

TRANSCENDING PARADIGM BASHING: REALISM AND IDEALISM IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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Abstract

In this article we will show that one should transcend the supposed differences between paradigms within the study of international relations. In order to do this, we will sort out the paradigms that can and must be seen as genuine alternatives and, being antithetical, do not lend themselves for a synthesis. We will argue that realism and idealism are still the opposite poles, redefined as material individualism and social idealism or as materially constructed reality and socially constructed realism. Subsequently, we will demonstrate that dialectical pairs of concepts like war and peace or material and ideational properties must be considered as two sides of the same coin. We will conclude this essay with the supposition that the theoretical opposites within the debate, realism and idealism, should be considered as two simultaneously existing truths, while an empirical - historical - analysis should decide about the degree to which each of them prevails.

1. Introduction

At the dawn of the third millennium the organization of security in Europe reflects a firm belief in the power of international institutions. Anarchy has been complemented by cooperation or substituted for community building and integration: peace, progress and prosperity, so it appears, can be shared and need not to be conquered. Institutions, so it seems, are considered to be a powerful force for stability and peace. Students of international politics, however, do not take this for granted and are still debating on whether international institutions, such as regimes, matter. They disagree on the origins, robustness, and consequences of these international regimes. The controversies and polemics are heated, as the outcome will have major academic implications. Within the arena, adherents to four, commonly distinguished perspectives or schools of thought are fighting each other. The struggle is still dominated by neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists, but liberalists and constructivists are gaining ground. The question is, then, whether we should wait until one of them is victorious – *Quod non* - or should strive for synthesis as is often suggested.

In this article we will show that one should do neither, but should try to transcend the supposed differences and paradigm bashing. In order to do this, we will sort out the paradigms that can and must be seen as genuine alternatives and, being antithetical, do not lend themselves for a synthesis. We will argue that realism and idealism are still the opposite

poles, redefined as material individualism and social idealism or as materially constructed reality and socially constructed realism. Subsequently, we will demonstrate that dialectical pairs of concepts like war and peace or material and ideational properties must be considered as two sides of the same coin. We will conclude this essay with the supposition that the theoretical opposites within the debate, realism and idealism, should be considered as two simultaneously existing truths, while an empirical - historical - analysis should decide about the degree to which each of them prevails.

2. Analysing paradigm bashing

The study of the theory and history of international relations is beset by numerous problems and heated controversy. The need to exercise caution here is at once apparent in any consideration of the approach, paradigm and methods or policy and research areas favored by researchers. Practitioners of the various disciplines, historians and social scientists, engage in frequent and at times virulent polemics relating to specific events, periods and social groups, to taking account of the past as a whole or to processes, structures and generalizations of socio-political developments, and to the links between past and present, even predictions of the future. Seeley's pronouncement is brief and to the point: "Without history political science has no root, and without political science history has no fruit."¹

The reservations among historians about political scientists nevertheless remain. For example, in his study of the past 500 years Paul Kennedy concludes with the thesis or theory about the recurring phenomena "imperial overstretch" amongst the hegemonic powers and the significant correlation between military and economic factors. And he adds: "The problem which historians - as opposed to political scientists - have in grappling with general theories is that the evidence of the past is almost too varied to allow for 'hard' scientific conclusions."² His reservations are shared by fellow historians who condemn the selective use of history in support of a particular theory of international relations. Paul Schroeder, for instance, is highly critical of neorealists.³ In his view, the far-reaching generalizations of Waltz, Mearsheimer, Walt, Layne and others must inevitably clash with Kennedy's warning for the varied evidence of the past.

¹ Quoted by A.F. Pollard, "What is history?" in P.B.M. Blaas, ed., *Geschiedenis als wetenschap [History as Science]* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979) p. 19

² Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. xiii-xxiv.

³ Paul Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs Neo-Realist Theory," *International Security*, Vol.19, No.1 (Summer 1994), pp. 108-148. Schroeder's aim is "to show how a normal, standard understanding of neo-realist theory, applied precisely to the historical era where it would fit best, gets the motives, the process, the patterns, and the broad outcomes of international history wrong, and predicts things of major theoretical and historical importance which on closer examination turn out not to be so. It indicates the central problem of neorealism with international history: that it prescribes and predicts a determinate order for history without having adequately checked this against the historical evidence." p. 147.

On the other hand, the claim that limits can be set to tracing reality back to a set of facts and events is unsustainable. A sound grasp of history as a process elicits a need for theory. Kennedy, for one, has formulated a theory on the loss of hegemonic power, and Schroeder's description of an international system bears a close resemblance to the concept of an international regime familiar from international relations theory. In his study, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*, he discusses in considerable detail such concepts and phenomena as "systemic institutional change, ... direction of greater complexity, subtlety, and capacity for order and problem-solving ... a history of change and even in a certain sense, of progress".

Power, the balance of power, strategy, decision-making processes, bipolarity, systems, organization, interdependence, all are part of the historian's vocabulary, but these concepts are not always precisely defined or viewed in relation to one another. The theory of international relations has sought to do that over the greater part of the past hundred years, ever since it acquired the status of a discipline distinct from diplomatic history and international law. It seems now to have become the principal discipline devoted to the study of international politics.

Caution is called for here as well, not just in regard to interdisciplinary relations, but equally in relation to sensibilities and nuances within the various disciplines. The realist and neorealist schools, targeted not only by historians, but also by students of international relations, is a case in point. Approaches focusing on integration, interdependence, functionalism, regime and international organization take the field as necessary complements or even alternatives in the debate with the realists, especially since the profound change in international relations witnessed in 1989.⁴ The realists respond with ferocious counterattacks. The end of the Cold War has by no means convinced them of the need to reconsider the validity and utility of the realistic approach. In one of his tirades, Mearsheimer attacks institutionalists who hold out "false promises" based on liberal views, the possibilities of a collective security system or post-modernist critical theories. He insists on the unimpaired validity of realist assumptions about the structurally unchanged nature of relations between states since the Middle Ages, and challenges his critics with the rhetorical questions: "Why has realism been the hegemonic discourse in world politics for so long? Why is the time ripe for its unseating? Why is realism likely to be replaced by a more peaceful communitarian discourse?"⁵ But would not there be some prospect of the

⁴ For example see John J Mearsheimer, "The false promise of international institutions," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 5-49. Robert O. Keohane en Lisa L. Martin, "The promise of institutionalist theory," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 39-51. Charles A. Kupchan en Clifford A. Kupchan, "The promise of collective security," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 52-61. John Gerard Ruggie, "The false premise of realism", *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 62-70. Alexander Wendt, "Constructing international politics," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1(Summer 1995), pp. 71-81. John J Mearsheimer, "The realist reply," *International Security* Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), pp. 82-93. See for a comparison between different perspectives Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer and Volker Rittberger, *Theories of International Regimes* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promises, p. 42.

integration or synthesis of the various approaches?⁶ Can we move away from the climate created by incorrigible know-alls and ardent advocates of one particular paradigm?

