Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," in Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*.

tions describe a world of constant background conditions. What permits us to explain variation in world politics?

We thus require a third and pivotal assumption, namely that interstate bargaining outcomes reflect the relative cost of threats and inducements, which is directly proportional to the distribution of material resources. In contrast to theories that emphasize the role of issue-specific coordination, persuasive appeals to shared cultural norms or identities, relative preference intensity, international institutions, or collective norms in shaping bargaining outcomes, realism stresses the ability of states, absent a common international sovereign, to coerce or bribe their counterparts. This is consistent with the assumptions outlined above. If underlying state preferences are assumed to be zero-sum, there is generally no opportunity (absent a third party at whose expense both benefit) for mutually profitable compromise or contracting to a common institution in order to realize positive-sum gains. Nor can states engage in mutually beneficial political exchange through issue linkage. The primary means of redistributing resources, therefore, is to threaten punishment or offer a side payment. It follows that the less costly threats or inducements are to the sender, and the more costly or valuable they are to the target, the more credible and effective they will be. Each state employs such means up to the point where making threats and promises are less costly to them than the (uniform) benefits thereby gained.[28]

The ability of a state to do this successfully—its influence—is proportional to its underlying power, which is defined in terms of its access to exogenously varying material resources. For realists, such variation does not reduce to variation in preferences, beliefs, or institutional position. States faced with a similar strategic situation will extract a similar proportion of domestic resources. With fixed, uniform preferences, a large state will thus expend more resources and is therefore more likely to prevail. The obvious example is military force, but there is no reason to exclude from the realist domain the use of commercial or financial sanctions, boycotts, and inducements to achieve economic ends—commonly termed "mercantilism"—regardless of whether the outcome is connected with security or the means are military. Realists need only assume that efficacy is proportional to total material capabilities. It follows that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.

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28. Coleman argues that coercion—"where the superordinate agrees to withhold an action that would make the subordinate worse off in exchange for the subordinate's obeying the superordinate"—is a "somewhat special" case of exchange. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory,* p. 29; and Kenneth A. Oye, *Economic Discrimination and Political Exchange: World Political Economy in the 1930s and 1980s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Realists have long insisted that control over material resources in world politics lies at the core of realism. When Morgenthau, Waltz, and Gilpin proclaim that the central premise of realism is the "autonomy of the political," they mean that by treating material capability as an objective, universal, and unalienable political instrument, independent of national preferences, institutions, and perceptions, realists isolate the essence of world politics. This simple notion gives force to Morgenthau's and Waltz's consistent dismissal of ideals, domestic institutions, economic interests, psychology, and other sources of varied state preferences—a position inherited (almost verbatim) from Niccolò Machiavelli, Friedrich Meinecke, and Max Weber.[29] For all these realists, material resources constitute a fundamental "reality" that exercises an exogenous influence on state behavior no matter what states seek, believe, or construct.[30] This is the wellspring of the label "realism." Realism, we maintain, is only as parsimonious and distinctive as its willingness to adhere firmly to this assumption. This assertion, above all else, distinguishes realism from liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist explanations, which predict that domestic extraction of resources and interstate interaction will vary not with control over material resources, but with state preferences, beliefs, and information.

The Degeneration of Contemporary Realist Theory

So far we have argued that a distinct realist paradigm must rest on three core assumptions. The power of these premises can be seen in contemporary realist theories that adhere firmly to them. Despite his curious reluctance to make explicit assumptions of conflictual preferences and rationality, Kenneth Waltz's influential neorealist theory, which stresses the polarity of the international system, is broadly consistent with these premises. John Mearsheimer's gloomy predictions about the future of Europe, derived from consideration of the consequences of shifts in polarity on national military policy, are as well.[31] Joanne Gowa adheres to core realist assumptions in her provocative argument that both the democratic peace and post–World War II international liberalization were designed in large part to generate "security externalities" within a bipolar structure of power.[32] Stephen Krasner, Robert Gilpin, and David Lake

29. The language in Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* p. 5, is echoed almost verbatim in Waltz, *Theory of International Politics.* On Weber, see Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).
30. Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case," pp. xii–xiv.
31. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future."
32. Joanne Gowa, *Allies, Adversaries, and International Trade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

have argued that the level of overall openness in the world economy is a function of the concentration of control over economic capabilities.[33] Robert Keohane, while in other senses not a realist, applies a similar logic to the role of hegemons in international economic institutions.[34] Gilpin and Paul Kennedy address the historical succession of security orders.[35] On a recognizably realist basis, Dale Copeland explains major war and Christopher Layne criticizes the democratic peace thesis.[36] Robert Powell's game-theoretical reformulation of realism in terms of increasing returns to material capabilities, like closely related theories of offense and defense dominance, fits within the three core assumptions, as does Barry Posen's analysis of variation in military doctrine.[37]

Among those who claim to be realists today, however, adherence to these core realist premises is the exception rather than the rule. Most recent realist scholarship—notably that of "defensive" and "neoclassical" realists—flatly violates the second and third premises. To illustrate this tendency, we first turn briefly to recent developments in abstract realist theory, focusing particularly on explicit definitions of realism, then trace three trends in recent empirical theory and research that highlight the slide of realism into liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theory, respectively.

MINIMAL REALISM IN THEORY

Most recent formulations of the realist paradigm are inconsistent with our tripartite formulation. Most important among these, for our purposes here, is what we term "minimal realism." Minimal realists seek to define a distinct and coherent realist paradigm with reference to a set of assumptions less restrictive than the three we outline above.

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33. Stephen D. Krasner, "State Power and the Structure of Foreign Trade," *World Politics,* Vol. 28, No. 3 (April 1976), pp. 317–347; Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics;* David A. Lake, *Power, Protection, and Free Trade: International Sources of U.S. Commercial Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Lake, "Leadership, Hegemony, and the International Economy: Naked Emperor or Tattered Monarch with Potential?" *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 37, No. 4 (December 1993), pp. 459–489.

34. Keohane, *After Hegemony.*

35. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics;* and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).

36. Dale Copeland, *Anticipating Power: Dynamic Realism and the Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, forthcoming); and Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy,* pp. 287–331.

37. Robert Powell, "Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory," *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 85, No. 4 (December 1991), pp. 701–726; and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 69, 229.

The most extreme among minimal realists maintain that realism's distinctiveness vis-à-vis other international relations paradigms lies solely in our first assumption—the existence of rational actors in an anarchic setting. Joseph Grieco, for example, maintains that realists need only assume rationality and anarchy—in other words, the pursuit of rational "self-help" strategies—to derive a concern about security and autonomy, a measure of underlying strategic conflict, strategies of relative-gains seeking and balancing of material power, and other elements of realist theory.[38] Outside of a small group of such realists, however, a variety of scholars agree that the assumption of hierarchical actors interacting rationally in an anarchic world is insufficient to distinguish realism. As we discuss below, this assumption is shared by almost all other schools.[39] Because anarchy and rationality are constant, moreover, assuming them tells us little about the distinctive realist variables and causal mechanisms for explaining variation in state behavior.

Other recent definitions of a realist paradigm therefore include additional assumptions, which seek to serve the same functions of social theory as our second and third assumptions, namely to specify agency and structure, and the interaction between them. Two assumptions are particularly common. First, states seek to realize a fixed set of underlying preferences ranging from defending their territorial integrity and political independence to expanding their influence over their international environment (often referred to, somewhat misleadingly, as "security" and "power," respectively). Second, among the political means states employ to resolve the resulting conflicts, force and the threat of force are preeminent. Nearly all the authors considered in this article base their discussion of realism on such a definition, even when some fail to make this explicit.[40]

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38. Joseph M. Grieco, "Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics," in Michael W. Doyle and G. John Ikenberry, eds., *New Thinking in International Relations Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997), pp. 166–168, is most explicit.

39. The transmethodological consensus on this point is near universal. In addition to Wendt, Powell, Moravcsik, Legro, and Schweller, cited above in n. 22, see Helen V. Milner, "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory," *Review of International Studies,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (January 1991), pp. 67–85.

40. This is true also of some more unwieldy definitions. Elman and Elman, "Lakatos and Neorealism," p. 923, define the realist hard core as rational, strategic states in anarchy seeking survival with limited resources. Ashley Tellis, "Reconstructing Political Realism: The Long March to Scientific Theory," *Security Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter 1995–1996), p. 3, describes "political actions aimed at enhancing security" as the "minimum realist program." Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, "Preface," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy,* pp. ix–x, focus on rationality, anarchy, and power, but make no assumption that underlying goals conflict and limit their definition to the use of military force. We see a similar move in Buzan, Jones, and Little, *The Logic of Anarchy,* which seeks to integrate interdependence, preferences, information, and institutions into a "realist" theory tied together only by the fact that it is systemic.

Yet even this more elaborate form of minimal realism fails to distinguish realism from its alternative paradigms, because nearly all variants of liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories share the same three assumptions.[41] Consider, for example, functional regime theory, democratic peace theory, theories of "aggressor" states, "endogenous" theories of international trade policy, and strategic culture theory. Surely, none is realist, yet each concurs that in an anarchic world system, no superordinate institution can establish a monopoly of legitimate force; rational unitary states are the major actors.[42] (Although it is true that liberals and epistemic theorists focus on contestation among subnational actors in the process of preference or belief formation, they generally hold that they act rationally thereafter.) Nearly all agree, moreover, that states are self-interested and their preferences, at least in security matters, lie somewhere between security and power. Indeed, nearly all go much further, assuming that a perfect underlying harmony of interest is so rare as to be almost irrelevant; a measure of conflict over underlying values and interests, all modern theories agree, is endemic to world politics. Nearly all concur, furthermore, that governments generally place a high, perhaps superordinate, value on national security, territorial integrity, and political independence. They also agree that a central and often decisive instrument available to states—the *ultima ratio,* at least in the abstract—is coercive force. In sum, among modern international relations theories, the claims that "power and interests matter," that states seek to "influence" one another in pursuit of often conflicting "self-interests," and that "self-help" through military force is an important, perhaps the most important, instrument of statecraft, are trivial.

Most clearly missing from minimal realism, as compared to the tripartite definition with which we began, are any distinctive assumptions about the source and resolution of conflict. Yet its adherents continue to employ realist rhetoric and claim consistency with traditional realist theory. This lack of

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41. Some sociological theories take the somewhat different view that actors behave according to a noninstrumental "logic of appropriateness," whereby actors conform to internalized rules imposed by society. See Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 28–31; and James March and Johan Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

42. Stefano Guzzini's assessment goes to the heart of the matter: "The closest we can get to . . . a single . . . assumption that would demarcate realism is the idea of anarchy . . . [But] traditional defenders of collective security [as well as 'democratic peace' liberals] have the same starting point. Rather than setting Realism apart from other international theories, the assumption of anarchy sets International Relations apart from other disciplines." Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. viii–ix. See also Helen V. Milner, "The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations"; and Keohane, "Introduction," *After Hegemony.*

distinctiveness is not simply a matter of abstract definition. It is, we argue, the most striking common characteristic of contemporary midrange "realist" theories. Increasingly, realist research invokes factors extraneous, even contradictory, to the three core realist assumptions, but consistent with core assumptions of existing nonrealist paradigms. This degeneration takes three distinct forms, depending on whether realists invoke exogenous variation in preferences, beliefs, or international institutions. These correspond, respectively, to realist degeneration into liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories. Below we consider each in turn.

