

# Applications of Theory

International Relations Theory, 2nd Edition

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palgrave

## **The International Political Theory Tradition**

For international political theory, the objective of application is not to 'test' a given theory against a set of empirical facts but to 'test' an argument or a line of argument. As we will see below, this objective has implications for the characteristics of the applied theories and the procedures for testing theories.

### **Terry Nardin (2006) 'International political theory and the question of justice', *International Affairs*, 82: 440–65.**

Terry Nardin begins by juxtaposing theorizing and political action, highlighting that the latter often inspires the former, whereas theorizing is detached from current affairs: 'Political theory can make its own distinct contribution only by keeping a certain distance from current affairs' (2006: 449). Nardin continues by outlining three major political ideologies – political realism, internationalism and cosmopolitanism – and then states: 'The task of the political theorist is to move beyond ideologies toward a more critical and objective understanding of the assumptions on which those ideologies rest' (2006: 450). It complicates matters that there is only one international states system for which reason generalization across systems is impossible. In Nardin's words:

This means that ideas about international justice are ideas about justice in a particular historic community, and the consequence of that particularity is to blur the already uncertain line between politics and political theory. Theoretical detachment is possible but achieving it takes an extra effort. (2006: 450)

### **Chris Brown (2001a) 'Ethics, Interest and Foreign Policy', in K. Smith and M. Light (eds), *Ethics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).**

In this chapter Chris Brown critically examines the launch of a so-called ethical foreign policy by the first British government under Tony Blair. Brown applies international political theory and therefore takes his point of departure in the concepts, theories and traditions that constitute the tradition. Brown argues that ethics cannot be differentiated along a spectrum of 'more or less ethical' but should be differentiated between different kinds of ethics. Moreover, he states that moral philosophy does not suggest a view that self-interested behaviour is immoral whereas only other-regarding behaviour is moral. In the words of Chris Brown, 'I argue that there is nothing inherently immoral in being self-interested so long as the interests of others are also taken into account – an ethical foreign policy will be one that creatively marries these two motivations, not one that suppresses the former in the interests of the latter' (Brown 2001a: 22). In the same self-reflexive chapter, Brown explains that his arguments are directed at 'saloon bar realists' and the 'Chomskyan left'.

## **The Liberal International Theory Tradition**

**John G. Ruggie (2004), 'Reconstituting the Global Public Domain – Issues, Actors, and Practices', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10, 4: 499–531.**

In this article John G. Ruggie engages in two analytical tasks. He first outlines conceptually what he calls the global public domain, i.e. an order that goes beyond but includes the international (states) system. Additional actors include, for instance, global civil society actors and transnational companies, actors that play a public role in global affairs complementary to or competing with the role of states. Ruggie argues that such actors play new roles, for instance producing expectations about global corporate social responsibility. He highlights the changing boundaries of private and public as well as state and non-state political action. Given that this is a huge topic and the length of an article is short, Ruggie focuses on an aspect of the topic, namely global corporate social responsibility. Having defined the parameters of the global order and its main actors, Ruggie analyses how actors operate in the global order, focusing on the UN and corporate actors' engagement in HIV/AIDS programmes. Ruggie's conception of global order is very useful for studies that focus on other instances, actors and issues.

## **The Realist tradition**

**B. R. Posen (2010) 'European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?', *Security Studies*, 15, 2: 149–86.**

In this article on European defence policy, Barry Posen engages in an unusual analytical enterprise, applying neorealism to understand the dynamics of European defence policy. It is unusual in the sense that most realists assume the EU, not being a state, is an international nobody or that, similar to small states, it does not matter. However, Posen's aim is to understand the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and in order to achieve the objective, he makes use of a multiple competitive theory research design that includes a set of liberal theories, balance of threat theory and balance of power theory. His procedure is to summarize the theories and on this basis outline what we, taking a theoretical stance, should expect about the investigated issue. Posen is aware that 'students of ESDP typically offer rich, multi-causal explanations for what has occurred' (2010: 185) and points out that he takes a different tack, 'mobilizing a general theory to explain this development' (ibid.). Posen concludes that Europe indeed is balancing US power and that the ESDP is a means to achieve that end. Posen's theoretical conclusion is that structural realism offers a better explanation than liberal theories and the realist balance of threat theory.

**Stephen M. Walt (1987) *The Origins of Alliances*.**

The key question of this book is why states form alliances. Walt addresses the issue at two levels. He examines the theoretical literature on alliance formation, points to the limits of balance of power theory and argues that balance of threat theory is a better theory. The chapter in which Walt examines the strengths and weakness of different alliance theories is a most useful overview of the theoretical literature. The downside is that the chapter was prepared three decades ago so an update is necessary. Second, the empirical case is the dynamics of alliance formation in the Middle East. In other words, the book is a rich source of information about the Middle East and a suitable point of departure for new studies of contemporary alliances in the Middle East. The Arab Spring (and Winter), the war in Syria and Turkey's emerging interest in the Middle East as well as Russia's return to the Middle East are all trends that call for new studies.