2.1 Realism as paradigm and its alternatives.

Could the realists after all be right in their pessimistic view of mankind as invariably committed to power politics and immutable power structures? Man is slow to learn; that we know. Faith in progress is easily shaken and therefore difficult to retain. Nonetheless, the world today is different, and better in many respects. We are not living in 1914 or the 1930s. And even if we have not adopted “Allons enfants de ...l'Europe” as the Internationale of the post-communist era, the process of integration is making headway. Through economic and technological interdependence and the overall desire for peace, international cooperation and organizations are anchored in the international system. National power is being embedded in international organizations, and there appears to be no alternative to multilateralism. To be sure, violence still exists in Eastern Europe, but on a much more limited scale than many had dared to hope. The peoples of Eastern Europe have displayed commendable patience under the pressures of an extremely difficult social and economic transformation; they have opted for a pluralist society and for integration with the West. The spontaneous eruptions of “Nous, les enfants de la Patrie” in 1789 and “Wir sind das Volk” in 1989 have effected fundamental changes in the international system and in power relations. The question now, as then, is how that progress is to be institutionalized.

Regarding the concept at the heart of realist theory, military power, peace has not broken out, nor has it proved to be indivisible, as is evident in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union. The great powers, however, now abstain from “land-grabbing”; territory has become an irrelevant factor in their power relations. The beneficial effect of nuclear weapons, viz. their deterrent or war-preventive effect, has helped to bring about “the long peace” and international cooperation in the field of security. The enemies of former years meet in the Security Council, and in NATO, WEU, OSCE, NACC and other fora, which have produced a number of collective security regimes of a solidity hitherto unknown. With varying success, these institutions have claimed a role for themselves in the international political arena. The Kantian world citizen has emerged to the extent that in the context of collective security such concepts as peace-keeping and peace-enforcement are now widely accepted, as is also the consensus-minus-one-rule in the OSCE, under which the ultimate right of the state - sovereignty - can cautiously be raised in discussions of issues involving the unlawful use of military force. A stronger security regime in Europe is not dependent on coercive power bases. Establishing the structural authority of such a

⁶ See for example, Charles W. Kegley Jr., ed., *Controversies in International Relations Theory*:

regime demands consensual power bases and mutual agreement. Matching norms and principles, agreement on matters of law, and the participating states' perception of the rightness and fairness of the regime are factors intrinsic to progress in the international community.⁷

Power politics, self-help, military institutions and so on are still with us, though, and might even stand in the way of progress. It would be going too far, however, to assert, as do some critics, that the realists' theories in fact contributed to war. Vasquez, for example, writes: "Power politics is an image of the world that encourages behavior that brings about war..."⁸ The realist school includes many teachers who tell different things about power and its relative impact. Mearsheimer, for one, is right to view the influence of realism in the United States in relative terms.⁹ Morgenthau recognized the importance of history and historical analysis and, on the basis of his seminal, realist contribution, was opposed to the US involvement in Vietnam. Kissinger, another realist, whose power politics met with much internal opposition from both conservatives and liberals, rightly stresses the influence of the Wilsonian tradition in American politics and the dilemmas it caused during the Cold War as well as for him during service in government.¹⁰ As a theoretician and historian, he consistently points out the essence of stable order and the necessary condition of legitimacy in addition to power and the balance of power. During the exemplary Concert of Europe, according to Kissinger, the principal actors acknowledged the need for a certain solidarity and legitimacy in the international regime, resting on shared principles, norms, rules and procedures, not on purely military power. Kissinger enriches his realist, materialist view with the liberal, ideational notion of cooperation and diplomacy. He concludes: "Thus the new international order came to be created with a sufficient awareness of the connection between power and morality; between security and legitimacy."¹¹ Of course, the conservative players cooperating in the Holy Alliance were, perhaps above all, concerned to ensure the continued existence of the empires. This notion of the "primacy of internal politics" is another element in sharp contrast to the realist paradigm, which neglects domestic factors. In any case, one of the aims of the Congress of Vienna was international stability and limitation of the use of military force through diplomacy. Kissinger and other realists acknowledge the broader context of international relations and include additional

Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

⁷ Extensive cooperation within a regime to which states surrender part of their sovereignty does not constitute full political integration. Kant too was against a 'world government' for fear of too great a concentration of power. He remained a realist aware of the need for a distribution of power and for a balance of power within the organisation of government at world level.

⁸ John A. Vasquez, *The Power of Power Politics: A Critique* (London: Frances Pinter, 1983), p. 220. See also a recent work by an advocate of critical social theory: Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994).

⁹ Mearsheimer, "The false Promise," pp. 47-49.

¹⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994). See for example Chapter 2, "The Hinge: Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson".

¹¹ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 318.

elements. This is precisely what pure realists are unable or unwilling to see. The resultant diplomacy at any rate fostered *cooperation between states in an anarchic world*, a new departure in the practice of international relations.