FROM REALISM TO LIBERALISM: POWER IS WHAT STATES WANT IT TO BE

The traditional realist view—about which there was, until recently, little disagreement—assumes that state preferences are fixed and uniform. Morgenthau and Waltz, we have seen, believed that this assumption accounts for realism's power and parsimony.[43] Still, there has been heated debate among modern realists over precisely which fixed, uniform preferences should be ascribed to states. Morgenthau emphasizes power itself as a goal, by which he may have meant a generalized desire to expand.[44] Waltz speaks of survival as the ultimate goal of states, but allows that states may seek anything between minimal survival and world domination. As we have seen, this assumption imposes almost no constraint on state behavior, because it subsumes the entire spectrum of possible motivations of states from pure harmony to zero-sum conflict, undefined and untheorized. Only outright self-abnegation is excluded.[45] This has given rise to a variety of formulations of the precise specification of state preferences. For our purposes, we need note only that throughout there has been agreement *in principle* that realism must assume fixed and uniform preferences, without which it loses its distinctiveness and power.

Yet many intellectual descendents of Morgenthau and Waltz reject even this. They neither simply disagree about the specific nature of fixed assumptions to

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43. Morgenthau speaks for nearly all realists in arguing that realism must "guard against two popular fallacies: the concern with motives and the concern with ideological preferences. . . . History shows no exact and necessary correlation between the quality of motives and the quality of foreign policy." Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* pp. 5–7; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* p. 29, see also pp. 65–66, 79, 90, 108–112, 196–198, 271; and Grieco, "Realist International Theory," p. 165.

44. Morgenthau's use of the term "power" can be ill-defined and overly expansive. See Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 25–37.

45. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* pp. 118, 126. Fareed Zakaria speaks for most contemporary realists when he terms Waltz's writings on such questions "confused and contradictory." Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 26–28.

be assumed, nor even challenge the notion that they are conflictual. They reject the underlying notion of fixed preferences itself. Nearly all argue that state behavior is influenced not just by power calculations, but by the varying points on the spectrum between motivations of security and power (expansion) on which different states find themselves. Such explanations inevitably import consideration of exogenous variation in the societal and cultural sources of state preferences, thereby sacrificing both the coherence of realism and appropriating midrange theories of interstate conflict based on liberal assumptions. Such theories include those that stress the nature of domestic representative institutions (e.g., the democratic peace), the nature of economic interests (e.g., liberal interdependence theories), and collective values concerning national identity, socioeconomic redistribution, and political institutions.

Our skeptical judgment is hardly new. A generation ago, Arnold Wolfers drew the consequences of such ad hoc extensions of realist theory: "One consequence of distinctions such as these [between hostile and status quo states] is worth mentioning. They rob [realist] theory of the determinate and predictive character that seemed to give the pure power hypothesis its peculiar value. It can no longer be said of the actual world, for example, that a power vacuum cannot exist for any length of time."[46] This tendency is evident in the work of self-styled realists like Jack Snyder, Joseph Grieco, Fareed Zakaria, Randall Schweller, and Stephen Van Evera.

JACK SNYDER ON IMPERIALISM. We begin with Jack Snyder's analysis of imperialism, to which we owe the label "defensive realism." Snyder sets out to explain "overexpansion"—situations in which great powers expand beyond the point where they trigger overwhelming countercoalitions and disastrous counterpressures. Unlike some of the theorists we examine below, Snyder provides a detailed theory to back his claims about the importance of domestic politics. For Snyder, the taproot of overexpansion lies in the misrepresentation of domestic interests such that small rent-seeking groups can profit at the expense of diffuse constituencies—a general tendency exacerbated by deliberate manipulation of ideology and logrolling among "cartelized" interest groups. The extent to which states are prone to such pathologies is a function, Snyder argues, of the timing of industrialization.[47]

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46. Arnold Wolfers, "The Pole of Power and the Pole of Indifference," in Wolfers, ed., *Discord and Collaboration: Essays in International Politics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), p. 42, see also pp. 86, 156, 160. Even in Waltz, *Theory of International Politics,* we encounter only the assertion, rather than the derivation, of the primacy of systemic concerns.

47. Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Snyder presents this argument as an improvement of realism by integrating domestic factors consistent with it. "My arguments stressing the domestic determinants of grand strategy," he argues, "are fully consistent with the defensive version of realism"—an ascription he defends with reference to Morgenthau.[48] Yet while many treat Snyder's argument as a definitive statement of defensive realism, his position has been criticized for its heavy reliance on domestic factors. As Zakaria observes: "While neorealism is loosely depicted as leaving domestic politics out, many defensive realists in fact have displayed the opposite tendency, using domestic politics to do all the work in their theories. . . . In the end we are left not with a novel combination of systemic and domestic determinants, but with a restatement of the traditional *Innenpolitik* case."[49] At the very least, Snyder's effort to redefine realism as including assumptions and causal mechanisms not traditionally connected with it has led realists into conceptual confusion about whether realism means anything at all. To employ more traditional terminology, if, as Zakaria asserts, realism subsumes both what Waltz terms "structural factors" at the system level and classic diplomatic historians the *Primat der Aussenpolitik,* and domestic and societal factors that alter state preferences, which diplomatic historians term the *Primat der Innenpolitik,* what is excluded? Are any concrete assumptions of this theory still distinctly realist?

Yet the problem is even more fundamental. What is innovative in Snyder's explanation draws almost exclusively on an existing *nonrealist* international relations paradigm. Snyder's is a classically liberal analysis of the impact on foreign policy of shifting domestic state-society relations in modernizing societies. As a matter of intellectual history, Snyder's theory is drawn from John Hobson and, as Zakaria notes, the left-liberal and social democratic German *Innenpolitik* school. As a matter of social science theory, its core assumptions are almost identical to contemporary theories of the democratic peace and of the role of domestic institutions in trade policy, both of which rest on specific implications of domestic misrepresentation and rent seeking for foreign policy. In sum, there is a disjuncture between label and reality. Snyder's midrange theory does not confirm realist assumptions; it demonstrates the power and generality of fundamental liberal assumptions beyond the simple case of the democratic peace. His theoretical language, which terms all of this "realist,"

48. Ibid., p. 12, see also pp. 19–20, 64.
49. Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy,* quote on p. 463, and Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power,* pp. 32–33, 181–183. We do not endorse all of Zakaria's criticisms of Snyder.

simply obscures, if not misstates outright, the significance of his important empirical result.

JOSEPH GRIECO ON RELATIVE GAINS. Joseph Grieco's proposal to define realism in terms of states' concerns about relative gains provides another example, this one from political economy, of how the line between power and preferences can become blurred when realism is not rigorously defined. Grieco posits that states are "defensive positionalists" in search of security—a desire that makes them sensitive to relative rather than absolute gains. States cooperate less—or, more precisely, they cooperate under different circumstances—than the mere presence of mutual benefits might lead us to expect, because they must "pay close attention to how cooperation might affect relative *capabilities* in the future."[50] Despite much criticism of this formulation and disagreement about whether the gains in question are actually "relative," Grieco clearly captures an essential quality of realism, namely its assumption of underlying conflict—a quality we highlight in our statement of core assumptions.[51]

Grieco is aware that states do not always forgo "absolute" economic benefits for "relative" geopolitical gains, so that any theory must state the antecedent conditions under which relative-gains seeking occurs. Given that not all states in all situations are equally sensitive to gaps in payoffs, he argues, we should employ a factor (termed *k*) that measures sensitivity to gaps between payoffs (relative gains), alongside absolute gains. We can thus restate Grieco's causal claim as follows: When *k* is high, states are more motivated to seek relative gains (or limit losses). This simply displaces the causal question, however, for we are now impelled to ask: What determines the value of *k?* What motivates states to worry about relative gains? Is this motivation distinctively realist?

In answering these questions, Grieco is driven to tinker with the assumption of fixed preferences, thus revealing that his relative gains–seeking definition of realism lacks theoretical coherence and distinctiveness. How does Grieco seek to establish the "realist" nature of his argument? He does so by assuming that the issue area in question explains variation in *k.* Specifically, *k* is always high in security affairs, an assumption endorsed by Mearsheimer and others.[52] Yet this assumed correlation between security policy and relative-gains seeking (even if it were clearly realist) is unsustainable. On the one hand, there are

50. Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," in Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism,* p. 138; and Powell, "Absolute and Relative Gains in International Relations Theory."
51. For the subsequent debate, see Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism.*
52. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," p. 342.

numerous security issues—say, interactions among democracies, the construction of security regimes, or power politics without increasing returns—about which it is difficult to conclude that there is any incentive to pursue a relative gains–seeking strategy.[53] Even more striking, economic conflict alone can give rise to realist and mercantilist dynamics, without the involvement of any security interest—as scholars such as Stephen Krasner, Michael Mastanduno, James Fearon, and David Lake have demonstrated.[54] As many critics have noted, neither Grieco's analysis of post–Tokyo round trade policy nor his other work reveals convincing evidence that "relative gains" in those areas could be exploited to threaten national security.[55]

Cut loose from the claim that all security conflicts necessarily generate intense underlying conflict (a high value of k), however, the "relative-gains seeking" account of realism no longer imposes any a priori theoretical constraint on variation in state preferences (variation in k). The argument becomes instead: When state interests clash, for whatever reason, conflict is more likely. Yet because other theories—realist, liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist—also predict that conflict may result from opposed interests and offer explanations of that variation in interests, there is nothing distinctly realist about relative-gains seeking per se.[56] In seeking to specify the determinants of variation in k, Grieco himself invokes variation in the nature of individual states—including "previous experiences," "reputation for exploitation," and whether they are "long-term ally . . . or adversary"—as well as more traditionally realist factors connected with relative power.[57] Indeed, nonrealist studies of trade policy find

53. Bruce M. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert Jervis, "Security Regimes," *International Organization,* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 357–378; Jack Snyder, "Averting Anarchy in the New Europe," *International Security,* Vol. 14, No. 4 (Spring 1990), pp. 5–41; and George Downs and Keisuke Iida, "Assessing the Theoretical Case against Collective Security," in Downs, ed., *Collective Security beyond the Cold War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 17–39.

54. Krasner, *Structural Conflict;* Mastanduno, "Do Relative Gains Matter?"; James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization,* Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 379–414; and Lake, "Leadership, Hegemony, and the International Economy."

