On the Role of Metatheory in the Academic Discipline of International Relations

Submitted by Lucas Grassi Freire to the University of Exeter
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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: .................................................................
THESIS ABSTRACT

On the Role of Metatheory in the Academic Discipline of International Relations

This thesis investigates in three parts the role played by metatheory in the discipline of International Relations (IR). Part one defines metatheory as 'systematic discourse about theory' and classifies it in a typology combining elements internal or external to the discipline with intellectual or contextual aspects of theorising. Each combination has particular functions. They also add to the roles played by several modes of metatheoretical inquiry (hermeneutical, evaluative, corrective, critical and historical). The typology offered in part one clarifies the general roles of metatheory as a constraining and enabling discursive mechanism. This is also discussed in part two, addressing how IR scholars portray metatheory's role in the discipline. Arguments against and in favour of metatheory are scrutinised, leading to a qualified defence of metatheoretical research in IR. Some of the negative impact of metatheorising in IR is acknowledged, but ultimately a stronger case attempting to eliminate it from the field cannot be sustained for analytical reasons. The merits of metatheory, therefore, will depend on how it operates in particular instances. A selection of illustration cases in part three further develops the argument. The first case stresses how metatheoretical directives shaped 17th century views of the Holy Roman Empire. It indicates that metatheory can frame theoretical claims even in a weak disciplinary context. A stronger disciplinary environment frames the second case, analysing a number of IR theories on the impact of the Peace of Westphalia in the European states-system. This discussion often alludes to the notion of hierarchy. The third case examines the interaction between metatheoretical directives and theories of hierarchy. These arguments are not necessarily compatible with the metatheoretical principles argued by their authors. As a mechanism, therefore, metatheory does not relate to theory in a deterministic way. Part three itself is, of course, a metatheoretical study that further illustrates the thesis.
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In Ecclesiastes (12.12 AV), King Solomon wisely warns me:

And further, by these, my son, be admonished:
of making many books there is no end;
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Over the years, the presence and support of the wonderful people mentioned here have constantly reminded me that “weariness” can be avoided if “much study” is understood as one among many facets of life – a great one, to be sure, but not its chief end.

L.G.F.

Exeter, September 2012
Introduction

Metatheory as an issue in IR

In this thesis I investigate the role played by metatheory in the academic discipline of International Relations (IR). As a provisory definition, I start with the notion of metatheory as 'theory of theory' or 'systematic discourse on theory'. Similar designations can be made, such as 'scholarship about scholarship', as a kind of 'bridge' leading us beyond theory, or perhaps connecting the generalities of philosophical inquiry to the specificity of research in a given field. Arguably, every academic discipline is potentially or actually engaged in discussions about its own nature as a field of knowledge. Examples abound: philosophy of mathematics, of physics, of biology. The philosophy of science. In the social sciences, economic 'methodology', social metatheorising, social philosophy. The philosophy of social science. In humanities, philosophy of history, meta-ethics, prolegomena to theology. Meta-philosophy. It comes as no surprise that a similar discursive domain has gradually emerged in our discipline since IR became institutionalised with its own self-identified specialists, theories and canonical texts. Yet, most of this discussion concentrates on localised aspects of metatheorising. Important as they are, these studies lack clarification on what this discursive layer does for IR as a discipline in general terms.

Unlike the self-reflective sub-disciplines mentioned above, there seems to be no clear identification of 'Metatheoretical IR' as a sub-field yet, although instances of 'debates' at the level of metatheoretical discourse have been identified. There are several possible explanations for this fact. One is that IR is a relatively young academic discipline and shall eventually circumscribe metatheory as a domain of its own. Another position is that there still is much confusion about the nature of theoretical inquiry in the field as such, and what is often metatheoretical seems to be portrayed as primarily theoretical. Finally, others could possibly ascribe this state of affairs to the general situation of confusion on what IR is supposed to study in the first place. Having prevented the establishment of a widely recognised sub-field of metatheory in the discipline, these three factors taken together would apparently discourage my endeavour here. Instead, I take them rather as stimulating challenges and motivation.
On the first view – that IR is a young discipline – I grant that this is indeed the case, but the assumption that IR will inevitably obtain its own 'metatheoretical sub-field' rather than remain confused on this matter may seem too optimistic for those acquainted with the nature of metatheoretical scholarship in the discipline. There is no necessary reason why metatheory in IR would clarify itself if only we gave it more time, but it is indeed my hope that this thesis will work to that end by defining what metatheory is, and the main roles it plays in shaping academic inquiry in IR. This leads me to the second view on the status of metatheoretical discourse in the discipline – namely, that IR scholars barely define 'theory', let alone 'metatheory'. By defining 'metatheory' and deriving its implied general roles, I provide a contribution in this respect. Because I start from the generally accepted notion of metatheory as 'theory of theory', there is a sense in which the meaning of 'theory' in IR itself is assessed here. Granted, there is no disciplinary agreement on what IR theory is (or should be) and, by implication, what it aims to do, how we test it, how we tell its story, and so on (P. T. Jackson, 2011a). However, this should not necessarily prevent us from further developing metatheoretical discourse in IR. As we shall see, the same word, 'theory', is employed with different meanings in the discipline, but it is possible to distinguish how each group of theorists employs it and where they converge. Collateral issues like the goal of theory, its use, test, history, etc. – can only be assessed if we engage in 'systematic discourse on theory', or simply, 'metatheory'. That is: far from being a reason to avoid metatheoretical research, the disagreements on the role of theory in IR are rather an invitation to metatheorise – and, therefore, reinforce the need for something like the present thesis. Finally, the third view – general confusion on what IR is meant to study, and whether it should metatheorise at all – once again invites us to this exercise. For, although the question of whether IR should be studying the globalisation of sports or the transnationalisation of religion pertains to another level, it is surely the case that forming a general self-image of what the discipline is or should be pertains to the nature of metatheory as 'scholarship about scholarship'.

What is the role of metatheorising in general? What roles does it play in IR? In what ways does metatheory shape theoretical research in the discipline? In the present thesis I address these questions by developing and illustrating in concrete terms the following argument: metatheory plays roles in IR that relate both to (1) the subject-matter addressed by metatheoretical discourse and (2) to the mode of metatheoretical inquiry. On the subject-matter side, we may divide metatheory in terms of combining its
focus – internal or external to the discipline of IR – with its 'point of entry' into theory – in intellectual or contextual terms. Thus, one way of identifying what metatheoretical discourse does is by looking at these permutations: Internal/Intellectual, Internal/Contextual, External/Intellectual and External/Contextual. As for the modes of metatheoretical inquiry, I analyse four main 'ways of metatheorising' – hermeneutical, evaluative, corrective, critical and historical. Metatheory, following this scheme, (a) interprets theory; (b) judges theory according to certain standards; (c) refines theory; (d) provides social critique of theory; (e) accounts for the formation of theory over time. These are the main roles of metatheory at the most general level. In the first part of the thesis, I explain each of them in a conceptual manner. In the second part, I look at what IR scholars themselves consider to be the effect of metatheorising in the discipline. Some have a very negative opinion of it, others understand it can play a positive role. There is a sense in which the IR literature goes beyond the conceptual generalities addressed in the first part of the thesis. The second part, in this vein, draws on what IR scholars have written in order to include an account of those roles played by metatheory which are contingent upon the situation in the field. Another way to make the discussion palpable is to illustrate the operation of metatheory in a number of 'illustration cases'. In the third part of the thesis, therefore, I look at the several ways in which metatheory shapes theoretical inquiry in a selection of texts and debates in IR and some of its sub-fields.

**IR studies on aspects of metatheory**

The relevant metatheoretical literature in IR can be organised in at least five types of text, examined below and in the following chapters. The first comprises systematic discussions on 'theory' by key theorists in the discipline. The second type is similar, but more focused on methodological texts with metatheoretical passages. These first two types of text pertain to a group of works which most scholars in the discipline would almost immediately recognise, given their influence in shaping the field one way or another. The remaining types are recent studies focused on specific aspects of metatheoretical research. The third category indicates the growth of this intermediate 'discursive layer' in IR with books specialised in the application of philosophy to our discipline. The fourth category involves not only 'disciplinary history', but also studies of 'theory-in-context' (that is, the impact of theory on social context and disciplinary dynamics, and vice versa). The final type of metatheoretical research relevant to my
argument includes a couple of recent journal debates on particular elements of metatheory in IR. Jorgensen's (2010) textbook containing advice on how to theorise world politics is a rare attempt to clarify some of the core issues in the field to the student audience, and an indication of a possible direction that the forthcoming literature might take.

Key IR scholars have on occasion discussed the nature of theory and scholarship. Classical theorists like Raymond Aron (1966, pp.1-19, 1967; see Frost, 1997) and Hans Morgenthau (see Cozette, 2008; Morgenthau, 1955, 1966) went as far as to address the role of IR as a discipline in light of the increasing popularity of positivist philosophy in politics and the social sciences. Kenneth Waltz's introductory chapters in Theory of International Politics (1979) on the character of theory and how one should theorise world politics from a 'systemic' perspective figure among the most controversial pages in the discipline (Joseph, 2010). This is attested by a range of critical and fertile responses to his approach (e.g. Ashley, 1986; Keohane, 1986; Wendt, 1987). New theories emerging from this reaction in dialogue had to find their own discursive space in tension with mainstream scholarship under the influence of Waltz and others. The new disciplinary space was opened up by a series of metatheoretical pronouncements against mainstream theorising, its notions of social science and normative implications (e.g. Adler, 1997; Der Derian & Shapiro, 1989; Lapid, 1989; Walker, 1993). Robert Keohane's (1988) reinforcement of the dominant IR position on these issues triggered similar reactions (e.g. Weber, 1994). Scholars operating in alternative research programmes in IR often establish metatheoretical credentials before introducing or further developing theory (e.g. Tickner, 1992; Wendt, 1999). Methodology texts also reflect this type of tension, even though the metatheoretical issue is subordinated to the broader debate on research methods. Popular not only among IR scholars but also in general political science, some of the mainstream texts claim to provide a universalistic view of scientific research which has to be adopted in these fields in order to determine their robustness (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Van Evera, 1997). Critical reactions often emphasise theoretical and metatheoretical plurality and the desirability of reflecting this plurality in the choice of methods, as well as in the evaluation of empirical research (Lebow & Lichbach, 2007; Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). These debates on what makes good IR scholarship are often seen by theorists themselves as a source of division in the discipline (e.g. George, 1989; Holsti, 1989; Jones, 2002), although many also locate the source in normative presuppositions
embedded in each research programme (e.g. Cox, 2008; Neufeld, 1995; Walt, 1998). While displaying a metatheoretical character, these writings have not provided any extensive commentary on the general role of metatheory in IR.

A second group of texts in the metatheoretical literature in IR comprises the remaining types of studies focused on particular aspects of metatheoretical research. The first kind of study in this group deals specifically with applications of philosophical debates to the discipline. Martin Hollis and Steve Smith's *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (1990) is an earlier attempt to map IR along metatheoretical lines that helped to advance the agenda of disciplinary diversity. A number of discussions was triggered by that book (Hollis & Smith, 1991; Jabri & Chan, 1996; Wendt, 1991), which provided a platform and a disciplinary 'vocabulary' for subsequent epistemological debates (George, 1994; Nicholson, 1996a). A key issue emerging from these earlier debates had to do with the implications of 'positivism' in IR (portrayed as the mainstream position on how the discipline should proceed) and how to react to it. Alexander Wendt's (1987, 1992, 1998) work and, later on, Colin Wight's (1996, 1999, 2002) contribution pointed out the need to look first at the diversity in ontological presuppositions, rather than the epistemological issue.

In the current metatheoretical debates in IR, epistemology and ontology frequently provide a link to methodological discussions and other elements of research. Particular positions in the philosophy of science are frequently 'imported' and adapted to our discipline (e.g. Elman & Elman, 2002, 2003; Joseph, 2007; Joseph & Wight, 2010). Fred Chernoff's *Theory and Metatheory in International Relations*, in fact, defines metatheory in IR in this narrow way, i.e., as an application of the philosophy of science and of social science to our discipline (Chernoff, 2007, pp.68ff). His own contribution purports to defend a conventionalist position and illustrate how this point of view would deal with issues of theory choice influencing policymaking (Chernoff, 2009b). In close dialogue with both philosophy and general social science, Wight's application of scientific realism adds to Wendt's focus on ontology and further advances a (philosophically) realist perspective on social agents and structures (Patomäki & Wight, 2000; C. Wight, 2006). Milja Kurki's (2006, 2008) study of 'causation' also adds to Wendt's (1998) previous contributions to the scientific realist approach, highlighting shortcomings in the prevailing (empiricist) view of 'cause' in the discipline (e.g. Nicholson, 1996b). While those like Chernoff focusing mainly on mainstream philosophy of science are critiqued for their narrow arguments, scientific realists are
targeted for emphasising ontology too much (Brown, 2007; Chernoff, 2002, 2007b). Friedrich Kratochwil, for example, insists in the primacy of epistemology, and sharp differentiation between the practice of metatheorising and the character of social theory affecting political practice (Kratochwil, 2007a; C. Wight, 2007). Patrick Thaddeus Jackson attempts to step back from the specificities of these metatheoretical issues, providing rather an overview of how they affect research methodology (2011b). Jackson's study, together with an advanced textbook chapter by Kurki and Wight (2007), are so far the most relevant attempts to treat the issue of metatheory at a more general level. They lack, nevertheless, any intensive effort to define 'metatheory' and its overall roles. They also do not map the defences and critiques of metatheoretical research in IR or weigh relative merits of the key claims on each side.

Another type of 'systematic study of theory' in IR refers to how theories fit into 'self-images' of the discipline (Hoffmann, 1977; Smith, 1995, 2000). We can find this connection between research on IR theory and self-images not only in analyses stressing solely cognitive aspects, but also in 'disciplinary history' (Guilhot, 2011a; B. C. Schmidt, 1998, 2002a) or, alternatively, research on 'theory-in-context', including applications of the sociology of knowledge to IR (Waever, 1996, 2010). Of particular relevance in recent publications is the combination of both history and sociology of IR theory into general frameworks (Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Buzan & Little, 2001). A central issue addressed in this vein is the 'Western-centric' character of IR scholarship (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2004; Keene, 2002). 'Eurocentric' limitations in the study of world politics are denounced and critiqued in a number of ways (Carvalho et al., 2011; Hobson, 2012; Kayaoglu, 2010), but studies evaluating 'peripheral' strategies of scholarship are increasingly relevant to the construction of a 'self-image' that shows some of the 'flip side of the coin' (Acharya, 2011; Aydinli & Matthews, 2008). The key feature of this type of study is its combination of metatheoretical issues with broader views of the discipline in terms of its institutional structure. This, however, is also its main shortcoming as a replacement for what this thesis purports to do. While we have much to gain from empirical analysis of these factors, 'theory' is only one of the core issues. A debate on the use of 'systematic study of theory' is omitted, since the focus on theory is subsumed to the broader disciplinary research interest (Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, & Tierney, 2011; Rickard & Doyle, 2012). In this literature, therefore, we also cannot find any detailed general treatment of metatheoretical research and what it does for IR.
A final kind of metatheoretical literature worth mentioning here comprises journal debates on localised elements of metatheory in IR. Two discussions have recently been capturing the attention of key scholars in the field. The first has to do with the importance of the philosophy of science for our discipline. The inaugural issue of *International Theory* contains a piece by Nuno Monteiro and Keven Ruby (2009a) launching an attack on metatheorising. It argues that applications of philosophy of science to IR have done much disservice to substantive research and cross-theoretical communication. Those who replied to the article raise a number of points also related to metatheorising. Kurki (2009) addresses the role of political ideology in shaping metatheoretical and theoretical positions, while Jackson (2009) defends the examination of philosophical assumptions dividing the discipline. He partly agrees that ultimately these are not sufficient grounds for avoiding cross-theoretical dialogue. Chernoff (2009b) once more defends his conventionalist view and the exercise of employing philosophical tools in the discipline, but also analyses the internal logic of Monteiro and Ruby's argument. In their rejoinder, Monteiro and Ruby (2009b) further clarify their position and defend a move to substantive and eclectic theorising as a result of what they call 'foundational prudence'. A second relevant debate draws on a similar perception that substantive research has been slowed down by metatheoretical divides (Katzenstein & Sil, 2008). Taking this perception as a starting point, Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein (2010) attempt to show the added benefit of cross-theoretical 'syntheses' emerging from more openness at the metatheoretical level. In *International Studies Quarterly*, David Lake (2011) reiterates the point and adds his own view that a construction of a 'common lexicon' to facilitate cross-theoretical communication could provide a platform for substantive research driven by a more pragmatic focus. Henry Nau (2011) replies that, due to the nature of social science, metatheoretical 'drives' behind substantive theorising is unavoidable. For example, Lake's 'lexicon' privileges mainstream theorising, rather than erasing the 'insulation' between mainstream and alternative approaches. Sil and Katzenstein (2011), on the other hand, are relatively more sympathetic to Lake's critique of the disciplinary insulation of 'isms', but insist that their own version of 'analytic eclecticism' would be a more helpful approach to address the issue. Once again, we see little commentary on the general function of metatheory in IR, but in-depth discussion on some of its aspects and consequences.

The relevant literature, then, often assumes a number of positions on the role of metatheoretical scholarship and sometimes vaguely defend these positions, but we still
lack a more general study on metatheory itself from the perspective of our discipline. It is mainly in response to these shortcomings that I claim originality for the present study. The assumptions adopted in this literature are, for most part of the time, implicit, although they do frame each author's approach in particular ways. This thesis, conversely, purports to unpack a number of points deriving from the notion of metatheory as 'systematic discourse about theory'. In order to do so, it (1) conceptually looks in detail at the nature of metatheory; (2) critically considers the IR literature both against and in favour of metatheoretical research in the field; (3) analytically elaborates an argument in response to these positions; (4) further addresses implications of metatheorising as a mechanism that shapes the discipline in specific cases. A detailed look at the structure of each chapter and how they connect to the main argument will help to clarify these claims.

The argument under consideration
The present study is, first of all, an attempt to provide a conceptualisation and classification of metatheory as it applies to IR. Chapter 1 sets the scene, so to speak, by mapping what 'theory' means to key scholars in the discipline, and by deriving a series of questions which may only be addressed at the level of 'systematic discourse on theory'. In an intuitive way, we are thus confronted by a number of demands for metatheory. These intuitive demands are confirmed, next, in Chapter 2, where this basic definition of metatheoretical research is related to some of the few cases in which it figures in the IR literature. The same chapter expands this framework in light of similar studies in cognate disciplines (politics, economics, sociology) and provides a general typology of 'metatheory'. The term has also been differently employed sometimes in these correlate disciplines. For this reason, I further clarify the conceptualisation and typology with a short discussion of what I do not mean by metatheory. Specifically, I stress the ways in which metatheory differs from philosophy, although there is some overlap between them. The lack in IR of a general understanding of 'metatheory as such' (despite the sporadic appearance of short definitions and even detailed applications in specific issues) is only one research gap addressed in the first part of this thesis.

Another gap is the lack of an overview of what IR scholars have said about the roles metatheory has played in IR. In the second part of the thesis, the initial goal is to organise the literature in terms of the main claims against metatheoretical inquiry and the main claims in its favour. This is executed, respectively, in Chapters 3 and 4.
Besides organising this material, I also provide a critical evaluation of both negative and positive views of metatheory. They often cancel each other out. Moreover, within each view there are also opinions that seem inconsistent with each other. Finally, some of the points on either side may still be maintained. For this reason, in Chapter 4 I call for a qualified defence of metatheoretical inquiry in IR. I do so, first, on account of the existing literature on why we need metatheory, how we should improve it and what we should avoid. Secondly, I provide my own 'analytical', deductive, argument to secure a place for metatheoretical discourse in IR. I prove that one cannot completely eliminate metatheoretical discourse from a discipline especially when one systematically argues against it. My analytical claim is 'transcendental' in that I investigate what it takes to make a strong and absolute objection to metatheoretical discourse in this sense. I find a contradiction between these conditions of possibility and the actual argumentation for the absolute elimination of metatheory from a given discipline. Since this full argument is ruled out, we are thus left with the proposition that there is, indeed, at least some room for metatheory in a discipline. We might as well look at its problems in the concrete situation of IR and try to contribute in such a way as to take into account the other, more plausible, objections raised by critics of metatheory in the discipline. What the second part of the thesis provides is a critical survey of the IR literature and a limited defence of metatheory in our field that allows for some criticism but ultimately acknowledges the relevance of metatheoretical scholarship.

We do well in bouncing the analytical and deductive argument back to concrete discussions in the discipline. The third part of the thesis, then, indicates how metatheory helps us analyse, assess and account for a selection of debates on world politics. In a series of 'cases', I address what metatheory is doing for protagonists in each debate, and what it can do for us, as we look at the cases. For each instance, I pick a central issue discussed in light of one aspect of the study of world politics, identify diversity of theoretical claims around that issue and identify roles played by metatheory in that case. I end each analysis with an examination of how studying them is illustrative of the general roles ascribed to metatheory in the initial part of the thesis. The first case, however, is somewhat different from the other two. Contained in Chapter 5, it is an exercise in dialogue with International Political Theory (IPT), and addresses a 17th century debate on what the Holy Roman Empire was. The authors selected for this exercise (Johannes Althusius, Samuel Pufendorf and G. W. Leibniz) have shaped modern political thought in different ways and are now recognised as relevant theorists.
of sovereignty and federalism (Eulau, 1941). Althusius was selected not only because of
the originality of his formulation, but also because of the historical context. Writing
before the Peace of Westphalia (1644-8), which substantively altered the configuration
of the Empire, he presents an interesting portrait of an already decentralised polity. Post-
Westphalia thinkers Pufendorf and Leibniz shared a similar background and
metatheoretical assumptions and yet presented diverging accounts of the Empire. In
combination, these differences and similarities leave us an interesting selection of
examples. The chapter operates in this thesis as a 'control' case, whereby I establish the
validity of claiming that metatheory shapes theory – in this case, political theory –
regardless of a well-defined disciplinary context. The first study, therefore, will mainly
interest political theorists and historians of ideas.

Despite its pre-disciplinary focus, the case can be of general interest also to IR
scholars, considering that both the Empire and its constitutional transformation in the
17th century are at the centre of a key controversy in the History of International
Relations related to how Westphalia shaped the Early Modern states-system. This latter
theme is my second 'illustration case', in Chapter 6. I look at three distinct theoretical
views of Westphalia in IR and their respective metatheoretical 'drives'. Their authors
(Adam Watson, Daniel Philpott and Benno Teschke) were considered of relevance in
my design of this illustration due to not only the prominence of their treatments of this
historical topic in IR, but mostly the divergence between the 'schools' of thought to
which they belong. Watson's 'English School' approach is more inductive, teleological
and comparative. Philpott's individualist 'soft constructivism' affirms the primacy of
ideational factors and attempts to fit them into a 'chain of events' causal framework.
Teschke's materialist analysis is influenced by Marxism and provides a critical, dialectic
and constitutive account of systemic processes. I argue that these metatheoretical
positions constrain and enable certain types or theoretical claims on 'order' and 'change',
the nature of historical inquiry and how to execute it in IR. Metatheory also leads to
specific dynamics across different theories on the same issue and sometimes can even
account for lack of factual precision and help us understand why certain types of
empirical data are selected in particular ways to support theoretical claims.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide in-depth analyses of a limited number of approaches to
empirical and historical issues – one theorising the Holy Roman Empire and the other,
Westphalia. Besides constraining and enabling claims in these debates, metatheory also
shapes my own study. In both cases, it enables comparative interpretation of theory. In
Chapter 5 it also helps me formulate a historical, contextualised, account of political theory. In Chapter 6, it provides the discursive space to engage in some evaluation as well. My main intention, however, is to illustrate the role it plays in the debates themselves, focusing more on the authors analysed in each chapter than on my own manoeuvres. For this reason, the 'self-reflexive' study of the overarching metatheoretical discourse analysing those debates is more implicit in those chapters than in Chapter 7.

In dialogue with approaches in IR and International Political Economy (IPE), this final case looks at the notion of 'hierarchy' in the international system according to a number of 'research programmes'. Hierarchy is often mentioned in accounts of the transition allegedly marked by Westphalia in world politics. However, the concept is also empirically relevant given the post-Cold War intensification of the asymmetry between the United States (US) and remaining countries in our system. The portrait of world politics as hierarchical challenges one of the core theories in IR, Kenneth Waltz's neorealism. His structuralist and instrumentalist view of hierarchy contrasting with anarchy is the first notion analysed in this case. David Lake's mainstream model of 'dyadic hierarchy' has attained prominence in the discussion and is contrasted to Waltz's view. Less conventional are the choices for the remaining theories. Carlos Escudé's 'peripheral realism' places weak states at the centre of the analysis of hierarchical arrangements and possesses an inherently normative character. Hans-Hermann Hoppe's individualistic approach based on 'Austrian School' economics avoids dialogue with IR but challenges some of the received assumptions in IPE about the nexus between 'wealth' and rise to 'power'. In this final chapter I make deliberate reference to John Hobson's (2012) study of 'Eurocentrism' in the historical formation of international theory as a metatheoretical framework that helps me organise the material. In applying his study to a number of theories of hierarchy, I ask whether it can make sense of the inner dynamics in each of the approaches analysed. Moreover, I go further than Hobson and ask for each approach whether its respective theory of hierarchy is consistent with the metatheoretical claims defended by each author. The reflection on the overarching framework employed in my understanding of this specific debate (i.e. Hobson's study), therefore, is more explicit. On the other hand, the fact still remains that each approach is driven by peculiar sets of internal metatheoretical assumptions which are more specific than Hobson's typology of 'Eurocentrism'. Finally, it becomes clear that metatheory helps us not only by providing a reading of each approach to hierarchy in terms of their 'immanent' elements and 'outside' relation to Hobson's framework. In this study, it also
provides a way of critically dealing with the shortcomings of this framework and perhaps complementing it with additional considerations.

The claims advanced in this final part of the thesis should be tested with reference to the 'empirical material', or texts, to which it refers. I try to provide an in-depth and clearly organised reading of these texts, and my views should be checked against that material. I sought to strike an even balance between known and lesser-known authors in my choice, to make the selection itself another original contribution. Despite this, ultimately the point is to limit the number of analysed texts to a reasonable amount that allows for the required depth. What I hope to achieve with the 'cases' in this third part of the thesis is a clearer understanding of metatheory as a mechanism that constrains and enables certain theoretical and disciplinary dynamics in IR. This notion that it does affect the discipline complements my analytical argument, developed in part two, that there may be problems with metatheoretical research in the field but we cannot completely eliminate it from IR. At that step of the argument, the test criteria have to do more with the internal coherence of my claims and to whether they do justice to the literature surveyed and critically examined. Part one, to which we now turn, begins to explore the general notion of metatheory as 'systematic discourse about theory' or 'scholarship about scholarship' by executing, first, a survey of many conceptions of 'theory' in our discipline. In IR, the level of debate at which the definition of theory, its forms, uses, evaluation and other issues operate is not the level of the study of world politics per se, but rather the study of theory of world politics. This 'second-order' character of metatheory is emphasised after the next chapter, where a typology of metatheoretical research and the roles played in general by each type is introduced and illustrated.
PART ONE
Chapter 1

Theory in the Discipline of International Relations

Being theoretical is unavoidable. Why? Because the very process of engaging in observation requires sorting out some of the observed phenomena as important and dismissing the others as trivial. There is no alternative. The details of situations do not speak for themselves. (Rosenau, 2006, p.98).

Introduction

Metatheory has been provisionally defined as ‘systematic discourse on theory’, and this leads us to the necessity of defining what is meant by 'theory' in IR. Writings of social scientists and philosophers of science are helpful here, not least because they have been influential in the discipline. There are those who find this material wanting. “Much writing on social science”, says mainstream IR theorist Stephen Van Evera (1997, p.3), “assumes that readers already know what theories are, what good theories are, what elements theories contain, how theories should be expressed, what fundamental rules should be followed when testing or applying theories, and so on”. Yet, practically every key IR theorist, economist or social theorist has made some kind of declaration on the nature and role of theory in the field. They may lack detail, as Van Evera implies, but we cannot deny their influence in shaping their respective disciplines. We can think, for example, of Hans Morgenthau's pamphlet differentiating theory in politics from theory in natural science, or Martin Wight's well-known essay on the distinction between international theory and 'domestic' political theory. Or maybe the debate between Hedley Bull and Morton Kaplan on whether IR theory should be 'traditional' or 'scientific'. We may think of Kenneth Waltz's stipulation that theories should be judged by their usefulness in prediction, and that they should be 'systemic', rather than 'reductionist'. Or maybe the widely cited textbook by King, Keohane and Verba demanding explanatory, causally-inferred theories from IR scholars. Examples abound of such pronouncements ex cathedra from these central figures in the field. A similar pattern can be detected in other disciplines.

To his credit, Van Evera is partially right. There is an abundance of material on
theory in the social sciences, but most of the issues still revolve around what theories do, how to test them, etc. rather than what they are. In addition to this, when IR theorists do state in brief what they mean by 'theory', at the most 'basic' level the definitions tend to be quite similar. They may not be worded in exactly the same way, but there is enough resemblance to allow for a 'common denominator' definition of 'theory'. Simply put, a theory is an argument, a set of interrelated propositions about a subject-matter. Theory is systematic discourse about something (see Bunge, 1999, p.1). What usually happens, though, is that these authors quickly move on to embed their respective definitions into a wider framework. This is frequently done with reference to the philosophy of science or to social science, which might explain the assumption that we know the literature enough to 'fill in the gaps' with the remaining details. In the end, despite all the agreement on the 'basic definition' of theory, when it comes to its implications there is considerable diversity. Even IR theorists belonging to the same school of thought might disagree on what the roles of theory are, how theory operates in the logic of scientific research and how we should assay theoretical formulations in the discipline. Taking that into account, I seek to delineate, whenever possible, their statements not only on the 'basic definition' of theory, but also on the roles and elements of theories, and how to evaluate them.