In the debate in the United States the object became not so much to seek an alternative to power, but to find a complement to a one-sided and too restricted orientation towards this fundamental political concept. As Nye and Keohane explicitly state in *Power and Interdependence*: “...the sharp opposition between realist and liberal theories is overstated. In fact, the two approaches can be complementary.”¹² That was a sympathetic gesture towards the realists in the 1970’s, but the wide gap between neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists largely remained intact well into the 1990’s. Attempts to complement or modify the realist approach were not seen as an enrichment, but as an attack on the “hard” social science approach, in particular in the country where the discipline of international relations was born and raised, the United States. Convinced that problems can be solved, many scholars believed that social sciences can be treated objectively and social phenomena explained rationally, dispassionately and coherently. A belief as if it concerned natural science. Stanley Hoffmann’s remarks from the 1970’s are still worth reminding:

What is specifically American is the scope of these beliefs, or the depth of this faith: they encompass the social world as well as the natural world, and they go beyond the concern of problem-solving (after all, there are trial-and-error, piecemeal ways of solving problems): they entail a conviction that there is, in each area, a kind of master key – not merely an intellectual, but a operational paradigm.¹³

Whereas these beliefs are still operational in some places, the leading and competing paradigms of the “American social science” have nonetheless seen a *rapprochement* allowing an intellectual discourse during the 1990’s. Paradigmatic factors of one school have been added to those of another school and many accept the idea of *complementarity*. But this, in turn, begs the question: in which way and to what extent do the leading paradigms complement each other? Or: are there still distinct paradigms which can and must be seen as genuine alternatives and which do not lend themselves for a synthesis?

2.2 Is everybody now a Realist and an Idealist?

In their penetrating analysis of the trouble of present-day realism, “the oldest and most prominent theoretical paradigm in international relations,” Legro and Moravcsik reproach their colleagues of not respecting two related criteria for a conceptually productive paradigm,

¹² Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), p. xi.

coherence and *distinctiveness*.¹⁴ The use of the realist paradigm has been confused and mixed with its institutionalist, epistemic and liberal alternatives.¹⁵ The core assumptions of genuine realism have been supplemented or expanded by the notions of these three paradigms, notably by the role of international institutions, norms and information, by the role of collective beliefs and ideas, and by the role of state preferences embedded in state-society relations. According to the authors, this hampers both theoretical debate and empirical research and prompts their outcry: "Is everybody now a realist?"¹⁶

For sure, realism is a mighty power-house in the analysis of international relations and a truly first-order paradigm in the history of war and peace of mankind. Realism is a fully justified and universally accepted approach, although not the only one nor fitting all circumstances. But it is not self-evident why there should be just three alternatives or, rather three additions to cover a much more comprehensive and more realistic set of circumstances in world affairs. One could argue in favor of five, six or more additional views, making room for analytical dimensions such as domestic politics, transnational relations, structuralism, culture, socio-economic classes or globalization as first-order theories or paradigmatic factors. The complexity of international relations, particularly after the Cold War as an exemplary "realist" era, would be explained in an ever more detailed and refined way. Unfortunately, one could no longer tell the trees from the forest and the discourse about the relative strengths of each approach would become still muddier. Individual theories would perhaps become richer and more wide-ranging, but the theoretical debate would suffer. As a matter of fact, the complexity of the subject matter cannot be overcome by merely adding useful insights.

Nonetheless, incremental pieces of insight and corresponding theories are unavoidable in dealing with nothing less than world affairs and mankind. Indeed, reductionism in theory building and necessity of choice between units of analysis appear to be an inescapable fate of social studies. Neorealism theory of Kenneth Waltz is a brilliant, albeit for many a failed, attempt to circumvent reductionism. Waltz tries to eliminate the "bold" analytical parts and embraces the "beautiful" of sameness and ever recurring events. For decades, TV audiences (in the United States and elsewhere in market economies) have determined by the high ratings of soaps why the world turns "As the world turns": love, affairs, disillusionment, new love, new affairs, same disillusionment, same love, same affairs, thus continuity. However, this is an untenably simplified role of real life actors. Reductionism

¹³ Stanley Hoffmann, "An American Social Science: International Relations," *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No. 1 (Summer 1977) p. 45.

¹⁴ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5-55.

¹⁵ The epistemic alternative falls under the general rubric of post-positivist theories or critical theories, which include constructivism, critical theory, gender studies and post-modernism.

¹⁶ Legro and Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" p. 54.

may not be likened, but the “like-units” in Waltz’ *Theory of International Politics*¹⁷ turn out not to be so much alike. At the very minimum, even according to Waltz, states differ in their variation of power and subsequent position in the international system. Evidently, the unit of analysis, the state, varies moreover in time and place and its multifaceted characteristics can be of decisive importance viz. the history of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁸

On the other hand, reduction and the necessity of the analysis of parts of the whole are no excuse for adding factors and incremental building of theory. One cannot endlessly mould the realist paradigm in order to describe and analyze another – more realistic – reality. The history of interstate relations supports realist theory. Empirical studies abound. International relations theory got stuck in realism as a paradigm, one way or the other. However, the search for an antithesis - not its rejection – is unlikely to succeed by clustering variations around the main thesis.

Of course, all alternatives presented in the “American social science” – liberal, epistemic or institutional – do embody antithetical elements *vis-à-vis* the realist paradigm to a greater or lesser degree. As a corollary, they overlap and make use of more or less similar concepts and notions like power, interests, norms or rational choice. That there are four distinct ways of distribution of values and four distinct ways to assess the *relative* influence of each on world politics, is not disputed. As a matter of fact, the four identified foci are widely recognized as central points of departure in international relations theory. As Legro and Moravcsik note as well: “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.”¹⁹

The main question is whether we speak of merely *variations* in the structures and actors or are we dealing with *essentially different* assumptions about the structures and actors. Do the different paradigms really exclude each other? Only then we will be able to tell which paradigmatic elements characterize the relations between actors and the extent to which various elements of the different paradigms play a role in particular situations under investigation. That is exactly why Legro and Moravcsik insist upon for the conservation of a coherent and distinctive realism. To that end they specify three assumptions which should not be broadened or confused by borrowing derivative elements from the other paradigms. Realism proper can be judged on its strengths and limitations if, and only if, analysts stick to these assumptions. The formulation of a paradigm “comprises the essential elements of a

¹⁷ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹⁸ See for the role of domestic factors, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Legro and Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” p. 47.

social scientific theory, namely assumptions about actors, agency, and structural constraint”:

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1. The nature of actors: rational, unitary political units in anarchy;
2. The nature of preferences: fixed and uniformly conflictual goals;
3. International structure: the primacy of material capabilities.