55. Peter Liberman, "Trading with the Enemy: Security and Relative Economic Gains," *International Security,* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Summer 1996), pp. 155–158; Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously," pp. 538–540; and Robert O. Keohane, "Institutionalist Theory and the Realist Challenge after the Cold War," in Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism,* p. 280ff.

56. Because k cannot be observed directly and it is difficult to differentiate security from power seeking—hence the security dilemma—it is difficult to know how this theory could be tested, absent a theory of the determinants of k. There has been, to our knowledge, no attempt to measure k independently of state behavior. Cf. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," pp. 347–348.

57. See Joseph M. Grieco, "Realist Theory and the Problem of International Cooperation," *Journal of Politics,* Vol. 50, No. 3 (August 1988), pp. 610–612; and Grieco, *Cooperation among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 45–47.

that particularly strong pressure from economic interest groups—the classic liberal explanation for protection—is concentrated in precisely those areas (government procurement and industrial standardization) in which Grieco's study of the Tokyo round finds unexplained relative-gains seeking.[58]

Absent a tighter paradigmatic definition of realism and more detailed specification of its causal mechanisms, this fundamental indeterminacy and lack of theoretical distinctiveness cannot be surmounted. The central problem for Grieco is quite simply that relative-gains concerns, conflict, inefficient bargaining, and suboptimal cooperation are predicted by all major rationalist (and some nonrationalist) theories of international relations. The key differences among paradigms lie not in *whether* they predict interstate conflict—all do—but in *when, why,* and *under what circumstances* they predict conflict. Bargaining failures, such as those Grieco observes in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, may result from inefficient bargaining under uncertainty, as institutionalists and negotiation analysts maintain; from particularly conflictual societal preferences, as liberals argue; or from a lack of shared language or cultural capital, as some epistemic theorists assert—as well as concerns about future power, as realists contend. Without a more precise specification of realism, Grieco cannot distinguish these empirically or theoretically.[59]

NEOCLASSICAL REALISM. Whereas Snyder and Grieco stress the preference of states for security, a new generation of realists, recently heralded by Gideon Rose as "neoclassical realists" (NCRs), stresses the other pole of Waltz's loose specification of state preferences—the natural desire of all states to wield external influence.[60] States, the NCRs argue, do not simply respond defensively to threats; they exploit power differentials to expand their influence over their external environment—a view of international politics quite different from that based on the simple assumption that states seek security. Some of these realists—notably Zakaria, as we have seen—are harsh critics of Snyder and others for their purported ad hoc reliance on domestic factors to explain conflict among states assumed only to seek security.

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58. For a review of this literature, James E. Alt, Jeffry Frieden, Michael J. Gilligan, Dani Rodrik, and Ronald Rogowski, "The Political Economy of International Trade: Enduring Puzzles and an Agenda for Inquiry," *Comparative Political Studies,* Vol. 29, No. 6 (December 1996), pp. 689–717.

59. Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power"; and Keohane, "Institutionalist Theory and the Realist Challenge." If such bargaining failure cannot be attributed to concerns about ex post cheating, Grieco argues, it confirms realist claims. Yet Grieco concedes the existence of a competing liberal explanation in a long footnote, but then drops the point. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation," pp. 486–488.

60. Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998), pp. 144–172.

Yet, ironically, neoclassical realism (NCR) suffers from precisely the same weaknesses as defensive realism, namely theoretical indeterminacy and a reliance on exogenous variation in state preferences. Most NCRs seek to incorporate in one form or another variation between states with underlying status quo and revisionist preferences. The incorporation of variation in underlying domestic preferences, we argue, undermines (if not eliminates) the theoretical distinctiveness of NCR as a form of realism by rendering it indistinguishable from nonrealist theories about domestic institutions, ideas, and interests. For realists, however, these domestic preference shifts, moreover, remain ad hoc.[61] As with defensive realists, this inclination toward indeterminacy and indistinctness is not a purely abstract concern, but adversely influences the empirical work of some of realism's latest and brightest defenders. Consider the work of Zakaria and Schweller.

FAREED ZAKARIA ON NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA. Fareed Zakaria offers an insightful analysis of the reasons why the U.S. government moved toward expansion in the late nineteenth century more slowly and less thoroughly than shifts in relative power predict. To explain this neorealist anomaly, Zakaria rejects the traditional realist assumption of a unitary state in favor of a distinction between domestic state apparatus (state) and society (nation). State power, he argues, depends not just on control over resources, but on the ability of states to extract those resources from society.[62] The tendency of states to expand is thus a function of the international *and* domestic power of the state. Both, he contends, were necessary for late-nineteenth-century U.S. expansion. Insofar as states are influenced by relative power *and* can muster societal support for their policies, they exploit opportunities to wield influence.

Zakaria's argument is a noteworthy effort to bridge the gap between domestic and international politics. Yet it rests decisively on treating a state's ability to extract societal resources not simply as an exogenous factor predictably related to geographical control over material resources, but also as a function of particular domestic political circumstances. Zakaria compounds the inherent indeterminacy of an unweighted combination of material and domestic political sources of power by offering no general theory (or even consistent inter-

61. Ibid. Rose seeks to make a virtue of this, citing Aristotle for the proposition that domestic politics is simply too complex a subject about which to generalize. This claim must come as a surprise not only to scholars of comparative and U.S. politics, but to those who study the democratic peace, economic interdependence, aggressive ideologies, and other domestic determinants of security policy. In any case, no more recent support for the assumption is provided.

62. For a similar argument, see Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

pretation) of shifts in domestic state power. Absent a theory of domestic politics, any argument about why a particular state can extract more or fewer resources from domestic society (even an argument implying irrational state behavior) becomes consistent with what Zakaria terms "state-centered realism." This is reflected in the exceptionally wide range of considerations that he admits affected "the degree to which national power can be converted into state power"—including technological, ideological, institutional, partisan, cultural, and racial influences.[63]

Although Zakaria employs an indeterminate assemblage of causal factors, he draws disproportionately on precisely those liberal factors cited by contemporary liberal democratic peace or endogenous tariff theorists—as well as early twentieth-century "idealists." (This is particularly ironic, given his widely cited criticism of Snyder for adhering to just this *Primat der Innenpolitik*.) Zakaria returns repeatedly to a core claim of democratic peace theory, namely that legislative or judicial control over the executive undermines its ability to deploy force aggressively, except where expected costs are low.[64] He frequently invokes mutual recognition among liberal republics, economic modernization, public unwillingness to increase taxes for overseas adventures or military procurement, popular opinion on questions like race, and partisan politics—all well-developed liberal causal mechanisms. Surely Morgenthau, Carr, and George Kennan would be hard pressed to recognize in such a view a renewal of classical realism.[65]

RANDALL SCHWELLER ON INTERWAR FOREIGN POLICY. Randall Schweller's book on the security policy of the great powers between the world wars, *Deadly Imbalances*, offers another instructive example of how recent realists have come to rely on ad hoc variation in state preferences in lieu of variation in (even broad measures of) capabilities.[66] Schweller argues that the decisive cause of changes in state behavior during the 1930s was a perceived shift in the power structure from multipolarity to tripolarity. This appears at first glance to be a traditional realist argument, yet the shift in polarity in the 1930s was not, in

63. Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power*, p. 38.
64. Ibid., pp. 60–67, 77–78, 90–127.
65. Zakaria cites Otto Hintze and Morgenthau in his defense. Yet Hintze viewed state structure as a product of international circumstances, not the reverse. Morgenthau, we shall see, did not believe that his claims about moral restraint were realist. Vague though Morgenthau's notion of "power" may be, he firmly rejects appeals to public opinion. "The government," he wrote, "must realize that it is the leader and not the slave of public opinion. [Public opinion is] continuously created and recreated by informed and responsible leadership." Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, pp. 133–135, 205, chap. 9.
66. Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Schweller's view, the result of exogenous shifts in the distribution of material resources. Instead it reflected the decisions of particular revisionist nations, notably Germany, to build up their military forces beyond what was tolerated by others or required for security. Germany's leap from a lesser power to major power "pole," for example, occurs suddenly as a result of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and his particular idiosyncratic conception of German national interest.[67]

This shift in emphasis from variation in material capabilities to variation in state preferences is the essence of Schweller's theoretical contribution. Schweller criticizes Stephen Walt for his unwillingness to integrate fully variation in state preferences. He proposes Walt's evolution from "balance of power" to "balance of threat" be extended one step further to "balance-of-interest" theory. State behavior and international outcomes, he argues, vary with the distribution of both state power and state preferences, but primarily the latter. "The most important determinant of alignment decisions," Schweller asserts, "is the compatibility of political goals, not imbalances of power or threat."[68] One simply cannot assume that states uniformly seek any particular goal. Some states ("wolves" and "jackals," he terms them) have an intrinsic desire for revision or risky gain, while other states ("lambs" and "lions") seek only the status quo. Schweller's predictions are driven by this distinction. Revisionists, he argues, "bandwagon for profit" and thus seek "minimum winning coalitions," while status quo states seek to balance only against threats and are comfortable with overwhelming power. Many other similar predictions follow.[69]

With this analysis, Schweller reverses the causal arrow of realism. Rather than arguing, as have realists for centuries, that the distribution of power influences state behavior despite varying preferences, he offers a compelling and creative account of how governments adjust their power to their preferences. Coherence and distinctiveness are thereby sacrificed. The coherence of realism is undermined because it is unclear what set of common nontrivial assumptions would permit us to explain state behavior as a function of both variation in power and variation in underlying state preferences. Schweller,

67. Ibid., pp. 26–29, 93–120.
68. Ibid., p. 22; and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy*, pp. 255–257. Andrew Kydd terms this view "motivational realism." Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing." This, it should be noted, violates Rose's explicit definition of NCR, which assumes that systemic factors remain empirically more important.
69. See Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances*, pp. 84–89; and Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances," pp. 928–929.

moreover, neither consistently invokes nor develops any particular theory of domestic preferences—let alone a distinctively realist one.[70] To the contrary, insofar as we can read a theory into Schweller's empirical interpretations, he tends, like Zakaria, to invoke concrete causal mechanisms central to liberal and epistemic theories. In the few cases in which he speculates on the underlying sources of state preferences, Schweller cites the democratic peace and the aggressiveness of totalitarian dictators.[71] What is excluded from such an analysis? And if preexisting liberal international relations theories offer more detailed, compelling, and empirically robust causal mechanisms, what is gained by subsuming a thinner version under a loose conception of "realism"?[72]

To defend the realist label, Schweller neither links his argument to a coherent set of realist assumptions nor explicitly distinguishes it from nonrealist theory. Instead, he invokes intellectual history.[73] Morgenthau, he maintains, employed the distinction between status quo and revisionist states, as well as writing about the role of domestic politics, ideas, and institutions. Schweller's appeal to the intellectual history of classical realism deserves our closer attention, because it—and the characteristic error in social science theorizing it represents—is also found in the scholarship of Zakaria, Snyder, and others.