In IR, the wider intellectual context in which discussions of 'theory' emerge is often related to self-reflective 'debates' that have shaped the discipline (Lijphart, 1974a; Smith, 1995). Textbooks and review pieces tend to rely on the disciplinary narrative of the so-called 'Great Debates' and a series of derived cross-theoretical dichotomies or 'disciplinary divides' (Holsti, 1985). While there are reasons to question the framework, some familiarity with it is required because IR theorists often refer to it, or assume it, when they portray 'theory'. The First Debate allegedly divided IR between 'realists' and 'idealists'. The narrative states that the key point of tension was whether world politics should be studied 'as it is' (realists) or 'as it ought to be' (idealists) (but see Ashworth, 2002; Schmidt, 2012). Idealists (particularly the liberals) were motivated by an 'ideal of control' over the international system and understood it in light of some sort of classical progressivist framework (Guilhot, 2011b). Realists (particularly those drawing on political theory) were more sceptical of this ideal, given historical contingency and the complexity of human nature and its 'will to power' (Ashworth, 2011; Mearsheimer, 2005). This other aspect of the initial tension was made manifest in another 'divide' in the Second Debate, between those defending IR as a 'hard science' and those adopting
practical reason, historical evaluation and ethical/legal judgement as the main guidelines for IR as an 'art' (Curtis & Koivisto, 2010). The Third Debate, of lesser importance in this discussion on 'theory', still made reference to it, portraying theory in terms of 'paradigms' in competition (Banks, 1985; but see Waever, 1996). It was widely believed that IR should eventually agree on a single 'paradigm' in order to move on with empirical research. The Fourth Debate questioned once again the role of IR theory (Lapid, 1989).¹ A new 'divide' emerged between those defending 'interpretive' theorising (the postpositivists) and those adhering to 'explanation' as its predominant role (often labelled as 'positivists') (Hollis & Smith, 1996). Accounts of this wider intellectual context in which views of 'theory' have emerged in IR are deeply contested (Waever, 2010). For one thing, it provides too uniform a view of 'postpositivism' that needs to be unpacked, for example, in the responses referring to 'critical theory', 'practical judgement' and 'incredulity toward meta-narratives'. Disciplinary historians have correctly dispelled the Great Debates story and the survey in this chapter will contribute to advance the cause of a more nuanced 'self-image' of IR (Guilhot, 2011a). My reference to this contested account is simply to point out its pervasiveness in the discipline.

This chapter outlines, first, some of the key positions in philosophy and social science influencing the debate on the nature and status of theory in IR. After that, I further detail the connection between this literature and some of the most important views of theory in IR. As it turns out, both mainstream and alternative approaches in the discipline owe much to philosophy and general social science. I deal first with classical, normative and mainstream IR and then with alternative views of theory in the field. This is followed by a brief discussion, in which I raise a number of questions about the nature of inquiry on theory in IR, guiding us to the next chapter.

**Context in philosophy and social science**

Two philosophical ways of approaching science have influenced our discipline. The first looks at isolated theories and their empirical subject-matter. The second approach looks at theories in a more dynamic way, as part of the 'growth of knowledge'. Discussions on 'syntactic' and 'semantic' views of theory, logical positivism and falsificationism refer to the first approach. The 'syntactic view' of theories (Nagel, 1961; Wartofsky, 1968) sees

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¹ Some will number this debate on postpositivism as the Third Debate, but Ole Waever's (1996) account of it as the 'Fourth Debate' in IR is also a popular narrative.
them as “collections of statements that can have a formal representation as axiomatic systems”. The “logical structure of a theory” is separable from its “factual content” (Bortolotti, 2008, p.55). It would, therefore, be possible to distinguish between 'un-interpreted' implications of axioms from 'interpreted' logical, observational and theoretical terms. This notion was very popular in the golden age of logical positivism, and widely subscribed by scientists.² Logical positivists had a very restrictive view of theories as part of 'the scientific method', in which only deduction and empirical verification of hypotheses relying on the existence of 'brute facts' would count as knowledge (but see Hempel, 1965). Having emerged in opposition to the “oversimplifications” of this view and its “almost exclusive concern with formal aspects” (Achinstein, 1964, p.328), the 'semantic' account focuses on the role played by theories as models of reality (Suppe, 1974). The practice of representation is key to our understanding of science (Giere, 2004, p.743). In fact, some proponents of this alternative approach go as far as to reduce theories to models (e.g. Giere, 1988, p.86), or at least deny the primacy of a formal language (van Fraassen, 1980, pp.44; 67), without being altogether hostile to a certain degree of formalisation (Bunge, 1998, p.503).³ For others, there is a qualitative difference between models and theories, the former being employed to formally represent not only the subject-matter but also the theories themselves (Morrison, 2007, pp.195-6).⁴ While 'syntacticians' highlight the inner structure of scientific theories, the 'semanticists' focus on the relation between theoretical models and the empirical subject-matter.

Falsificationists, following Karl Popper, also emphasise this relation, albeit in a different manner. Popper and influential positivists subscribe to the 'deductive-nomological' and the 'hypothetico-deductive' descriptions of scientific research. The deductive-nomological model forms theories by extracting implications from general premises where at least one part of the starting point is a 'law-statement', i.e., a

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² Albert Einstein, for example, defined theories as “the totality of the primary concepts, i.e., concepts directly connected with sense experiences, and theorems connecting them”. Of paramount importance in his view is “the aim to represent the multitude of concepts and theorems, close to experience, as theorems, logically deduced and belonging to a basis, as narrow as possible of fundamental concepts and fundamental relations which themselves can be chosen freely”. It is “by means of such concepts and mental relations” that we may “orient ourselves in the labyrinth of sense impressions” (2006, p.53; 56-7).

³ Contrary to Frigg and Hartmann's (2009, p.23) opinion that the semantic approach requires the rejection of formalisation, advocates of this notion have defended even axiomatic formalism under certain conditions (Achinstein, 1968, pp.153-4).

⁴ Dichotomising between 'syntactic' and 'semantic' notions of theory in a very strict sense is unhelpful. There is more potential dialogue across the approaches than their respective advocates would admit (Hendry & Psillos 2007) and, besides, as we shall see below, in the case of IR, scholars do indeed acknowledge theories as being both 'arguments' and 'models'.

description of a pattern of regularities and correlations. It is also called the 'covering law' model, because predictions are made based on what can be inferred from the law-statement, which is supposed to 'cover' or subsume singular occurrences as an instance of the law stated (Psillos, 2007, pp.58-59). The hypothetico-deductive model, in turn, starts from the formulation of a 'conjecture' or hypothesis with implications and then empirically tests it (Psillos, 2007, pp.113-4). 'Inductivist' positivists, argues Popper, face the problem of demanding too much of 'verification' in a theory test. They cannot get around the fact that confirming the same hypothesis over and over again will never strictly prove it.\(^5\) Starting from 'if \(P\) then \(Q\)' and finding \(Q\) does not necessarily mean that \(P\) obtains. Instead, conjectures should be tested with a view to proving them wrong, i.e., 'falsifying' them: 'if \(P\) then \(Q\). Not-\(Q\), therefore, not-\(P\)' (Popper, 1935). Notice that both approaches assume a very narrow idea of 'causation' – they reduce 'causation' to a discrete relation between \(P\) (cause) and \(Q\) (effect), as if everything operated like colliding billiard balls. In this 'chain of events' account, causes are merely sequences of correlated events (see Mackie, 1974). For falsificationists, science can be demarcated from other forms of discourse by being open to criticism (Popper, 1963). Attempts to 'immunise' a falsified conjecture either by adding \textit{ad-hoc} hypotheses covering some of the challenging evidence or making the theory unfalsifiable altogether are pseudo-scientific.

Parallel to this discussion is the issue of 'instrumentalist' and 'realist' understandings of theories. Instrumentalists treat theories primarily as tools, 'maps' or 'filing systems', designed to organise and connect statements about observation (e.g. Duhem, 1954). Theoretical statements should be evaluated not in terms of their 'realism'. Rather, we should ask whether they are 'useful' in this 'organising' and 'simplifying' role, as well as in their capacity to predict. W. V. O. Quine challenged the empiricist stance defended by positivists, including their view of 'brute facts', by arguing that hypotheses cannot be tested in isolation, given the possibility of providing a number of equally reasonable 'maps' of a given 'pool of facts'. Some had previously argued that hypotheses should necessarily be placed in a wider system, a theory (see Fleck, 1979). Admitting the 'theory-ladeness' of scientific observation (Godfrey-Smith, 2003, pp.155-62), Quine (1951) went even further and claimed that a clear-cut

\(^5\) Inductivism is the doctrine that stipulates that knowledge of the general may be obtained from the examination of a great number of particular instances. The 'problem of induction', described here, had been formulated long before Popper, in the epistemological writings of empiricist philosopher David Hume.
distinction between 'propositions' and 'facts' against which they should be 'tested' is ultimately untenable. It is the field of science that should be tested as a whole, and not isolated theories. For instrumentalists, therefore, the "general purpose" of science is "to make useful predictions" and give us "manipulative power". Theories, in their condition as "instruments", can be assayed in terms of their "utility", not 'realism' (Keat & Urry, 1982, p.63). Realists, on the other hand, "regard theories as attempts to describe reality even beyond the realm of observable things and regularities" (Niiniluoto, 2011). This does not necessarily mean that realists discard the 'mapping' role played by theories (Hendry & Psillos, 2007). "Science", says a leading scientific realist, "tends to build conceptual mappings of the patterns of facts – i.e., factual theories". But theories are more than maps. They establish "logical relations", provide explanation via interconnected hypotheses and "enhance the testability" of hypotheses taken together (Bunge, 1967, pp.28; 383). Explanation, in the realist sense (and deeper than the positivist approach of 'covering law' in light of 'correlations'), means accounting for "underlying structures and mechanisms which are involved in causal processes" (Keat & Urry, 1982, p.32). Realists argue that a key role of theory is to uncover these mechanisms, and that successful theories will contain models that bear some correspondence to reality (Bunge, 1998b, 2004). It is important to acknowledge this parallel debate because, first, it goes to the core of the issue of theories and their role in science. Secondly, some of its aspects – like the 'theory-laden' character of observation – also recur in general social science and IR. As we shall see, a collage of positivism, falsificationism and instrumentalism has grounded some of the mainstream positions on theory in IR. Realist views have also emerged in the field.

These three engagements – syntactic or semantic, positivism or falsificationism and instrumentalism or realism – have something in common. They tend to address isolated theories in relation to their empirical subject-matter. Following Quine's thesis, alternative accounts of theory in the philosophy of science, in turn, understand them as part of the 'growth of knowledge'. That is to say, embedded in wider frameworks. Notions like 'research programmes' and 'paradigms' are part of this second approach. We shall look into these in more detail when we address their respective IR adaptations. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that their original elaboration, aiming at an understanding of natural science, has been extrapolated and transposed to IR. The same is the case for the philosophical literature on theories in isolation. Philosophy – and, mainly the philosophy of science, is the first type of source scrutinised by IR in its quest for a more
clearly articulated notion of theory.

Another intellectual milieu that has been considerably influential in our discipline is that of general social science. Mainstream IR, under the influence of both natural science and economic methodology, relies more upon an essentially 'unitary' view of science as a whole. Some of the alternative views of theory in IR and social science highlight the inherent split between natural and social worlds, where ideas constitute to a great extent the subject-matter. Therefore, we should be open to a number of reconfigurations of IR as an 'interpretive' study of society (rather than part of a 'unified science'). First, we should be aware of the impossibility of value-neutrality, as values are both part of the worldview of the researcher and part of the subject-matter. Secondly, we need to take the critical potential of theorising more seriously. That is, we need to look at the social world not as given, but as constructed. Configurations of power and injustice, therefore, are not fixed, but malleable to change. Thirdly, 'reflexivity' means that scholarship about the social world also potentially helps to *shape* it. We cannot postulate a sharp distinction between researcher and subject-matter. Doing social science means constructing the social world. Among the non-mainstream proponents of IR as a social science, some still defend an explanatory role of theory, but in terms of 'constitution' and 'mechanisms', while others prefer to major on 'reflexivity' and 'interpretation' and see an unbridgeable gap between 'explanatory' and 'interpretive' roles of theory. There are also those who reject the project of 'IR theory' in a scientific (even social-scientific) fashion. Others take it a step further and denounce the exclusionary drive of theoretical discourse as power capable of imposing 'order' upon the world. In what follows, each position is discussed – IR theory as social theory and IR theory as discourse and social practice. These two, however, follow a study of classical, normative and mainstream views of theory in IR.

**Theory in classical, behavioural and normative IR**

Here I juxtapose classical and normative IR because of the clear continuity between their views of theory's definition, elements, use and assessment. Additionally, there is also continuity in that both articulated their position on the conduct of inquiry against claims to 'science'. Classical or 'traditionalist' IR is said to have pioneered the field alongside 'scientific' technocratic-liberal attempts to explain and control public policy at the international level (Guilhot, 2011c; Quirk & Vigneswaran, 2005). Eventually, it formulated a clear reaction to the rise of behaviouralism in political science and IR.
Normative IR, later on, deliberately drew on traditionalism and occupied its disciplinary space in reaction to mainstream IR. I tackle mainstream IR in the next section.

Theory and ethical judgement was defended in the classical fashion against particular forms of 'raw empiricism' advocated by some of the new 'scientific' approaches under the influence of inductivistic positivism.6 In behavioural IR, world politics was under-theorised and allegedly 'value-free'. Instead, isolated (and often contradictory) hypotheses were elaborated and 'tested' against empirical evidence in a 'neutral' way, seen as devoid of assumptions (see Vincent, 2004, p.58). Due to such efforts, databases like the Correlates of War Project (Singer, 1972a) were created, providing a catalogue for data. Other behaviourists in politics defended some role for theory, although it was very instrumental and limited (Kaplan, 1966). Heinz Eulau, for example, argued that “theory” is just “a tool” to transform “facts” into statements that should be “tested in (...) empirical research”. The overall study of politics was portrayed as something “built by the slow, modest and piecemeal cumulation of theory, methods and data” (Eulau, 1963, pp.25; 116). Value-neutrality, in any case, was a key principle advanced by behaviouralist IR.7 Ethical judgement was replaced with 'policy prescription' in that framework. To be sure, scholars like Eulau (1941) himself could still write political theory in a more traditional fashion, but empirical theory should be kept separate from these philosophical endeavours. As a consequence of the 'behaviouralist revolution' in the general study of politics, then, 'scientific' IR developed an idiosyncratic framework for research (Easton, 1969; Gunnell, 1986, p.92). It was stressing the centrality of theory and ethical judgement that traditionalists reacted.

Scholars in the classical tradition, such as Morgenthau and Hedley Bull, emphasised several interrelated types of political discourse beside common sense, practical, theoretical and philosophical knowledges. They markedly adopted a 'humanistic' and 'vocational' approach to IR in opposition to the 'scientific' and 'technocratic' view (Jackson, 1996, pp.205-8). Morgenthau, for example, argued that IR should be studied as an art (1946, p.10):

Politics must be understood through reason, yet it is not in reason that it finds its model. The principles of scientific reason are always simple, consistent and abstract; the social world is always complicated, incongruous, and concrete (...). Politics is an art and not a science, and what is required for its mastery is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and the moral strength of the statesman.

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6 See Jouvenel (1961) for a discussion in the context of general political science.
7 Or should we say, a key value?
Due to the complex character of politics and the decision to study it in this 'humanistic' fashion, the classical way of theorising was closely connected, as Bull (1966, p.361) explained, to the study of philosophy, history and law. It relied upon “the exercise of judgment” and went beyond the “strict standards of verification and proof” required by the 'scientific' view, humbly recognising the role of “intuition” and the “tentative and inconclusive status” of the exercise. Reinhold Niebuhr (2011, p.272), another classical theorist, defended a similar view based on the notion that the “historical realm” is not comparable to “the realm of nature”. IR theory, in his view, should be aware of “historical fate”. Morgenthau (1944), conversely, assumed continuity between both realms, but still defended classical theorising on the grounds that social reality is incredibly more complex and demands ethical judgement. Despite its critique of the rampant empiricism in the 'scientific' behavioural approach, classical IR did not dissociate theory from empirical evidence. William T.R. Fox (2011, pp.273-5) noted that empirical information is important, but we can only use it in light of “some theory, implicit or explicit”. Like maps, a theory is “a tool for understanding” and brings “order and meaning to a mass of phenomena”, treating data “in propositions of both objective and general validity” (Morgenthau, 1955, pp.445; 452). IR scholarship is, therefore, inherently theoretical – even if understood in this 'humanistic' fashion. Only later, to mainstream IR’s merit, would a clearer notion of the crucial role of theory in research be articulated and absorbed by those interested in practising IR as a science.

As an outcome of the clash between ‘classical’ and ‘scientific’ scholarship in the discipline, in some settings IR has been studied in the line of political or 'normative' theory. Normative IR recovers the 'traditionalist' approach and takes issue with the mainstream on two accounts. On the one hand, it challenges the notion of value-neutrality, which 'scientific' IR seeks to preserve. On the other, most of the mainstream theories assume an 'ethical vacuum' at the international level. Normative theorists side with classical IR on both issues. Searching for great works of international theory, Martin Wight famously defined it as a “tradition of speculation” (1966, p.17). He denounced the lack of ethical imagination of the field, which tended to assume an inner connection between morality and sovereignty. Because of the lack of a supra-national sovereign, most of the classics of 'domestic' political theory could not be 'transposed' to the international level, hence the absence of an international 'mirror' of political theory (but see Suganami, 1989; Walker, 1995, 2006). Now that the dichotomy between
‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the sovereign state is deeply contested in the field (Walker, 1993), there seems to be more room for “philosophical and normative” argument concerned with issues of “justice, freedom, equality and how human beings can achieve the good life” (Schmidt, 2002, pp.119; 121).

Those who pursue this mode of inquiry in IR will readily admit that there are many ways of theorising world politics, even within the normative field (Cochran, 1999, p.2; Rengger, 2000, pp.764-70). Some, like Chris Brown (1992, p.3), go as far as to affirm that a ‘non-normative’ empirical theory is possible in principle, although rarely seen in practice, despite mainstream claims to ‘value-neutrality’. Most, however, share with Mervyn Frost (1996, pp.13; 34) the perception that “there is no way in which social scientists may legitimately avoid becoming involved in normative theory”. “All theory of International Relations” says Molly Cochran (1999, p.1), “is normative theory”, although only a relatively small number of works display awareness of the fact (see Rengger, 2000b, p.18). As we shall see later, some normative theorists like Andrew Linklater (e.g. 2007) combine ethical thinking with 'critical theory'. In doing so, they are also interested in denouncing injustice in the current order and theorising alternative orders. IR theory defined in this ethical sense, therefore, does not necessarily exclude alternative ways of theorising, although a clear argument about the role played by values and ethical judgement is desirable.

Simply put by Toni Erskine (2010, pp.37-9; 55), international political theory aims at “exploring moral expectations, decisions, and dilemmas in world politics”. Going beyond mere ‘prescription’, political theorists are mainly concerned with moral norms, frequently in order to “revise and transform” them. A similar definition adds specific direction to normative IR theory, which “takes as its subject matter the criteria of ethical judgement in world politics and seeks shared principles for extended moral inclusion and social reconstruction in international practice” (Cochran, 1999, p.2). An example is in order. One of the most widely cited works in normative IR is Michael Walzer's Just and Unjust Wars. In that book, Walzer (1977, p.xix) looks at ethical claims about war, given “the present structure of the moral world”. His aim is not only “to account for the ways in which men and women who are not lawyers but simply citizens (and sometimes soldiers) argue about war”, but also “to expound the terms we commonly use".
But that's not to suggest that we can do nothing more than describe the judgments and justifications that people commonly put forward. We can analyze these moral claims, seek out their coherence, lay bare the principles that they exemplify. We can reveal commitments that go deeper than partisan allegiance and the urgencies of battle (...). And then we can expose the hypocrisy of soldiers and statesmen who publicly acknowledge these commitments while seeking in fact only their own advantage (...).

We are rarely called upon to invent new ethical principles; if we did that, our criticism would not be comprehensible to the people whose behavior we wanted to condemn. Rather, we hold such people to their own principles, though we may draw these out and arrange them in ways they had not thought of before (Walzer, 1977, p.xxi).

In this passage, Walzer details the elements and aims of normative theorising. A similar notion is advanced by Brown (1992, pp.3; 7), who tentatively defines political theory as “the study of the search for justice in society” and applies it to IR in terms of a “body of work which addresses the moral dimension of international relations and the wide questions of meaning and interpretation generated by the discipline”.

In Brown's definition, the transformational agenda drops out and a hermeneutical concern is highlighted. In addition to this, there is an implicit historical feature. While not strictly necessary, the interaction with ‘canonical’ texts on similar normative issues is illustrative of international political theory (Thompson, 1994; M. Wight, 2005), hence the relevance of the interpretive element (see Brown, Nardin, & Rengger, 2002, p.1). Because of these features, normative theorists defend some criteria of evaluation for their research that would not necessarily apply to empirical theorising. Those arguing for a particular interpretation of a certain author or tradition of thought may refer to hermeneutics (e.g. Schleiermacher, 1998) or specialised works in political theory dealing with the issue of textual exegesis (e.g. Tully, 1989). Those doing normative IR theory in the broader sense may struggle to find uniform criteria, although clarity and logical validity are generally seen as positive properties of good normative thinking (Raz, 1990). An ability to deal with specific cases in the present or the past is also desirable (Walzer, 1977, p.xxii). Traditional approaches to international ethics may have sought to provide a wide foundation in general ethics in order to ground specific claims on world politics (e.g. Pettman, 1979). Most of the contemporary views, however, tend to side with Walzer (1977, p.xxii) on the specific applied focus:

I am not going to expound morality from the ground up. Were I to begin with the foundations, I would probably never get beyond them; in any case, I am by no means sure what the foundations are (...). The study of judgments and justifications in the real world moves us closer, perhaps, to the most profound questions of moral philosophy, but it does not require a direct engagement with those questions.
“The key to this theoretical practice”, for several normative IR theorists, “is finding a method by which one can discriminate between competing conceptions of international justice without falling foul of the charges of political and philosophical idealisation” (Sutch, 2001, p.29). This is a criterion particularly designed to evaluate normative theorising.

**Science and theory in mainstream IR**

The mainstream rejects a sharp, qualitative, distinction between social and natural science. Differences are, rather, a matter of degree (e.g. in objectivity, accuracy, measurability, and so on). Much mainstream social science writing on the role of theories in the conduct research has adopted a combination of logical positivism, falsificationism and instrumentalism (Bryant, 1985, pp.133-73). Milton Friedman's influential essay on economic methodology is a case in hand. He trusts 'positive' economics (as opposed from 'normative') can be studied in an objective, value-free fashion “in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences” (1953, p.4). For him, the “ultimate goal of a positive science” is the formulation of theory, comprising two aspects. On the one hand, it is a “set of tautologies” that organises “empirical material”. On the other, it is “a body of substantive hypotheses designed to abstract essential features of complex reality”. We judge the former via formal logic, whereas the latter should be evaluated “by its predictive power” as an explanation for a “class of phenomena” (1953, pp.7-8). Up to this point, his argument follows the logical positivist view of theory. Predictive power, however, is understood in falsificationist terms: if prediction fails, the conjecture needs to be adjusted. Despite this, it is in an instrumentalist fashion that Friedman breaks down the process of evaluating theories. He asserts that, in terms of their assumptions, theories must be judged not by their 'realism', but rather by their 'usefulness' in prediction (1953, pp.9-15). Moreover, theories are constructed in “a creative act of inspiration, intuition, invention” (1953, pp.39-43). Friedman's case is illustrative of the blending that occurs when the philosophical literature is adapted to social science.

Mainstream philosophy of social science handbooks have indicated a widespread adoption of this type of hybrid approach. “The structural characteristics of a social-science theory”, says Richard Rudner (1966, p.10), “are precisely the same as those of any other scientific theory (...). A theory is a systematically related set of statements,

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8 At times, Friedman is somewhat vague and conflates 'theory' with 'hypothesis' and 'model'.
including some lawlike generalizations, that is empirically testable”. While formalisation is something social scientists should aim for in their theorising, this is not always possible or even desirable. Anyway, “fruitfulness” and “simplicity” are criteria we should employ to judge social research (1966, p.41). Jerald Hage (1972, p.172) comments on a “general agreement” in sociology that “a theory is a set of propositions or theoretical statements”, consisting of both “concepts” and their connections. In terms of evaluation, the suggested standards echo Friedman's instrumentalism: “scope, parsimony, precision of prediction, and accuracy of explanation” (1972, p.176). Later authors indicate the adoption of a more nuanced view in mainstream social theorising. William Skidmore, for one, opts for a ‘basic’ definition of theory as “systems of thought” which in their presentation could be arranged in a “continuum” between formal and informal (1975, pp.1-2). Among the uses of theory are the organisation of a “chaotic mass of data”, establishing “meanings” for concepts and constructs, and “relating somehow a conceptual problem or set of observations to a theoretical construction of reality which fits it”. The latter is “explanation”, which is “the main goal of sociological theory” (1975, pp.14-15). The author further notes that bias should be avoided, and we should theorise about “things which in principle can be measured, counted, observed, and correlated”, although he acknowledges the inevitable presence of some degree of subjectivity and inexactness (1975, p.25). Whether in a nuanced manner that accepts other ways of theorising, or in a more dogmatic way, mainstream social science has conveyed not a 'pure' positivist, falsificationist or instrumentalist view, but rather a mixture of these elements. This inclination to hybridise, in turn, was absorbed by IR and is manifest in the works of scholars like Michael Nicholson, Robert Keohane, Stephen Van Evera and Kenneth Waltz.10

9 Mainstream views of theoretical enterprise in social science have brought discontentment to researchers due, perhaps, to the 'static' character of this view of theories, taken in isolation against empirical evidence (G. Fox, 1997). Alternative interpretations of theories have been sought in the mainstream, still based on the philosophy of science. In economics, for example, these additional views are often set forth with reference to Popper's falsificationism (Blaug, 1993), Lakatos' methodology of research programmes (see Hands, 1993), Kuhn's paradigmatism (Coats, 1969) and, more recently, scientific and critical realism (Lawson, 1999; Mäki, 1998). There is something striking about most of these 'adaptations' of the philosophy of science to economics. Just like Friedman's instrumentalism, they tend to add elements of what economists perceive to be peculiarities of theory-building and theory-appraisal in their discipline, as well as traditional narratives in the history of economic thought (Backhouse, 1994; Caldwell, 1994; Latsis, 1976). Whether these adaptations do justice to the original material in the philosophy of science is beyond the scope of this study, but the point remains that resulting frameworks on how to analyse economic theorising tend to be hybrids, mixing disciplinary peculiarities with the philosophical material (e.g. Blaug, 1975).

10 It is telling that, due to such a strong preference for a 'unified' view of science, mainstream theorists prefer to hybridise this material rather than look elsewhere.
Nicholson's (1992, p.34-39) position is perhaps the most well-known version of what has been labelled 'mainstream positivism' in British IR (see also 1996a). He describes theories as 'maps' to aid research. Facts are only facts if seen in light of a conceptual framework that connects and organises them. Strictly speaking, theory is only one part of the 'hypothesico-deductive' method of natural and social science whereby hypotheses are deduced from an initial set of axioms and then subjected to empirical tests (1992, p.30). Unlike isolated hypotheses, theories have a general character: they are collections of “propositions which apply to classes of events, and not just to individual events” (1992, p.26). Interestingly, the author has labelled his position “broad positivism” and uses the term “reluctantly”, rejecting the “behavioural tradition” normally attached to it (Nicholson, 1996a). King, Keohane and Verba (1994, pp.3-9) follow Nicholson in the assumption of a single logic of empirical research for both natural and social science. “A social science theory”, they say, “is a reasoned and precise speculation about the answer to a research question, including a statement about why the proposed answer is correct. Theories usually imply several more specific descriptive or causal hypotheses” (King et al., 1994, p.19). Social science not only aims at describing, but also at explaining by means of causal inference, generalising from a given collection of correlations. Like Nicholson, they postulate that the focus of theories lies on generals, not particulars, accepting the validity of the hypothetico-deductive model. A theory is “designed to show the causes of a phenomenon or set of phenomena”, always containing an “interrelated set of causal hypotheses” relating variables with “observable implications” to be tested (1994, pp.34-35; 99-100). Van Evera (1997, pp.7-9) provides a similar definition, but adds his own detailed emphasis on explanation. “Theories”, he says, “are general statements that describe and explain the causes or effects of classes of phenomena. They are composed of causal laws or hypotheses, explanations, and antecedent conditions”. By 'explanation' he means statements making reference to a chain of cause-and-effect events, observed as 'variables'. Waltz's (1979, pp.2-5) position echoes some of the above, although he stresses the role of creative conceptualisation in theory more than other mainstream writers. Theories are not merely “collections or sets of laws” but also “statements that explain them”. Science, whether natural or social, goes beyond description, creatively inventing 'theoretical notions' to circumscribe a field, and adopting them as a framework to organise data, explain and predict (Waltz, 1990, pp.22-26). While sharing these aims of explanation and prediction with mainstream colleagues, Waltz (1979, p.11) points out
the need to “go beyond the necessarily barren hypothetico-deductive approach”, in that we need to understand theories as more than just the usual 'positivist' combination of inductive and deductive procedures, also including 'theoretical notions' and creative insight.