Clearly, these elements impose the “reality out there” upon the analysis or, stated differently, the analyst, by choosing these core elements, prescribes what the “reality out there” is and always is. Thus realists observe the structure of the international system as a distribution of material capabilities, since they use a materialist lens. Actors, namely states, do what they have to do in the world as structured. The restraints upon actors are fundamental. There is no room for individual or collective beliefs, goals or preferences. They are fixed. The realist as analyst “objectively” prescribes what is, notably what the state is and what security is. The objectivist approach sets realism apart from other paradigms where room exists for the actors to create the political outcome, the structure.

The degree to which the actors are free – or left free by the analyst - to determine the outcome varies according to the essential elements of the respective paradigms. Moreover, the actors are not only states; nor are they just concerned with security issues; nor is the interaction between actors, gifted with reason and free will, uniformly fixed. Thus, are we dealing with caused variations in structure or are we dealing with dynamic processes caused by (still to be defined) actors?

Here we enter the area of so-called *constitutive theory*, the domain of philosophical, ontological and epistemological questions about the subject matter of social and international relations. Whether or not this can be called another “great debate” is not relevant.²¹ The irritant and unproductive business of paradigm bashing which occurred, in particular, between the most ardent advocates of realism and critical theories, has contributed little, if anything, to theoretical and empirical clarity. In any case, the philosophical and theoretical thoughts which Martin Wight presented in his lectures during the 1950’s, which were only published in 1991, should have made the incorrigible and most ardent advocates of one particular paradigm a little more modest. Wight has brilliantly discussed and analysed “The Three Traditions” in the long history of probing and juxtaposing the assumptions of the competing paradigms in *International Theory*.²² Hedley Bull writes in his introductory chapter about Wight’s contribution, among other invaluable things:

²⁰ See for their elaboration, Legro and Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” pp. 12-18.

²¹ See D. S. L. Jarvis, *International relations and the challenge of Postmodernism. Defending the discipline*, (Columbia S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000).

The first is his view that theoretical inquiry into International Relations should be focused upon the moral and normative presuppositions that underlie it [...] The second is his attempt to associate theoretical inquiry with historical inquiry [...] The third and most important is Wight's very deep commitment to intellectual values and to the highest academic standards. Especially, perhaps, in a field such as International Relations there is a temptation to study what is ephemeral rather than of enduring importance, to be knowing rather than to say only what one truly knows, to claim results prematurely rather than to persist in the long haul.²³

It is, perhaps, in a new area of reflectivism and historic-philosophical inquiry that the requests of Legro and Moravcsik concerning theoretical debate and empirical research are most needed. The two authors refrain from entering the field of constitutive theory and *Kritik* as a dialectical device. They include the constructivist or inter-subjective approaches under their rubric of epistemic paradigm, but say nothing about its distinctiveness and, as we will argue later, its place as one representation of the genuine paradigmatic alternative to realism. Even though they rightly point to the strength and usefulness of a *coherent* paradigm as they formulate for realism to be, they do not fully elaborate on its characteristic or unique *distinctiveness*. They come, however, very close when they specify the *conditions* under which realist claims are justified and assert that these claims should be limited to these specific circumstances. Indeed, specifying realism's proper domain²⁴ is necessary for the pure realists as well as their critics. "Realist theory does not apply across the board to security affairs," they say to colleagues like Waltz or Mearsheimer, and "security disputes among advanced industrial democracies tend to be resolved non-militarily – a liberal prediction consistent with the near total suppression of realist politics among them observed by Schweller, Snyder, Grieco, Van Evera, and others," the authors Legro and Moravcsik review in their article.²⁵

Thus, the distinctiveness of a paradigm is related to the empirical circumstances (history) and empirical research. By the same token, the analyst's position *vis-à-vis* the empirical circumstances (history) and his research object is crucial for the preservation of the necessary distinctiveness. For example, an analysis of Western policy *vis-à-vis* Milosovic fits the realist paradigm in which the analyst gives his objectively prescribed definitions of the sovereign state and national security. A study of the establishment of the security regime

²² Martin Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, edited by G. Wight and B. Porter, (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1991).

²³ Hedley Bull, "Martin Wight and the Theory of International Relations," in Wight, *International Theory*, p. xxiii.

²⁴ Legro and Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" pp. 48-50.

²⁵ Legro and Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" p. 49. cf. "In order to fully capture the totality of security politics in Europe, we argue that scholars must employ several different cameras with different lenses and perspectives, each camera providing one critical part of the entire picture." Mary M. McKenzie and Peter H. Loedel, "Conclusion: Interests, Institutions and European Security Cooperation," in Mary M. McKenzie and Peter H. Loedel, ed., *The Promise and Reality of European Security Cooperation: States, Interests and Institutions* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), p. 176.

within the framework of the CSCE requires a different analytical approach and challenges the analyst's prescriptions of what is sovereignty and security.²⁶ In the latter case, sovereignty and security have – in large part or fully - been defined by the object (the political actors themselves) and the relation subject-object is fundamentally different. Legro and Moravcsik, however, do not draw that conclusion from their observation of the necessity to differentiate between circumstances for the use of a particular paradigm.

On the other hand, they are right on target when they distinguish essential factors around which the paradigmatic views evolve: the distribution of material resources, the distribution of preferences, the distribution of beliefs, and the distribution of information. These factors and categories are useful lenses through which we observe reality and each of them fits or highlights specific and distinct circumstances. In that sense, they are complementary and the set of approaches goes “beyond monocausal mania: moving toward theory synthesis” as Legro and Moravcsik argue in their attempt to bridge differences in distinct approaches in order to present a comprehensive and cogent framework of analysis. So, realism is not only still alive, but enriched; realism is the point of departure as well as the end result if and when carefully stretched and broadened with other rationalist categories. John Ruggie's term “monocausal mania” had to be replaced by “multicausal, even multiparadigmatic synthesis.” And the authors continue: “The unavoidable first step, however, is to develop a set of well-constructed first-order theories. Multicausality without a rigorous underlying structure only muddles the waters, encouraging ad hoc argumentation and obscuring the results of empirical tests.”²⁷

3. The First-Order Theories: Realism and Idealism

A statement like this cannot be refuted, but is meaningless without specification of why these four are *distinct* first-order theories. Are the four paradigms mentioned really first-order theories? In order to answer this question, it is important to realize that, Legro and Moravcsik define realism as a rationalist approach that describes states as self-interested and goal-seeking actors, which strive for maximization of individual utility. In an anarchical situation a state has to provide for its own security and, therefore, should be concerned about relative gains. This "self-interestness" is a constant and exogenously given. It assumes actors to make purposive choices: they investigate their settings and make a cost-benefit calculus in order to meet their goals. Thus the environment together with the actors' preferences determines their

²⁶ See for instance Gregory Flynn and Henry Farrell, “Piecing Together the Democratic Peace: The CSCE, Norms, and the “Construction of Security in Post-Cold War Europe,” *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 505-535.