Efforts to define realism by reference to intellectual history in general, and classical realism in particular, are deeply flawed. The coherence of theories is not defined by their intellectual history, but by their underlying assumptions and causal mechanisms. Resort to intellectual history offers a circular definition, restating rather than resolving the question of what realism is: It is what realists believe, and realists are those who believe it. Moreover, intellectual traditions, and even individual statements, contain unresolved, often contradictory tensions. Thus scholars have long debated whether the arguments of realists from Thucydides to Kennan are in fact coherently realist.[74] It is noteworthy—although thoroughly unnoted in current debates—that Carr and Morgenthau themselves denied that any argument they advanced was ipso facto realist. Both were generally careful to distinguish the realist parts of their

70. See Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances,* pp. 31–38.
71. See, for example, ibid., pp. 200–201.
72. This confusing situation can arise because Schweller, like other contemporary realists, tests his theory against neorealism but ignores nonrealist alternatives.
73. Ibid., p. 20.
74. Those with concerns other than social scientific explanation may legitimately see indeterminacy and richness as a virtue. Michael W. Doyle concludes a recent study of realism by warning that if we "want to retain the range of insight embodied in the works of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Rousseau . . . we need to reject a monolithic conception of a Realist model." Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace: Realism, Liberalism, and Socialism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 195; see also pp. 137–160.

analysis from nonrealist parts—often by chapter or section.[75] For all these reasons, rigorous assumptions, not received authority, should determine the coherence of social scientific theory.

On the specific issue of status quo states, moreover, Schweller (like Snyder and Zakaria) simply misreads Morgenthau. In this regard a true realist, Morgenthau introduces "status quo" and "revisionist" policies (he terms them "the policy of imperialism" and "the policy of the status quo," and adds also the "policy of prestige") as *strategies,* not preferences. That is to say, he seeks to show that policies that *appear* to be the result of varying ideologies and intentions are in fact tactics in a common "struggle for power." In the three chapters devoted to these policies in *Politics among Nations,* such policies are explained as responses to shifts in relative power owing to factors such as "lost wars" and "weakness."[76] For Schweller and other contemporary realists, by contrast, the status quo/revisionist distinction refers to *exogenous* variation in state *preferences,* independent of power, which in turn reflects varied domestic circumstances and state-society relations. This is precisely the sort of theoretical appeal that Morgenthau, in this sense a true realist, rejects explicitly. Wolfers again summarizes the matter succinctly: "[In the claim that] countries that seek self-extension tend to be the initiators of power competition and the resort to violence . . . lies the significant kernel of truth in the idealist theory of aggression."[77] Schweller has transformed realism into idealism.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA ON THE CAUSES OF WAR. A final example of the slide from power to preferences is visible in the work of Stephen Van Evera—arguably the most influential scholar among a generation that has revitalized theoretical debates in security studies. Van Evera's magisterial study of the causes of war aims explicitly to improve realism by highlighting the weaknesses of objective material measures of aggregate power and redirecting us to consider a broader range of factors.[78]

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75. For example, Morgenthau distinguishes consistently and explicitly between realist and nonrealist elements. The realist elements rest on "the concept of interest defined in terms of power," which "sets politics as [a] . . . sphere of action and understanding" independent of law, morality, or economics. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* pp. 5, 7–8, 12. He explicitly sets off sections on norms and institutions with an introduction presenting them as alternatives to the initial realist theory. Ibid., p. 227. E.H. Carr's classic realist statement contains similarly self-conscious dichotomies. Carr, *The Twenty-Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 93–94.

76. See especially Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations,* pp. 50–51. About this there is no exegetical ambiguity in the relevant chapters. Still, we agree with Robert Keohane that there is considerable contradiction and paradigmatic ambiguity in these theorists.

77. Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration,* p. 96.

78. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); citations are from a manuscript copy.

Although Van Evera does employ some progressive extensions of the realist research program, notably hypotheses on the consequences of variation in the offense-defense balance, his major focus is on preferences and perceptions, not objective measures, of power.[79] He is admirably clear, moreover, in explicitly rejecting both a Waltzian interpretation of biased preferences (which treats them as an indirect consequence of underlying power structures) and a random, psychological, or irrational explanation of them. Instead Van Evera, very much like Snyder in his work on imperialism, attributes biased perceptions of power to the generalizable impact of four factors: manipulation by elites, self-serving bureaucracies, militarism, and nationalist ideology. Where these factors are present, aggression and war are more likely. As in Snyder's work, the preferences and relative power of social groups are the underlying independent variables, while perceptions and ideas often serve as an intervening process that widens and deepens the domestic influence of those groups.[80] An obvious objection to such a broad definition of realism is simply that it lacks any analytical coherence. What common assumptions can it claim with realism?

The problem here, however, is not simply the breadth and questionable coherence of Van Evera's brand of realism. A deeper flaw is that the concrete causal mechanisms Van Evera cites—his willingness to make these very explicit is among the most admirable qualities of his work—stems from existing nonrealist international relations paradigms. Most relate state behavior to inequalities and biases in the preferences and power of particularistic domestic interest groups, who mislead or coerce the less powerful to pursue policies to their narrow advantage. Such arguments lie at the very core of the liberal international relations paradigm, in which domestic misrepresentation is an important source of interstate conflict in issues ranging from war to tariff policy.

What could be more classically liberal, for example, than Van Evera's well-reasoned conjecture that misperceptions "originate with the world's propagandists, spin doctors, and professional obfuscators, whose self-serving falsehoods become national misperceptions" and that "publics misperceive because they are misled by national leaders, state bureaucracies, or propagandists"?[81] In his influential article, "Primed for Peace," Van Evera explains post–Cold War peace

79. Ibid., p. 8.
80. Ibid., pp. 9–10. Van Evera is quite explicit that he considers this move realist: "The theories discussed here address the effects of the structure of power, or of perceptions of the structure of power. As such they fall into the Realist camp. Their explanatory power therefore adds to the overall explanatory power of Realism, and bolsters Realist arguments that power factors strongly shape international politics."
81. Ibid.

in Western Europe with reference to a bold series of classical liberal generalizations: economically modern, politically democratic, nationalistically satisfied governments with civilian control over the military, liberal education, complex technological networks, and generous social welfare systems do not provoke wars.[82] Although more modern and sophisticated, Van Evera's core thesis is an intellectual descendent of arguments advanced by early twentieth-century liberal "idealists" like Normal Angell, John Hobson, Lionel Robbins, and Leonard Wolff. Properly understood in terms of its general assumptions and causal processes, Van Evera's scholarship is a confirmation of the unexpectedly robust predictive power of the assumptions underlying liberal or epistemic paradigms—even in the area of pure security studies.[83] The dilution of recent realism obscures this essential commonality.

Whereas the modern liberal international relations paradigm explicitly links domestic misrepresentation to general causal mechanisms and core assumptions underlying phenomena from the democratic peace to tariff policy, Van Evera's hypotheses—despite the brilliance with which they are elaborated—remain theoretically ad hoc. They are related to no explicit set of paradigmatic assumptions—though we have seen their true provenance. Little is gained and much lost by disconnecting such arguments from the liberal assumptions that underlie them and presenting them instead as realist. Van Evera is doing more here than simply challenging a narrow neorealist formulation of realism. In all but name, Van Evera, like Snyder, Grieco, Zakaria, and Schweller, has transformed realism into its opposite.

From realism to epistemic theory: power is what states believe it to be

Realism's central analytical leverage, parsimony, and distinctiveness derive from its ability to explain social life simply through variation in the distribution of objective material power capabilities, rather than preferences, perceptions, or norms. As Benjamin Frankel succinctly puts it, realism assumes "that there are things out there that exist independently of our thoughts and experience. When we admonish an individual to be realistic we urge that individual to give up beliefs or notions that fly in the face of reality."[84] Yet while contemporary realists continue to speak of international "power," their midrange expla-

82. Stephen Van Evera, "Causes of War, Volume 2, Misperception and Its Roots," unpublished book manuscript, pp. 9–10.
83. For a study demonstrating why it is necessary to treat Van Evera as something other than a realist in order to engage in any sort of orderly empirical testing, see Peter Liberman, "The Spoils of Conquest," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 125–153.
84. Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case," p. xiii.

nations of state behavior have subtly shifted the core emphasis from variation in objective power to variation in *beliefs and perceptions* of power.

This poses a fundamental problem. If the perceptions and beliefs about effective means-ends calculations of states, given adequate information, consistently fail to correspond to material power relationships, then power is at best one of a number of important factors and perhaps a secondary one. The parsimony and coherence of realist theory is eroded.[85] When recent realists theorize this relationship explicitly, moreover, they are forced to borrow propositions more fully elaborated in existing epistemic theories, which theorize the influence of societal beliefs that structure means-ends calculations and affect perceptions of the environment. If realism subsumes, alongside traditional material capabilities, factors such as national ideology, organizational biases, and perceptions, what remains theoretically distinctive? If any government acting on the basis of geopolitical national interest *or* the aims of a particularistic interest group *or* ideationally induced strategies or misperceptions is in accord with "realist" theory, what plausible constraints on state behavior are excluded?

We have already glimpsed this tendency in the work discussed in the preceding section. As well as relying on exogenous variation in preferences, these works accord causal significance to exogenous shifts in collective beliefs about means-ends relations. Snyder and Van Evera dip into epistemic theory when they highlight "blowback," whereby elites and states become trapped in their own myths. The resulting policies no longer serve either elite interests, as liberals predict, or the maintenance of the balance of power, as realists predict.[86] Van Evera points in particular to the cultural factors, independent from actual technology and military feasibility, that shape how states view the offense-defense balance.[87] Schweller invokes epistemes when he asserts that

85. Robert Jervis, "Realism, Game Theory, and Cooperation," *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (April 1988), pp. 317–349. It is, of course, consistent with realism to trace the nature of perception and calculation back to the distribution of material power, as does Waltz in *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 168–172.

86. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, pp. 41–42, 49. Van Evera recognizes the problem and resolves it by assertion: "The Realist family includes causes lying in the structure of international power and in the misperceptions of that structure, although rather limited room is allowed for misperceptions." Van Evera, *Causes of War*, p. 9 n. 12.

87. Van Evera, *Causes of War*, chap. 6. Building on Van Evera's earlier work, Christensen and Snyder emphasize perception and misperception of the offense-defense balance to explain alliance patterns in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. In contrast to Waltz and traditional realists, however, Christensen and Snyder do not view perceptions as endogenous to power (or as a random product of uncertainty), but as the result of the lessons of past wars and the relative domestic power of civilians and the military. Their aspiration to synthesize different theories and levels of analysis is a progressive step more generally—a point to which we return in the final

contemporary Germany and Japan are not polar powers because they *choose* not to have military power. This, he argues, is not solely because they are status quo powers, but because of specific path-dependent beliefs about the efficacy of force. In this, Schweller would appear to join ranks with culturalists like Thomas Berger and Peter Katzenstein in arguing that German and Japanese antimilitarism results from the socially embedded lessons of World War II, not current strategic opportunities and constraints.[88] Zakaria's study suggests the centrality of a "cultural paradigm shift" in the ideas that underlay how Americans thought about foreign policy—a shift he leaves unexplained.[89] In turning to culture, Zakaria joins the long tradition of realists who find U.S. foreign policy anomalous because "realism is largely alien to American culture."[90] We can more closely observe the shift from realism to epistemic theory in considering the work of Stephen Walt and William Wohlforth.