Waltz does not conclude his argument at the mention of 'theoretical notions' which are not 'falsifiable' in the Popperian sense. Up until this point, he is echoing positivism, instrumentalism and Friedman's hybrid economic methodology.11 Later on, he takes a step further. In search for a more dynamic approach capable of dealing with the 'growth of knowledge' and theory appraisal, he connects his view of theory to Imre Lakatos' concept of 'research programme' (Waltz, 1979, pp.17-37). According to Lakatos (1970), each programme contains an unfalsifiable 'hard core' of basic propositions (Waltz's 'theoretical notions'), defining its essential assumptions. It also contains a negative and a positive 'heuristic' and a 'protective belt' of 'auxiliary hypotheses'. The negative heuristic forbids certain amendments to the research programme, while the positive heuristic stipulates how one should proceed, including which ways of theorising would be compatible with that programme. While a programme is a large-sized and largeScoped theoretical system (e.g. Waltz's neorealist theory of international stability), it also contains additional theories of a more modest character (e.g. Waltz's account of emulation and socialisation generating like-units in the international system), designed to protect it. By hindsight, we could 'rationally reconstruct' an episode in which one or more programmes developed new theories in response to empirical challenges (Zahar, 1973). A programme dealing solely with the challenging evidence, or going against its own heuristics, would then be labelled 'degenerating' and, in the long run, this would suffice to account for its loss of adhesion. A rival programme able to cope with the challenge and also predict 'novel' facts, without disrespecting the boundaries set by its heuristics, would be, over time, a 'progressive' and promising programme (Lakatos, 1971). By hybridising his view of theories with the 'methodology of scientific research programmes', Waltz was able to go further than his colleagues in the mainstream in terms of providing a more dynamic view of the 'growth' of theories and their appraisal.

After Waltz, a number of mainstream IR theorists have employed the methodology of scientific research programmes in order to portray their own theory as

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11 Waltz references Ernst Nagel's 'syntactic' account of theories, but there is no citation of Friedman's essay on positive economics. Later writings indicate his indebtedness to economic science (see Chapter 7 for more).
'progressive' and disqualify rival approaches as 'degenerating' (Elman & Elman, 2002, 2003). As in Waltz's case, most often these transpositions from the philosophy of science to IR have resulted in modifications of the original material in order to accommodate it to the discipline (L. G. Freire, 2008). Another 'dynamic' formulation of interest to mainstream IR is Thomas Kuhn's view of 'paradigms' and 'normal science'. Kuhn (1996) understands theories in terms of two main cycles in the historical formation of a given scientific discipline. 'Normal science' predicates research on the dominance of a given 'paradigm', or a set of directives, implicit or not, on which scholars operate. Although we may find it hard to pin-point an accurate definition of 'paradigm', it is often seen as revolving around a hegemonic theory, also recommending methods, determining relevant questions and ways of doing research. The other cycle of a discipline is connected to 'revolutionary science'. Contrary to what Popper says, if a paradigm is strong enough, it can afford to ignore falsifying pieces of evidence. If it persists ignoring them, though, scientists may feel that the approach is losing its explanatory power and may resort to an eventually available alternative theory (Godfrey-Smith, 2003, pp.84ff). Mass adherence to a new paradigm leads to a qualitative shift, a 'scientific revolution'. From a Kuhnian perspective, the point of science would be to find an agreement on general paradigmatic principles as soon as possible and then move on solving puzzles on that basis.

Selective readings of Kuhn prevail in IR. Mainstream theorists prefer this version – a normative claim of 'normal science' being the aim of IR. If we agree on a uniform 'paradigm', we will eventually go to the next stage and solve puzzles (Lijphart, 1974b). Others, aware of the relativistic implications (addressed later in this chapter), prefer to blend Kuhn's 'paradigmatism' with additional material – usually a mixture of Popper and Lakatos (Vasquez, 1995, 1999). This sort of move has led to some controversy, not least because reference to Popper, Lakatos and Kuhn tends to imply assumptions about how research should be conducted in IR, and what makes a good theory. For instance, in a journal controversy that attracted some attention, John Vasquez was questioned along these lines by Waltz (1997), Randall Schweller (1997), Stephen Walt (1997) and other colleagues (Christensen & Snyder, 1997; Elman & Elman, 1997). Vasquez (1997) had to defend not only his 'hybrid' framework and its implications for theory appraisal, but also debate whether his reading of Lakatos was adequate, and whether his 'rational reconstruction' of Waltz's neorealism as a 'research

12 On the ambiguity of the term 'paradigm' in Kuhn's work, see Masterman's (1970) discussion.
programme' was appropriate. For the latter scholar, curiously, the methodology of scientific research programmes is a way of drawing a line between his own approach and empiricist positivism (Waltz interviewed by Halliday & Rosenberg, 1998).

So far, we have looked at classical, normative and mainstream views of theory, its definition, roles and assessment in IR. Both classical and normative IR draw on general political philosophy and correlate areas in order to argue for the indivisibility of ethical judgement from IR theory. They both postulate a set of peculiar conditions separating political practice from the subject-matter of the natural sciences. They also highlight the need for theory, an element neglected to a large extent by the 'scientific' proposal of behaviouralist IR under the influence of positivism. Drawing on additional elements in the philosophy of science, social science and economics, mainstream IR embraces a more nuanced view of theories. Some scholars look even further at the philosophy of science in order to incorporate a more 'dynamic' view of theories embedded in 'research programmes' or 'paradigms'. In all these cases, however, a new formulation emerges from the decontextualisation of the original approaches. Still, all of them assume some sort of continuity between natural and social science that would enable the move. Those who understand otherwise look at other sources to support their view of IR theory as social science or, alternatively, as social discourse or practice.

**IR theory as social theory**

Mainstream views of theory in IR delineate its role as primarily one of explanation as a 'covering law' and 'causal inference'. A certain event is explained as an instance of a statistically grasped 'general law'. Its 'causes' are identified in correlations and 'chains of events'. This view of the role of theory has been challenged in social science in a number of ways. We turn, now, to views of theory in IR predominantly influenced by alternative approaches to social science, based on 'interpretive', 'critical' and (scientific) 'realist' perspectives. 'Anti-naturalists' postulate an intrinsic separation between the 'natural' and 'social' realms. One manner in which social science reflects this distinction is in the aim of employing theory to 'interpret' human action. Interpretivists in this sense either reject the notion of 'explanation' altogether or attempt to reform it in light of alternative insights. There are also those who reject the mainstream view but still adhere to a 'naturalist' position. They tend to keep explanation as a key role of theory. Scientific realists and/or some of the critical theorists (in a broad sense) are the most common example in IR. Instead of adhering to the mainstream view of explanation, or rejecting it
altogether (as some 'interpretivists' do), they redefine explanation. A notion employed in
this redefinition of the goal of social theorising is that of accounting for 'constitutive'
causation, or perhaps for 'mechanisms'. This alternative view also makes room for
'interpretation'. It could also incorporate relevant insights on 'reflexivity' and the critical
character of theory.

Let us look, first, at the interpretive views. Interpretive social scientists have
adopted an anti-naturalist framework of 'social science' based on the idea of an intrinsic
separation between the 'natural' and 'social' realms. By implication, theory in social
science necessarily operates in a different way. Charles Taylor (1985, p.92), for
instance, laments “a constant temptation to take natural science theory as a model for
social theory” and notes that the latter “is part of a significantly different activity”. Max
Weber and Peter Winch actualised this 'anti-naturalist' stance via an 'interpretive' or
'hermeneutical' approach to social theory. Weber (2006, p.228) in principle did not
exclude 'explanation' from the goals of social research, but affirmed the need to go
beyond an account of the 'chain of events' leading to a certain effect. Rather, an
interpretation or understanding of the 'reasons' for social action in its unique setting
should be provided. “Understanding in this sense”, said Weber, “consists in placing the
act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning” (2006, p.233). The theme
reappears in Winch's (1958) influential work. According to him, doing social science
means looking at the rules that stabilise our expectations about a given action and, at the
same time, construct the actor's environment. This reconstruction provides insight into
the reasons for action. Society is like a kind of game, the rules of which need to be
grasped by the observer.13 For Winch “the correct description of an action is one that
relates it to the agent's reasons” (Lyas, 1999, p.65). This kind of dynamics is absent
from natural science. This portrait of an intrinsic difference between the natural and the
social realms makes any talk of a 'science of society' in the naturalistic sense extremely
problematic. Unlike the mainstream imitations of Friedman's 'positive economics',
interpretive social theory may take into account the empathy between those observing
society and what is observed. On the one hand, we are able to provide a proper
interpretation of the meaning-context in which actors are embedded, at least in part,
because we share participation in society with them (but see Lyas, 1999, pp.58-62;
Mennell, 1974, p.23). On the other, although being more aware of this fact than 'value-

13 Winch explicitly links his attention to rules in this particular framework to the philosophical influence
of Ludwig Wittgenstein, a move that helps us differentiate his view from Weber's.
free' theorists can yield some critical results, we cannot ignore anymore the role played by values in the social action analysed. Nor can we keep assuming our observation does not interfere with what is observed.

For even though theory may be serving us, the social scientists, simply as an instrument of explanation, the agents whose behaviour we are trying to explain will be using (the same or another) theory, or proto-theory, to define themselves. So that whether we are trying to validate a theory as self-definition, or establish it as an explanation, we have to be alive to the way that understanding shapes practice, disrupts or facilitates it (Taylor, 1985, p.116).

In other words, social science is 'reflexive', as it may well be, for instance, “akin to self-fulfilling prophecies, which generate what they foresee” (Hollis, 2002, p.198).

Despite the fact that Weber and Taylor still take 'explanation' (loosely defined) into account, in IR a sharp divide between explanatory and interpretive theory has often been assumed on both sides of the issue (Parsons, 2010, pp.83-4). Speaking from the mainstream, Keohane describes the “sociological approach” in IR and denounces its supporters on the grounds that they “need to develop testable theories”. For him, a “synthesis” between this approach and the mainstream “will not emerge full-blown”, but rather derive from “competition and dialogue between these two research programs” (1988, p.393). An important defence of the sociological or interpretive view is provided in the work of Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, where it is juxtaposed to the 'explanatory' mainstream programme. Explanation and understanding, they say, are two valid modes of inquiry which do not go well together (1990, pp.1-7). In an individual statement at the end of the book, Smith expands on the difference such distinction makes for interpretive IR theory:

I do not accept the idea that we can construct a neutral theory, valid across time and space, that allows us to predict in the same way as occurs in the natural sciences. I do not see that as only a matter of complexity, but as a fundamental feature of the social sciences (Hollis & Smith, 1990, p.203).

One of the points of contrast here is the role theory should play in social science. Ian Hurd voices the positivist view that “in social life data are not fully objectifiable, observers cannot be fully autonomous of the subject under study, and social relationships cannot be separated into discrete 'causes' and 'effects'”. By implication, “the purpose of theorizing is not to identify and test hypotheses about lawlike regularities”, but to “interpret” or understand “how social meaning and power produce
the apparent stability in the social world” (2008, p.307). These differences matter for those defending IR theory as a social science, even in the interpretive fashion. Richard Ned Lebow (2007, pp.2; 7) further expresses the postpositivist IR objection to “a narrow understanding of science as a form of inference whose ultimate goal is predictive theories”. Social theorising, however, does not necessarily imply any willingness to throw “the baby of science” away with “the bathwater of positivism”. That is, 'science' does not equal 'positivism' and does not require strict adhesion to the mainstream's view of theory, and in our rejection of mainstream ways of theorising we need not dismiss the notion of a social science (L. G. Freire & Koivisto, 2012; C. Wight, 2002). It is with that differentiation in mind that critical theorists and some (but not all) constructivists have produced a new platform for social scientific IR along postpositivist lines (Klotz & Lynch, 2007). In doing so, they purport to take into account both explanation and interpretation, reflexivity and non-mainstream scientific rigour.

Paramount to this approach to theorising is the redefinition of the explanatory role of social science. Among theorists in IR adhering to a non-positivist position are some constructivists like Emanuel Adler and Alexander Wendt.

Constructivists have followed Third Debate theorists in rejecting the possibility and desirability of formulating law-like generalizations that would justify a meaningfully positivist science of international politics. Yet they have not shied away from offering more contingent generalizations about aspects of world politics. Drawing on their analyses of historical processes, cultural practices, intersubjective meanings and norm formulation they have proffered generalizations about the nature and dynamics of international change, institutional development and moral community (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998, pp.273-4).

Adler (1997) argues that most constructivists have attempted to re-define the status of social science in IR by occupying a 'middle-ground' between mainstream theory and 'relativism'. He points out the need to unpack “a coherent constructivist methodological base that suggests a practical alternative to imitating the physical sciences” (2002, p.109). Commentators and critics, even on the constructivist side, differ on the value of such strategy, but it has certainly called theorists to re-think IR as a social science (Pouliot, 2004). Wendt's notion of theory, borrowed from elements of scientific realism, has played a significant role in this process. He notes that “one of the essential features of theories seems to be that they 'explain'” (1998, p.110). There are, in his view, two kinds of explanation. Under the influence of logical positivism and falsificationism, mainstream IR has subscribed to the 'covering law' way of theorising. A causal theory,
in this sense, connects several aspects of its subject-matter via a sequence or chain of events – a 'billiard-ball' approach. Wendt's preferred way of theorising, by contrast, attempts “to account for the properties of things by reference to the structures in virtue of which they exist”. This is what he calls 'constitutive theory', an argument that addresses questions like 'what is P' and 'how is P possible' (1998, pp.104-5). While not all constructivists defend a scientific enterprise in IR, the middle-ground presentation of Adler and Wendt has gained acceptance into the core of the discipline (see Guzzini & Leander, 2006). Their accounts of the 'constitution' of international phenomena in interpretive terms have generated fertile research programmes.

Critical theorists in the general sense are also concerned with the constitution of world politics, but add a clearer transformational and emancipatory aim for IR as a social science (Ashley, 1986, p.294). “Critical theory questions the dominant world order by taking a reflective stance on the framework of this order. By doing so it also questions the origins and legitimacy of political and social institutions and the way they change over time” (Griffiths, O’ Callaghan, & Roach, 2008, p.60). Here we see a constitutive component. There is also a 'reflective' element whereby “critical theory re-opens assumptions that have grounded our political thought (...) by questioning the starting point of thinking politically” (Edkins & Vaughan-Williams, 2009, p.2). Critical theorist Andrew Linklater (1996, pp.279-80) defends a similar position, but adds a number of important details. Like most critical theorists, he argues that critical theory “reflects pre-existing social purposes and interests”, collapsing the “subject/object distinction” and denies the immutability of existing structures.14 Linklater (1992) is more explicit on the normative side, in that he believes it is the critical theorist's aim to clearly delineate alternatives in a substantial way. Working in close dialogue with political theory, he stresses the need to think about the emancipatory aim of producing “new forms of political community which break with unjustified exclusion” (1996, p.280). In Ken Booth's words, this means “freeing people, as individuals and groups, from the social, physical, economic, political and other constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do” (1995, p.344). In IR, critical theory's subject-matter is, therefore, two-fold. On the one hand, it purports to look at how the current order has been constituted, with the aim to denounce its patterns of harm and exclusion. On the other, it also investigates the possibility of alternative arrangements.

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14 This unclear connection with the subject/object issue is perhaps an allusion to the fact that we are both students and makers of social reality.
with a view to emancipatory transformation (see Hutchings, 1999, pp.63-76).

Another group of scholars acknowledge some of the insights of the 'interpretive turn' in social theory but maintain an explanatory and scientific framework. They overlap with some critical theorists and constructivists, but can be identified as a separate group sharing a view of theory influenced by scientific realism (see Bhaskar, 1998). Simply put, the main task of science for them is “to explain 'facts' in terms of more fundamental structures” (Outhwaite, 1987, p.19). Notice the need to go beyond the surface of phenomena – beyond the empiricist view advocated by the mainstream – and uncover 'fundamental structures' in terms of their constitution. This implies, in turn, that a mere 'covering-law' and 'billiard-ball' account of events cannot fully explain, due to the exclusive focus on observables and assumption of discrete 'causes and effects' (Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010, p.53). Instead, an alternative notion of explanation is required.

Thus, if asked why something occurs, we must show how some event or change brings about a new state of affairs, by describing the way in which the structures and mechanisms that are present respond to the initial change. To do this, it is necessary to discover what the entities involved are: to discover their natures or essences (Keat & Urry, 1982, p.31).

Mechanisms in this sense are “frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences” (Elster, 2007, p.36). The reference to a more nuanced view of explanation as 'causal analysis', referring to structures and mechanisms, has been stressed by scientific realists in IR, like Milja Kurki and Colin Wight. “Scientific explanation is about providing deep understanding of the processes and objects around us”, says Kurki (2008, p.200). Due to the indeterminate character of causal mechanisms, prediction “cannot be the primary aim of science” (2008, p.199). “Theory” for Wight “is suggestive of the elements we deem important to the explanation of any given event” (2006, p.288). Such elements are not restricted to material factors. Ideas, meanings, concepts, etc. employed by agents, to the extent that they matter, “are part of a causal complex and, hence may be mechanisms” (C. Wight, 2004, p.296). Kurki concurs, opening up the possibility of integrating interpretive accounts into a scientific realist approach in IR. In order to be able to explain things in this sense, scientific realists broaden the notion of 'causation' and make reference to “a variety of things, actions, processes, structures or conditions that we can talk of as being responsible for directing

IR theory as discourse and practice
A particular reading of Kuhn's 'paradigmatism' has been a key source for the postpositivist view of theory. Reference is made to 'incommensurability' and some of the relativistic implications of Kuhn's account (Smith, 1987, 1996, 2003). For Kuhn, theories are never isolated, but deeply embedded in worldviews or wider intellectual and cultural frameworks. Adhesion to a paradigm is not fully explained in rational terms. By implication, ultimately the dominance of a paradigm is a matter of convention, at least within the scientific community, rather than its intrinsic merits. Rival paradigms cannot be compared in the strictest sense, even if at first sight they may attempt to deal with similar phenomena. Scientific observation, description, explanation and even validation are never neutral, and are deeply bound to paradigmatic understandings. If that is indeed the case, we are actually speaking of paradigms as constituting different worlds (see Neufeld, 1991). Steve Smith is a key IR theorist advancing this portrait of theories as a disciplinary narrative (2010, pp.11-12):

I think that the theories (...) are like different coloured lenses; if you put one of them in front of your eyes, you will see things differently. Some aspects of the world will look the same in some senses, for example shapes, but many other features, such as light and shade of colour, will look very different, so different in fact that they seem to show alternative worlds (...). The theories we use cannot simply be combined together so as to add up to different views of the same world of international relations; instead, they actually see different worlds.

In short, 'paradigm' implies incommensurability (Daddow, 2009, p.61). Although perhaps not clearly intended, this view of paradigms as constituting different worlds has a radically relativistic potential, which should lead to the 'pacific coexistence' of a plurality of theories. At least this is how several non-mainstream IR theorists sympathetic to Kuhn's view interpret his claims (see C. Wight, 1996 for a critique). Of course, this selective reading ignores the other side of Kuhn's paradigmatism – the need to erase this plurality, agree on a single paradigm and 'normalise' IR, turning it into a puzzle-solving science.

An outcome of the 'postpositivist turn' in social science is that it looks very different from mainstream inquiry. Theory now consists, in Clifford Geertz's (1983, pp.19-21) words, of “blurred genres”, whereby historical, philosophical, literary and artistic expressions of interpretation become extremely relevant and hypothetico-
deductive, axiomatic and formalised material will be less recurring.

The strict separation of theory and data, the 'brute fact idea'; the effort to create a formal vocabulary of analysis purged of all subjective reference, the 'ideal language' idea; and the claim to moral neutrality and the Olympian view, the 'God's truth' idea – none of these can prosper when explanation comes to be regarded as a matter of connecting action to its sense rather than behavior to its determinants (Geertz, 1983, p.34).

Anti-naturalist theorising, therefore, has led the study of society to “a revised style of discourse”, consisting in “the casting of social theory in terms more familiar to gamesters and aestheticians than to plumbers and engineers” (Geertz, 1983, pp.22-3). “Theorising”, in the words of a feminist IR scholar, “is a more nebulous activity than theory building exercises aiming at constructing law-like statements” (Sylvester, 1996, p.257). In fact, as Richard Ashley points out, this blurring of genres to which Geertz refers has the effect of of turning IR “theoretical discourse” into “practical and prescriptive text whose primary function is not unlike that of speeches, dialogues, treatises, and precepts” (1995, p.122). Approaches influenced by the “incredulity towards meta-narratives” which characterises postmodern orientations (Lytotard, 1979) deny both the desirability and possibility of the 'science' ideal. Paul Feyerabend controversially argued that the only methodological statement that does justice to the history of what we call 'science' is “anything goes” (2010, p.19). He pronounced his deep concern with the 'authoritarian' implications of a 'paradigm' in 'normal science', a discourse of exclusion dictating the norms of knowledge without necessarily being able to justify itself in absolute terms. In fact, Feyerabend saw little difference between science and pseudo-science, academic and traditional knowledge, research and witchcraft (Oberheim, 2006, p.280).15

Zygmunt Bauman voices some of the postmodernist concerns advancing a similar position. We have a high regard for scientific discourse, says Bauman (1990, p.215), because it allows us to predict and control. When we transpose this view to the study of society, the implications are, to say the least, dehumanising (p.216, original emphasis).

What all such demands amount to is that sociologists should offer advice on how to reduce the freedom of some people so that their choice be confined and their conduct

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15 Many commentators unfortunately do not appreciate the irony of Feyerabend's statements to this effect. Upon close examination, it can be seen that 'anything goes' emerges from a demonstration of the absurdity of prescribing a priori rules for scientific knowledge, rather than being a prescription itself.
more predictable. A knowledge is wanted of how to transform the people in question from subjects of their own action into objects of other people's actions.

Reflexivity means that theory as such, or 'scientific' discourse in general, not only 'explains' or 'understands' the world, but also orders it. Perhaps, even reproducing its own hierarchies and exclusions, reducing it to 'predictability' and 'controllability'. Besides, theory and its perverse effects operate in conjunction as an exclusionary constellation of discourses. Theory establishes 'orthodoxy' and condemns 'heresy' – what is 'heretical', being condemned for rational, 'scientific' reasons, is condemned not only in thought (Bauman, 1990, pp.227-31). Since theory constructs the world via exclusion of alternative ways of 'ordering' the world, to theorise is to affirm one kind of social order against alternative narratives and proposals (cf. May, 1995). “Social theory is a normative project, although that agenda has been hidden in various quests for legitimacy and objectivity” (Croissant, 1998, p.148, original emphasis). A 'scientific' attitude to the use of theory, in this sense, is not only problematic (for if theory is world-producing, then which world would be theory-testing?), it is also undesirable. It excludes alternative interpretations and crystallises such exclusionary patterns in its construction of order. “Theory”, in Nina Baym's words, “is a form of policing” (1984, p.45). Upon consideration, Feyerabend's 'anything goes', taken literally, would appear to be the only viable way.\textsuperscript{16} Notice, however, that this sceptical attitude to 'theory' does not necessarily imply a rejection of our 'working definition' of theory at its basic level. In fact, it assumes it, and then condemns it as untenable and undesirable.

In IR, a number of theorists of 'poststructuralist' leanings interact with these ideas. An early textbook in this line makes reference to “the world-making nature of theory, of theory as everyday political practice” (George, 1994, p.3). A more recent text further develops the point:

IR theory makes organizing generalizations about international politics. IR theory is a collection of stories about the world of international politics. And in telling stories about international politics, IR theory doesn't just present what is going on in the world out there. IR theory also imposes its own vision of what the world out there looks like (C. Weber, 2009, p.2, emphasis added).

For the poststructuralist, says David Campbell, there is a “reorientation” that places “theory” at the centre of analysis, rather than keeping it as “simply a tool for analysis”

\textsuperscript{16} A close reading of Feyerabend's works would yield a much less relativistic impression. But, then, postmodernists would probably dispute such exclusionary interpretation!
(2010, p.227). Due to the blurring of genres, although there is some sense in which theoretical discourse may be discerned from other narratives, IR theory may also be found in unexpected places like “classic IR texts, classrooms, and in more popular sites of culture like film, literature, art, and television” (C. Weber, 2009, p.226). Most often, though, poststructuralists assume some sort of distinction between the 'textual genre' connected to our 'basic definition' of theory, most often found in academic works, and other sorts of 'discourse' which also construct world politics. IR theory, according to Campbell (1998, p.17) for example, “is one instance” (presumably among many) of “cultural practices that serve to discipline ambiguity”. It is, therefore, only in a loose sense that 'international theory is everywhere', to parody Martin Wight. In Marysia Zalewski's words, when we theorise, we are “global actors”, and those who we normally consider to be global actors are, in turn, also “theorists” (1996, p.348). What are the implications of this view of theory in research? Campbell's work suggests a possible answer. He defends a “logic of interpretation”, as opposed to a “logic of explanation”. His preferred form of interpretivism is one which “acknowledges the improbability of cataloguing, calculating, and specifying the 'real causes', and concerns itself instead with considering the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another” (1998, p.4).17 The evaluation of theory is also affected, as Jim George (1994, p.24) indicates:

This position, in simple terms, is that the world is always an interpreted 'thing', and it its always interpreted in conditions of disagreement and conflict to one degree or another. Consequently, and for all our attempts to construct scientific means of solving this problem, there can be no common body of observational or tested data that we can turn to for a neutral, objective knowledge of the world.

Rather than 'police thought', then, this alternative view of theory in IR defends 'openness' and would evaluate discourse against discourse itself. Critical criteria can be followed: how exclusionary of alternative 'voices' is the discourse (Ashley, 1996)? There are also literary criteria. If seen as text, what about, for example, its 'aesthetic' properties (Ashley, 1995, pp.120-5)? Finally here (but the list goes on), there are political criteria which could be employed (Zalewski, 1996, p.352). What is the discourse's potential for violence? What is our role in theorising/constructing the world?

Besides the postmodern or poststructuralist critique of theory, there are other rejections of the project of a theoretical social science. A popular one, gaining relevance

17 But how can one reject 'causes' and remain concerned with 'manifest political consequences'?
in IR, is the defence of 'social science that matters', understood “as practical, intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.4). Assuming a distinction between the 'natural' and the 'social' worlds, it is argued that “the study of social phenomena is not, never has been, and probably never can be, scientific in the conventional meaning of the word 'science'” and that “it is therefore not meaningful to speak of 'theory' in the study of social phenomena, at least not in the sense that 'theory' is used in natural science” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.25). This is due to the fact that, by definition, a scientific theory possesses a general character, aims to be context-independent, “predictive”, “universal” and must “have rules”. But, then, society unfolds in terms which are “context-dependent and cannot be reduced to rules”, even in an interpretive sense. For (in this view) it is context, and not some sort of meaning-rule, that determines what counts as a social object of analysis or not (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp.39-42; 45). Therefore, it would appear that social theory in the strict sense of a 'context-independent framework' is not a tenable project (see Bourdieu, 2000). Trying to execute such a project, in fact, has distorted the relevance and role of studying society. Hence the need for a 'social science that matters'.

In this scenario, the purpose of social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society's practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests. The goal (…) becomes one of contributing to society's capacity for value-rational deliberation and action (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.167).

Social science 'that matters', in short, “goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge” and also “technical knowledge or know-how” and “involves judgments and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.2).

In IR there is an increasing body of reflectivist work that borrows from this literature. It dismisses the scientific and explanatory aspirations of the other approaches while at the same time avoiding a full commitment to 'postmodernism' and keeping a 'constitutive' focus. Brown (2012, p.442) points out the rejection of the mainstream view of theory, which “in this case is not to be understood in neo-positivist terms as a set of causal laws or 'if-then' propositions linking independent, intervening and

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18 And then we can question: is this a rule? If so, then the argument collapses (reductio ad absurdum). If not, then at least in some cases theory and social science, denied in the claim, would be feasible (non sequitur).
dependent variables”. Damiano de Felice and Francesco Obino highlight the 'reflexive' component, arguing that the more informal kind of “theory” emerging in this context is “a set of practices in itself”, which “constructs and delimits what is possible and/or impossible in international relations”. When theorists speak of world politics as experts, they are part of this broader 'practice': “IR does not simply gaze at 'ir' from a safe distance” (2012, p.431). Vincent Pouliot and Emanuel Adler (2011, pp.8; 28), who have contributed much to the advancement of this way of understanding our discipline, define research along these lines simply as “sense making and situatedness” allowing for interaction in IR between the several “paradigms”, thereby distancing themselves from the stricter 'incommensurability thesis'. While the close interaction with the literature of 'social science that matters' is recent, similar themes can be identified in the contributions of anti-naturalist constructivists like Nicholas Onuf and Friedrich Kratochwil, among others (see Fierke, 2007; Zehfuss, 2002, pp.250-4). Onuf (1989, pp.8-14) is very critical of any fixation with theory as a “holy grail” capable of providing “some kind of transcendental knowledge” of “ensembles of human practices” coherent enough to be self-contained. Kratochwil agrees and takes the argument a step further, adding a 'pragmatic' direction. This is evident in his view of theories as “guides for understanding social reality and for directing action” (2000, p.59). Theory as such, taken in the strictest sense, is not necessarily the core of scientific research. “Perhaps science is best conceived not as a theory-driven enterprise but as a practice among a set of persons who share certain techniques” (Kratochwil, 2007b, p.27). Given this picture of IR research, how should we proceed in evaluating knowledge claims? For Kratochwil (2007a, p.13), the presumption of an overarching set of criteria to judge theory from a 'transcendental' perspective is off the table. It is an 'unrealisable plan'. However, Feyerabend's 'anything goes' is also out of question. The 'truth' of theory, in light of this 'pragmatic' approach, “has become a procedural notion of rule-following according to community practices” (Kratochwil, 2011, p.211).