²⁷ Legro and Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” p. 50.

choices. International behavior and, consequently, international institutions are the products of rational cost-benefit calculations and not of tastes or identities. Realism, therefore, is not only a materialist oriented approach that deems the nature and organization of material forces as the most important fact of international life. It is also a micro- or individual approach to international politics.²⁸

From this point of view, neoliberal institutionalists do not offer an alternative to realism, since they are only trying to modify it.²⁹ They accept the rational assumptions of realism that posit an international system of power-maximizing "like-units" in an anarchical environment. Moreover, they agree with realism that states seek power and calculate their interests accordingly. In fact the debate between the two approaches has boiled down to the problem of relative and absolute gains or to the question whether states are more interested in security or wealth. Thus, like realism, it can be seen as a materialist and an individual approach to international politics.

Even belief system theories and theories of domestic politics do regularly not offer a real alternative to realism. Much of the research on international politics from this perspective proceeds from the idea of bounded rationality. Thus, instead of taking unitary actors for granted, they opened up the black box. Interests are therefore not to be taken as exogenously given. This, however, does not mean that they cannot be described as rational approaches. Indeed, they do not use the so-called *thick-theory of rationality*.³⁰ Realism and neoliberal institutionalism ascribe certain preferential orderings to the individual on the basis of their theory. Belief system theorists, on the other hand, prefer a *thin theory of rationality*: actors can make their own order of preferences as rationality has no say in their content. In other words, these theoretical approaches make the unknown knowable to neorealists and rational choice supporters. They argue that modern realism needs what they have to offer.³¹ Therefore, they make important additions to the above mentioned approaches, but offer no alternative. Actors are still purposeful as they have preferences and pursue them as best they can in a certain environment: rationality is strictly seen in terms of transitivity and consistency. This is

²⁸ This does not mean that all interaction can be grounded in individual behavior, but that it deals with the connection between what actors want, the environment in which they strive to further their interests, and the outcome of this interaction. See David A. Lake and Robert Powell, "International Relations: A Strategic-Choice Approach," in: David A. Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 20-21.

²⁹ See for this discussion among others Robert Keohane, "International Institutions; Two Approaches," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1988), pp. 379-396; Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (June, 1994), pp.384-396; John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 855-885.

³⁰ John Ferejohn, "Rationality and Interpretation," in K. Monroe, ed., *The Economic Approach to Politics*. (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991), pp. 279-305.

not in contradiction with the rational approach. Games of incomplete information, for instances, are capable of addressing issues such as misperception and miscommunication in a systematic fashion.³² More important, in this way beliefs are seen as intervening variables between the (material) structure and the actor. The focus on beliefs does not constitute a threat to the rational approach.³³

Thus, although the above mentioned approaches offer different – and interesting – views on international politics, they can be regarded as variations on basically a materialist-individual approach. In the end they all consider state preferences to arise from a material structure; the role of ideas is reduced to an intervening variable between outcomes and these forces, at the most. Moreover, they adopt an individualist approach assuming causal relationships that rule out the possibility that social structure can have constituted effects on agents. There is a domination of positivist logic in which agents and structures are separated into distinct analytical components. They produce either system-level or unit-level theories, but cannot picture the simultaneity of the collective and the individual dimensions of human agency. However, reality cannot be split in theoretical truths of an either-or type. The task of the analyst is to discover and explain the processes in which agents and structures are both influencing each other.

All things considered, Legro and Moravcsik do not offer distinct first-order theories. They, moreover, reject the dichotomy realist-idealist, exemplary for the first “great debate”, as unsuitable for today’s discourse. But are they right in this judgment? The great debates in international relations theory usually tended to split along a simple idealist-realist axis of argument. As Robert Crawford observes:

Since the 1980s IR debate has been preoccupied with the issue of theoretical pluralism but, still partly blinded by the failing light of positivist mono-science, its participants have been more inclined to peer nervously toward a distant and unknown future than able properly to apprehend a more familiar, less threatening past. The eruption of “new” concerns is impressive, but the disjuncture between past and present debate is greatly exaggerated ... and many of these concerns ... can be traced to the perennial division of idealism and realism.”³⁴

³¹ See for instance Eric Singer and Valerie Hudson (eds.), *Political psychology and foreign policy*. (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1992).

³² See James D. Morrow, "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics," in: Lake and Powell *Strategic Choice*, pp. 77-114.

³³ See for this argument Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security," in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); see also Paul Kowert and Jeffrey Legro, "Norms, Identity and Their Limits: A Theoretical Reprise," In Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*; Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and Ruggie, "The Social Constructivist Challenge," pp. 865-869.

³⁴ Robert M.A. Crawford, *Idealism and Realism in International Relation: Beyond the Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. ix.