STEPHEN WALT ON ALLIANCES. Stephen Walt is an effective critic of neorealism, which he considers too spare to explain balancing behavior accurately. He therefore seeks to supplant "balance-of-power" theory with "balance-of-threat" theory. Alliances are triggered by imbalances of "threat," not imbalances of "power." Unlike the concept of power, the concept of external "threat" includes "perceived state intentions" alongside more clearly realist variables like economic resources, military technology, and geography. Walt goes on to demonstrate convincingly that the primary purpose of alliances is to balance, not to bandwagon against threats—an important contribution.

Walt explicitly labels this move as a progressive and parsimonious revision of realist balance-of-power theory.[91] Yet "balance-of-threat" theory in fact sac-

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section. Yet there remains considerable ambiguity whether Christensen and Snyder believe this is a "progressive problem shift" within the realist paradigm or a form of theory synthesis. Certainly they are often cited as realists (e.g., Grieco, "Realist International Theory," p. 181). Either way, Christensen and Snyder clearly demonstrate the fundamental limits not just of neorealist theory but of the realism paradigm more broadly. Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization,* Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring 1990), pp. 144, 166; Christensen, "Perceptions and Alliances in Europe," *International Organization,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Winter 1997), p. 65; and Christensen and Snyder, "Progressive Research and Degenerate Alliances," pp. 920–921.

88. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances,* pp. 19, 88, 164–168, 200.

89. In an otherwise highly complimentary review, historian Walter McDougall calls our attention to precisely this empirical indeterminacy. McDougall, "American Empire: Review of Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*," *New York Times Book Review,* May 3, 1998, p. 25.

90. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," p. 376.

91. For specific claims of a progressive shift, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. viii, 5, 21, 263–265. The underlying problem is that a prediction of balancing is not unique to realism. Nearly all international relations paradigms and theories predict that states align and balance against threats to the realization of one's interests, whether the latter are status quo or revisionist. Why else would a rational government form a

rifices the theoretical coherence and distinctiveness not just of neorealism, but of realist theory more broadly. By combining exogenous changes in power and state perceptions of the intentions of others into a single variable, Walt's "balance-of-threat" approach excludes virtually no potential cause of rational balancing short of irrational, altruistic, or incoherent state action.[92] Combining intentions and power into dimensions of a single variable without an a priori weighting, numerous critics have observed, is a source of fundamental indeterminacy. Walt himself concedes that "one cannot determine a priori . . . which sources of threat will be most important in any given case."[93] An example is his analysis of the Cold War bipolar balance in Europe—arguably the most important single set of alliances in the twentieth century and a "critical" realist case. Perceived state intentions (and geography) reverse the predictions derived from pure power balancing, thereby leading country after country to side with the overwhelming U.S.-led coalition. Absent a clear weighting of factors, how are we to judge (even in principle) whether this confirms or disconfirms Walt's basic theory?

Having cast the theoretical net so widely, Walt necessarily encounters difficulty clearly defining plausible alternative theories (neorealism aside) against which to test his own. At first glance, he appears to treat ideology as an alternative explanation. Yet in fact Walt rejects only very primitive forms of ideological motivation almost absent from international relations theory, notably that governments ally with those who espouse similar formal ideological doctrines.[94] "Balance-of-threat" theory subsumes most other ideological argu-

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military alliance? Theories differ in their predictions about conditions under which states balance. Liberal theories predict balancing against "aggressor" states, institutionalist theories predict balancing within institutions, epistemic and some constructivist theories predict balancing where it is perceived as efficacious, and realist theories predict balancing against power.

92. For a striking statement, see ibid., p. 149: "In the Arab world, the most important source of power has been the ability to manipulate one's own image and the images of one's rivals in the minds of other Arab elites. . . . We are therefore dealing with two broad types of balancing: balancing conducted by military means [and] balancing conducted by political means directed at an opponent's image and legitimacy." There remains ambiguity about whether perceptions of intentions involve basic variations in preferences or beliefs about such intentions—the heart of which lies in the lack of theoretical constraint Walt is able to impose on "state intentions."

93. Ibid., p. 22. Our criticism is not simply this indeterminacy, but that his concept of "threat" subsumes all but the most implausible of prevailing rationalist explanations. Ibid., p. 26. Waltz takes a similar view, arguing that Walt (like Schweller and others) should not be seen as "increasing the explanatory power of defective theory and making it more precise," but bringing in extra-theoretical variables. "Walt," he writes, "[has] unfortunately taken the imaginative application of the theory to be a new one." Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," p. 916. See also Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf, "Neorealism, Neoliberal Institutionalism, and the Future of NATO," *Security Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn 1993), pp. 3–43.

94. Douglas J. MacDonald's review in *Journal of Politics,* Vol. 51, No. 2 (August 1989), p. 796, accuses Walt of employing a "rigid" definition. Walt acknowledges, for example, that the Soviet

ments (as a primary source of "state intentions"), in particular the claim—far more common in the international relations literature—that states ally against ideologies perceived as "aggressive" and with those perceived as "unthreatening." Factors such as Pan-Arabism in the Middle East, Hitler's expansionist view of security before and during World War II, and "the *divisive* character of Soviet Marxist-Leninism . . . an ideology calling for the authoritative leadership of the Socialist system by Moscow" play central causal roles in his empirical explanations.[95]

Of more concern than the indeterminacy of Walt's theory is its appropriation of nonrealist causal mechanisms. The "aggressive intentions" underlying "threats" include precisely those predicted by nearly all nonrealist explanations of alliance formation. As seen in the examples just cited, interpretations of the intentions of others play a central role in the alliances that occur, and these are shaped in turn by the compatibility of strategic beliefs and perceptions held by different countries, as epistemic theory predicts. The alliance among postwar West European democracies (along with a few noncommunist authoritarian states) reflects in large part the perception that they posed less of a threat to one another than did the Soviet Union and its allies—which helps reverse the impact of material variables. Walt does not clearly specify whether the Western perception of aggressive Soviet intentions is the product of underlying preferences, as liberal theories of peace and war (notably democratic peace theory) predict, or of strategic beliefs and perceptions, as epistemic theory predicts. We do know, however, that these intentions are exogenous to economic capabilities, military technology, and geography—distinctive variables in traditional realist theory. What is gained by terming this unwieldy synthesis a progressive extension of "realism," thereby impeding any possible empirical challenge from more plausible nonrealist explanations?

WILLIAM WOHLFORTH ON THE END OF THE COLD WAR. The centrality of perceptions and beliefs—and thus epistemic theory—is even clearer in William Wohlforth's analysis of Soviet (and U.S.) policy during the Cold War.[96] Like Zakaria, Wohlforth argues that state behavior is shaped most fundamentally

Union allied with leftist regimes in the Middle East and the United States did not, but he does not treat such actions as ideologically motivated because neither superpower demanded that its allies alter their domestic policies.

95. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp. 149, 168, 266; and Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Politics," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy*, pp. 214, 243 (emphasis in original).

96. We set aside another problem, namely Wohlforth's evident reliance on a distinction between status quo and revisionist states as a "contextual" factor explaining Soviet preferences and, in particular, the absence of a "World War III." As we have already discussed degeneration into liberal theory, we focus here on Wohlforth's overt perceptual challenge to objective power analysis in

not by exogenous variation in objective power, but in varying *perceptions* of power. Unlike Zakaria, however, who employs perceptions of ruling elites primarily as a method to observe the working of more fundamental variables, Wohlforth asserts that perceptions are exogenous variables, systematically skewed and of great causal importance. This becomes the centerpiece of his theoretical innovation.[97] Objective power shifts, he argues, "can account neither for the Cold War nor its sudden end." Either objective measures of power are "not even roughly accurate indicators" of true power or "power does not matter."[98] The end of the Cold War, Wohlforth contends, is instead a story about reactions to (often questionable) perceptions of power.

If perceptions and power diverge, however, power no longer necessarily serves as the primary independent variable driving state behavior. If both power and beliefs about power matter, it becomes unclear *in principle* when one or the other predominates. The coherence of the realist core is eroded. Insofar as Wohlforth seeks to render this problematic mix determinate—and careful historical reconstruction is an unambiguous strength of his work—he does so by replacing realist variables and causal mechanisms with those drawn from existing epistemic and liberal theories. Wohlforth generally views states as being guided by embedded beliefs about foreign policy that are relatively resistant to change, even when experience with the material environment clearly signals the need for it.

Consider, for example, Wohlforth's explanation of the timing of the sudden Soviet perception of decline in the late 1980s that, in his view, brought the Cold War to an end. He relies on four concrete causal mechanisms, at least three of which (and perhaps all four) are more consistent with international relations paradigms other than realism. The first and ambiguous factor is the "scientific-technical revolution," which sparked a desire to reform the socialist economies. It is unclear whether Wohlforth views this as a straightforward source of material weakness, as realist theory would have it; or as a shift in the dominant models and standards for economic growth, as epistemic theory would predict; or as a qualitative change in domestic views about the need to link economic modernization with an opening to the West, as liberal theory would suggest.[99]

William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," in Brown, Lynn-Jones, and Miller, *The Perils of Anarchy,* pp. 32, 36–37.

97. William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 1–17.

98. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," p. 41.

99. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance,* pp. 233–234, 242–243, 251; and Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," pp. 19–22, 37.

Whereas it remains unclear whether Wohlforth's first factor is realist, the remaining three clearly are not.[100] One was that the Soviet Union from Joseph Stalin through Leonid Brezhnev was guided by a "correlation-of-forces" theory that not only saw capitalism as a threat but also held that states bandwagon to power, especially military power. This led successive leaders to discount evidence of Soviet decline. Perceptions and ideas suddenly shifted in the late 1980s because of the endogenous dynamics of epistemic structures. The correlation of forces model, he argues, became so entrenched and formalized that it generated excessive expectations, making it more vulnerable to sudden change from failed predictions.[101] Still another factor was the new role of the United States in the 1980s, which no longer "buttressed" the Soviet perception of well-being by treating it as a rising power whose interests had to be accommodated.[102] Does this reasoning not reduce relative power to whatever one's enemy acknowledges it to be—a theme more constructivist than realist?