Questions on theory and IR
I close this survey of IR views on the definition, elements, uses and validation of theory with some comments. Table 1.1 (below) provides a brief summary of the commonalities and differences across the views surveyed in this chapter. I will expand on the commonalities. After that, I contrast my reading to alternative accounts of theoretical diversity in IR. This is followed by a series of implications and questions leading to the
Table 1.1 – Views of theory in IR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group of theorists</th>
<th>Defining theory</th>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Uses</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. International theory as a different genre, a branch of political theory.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; normative statements; historical narrative; political commentary.</td>
<td>Provide practical wisdom; clarify moral issues; organise experience; speak 'truth to power'.</td>
<td>Historical accuracy; internal consistency and coherence with wider normative-philosophical frameworks; clarification of concrete situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. Theory may be part of a research programme or a paradigm.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; normative statements; 'causal' connections; prescriptions.</td>
<td>Explain via causal inference; predict; organise experience; provide policy-relevant prescription.</td>
<td>Parsimony; testability; usefulness of assumptions; verification/falsification; predictive power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. Normative theory as a different type. Both go often together.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; normative statements; historical narrative; exposition of texts.</td>
<td>Provide practical wisdom; clarify moral issues; organise experience; articulate quest for justice; interpret and adapt 'canonical' theories.</td>
<td>Concern for justice; internal consistency and coherence with wider normative-philosophical frameworks; clarification of concrete situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. Theory embedded in a social context. Theory also impacts social context.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; normative statements; historical account; defence of alternative order.</td>
<td>Social critique; theoretical critique; account for status quo and identify its injustice; analyse its historical constitution; challenge status quo in search for emancipation.</td>
<td>Historical accuracy; injustice identified; 'Abstracted empiricism' criticised; emancipatory potential; concrete proposals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpositivist science</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. Theory embedded in a social context. Theory helps shape social context. May be part of a paradigm.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; constitutive account; categories (not 'variables').</td>
<td>Provide an interpretive account of the constitution of order and change in social reality; understand action in a framework of meaning.</td>
<td>Due to reflexivity, falsification or verification not tenable in the traditional fashion. Evaluation depends on the kind of theory (causation/constitut ion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postpositivist non-science</td>
<td>Empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. Theory embedded in a social context.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; constitutive</td>
<td>Provide practical wisdom; organise experience; provide an interpretive account of the</td>
<td>'Abstracted empiricism' criticised; theory better evaluated, as a practice, by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

next chapter and the rest of the thesis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory helps shape social context. May be part of a paradigm or worldview.</th>
<th>account; categories; normative statements; reflection on how own theorising affects the world.</th>
<th>constitution of order and change in social reality; understand action in a framework of meaning.</th>
<th>experts doing scholarship and by its use to the community of political practitioners.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges empirical theory in the 'basic definition'. However, any 'label' or 'concept' is inherently problematic. Scholarship should have various shapes and forms.</td>
<td>Concepts; propositions; logical connections; several types of discourse and critical reflections on narratives of different genres. Cultural critique.</td>
<td>Against other theories: they 'police' thought and exclude discourses. Own theories: social critique; theoretical critique; provide 'a voice'; deconstruction.</td>
<td>Aesthetics; form criticism and deconstruction; critique of normative and actual implications of theory; potential to 'voice' excluded discourses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

In the beginning of the chapter I set forth a 'basic definition' of theory to which all the positions represented in the table refer in one way or another. Theory is 'systematic discourse about a certain subject-matter'. The definition, of course, does not mean much unless it is further explained (Bunge, 1998a). This is what each of the views of theory in IR have done throughout the development of the discipline. Yet, at the same time, the 'basic definition' tells us a great deal about the nature of these debates. Theory is discourse. It can be expressed in different ways, but loosely speaking, it must consist in at least a set of connected propositions (Bunge, 1996, pp.108-114). Theory is systematic. These propositions are connected in many forms, and need not be stated exclusively with a formal language, as some 'syntacticists' initially believed would be possible. In fact, demanding too much rigour in the presentation of theories would probably 'erase' most IR research from the category of 'theory' (see Rice, 2000, p.240ff). Theory is about a subject-matter. 'Aboutness' can be a disputed notion. There are many ways of theorising the same referent. Moreover, just what 'about' means itself is a matter better left for philosophers in the field of semantics (Bunge, 1972). The 'subject-matter' is also a matter of deeper philosophical debate. As we have seen, there is much disagreement in philosophy and social science on the status of the things we theorise about. Are they mind-independent? Are they always observable? Are they useful figments of the imagination? Nevertheless, all positions agree that theories do have a subject-matter. So, then: theory is an argument, consisting at least in interrelated propositions, about something. Up to this point, all views of IR surveyed in this chapter
can agree.

There are also commonalities in terms of the type of disagreement across these views. First, the 'structure' of the claims is similar. Most of the positions on theory in IR attempt to flesh out not only this 'basic definition' or 'common denominator', but also the elements, uses and evaluation of theory. These three issues go together in all the positions mentioned here (see Hoover, 1984, pp.38-40). A certain formulation is articulated about the 'way' in which one should theorise. The elements of a theory will vary according to the way of theorising. This mode also impacts what one assumes to be the use of theory. Such use informs a notion of what makes a proper theory, or how one should evaluate it (Attinà, 2011, p.18). Another commonality here is the 'origin' of the claims. All the positions reviewed in this chapter borrow either directly or by analogy from other disciplines. “IR scholars tend to live in an echo chamber” (Zarakol, 2011, p.648). The philosophy of science, certainly due to its focus on theories and ways of inquiry, has been a major source of ideas. A further source is the general literature on social scientific research, and the more critical literature on scholarship about society that rejects stronger claims to science. There is yet another commonality in that all these 'borrowings' involve some re-contextualisation and 'blending' in order to accommodate the borrowed material to the new field of IR. As a result, we can see thus the formation of a 'discursive layer' in IR preoccupied with the notion of theory, what to do with it, how to tell its story in terms of the 'growth of knowledge', how to judge it in terms of the context to which it refers, or in which it emerges. This 'discursive layer' is not the mere application of 'external' texts to our discipline. It is also a 'bridging' mechanism, hybridising them with our disciplinary views.

Only by investigating how these notions of theory in IR shape themselves in dialogue and tension with their 'origins' can we better understand this 'discursive layer'. This is important for several reasons, not least because it provides a way of criticising our disciplinary 'self-images' about where the divides are and where there is room for cross-theoretical interaction (Lake, 2011). Take, for example, the dichotomies we often find in the literature on the types of IR theory: 'normative / positive', 'critical / problem-solving' and 'explanatory / interpretive'. Normative thought and positive theory often coexist and acknowledge each other's use and relevance. Traditionalists like Morgenthau, Bull and Martin Wight certainly recognised alternative ways of theorising IR, defined as “a system of empirically verifiable, general truths, sought for their own sake” (Morgenthau, 1955, pp.451-2). Bull (1975, p.277) provides a similar definition of
IR theory as a “body of general propositions that may be put forward about relations among states, or more generally about world politics”. Despite Wight's (1991) deliberate focus on common sense, practical and philosophical knowledges while discussing so-called 'traditions' in 'international theory', he has at least once provided his own definition of empirical IR theory: “some conceptual system which offers a unified explanation of international phenomena”. Speaking on behalf of contemporary normative theorists, Brown (1992, p.2) defines empirical IR theories as “sets of interconnected law-like statements” which are then embedded into wider “intellectual frameworks”. A number of mainstream scholars, in turn, known for their narrower view of 'positive' theorising, in fact did not reject normative and traditionalist thinking either. Waltz (1979, p.6) himself acknowledges a different use for the term 'theory' in the traditional sense of “philosophic interpretation”, a definition in line with his own earlier work (Waltz, 1959). The distinction between normative and positive theory, therefore, is not as intrinsic to theorising as it would appear to be.

Another questionable dichotomy is that between 'critical' and 'problem-solving' theory. Robert Cox (1981) defends the former and contrasts it to the latter, claiming it tends to reiterate the status quo, focusing in incremental 'quick fixes' rather than deep change. The problem with this sharp distinction is that, in and by itself, it does not tell us whether a specific theory is critical or not. Many critical theorists influenced by Marxist political economy (including Cox himself) are very sceptical about the current economic system. They theorise from a critical perspective in order to change it. However, a free-market libertarian like Hans-Hermann Hoppe (1990) does exactly the same, questioning how we got to the current state of affairs, how prevailing ideology serves the purpose of 'big government' and what we need to do in order to transform the status quo into an anarcho-capitalist system. “The main task of contemporary social science”, says classical liberal Ludwig von Mises (1944, p.14), “is to defy the taboo by which the established doctrines seek to protect their fallacies and errors against criticism”. It seems that this way of portraying the distinction between critical and problem-solving theory is “confusing since the content of the term critical is dependent on a political context” (Kurki & Wight, 2010, p.28). It is confusing because two theories can be equally 'critical' in this definition on exactly the same issue and move exactly in the opposite direction. We may still draw a line between more and less

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19 Critical theory is not the monopoly of Marxist-oriented scholars, and it is fair to say that most normative writers, regardless of buying the Marxist diagnosis or not, “may also want to alter world society in one way or another” (Williams, 1992, p.x).
conservative theories, but a sharp dichotomy along these lines will not do, if it avoids accounting for substantive claims.

While this 'divide' in the discipline has attracted some attention, the 'explanation vs. understanding' dyad seems to be more widely adopted, especially in some of its alternative manifestations – 'positivist vs. postpositivist' and 'science vs. practice'. For proponents of the sharp divide, “this boils down to a difference over what the social world is like”. They are of the opinion that explanatory and interpretive theories “are not combinable so as to form one overarching theory of the social world” (Smith, 1995, p.27). Social scientific attempts to combine both are condemned as “unrealizable plans” and “delusional projects” (Kratochwil, 2007b, p.11). Theory as merely a “tool” is rejected, and “theory as everyday practice” is stressed (Zalewski, 1996, pp.345-6). Of course, the 'unity of science' view inspired by positivism and defended in the mainstream is a way of eliminating the dichotomy at the cost of erasing interpretive approaches altogether from 'social science' (Chernoff, 2007, p.38). But the sharp dichotomy fails to do justice to a non-positivist alternative, advanced in relevant claims by scientific realists (Patomäki & Wight, 2000, p.217). Kurki (2008, p.72) points out that many interpretivists reject the ideal of a social science based on causal analysis because they equate 'social science' and 'causal analysis' to 'mainstream social science' and empiricism. Rather than distinguishing between 'causes of' and 'reasons for' action, scientific realists “can recognise reasons as causal in the sense that they 'produce' outcomes” (Kurki, 2008, p.170). In a similar way, Colin Wight (2006, p.267) acknowledges that to some extent theoretical discourse may construct social phenomena, but also maintains that a line should be drawn. “After all, if the agents engaged in their activities and concepts they have of those activities are exhaustive of the social world, it is difficult to see what role social scientists might play, other than to mystify, through a technical language, that which social agents already know”. In fact, Stefano Guzzini (2011) has shown that some of the anti-naturalist interpretive work can be re-theorised in terms of 'causal mechanisms', and suggested, with Wight (Guzzini, 2010; C. Wight, 2007), that interpretivists also tacitly assume scientific realist principles in their practice of scholarship. Since they value taking practice seriously in its own context, then the recurrence of this tacit assumption suggests they should take scientific realism more seriously.

After the survey in this chapter, a more nuanced view of the theoretical divide in IR emerges. There are more points of contact than the dichotomous 'self-images' in the
discipline would allow. Because a number of the alleged Great Debates in our field has been portrayed in function of these binaries, we can safely add this contribution to a more accurate account of the disciplinary divide in IR. These are by no means the only 'organising' schemes suggested by theorists to account for theoretical diversity. Some prefer to distinguish theoretical discourse according to substantive claims about the international system (Attinà, 2011; Gabriel, 1994; Woods, 1996). Others focus on the outreach of the theoretical scheme (Singer, 1961; Waltz, 1979, pp.60-78). But the classification such as the one pursued here, in terms of 'ways of theorising' IR, has been increasingly favoured (Jørgensen, 2010, pp.20-1). The findings in this chapter strengthen the categorisation proposed by Kurki and Wight (2007), but suggest we should perhaps go beyond that. The main types of IR theory, according to them, are 'explanatory', 'critical', 'normative', 'constitutive', and 'theory as a lens'. I would add that we need to bear in mind that these are 'types', i.e., not exclusive, but capture the most salient claims in each sort of theoretical discourse. I would also add that theory is often portrayed as embedded within a wider framework, be it a paradigm or research programme. With these authors, I would argue that questions of theory-appraisal, objectivity and impact of theory on practice (or vice-versa) depend on the philosophical background that shapes each of these ways of theorising.

**Another level of discourse**

At this stage we may draw nearer to the question posed by this thesis. A number of themes to which this chapter alludes raise issues about another level of discourse in IR – discourse about theory and the discipline themselves, and not about world politics *per se*. First, we have seen that in IR several views of theory, its main elements, uses and evaluation are in part constituted by pre-existing views in philosophy and general social science. Secondly, it has been pointed out that, on several accounts, the material borrowed from these other fields is often adjusted to suit IR scholars' concerns. Thirdly, some of the issues addressed at this level of discourse deal with how to judge theoretical work and how to theorise. The scientific status of IR, the political and social impact of theory and the relation between theory and its subject-matter are also discussed at this level. Fourthly, one could add critical concerns to the list as well. For example, narratives about theory tend to generate accounts of the historical formation of IR as a discipline, such as the Great Debates story with the dichotomies upon which it relies. This other level of discourse would provide space to question the 'self-images' of the
discipline. It would also provide critical space to go beyond its role as a 'bridge' between philosophy, other disciplines and IR and also criticise such attempts to 'bridge' and 'hybridise' material across fields. These issues pertain not to the study of world politics, but rather to the study of scholarship about world politics. They are located at the 'bridge' level, the discursive layer placed between one theory and another. They are, in this sense, questions of a metatheoretical nature.
Chapter 2

What is Metatheory?

The questions raised in the previous chapter about the nature of the discussion on theory in IR led us to the assertion that they belong to a specific 'discursive layer' in the discipline. While many of these debates are philosophical in nature, they are also shaped by a specific disciplinary context. For this reason perhaps we should consider them in their own terms, instead of hastily reducing them to philosophy. Despite being raised and debated in IR, they are not so much questions about world politics as they are about the issue of theory itself – in this case, the theory of international relations. In other words, they are problems of metatheory. "Meta-theory quite simply means theoretical reflections on theory" and "promises to enhance our understanding of the nature of IR theory" (Jørgensen, 2010, p.15).

In this chapter, I further expand the discussion by looking at the definition and types of metatheory. I begin by reminding the reader of our preliminary definition of 'metatheory' as 'theory of theory' or 'systematic discourse about theory'. After highlighting some of the implications of this definition, I note the use of parallel understandings in general social science and two selected cognate fields to IR – economics and political science. Following that, I unpack the preliminary definition in a typology of metatheoretical research that accounts not only for the examples provided to illustrate each type, but also for similar attempts to classify metatheorising in social science. In this typology, the general roles of metatheoretical research are described according to their most salient features following two criteria. On the one hand, there is the subject-matter of metatheoretical research. In connection, of course, to the centrality of 'theory', other issues are addressed by metatheory. On the other hand, these issues are addressed in different ways – metatheoretical discourse will have distinct functions depending on the type of argument. Metatheorising in IR reflects, therefore, a rich combination of elements on both sides of the typology. Having established a definition and typology for metatheory, I proceed to a discussion of metatheoretical research according to the key combinations of subject-matter and predominant function using IR
examples. This I do in order to open up a more nuanced understanding of the role of metatheory in the discipline in general terms. With that, part one of the thesis is closed. An exposition and evaluation of what IR scholars themselves claim to be the roles played by metatheoretical research in the field is left to the forthcoming chapters, in the second part of my study.

**Theory of theory**

The concept of metatheory adopted up until this point defines it as 'theory of theory'. But what are the basic forms in which we can systematically study IR theory? What exactly are the implications of this way of thinking? Let me begin to further explore the issue by showing in this section that the preliminary definition of 'metatheory' adopted so far is consistent with IR usage. In the next section, I turn to parallel views in general social science, economics and political science.

The notion of metatheory as systematic discourse on theory in broad terms is no novelty in the academic discipline of IR (Griffiths, O’ Callaghan, & Roach, 2008, p.313). Mark Neufeld (1994, pp.11-13) highlights “reflexivity” as the core of metatheoretical research. He contrasts IR theory, which treats “empirical evidence”, with a certain type of theory that addresses the issue of theory itself. Taken in this sense, metatheorising consists in “reflection on the process of theorizing”. Alexander Wendt (1991, p.383) poses a distinction between “first order theorizing” in the form of “substantive theories” and “second order or meta-theorizing”. Roger Spegele (1996, p.xiii) clarifies the meaning of “second-order inquiry”, or research whereby “one is examining the examiners of the world rather than the world itself”. Perhaps in a more judgmental way, Fred Halliday (1994, p.23) contrasts “meta-theory”, focused on “theory”, with “substantive analysis”. Colin Wight (2002, p.33) draws the line between metatheoretical research and IR theory in terms of a distinction in subject-matter between “the nature of inquiry itself, as opposed to the nature of the international system”. With Milja Kurki, he further expands on the difference between first and second-order inquiry: “Meta-theory does not take a specific event, phenomenon, or series of empirical real world practices as its object of analysis, but explores the underlying assumptions on the act of theorizing and the practice of empirical research” (Kurki & Wight, 2010, p.15). In short, they say, metatheories are “theories about theories”.

Another way of thinking of metatheory in IR is to define it as a 'bridging'
discursive layer between the generality of philosophy and the specificity of theories of world politics. This adds an extra dimension to our basic definition, but does not contradict its core. Jorgensen (2001, pp.37-44), for example, makes reference to “levels of reasoning” and arranges them from wide to narrow in the following order: philosophy, metatheory, theory and empirical analysis. Metatheory is the level concerned with the study of theory. Interestingly, in IR it does not need to focus solely on international theory, but may also make reference to social theory in general, operating as a kind of 'bridge' or 'link'. Taken in this sense of a 'bridging mechanism', metatheory adopts a more dynamic and synthesising role, by applying philosophical notions to a specific discipline or simply by joining different theories into one coherent approach. Debates on philosophy of science (Chernoff, 2007a), epistemology (Lapid, 1989), ontology (Wendt, 1987), mode of inquiry (P. T. Jackson, 2011b), role of theory as social critique (Neufeld, 1995) and so on are examples of this 'bridging' element of metatheoretical research in IR. While we may notice an additional dimension here, we need not interpret this feature as detached from our basic definition of metatheory. Jorgensen (2010, p.29) himself expands on the 'bridging' role played by metatheoretical research with reference to each of these topics and still subordinates it to the notion of 'systematic discourse about theory'. In this case, operating in a dynamic mode as “the framework of analytical commitments by means of which it is possible to reflect on existing theories or create new theories”. These positions of metatheory, mediating philosophy and theory, or as a 'bridge' between one theory and another are, thus, some of the key features IR scholars ascribe to metatheoretical research.

A final way in which this discursive layer is identified in IR has to do with applications of 'meta-science' or 'science studies' to the discipline. This eclectic field “tracks the history of disciplines, the dynamics of science as a social institution, and the philosophical basis for scientific knowledge” (Hess, 1997, p.1). There is, for example, an increasing number of works on the sociology of knowledge in connection to the production of IR theory (Acharya, 2011; A. B. Tickner & Waever, 2009; Turton, 2011; Turton & Freire, 2009). There is also an increasing number of in-depth studies on the immediate settings that shaped certain episodes of our disciplinary history (Guilhot, 2011c; Hobson, 2012; Linklater & Suganami, 2006). This type of research in IR is less frequently self-identified as metatheoretical, as it tends to focus on additional aspects of theorising, such as social context and disciplinary history. However, one cannot help but notice that such works on the 'contextual' elements of IR theory share the feature of
being 'systematic discourses about IR theory'. It is here, however, that I part ways with those who defend a clear-cut dichotomy between 'first and second-order inquiry'. Metatheoretical studies will often either directly or indirectly uncover mechanisms in the 'real world'. Theories are part of the social world, and it should not surprise us that a study of the social world may include analysis of how it shapes theory and how theory shapes it to some extent (Wallerstein, 2004, p.xi). Provided we keep in mind that metatheory is only a specific subset of this kind of research – namely, study that has theory as its key subject-matter – we can thus infer some limited overlap between first and second-order. It is clear that metatheory is generally understood in IR as 'theory of theory'. Before we look at further implications, let me point out that cognate disciplines in social science share with IR a similar view of metatheoretical research.

**Metatheory in cognate disciplines**

Mario Bunge, a philosopher of science whose work delineates philosophical analysis as an exercise that cuts across all theoretical disciplines, speaks extensively of metatheory in his contributions to social science. According to him, there are at least two points of entry for metatheoretical research in this context (1996, pp.1-6). On the one hand, social science includes philosophical material to a great extent. On the other, specific controversies which have emerged in key social scientific fields are inherently philosophical, in that they permeate all theory-based disciplines and point out to issues of a broader nature (e.g., the nature of reality, the validation of knowledge, the role of scholarship). 'Metatheory', in a sense, is part of the “philosopher's duty” towards this set of specialised fields of knowledge (1996, p.xii). His definition of the term echoes what we have seen so far in the IR literature: “a metatheory is a theory about theories”. Roland Giere, another philosopher of science, stipulates that theories of science (including theories about theories) are analogous to scientific or empirical theories. That is, in principle they should have similar structure, consistency and formality (1988, p.1). Bunge, in turn, warns against being too strict in defining what a 'theory about theory' is, considering that what we frequently call 'metatheory' in social science tends to be sets of “loosely knit metatheoretical propositions” (1996, pp.125-6). Similar informal views of metatheory as 'theory of theory' abound in the social sciences in general and, more specifically, in fields which display many affinities with IR, such as sociology, economics and political science.

Steven Wallis (2010) has compiled and analysed a number of definitions of
metatheoretical research in social science. Some of the most relevant conceptualisations listed in his study corroborate in other disciplines what we have seen for the case of IR. “Metatheory”, defines communication theorist Robert Craig, “is theory about theory”. The purpose of metatheory in general has to do with the uncovering and critiquing assumptions of theory (2009, p.657). Deborah Fingfeld, a health research specialist, fleshes out some of its functions. “Analysis and interpretation of theoretical, philosophical, and cognitive perspectives; sources and assumptions; and contexts” of scholarship are central among the roles of metatheorizing (2003, p.895). Still in health research, the authors of an authoritative handbook define metatheory as “a critical exploration of the theoretical frameworks or lenses that have provided direction to research and to researchers”. In this sense, it relates to “the analysis of primary studies for the implications of their theoretical orientations” (Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001, p.92). Social theorist Shanyang Zhao asserts in an encyclopedia entry that metatheorising “focuses on the examination of theory and theorizing”. He adds that metatheory “takes place in virtually all fields of social science” (2004, p.501). In his study of these definitions and parallel statements of social scientists, Wallis (2010, p.78) concludes that most reflect the 'core' of metatheory and a number of them address only some of its aspects. “Metatheory”, in his synthesis, “is primarily the study of theory”. This includes both “the development of overarching combinations of theory” and “theorems for analysis that reveal underlying assumptions about theory and theorizing”. As seen in the case of IR, while there are other peripheral aspects to it, the key to metatheory is that it revolves around 'theory'.

Metatheoretical issues are often discussed under the label of 'methodology', although this is not necessarily a universal trait of all disciplines. In economics, for example, the term 'economic methodology' is frequently used interchangeably with 'philosophy of economics'. As Daniel Hausman, a key specialist in this sub-field, puts it, the methodology of economics asks “philosophical questions”. They include issues such as the goal of theorising, the definition of a theory and a model, how they relate to reality, and whether there is an intrinsic distinction between natural and social science (2008, pp.4-5). But, then, these are metatheoretical questions. Drawing on a similar set of questions, Glenn Fox, another economic methodologist, comes to the conclusion that methodology, in this particular sense, is simply “the theory of theories” (1997, pp.33-6; 122). Unlike general philosophers of science, who apply philosophical reasoning to specific fields of science from outside, economic methodologists (or metatheorists in
economics) philosophise within the discipline of economics (Hausman, 2008, p.3). This is arguably what accounts for the philosophical eclecticism and hybridisation which one finds in economic methodology (Fox, 1997, p.2). Rather than being a mere application of philosophy to economics, this sub-field plays the role of a 'bridge' between general philosophical questions and 'mid-range' points concerning that specific discipline.

When the term 'metatheory' is employed with a clearer meaning, it often refers to the application of the philosophy of science or philosophy of social science to a specific field. Political scientists, who use the term more often than economists, are used to thinking in terms of a 'bridging' role for metatheory. David Marsh (2010, p.212), for one, connects (but does not limit) the term “meta-theoretical issues” to the following list of problems: “the relationships between structure and agency, the material and the ideational and stability and change”. Speaking from a different perspective, Charles Tilly (2008, p.4), another influential scholar, lists possible 'bridges' between “epistemology, ontology, and logics of explanation” on the one hand and social theory on the other as key aspects of metatheory (see also Tilly, 2008, p.27). Joseph Jupille (2005, pp.210-211), another political scientist, provides a similar list, adding “disciplinary” aspects like the assessment of “different architectures of inquiry” and “scholarly style”. Sociology, however, is perhaps the one discipline in which these issues have been more thoroughly studied with a clear view of their 'bridging' role between philosophy and social science (see Giddens, 1979). While some have adopted a more restrictive view of metatheory, applying it merely to 'theory construction' and 'evaluation' (Hage, 1972, pp.5-6), others have conflated the term with what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls 'grand theory' (e.g. Powers, 2010, p.9). However, most would still agree with the general definition developed here – metatheory as the “study of theories per se” (Wallace, 1992, p.53).

To a great extent, it was George Ritzer's (1988, 1990, 1991, 1992) careful work fleshing out the concept and roles of social metatheorising that set the tone of this sub-field in sociology. Echoing Bunge's recommendation of a more flexible understanding of 'metatheory' to accommodate to current usage in social science, Ritzer (2001, p.14) defines metatheorising as “systematic study” of theoretical material. In sociology, for example, “a metatheorist is one who studies sociological theories of the social world, while a theorist is one who studies the social world more directly in order to create (or apply) sociological theory”. This avoids the restrictive view of metatheorising

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20 See Chapter 1.
as a heavily formalised endeavour. Moreover, it also clarifies how metatheory differs from grand theory. While one of the key roles of metatheorising may be that of cross-disciplinary and cross-theoretical synthesis, – a 'bridging' role – we should not lose sight of the 'theory-centred' character of metatheoretical research (Ritzer, 1991b, p.3). To be sure, grand theories like Marxism may operate as cross-disciplinary metatheorising in a synthetic move (say, by applying an account of social structure to IR theory) or perhaps in the less common use of Marxism as a 'sociology of theoretical knowledge' (Löwy, 1985).\footnote{I owe this point to Noé Cornago, who mentioned Löwy's contribution to the sociology of knowledge while commenting my earlier work on the use of Imre Lakatos' philosophy of science in IR.} However, unlike metatheory, Marxism is primarily interested in providing an account of the historical formation of society in general. Taken in this sense, the loose use of 'metatheory' in some circles would blur the distinction. Simple as it may be, Ritzer's definition handles this problem. Another issue sorted by his extensive effort to clarify what it means to do social metatheorising refers to the 'direction' of metatheory. We often read about a certain 'normative' drive of metatheoretical research (e.g. Fox, 1997, p.128; Wallace, 1992). Systematic discourse about theory tends to aim for the improvement of theoretical material in one way or another. This has led some IR scholars, for instance, to affirm that metatheory must always provide clear directives on how to theorise or evaluate theory (Chernoff, 2009a; P. T. Jackson, 2011a). But this is not the only possible function of metatheory, or even a necessary one. While Ritzer (2001, pp.14-15) acknowledges these roles of metatheorising as paramount, his broader definition does justice to both current usage of the term in social science and the broader notion of metatheory as 'theory about theory'. In his own words, the kernel of this kind of research meets “a need to better understand social theory” (Ritzer, 2001, p.1). As we can now tell, this view recurs not only in IR but also in parallel disciplines.

**Typology of metatheorising**

The discussion above clarifies a number of points. First, metatheory has theory as its key subject-matter. Secondly, by implication, metatheory operates as a 'bridge', between philosophy and specialised theory or between two specialised theories. Thirdly, there are many possible ways to actualise this bridging role. Fourthly, some of these ways may go beyond the academic discipline in question. Finally, some of these ways may involve the relation between theory and its subject-matter in that discipline. These five points invite a typology of metatheoretical research highlighting salient features of
specific claims. In this typology I follow, in part, Ritzer's account of metatheorising.

Ritzer divides metatheorising in three major types, according to their respective "end products" (1991b, pp.6-17). One type results in new social theory. A second type synthesises theories and produces an overarching perspective. A third type, more frequently encountered in the literature, leads to "a deeper understanding of theory" and may be subdivided into a focus which is mainly 'Internal' or 'External' to the discipline in question; as well as 'Intellectual' or 'Social', depending on whether we look at theory by itself or theory in context. Ritzer's formulation has been employed time and again by other social scientists and has helped shed light on crucial issues in sociology and correlate disciplines (see Zhao, 1991). For all its merit, this typology still requires some adjustment. One justification is that a key motivation to systematically study theories is to better understand them. In principle, all types of metatheoretical research pursue that goal, broadly conceived. For this reason, we should not restrict it to a mere sub-type. Another justification is that the two axes (Internal/External and Intellectual/Social) also apply to the other types of metatheoretical discourse. Nevertheless, strong reasons abound to retain much of Ritzer's effort, adapting rather than rejecting it altogether. Unlike Ritzer's differentiation of 'end products', I make a distinction between a typology of the subject-matter of metatheorising (besides theory itself, of course) and ways of metatheorising. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of the functions and roles of metatheoretical research in social science whilst at the same time keeping all of Ritzer's core types of metatheory. My departure from Ritzer is clearer in the next section, where I deal with ways of metatheorising in connection to possible subject-matters. In this section, the main point is to arrange metatheoretical research according to subject-matter. Like any other typology, the central concern here is to organise the material highlighting the peculiarity of each type. The aim is to increase our understanding of how metatheoretical discourse operates in a discipline.