**John J. Mearsheimer (2014) 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault', *Foreign Affairs*, 93, 5: 77–89.**

In this article, John Mearsheimer picks up the realist tradition of appeasing great power aggressors, a tradition launched by E. H. Carr (1939) in the 1930s. While there are occasional references to the logic of realism, the application is not theoretical-analytical but political and a consistent misfit with Mearsheimer's scholarly work. Three examples of misfit: political rhetoric is bought at face value; the EU matters immensely, whereas it used to be a case of 'false promise'; though a systemic structural features pop up in references to rising China, they are largely absent and replaced by individual-psychological factors. In short, the article eminently illustrates the schism between scholarly work and political advocacy analysis.

## **The International Society Tradition**

Idealists: Life, internationally, is nasty and brutish, but there is a way out. Let us repeat what we have done domestically. Let us, this time, create a greater Leviathan (or its negative surrogate).

Realists: Life, internationally, is nasty and brutish, and ideally, a greater Leviathan would be the right solution. But there is little we can do to create it. So let us think of how to survive in this miserable condition.

English School: Life, internationally, is not that bad. What a surprise. Let us work out why.

(Hidemi Suganami 1983: 2369)

### **Robert Jackson (2000) 'Humanitarian War over Kosovo', *Politica*.**

The article is a very good example of an English School-informed normative analysis of NATO's 'humanitarian war over Kosovo'. However, within the English School Robert Jackson self-identifies with the pluralist current of thinking and the article eminently illustrates how the orientation colours the analysis. The aim of the article is not to analyse the Kosovo case but to examine justifications or reasons for political action. In this fashion, the article is also an example of English School-informed international political theory, demonstrated by: (i) the application of key English School key concepts, including international society, international order, great powers, (humanitarian) intervention as well as international norms and principles; (ii) a focus on normative, moral and ethical issues. Jackson employs for instance an ethics of responsibility, not to save strangers but instead not to 'rock the boat' of great power relations. Jackson argues that, from a pluralist perspective, NATO's bombings were misguided and unnecessary. When declaring that there was no threat to international peace and security Jackson seems to slide away from analysing the intersubjective understanding of the situation (as represented by the Security Council) and into causal analysis. Similarly, it is an empirical question if the international order was at risk or if the concern about this risk functioned as a pretext for non-action. Jackson's analysis of normative issues can be dismissed as normatively biased but it might also help us understand how the Kosovo case was one of the first seeds that brought Russia onto its current confrontational track, thus validating Jackson's warnings.

### **Ian Clark (2011) 'China and the United States: A Succession of Hegemonies?', *International Affairs*, 87, 1: 13–28.**

Ian Clark (2009) has previously produced an English School-informed conception of hegemony. In the present article he applies the concept to understand power transition or hegemonic succession, specifically concerning the United States and China. Clark argues that power transition is significantly different from hegemonic succession.

## **The International Political Economy**

**Francis Snyder (1999) 'Governing Economic Globalisation: Global Legal Pluralism and European Law', *European Law Journal*, 5, 4: 334–74.**

Studies of processes of globalization are ubiquitous yet often disappointingly vague, general or bounded by concepts that do not match the topic. This article by Francis Snyder is the opposite. He analyses how economic globalization is governed, employs a pluralist legal perspective and examines the global commodity chains (in toys). Both the legal pluralist perspective and the focus on commodity chains are very far from the traditional state-centric IR theories and produce new insights. The application of the legal perspective results in a highly informative study of the complexity of producing, for instance, Barbie Dolls. In short, the article is a rich source of inspiration for other studies of single commodities, for instance aeroplanes, cars or mobile phones.

**Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney (2011) 'Introduction: "Critical" and "International Political Economy"', in *Critical International Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).**

When assigned an essay in which students are tasked to apply IPE theory in a theory-informed empirical analysis of a given topic, the distinction between 'critical' and 'orthodox' or 'mainstream' IPE constitutes a strategic choice as each option leads down very different avenues. In their brief Introduction, Stuart Shields, Ian Bruff and Huw Macartney explain what being critical entails, situate critical IPE in the theoretical landscape, introduce the contributions to the volume and discuss the strengths and limits of critical IPE. In a sense they introduce applications of critical IPE as a current of thinking yet leave the application of distinct theories to their contributors.