The final factor was the formation of an overwhelming balance of power against the Soviet Union, in which revolutions in East Central Europe constituted the final, decisive steps.[103] East European revolutions, Wohlforth argues, had a symbolic effect on Soviet power perceptions because they "began to call socialism's vitality into question." Such an explanation faces precisely the difficulties that plague Walt's theory of alliances. Like Walt, Wohlforth offers neither a distinctively realist explanation for why an ever-expanding anti-Soviet coalition should form nor, more fundamentally, an explanation for why changes in regime type should influence state calculations. Why do East European governments not move toward the Soviet Union as it declines and mellows? Moreover, Wohlforth treats the Soviet policy choice—its withdrawal from Eastern Europe and opening to the West—as one designed to induce changes in Western perceptions of the Soviet threat, rather than to alter the balance of power.[104] But what is realist about this world in which imbalances, images, and internal politics override sober calculations of relative power?

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100. For a presentation of a clearer realist argument, see Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "How Identities Change: Material Forces, Identity Transformation, and the End of the Cold War," unpublished manuscript, March 1999.
101. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance,* pp. 52–53, 220–229, 250.
102. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," pp. 21–22, 32–35.
103. Ibid., pp. 23, 34, 38–39.
104. Ibid., p. 23. It remains unclear whether Wohlforth means to argue that regime type actually shifted East European policies, or shifted Soviet perception of its relative power. Either way, the connection to relative power capabilities—even understood in a more fine-grained sense—remains unclear. Wohlforth also stresses the unintended consequences of Soviet policy shifts, particularly in Eastern Europe.

FROM REALISM TO REGIME THEORY: POWER IS WHAT STATES AGREE IT TO BE

The realist assumption that the distribution of material resources is the critical exogenous variable determining state behavior implies not only that the actions of states remain uninfluenced by variation in state preferences or beliefs, but that such actions remain essentially uninfluenced by international institutions. In the realist view, governments cannot induce changes in their relative influence by entering into multilateral commitments. From Bismarckian criticisms of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe to Mearsheimer's criticism of contemporary regime theory, realists have delighted in demonstrating that international institutions reflect and ratify, but do not transform, existing power relations. Those who believe otherwise are "legalists."[105]

Yet after rejecting the independent influence of international institutions for centuries, realists are suddenly embracing "legalism." Recent realist theory not only treats international institutions as autonomous forces in world politics, but at times views their impact as far stronger, if also far more ad hoc, than does conventional regime theory. The tendency of recent realists to reverse this causal mechanism not only undermines realism's coherence and distinctiveness, but is ultimately parasitic on existing regime theory—not least because realists have yet to offer a distinctive theory of why international institutions influence state behavior. We illustrate this tendency with examples drawn from the prominent work of Joseph Grieco and Charles Glaser.

JOSEPH GRIECO ON EUROPEAN MONETARY INTEGRATION. A striking example of the slide from realist to institutionalist assumptions is found in Joseph Grieco's attempt to employ realist theory to explain European integration and, more generally, the formation of international economic regimes. For realists, the agreement among European Union members at Maastricht in 1991 to move to a single currency—Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)—appears anomalous.[106] Absent coercion, how could states primarily concerned with "relative gains" ever agree to surrender basic elements of state sovereignty to an ambitious international institution of this kind?

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105. On Bismarck, see Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), pp. 120–131. On the realist view of international law and institutions, see Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions." Recall that institutionalists adhere to nearly all the same assumptions as realists—an underlying state of anarchy, states as rational egotistical actors, substantial conflict of interest—but argue that governments faced with collective action problems can contract among themselves to mitigate the major disadvantages of anarchy.

106. Grieco, "Realist International Theory," pp. 184–186. Liberals and institutionalists have relatively little trouble explaining this outcome. See Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

In a bold move, Grieco seeks to extend realist theory to encompass and explain such behavior—thereby generating a realist theory of international institutions. He proposes the "binding hypothesis," whereby weak states, rather than forming a balancing coalition against or submitting to the will of a larger state, propose legal commitments that allocate voting rights within international institutions so as to redistribute power from the powerful to themselves. EMU, he argues, was a Franco-German bargain in which Germany surrendered its power to satisfy French and Italian fears that cooperation would undermine their power. In sum, international institutions are a means of alienating and transferring state power.

By introducing an autonomous role for international institutions—one even more powerful than that institutions play in most conventional studies of regimes—Grieco's reformulation sacrifices realism's coherence and distinctiveness. It sacrifices coherence because the analysis rests on contradictory (if unstated) sets of assumptions about the constraints on state behavior, most of which cannot be traced back to the exogenous impact of relative power. According to Grieco's reformulation, institutional commitments might be a function of underlying state power, as realists have traditionally argued; or they might be a factor alongside state power, as Grieco's case study seems to suggest; or they might even be a determinant of state power, as the binding hypothesis suggests.[107] Because these contradictory directions of causality coexist, Grieco's formulation of realism subsumes the entire universe of international relations theories about international institutions. Thus a government facing a powerful country may balance against it, submit to its demands, or contract with it. Bargaining outcomes and institutional commitments may favor strong states or weak states. International commitments may be credible or not. No rational state calculations, strategies, or outcomes are privileged or excluded. Grieco offers no assumptions specifying even in principle where to look for causal mechanisms, antecedent conditions, or weighting of competing considerations that would render these predictions more determinate in any specific case. As Grieco himself concedes, realist predictions about ongoing negotiations over EMU are therefore fundamentally indeterminate.[108]

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107. Joseph M. Grieco, "State Interests and Institutional Rule Trajectories: A Neorealist Interpretation of the Maastricht Treaty and European Economic and Monetary Union," in Frankel, *Realism,* pp. 287–290.

108. Grieco, with admirable honesty, concedes the indeterminacy: "It will be of intense interest to students of international politics," he concludes, "to observe whether institutions [i.e., Grieco's binding hypothesis] or underlying differentials of power [i.e., the conventional realist argument] will have a greater impact on the future course of European monetary affairs." Ibid., p. 304. Yet

To explain outcomes so clearly at variance with traditional realist premises, Grieco further sacrifices realism's distinctiveness by invoking basic assumptions and causal processes central to nonrealist paradigms. To explain the main puzzle of EMU from a realist perspective—why in a world of relative-gains seekers, powerful states (in this case, Germany) would agree, uncoerced, to alienate sovereignty—Grieco is forced to reintroduce absolute gains and misperceptions. Having rejected the possibility that Germany was "balancing" against the United States, he concludes that there must have been common gains, or that either Germany or its partners (or both) misperceived the true costs of EMU. To explain why the commitments of Germany and others are credible, moreover, Grieco relies implicitly on the notion that institutions strengthen the credibility of commitments—the core prediction of functional regime theory. Yet he neither acknowledges the transaction-cost logic of functional regime theory nor provides an explicit alternative to it. Behind the rhetoric, realism has been transformed into its nemesis.[109]

CHARLES GLASER ON SIGNALING AND ARMS CONTROL. Charles Glaser has advanced a sophisticated synthetic view, termed "contingent realism." Part of his argument is designed to show that a stable world in which states signal peaceful intent and engage in tacit or formal arms control is consistent with realist theory. Here Glaser, like Grieco, shifts the analytical focus from causal reliance on exogenous variation in the distribution of capabilities to exogenous variation in the international informational and institutional environment. Glaser aims to show that even if we adopt structural realist assumptions, cooperation is much more likely than realists commonly assume and can be substantially assisted by international regimes. Glaser's argument is overtly functional. International institutions provide information to states that helps them to realize common interests and joint gains.

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in a realist theory of European integration in the 1990s, shouldn't the outcome of EMU be a decisive theoretical prediction, not a matter of empirical happenstance?

109. Grieco, "Realist International Theory," pp. 185–186; and Grieco, "State Interests and Institutional Rule Trajectories," p. 286. Grieco rightly observes that the historical record does not confirm that initial and ongoing support for the agreement by the most powerful government, that of Germany (rather than imposing an institutional solution on weaker countries) can be explained as an effort to balance against U.S. monetary power. Grieco invokes at various points the claim that EMU generates absolute gains (as liberals maintain) and that Germany or others may have misperceived the likely economic outcome (as epistemic theory might suggest), or because international institutions enhance the credibility of national commitments (as institutionalists maintain). He also argues that Germany was forced to grant a quid pro quo in exchange for German unification, but this flies in the face of a growing consensus that the German commitment to move to EMU began months, even years, before reunification, and did not weaken when reunification was complete. For a review of the evidence, see Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe,* chap. 6.

To explain how and predict when this will occur, Glaser adds an exogenous variable to realism's concern with relative power: transaction costs.[110] To minimize conflict, Glaser assumes, states must establish their own defensive intentions and reduce uncertainty about whether other states are "greedy"—that is, whether they prefer more than just security. While unilateral policies may sometimes achieve the same end, formal international institutions (i.e., arms control regimes) may help states achieve this efficiently by signaling or enhancing the credibility of commitments through monitoring.[111] According to Glaser, "Institutions . . . that provide information and reduce transaction costs . . . do not pose a problem for structural realism. Nothing about the roles performed by this type of institution conflicts with structural realism's basic assumptions." Glaser's argument is that tacit coordination or perhaps formal international institutions can be employed to generate joint gains where the transaction costs of decentralized signaling, coordination, and monitoring are high.

Yet if Glaser's reformulation of realism encompasses not only the distribution of military power, but also exogenous variation in costs—and implicitly admits, albeit as a nonrealist factor, the role of "greedy" states—does it not encompass the assumptions of the institutionalist paradigm? Has it become a generic commitment not to a distinct realist theory, but simply to a lowest-common-denominator rationalism? Acknowledging that contingent realism might appear overly broad—a dilution rather than a deepening of realist premises—Glaser explicitly seeks to establish his realist credentials by demonstrating that "contingent realism" does not change "states' motives . . . to altruism" or grant "tremendous control to an international authority." Yet this only serves to demonstrate the difficulty contemporary realists face, once having appropriated (but not theoretically subsumed) nearly all rationalist alternatives, in locating plausible competing theories. Glaser's alternatives are straw men. Both altruism and a world state have been utterly absent from scholarly debates for nearly half a century.[112] Neither is advocated or analyzed

110. Glaser is ambiguous on the role of motives. In "Realists as Optimists," pp. 394–397, he argues that "contingent realism suggests the importance of motives" and renders standard power variables "less important." In Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics,* Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997), p. 191, he argues, "contrary to the standard [realist] argument, countries should not focus solely on capabilities, but also on motives." Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," p. 17, brings the distinction between democracy and nondemocracy, as well as variation in ideology, to explain such behavior.

111. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," p. 410ff.

112. Ibid., p. 411. Another example is Mearsheimer's detailed refutation of collective security theory, yet Mearsheimer cites very few, if any, clear advocates of collective security (as opposed

in any significant contemporary institutionalist or liberal scholarship—a handful of recent writings on altruistic motives for human rights or environmental activism aside. More specifically, is not the effort to show that largely realist assumptions generate predictions of cooperation, even institutionalization, the central premise of Keohane's seminal statement of institutionalism in *After Hegemony?* And is Keohane's theoretical solution drawn from the transaction-cost economics of Oliver Williamson not identical to Glaser's?[113] What is gained by terming all these competing rationalist claims "realist"?