In this typology, I draw two distinctions related to the main focus of specific instances of metatheoretical research. On the one hand, theories are often derived from other disciplines and fields, or at least make reference to material outside the discipline in which they are primarily formulated. In order to gain insight into these moves, metatheoretical research may actualise its 'bridging' character by looking beyond its

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22 In this thesis I shall repeatedly apply the capitalised terms (Internal, Intellectual, Contextual and External) to refer to elements in the typology.
main discipline of focus (Halliday, 1994, p.9). Thus we may speak of study of theory with core references to aspects which are 'Internal' or 'External' to the discipline in question (Ritzer, 2001, p.25). On the other hand, however, we must remember that a discipline cannot be fully reduced to its academic output (Bunge, 1998, pp.36-8) and that metatheoretical research might reach beyond a discipline's content (e.g. Polanyi, 1998). Because theorising also operates in a certain context, and studies aspects of the 'real world', metatheoretical discourse may focus not only on the 'Intellectual' side, but also on the 'Contextual' side of a discipline. The former deals with the “cognitive structure” of the field, whereas the latter emphasises the way research functions in a community in practice (Ritzer, 1991b, p.17). In a preliminary fashion, then, we may organise metatheoretical research according to its central focus on features which are Internal and External to the field, as well as Intellectual and Contextual. In any case, theory is the kernel subject-matter around which these additional issues revolve. Theory is like the sun in our solar system: metatheoretical research will 'reflect' its 'light', but in a diversity of approaches in any given discipline.

Table 2.1 – Metatheorising according to focus, with examples

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<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
<th>INTELLECTUAL</th>
<th>CONTEXTUAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX I:</td>
<td>Schools of thought</td>
<td>Theorist's immediate circumstances</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IR Theories</td>
<td>Research funding for specific project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cross-theoretical debates</td>
<td>Networks, academic politics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumptions and structure of theory</td>
<td>Academic prestige in IR</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOX II:</td>
<td>Borrowings from other disciplines</td>
<td>Impact of general historical context</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bridge from philosophy to IR</td>
<td>Impact of culture (e.g. Non-Western)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IR and natural/social science</td>
<td>Impact of theory in society</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Axiological assumptions of theory</td>
<td>IR theory and policy-making</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL</th>
<th>BOX III:</th>
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<tr>
<td>BOX IV:</td>
<td>Impact of theory in society</td>
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Source: Based on Ritzer's typology.

Table 2.1 (above) illustrates the possible combinations with generic examples. Each of these types of metatheorising contributes in a particular way to a better understanding of theory in a given academic discipline. Although the general logic applies (either actually or potentially) to any academic discipline, for the purposes of this thesis, I shall refer to examples in IR. Internal/Intellectual metatheorising (Box I)
addresses IR theory primarily in terms of the way it operates in the discipline of IR (including its sub-fields) and places heavy emphasis on logical and cognitive aspects of scholarship. Discussions on schools of thought, refinement of the structure of an IR theory, accounts of cross-theoretical debates and examinations of the underlying structure of a theory are counted among examples of Internal/Intellectual metatheorising. Notice that these instances are all elaborated from the particular perspective of the discipline. In our illustrations, schools of thought would be referred to in the common IR parlance of 'isms' ('Classical Liberalism' in IR is very different from 'Classical Liberalism' in political theory and economics). An IR theory would be refined with the use of critical thinking and reference to further IR literature. Cross-theoretical debates would be described in the discipline's own peculiar narratives (e.g. the Great Debates). Thus, in Internal/Intellectual metatheorising, little reference is made to elements outside the scope of the cognitive aspects of IR.

The second basic type of metatheoretical research according to subject-matter is External/Intellectual (Box II). It is still primarily interested in the intellectual side of academic production, but looks at IR theory with great concern with scholarship undertaken outside the field. It involves “turning to other academic disciplines for ideas, tools, concepts, theories, and the like” and adapting them to IR, or perhaps observing how they have been adapted to IR (Ritzer, 2001, p.29). It is in such 'borrowings' that the 'bridging' role of metatheory becomes clearer, as a bridge from philosophy to IR or from other disciplines to IR. Notice that this does not mean that metatheory only functions as a bridge when it is 'External' in this sense. For example, an 'Internal' bridge would be the 'Neo-Neo' synthesis attempt to combine neorealist and neoliberal institutionalist theories (Waever, 1996, pp.163-4). An instance of 'External' bridge would be Kenneth Waltz's (1979) adaptation of structuralism to IR. Evaluating the coherence of Waltz's move in light of sociological structuralism and whether IR gains from it or not is also External/Intellectual metatheorising (e.g. Ashley, 1984). Box I and Box II cover the main types of metatheoretical research focused on key intellectual aspects of IR theory. This kind of argument provides an in-depth look at theory as such, or perhaps, theory in conjunction with other theories and remaining discursive elements of scholarship.

Metatheoretical research that fits into Box III and Box IV bring the contextual side of theoretical research in IR to the centre. Internal/Contextual metatheorising (Box III) highlights additional aspects shaping the development and modification of theoretical discourse in the discipline. This type of research is predominantly focused on
the specific context of IR. A study of the British Committee on the Theory of International Relations, for example, containing relevant information on the network itself, each member's contributions and how these features shaped English School IR is Internal/Contextual metatheorising (Hall, 2006; Vigezzi, 2005). It tries to connect these communal elements to IR theory in light of the immediate disciplinary setting. External/Contextual metatheorising (Box IV) deals with similar non-intellectual aspects shaping IR theory, but stresses extra-disciplinary factors, assuming they are also relevant to a more complete understanding of the process of formulation, testing and application of IR theory. An illustration is the popular narrative that changes in the structure of the international system (the interaction between Great Powers, general wars, relevant peace settlements, etc.) have somehow shaped the development of IR theory (Knutsen, 1997). It is important to remember that this relation between context and theory is not uni-directional. While it is easier to realise that both the discipline of IR and the practice of world politics affect theory, theory in turn can also have an impact in the discipline and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the 'world' of world politics.

Table 2.2 (below) expresses my preferred formalisation of the distinction between these types of metatheorising. Sharp dichotomies between Internal and External, and Intellectual and Contextual are erased. Instead, both axes are represented in function of these extreme 'ideal types', and specific metatheoretical arguments may be classified in a continuum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.2 – METATHEORISING CONTINUUM, ACCORDING TO FOCUS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNAL</strong></td>
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<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
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<td><strong>EXTERNAL</strong></td>
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<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Own elaboration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Internal/External axis, internal metatheorising may yet allude to external features, but still retain its predominant focus on internal elements. For instance, even if we are studying the inner logic of Wendt's views on agency and structure and how it is shaped by specific IR debates, we may study Anthony Giddens' original sociological
formulation of the same problem in order to better interpret Wendt's text \((Th_{IR} \leftrightarrow Th_D,\) where \(Th_{IR}\) means 'theory in IR' and \(Th_D\) means 'theory in another discipline'). The same applies to the Intellectual/Contextual axis. Intellectual claims may also resort to contextual elements while remaining in line with the chosen point of entry into metatheoretical research. For instance, awareness of the recently disclosed fact that Adam Watson was responsible as a diplomat for anti-Soviet propaganda may have an impact on how we read his theoretical work on the 'historical tendency' toward hegemonic 'spheres of influence' displayed in several states-systems \((Th \leftrightarrow C,\) where \(Th\) means 'theory in IR' and \(C\) means 'general context').\(^{23}\) The point here is simply that types are not 'pigeonholes' in the stricter sense. The most salient features are highlighted by separating one type for another, but they are not meant to reflect exclusionary binaries.

**Metatheoretical research**

Internal/External and Intellectual/Contextual are combinations of the most salient features of metatheoretical research according to its main subject-matter or focal point. In addition to this, we can also analyse ways of metatheorising. There are five main ways of metatheorising: hermeneutical, corrective, evaluative, critical and historical. While no metatheoretical research follows only one of these logics in a pure way, we can often identify which of these 'ways of metatheorising' qualifies a given argument, or set of 'meta-statements' (Bunge, 1996, p.125). Table 2.2 (above) contains symbols representing key relations in metatheoretical arguments, which we explore below according to their occurrence in each type and way of metatheorising. \([Th] is IR theory studied by itself, and \(Th_{IR} \leftrightarrow Th_{IR}\) relates two or more IR theories. \(Th_{IR} \leftrightarrow Ph\) relates IR theory and philosophy. \(Th_{IR} \leftrightarrow Th_D\) operates in a similar way, but with reference to theory in a discipline other than IR. \(Th \leftrightarrow C_{IR}\) connects IR theory to the disciplinary context, and \(Th \leftrightarrow C\) links IR theory to the broader context. Each relation plays distinctive roles depending on the combination of focal point and way of metatheorising, helping us better understand IR theory.\(^{24}\)

Hermeneutical metatheorising plays the role of interpreting theoretical material.

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23 Buzan and Little (2009, pp.xi-xviii) mention this biographical detail but avoid inferring a strong connection to Watson's arguments and work.

24 These symbols help us locate metatheoretical arguments in the diagram and will be employed subsequently in this thesis. Here, the form 'A \(\leftrightarrow\) B' does not indicate the logical relation 'iff' (if and only if) between A and B. It merely indicates that a metatheoretical argument is relating A and B, where at least one of these terms is a theory.
look at a certain theory by itself, like textbooks sometimes do. Internal/Intellectual hermeneutical metatheorising also studies the relation between two IR theories to shed light on the meaning of both. For example, students are often required to compare and contrast Waltz's 'defensive (neo)realism' to John Mearsheimer's (2001) 'offensive (neo)realism' so as to better understand both approaches. External/Intellectual cases are more frequent. They can relate IR theory to philosophy in an effort to understand the latter's impact on the former. Or they may look at the roots of a certain IR theory in theoretical material found outside the discipline. A philosophically focused work is Jens Bartelson's (1995) investigation of the origins of IR thinking on sovereignty in political philosophy. An hermeneutical effort connecting IR theory to theories elsewhere, in turn, is Aaron Beers Sampson's (2002) study of the relation between Waltz's and Wendt's views of social structure and classical anthropological theory. Contextual metatheorising in this interpretive sense, however, is much more frequent than the Intellectual variety for the reason that reading a text with reference to context is a widely practised exegetical norm (see Schlieiermacher, 1998). Internal/Contextual research here moves from context to theory. Tim Dunne's (1998) interpretation of the English School in light of archival sources on the meetings of the British Committee is a good illustration: this is Contextual metatheorising, but Internal to the discipline of IR. While the theoretical text still regulates the reading, awareness of an author's situation of writing (what exegetes call Sitz im Leben) can often disclose new ways of looking at that text. Even the interpretation of material often taken for granted, such as Martin Wight's (1946) Power Politics, can change in light of relevant biographical or contextual information. This External/Contextual avenue of research I have pursued, discovering connections between hard passages in the text and Wight's Christian Pacifist activism, challenging the more conventional reading of that work as a classical realist manifesto (L. G. Freire, 2012). What all these cases share is their key interpretive function, which qualifies the hermeneutical way.

The second way of metatheorising is corrective, in that it helps us adjust and modify theoretical material in order to refine it (see Hendry & Psillos, 2007, p.153 for a philosophical exploration of this theme). From an Internal/Intellectual perspective, we can focus either on an IR theory in isolation or relate different IR theories. Whether in isolation or in interaction, formalisation of theoretical material basically involves restating the original approach(es) in new modes, and is often pursued as a way of refining it, not necessarily with much success (Bunge, 1999, pp.69-101). On the
External/Intellectual front, refinement is sought with reference to theoretical material from outside. Here we see once more the bridging role of metatheory from philosophy to IR or from theory in another discipline to IR theory, such as Robert Powell's (2003) attempt to present Waltz's neorealism in game-theoretical terms. Contextual occurrences of corrective metatheorising involve different processes. While most work on the Intellectual side deals with bibliographic analysis, here we face a whole range of techniques employed to refine theory in light of its relation to the 'world' it attempts to explain. The most frequent form in which this occurs is Contextual/External, where theory is juxtaposed to events in world politics, and refined in order to better account for them. Many debates on IR theory after the end of the Cold War were intended to improve our models of unipolarity or hegemony and did not necessarily emerge as direct results of theory testing or 'evaluation', but rather as indirect response to this general context. This will suffice to explain and illustrate correction and refinement.

Evaluation, in fact, is our third way of metatheorising. It is often pursued as a form of adjudication of claims to knowledge, but can also go after alternative goals (Staehle, 1982, pp.25-6). The need to refer to empirical aspects of scholarship (regardless of one's views on empiricism) means evaluative work will be more concentrated on the Contextual side. Still, one can evaluate IR theory in an Intellectual way in terms of coherence, logical adequacy, and so on. Internal/Intellectual evaluation focuses on standards of the IR discipline itself. E. H. Carr's smear campaign against 'idealism' or 'utopianism' is an example of internal standard that prevailed for a long time in the field (Mearsheimer, 2005; P. Wilson, 2000). With reference to material outside the discipline, Intellectual/External metatheorising either tests IR theory's synthetic efforts to 'bridge' between approaches from philosophy or other disciplines to IR (Doty, 1997) or, alternatively, evaluates IR theory in light of philosophy and these other disciplines. The heavy emphasis on the philosophy of science is a key feature of this way of metatheorising (P. T. Jackson, 2011b). However, most instances in this case also point to the Contextual side, with a view to empirically testing the claims of IR theory and/or generally establishing scientific credentials for the discipline, or an approach within it. Scholars are usually inclined to label this kind of exercise 'methodology', but when the philosophy of science is explicitly mentioned as the 'umbrella' that provides a verdict, the metatheoretical character is highlighted (Lake, 2011). “Conscientious investigators can't get away with a theory of the phenomenon under study and a simple hope that their methods test the theory. They need two
theories: one of the phenomenon, and another of the process producing their evidence” (Tilly, 2008, p.19).

Evaluative metatheorising is in many respects similar to a fourth type, the critical approach. Indeed, they both share the attitude of adjudication, but suggest different and not necessarily exclusive ways of judging theoretical material. Critique may be Intellectual/External with reference to ideology, normative assumptions and worldviews influencing IR theory (Gabriel, 1994; Griffiths, 2011, pp.2-7). Critical metatheorising is often Contextual, in that it looks at the effects of social context on theory and vice-versa. Contextual/Internal critique analysing the impact of IR theory on the discipline can be illustrated by studies on the politics of the discipline. Cynthia Weber's critique of Robert Keohane's (1989) gatekeeping discourse on feminism as president of the International Studies Association is a case in hand. Keohane's text, classifying approaches to gender in IR as more or less useful to his own research agenda (framed as universal) was sharply critiqued for the implication of perpetuating a discipline dominated by masculine discourses (C. Weber, 1994). On the Contextual/External side, a similar kind of critique applies, only with a wider focus. Ashley's (1986) worry that neorealism crystallises the status quo in world politics is an example of theory-to-context analysis, whereas Kurki's (2009) study of the way political agendas may indirectly influence discourses of science in IR illustrates a context-to-theory approach. Both cases mobilise aspects of so-called 'critical theory' in a metatheoretical fashion, with a view to better understand the social and political roles played by theoretical knowledge in IR.

Our final way of metatheorising highlighted here is historical. It looks at the formation of IR theory from several perspectives. The Internal/Intellectual variety tends to follow a 'growth of knowledge' approach. The Great Debates narrative may be seen as a systematic account of the cognitive development and progress of IR as a discipline and exemplifies this historical way of metatheorising (Lijphart, 1974a). External/Intellectual stories emphasise this 'growth of knowledge' with reference to how IR incorporated knowledge from other disciplines. The metatheoretical framework itself may be drawn from other disciplines too, as we see in the case of those using (peculiar readings of) Thomas Kuhn's notion of 'paradigm' in the field (Lijphart, 1974b). On the Internal/Contextual side, one may study the impact of IR theory on the formation of the discipline, but most likely the account will move from disciplinary context to theoretical material. Guzzini's (2000) story of how constructivism gained acceptance into the field
by presenting itself as a *via media* between 'positivism' and 'relativism' is worth mentioning. External/Contextual metatheorising in disciplinary history emphasises factors outside the discipline and their impact on theory. It can be illustrated by Arlene Tickner's (2008) suggestion of a connection between economists of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, political scientists reacting to geopolitical thinking under the influence of military rule and IR theory in Latin America, especially during the Cold War.

These five main ways of metatheorising – hermeneutical, corrective, evaluative, critical and historical – are not 'pure' types. They often overlap. For example, Dunne's study of the British Committee and the English School plays both an interpretive role and a historical one, in that it helps us better understand the way British IR has developed under the influence of the School. While in many cases it will be hard to pinpoint a single most salient element in a given piece of metatheoretical research, the fact still remains that these ways of metatheorising abound in the literature. IR scholars recognise these roles and associate them to metatheory, but many take the additional step of denouncing metatheoretical research for one reason or another. Some, still, defend the way in which this discursive layer shapes the discipline. In this chapter, however, we are primarily interested in exploring the implications of our basic definition of 'metatheory', as well as unpacking some of its general roles. Additional and specific examples from IR authors, statements in favour and against metatheorising and further explorations of how metatheory works in our discipline in a selection of cases are left to the forthcoming chapters, in the second part of the thesis.

**Synthesis and clarifications**

Each combination of 'focal point' (subject-matter) and 'way' of metatheorising constrains and enables certain 'bridging' roles, indicated by the relations represented in Table 2.2 (above) and illustrated in the previous section. Some ways of metatheorising treat these specific relations with more facility than others, hence the importance of inferring the roles played by the possible combinations. After breaking down the topic almost to exhaustion, in Table 2.3 (below) I summarise what has been discussed so far.
Table 2.3 – Combined foci, relations and ways of metatheorising

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Interpret</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Refine</th>
<th>Critique</th>
<th>History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal/Intellectual</td>
<td>[Th]</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Th_I → Th_I</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/Intellectual</td>
<td>Th_I → Ph</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Th_I → Th_D</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal/Contextual</td>
<td>Th → C_I</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C_I → Th</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External/Contextual</td>
<td>Th → C</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C ← Th</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

Let me emphasise once again that the 'relations' addressed in metatheoretical arguments and listed on the table are concrete indications of metatheory's manyfold bridging roles. They also account for its stress on 'theory', regardless of what else constitutes these relations. Theory \((Th)\) is common to all such endeavours also regardless of their multiple roles of interpretation, evaluation, refinement, critique or simply historical account. For all their diversity, metatheoretical arguments still count basically as 'systematic discourse about theory'. After analysing the topic and its implications in a meticulous way, we can synthesise the findings once more and reaffirm this basic definition of metatheory, which does justice to the usage of the term in IR and cognate disciplines.

Ritzer's typology applies the Internal/External and Intellectual/Contextual continua to only those arguments which fit one specific kind of metatheorising. These go under “metatheorizing as a means for attaining a deeper understanding of (...) theory”. In his view, they would not apply to “metatheorizing as a prelude to theory development” or as “a source of perspectives” that synthesise theoretical material and overarch it (Ritzer, 1990, p.4). In my analysis I have adopted a more encompassing role for those two continual axes and subordinated everything to the basic definition of metatheorising. The other varieties (metatheory leading to theory development and synthesising theory) happen to fit (albeit in different ways) into the combinations of both axes in the case of IR anyway. Moreover, I have also refined Ritzer's views in terms of the basic 'relations' between theory \((Th)\) and the rest, highlighting the 'bridging' role of metatheory. This feature is often implicit in Ritzer's approach, but not as a general feature of metatheoretical research. Finally, I have also improved upon the original framework in my analysis by incorporating 'ways of metatheorising' into the
combination of several factors. Breaking down a subject to this level of detail is not, in my view, something to be pursued in every treatment of the topic, but the exercise is especially fruitful and original in this study, where the issue is being addressed as relevant in itself.

It is now time to clarify a very important implication to which some examples provided here allude: metatheorising can also be a self-referential exercise. Metatheory, being a kind of theory, is potentially an object of itself. That is, because metatheory is a 'theory of theory', and because it is a kind of theory, it follows that it can eventually be employed in the (meta)theoretical study of metatheories. Thus, in addition to its more 'conventional' functions, it may well play the role of theorising about *metatheory* (Lakatos, 1978, pp.152ff). If the present thesis consisted in systematic discourse about *theory alone* (as in the case of part three), it would be metatheoretical. Despite operating mainly as systematic discourse about *metatheory*, this thesis is still metatheoretical. Such an important point will be stressed again in my assessment of the strong critiques of metatheoretical research in IR, analysed in the forthcoming chapters (part two). There is another relevant implication of the basic definition to clarify. In principle, it would also make sense to apply the key 'ways of social theorising' seen in the previous chapter to another level, as 'ways of metatheorising'. The reason is very straightforward. Theories are artefacts. In this sense, they are part of the social world (Staflieu, 1987). Patrick Jackson's analysis of the “vocational orientations” of theory is a good example. He studies the different uses for 'theory' in IR depending on the 'ideal type' of persons employing theoretical perspectives and concludes that we gain a better understanding of what 'theory' means in IR by looking at whether they are interested in 'practice' or 'contemplation' (P. T. Jackson, 2011a). Contextual metatheorising such as this case can be typical illustrations of how social theory is employed to analyse theory-in-society. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the 'ways of metatheorising' studied here are conceivably analogous to the types of social theory surveyed in the previous chapter. In sum, two points made explicit at this stage are: metatheory can study metatheory, and social theory in some cases can study theory.

There is, still, one further clarification to be made, pertaining to metatheory's position as a 'bridge' and its relation to philosophy and theory. The general distinction between metatheory and theory, as well as specific areas of overlap, are topics we have addressed already. However, what else can we say about the relation between philosophy and metatheory to further distinguish between them? Metatheory would
seem to be a mere application of philosophy to a discipline. Philosophy is often portrayed as the “discipline of disciplines”, in that it cuts across special fields, always bridging between their specific and wider issues (Strauss, 2009). Can metatheory, then, be fully reduced to philosophy? The answer is not simple. Philosophers themselves tell us that philosophy is “a way of thinking” (Warburton, 2004, p.1), or “a method of thinking, rather than a collection of facts” (Trigg, 2002, p.11). Its questions are always of the broader kind – the nature of reality, the nature of knowledge, the nature of morality and so on. But similar issues appear in a narrower version in specific scholarly disciplines – the nature of social reality, of knowledge in social science, of the morality of social policy, etc. (Strauss, 2006, p.29-58). Is the difference merely a matter of scope of the issues addressed, or does the bridging character of the application make a qualitative difference? Is metatheory only a 'method of thinking' or can it deal with theories as 'collections of facts' in a manner deemed as not so relevant to philosophy, but very relevant to 'science studies' or 'meta-science' (Hess, 1997; Radnitzky, 1970)?

According to what we have seen about the types and ways of metatheorising, we have to answer that, while there is some overlap between metatheoretical and philosophical inquiry, there are reasons to analytically draw a distinction between them. The simple reason is that metatheory often 'empirically' studies theory. This, according to what we have gathered above from philosophical writings, is very distinct from the task of philosophy. A more complex explanation is that qualitative differences may (depending on the case) be triggered by the 'bridging' operation. Scholars often imply that metatheoretical research is a kind of application of philosophical issues to a narrower field (e.g. Hollis, 2002, p.ix). There is a sense in which this 'bridge' simply adapts the issues to a special discipline (Bunge, 1996, pp.6-10), but sometimes it operates as a productive mechanism. The bridge always involves 'theory' in the specific discipline, regardless of additional 'departures' and 'arrivals'. There is a wide perception that metatheorising constrains and enables certain kinds of theoretical argument. One often reads, for example, that “diversity of forms” of IR theorising “can be explained by different meta-theoretical commitments”. Such commitments “can have a major impact on substantive theoretical traditions, currents of thought and on specific theories effectively 'shaping' them into new forms” (Jørgensen, 2010, pp.5; 20). “In this sense”, say Kurki and Wight (2010, p.15), “meta-theoretical positions direct, in a fundamental way, the manner in which people theorize”. This kind of mechanism, argues Stoker, “is not something that is merely on the surface of an approach. It is ingrained” (2010,
p.181). Metatheoretical commitments derived from philosophical perspectives "limit what sorts of explanations are logically possible", but they do not operate in a deterministic way (Tilly, 2008, p.8). The connection "may open up (or close down) avenues for substantive theory and thereby exercise an important regulatory influence" (Wendt, 1991, p.383). Metatheoretical 'bridges' always point to theory in a specific discipline, and in many occasions trigger this productive mechanism, creating something new, and not merely a simple application of philosophy to a more restricted field. Thus, while some may even define 'philosophical theory' as "theory about theories" (Uto, 2005, p.264), metatheoretical research does specific things for IR which philosophy by itself cannot provide.

**Final remarks**

This chapter concludes the first part of the thesis. It has identified, analysed and clarified a certain 'discursive layer' of scholarship that pertains to each discipline. Followed by illustrations taken from some of the literature in IR and parallel fields in social science, the definition of metatheoretical research as 'systematic discourse about theory' has been expanded in its manyfold aspects and implications. With reference to focal point, or subject-matter, metatheorising always relates to 'theory', but goes beyond this Intellectual element, also looking at Contextual factors. With respect to the 'bridging' role of this discursive layer, a number of combinations has been detected. In our discipline, metatheoretical research may look at IR theory in isolation or in relation to other IR theories. In addition to this, it can relate IR theory to philosophy or theory in other disciplines. Moreover, Contextual metatheorising can shed light on theoretical elements of IR from the perspective of social dynamics in the discipline or outside the discipline. Taken together, these possible 'bridges' and 'focal points' are not the only ways to characterise metatheoretical research in IR. Using examples for each case, this chapter has also looked at 'ways of metatheorising', which play the roles of interpreting, evaluating, refining, critiquing and telling the story of IR theory. The analysis concludes with a brief clarification of the distinctions between philosophy and metatheory. While the nature of metatheoretical and philosophical inquiry overlap to a certain extent, we do well in avoiding a full reduction of metatheory to philosophy. Metatheory always points to theory within a specific discipline, and depending on the case it can be a mechanism influencing the way we theorise in that discipline.

The general question of the role of metatheory in social science and IR has now
been addressed. The role depends on the combination of the types, 'bridges' and 'ways' of metatheorising. This, however, is only part of the issue treated in this thesis. We are also interested in the concrete ways in which metatheory makes a difference in IR. The next couple of chapters, in part two, deal with what IR scholars themselves claim to be the roles played by metatheoretical research in the field. Whether negative or positive, these views help us better understand the disciplinary dynamics of metatheory in IR. It is now clear that metatheoretical scholarship provides us a great number of intellectual services. Nevertheless, before deciding in favour or against the use of metatheory in IR, we should carefully weigh the relative merits of both types of claims as they manifest themselves in the discipline. Although I provide my own position already in the next couple of chapters, there is yet another step to be followed. We should not rest content with the mere assertion, made in the literature, that metatheory can affect the discipline by operating as a 'mechanism'. This crucial point should be further developed by analysing how metatheory operates in concrete IR studies and texts on different topics. In the final chapters, or part three, this will be pursued with the side effect of providing even more illustrations of the roles of metatheory. Such 'spillover' will be the case for the simple reason that the exercise involves 'systematic discourse about IR theory and metatheory'. The next step, however, is to look at the negative and positive views of metatheoretical scholarship in the discipline of IR.
PART TWO
Chapter 3

Negative Views of Metatheory in International Relations

Introduction
Having defined what metatheory as such is and what its intrinsic roles are, I proceed now to a critical evaluation of the IR literature on the roles of metatheoretical research. In the previous chapters I have explored the notion of ‘metatheory’ as ‘systematic discourse about theory’. As a partial conclusion, we are left with a list of roles that different kinds of metatheory may play according to their inner features. However, we cannot completely reduce an investigation of the roles of metatheory in a given field to mere philosophical analysis. For one thing, metatheory may also play accidental roles. For another, these functions – be they accidental or not – do not emerge solely from the Intellectual or content-related aspects of metatheory, but also from the fact that this 'discursive layer' is employed by scholars and groups of scholars with certain purposes. Metatheories should, therefore, also study Contextual roles performed by theories. By the same token, my (metatheoretical) study of IR claims will only be comprehensive if their own Contextual features are also given due consideration. There is, therefore, the need to go beyond what we can know via philosophical and conceptual inquiry and closely examine metatheory as it is treated in concrete instances in the IR literature.

The following chapters bring the discussion, initiated at a general level, closer to our academic discipline. By thoroughly surveying the relevant material, they purport to elucidate the field’s overall perspective regarding what metatheory is and does. In the present chapter I examine several negative views of metatheory, taken from a survey of the literature on the subject. In the following chapter, a similar procedure is adopted, but with the contrasting focus on what IR scholars see as positive aspects of metatheorising and their constructive contributions to the discipline, both potential and actual. Although I primarily emphasise what has been, and is being, said about metatheory in IR, I also go to the vicinities of the discipline (e.g. politics and the social sciences in general)
asking whether what happens there is analogous to the debates in IR. This I do for a simple reason. Both IR objections to metatheory and supporting views in its defence often draw on extra-disciplinary debates in order to establish their claims. This means that, in order to better understand the discussion of metatheory in IR one should also look at the context in which the arguments are developed. IR comments on the subject are often made in passing, and shedding light on them with reference to their origins may help clarify the issues at stake.