## **The Post-Positivist Tradition**

**Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.) (1996) *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press).**

The book, edited by Peter Katzenstein, is about applying constructivism to the field of security studies. Constructivists had been criticised for choosing 'easy' cases so Katzenstein and his group chose to demonstrate how constructivism can be applied in studies of hard cases, specifically national security. In the first chapter Ron Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein outline a framework that contains lines of argument that on the one hand specifies what constructivism is not and, on the other hand, outlines some of the common characteristics of constructivist approaches. Hence, it is not a theoretical framework per se but a more flexible 'framework of frameworks' that provides some flexibility to the contributors of individual chapters. The book also contains a chapter in which the authors outline the biases and limits that characterize the general approach as well as the applied studies.

**Ted Hopf (2009) 'Identity Relations and the Sino-Soviet Split', in *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, 279–315.**

Ted Hopf is an expert on Russian foreign policy and has published numerous publications on the topic. In this contribution he is laudably explicit about his choice of identity theory and the derived methodological choices. The first sentence is as concise as it gets: 'Theory should determine method.' (2009: 279) Hopf continues explaining that, 'how I theorize identity drives my methodological choice of discourse analysis. Had I chosen to theorize some variable other than identity, say objective military power, or had I chosen to theorize identity differently, say as the subjective perceptions of decision-makers, then the method chosen would have been different.' (ibid.)

After 14 pages of crystal-clear explication of the analytical set-up, Hopf begins to apply it, i.e. explaining the Sino-Soviet split.

## **The Post-Positivist Tradition (Continued)**

**Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore (1999) 'The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations', *International Organization*, 53, 4: 699–732.**

Studies of international organizations (IOs), with a heavy emphasis on formal rules and procedures, can be dull, normatively biased and uninspiring. Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore's article is the opposite. It is a sophisticated analysis of what IOs do and provides examples of constitutive explanation (as different from causal explanation). Having set the scene, Barnett and Finnemore draw on (sociological) organization theories and create a constructivist approach. Subsequently they take us to the politics of IOs, examine the power of IOs and provide ample examples of the dysfunctionalities and pathologies of IOs: 'We use the term pathologies to describe such instances when IO dysfunction can be traced to bureaucratic culture' (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 702). Whereas much research is devoted to understand why IOs are created, the article aims at understanding what IOs do. The article is directed at (i) realists who simply assume that the politics of IOs is the politics of member states or that (ii) IOs have no power. Furthermore, it is directed at neoliberal scholars who assume that IOs are 'good' and therefore turn a blind eye to the pathologies.



## **The Human-Nature Tradition**

Theories within the Human–Nature tradition have been applied to all sorts of empirical and normative issues. The four samples below demonstrate how theories have been applied in research on environmental, security and political economy issues as well as the issue of human nature.

### **Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson (2010) ‘Sex and the Shaheed. Insights from the Life Sciences on Islamic Suicide Terrorism’, *International Security*, 34, 4: 37–62.**

In ‘Sex and the Shaheed’, Bradley A. Thayer and Valerie M. Hudson argue that insights from the life sciences are important for enhancing our understanding of the motivations that drive Islamic suicide terrorism. Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson review the literature on suicide bombings, outline its shortcomings and argue that the life sciences can provide additional insights. It is thus clear that what is applied is not a first order theory about international relations but an entire branch of the sciences. Moreover, instead of findings, Thayer and Hudson offer insights. In their analysis of motivations for suicide terrorism among (primarily) young males in the Middle East, they point to research on dominance hierarchies among chimpanzees, characterized by the behaviour of alpha (and non-alpha) males, explaining that it is the non-alpha male status that drives young males to become shaheed (martyr).

### **Daniel Jacobi and Annette Freyberg-Inan (eds) (2015) *Human Beings in International Relations*.**

This book is probably the most comprehensive study of human beings in international relations. Similar to the nature of politics, human nature and nature’s humans is an under-researched topic, a somewhat paradoxical fact given that human nature is among the key concepts in theories of international relations. The contributors employ both anthropological and post-anthropological perspectives and demonstrate in numerous chapters how applications produce valuable insights about important issue areas.

### **Francis Fukuyama (1998) ‘Women and the Evolution of World Politics’; Ann Tickner (1999) ‘Why Women Can’t Run the World: International Politics According to Francis Fukuyama’.**

In an article on the role of women in international politics, Francis Fukuyama applies evolutionary theory. Similar to Thayer and Hudson, Fukuyama is highly impressed by recent advances within the life sciences yet he does not analyse suicidal young males but the issue of women in world politics. He claims that ‘once one views international relations through the lens of sex and biology, it never again looks the same’ (1998: 33). Moreover, ‘if gender roles are not simply socially constructed but rooted in genetics, there will be limits to how much international politics can change. In anything but a totally feminized world, feminized policies could be a liability’ (1998: 36). While emphasizing that biology is not destiny, Fukuyama mainly observes the dangers of and obstacles to a feminized world. Ann Tickner responded with ‘Why Women Can’t Run the World: International Politics According to Francis Fukuyama’ (1999). Combined, the two articles make an intriguing primer to the issue of biology, sex and world politics.