Practical Advantages and Broader Implications: Why Reformulate Realism?

The works considered above make innovative and valuable contributions to scholarly understanding of world politics, particularly at the level of midrange propositions. There is much to be said in defense of their empirical insights and midlevel theorizing, which we have necessarily slighted here. They belong among the most fruitful advances in recent international relations scholarship. Yet the fact that scholars working under a particular label produce interesting empirical insights is not the only criterion by which to judge a theoretical paradigm. The question is not simply whether such authors provide interesting explanations, but what their findings tell us more generally about world politics.

A causal reading of recent realist research would lead one to believe that realists have successfully found innovative ways to build on core realist assumptions to explain new aspects of world politics. Yet if the true assumptions and causal mechanisms underlying much recent realist research by self-styled realists was made explicit, we have argued, realism's affinity with existing liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories of world politics would become clear. This systematic mislabeling of findings has tended to isolate realists from important trends in international relations theory. In lieu of fully theorizing factors like domestic preferences, collective epistemes, and international institutions, many realists are tempted to deny that any true theories (e.g., of domestic politics) are possible. Rose goes so far, in his prominent review essay, to proclaim this unwillingness to theorize domestic politics fully as a defining virtue of contemporary realism—a claim for which he cites Aristotle.[114] Yet

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to concerts or regimes) after the 1950s. Robert Keohane explicitly rejects such an "idealist" account. Keohane, *After Hegemony,* pp. 59–60 n. 2.

113. On Williamsonian theory, see Keohane, *After Hegemony.*

114. See n. 60.

little is gained by distinguishing realism as a theory, only to reintroduce liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist arguments in a vaguer form by loosening the specification of core concepts. At best this is insular, at worst quite misleading. Scholars would benefit if the role of these factors, and the assumptions about world politics on which they rest, were made explicit, and theories were grouped accordingly. More rigorous and consistent links between hypotheses and underlying assumptions would clarify the landscape of international relations theory. Our general theoretical understanding would, for example, be quite different if the work of Snyder on imperialism, Grieco on relative gains, Van Evera on war, and Zakaria or Schweller on national expansion were treated—as their assumptions demand—as part of the same liberal research program that has given rise to theories of the democratic peace and commercial policy.

Yet the issue here is not just the provision of a simpler and more accurate guide to the actual assumptions of major international relations theories, important though that goal may be. Like the authors of the articles we examine above—all of whom took great care to underscore the realist nature of their claims—we believe that proper definition of basic theories has practical implications for theoretical debates, empirical research, and pedagogy. Specifically, we believe that adherence to our reformulation would facilitate more decisive tests among existing theories, define more sharply the empirical domain of realist theory, and provide a superior foundation for multicausal synthesis between realism and other theories.

Refocusing empirical tests

One implication of our proposed reformulation of realism is that its conceptual language permits scholars to represent the theoretical implications of ongoing empirical research. Testing theories is a way of evaluating the assumptions that underlie them. The proper identification of those assumptions is the most important reason why the semantics of paradigmatic debates matter. We believe that a central issue in international relations today—as it has been for 200 if not 2,000 years—is to assess the relative influence on world politics of, and the interactions among, four factors: the distribution of material resources, the distribution of preferences, the distribution of beliefs, and the distribution of information. These factors are critical, we submit, regardless of the language one uses to describe theories—formal or informal, traditional or modern. These four categories—power, preferences, beliefs, and information—roughly correspond to the four major categories of modern rationalist international

relations theory, namely realist, liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories.[115] These theories correspond also to the four generic determinants of actor behavior in fundamental rationalist social theory: resources, tastes, beliefs, and institutions.[116]

Were empirical research consistently structured around the relative importance of (or, as we shall see below, the interaction among) these factors, the discourses of major traditions in international relations theory would surely become more consistent with one another and with fundamental social theory. Students of world politics could better judge what is at stake in empirical research and theoretical debate. Acceptance of a reformulated realism would clarify what is in fact a realist argument and what is not, and thereby refocus theoretical debate and empirical research on the enduring issues of world politics raised by realism's traditional skepticism of intentions, ideology, and institutions. Curiously insular, contemporary realists are strikingly reluctant to test their hypotheses against nonrealist theories. Loose formulations of realism discourage decisive empirical testing against fundamentally competing rationalist views. Proper paradigmatic definition reveals that the theoretical innovations in recent defensive and neoclassical realist research in fact confirm assumptions and causal mechanisms underlying the liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist paradigms more than those underlying the realist paradigm.

This would open a number of new and compelling areas for empirical confrontations among theories that are currently blocked by contemporary minimal realist formulations. We believe that more fine-grained empirical debates would become theoretically inescapable. Consider the following possibilities.

IMPERIALISM. By combining power and preferences in his explanation of imperialism, Snyder—as Zakaria observes—blurs the relative importance of the two. Subsequent realist studies of expansion, including those by Zakaria and Schweller, similarly fail to distinguish the role of power vacuums, on the one hand, and "strong" domestic states or "revisionist" aggressors, on the other. If scholars explicitly separated, developed, or tested nonrealist theories, it would become possible to discern the relative influence of each.

ALLIANCES. Walt, by structuring his analysis of alliance formation as a dichotomous contest between the "balance of threat," on the one hand, and

115. For example, Lake and Powell, in *Strategic Choice,* employ nearly identical categories, but different labels.
116. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory;* and Elster, "Introduction."

irrational ideology, on the other, subtly discourages empirical tests of realism and alternative explanations. How much of alliance behavior can be explained by capabilities, geography, and technology and how much by state "intentions"? In assessing threat, to what extent should scholars and policymakers be concerned about military might and to what extent the management of images and the accumulation of cultural capital?

COOPERATION. Grieco, by structuring discussions of cooperation around the dichotomy of "absolute-gains seeking" and "relative-gains seeking," discourages investigation of competing sources of conflictual ("relative-gains seeking") behavior. Who is correct—liberals who attribute conflict to deadlocked preferences, epistemic theorists who point to conflicting embedded beliefs, realists who invoke security externalities, or institutionalists who highlight coordination (bargaining) failure? Current realist theory, which combines all four into "relative-gains seeking," evades this question. More fine-grained studies would provide more insight.

WAR AND PEACE. In their studies of hot and cold wars, Van Evera and Wohlforth focus on power and perceptions of power. In doing so, they either subsume or ignore a series of narrower explanations for the beliefs that they conclude are at the heart of world politics. Only recently, however, have we begun to see focused tests between variants of realist, liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theory.[117] More would be welcome.

HEGEMONY. Scholars have isolated four different variants of hegemonic stability theory, each grounded in a separate aspect of international leadership. A liberal variant stresses variation in differential competitiveness, an epistemic variant looks to shared ideas and beliefs between leader and followers, an institutionalist variant emphasizes the provision of institutional infrastructure, and a realist variant stresses the hegemonic provision of resources that permits "follower" governments to defray the short-term costs of adjustment, in exchange for which the hegemon gains influence over the terms of future cooperation or benefits from security externalities. As David Lake has observed, more attention could be paid to the relative power of these four explanations.[118]

THE VIRTUE OF LIMITS: SPECIFYING REALISM'S PROPER EXPLANATORY DOMAIN

Assumptions define the empirical scope of a paradigm. A more precise and distinct paradigm, based on more than a minimal commitment to rational state

117. See, for example, Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace.*
118. Lake, "Leadership, Hegemony, and the International Economy."

behavior in anarchy, should thus offer a more precise specification of the predicted empirical domain of realist theories. Most realists today, we have seen, assert that realist hypotheses should always enjoy analytical priority—at least wherever security issues are involved.[119] Yet, no single theory can or should claim to explain all of world politics or to be empirically preeminent under all circumstances. Assertions of blanket preeminence undermine the credibility of modern realism, whereas acceptance of assumptions that impose explicit constraints on empirical domain would be a sign of theoretical maturity.

The three assumptions we propose in the first section of this article suggest a more sharply defined domain than that claimed by contemporary realists, yet one that eliminates many apparent realist anomalies. Realist theory does not apply across the board to security affairs. It is appropriate instead only to those cases marked by severe underlying conflict of interest (economic, ideological, or political) relative to the cost of overt coercion or inducement. If the underlying preferences at stake are weak or the relative cost of exercising power is high, states will have little incentive to threaten or provoke overt coercion or inducement, and the outcome of conflict is more likely to reflect an institutionalized focal point (as institutionalists argue), concordant/discordant causal beliefs (as epistemic analysts argue), or the relative preference intensity (as liberals argue).[120]

For the realist link between total resources and bargaining outcomes to hold, both parties must consider that the issues at stake are of paramount importance. Realist claims should therefore be limited to circumstances in which states are motivated by strong and symmetrical underlying conflicts in preferences—overlapping territorial, economic, or ideological claims—or situations where the cost of coercion is so low (at least to one party) that its cost-effective use is feasible. This explains why security disputes among advanced industrial democracies tend to be resolved nonmilitarily—a liberal prediction consistent with the near total suppression of realist politics among them observed by Schweller, Snyder, Grieco, Van Evera, and others.[121] In such cases, realist theory

119. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics;* Mearsheimer, "False Promise of International Institutions," p. 351; and Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," in Baldwin, *Neorealism and Neoliberalism,* pp. 60–84.

120. We should expect war and realist security dynamics, for example, only involving at least one state sufficiently "aggressive" to raise "vital" interests for all involved. Here we find support from Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances," pp. 928–929. For a classic statement of this position, see also Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of an Ethical International Politics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981), pp. 14–16.

121. We have noted these examples above. Such scholars voice criticisms of what they take to be liberal views, but they tend to take the form of either skepticism that democracies are stable or

is not disconfirmed, but is simply inappropriate, because its assumptions are not met. Similarly, in cases where the stakes are asymmetrical—for example, the Boer War, Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland, and more recent peripheral conflicts in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Chechnya—an intense preference or "political will" concerning the particular issue at stake can compensate for a deficiency in capabilities.[122] Specifying the proper domain of realist theory is thus a means not only to constrain realism, but also to strengthen it by limiting claims to domains where it should be expected to apply. A leaner realism may be meaner.

BEYOND MONOCAUSAL MANIA: MOVING TOWARD THEORY SYNTHESIS

Some readers may object that debates about the accuracy and scope of unicausal explanations of world politics are unnecessarily limited. Is it realistic to maintain that patterns of important, complex events in world politics are the result of a single factor? Is not theory synthesis the real goal of the defensive and neoclassical realists we critique, however they label their empirical claims? Doesn't excessive attention to "isms" encourage sectarian and semantic battles among schools that would be better treated as elements within broader integrated explanations? Isn't this the implication even of our own specification of realism in terms of interstate bargaining?