The concept of idealism stem from many political thinkers. For our purpose, however, attention is focused on the philosopher-theorist whose writings on peace are acknowledged to be unsurpassed, dissecting the subject as they do right down to its very core. It is moreover of importance to the theoretical debate that analysis of his approach yields a formula that may be regarded as an extreme form of the idealistic approach to international relations, i.e. the perspective of “perpetual peace”. This theoretical extreme constitute the opposite pole to realism. For this school the path to absolute peace is set out by the philosopher of reason, liberty and law, Immanuel Kant.³⁵ Kant perceives a teleology in the history of mankind. Nature's plan is more powerful than anything accomplished through the actions of individual humans. It compels them to live together, which engenders war, but “nature comes to the aid of the universal and rational human will.” Kant's optimistic approach to reason is again evident here. Destructive forces are reined in or even eliminated by reason, and man is obliged “to be a good citizen” in a republican state. “As hard as it may sound, the problem of setting up a [republican] state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding).”³⁶

Following this line of thought, just one - admittedly huge - step is needed to arrive at a community of (free, democratic) states and world citizens in which generosity of spirit, trade and prosperity will eventually supplant man's leanings towards egotism and war. Reason and constitutional law are thus of relevance to the concepts of international law and world citizenship rights introduced in the second and third definitive articles for everlasting peace. With the aid of nature in curbing or even overcoming man's “unsocial sociality”, and with the advent of democratic states founded on the rule of law whose citizens are also ‘generous’ world citizens, ever lasting peace becomes not only possible but theoretically irrevocable. The configuration of human relations are, in principle shaped primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces.

On the one hand, starting from the national state and society, Kant extends his idea of a legitimate and just system of government to international developments, while on the other he perceives the connection between international relations between states and the internal political order. As he states in *The Idea*: “The problem of establishing a perfect civil constitution is subordinate to the problem of law-governed external relations with other states, and cannot be solved unless the latter is also solved”³⁷. There is an interaction of rights and duties not only between governments and citizens at the national level, but also between governments and citizens of different states. International law and free, peaceful (diplomatic)

³⁵ For an English edition, see Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1971), pp. 41-53, and Immanuel Kant, “The Idea” in Reiss, *Kant's Political Writings*, pp. 93-115.

³⁶ Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” p.112.

³⁷ Kant, “The Idea,” p.47.

relations are of essential importance for the internal political order of states. World order is infused with norms and rules that subsequently affect the individual state. Kant posits not only that states are able to create preferable international structures, but he also points at a reverse relationship: the international structure does have important effects on states. Kant here emerges as a path breaking scholar of International Relations, placing the state at the center of his theory, but also explicitly linking national and international structures. A truly, second Copernican revolution.³⁸

The so-called English School of IR has taken up this theme.³⁹ They make a distinction between a system of states and a society of states. According to Bull the former is “formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them ... to cause them to behave ... as a part of a whole.” The latter, a society of states or international society, can be regarded as a much broader concept. Not only do states form a system because of their mutual relations, they also form a society as they share a common set of norms and rules that affects their behavior. An international society exists when “a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another.”⁴⁰ This common set of rules can be seen as constitutive to the international society. “The function of law in relation to international order” John Vincent writes, “was not itself to produce it ... but to identify the constitutive principle in the international organization of humankind – the society of states.”⁴¹ He therefore depicts international law as a cart, not as a horse. ⁴² This idea echo’s in the works contemporary sociologists such as Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall who argue that international institutions such as diplomacy, international law and sovereignty “constitute state actors as subjects of international life in the sense that they make meaningful interaction by the latter possible.”⁴³

Although materialist and individualist approaches dominated the field of IR, there is a tradition that, partly, describes international politics as socially constructed: not only do actors create international structures, their identities and interests are likewise constructed by shared ideas, common rules and norms. They accept what must be the case in reality, “namely the

³⁸ See Walter B. Gallie, *Philosophers of Peace and War: Kant, Clausewitz, Marx, Engels and Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³⁹ See Jepperson c.s., “Norms, Identity, and Culture”; Wendt, *Social Theory*.

⁴⁰ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan 1977), pp. 9-10, 13.

⁴¹ R.J. Vincent, “Order in International Politics,” in J.D.B. Miller and R.J. Vincent, eds., *Order and Violence. Hedley Bull and International Relations*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 54.

⁴² See Iver B. Neumann, “John Vincent and the English School of IR,” in Iver B. Neumann and Ole Waever, eds., *The Future of International Relations: Masters in the Making* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 40.

⁴³ Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall, “Institutions and international order” in: Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James N. Rosenau (eds.) *Global change and theoretical challenges: Approaches to the world politics of the 1990s*, (Lexington, 1989): p. 53.

simultaneity of the individual and collective dimension of human agency.”⁴⁴ In other words they consider realism and its offspring “undersocialized”.⁴⁵ The radical opposition to the material and individual approach is thus an ideational and social approach.⁴⁶ This *social-idealism*⁴⁷ – as we call this approach – criticizes the rationalist approaches because it ignores that “rationality always presupposes sociality, that there is no optimization without prior socialization.”⁴⁸ The nature of international politics is determined by the knowledge and beliefs that actors have about each other, while these are primarily constituted by social structures. In other words, power and interests, and their effects, do not have independent meanings, but are depending on the dominant social structure. The social-idealistic approach rejects, therefore, the a-historic realist (and neoliberal institutionalists) notion of states as rational actors with interests, powers and identities that are preceding the international structure. There are “social *prerequisites* of rationality which cannot be accounted for by rationalism without circularity.”⁴⁹ This means that actors can learn. Not only will they use new information to adapt their means to a new situation, but they are also capable of changing their priorities and altering deeper goals. In other words, “learning no longer means adapting to constraints, imitating the successful, or undertaking bounded search processes. It progressively becomes second-order learning.”⁵⁰ Actors are capable of altering not only the way in which they deal with particular problems, but also their dominant concepts of problem solving.

This is not to say that rationalism is rejected all together. The social-idealistic approach (or idealism) shares common ground with realism in seeking to understand the relationship between the ideational and material world and between human activities and structure.⁵¹ In a sense it is a rationalist approach as it is, according to the definition of Emanuel Adler, a “view that the manner in which the material world

⁴⁴ Justin Rosenberg, “The international imagination: IR theory and ‘classic social analysis’”, *Millennium* vol. 23, no.1 (1994): p. 94.

⁴⁵ Wendt, *Social Theory*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ For a different view see Jennifer Sterling-Folker, “Competing Paradigms or Birds of a Feather? Constructivism and Neoliberal Institutionalism Compared,” *International Studies Quarterly* 44 (2000), pp. 97-119.

⁴⁷ In recent academic work a variety of social theories can be found, such as constructivism, critical theory and gender studies. All of them have accepted the importance both of social structures, contrasting the individualist approach, and of common ideas and information instead of material forces. Hence our plea for the overarching concept of social-idealism. Moreover it suggests more continuity in contemporary debates than often is assumed.