In this chapter, a critical review of the key objections to metatheorising in IR is provided as a way of assessing perceptions of negative roles that metatheory plays or could potentially play. Although they may be grouped in different ways, I find the following headings informative enough: (1) intrinsic features of metatheory; (2) the complexity of metatheory; (3) the teaching of metatheory; and (4) the politics of metatheory. As I go through each of these points in detail, I assess their respective merits as portraits of the negative roles metatheorising plays in IR. I leave a stronger critique of the objections to metatheory in IR for a later stage, but at the end of this chapter I discuss serious internal problems with these views. There is something to the negative view of metatheory, but ultimately it fails to provide any strong claim for the elimination of metatheory from the field. As a consequence, we also need to consider potential and actual constructive roles that metatheory may perform, a task which is left to the next chapter. For the time being, let me consider the key complaints about metatheory in IR.

**Intrinsic features of metatheory**

One of the strongest kinds of objection to metatheory in IR comes from the notion that metatheoretical discourse is damaging or at least irrelevant, given some of its intrinsic features. This approach is inherently analytical in the sense that it relies on strict conceptual distinctions connected to disciplinary borders. For some time, social scientists have been discussing what falls within the scope of their specialised fields and, by implication, what kinds of debates are better left to other disciplines (Fiske & Shweder, 1986; Giddens, 1979; Strauss, 2006). The analytical objection to metatheory emerges from such boundary disputes as an attempt to ‘purify’ IR from what it must *not* be doing. The same kinds of claims have already been developed in politics and expanded to general social science. For this particular reason, it is useful to take this background into consideration as well. There are, accordingly, two main types of
analytically-oriented formulations about why metatheorising in IR is a bad idea. One of them focuses on Intellectual issues about what the contents of ‘IR-talk’ should be. I will look in more depth at this view because of its current relevance as pivotal in a heated recent metatheoretical IR journal debate (Monteiro & Ruby, 2009a)\(^\text{25}\) The other kind of analytical claim emphasises the Contextual crystallisation of scholarly practices that revolve around whatever is considered to be ‘IR-talk’. The common argument of both Intellectual and Contextual sides of the equation is that metatheory is intrinsically distinct from what the content of disciplinary discourse in IR should be. What emerges from this negative view of metatheory is the notion that what passes as ‘IR-talk’ must change, and so must the institutionalised practices of scholarship. This is a strong objection to metatheory because it represents an attempt to eliminate metatheoretical discourse from the field.

The first analytical claim against metatheory is that it must be differentiated from theory, with several Intellectual implications of a normative character. This idea has been elaborated to exhaustion in John Gunnell’s works, starting with his complaint against what he called the ‘philosophisation of political science’ (1979) and moving to an expansion of the same logic to political philosophy (1986) and, then, to social science in general. As he deals with the latter, Gunnell (1998) postulates a series of sharply distinguished kinds of practices. A first-order practice (e.g. playing football) is intrinsically different from a second-order practice (e.g. writing about football). Second-order discourses embedded in second-order practices (e.g. what sports journalists say about a football match) do not have any authority or direct impact upon first-order discourses and practices. In the case of politics, political debate may be classified as a first-order kind of discourse, whereas a model of political analysis pertains to a second-order category. Because it has a second-order practice (theory-making) as its focus, metatheory would qualify as an even higher order of discourse. Now, if it is indeed the case that a higher order of discourse does not have any authority or direct impact upon a lower order (as in the case of journalistic commentary on football compared to football matches), then, by inference, it follows that metatheory also has no authority or direct impact over the lower orders (theory-making and politics-making).\(^\text{26}\) The increasing subsuming of social science to higher orders of discourse has been inflating special disciplines with philosophical debates that, at the end, have no positive role to play in

\(^{25}\) Others in the debate are Bohman (2009), Chernoff (2009), Jackson (2009), Kurki (2009), Mercado (2009).

\(^{26}\) A refutation of the basic premise follows below, at the end of the chapter.
these lower orders. IR, by implication, should discuss ‘global political practice’ while, instead, it has been dealing more and more with ‘political theory-making’ (Gunnell, 2011).

According to this view, then, what are the problems of discursive-order conflation faced by IR? To begin with, there is a false illusion that metatheory (or philosophy for that matter) is capable of settling problems that are the object of lower-order practices. In short: in this view metatheory is not, and cannot be, theory. For metatheory speaks about theories, not society. Therefore, those who think that metatheory helps shed light on social issues are simply mistaken. As David Armstrong (1995, p.357) says, metatheory “is inherently parasitic. It purports to be able to make ‘reasoned judgements’ between rival paradigms but it cannot produce paradigms of its own”.27 In other words, “it would be a great mistake to believe that metatheory can provide authoritative answers about how to study international politics” (Schmidt, 1997, p.111). Only the theoretical level may speak of first-order practices. And besides, even in this case (according to Gunnell’s logic) a theory of IR would have no dealing with the practice of international political action.

This leads to the second problem: the quest for higher-order foundations in judging, or in providing directives for, lower-order discourses is doomed to failure (Lake, 2011). This is said to be the case not primarily as a matter of coincidence (despite the fact that philosophy of science, for example, has indeed been ignored by most natural scientists), but rather as a matter of necessity, for one discursive order intrinsically does not interfere with another. Therefore, why should IR scholars give so much credit to higher-order specialists like Popper, Lakatos, Kuhn, Bhaskar and others? Moreover, why should they pay more attention to them if not even natural scientists (whose practices their higher-order discourses originally emphasised) do (cf. Wight, 2002, p.25)? And, on the other hand, why should IR theorists be guided by philosophers of science and metatheorists if, in turn, theorists themselves are often ignored by politicians and other practitioners? ‘Town’, it is argued, does not require ‘gown’ in order to succeed. As sung in Iolanthe:

When Britain really ruled the waves  
(In good Queen Bess’s time) –  
The House of Peers made no pretense  
To intellectual eminence,  
Or scholarship sublime;

27 This claim is both logically and factually wrong. See my discussion below.
Discursive-order conflation is actually a concern not only for Gunnell, who certainly poses such questions at both necessary and contingent levels, but also for those who partially agree with him. Schmidt (1997, p.108), for example, alludes to Gunnell’s (1986, pp.134-68) complaints about metatheorists’ pretensions to judge theories, but concedes that “metatheory might contribute to the development of a good theory”. 29 The main problem according to him, however, is that “many metatheoretical claims, rather than simply offering commentary on a given theory or set of theories, seek to provide the foundations for building theory and for making authoritative judgments about appropriate knowledge in political inquiry”. 30

From the orders-of-discourse perspective, then, IR can never be metatheory and metatheory can never be IR. The idea is that we have been conflating distinct orders of discourse and that this has generated a great deal of unnecessary friction and, worse still, unnecessary scholarship that already starts from the wrong premise that discursive orders can indeed cross-fertilise (see Collins, 1986). We must step back from this procedure and purify ‘IR-talk’. For that, what we need is a sharper distinction between metatheory and theory – the clearer, the better.

Although Gunnell (2011) himself only marginally touches the subject when he discusses metatheoretical IR, Monteiro and Ruby have applied a similar reasoning to the field of IR with reference to the same approach. In their protest against the use of philosophy of science in the field, they describe most IR metatheoretical debates as quests for “a foundation to ground the discipline”. Such foundation would be able to address issues like validation of research, basis for graduate training following standards of good scientific practice, criteria for faculty selection and so on. According to the authors, the intention of those engaging in this kind of conversation is “to settle the science debate once and for all” in the pursuit of “a single foundation to define IR’s relationship to science” (Monteiro & Ruby, 2009, pp.16-7). Such aspiration is seen as an “imperial project” in that certain philosophical worldviews, when applied to IR in a

29 Schmidt (1998) displays not only his indebtedness to Gunnell’s work and influence, but also (ironically) great skill in metatheorising in a historical and hermeneutical fashion.
30 If we take together both statements, we can see that Schmidt does not manage to reconcile metatheory’s eventual ability to develop good theory on the one hand and, on the other, its intrinsic incapacity to ground theory-building. Besides, as shown in the previous chapter, this is not the only role of metatheory.
metatheoretical way, attempt to ‘colonise’ rival approaches with their own view of reality and knowledge. Similar claims about this ‘foundationalist’ intention behind metatheoretical debates in the field are repeated at several points. IR scholars are depicted as emulators of philosophy’s discussion on what would be “an unshakable foundation” (p.19) committing themselves to certain philosophical stances by portraying them “as the proper foundation for IR as a whole” (p.22, original emphasis).31 Moreover, despite the fact that metatheoretical debates were “supposed to solve” the foundational issue (p.24), they still “continue their quest for an unshakable philosophical foundation, capable of settling once and for all the most fundamental questions in the field – its scope, goals, criteria, standards, and methods” (p.22).32 In this account, then, metatheory is portrayed as playing in IR the negative role of attempting to bring uniformity to the discipline by trying to subsume it to certain philosophical ‘foundations’.

Has IR managed to achieve a final and irrevocable decision concerning metatheoretical issues? Has this kind of debate reached the ‘imperially foundational’ goal attributed to it by Monteiro and Ruby? A negative answer is the next step in their argumentation. They proceed to a highly critical diagnosis of the attempts to connect philosophy of science to IR. In the first place, metatheoretical discussions in IR “have contributed to the fragmentation of the discipline along meta-theoretical lines” (p.17). This is seen as an intrinsic effect of strict commitments to specific philosophical formulations:

The multiplicity of reasonable foundational positions, supported by prominent philosophers of science, virtually guarantees that each contending perspective in IR’s ‘science’ debate will find a well-supported philosophical position to justify its particular approach (...). Commitments to Instrumentalism, Social Constructivism, and Scientific Realism now anchor a three-cornered fight between positivists, anti-positivists, and post-positivists, with each side wielding its favored philosophical position (...). It should therefore come as no surprise that the turn to philosophical authority in IR has failed to produce a consensus on the proper foundations of the field (Monteiro and Ruby 2009, pp.16-17).

31 The authors echo Gunnell’s view of the intentions of philosophy of science as related to lower-orders scientific practice.
32 These claims about the ‘imperial project’ of specific philosophies involved in the metatheoretical debates are never demonstrated. Nor do the authors refer to any further literature or any other source (e.g. metatheorists in IR claiming they want to establish a single foundation). Do these affirmations, then, emerge from subjective judgement based on the authors’ personal experience in the discipline? The disputable character of the claims is rhetorically masked in a plethora of repeated statements about how metatheoretical debates in IR imply ‘imperial projects’ (See Monteiro and Ruby 2009, pp.22-23; 43 besides the passages quoted above).
The irony is that, according to them, the whole point of metatheoretical engagement is to bring a definite end to such fragmentation in the discipline instead of making the situation worse. For this reason, it might be claimed, as Friedrich Kratochwil (2007, p.2) puts it, that “this project of securing knowledge through (...) finding absolute foundations failed”. In sum: because there is no agreement between the several schools of philosophy, looking metatheoretically for philosophical authority to rule over IR can only lead to sharper antitheses in the field. This is what has been called “the inherent foundationalist tendency and problematic nature of metatheoretical arguments” (Schmidt, 1997, p.111).

In addition to the fragmentation brought about by the failure of the so-called ‘imperial’ project, another negative role played by metatheory in IR according to Monteiro and Ruby is the rejection or endorsement of specific IR contributions due to their implicit or explicit philosophical background. That is to say, regardless of an approach’s substantive (i.e., lower-order) claims about the practice of world politics, agreement and disagreement from other researchers emerges primarily in terms of metatheoretical issues. There has been, then, a shift in the criteria of disciplinary appraisal of scholarship. From “judging work on its substantive contribution”, IR has increasingly been making “a priori judgments based on foundational commitments on what constitutes legitimate work in IR” and based on “the degree to which the chosen approach conforms to a particular conception of science” (Monteiro & Ruby, 2009, p.18). Defending a similar opinion, Kalevi Holsti (2000, p.31) portrays the joint effects of disciplinary fragmentation and (mis)judgement due to metatheoretical clashes as leading to a virtual breakdown of academic dialogue. Metatheory implies not only growing disagreement, but also 'misunderstanding' or lack of hermeneutical charity:

Disagreement is not the same as misunderstanding. The latter is indicated when people speak past each other. When is this the case? Usually, it is when people believe they are right and all others are wrong. It is seen in the habit or stance of arguing that my methodology or, worse still, my metatheoretical preference is valid, whereas yours is not…

Due to its inherent tendency to ‘intrude’ in alternative orders of discourse, therefore, metatheory is blamed for bringing to IR scholarship much fragmentation and less

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33 In this respect their argument is an extension of Gunnell’s view of what happens with metatheory in social science as a whole. See above.
34 Keohane’s (1988) classical dismissal of ‘reflectivism’ based on the latter’s failure to conform to the mainstream view of scholarship comes to mind.
incentive to cooperate in cross-approach endeavours. Instead of evaluating propositions according to their capacity to shed light on international political phenomena, IR scholars have been (mis)driven by metatheory to judge themselves for their ability to explain, affirm or deny certain features of scientific practice. The only solution, again, would be to provide a clear-cut distinction between discursive orders, thus eliminating metatheory’s pretension to ‘invade’ the realm of theory.

If the Intellectual objection to metatheory complains about its negative roles in conflating ‘IR-talk’ with ‘theory-talk’, the Contextual claim, on the other hand, is a statement that metatheory, being different from ‘IR-talk’, should be relocated as an institutionalised practice. This second kind of analytic attempt to eliminate metatheory from the field also draws a thick line between metatheoretical and substantive research. However, it takes the further step of drawing another line between both as they are actualised also in practice. If ‘theory-talk’ is not the kind of activity that IR scholars normally (should) do, then, in the current university curriculum, it must also be taken away from IR, even if it may be valuable elsewhere. Fred Halliday (1995 p.745), for one, illustrates this position. He acknowledges, to some extent, the pertinence of metatheoretical aspects of scholarship: “methodology and ‘metatheory’ are important for social sciences, IR included”. However, he has a different view about the ideal institutional setting of such discussions: “they should be discussed where they belong, in philosophy departments”. Lest we miss the positive properties of metatheory, he also recommends “writers on IR to be more aware of, and (...) students to be more literate in, the philosophy of the social sciences in general”. Just how it would be possible to isolate metatheory from IR both Intellectually and Contextually and still require IR scholars to get acquainted with metatheoretical material is a puzzle that Halliday leaves us to grapple with.

Chris Brown (2012), Vincent Pouliot (2010, p.11-91) and others (Kratochwil, 2000; Pouliot & Adler, 2011) further develop the Contextual side of the distinction between discursive orders. They all emphasise the contrast between the practice of diplomacy, statecraft and other aspects of world politics, on the one hand, and the practice of theorising IR on the other. They stress the differences between intuitive and 'background' ideas orienting the practice of world politics and those guiding IR scholarship. A clear dichotomy, therefore, is postulated between 'IR-talk' and 'IR-practice'. Brown (2006, p.683) tries to further develop the Contextual claim by extending it to the difference between theory and metatheory. He highlights the
asymmetry of 'academic expertise' between philosophers and IR scholars. Institutional isolation, reflecting an ideal discursive distinction between metatheory and ‘IR-talk’, is even more attractive in a context where 'abstract research' in IR has turned into a very demanding kind of specialisation and perhaps should be left only to those who have “mastered a complex and difficult body of literature which non-theorists may well find daunting”. 35 The claim behind this intention to drag metatheory out of the discipline is that metatheory has been playing the negative role of distracting IR scholars with philosophical quarrels that, interesting as they may be, should be discussed elsewhere. And this must be the case because metatheory is, intrinsically, not IR, and vice-versa. This summarises the Contextual claim, which is actually just the institutional application of the Intellectual or analytical distinction between ‘IR-talk’ and ‘theory-talk’.

**The complexity of metatheory**

In addition to the negative role played by metatheory due to its intrinsic property of conflating discursive orders, there is also a complaint against metatheory due to negative ‘externalities’ that emerged in IR (supposedly) out of an increase in metatheoretical activity. In this section I deal with problematic effects of metatheory related to the field’s fragmentation, to the questionable quality of metatheoretical research and to practicalities of metatheory. I have grouped them together under this heading because the notion that metatheory is ‘complex’ and has led to further ‘complication’ of IR is typical of the positions addressed in this section. A discussion of the remaining externalities is left to the rest of the chapter, where we see the perception that an increase in metatheoretical activity has negatively affected teaching as well as some political issues connected to the role of the discipline in society.

The first way in which metatheory is said to ‘complicate’ IR bears some relation with Monteiro and Ruby’s (2009, p.43) final verdict on the failure of philosophical debates in achieving a consensus on the ultimate foundations of the field: “foundations have not provided any firm bases for standards, have not settled any methodological debates [and] have not conclusively decided any empirical question”. To the contrary, metatheory has actually made things even worse by reifying “the unproductive division of the field along artificial fault-lines”, leading to lack of dialogue and constructive

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35 See below for more arguments about negative outcomes of metatheorising in terms of practical aspects of scholarship.
criticism. Using a geographic analogy, Jose Ciprut (2000, p.xii) achieves a similar conclusion: “the discipline of ‘international’ relations has developed into an ocean in which distal archipelagos, themselves subdivided into islets of theory, provide abode to aborigines who speak with each other in their local tongue, using mutually reassuring code”. Holsti, to whom I have referred before in connection to the fragmentation of IR, portrays the phenomenon as an outcome of the clash of different metatheoretical orientations since the times of the earlier debates:

There are always debates in the field. There were immense debates in the 1960s between the more traditionally-oriented scholars and the so-called ‘behaviourally-oriented scholars. These debates were sometimes vicious: people really abused each other, even on a personal level. This kind of ‘cold warring’ infected departments and critically damaged the trust and intellectual pluralism that are the hallmarks of academy. The postmodernist challenge has led to the same kind of behaviour: the rejection of antecedent knowledge, the attempt to create something new, to question all that has gone on before, and to suggest that it was all wrong.

Abuses from one side against the other and the threat to ‘intellectual pluralism’, according to him, should be enough to counterbalance what some may see as a kind of excitement coming from metatheoretical clashes: “You might say that intellectual warfare is dramatic but I do not think it necessarily leads to a very happy or productive intellectual community”. Instead of bringing more agreement to IR, therefore, metatheory has made the discipline even more complex and fragmented (interview with Jones, 2002, pp.622-3).

However, metatheory is not alone in performing this role of augmenting intra-disciplinary fragmentation and insulation. In the past, a similar accusation was raised against any theoretical or philosophical activity as such. The insulation of theorists from non-theorists in fact led J. David Singer (1972), who saw himself as bridging between one extreme and the other in his scholarly practice, to complain about the ‘two-culture problem’ in IR academe. That is, instead of portraying the field’s internal ‘insularity’ as a function of subscription to specific theoretical or metatheoretical approaches, Singer located the problem in the fact that many empirical researchers would simply ignore what was being produced in the theoretical realm, whereas theorists lacked the ability and will to look at historical and contemporary concrete issues. In short: the ‘two-culture’ thesis, as an alternative way to look at IR’s fragmentation, ascribed the latter’s origin to the specialisation that emerged from the abstract character of theorising – a
feature that has been extended to metatheory.\textsuperscript{36} When Brown (2006, pp.679-684) recycles Singer’s notion, he alludes to metatheoretical activity in the current ‘theorists’ group. Speaking about the British IR community, he laments that “theorists have come close to achieving a situation in which they have marginalised everyone else” (p.678). The perception is that the same applies beyond the confines of British IR. In a speech delivered to IR scholars, William Wallace (1996, p.303) depicted the cult of abstraction as a general trend in the social sciences:

There is a tendency for all academic disciplines to demonstrate their intellectual standing in the university by privileging theoretical studies over applied. This tendency has been particularly evident in the social sciences, as they struggled to gain respect from disdainful classicists, philosophers and natural scientists.

With this division over ‘abstract vs. empirical’ research, non-theorists, in turn, run the risk of being driven by what Brown (2006, p.685) calls “a generalised anti-intellectualism”. This, he argues, is “an unhealthy situation from pretty well every perspective, not least that of the theorists themselves” (p.678). It may be granted that metatheory alone did not give rise to the ‘two-culture problem’, but it should be held at least partially accountable for it.

Fragmentation leading to lack of dialogue is not the only negative outcome emerging from metatheoretical activity. There is a second category of perceived ‘externalities’ connected to the fact that metatheory is a particularly demanding specialisation, namely, the bad quality of metatheoretical scholarship in IR. This can be noticed mainly in uncritical attempts by IR scholars to ‘import’ certain ideas developed outside the field and to adapt them to the new context. Speaking in terms of past and recent social science as a whole, Gunnell (1998, p.36) complains that theorists have insisted in subscribing to certain philosophical positions, yet “little or no consideration” was given “of the extent to which these philosophical accounts were adequate”. Referring to the metatheoretical adaptation of ‘foreign’ knowledge to the discipline of IR, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1991, pp.393-4) alert us to “beware of gurus”:

It is tempting to import positions from elsewhere in the social sciences, complete with the sacred names of theorists associated with them. These gurus may be too simply credited with a coherent analysis which solves the problem or at least indicates where a solution will be found (…). The danger is not that the importers believe in magic themselves but that they break into previously accepted theory by means of compressed survey articles which identify gaps tailor-made for the new guru. The imported

\textsuperscript{36} A similar tension occurs between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ researchers.
positions are then presented in a summary form which suggests that they have only to be stated to be believed.

Those who metatheoretically ‘import’ knowledge from other specialised disciplines and from philosophy run the risk of de-contextualising and oversimplifying the ideas (see Cusset, 2008), and so do the others who critically reflect on such moves:

It is a lot easier to make fun of figures such as Derrida [hermeneutics and language] or Lacan [psychoanalysis] (or Rawls [law and ethics] or Schmitt [political theory] for that matter) than it is to master their thought – it might be that having done so one would still wish to put the boot in, but it would be nice to think that some of the people who are readiest with their criticism had actually done the necessary leg-work: all too often this is not the case (Brown 2006, p.685).

Similar complaints against both types of protagonists – importers and critics – have been voiced in the specialised metatheoretical literature itself. Discussions at this level have often digressed to exegesis of extra-disciplinary material (Kornprobst, 2009, p.103), and one of the reasons presented is that IR scholars tend to be bad philosophers and natural scientists. Thus, whenever such trans-disciplinary trends are at play, there is always the risk that IR metatheorists will adopt highly contested views, as they already have in the case of Kuhn, Lakatos, Bhaskar and, surprisingly, Darwin (Bell, MacDonald, & Thayer, 2001; Thayer, 2000, 2004) and a few palaeontologists (Chernoff, 2008; Van Belle, 2006)! In any case, prolonged discussions on marginal topics are clearly outside the scope of IR and, on the other hand, in their respective fields they would probably be too basic and unattractive. Having complained about the disciplinary fragmentation caused by the rising volume of metatheoretical discussions, Buzan and Little (2001, p.32) add that these debates “have been imported into IR from other disciplines, reproducing intellectual oppositions formed in the past and within different contexts, lacking very often the expertise that gave rise to them in the first place”. This means that they do not have much momentum per se and that, whenever they occur in IR, they may lead to more confusion than enlightenment (see Holden, 2002, pp.265-70 for examples).

Critics of metatheory also point out an additional component that comes from these patterns of ‘movement of ideas’. They correctly identify a time-lag between the initial discussions and their repercussion in IR. Hollis and Smith (1991, p.393) observe that “theoretical discussions have often come late to international relations”. “In what seems to be a recurrent pattern”, says Schmidt (1997, p.107) more eloquently,
“controversies that once held sway over other academic disciplines come belatedly to international relations”. Michael Nicholson (2000, p.196) has a similar impression:

With the time-lag which it seems that we require in International Relations before catching up with the intellectual fashions which convulse the rest of the chattering classes, we finally caught up with the problems of (...) philosophy in our area too. It seems that we are all eager readers of the New York Review of Books, but only get our copies ten years late.

This occurs, according to Buzan and Little (2001, p.32), due to an inversion of priorities. “IR is placed in a peripheral zone, where issues that have been fought over and sometimes resolved elsewhere, arrive late and clash through a constituency that is not all that well trained to deal with them”. Suggestively, part of their essay’s title asks “why International Relations has failed as an intellectual project” (p.19). In sum, by bringing extra-disciplinary ideas too late to the field, and due to the poor quality of their status, metatheoretical discussions play the negative role of shifting the discipline’s efforts to marginal issues as if they were priority. As Brown (2006, p.682) observes, it takes IR research “some way away from its origins”.

So far, I have considered under this heading problems of disciplinary fragmentation and problems related to the quality of metatheoretical scholarship in IR. There is a negative perception of metatheory attached to the fact that both kinds of ‘externalities’ bring more complexity and confusion to the field. I now turn to the third and final category of complexity-related claims, which encompasses several practical issues of metatheory. Some object to metatheory based on pragmatic (and, sometimes, subjective) considerations such as lack of attractiveness and lack of clarity in metatheoretical discussions. These perceived properties of metatheory, therefore, play the role of hindering the development of potentially constructive interest in world politics by introducing unexciting and confusing notions into the discipline of IR.

First of all, there is the opinion that metatheory is one of the most boring issues that could possibly arise in social science. For decades, this judgement has been evoked at pivotal moments of the discipline. Hans Morgenthau (1966, p.74), for example, alludes with little excitement to the argument over ways of theorising which divided IR into a dualistic “new scholasticism” comprising traditionalists (see Bull, 1966) on the one hand and behaviouralists (see Kaplan, 1966) on the other. In a review of the same discussion, Fred Neal and Bruce Hamlett (1969, p.281) denote that they share the same opinion: “Scholarship about scholarship, like theory about theory, and teaching about
teaching, is rarely very stimulating”. They find it lamentable that “Such commodities are not in short supply in the field of international relations”. That is, in their view there should be less meta-scholarship, metatheory and meta-teaching. Despite this, since that occasion the volume of metatheoretical contributions has increased and contemporary scholars have manifested a similar opinion regarding the unexciting character of metatheory. Brown (2007, p.415), for one, labels current discussions over science in IR as “ultimately a series of not very interesting metatheoretical debates”. Having interviewed several theorists about ways of identifying themselves in the discipline, Tony Porter (2001, p.143, my emphasis) reports:

Several respondents indicated that they either did not like or were not entirely clear on the significance of this question. Rob Walker, for instance, added two other categories, “theoretically interesting questions” and “politically interesting questions” and ranked them well above the other categories [i.e., nationality, IR subfield, issue-area, major IR ‘paradigm’, key concept, regional focus and epistemology/methodology], adding that “it is not at all that difficult to identify worthwhile scholarship whatever the ‘approach’. Far too much energy is spent classifying such approaches, usually in a very crude way, and far too much boring research and writing is produced as a consequence”.

A similar opinion occurs in the broader scope of social science as a whole – what Lapid (1989, p.236) describes as “a prescription for a rigorous philosophy-avoidance strategy”. Daly (2008, p.57, my emphasis) summarises the issue: “Engagement with ontological and epistemological issues in [metatheoretical] political study has been arguably less than full-blooded. Too often it seems that they are treated as unpleasant hurdles to be quickly vaulted in order to get on with the ‘business’ of political analysis”. Metatheoretical debates seem to play the negative role of a nuisance in such situations and, more importantly, when they have to be taken seriously this is regarded by critics as an excruciating task.

When it comes to practical issues, besides its lack of attractiveness, metatheory is also perceived to involve discourse of a significantly confusing quality. This applies primarily to the language often employed in metatheoretical debates, despite, of course, their inherently high level of complexity. Such ‘externality’ is paradoxical, considering that one of the key arguments in favour of metatheoretical discourse is its potential to help us make sense of what goes on academically in IR. The “vast theoretical outpouring” in the field means that “students beginning the discipline today are faced with a bewildering variety of theoretical perspectives” (Armstrong 1995, p.356). Given this context, metatheory has been presented in textbooks (Burchill & Linklater, 2005; R.
Jackson & Sørensen, 2010; Kurki & Wight, 2010) as a helpful tool that deals with “some fundamental problems” of cross-theoretical debates (Smith, 2010, p.12). Despite this, whenever abstract knowledge is implied, great care should be taken in order to make its output available to non-specialists in this kind of research (Brown 2006, p.686). Amongst those blamed for being less than precise in their communication of ideas are critical theorists and poststructuralists, both of which draw heavily upon philosophical literature in their argumentation (Halliday 1995, p.739). However, the same charge may be made against mainstream works (e.g. Morton Kaplan’s 2005 case for adapting systems theory to international politics).\footnote{On Kaplan’s complicating rhetoric, see critiques by Spegele (1982) and, more informally, Waltz in an interview (Halliday & Rosenberg, 1998, p.386).} Regardless of its particular origin, complex language is better avoided. We ought to neither “hide our knowledge in obscurely erudite terminology, nor to lose ourselves in scholastic word games” (Wallace 1996, p.305). As Holsti (2000, p.29) says, “in many of our scholars’ excursions into epistemology, ontology and metatheory, we sometimes lose sight of one of our common purposes as international relations scholars: to make a seemingly difficult and often chaotic field (...) more intelligible”.

Besides the paradox of being meant to simplify things and ending up complicating them with the use of obscure language, metatheory has also led to a further negative ‘externality’: its occasional alienation from those non-specialists who want somehow to have access to metatheoretical knowledge. As an example, notice how Stephen Van Evera (1997, p.2) attempts to explain why he wrote a (partially) metatheoretical research guide without much reference to the metatheoretical literature:

I learned some important things from writings on philosophy of science and social science methods, but I have found much of that writing abstruse and useless. It was often easier to invent my own answers than dig them up from the reams of muddy arcana produced by philosophers and methodologists, even when the answers existed somewhere in those reams.