We agree. Our purpose in this article is not to freeze the lines between unicausal paradigms. The replacement of what John Ruggie has termed "monocausal mania" with such multicausal, even multiparadigmatic syntheses, we believe, is desirable, even imperative. It is the future of international relations theory. The unavoidable first step, however, is to develop a set of well-constructed first-order theories. Multicausality without a rigorous underlying structure only muddies the waters, encouraging ad hoc argumentation and obscuring the results of empirical tests.[123]

We submit, moreover, that a major advantage, perhaps the most important one, of our proposed reformulation of the definition of realism is that it suggests an easily operationalizable and internally coherent mechanism for

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concerns about the transition to democracy, neither of which supports realist claims against liberal ones.

122. Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously," pp. 523–524. See also Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 60–61; Morrow, "Social Choice and System Structure," pp. 83–84; and Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetrical Conflict," *World Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (January 1975), pp. 175–200.

123. John Ruggie, personal communication. For a view that one theory must dominate, see Ethan B. Kapstein, "Is Realism Dead? The Domestic Sources of International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Autumn 1995), pp. 751–774.

synthesizing realism with other theories. This mechanism we have termed the "two-stage" or "two-step" method.[124] The two-stage or two-step method assumes, as any rationalist (or boundedly rational) theory of state behavior must, that in world politics in which states are the relevant actors, the domestic and transnational state-society relations of preference and belief formation can be analytically separated from the strategic logic of interstate interaction, whether explained by realism or institutionalism. If we understand international relations as a bargaining problem, as realists do, theories that account for the distribution and intensity of national preferences (in Krasner's much-cited application of bargaining theory, the shape and location of the Pareto frontier) are distinct from theories of bargaining and collective action (which concern how to "get to" or "move along" the Pareto frontier).[125]

Two implications follow from this dichotomy. First, each major international relations theory paradigm enjoys a comparative advantage in explaining a different input into the bargaining game. Liberal and liberal constructivist theories focus on exogenous variation in underlying state preferences (not policies or strategies); hence the analyst concerned with the causes and consequences of variation in state preferences will find liberal theory most useful. Epistemic theories highlight exogenous variation in collective beliefs that guide actors in their pursuit of goals; hence the analyst concerned with the causes and consequences of changing conceptions of means-ends relations or the boundedness of rationality will find such theories most useful. Both realist and institutionalist theories, by contrast, take specific configurations of state preferences and beliefs as given and focus on the impact of exogenous variation in external systemic constraints—resources in the case of realists and information in the case of institutionalists. For the analyst interested in explaining varying outcomes where preferences and beliefs are fixed, the interaction logic of realist or institutionalist theory may be more useful.

The second implication of the two-stage or two-step method is that it suggests a more defensible and internally consistent approach to theory synthesis than that commonly employed today. Most leading contemporary scholars—including Waltz, Keohane, and those whose work we analyze in this article—recommend that we synthesize theories by automatically considering realism first (with preferences assumed to be invariant) and then introducing competing theories of preference or belief change as needed to explain residual variance: "Liberalism . . . makes sense . . . within the explanatory constraints

124. Legro, "International Cooperation Two-step"; and Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously."
125. Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power."

imposed by realism"[126] or "When realist theories are found wanting, we should supplement them with new culturalist theories."[127] This conventional procedure, we have argued in detail elsewhere, lacks any coherent methodological or theoretical justification. Methodologically, it overtly introduces omitted variable bias by arbitrarily privileging realist explanations of any phenomena unicausally explained by realist, liberal, and epistemic theories, without ever testing the latter two explanations. Theoretically, the conventional approach contradicts its own assumption of state rationality and fixed preferences, which implies precisely the opposite: If preferences and beliefs vary across states and issues, we must first explain how they vary.[128]

It is important to recognize, of course, that as one moves away from static decisions toward long-term change, the explanatory domains suggested by the two-step method—liberalism explains preferences, epistemic theories explain beliefs, whereas realism or institutionalism help explain strategic interaction based on resources and information—become increasingly dependent on specific empirical attributes of the situation. A dynamic view opens up more complicated linkages among the various elements of rationalist theory. From Otto Hintze to Charles Tilly, realists have made a case for preference and identity formation via a particular subset of "second-image reversed" arguments. They maintain that conflict and war have definitively shaped states and their desires, such that the very identity and preferences of states adapt over time.[129] Similarly Barry Posen and John Mearsheimer have argued that collec-

126. Robert O. Keohane, "Theory of International Politics: Structural Realism and Beyond," in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 192. See also Stephen Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization,* Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 471–472.

127. Michael C. Desch, "Culture Clash: Assessing the Importance of Ideas in Security Studies," *International Security,* Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer 1998), p. 170.

128. The "two-step" model to explain static bargaining outcomes follows, in our view, directly from the rationality assumption shared by realism and most of its basic competitors. As classic studies of power by Robert Dahl and others taught us a generation ago, it is impossible to model strategic interaction without first determining preferences or beliefs (or both) independently of the strategic circumstances. Only where the pattern of preferences is consistent with the realist assumptions above—preferences are intense, symmetrical, and zero-sum—is it proper even to consider realist theory. In any other case—say a situation where preferences are compatible or where the collective action problem is informational—realism is not simply incorrect; it is completely inappropriate. Thus in classical bargaining theory, the locations of ideal points and outside options (preferences) are almost always relevant, whereas linkage to threats and inducements are only relevant under specific conditions. This mechanism for theory synthesis is the most powerful basic tool that rationalist social science theory has developed for this sort theory synthesis.

129. Otto Hintze, *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975); Grieco, "Realist International Theory"; and Layne "Kant or Cant," pp. 326–327.

tive beliefs—for example, nationalism—can be the product of international security competition, not simply of mass culture, societal development, or domestic political manipulation.[130] Institutionalists both of a regime-theoretical and constructivist variety argue that over time institutions can also shape preferences and ideas—though as yet there is no theory of this phenomenon.[131] This dynamic view of preference and belief construction may allow for much more complex claims about the relationship between realism and its competitors when studying long-term phenomena—another implication of our reformulation concerning the empirical scope of different paradigms.

Still, by clearly specifying the assumptions about state preferences involved, our reformulation of realism encourages acceptance of the two-stage or two-step synthesis as a first-cut explanation of discrete episodes of state behavior. This would, we believe, permit realists who seek to incorporate domestic factors to draw more explicitly on vibrant bodies of relevant nonrealist theory, such as the literature on the democratic peace, economic interdependence, ideas in foreign policy, and credible commitments. Conversely, a clearly defined realist theory about the role of material resources in shaping the outcome of interstate conflict offers a salutary correction to those liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories that ignore or attempt to implicitly smuggle power into their analysis.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most useful way to judge the power of a social scientific paradigm is by examining what it is able to exclude. By this standard, the realist paradigm is degenerating. Its conceptual foundations are being "stretched" beyond all recognition or utility.[132] There exists no set of shared nontrivial assumptions that can distinguish the arguments shared by realists today. Instead of challenging competing liberal, epistemic, and institutional theories, realists now regularly seek to subsume their causal mechanisms. Realism has become little more than a generic commitment to the assumption of rational state behavior. One result is ad hoc appeals to exogenous variation in national preferences, beliefs, and international institutions. Others, to be sure, elaborate more de-

130. Barry R. Posen, "Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 80–124; and Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future."
131. Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What You Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425.
132. On "conceptual stretching," see Sartori, "Concept Misinformation in Comparative Politics," p. 970.

tailed midrange causal propositions about the causes and consequences of such variation, but the explicitness of these arguments serves only to highlight their liberal, institutional, or epistemic provenance. From the perspective of the realist paradigm with which we began this article, we ask, "Is anybody still a realist?" From the perspective of minimal realism the question becomes: "Is everybody now a realist?" Either way, realism is in need of reformulation.

The tendency to label nearly all rationalist explanations of state behavior "realist" misstates the broader significance of the empirical research that self-styled realists have recently conducted. Its real significance lies *not* in the revitalization of core realist premises, to which its connection is tenuous at best. It lies instead in the empirical validation of assumptions about world politics that realists traditionally reject. The mislabeling of realism has obscured the major achievement of this research in the 1990s, namely to demonstrate in important areas of security studies the explanatory power of liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories. Here many of the realists considered above, as well as critics like Vasquez—all of whom explicitly defend adherence to realism, despite anomalies, because there appears to exist no alternative paradigm—understate the problem.[133] The real problem is not simply the use of ad hoc arguments to patch anomalies, but the systematic use of arguments from existing alternative paradigms.

Instead of acknowledging this trend, recent realist writings defend it by inviting us to return to the early 1940s—a period in which realists such as E.H. Carr convinced scholars that the central debate in international relations theory should be between "realists," who believe in rationality, prudence, and the importance of national self-interest, and "idealists," who believe in the uniform harmony of state interests, the power of altruistic motivations, or the possibility of world government. Whether this dichotomy was a useful guide fifty years ago remains an open question. Its unsuitability today should be obvious to all. These two categories are too vague, too broad, too open-ended, too normative, and too dismissive of contemporary nonrealist theory to be of much use as a guide to social scientific theory and research.[134] The major development in international relations theory over the past three decades is instead the emergence and firm establishment of more subtly differentiated rationalist

133. Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm," pp. 909–911.

134. Some constructivists seem also to encourage the use of this dichotomy. We have not, however, considered a constructivist "theory" here because we take seriously those who warn that "constructivism"—like "materialism," "rationalism," and other such broad categories of social theory–does not define a discrete international relations paradigm or theory. It should not, therefore, be

theories—variants of liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories. These are potent competitors to realist claims and should be recognized as such. Any categorization of international relations theories that fails to accord these a central and distinct place is profoundly misleading.

One corrective to the degeneration of contemporary realism would be, of course, simply to jettison the term altogether. We believe it is too soon to contemplate such a radical solution. It would be preferable for realists and their interlocutors to observe greater precision in stating and applying its premises. A commitment to "realism" should signal far more than a belief in state rationality and international anarchy. It should mark a commitment to a particular rationalist theory of state behavior in anarchy, one stressing the resolution of international conflict through the application of material power capabilities. The true role of such capabilities can be appreciated only through conceptual clarity, not conceptual stretching. Acceptance of our tripartite reformulation of realism would provide theoretical foundations clearly distinct from other rationalist theories, generate crisper empirical predictions, and contribute to more rigorous multicausal syntheses. Such a coherent and distinct realist paradigm would be fit to assume its rightful role in the study of world politics.

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employed as a counterpart to realism, liberalism, institutionalism, or epistemic theory. Constructivist arguments might be found in any of these categories. A realist versus idealist/constructionist dichotomy would thus be unhelpful. See Wendt, "Social Theory and International Politics"; and Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Spring 1998), pp. 890, 909–912.