⁴⁸ Hasenclever et al, “Regimes as Links”, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Hasenclever et al, “Regimes as Links”, note 14.

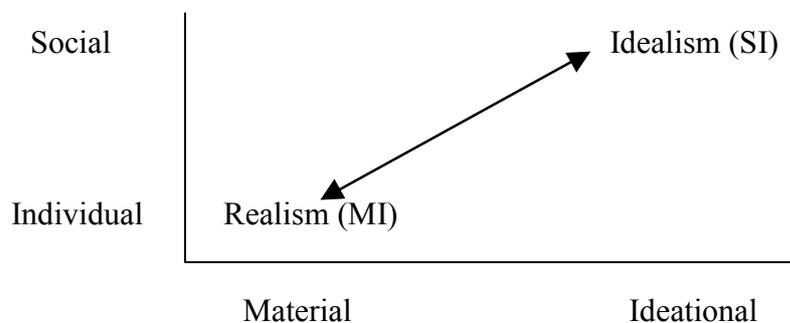
⁵⁰ Ruggie, “The Social Constructivist Challenge,” p.868.

⁵¹ Ruggie, “The Social Constructivist Challenge”, p.879.

shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world.”⁵²

Idealism, redefined as social idealism, is therefore the real first-order theory opposite to realism. While realism contends that material forces primarily determine the international system, social idealism speaks of an international society that is predominantly affected by shared ideas. Moreover, identities and interests of different actors are not given by nature but constructed by shared ideas. Dialectical pairs of concepts like war and peace, material and ideational properties or structure and actors must therefore be considered as two simultaneously existing truths. The theoretical extremes are constructs that put the opposing concepts in perspective and the empirical – historical – analysis should tell us about the degree to which one or the other prevails in time and space. Metaphysical propositions as part of the paradigm’s assumptions like anarchy versus the teleological nature of Nature and the intrinsic elements of the object like violence in war versus social ethics in peace must be brought before the “court of critical Reason” and history. That is for instance how Clausewitz, departing from the raw material of war, was able to arrive at the *idea* of the political essence of the object and Kant, applying “*reines Vernunft*” to acting men, at the *structure* of a peaceful order.⁵³

This way we present realism and idealism as two dialectical perspectives, fully taking into account the various theoretical appearances of these two clusters of antithetical paradigms. The empirical coherence of (historical) reality must be sought somewhere between the two poles - the two distinctive theoretical approaches. This dialectical relationship is represented by the diagonal line in Figure I where the lower-left embodies the first-order



⁵² Emanuel Adler, “Seizing the Middle Ground,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. III No. 3 (September 1997), p. 322.

paradigm of material-individualism (MI) – including schools as neorealism and neoinstitutional liberalism - and the upper-right the first-order paradigm of social-idealism (SI) including schools of thought like critical theory and constructivism.⁵⁴

In the theoretical discourse, the variations and nuances regarding the theories in pole MI have been extensively argued. The relatively recent attention paid to the appearance of sociological theories in pole SI may need a brief digression. Critical theory and constructivism (and its elaboration), however, share common ground with positivist approaches in seeking understanding of the relationship between the ideational and material world and between human activities and structure. As a matter of fact, Kant's philosophy and his theory of IR includes features of both approaches. And Critical theory stresses the essential request of purpose of knowledge. In the often quoted words of Robert Cox: "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose."⁵⁵ Moreover, the purpose of social knowledge and theory is, following the Marxist tradition, emancipatory. Critical Theory, following the *Frankfurter Schule*, chooses for the support of the suppressed and disadvantaged and seeks to rectify structures of domination through communication and socially constructed reality in order to establish a *just*, in Kant's view a "socially ethical", order. The dialectics in these approaches is certainly not lost, even though the ideational prevails as anchor and point of departure for analysis.

Keeping in mind the different nuances between the theorists in both poles, what are the defining elements of the social-idealistic paradigm? The following three assumptions seem to be essentially opposed to those advanced by Legro and Moravcsik for realism:

1. The nature of actors: rational, pluralistic political and societal units in communication (whether in anarchy or not);
2. The nature of preferences: depends on shared knowledge and knowledge about each other;
3. International structure: the primacy of social structure and intersubjective knowledge and learning.

The "socially constructed reality" represents the international structure and is constraint by the distribution of ideational qualities as against the distribution of material qualities. Beliefs, knowledge and the degree of mutual, shared or collective understanding of these cognitivist qualities rather than the scarcity of material resources and its constraints, define the limits and depth of the international structure or international regime. The process of coming to an understanding is the key to this approach. This political understanding has two dimensions:

⁵³ Peter Volten, "Kant en Clausewitz: Eeuwige vrede en totale oorlog (Kant and Clausewitz, Perpetual Peace and Total War)", *Transaktie* 27 (3) (1998), pp. 356-373.

⁵⁴ See also Jepperson c.s. "Norms, Identity and Culture" and Wendt, *Social Theory*.

⁵⁵ Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," in Howard LI. Williams, Moorhead Wright and Tony Evans, eds., *A Reader in International Relations and Political Theory* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993) p. 276.

“the attempt to understand the plurality of moral views in order to reach agreement about the principles of inclusion and exclusion, and the attempt to understand the rules of coexistence which agents could accept where they fail to reach consensus.”⁵⁶

The first two defining elements expressed in pairs of dialectical concepts deal with the actors and the way in which the preferences or political issues are defined. This can be done by the single actor – the state – in the realist paradigm imposed upon reality by the theorist or by the discourse between multiple formal actors and self-identified communities. The realist’s ‘objectivist’ reality is opposed by socially constructed or inter-subjective reality. In the latter case there is no defined limit to the participating actors. They have a Kantian cosmopolitan approach, if linked to values like democracy and justice and to Kantian ethics, in general. In critical theory parlance of today: “The logic of discourse ethics is that moral agents should be willing to problematise all boundaries and bounded communities.”⁵⁷ Inclusion requires dialogue and communication; exclusion refers to its antipodal antagonist strategist.