At a later point, he avoids further engagement with the metatheoretical literature in a disclaimer on why he does not wish to pursue a detailed exposition of a set of writings in the philosophy of science that are quite relevant to his topic. The arguments, he claims, “are well hidden in tortured prose that gives new meaning to the phrase ‘badly written’ and no reading of such dreadful writing is ever certain or final” (Van Evera 1997, p.44 note 55). Maybe Van Evera’s choice of ignoring the core literature as he
writes about metatheory contradicts accepted academic standards, but in any case one should not expect such a highly specialised vocabulary to be universally known to all non-specialists, even if they are part of the field. “The cultivation of a complex language, of obscure terminology accessible only to those already deeply immersed in the specialist literature, is a justifiable tendency only in theoretical writing within specialist journals” (Wallace 1996, p.305). If metatheory plays the negative role of alienating itself from non-metatheorists due to the complexity of its issues and presentation, it poses an even greater problem for non-scholars. This particularly applies to the case of students, on the one hand, and, on the other, policymakers and additional practitioners. “Our student audience – at least, our undergraduates – need something more straightforward; and a wider audience will remain beyond reach unless addressed in terms which they can understand without too much difficulty” (Wallace 1996, p.305). These two issues – metatheory in education and metatheory for the ‘wider audience’ – are the specific themes of the next two headings.

The teaching of metatheory
Teaching is one of the central aspects of the communication of metatheoretical knowledge beyond the research community that must be addressed. Although the IR literature focusing solely on instruction which specialises on metatheory is underdeveloped, the topic has figured sporadically in journal articles. In one of them, Stefano Guzzini treats metatheory as paramount to the IR curriculum and deals with it predominantly in a favourable way. However, he also warns us that, if badly taught, metatheory could lead to certain negative consequences. For example, depending on the module’s or programme’s structure, it “risks moving the discussion too early to a highly theoretical level” and “leaves a certain taste of ad-hoc-ness to it” (2001, p.111). Moreover, he argues that courses focusing on “meta-theoretical differences” between approaches may have “the disadvantage” of being taught in a “‘top-down’ manner”. This is likely to lead to excessively passive learning. If, instead, instructors opt for a course design emphasising active and critical learning through several assessments, they must be ready to “give very thorough and frequent feedback to students”, which of course is a “time-intensive” strategy and may “not work well in big settings” (p.110). In a more empirically-oriented article that compares different styles of teaching from the point of view of learners, Arie Kacowicz (1993, p.78) reports that even groups of students who were “familiar with the scientific jargon and the different dimensions of
the discipline (…) were nevertheless puzzled and in some cases confused by the analytical abstractions”. Referring to a module that ascribed great weight to debates over “research methods and approaches (traditional and scientific methods, case studies and comparative methods, content analysis and event data, forecasting, and theory and policy making)” (p.76), students complained that “they could not appreciate the entire structure of the theoretical edifice” and that “they felt lost in the (…) logical and theoretical abstractions of the lectures” (p.79). With reference to another module, which “was driven by a strong methodological and epistemological concern with the scientific approach” and which included issues like “science and wisdom” (p.77), students “regarded the course material as too abstract and detached from reality, and expected a more comprehensive and concrete discussion of international problems” (p.79).38

Speaking from a more critically-oriented perspective in a symposium on IR teaching, McGowan and Nel (2002, p.255), editors of a theory textbook that specifically targets those interested in Africa as a region, declared that “students everywhere struggle to define contested concepts clearly, and to engage in theoretical discourse in which they discover and interrogate their own assumptions”. Purporting to encourage reflection, the authors have adopted a “student-centered, outcomes-based” approach. In such method, “the emphasis is not so much placed on what students should ‘know’, but rather on what they should be able ‘to do’ once they have completed a module or course”. It “starts with what the student knows and tries to develop both a deeper understanding of that prior knowledge, and a broader application of this deeper understanding”. In emphasising an “intuitive understanding of their region as a base from which to explore the dynamics of the world as a whole”, they have clearly tried to follow a critical pedagogical approach (see P. Freire, 2006) and a ‘non-Western’ view of IR. Commenting on their work (Nel & McGowan, 1999) and on the potential contribution of a similar teaching method to IR in Eastern Europe, Zlatko Šabič (2002, p.250) laments the tendency of some universities “to accept Western expertise and textbooks without much reflection on whether or to what extent these works correspond to the actual needs of (non-Western) students”. Donald Gordon (discussant in Boyer et al., 2002, p.238) also endorses a more critical look at IR pedagogy and its implied avoidance of the abstract debates taking place in ‘the West’. Welcoming Nel and

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38 Guzzini’s and Kacowicz’s concerns about careful planning of their role as teachers in metatheoretical modules reflect, even if indirectly, a specific emphasis of certain streams of educational theory on the teacher as a ‘mediator’. See Gredler & Shields (2008) for a recent overview of Lev Vygotsky’s classical statement and Souza, Depresbiteris and Machado (2004) for an account of Feuerstein’s contemporary and influential formulation of the topic.
McGowan’s textbook, he praises its “shift away from looking at the world through the theoretical ‘eyes’ of the industrial West”. To the extent that metatheoretical debates reflect an academic interest that does not correspond to the local intellectual needs, does not add anything to the local disciplinary context and, moreover, distances the students from more pressing needs related to their own political agenda, metatheory may be a hindrance to learning.

There are additional problems connected to the pedagogy of metatheory as seen from a critical perspective. Because the disciplinary discussion on this matter only touches some of the issues, it is perhaps more illuminating to bring to evidence a similar debate recently introduced in the broader literature on politics. Concerns related to disciplinary diversity and to the instrumental role of metatheory in the acquisition of critical skills are pivotal in a review essay by Stephen Bates and Laura Jenkins on negative educational outcomes of metatheory. In their article, they ask whether the contents of both political analysis textbooks and teaching introduce metatheoretical discussions in a way that provides students enough incentive to think independently. Bates and Jenkins (2007a, p.55) identify metatheory as a relevant educational tool in the context of a disciplinarily diverse field of politics. According to them metatheory is “an important element of political science, as it helps students to appraise, differentiate and choose between competing philosophies, theories and analytical traditions”. Like Guzzini and unlike the commentators of Nel and McGowan, they appreciate the potential didactic benefits of highlighting central metatheoretical debates to make sense of theoretical and philosophical plurality. However, they are even more concerned than the African textbook authors with the ability of metatheory to bring about reflective learning. Drawing on Paulo Freire’s (cited in Bates and Jenkins 2007a, p.61) view of ‘mentoring’, intended to “give rise to the possibility that the students become the owners of their own history”, they indicate that metatheory should be instrumental to this emancipatory goal:

As such, teaching and learning within political science should not be about the instruction and regurgitation of knowledge. Instead, teaching should mean alerting students to different ways of thinking. It should provide a non-prescriptive basis from which students can reflexively engage with the material in order to uncover relationships, connections and underlying patterns and, consequently, partake in critical analysis (pp.56-57).

Such engagement with metatheoretical issues is regarded as a way of ‘mentoring’
because students could “develop a theoretically informed, innovative and research-oriented disposition” (p.56). In short, metatheory could play a positive role in educational terms.

The problem, though, is that the teaching of metatheory in politics has been failing on both didactic and emancipatory fronts. In the first place, as the previously discussed case of IR illustrates, metatheory may (and, actually did) bring more complexity and confusion to disciplinary contexts of theoretical plurality. After recognising the positive side of teaching metatheoretical issues in politics, Bates and Jenkins complain that the main available textbooks and predominant educational methods actually hinder intelligibility. According to them, the way metatheory has been taught is “pedagogically problematic” (2007b, p.208), as “the dominant literature on ontology and epistemology within political science retains some unacknowledged and problematic assumptions” (2007a, p.55). Apparently there is a trade-off between accessibility and precision. They agree with Guzzini and with Kacowicz on metatheory-related lecturing being particularly demanding in terms of balancing both sides of the equation. Bates and Jenkins (p.59) identify problematic issues in the most widely adopted texts. One particularly striking example is the frequent conceptual conflation of ‘epistemology’ and ‘ontology’. If textbooks are inconsistent and inaccurate as they say, then the goal of clarifying “differences and disputes between political scientists [which] are more profound than students often assume” (p.57) will hardly be reached. “Consequently (...), the very activities promoted by an understanding and appreciation of ontology and epistemology, are paradoxically undermined and become stunted at this meta-theoretical level” (p.56). So the first negative role played by metatheory in educational terms is that it may actually make things worse when, instead, it is supposed to clarify and elucidate.

The other negative outcome of teaching metatheory in the 'wrong' way is that, despite its alleged mission to encourage reflective learning, in the pretension of presenting one single argument that would define the disciplinary situation for the students, metatheory actually leads to closure. This, in turn, prevents the development of an adequate attitude towards the ‘mentoring’ process. Closure is damaging to emancipatory education, according to Paulo Freire (cited in Bates and Jenkins 2007a, p.61), because mentors are neither supposed “to encourage” their ideas nor provide ‘closed’ answers “to be reproduced in the mentees”. Having analysed a few introductory texts to political analysis (e.g. Furlong & Marsh, 2010; Hay, 2002), Bates and Jenkins
(2007a, pp.59-60) question the way in which they convene ideas about the relation between ontology and epistemology as metatheoretically applied to politics. Such texts, they argue, portray the relation as a ‘case closed’: either one precedes the other or both go together. However, these are not the only options available, as becomes evident when we observe neighbouring disciplines like sociology and IR (pp.60-61; see also Daly 2008). Bates and Jenkins (2007a, p.61) believe that ‘closure’ “may lead to an outcome where students are more prone to support and defend particular theories, and reject, find contradictions within and fail to understand others”. As a result, “their meta-theoretical choices are hindered by the position of these teachers”. Guzzini (2001, p.109) refers to a similar situation involving metatheory and IR. There is often “a confusion of ideologies with meta-theories”, which leads to “the risk of taking these clusters in purely ideological terms”. If metatheory is taught “in such an ideological way” (p.110), then, “instead of opening up for thinking, it closes down the path to debate”:

If diverging values are all there is, then the debate can easily run into a show of verbal fists. Worse, in some settings, the intellectual exchange might never start since everybody feels entitled to stick to what they think anyway (and professors are always right).

In other words, despite whatever positive roles that metatheory can potentially play in education, they may also end up being, “paradoxically, undermined by a lack of reflection” (Bates and Jenkins 2007a, p.61).

One last point connected to teaching is that the advantages of learning metatheory, as seen above, are usually depicted primarily in terms of transferable skills such as ‘encouraging critical thinking’. Colin Hay (2007, p.115), one of the textbook authors discussed by Bates and Jenkins, portrays their justification for teaching ontology and epistemology in political analysis as “couched almost entirely in terms of the indirect rather than the direct consequences and benefits of being able to adjudicate arguments”. Opposing the primacy of such indirect benefits in justifying the educational use of metatheory, Hay (2007, p.116) states that “it is wrong to suggest that these are responsible for its place in the teaching of political analysis today”.

Moreover, while none of the pedagogic ‘goods’ to which Bates and Jenkins appeal can be imparted directly, none can only be attained through a consideration of ontology and epistemology. The relationship between the goods to which they appeal and the means by which such goods are to be attained is, then, almost entirely contingent. Indeed, there are clearly other – and, arguably, more effective – means of promoting each of the benefits to which they refer (p.166, original emphasis).
For this particular reason, if transferable skills are the main justification for teaching metatheory, then the whole enterprise may be jeopardised. “Those less wedded to the advantages of ontological and epistemological reflection than Bates and Jenkins might well use precisely the same move to argue for the demotion of such meta-theoretical debates from the curriculum”. To sum up, metatheory has sporadically been defended as a good didactic and emancipatory educational device. However, its didactic value is highly contingent upon using adequate teaching methods and positive results are less than likely to obtain. From an emancipatory perspective, in turn, metatheory is said to lead primarily to certain benefits connected to transferable skills. Despite this, results are again less than guaranteed and, besides, several other kinds of content could be taught instead in order to develop the same ‘mentoring’-related skills. If there is any advantage in teaching metatheory to politics and IR students, it must be defended on other grounds.

**The politics of metatheory**

Metatheory is said to play the negative roles of bringing further complexity to abstract research and its communication in the disciplinary context of IR. As seen before, this may be due to both intrinsic and extrinsic features of metatheoretical knowledge. Apparently, the same scheme applies to the assessment of political implications of metatheory. Some scholars have protested against the increasing ‘metatheorisation’ of IR by associating it, first of all, with the negative inherent political effects of the conflation of distinct discursive orders and practices. Secondly, it has also been pointed out that metatheory is a hindrance to the pursuit of the social ‘calling’ of intellectual life. Finally, some have claimed that the metatheoretical dimension of theoretical thought operates as a ‘mask’ for all sorts of ideological struggle and other political issues related to social scientific scholarship. These objections to metatheory come from varied sources, but it is clear that they draw on previous commitments to specific positions about, for example, the role of IR or social research and the role of intellectuals in society. It is, therefore, important to turn to each of these points in more detail by also taking into account their backgrounds.

First of all, then, there is the notion that metatheory plays a negative political role due to some of its inherent discursive-order features. This idea is yet another application of Gunnell’s (1998) claim that metatheory, for most part of the time,
conflates the first (social practice), second (theory about social practice) and third orders (theory about theory of social practice). His intention is to provide “a criticism of (...) the assumption that academic discourse is necessarily in some way a form of political action” (p.16), an assumption which, according to him, is increasingly recurrent in politics and social science specifically due to the rise in popularity of poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches. This is highly problematic because first-order practices (for instance, world politics) are simply “not normally or logically open to metatheoretical arbitration” (p.20). Why, then, is there an insistence in treating first-order practices as subject to higher discursive orders? The problem of ‘metatheorising’ the study of first-order practices derives, according to Gunnell (1998, p.26), from its “dual rhetoric of inquiry”, that is to say, a strategy “which is devoted not only to the internal justification of certain claims and approaches but to justifying itself to an external audience that is often its object of inquiry”. In IR such strategy may be illustrated by Chernoff’s (2007) study of policy-related implications of metatheory. He attempts to explain why practitioners should employ metatheoretical principles in order to test competing IR claims before adopting specific policy recommendations emerging from them. The purpose of this discursive approach is, according to Monteiro and Ruby (2009, p.43), to show that “knowledge produced by a science of IR that stands on unquestionable foundations can claim the status of a special discourse about international relations, one that cannot be challenged”. For “without establishing their enterprise as ‘scientific’, how can IR scholars expect policymakers to take the intellectual fruits of the field seriously?” (p.16) Therefore, in the same way that metatheory must not be conflated with theory, it also should not be employed as foundational for political practice. The fact that it is reflects an anxiety related to the status of the discipline rather than any logical necessity.

The conflation of discursive orders and practices can, alternatively, be seen as a move aimed at alleviating the political pressure from scholars’ shoulders. James Kurth’s (1998, pp.32-3, my emphasis) opinion voices the general sense of the policy community that too much abstract research reflects an isolationist tendency in IR scholarship. The negative effect is that, instead of being concerned with pressing political issues, scholars turn their focus to their own academic peers and, thus, abstraction turns into an end in itself:
Most academics (...) are only academics (...) [and] one-dimensional people. They
therefore have not had the breadth of experience to give them a sense of the reality
of international relations; nor have they had the depth of experience to give them a sense
of its tragedy [and urgency] (...). For such people, there are only a few kinds of
achievements possible in regard to international relations. One of them is to sit down
and spin out theories that fellow academics will praise as being rigorous and original.
(Merely being realistic and responsible, in contrast, will not evoke their praise). In
truth, most academics are only concerned about the good opinion of about a dozen other
academic specialists in their particular sub-sub-field.

Obviously all the accusations above potentially apply to every kind of theoretical
scholarship. As a foreign policy theorist once put it:

I am afraid that even some of my academic colleagues exaggerate the promise of theory
to the point of making theorising not an aid but a substitute for really hard thinking
about the issues on hand; it is much cosier to delve into the intricacies of an abstract
theory than to analyse, leave alone resolve a concrete issue (Frankel, 1981, p.538).

However, Kurth (1998, p.37) has IR metatheory specifically in mind. The rise of
metatheoretical debates, for him, means that “in the future, the study of international
relations will be even more uninteresting and irrelevant than it is now”. Commenting on
the loss of political content with the increasing ‘philosophisation’ of IR, Monteiro and
Ruby (2009, p.43 note 37) summarise the issue:

Perhaps this helps explain why foundational questions are particularly attractive to IR
scholars. The real-world stakes of academic IR debates can be very high, up to and
including questions of life and death, or war and peace. So IR scholars may succumb to
the temptation to settle political debates on big issues of international relations by
invoking the status of an unquestionable discourse – that of a science with unshakable
foundations.

In both cases – too much theory and too much metatheory – the avoidance of politically
pertinent problems is ultimately a negative outcome of discursive-order conflation.

The distance, or ‘gap’ (Nye, 2008; Walt, 1998, 2005) between (meta)theory and
political practice is particularly acute in relation to the perceived ‘mission’ of social and
political science in society. Since their incipience, a sense of ‘calling’ or vocation has
certainly been present in academic Economics and Sociology (P. T. Jackson, 2011a).
Political analysis, for that matter, developed itself against a civic educational
background and, at least at an earlier stage, internationalist academic discourse followed
similar tendencies by emphatically stressing its own role in democratic society
(Schmidt, 1998, pp.43-76). More specifically, we are often reminded that the academic
institutionalisation of the study of world politics initially aimed at nothing less than the
eradication of warfare (Fritz, 2005; Knutsen, 1997, pp.211-23). The rationale behind having a separate discipline of IR, as one of its pioneers once put it with some exaggeration, was that “the better the world is understood by the better people in it, the better for the world will it be” (Manning, 1954, p.84). Since the beginning, therefore, there has been a working assumption that the discipline should pursue the improvement of the general conditions of coexistence in the international scenario, given the pressing issues of political practice (see also Herz, 1971). Nicholson (2000, p.183), whose position is overall in favour of metatheory, voices the same concern for the contemporary setting. He also believes that the political relevance of IR goes beyond the political relevance of performing civic duties:

The purpose of doing International Relations, like all social science, is to influence people, sometime, somewhere in a context which will make a difference to their actions. Thus, at some stage, possibly distant, a course of action will be taken, or abandoned, as a result of our efforts. The world will then look slightly or even significantly different because of our activities. We hope it will look better, though what ‘better’ consists of is itself a result of our moral positions. This also means that we think we have something to say which goes beyond that which a concerned citizen could say.

Arguments about political relevance of scholarship are, in short, usually made from general assumptions about the role of IR in society.

This provides the background for the second point: metatheory is also portrayed as playing a negative role with respect to the political implications of social scientific study. Perhaps the position most often associated to this theme is that of critical theorists, who have connected the role of IR scholarship to emancipation, at times, via “sociological imagination”. The notion was classically defined by Wright Mills (1959, pp.4-5) as a “quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world” and that enables one “to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world”. Sociological imagination has been advocated as defining IR’s vocation. It is, as Justin Rosenberg (1994, p.101) argues, “a necessary public virtue. Unless we know what the structural consequences of our choices are, we [scholars] cannot exercise the political freedoms we have in a responsible way”. He claims that sociological imagination as applied to IR must also reject “grand theory” and “excessive abstraction”, even in empirical research, and that this is paramount to emancipation:
It is (...) the particular responsibility of political intellectuals to promote (...) collective self-knowledge by illuminating the structures of social power, identifying the kinds of human freedom which can be realised within them, and tracing where the lines of responsibility (...) may run (...). [This responsibility] is addressed to a real social need, one which the alternative vocations of grand theory and abstracted empiricism have disqualified themselves from answering (...). This need is surely no less pressing in International Relations than elsewhere.

The problem of IR is that it has crystallised into a “bureaucratic social science” by distancing itself from ‘classical (i.e., Wright Mill’s) social analysis’ – “the grounding in substantive problems, the use of an historical and comparative depth of field, the perception of social totalities, and the commitment to ideals of freedom and reason” as a way to pursue the duty of sociological imagination (1994, p.94). In short, the shift from substantive issues and a concretely historical view of things, as well as the escape to technicalities of metatheory, have been portrayed as a deviation from the vocation of IR as a discipline which is supposed to be socially and critically relevant.

Concern with the social role of IR scholarship is not the monopoly of critical theorists. Speaking from the mainstream, Van Evera (1997, p.5, my emphasis) discusses the duty researchers have towards the general community as a matter of professional ethics:

Social science operates largely beyond accountability to others. Institutions and professions that face weak accountability need inner ethical rudders that define their obligations in order to say (sic) on course. Otherwise they risk straying into parasitic disutility. Social science is no exception.

Having established social relevance as part of the professional ethics which politics and IR scholars are supposed to follow, Van Evera’s (1997, p.2) distaste for metatheory comes as no surprise. Later on, in a list of principles that purports to define what an interesting research topic looks like, he recommends caution in the selection of highly abstract questions, as “study of the fundamentally unknowable is futile and should be avoided” (p.47). By implication, this means that IR researchers have a duty to address only those problems which are regarded as pertinent according to his criteria.

We have an implicit contract with society: in exchange for academic freedoms and privileges we agree to spend at least some energy answering society’s more urgent questions. This does not require headline chasing. We can meet our obligation with policy research or with more abstract work that could have policy implications far down the road. But social science violates its contract if it drifts into complete irrelevance, as much of it has (p.118).39

39 Like in many of the critiques of abstract research, there is no further explanation of how we could distinguish “more abstract work that could have policy implications far down the road” from work
Wallace (1996, p.305) concurs by stating that “we owe a duty of constructive and open criticism: to speak truth to power, and not (...) to speak truth in secret only to each other”. He provides a clearly negative diagnosis of British IR and blames excessive abstraction as the cause of its deviation from such political duty. The discipline “has become too detached from the world of practice, too fond of theory (and meta-theory) as opposed to empirical research, too self-indulgent, and in some cases too self-righteous” (Wallace 1996, p.304). Holsti (2000, p.30) affirms that, in IR, “the tensions between theorists and practitioners are well known”. The gap which time and again emerges between practice and scholarship are at least partially associated to metatheory.

Suffice it to say that communications between them ends when the one is unable to make any sweeping generalizations from vast experience in the field, and the other engages primarily in epistemological and lofty metatheoretical argument. The one drowns in a sea of hyperfactualism, the other in an ocean of metaphysics.

It is clear, then, that metatheory is perceived (by scholars coming from different places across the disciplinary spectrum) as playing the negative role of insulating IR from practical engagement.

The fact that metatheory implies distance from concrete politics and from the (perceived) role of scholarship in society may also go together with a third political problem: metatheoretical discourse has more than once been criticised as a technical mask for highly politicised issues.

The Sisyphean effort to place IR on unshakable [Philosophy of Science] foundations is at least in part an attempt to boil down the complex relation between IR and international relations to the supposedly more straightforward relation between social science and philosophy. In other words, it is an attempt to turn a political problem into a philosophical/foundational one (...). This reduction, however, is an over-simplification. There is no way to strip the relation between IR and international relations from its political dimensions. There is no cookie cutter way to deal conclusively with this complex issue in an apolitical way – a questionable goal in itself (Monteiro and Ruby 2009, p.43).

One of the aspects of scholarship hidden by metatheory, some claim, is the fact that academic discourse is inevitably driven by ideological assumptions. By making the whole discussion look purely technical, scholars attempt to camouflage the political roots of their argumentation. An example of this argument may be found in Andrew

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that “drifts into complete irrelevance”. Is this not, as Lakatos (1970) has extensively argued, a judgement more properly issued by hindsight?
Lawrence’s (2007, p.199) critique of the “imperial method” employed by democratic peace researchers. The author is not explicitly against metatheory and actually employs it in order to develop his claim. The idea is that democratic peace research has been treating political problems like the definition of ‘democracy’ at the (wrong) level of metatheory. By connecting positivist notions of scientific research to IR theory via a restrictive set of methods, theorists arrive at a superficial notion of ‘democracy’. However, in order to establish the thesis that democracies do not fight each other, the very definition of democracy is at stake. Dealing with such an important issue at a non-political level leads democratic peace theorists to beg the question.

Referring to metatheoretical debates in IR over the notion of science, Milja Kurki (2009, p.441) argues that “ignoring the politics of PoS [i.e., philosophy of science] runs the risk of misunderstanding why PoS debates matter in IR and what is at stake in them”. The link between politics and metatheory exists, according to her, not because a specific metatheoretical position is strongly determined by a particular political ideology, but rather because political worldviews are “constraining and enabling” (p.444). For example, someone who favours top-down social engineering is highly unlikely to support such political preference from the point of view of a poststructuralist, anti-closure, approach. As a result, metatheoretical issues must not be treated as merely philosophical and abstract, lest we run the risk of assessing the situation by ignoring such a relevant aspect as politics. She complains about the current “tendency to engage in a curious pretence of apoliticality in PoS debates in IR” (p.442) and concludes that “we should at least remain open to the proposition that [philosophy of science] positions can have certain political predilections built into them” (p.450). In other words, it becomes impossible to maintain that metatheorising is devoid of any political character, despite the current tendency to treat metatheory from a neutral perspective. This last point closes the circle of negative perspectives on the role of metatheory in IR: it leads to an increasing insulation of the field from political practice, it prevents a higher level of critical engagement in society and it disguises certain politicised features under the mask of technicality.

**Discussion**

Several negative views of metatheory in IR have been presented. In this examination of the relevant literature on the topic, I have identified four key areas in which metatheoretical research is said to hinder the development of the discipline. Due to its
intrinsic features, to the complex character of the issues that pertain to the subject, to educational aspects and, finally, to political impact, metatheory has been perceived as not playing a constructive role in IR. By voicing these concerns, I have gone beyond an application of the previous chapters (i.e., how metatheory operates in general) and towards an examination of some of the negative ‘externalities’ which have emerged with an increase in metatheoretical activity in this specific field. I turn, now, to a brief critical examination of each of the points presented in this chapter. Leaving a more detailed critical procedure for later, I focus here on how these elements hang together, how some actually cancel each other out and how, individually, some of them are internally problematic. We should take IR’s critique of metatheoretical research seriously, but the strong programme of eliminating it from the discipline is untenable.

So, first of all, what are the main relations between each of the complaints raised against metatheory? Let us recall the analytical objection to metatheory based on its intrinsic features of a higher-order discourse as a key converging point. This critique of metatheoretical research implies that it must necessarily be differentiated, on the one hand, from theory and, on the other, from social practice. IR, as a study of social practice, must not be conflated with the study of such study (i.e., a meta-study). If, to the contrary, such conflation does occur (as it is apparently the case in the discipline), then we will be operating under the illusion that a meta-study is capable of dealing with a lower-order practice. For example, searching for higher-order criteria in order to assess lower-order features is said to be a misguided strategy that leads to negative consequences for a field of inquiry, such as forgetting about a theory's own merits and judging it by higher-order criteria (e.g. philosophy of science) or, for that matter, presenting metatheory as extremely relevant to political practice in order to justify our production of knowledge in the discipline. In these two cases, metatheory plays negative roles such as increasing the complexity and fragmentation of IR along higher-order discourses (and not the directly relevant theoretical order), and attempting to justify IR via its higher-order status instead of making the case for its direct political pertinence in practice. Such Contextual consequences of metatheoretical activity cannot in any way be dissociated from its Intellectual or intrinsic discursive-order features. Therefore, there is a relation between the intrinsic features of metatheory and its complexity and political roles.

Particularly relevant too is the connection between the increased complexities of IR due to the metatheoretical tendency to conflate discursive orders and some of the
issues of communication. Because it fragments the discipline along higher-order divides, metatheory is at least partly responsible for the current lack of understanding across approaches. Insisting on judging theories by their metatheoretical leanings, IR scholars reproduce and amplify divides to such an extent that it becomes very hard to bridge them back to synthesis. This is perceived as leading to an aggravated isolation between research communities in the field. Another aspect of such isolation comes from the fact that metatheory also ‘imports’ knowledge from other disciplines, often with much delay and de-contextualisation, which renders this discursive layer even more problematic in terms of communication. This being the case, it comes as no surprise that, besides the cross-approach divides, another distinction emerges between those interested in more abstract research and those who are not. It is also not surprising that metatheory may be regarded as an excruciating intellectual activity: we often distance ourselves from that which we do not understand. Moreover, this kind of distinction that emerges from communication problems is not a trouble faced solely by scholars. In fact, if the research community itself cannot get past this issue, then why should we expect students and other ‘outsiders’ such as practitioners and the media to understand what is going on? It is also not surprising that an aversion towards metatheory has developed amongst those outside the field who are, nevertheless, interested in understanding international political practice. In addition to this, we even run the risk that, in our attempts to make metatheory look simple due to such communication problems, we may actually end up making it look simplistic. And with false simplicity comes a false assurance that we have arrived at a final answer to these questions. This kind of ‘closure’ is especially damaging in the case of teaching, where ‘closure’ to some extent may create a path-dependent decrease in theoretical plurality in the discipline.

Gatekeeping in teaching, disciplinary enclaves, bureaucratic insulation – all such elements reflect a theme that has been so far ignored by the literature if compared to the other points. Metatheory plays a negative political role not only in relation to practitioners or, perhaps, to others who want relevant scholarship in order to change society. That this is the case is sufficiently clear from what we have seen. However, the negative political externalities of metatheoretical research must also be seen in terms of the Internal disciplinary politics. It is with respect to the politics of scholarship that the further political problems originate and spread. Hence, for example, Cynthia Weber’s (1994, p.337) portrayal of Keohane’s (1989) attempt to ‘discipline’ IR feminism in political terms, as yet another example of “male paranoia”. Perhaps it could be argued
that even the (metatheoretical) critique of metatheory based on political considerations serves the purpose of ‘masking’ the politics of metatheory whenever it ignores the disciplinary political aspects. There is indeed a relation between metatheory and the fact that some of the politics behind the debates is somehow ‘concealed’. Nevertheless, the notion that this goes beyond the usual connection between our inherent political involvement as social actors and the accident that some of us happen to be scholars too must be taken to a further step. It must be developed into an analysis of the politics of metatheory concerned with its intra-disciplinary political effects. This leads me to consider the next issue at hand.