Concepts, central to social idealism – whether known as constructivism or ‘critical theory’ – are sociological in origin and include norm, identity and culture. They acquire meaning through interaction and result from social processes, purposeful action, and perceived capabilities. The structure of reality is dependent on the given distribution of information and knowledge. In this approach, interests, for example, are not primarily based on material factors or preferences, but are constructed through the process of interaction. Norms become a set of collective expectations that, if not respected, may prompt a conflict of interests. Collective identity gives rise to political unity as represented in state and nation, but, confronted with other identities, its own distinctiveness might lead to particular knowledge or information about interest. In the longer run, identities are engrained in culture, reinforced by customs, laws and rules as cognitive standards. Again, interests are defined in terms of inter-subjective knowledge rather than in terms of Morgenthau’s material-based power.⁵⁸

From the following a number of important observations must be made about the paradigmatic debates and empirical research. First, there is no winner in the debate pitting conflicting approaches against each other. Both are in the “world out there” and not in the

⁵⁶ Andrew Linklater, “The Achievements of Critical Theory,” in Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 292.

⁵⁷ Linklater, “The Achievements of Critical Theory,” p. 294.

⁵⁸ See for instance Peter J. Katzenstein, “Introduction: Alternative Perspectives on National Security,” in Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*; Jepperson c.s. “Norms, Identity and Culture”; Kowert and Legro, “Norms, Identity, and Their Limits”; Wendt, *Social Theory*; Yosef Lapid and Friedrich V. Kratochwil, eds, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Jan. 1998), pp. 324-348; Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Summer, 1998), pp. 171-200.

exclusive realist or idealist vision. A synthesis is not at issue; an integral approach is, however, recognizing an *and-and* consideration of reality and rejecting an *either-or* blindness for the other truth: both views can be useful. We, therefore, do not agree with John Ruggie's claim that both approaches should push their boundaries towards each other.⁵⁹ Rather, the question of the analyst should be to what extent the competing approaches impose themselves on the object under investigation.

Second, turning to the relationship between subject and object, the distinction made by materialists and idealists may not be so strong as suggested. While the materialist, 'objectionist' view on reality is separated from the object, the analyst in fact prescribes the salient features of a *particular* reality. The observer is sympathetic to that kind of reality which exists and may be even the dominant representation of the existing situation like realism during the East-West antagonistic relations during the Cold War. An idealist view on reality enters the object and displays empathy for the socially constructed reality. The analyst does not prescribe the characteristics of the actors, agents and structures, but reflects on the behavior and empirical data. The relationship between subject and object is, of course, different in both cases. Yet, one cannot claim that the realist steps back and merely observes. As a matter of fact, he is part and parcel of the object he himself has developed in theory. He rather steps in his 'objectionist' reality and explains causalities in human behavior. The constructivist starts at the other end and listens to the object's communicated reflections of empirical reality and understands purposeful human action. There is a difference to the degree the respective analysts are trying to explain reality according to a fixed set of variables in behavior and structure or to understand reality according to an open list of observable variables in communication and structure.

Third, history is a process with its own time-bound, temporarily dominant, albeit ever changing characteristics. A particular policy at a particular time does not mean that politics has nothing else in store. Policy and politics reflect goal and process, respectively. The analyst should look at both, but is willy-nilly subject to the dominant issues and events and to the prevailing views of his peers and colleagues. Human rights and views on arms control were not the dominant issues determining East-West relations during the Cold War, but Charter 77 and epistemic communities in the field of arms control did exist and eventually proved their influence in real politics.⁶⁰ By the same token, scholars were guided by the Cold War logic and few have attached sufficient importance to the significance of the socially constructed reality Havel and other dissidents shared with civil rights movements or, for that

⁵⁹ This, however, does not mean that he believes that a synthesis is possible: "The two approaches" he argues "are not additive, and they are unlikely to meet and merge on some happy middle ground." Ruggie, "The Social Constructivist Challenge," p.885.

⁶⁰ See for instance Peter Haas, ed., "Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination," special issue of *International Organization*, Vol.46, No.1 (Winter 1992).

matter, with Western democracies, in general; few have given credit to the influence of ‘alternative defense studies’ or developed a broader definition of security like Richard Ullman presciently did in 1980.⁶¹ Today, of course, the scholarly literature is overwhelmingly focussed on issues like humanitarian assistance and political, economic and environmental security. The research agenda is just as much a process as history.

Fourth, contrary to the ‘good’ or ‘progressive’ contribution of social idealism as purported by for instance Cox’ critical theory, we strictly adhere to Kant’s neutral understanding of human nature. The fact that actors share knowledge does not mean they are more cooperative: shared ideas may constitute conflict, while material forces may induce cooperation. “Hobbesian logics can be generated by deeply shared ideas and Kantian logics by only weakly shared ones.”⁶² Communities as actors can have very different and hostile socially constructed realities, either ideationally or materially motivated. Since social idealism as a paradigm faces the analyst with the challenge to determine which actors are involved and who they are, research is also bedeviled by the insolvable intricacies of the ‘level-of analysis’ problem. Whereas material individualism simply looks at one-level interaction and assumes antagonism between the units of analysis – the state -, social idealism and socially constructed realities “problematise all boundaries and bounded communities.”⁶³ The unit level can include more than states.⁶⁴ Actors interact at sub-national, national and international levels and there may be growing inter-subjective identities at one or more levels, like in the EU and its member states, but opposing and conflicting views might occur at the same time; a phenomenon, generally described as integration and fragmentation in post Cold War Europe. Common sense should therefore be at the heart of a research project and no group of actors should be privileged over another. The research question should guide the choice for actors and, for that matter, the limits of the system at hand.

Finally, Figure I offers a dynamic approach of representation of existing and changing situations and their analytical qualifications. Empirical reality determines to a large extent which approach fits best and it is up to the analyst to look beyond the dominant approach to a representation of reality for the dynamics of change represented by the other approach to representation of reality. Such openness of mind and analytical spirit would really transcend unfruitful paradigm bashing.

⁶¹ Richard Ullman, “Redefining Security,” *International Security* Vol. 8, No.1 (Summer 1980) 129-53.

⁶² Wendt, *Social Theory*, p 254.

⁶³ Linklater, “The Achievements of Critical Theory,” p. 294.

⁶⁴ See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), pp. 5-7.