Besides looking at how the points raised about the negative roles played by metatheory in IR converge, it is also necessary to take a critical look at how they diverge. In fact, some of them cancel each other out. Still on the subject of politics, for example, it is clear that two mutually exclusive theses have been advanced. One is that metatheory isolates IR from politics, thus leading to a decrease in the field’s relevance. The other is that metatheory actually brings politics to IR in particularly damaging ways such as, for example, serving as a kind of ‘Trojan horse’ for the clash of political ideologies. Both claims cannot be sustained at the same time and in the same relation. If one is to take issue against metatheory, then the option must be made between one point and the other. The same applies to the argument related to the complexities brought to IR by metatheory, some of which rely entirely upon the assumption that metatheory furthers the depth of the disciplinary divides. If that is the case, and if insulation is really a negative configuration, then why should we attempt to amplify fragmentation even more by drawing a sharper line between metatheoretical research and the rest? It seems that one side of the argument calls for more dialogue and plurality in the disciplinary discourse, whereas the other attempts to drag metatheoretical research out of the field by crystallising the distinction between discursive orders into a rigid institutional framework, thus leading to even more fragmentation. A similar contrast operates in the case of communication. If metatheory is to be further isolated from the rest of the discipline, how can we expect it to become more intelligible and perhaps more interesting? Maybe it is the opposite, i.e., bringing metatheoretical research to further integration with IR, that will help deal with the issue of communication and, by extension, with the educational aspect.

Going beyond comparison and contrast between the negative points concerning the role of metatheory in IR, it also must be said that some of them are internally
problematic. The discursive-order argument, for example, which is crucial for establishing a strong opposition to metatheory in any given field, depends on a falsely characterised situation. It may be the case that theories should be judged by not only metatheoretical criteria, but also other notions that do not pertain to this discursive order. However, we would go too far if we denied metatheory any relevant role based on the wrong premise that a discursive order does not have any impact or authority over another. In the example presented before, the claim would be that texts about football do not have any impact on football playing, which is obviously wrong. Of course, not all texts about football will have such impact, but some will. It is relatively easy to conceive of a situation in which, for instance, a manager will read journalistic commentary about how her team is doing and make decisions based on that second-order discourse. By the same token, IR theory could have a certain impact and even be regarded as possessing a certain authority over policy-making (even if empirically this does not seem to be the case), in the same way that metatheoretical works may be read by IR scholars and somehow orient what they do. It is precisely in those terms that Guzzini (2000) portrays the rise of IR constructivism, a theoretical approach born out of metatheoretical considerations. In addition to this, metatheory may also play a part in theorising in that, for ‘interpretivist’ scholars, theories are embedded in the social world that we study. “Anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992, p.395) because states ‘believe in’ certain theories of anarchy. “Power politics” became the prevailing mode of action in the modern international system because, first, it became the prevailing mode of thought (M. Wight, 1946). Metatheory is, therefore, also relevant at the theoretical level (see also Zalewski 1995). Actually, the fact that it is has led IR to proliferate its metatheoretical literature. The existence of problems with metatheory actually testifies against the strong argument in favour of eliminating it from the discipline. Not only this, but the productivity of metatheory in terms of leading to new approaches at the lower, theoretical, level illustrates that metatheory in fact is not merely ‘parasitic’ upon theory, but can be ‘productive of’ theory (Ritzer, 1992, p.11).

We are, thus, left with a weak version of the claim: instead of discussing whether or not there should be any metatheory in IR, we are left with the question of whether there is too much metatheory in IR. Accordingly, it may be granted that metatheory alone cannot judge political or theoretical arguments, that metatheory may cause misunderstanding, that metatheory may be hard to teach and that it may be hard to enjoy. All these arguments are perfectly valid in their context but they also possess quite
a few weakening properties if we attempt to extend them. The claim that metatheory is uninteresting is purely based on subjective opinion. It could be the opinion of many, but it is most definitely not the opinion of all. Moreover, if the quality of research and communication of metatheoretical knowledge has been low, it does not mean this will always be the case and, besides, it is just not clear how less incentive to metatheory would contribute to improve the situation. This does not mean that everybody should be doing it. In fact, there is a certain agreement among IR metatheatrists that the relevance and use of metatheory is always conditional upon being a tool for something else and not an end in itself (e.g. Alker, 1996; Neufeld, 1995). These views are echoed in Holst’s personal assessment of the metatheoretical debates:

I am somewhat concerned that too many people may be spending time discussing great issues of epistemology and metaphysics. I am interested in international relations more than philosophy. We are here because we are interested in a field of human activity. We must be sensitive to the ways we approach its study and raise questions about the whys and hows of knowledge. But beyond a certain point – and I cannot define exactly where it is located – concern with epistemology may lead us to lose sight of the subject matter (interviewed by Jones 2002, p.623).

Like Holst, Brown (2007, pp.415-416) recognises the partial merits of metatheory as well as the need of cultivating a balanced view of the issue:

What we have here are sophisticated and intelligent contributions to debates in the epistemology and ontology of the social sciences, but it is much less clear (at least to me) that these are debates that ordinary practising social sciences need to get too worked up about.

Metatheory may play several negative roles, but neither of them provides a compelling case for eliminating metatheory from IR. On the other hand, metatheoretical research should not be the centre of every scholar's attention in the discipline.

**Final Remarks**

In this chapter, I have considered intrinsic and contingent negative roles ascribed to metatheory by the IR community. Having expounded them in detail and very briefly analysed their merits, I come to the conclusion that the radical case against metatheory fails on account of internal problems. Moreover, weaker objections to metatheoretical research are usually associated to historically accidental features of the development of this discursive layer in IR. This being the case, it does not follow that we should eradicate metatheory from the discipline. However, it also does not necessarily follow
that we should do more metatheory than we do now. What has been established so far is simply that: (1) the status of metatheory in IR is highly contested; (2) several negative outcomes have emerged from metatheoretical research in the field; (3) none of these outcomes poses a sufficient reason either for interrupting our engagement with metatheory or for increasing it; (4) a number of the arguments raised against metatheory cancel each other out; (5) some of the claims raised against metatheory face considerable problems in the way they are structured; (6) in some of the negative views of metatheoretical research, its externalities are weighed against the positive potential of metatheory. This last point leads me to the next chapter: if there are some positive expectations about metatheoretical research, we should look at the extent to which they are actualised in the academic discipline of IR.
Chapter 4

Positive Views of Metatheory in International Relations

Introduction

Having discussed the main complaints against metatheoretical research and debates in IR, I now turn to perceived positive roles of metatheory in the field. The method is still the same as before: by critically reviewing the relevant literature, the main goal of this chapter is to present several views of what metatheory does in IR. This time, however, the focus is on the perceived actual and potential positive contributions of metatheoretical scholarship. The main source to be used here is the body of texts mainly concerned with IR theory and other self-referent disciplinary issues. Authors dealing with these research topics often make side remarks on the relevance of this kind of study, and asking how they justify the potential contributions of their own metatheoretical research yields insight into their perception of the positive roles of metatheory. Moreover they may also anticipate anti-metatheoretical criticism and attempt to explain the worth of their metatheoretical enterprise (or even metatheory in general) in reply. The second main source of positive comments on metatheory in IR is a collection of scattered comments in predominantly non-metatheoretical texts. Review passages in textbooks, theory textbooks and pieces on disciplinary history are the most likely elements to fall under this category. Finally, a third important source derives from texts which do not reflect much self-awareness of their metatheoretical character, but which may, nevertheless, be classified as predominantly metatheoretical according to the definitions provided and expanded in this thesis.

While I focus again mainly on the IR literature, it is nevertheless crucial to understand that many of the claims derive from neighbouring disciplines. For this reason, going beyond the IR literature wherever there is a clear connection between intra-IR claims and extra-IR discourse is a welcome additional procedure. The main headings for the positive views of metatheory are: (1) the potential improvement of IR theory and; (2) a better understanding of the discipline, including (but not restricted to) a refined analysis of its historical formation; (3) clarification of theoretical material and
its assumptions; and (4) study of theories as part of the social world. In my discussion it becomes clear that most of the points in favour of metatheory contradict the main negative views in IR. As a result, besides their mutual cancellation in some cases (as seen in the previous chapter), the complaints against metatheory also face the challenge of the positive views based on similar (sometimes exactly the same) issues. We are left, thus, with the following conclusion: if a certain range of points indicate both constructive and negative roles of metatheory in IR, then each of them will have to be assessed on an individual basis. In other words, there ceases to be a prima facie case against metatheory. However, an even stronger response to the complaints against metatheory in IR can be made. At the end of this chapter I provide an additional analytic argument for the validity of metatheoretical enterprise that problematises any attempts to completely eliminate metatheory from our academic field.

A tool for improving IR theory
There are several ways in which metatheory is perceived as playing a positive role in its contribution towards the improvement of IR theory. Contrary to the claim that metatheory is merely ‘parasitic’ and does not lead to new theory, Milja Kurki (2006, p.213) argues that “metatheoretical framings of explanatory frameworks have direct effects on the kinds of explanations we advance for concrete world political processes: indeed, theoretical and conceptual lenses ‘constrain and enable’ (...) the kinds of explanations we can construct”. One of the key points made in favour of metatheorising is that it may lead to better theories of world politics and, in fact, in concrete cases it has actually led to new theoretical material which has gained wide acceptance, such as neorealism and constructivism. Another argument for metatheory is that part of it consists in evaluating and validating research and this, in turn, refines IR scholarship. Metatheory, therefore, would be a necessary means to that end. A third way in which IR scholars portray metatheory as theoretically productive is the claim that a better organisation of scattered theoretical material leads to new theories. Most of the key IR theorists (e.g. Morgenthau, Bull, Waltz, Wendt, Keohane) have, at one point or another, dealt with metatheory in a ‘theoretically productive’ way. “Viewed in this way”, says Joseph Jupille (2005, p.210), “metatheory sets forth the basic architecture and requirements of scientific research, both guiding it and providing standards by which it can be assessed by members of the scholarly community”. The general agreement is that, ultimately, by doing this kind of metatheory, we aim at “developing a more reliable
and systematic understanding of international relations” (Lieber, 1973, p.viii).

A well-known example of IR theorist dealing productively with both theory and metatheory is Kenneth Waltz, whose key works, Man, the State, and War (1959) and Theory of International Politics (1979), are among the most cited books in the discipline. Elsewhere, I have provided a detailed reading of Waltz’s work as a coherent polyphonic discourse of three analytic voices – a metatheoretical voice, a disciplinary-historical voice and a theoretical voice (L. G. Freire, 2006b). Waltz’s modus operandi throughout his career is a good illustration of the three points mentioned above – metatheory as collecting and organising material for new theories; as research evaluation/validation and as enabling new theories to emerge. The initial move is primarily contained in the 1959 volume. The book gathers theoretical material on the causes of war from sources as varied as classical political theory, memoirs of diplomats and state leaders and the discipline of psychology in order to organise them into coherent sets of ‘images’ or categories of explanation. The final section presents a critique of each image and suggests the next steps of research, hinting at the desirability of placing all images together in an overarching framework. We learn from Haslam (2006, p.391) that in the 1960s Waltz decided to spend a few years reading on theories and the philosophy of science. In 1979 he was able to introduce neorealism in IR as emerging from his metatheoretical views:

I write this book with three aims in mind: first, to examine theories of international politics (...); second, to construct a theory of international politics that remedies the defects of present theories; and third, to examine some applications of the theory constructed. The required preliminary to the accomplishment of these tasks is to say what theories are and to state the requirements for testing them (Waltz 1979, p.1, emphasis added).

In the Theory there are two long metatheoretical sections: one on what theories are and how we should test them according to philosophical criteria; and the other is a concrete assessment of past IR theories according to Waltz’s metatheoretically adjusted set of criteria for the discipline.40 In his own words, metatheory was ‘preliminary’ to the construction of what he believed to be a better theory of international politics.

Not only has metatheory been crucial in the elaboration of theoretical material (and explicitly seen as such) in Waltz’s case, it also has become paramount to further

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40 That these are two distinct ways in which metatheory contributes to Waltz’s formulation is clear enough from the fact that the sets of criteria employed in each do not necessarily overlap. Chapter 1 of this thesis includes a discussion of Waltz’s ‘instrumentalist’ view of theories and Chapter 7 mentions his preference for ‘systemic’ over ‘reductionist’ theorising.
(meta)theorising in response to neorealism.

Scholars who had so laboriously opened IR to the new frontiers during the 1970s (“interparadigmatic debate”) had to watch how the success of Waltz’s Theory of International Politics locked up the discipline again (…). The critique therefore aimed at the meta-theoretical foundations of Waltz’s new disciplinary wall. Indeed, one can say that Waltz’s critiques (sic) used the debate around his book to force an inroad of meta-theoretical discussions into IR (Guzzini, 2000, pp.156-7).41

A particularly relevant post-Waltzian IR approach that clearly emerged from metatheoretical considerations is mainstream constructivism, as represented in Alexander Wendt's Social Theory of International Politics (1999). More than one commentator of constructivist research shares this reading. Milan Brglez’s (2001, p.339) narrative reconstructs the prelude of Wendt’s intellectual journey this way:

Firstly, he introduced the agency-structure problematique within the theory of international relations. That was a clarifying as much as a complicating move in the meta-theory of International Relations (…), in any case important because of his persuasive introduction of scientific realism and its possible uses in social and international theory (…). Secondly, in perhaps his most commonly quoted article, a new agenda of social constructivism was accepted and developed in a more scientific way (…) than the original [constructivist], which introduced (…) the term itself to IR.

Stefano Guzzini’s (2000, p.151) account also locates the starting-point for IR constructivism in a “meta-theoretical shift”, a unique moment in disciplinary history. “Whereas previous schools of similar content fought their battles on the level of policy analysis, this time the struggle was drawn into the meta-theoretical field. Constructivism combines many old hats with a willingness to challenge the scientific project of Mainstream International Relations” (2000, pp.155-6). The cases of neorealism and constructivism are, then, two examples of how metatheoretical considerations have actually constrained and enabled substantive theoretical formulations.

On the historical side, besides Waltz’s first book, there are other examples of the ‘harvesting and organising’ role of metatheory directed particularly to the elaboration of contemporary theories from material which might be available, but in an unsystematic, incomplete and scattered way. A great deal of Martin Wight’s published work consists exactly in this kind of metatheoretical exercise. James Der Derian (1989, pp.5-6), Roger Epp (1998) and Ian Hall (2006) correctly see Wight’s emphasis on theoretical and

41 Haslam (2006, p.391) comments that “later on, when Waltz was attacked for postulating at the foundation of his theory some axioms which were unfaithful to reality, his reading of the scientific method was quite handy”.
political discourse as a way of studying *international society* itself (see Freire, 2012). In this sense, metatheory operates as a tool of theory.42 Wight (1966) was also concerned with the status of IR as a discipline with no coherent theoretical body despite the wide availability of practical discourse about world politics. The international theorist's role, therefore, included the gathering, exposition, critique and refinement of this material. The notion of ‘harvesting and organising’ apparently disconnected propositions as a step to new theory has been a recurrent justification for works operating in the intersection between political theory and IR theory in particular. Thus, for example, we read in Knutsen’s (1997, pp.1-2) detailed textbook on the history of international theory that he wants to counter the assumption that there is no IR theory outside IR scholarship by stressing the relevance of pre-disciplinary international political thought. The point here is that sometimes we do not need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ and that, after we organise them, these already available ideas will actually provide us with the necessary building blocks of new theory.

Michael Donelan (1992, p.1), in his preface to an interesting imaginary dialogue between representatives of different reconstructed ‘traditions’ of international theory, states that he aims to “take the basic thoughts of the great men and try to widen them out to international politics”. However, he makes it clear that “our aim is not to describe past thought, but to use it to build theory” (1992, p.2). A similar argument appears in Gallie’s (1978, p.1) monograph on *Philosophers of Peace and War*. The metatheoretical character of the book transpires in his statement that it is meant “for comparison, analysis and assessment” of theoretical material which is scattered because the authors form “not a school, nor even a clear succession or progression of thought”. Alluding to Wight’s approach, the expressed reason is that there is a need “to collect our thoughts, to begin to unify our still separate lines of thinking” on the issue. Gallie (1978, p.2) then adds an interesting twist to the ‘harvesting and organising’ function. To those willing to understand the complexities of war and politics in the nuclear age, there should be an interest in theory formulated at “a time when it seemed very much simpler than we know it to be”. It might be an exaggeration, but the claim that “the more we appreciate [the] achievements [of past thinkers] (…), the better equipped we should be to deal with the new complexities” is clearly a defence of metatheoretical history of thought leading to new thinking on contemporary issues. Showing the possibility of a similar use for metatheory when we understand ideas about world politics coming from IR itself, Brian

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42 I further develop the point below in this chapter.
Schmidt (2002, p.4, emphasis added) summarises the point by listing some of the key aims of disciplinary historiography:

First, numerous theoretical insights, of largely forgotten scholars, have been simply erased from memory. Yet, once recalled, these insights can have critical purchase in the present. Second, the field has created its own powerful myths regarding the evolution of the field that have obscured history (...). Third, an adequate understanding of the history of the field is essential for explaining the character of many of our present assumptions and ideas about the study of international politics (...). There is, in fact, much evidence to support the proposition that much of what is taken to be new is actually deeply embedded in the discursive past of the field. Finally, a perspicacious history of the field offers a fruitful basis for critical reflection on the present (...) [and for] opening up some much needed space in which to think about international politics in the new millennium.

Other disciplinary historians would confirm the point (Vigneswaran & Quirk, 2010, p.107).

A tool for understanding the IR discipline

Metatheory has also been portrayed as essential to a critical understanding of IR as a discipline. There are three fundamental ways in which this is perceived to be the case, and much of current metatheoretical research actually falls into these categories: the provision of a ‘self-image’ (and critique thereof) in IR, the specification of our object(s) of study in the field at the most basic level, and the analysis of limitations and challenges in the discipline.

The abundant elaboration and critique of disciplinary ‘self-images’ in IR hints at dissatisfaction with some of these self-images and, in some cases, with metatheoretical ‘self-imagetic’ discourse as such (e.g. George, 1989). However, metatheory is still defended as the forum in which these self-images and the roles they play are critically evaluated (Smith, 1995). Well-known examples of highly contested self-images are: the ‘Science/Art’ dichotomy (e.g. Neal & Hamlett, 1969); the ‘IR as an American Social Science’ portrait (e.g. Hoffmann, 1977); the ‘Systemic/Reductionist’ distinction (e.g. Waltz, 1990); the ‘Great Debates’ narrative in IR’s disciplinary historiography (e.g. Banks, 1985); the ‘traditions of international thought’ narrative (M. Wight, 1987); the organisation of the field around ontological (e.g. Kurki, 2008; C. Wight, 2006) and epistemological (e.g. Hollis & Smith, 1996; Jabri & Chan, 1996) categories, among others. In several of the cases above, a new metatheoretical self-image has been produced exactly in order to correct problems in a previously attained self-image, such
as the lack of debate across divides due to a misapprehension of where the ‘real’ divides are (Jackson, 2011, p.30). Disciplinary history is prominent among many relevant kinds of metatheoretical research in this process. According to one of its key proponents, its aim is “to problematize (…) prevalent interpretations of how the field has developed and to indicate that the history of the field is both more complicated and less well known than typically portrayed” (Schmidt 2002, p.4). As a tool for understanding IR, then, metatheory goes beyond the formulation of a systematic reading of the field: it is also the space for questioning such metatheoretical readings.

An illustration connected to recent ‘self-imagetic’ trends in IR is in order here. The example has to do with Hoffman’s (1977) portrayal of IR as “an American social science”, a systematic analysis of the discipline and its theories which has been crystallised over time by the widespread repetition of the notion that IR knowledge is predominantly produced in America and reflect US policy interests (e.g. Puchala, 1997; Smith, 2000, p.399). The ‘IR as an American social science’ narrative, together with its effects, have been contested on sociological and postcolonial grounds by a number of scholars interested in the interaction between American IR and IR produced elsewhere. Pinar Bilgin (2008), to mention one, studies several potentially innovative shapes assumed by theory mixing peripheral scholarship with mainstream theory. Although it is indeed the case that IR research groups outside America “have been deeply impacted by theoretical and methodological developments in the United States” (Schmidt, 2002, p.5), portraying non-American IR as a mere emulation or copy hinders our understanding of how academic innovation works under hegemonic influence (Schmidt, 2006, p.254; Turton & Freire, 2009). In fact, empirical research on IR scholarly communities around the world (Cunningham-Cross, 2011; A. B. Tickner, 2003a) suggests that much theory in the ‘periphery’ of IR scholarship is, to use Homi Bhabha’s (1984, p.126) phrase, “almost the same” as American IR “but not quite”.

It is similar to the mainstream as a strategy of gaining acceptance into the ‘core’. It is not quite the same, because it deliberately re-territorialises the theoretical collage in order to advance a local agenda under that mask. The point is that Hoffmann’s narrative (or rather: its widespread tacitly accepted version) constrains our understanding of how the IR research communities operate in the ‘periphery’ by ignoring ‘peripheral’ agency (Bilgin 2008, pp.5-13). These studies conclude that there is, in fact, a considerable amount of relevant theoretical scholarship undertaken outside the English-speaking world in IR, as opposed to what the Hoffmann ‘self-image’ tells us. This finding
illustrates metatheoretical discourse as a way of critically reflecting on the ‘self-images’ of IR in order to attain a better understanding of the field.

Besides looking at disciplinary ‘self-images’, metatheory may also operate positively in the clarification of our object of study. At several junctures in our field, the point has been raised about delimiting the contours of the discipline and searching for an agreement on what the main issues are. In the US, a key problem that emerged and for some time persisted in the literature was that of finding the appropriate ‘level of analysis’ on which IR should focus (Singer, 1961). Another instance is perhaps the clearest metatheoretical constellation in this category, the debate on the role and weight of agency and structure, as well as material and ideational factors in IR theory (e.g. Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1987). Contrary to more substantive elements (such as key actors and issues) addressed elsewhere, this is not so much a discussion about what constitutes world politics, but rather about what kinds of entities and relations there are in world politics. Metatheory brings social ontology to IR in order to clarify our object of study and, as such, it is seen as playing a welcome role as a tool for understanding the discipline.

A final way in which IR scholars see metatheoretical research as a vehicle for positive disciplinary outcomes has to do with understanding the limitations and pitfalls of the discipline (Lieber 1973, p.viii). This is reflected, for example, in several works emerging as a response to the narrowness of the mainstream’s view on what makes good research in IR. The critical works, particularly those related to the ‘postpositivist turn’ in the discipline, have focused on many limitations of the field (Hopf, 1998; Lapid, 1989; C. Wight, 2002). Particularly acute is a sense that the dominance of positivism as a view of science has restrained the way we think in IR, leading to an unwarranted dismissal of non-positivist modes of enquiry as ‘unscientific’ (Jackson, 2011, pp.10-23) and to an unfortunate dismissal of ‘science’ by postpositivists who equal the term to ‘positivism’ (Kurki, 2006, p.215; C. Wight, 2002, p.37). The postpositivist position, with exceptions (see Guzzini & Leander, 2006), has been extremely critical of the prospects for the scientific analysis of world politics. By placing epistemology at the centre, some of the postpositivist literature has led to an increasing crystallisation of disciplinary divisions around binaries like ‘explanation vs. understanding’ (Hollis & Smith, 1990) or ‘causation vs. constitution’ (Wendt, 1998). Alongside, positivists have provided a falsely characterised ‘solution’ for disciplinary fragmentation by saying that postpositivist research may become relevant, but only if it is reframed in positivist terms (Keohane,
1988; Van Evera, 1997). This type of debate escalates to an even higher level of confusion when anti-science postpositivists (Fierke, 2007, p.174; George, 1994, p.127) accuse ‘light’ postpositivists (such as Wendt) of being positivists due simply to their belief in scientific enquiry. The introduction of scientific realist demarcations of ‘science’ (Patomäki & Wight, 2000; Wendt, 1999, pp.47-91) has highlighted the existence of a possible non-positivist science, suggesting that the real disciplinary fragmentation is not one of epistemology (Kurki & Wight, 2007, pp.23-5). Instead, scientific realists argue that the underlying divide is ontological and that epistemology and methodology are ancillary to specific ontological commitments. The ‘explanation vs. understanding’ binary, which is a reflection of the ‘science vs. anti-science’ dichotomy, is therefore questioned (C. Wight, 2002, p.38). The same applies to the case of ‘causation vs. constitution’ (Kurki, 2006, pp.211-2), a move that leads to new avenues of research. The examples above make it clear that metatheory operates both as a space for highlighting the limitations of the discipline, as well as questioning alternative views of such limitations (Kurki & Wight, 2007, p.14).

A tool for understanding theoretical material

The use of metatheory as instrumental to the understanding of IR as an academic field points to yet another perceived benefit of metatheoretical research: besides contributing to a critical reading of the discipline, it provides space for clarification of theoretical material in several ways. First, metatheory is a systematic way to discuss available specific theoretical formulations, as well as the hermeneutic principles behind such exercise. Secondly, metatheory analyses the deeper 'discursive layers' in which specific theoretical formulations are embedded in order to shed light on theory. Thirdly, metatheory is a handy tool of clarification when it comes to the parameters for the creation and appraisal of ‘theoretical collages’ across research programmes, including cross-disciplinary endeavours.

The first point for using metatheory as a way of clarifying theoretical material is that a systematic and methodical reading of theory texts is generally acknowledged as good hermeneutical practice (Adler & Van Doren, 1972, pp.163-4) and, in principle, operates as a means to a better understanding of the texts. This kind of proceeding is often visible in the work of disciplinary historians (e.g. Guilhot, 2011; Schmidt, 1998; Suganami, 2001) and international political theorists (see Elshtain, 1995; Thompson, 1994). Providing commentary based on ‘detailed readings’ is, in fact, an explicitly
acknowledged goal of disciplinary history: it plays a fundamental role in guiding us towards a better view of the historical formation of disciplinary discourse (Schmidt, 1994, p.359; 2002, p.16) and of the development of specific theoretical notions (Holsti, 1998, pp.29-30). Moreover, detailed readings also enable us to critically see the implications of (mis)using theoretical material. According to Darshan Vigneswaran and Joel Quirk (2010, p.107), a key purpose of doing history of ideas in IR is to question “misleading and simplistic depiction of past authors and eras”. Chris Brown, Terry Nardin and Nick Rengger (2002, p.3) ascribe considerable relevance to this point especially in the case of “classical authors”, because they are “employed by contemporary theorists to articulate particular positions (...) but there is a danger that if they are studied only for this reason or in this context a misleading picture of their thought will emerge”. Outside the group of disciplinary historians and political theorists there is a similar support for the critical role of metatheory in the clarification of theoretical material. Particularly in the case of philosophy of science, distorted readings have enabled some IR scholars to ‘sustain’ their own metatheoretical argumentation and have ‘authorised’ certain moves that a detailed reading would not have enabled otherwise. Technical terms like ‘positivism’, ‘epistemology’ and ‘ontology’ “are often thrown around like philosophical hand grenades, with little consideration of how they are deployed, or to what end” (C. Wight 2002, p.26). This has been specifically shown to be the case when IR scholars employ the philosophical systems of Popper (Jackson, 2008, pp.134-8), Lakatos (L. G. Freire, 2008), Kuhn (C. Wight, 1996) and Bhaskar (C. Wight, 2006, pp.17-19) at their convenience. Obviously, the discussion of what makes a ‘close reading’ of texts which are open to interpretation and how we should validate exegetical claims also pertains to the metatheoretical realm. The discussion has emerged more than once, such as, for example, Schmidt’s (1994, pp.360-4; 1998, Introduction) defence of an ‘internalist’ reading against IR ‘externalists’ like Hoffmann (1977, pp.41-7) and Knutson (1997, p.6), according to whom external context such as the end of the Cold War and other features determine variation in theoretical thought. Another example is Colin Wight’s (2000, p.424) claim that Jacques Derrida’s philosophical text, to say the least, should clearly not be read as a handbook of French cooking, in response to Roxanne Lynn Doty’s (1999, p.390) view that all interpretations are equally valid. Regardless of the substantive answers provided to the hermeneutic question, metatheory provides the space for this kind of discussion in IR. Of course, argument over exegetical principles is seen as ancillary to the aim of clarifying theoretical texts.
Also connected to the use of philosophical material in IR, metatheory has been defended and employed as a way of studying the deeper discursive layers in which specific theoretical formulations are embedded. This second point is not so much about the interpretation of the philosophical background of political theory, as it is about how it hangs together with other theoretical discursive layers in which theory is embedded. Some, like Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (2005, p.17), even see in this a crucial procedure in “studying theory”. Illustrating an aspect of this approach, Edward Keene (2005) analyses modern international political theory as derived from deep philosophical and worldview commitments, and Patrick Jackson (2011, pp.41-187) looks at the implications of ‘philosophical’ and ‘scientific’ ontologies for theorising IR. In a recent edition of a well-known political analysis textbook (Marsh & Stoker, 2010), more than one author present the examination of theories in the context of deeper theoretical layers as a necessary self-reflective way of understanding how political science works. Gerry Stoker (2010, p.181) argues that “ontological and epistemological positions”, conceived as key metatheoretical topics of study, “are crucial because they shape what we think we are doing as political scientists, how we do it and what we think we can claim about the results we find”. Paul Furlong and David Marsh (2010, p.184, emphasis added) expand on this:

> Each social scientist’s orientation to his or her subject is shaped by his/her ontological and epistemological position. Even if these positions are unacknowledged, they shape the approach to theory and the methods which the social scientist uses (…). Because they shape our approach, they are like a skin not a sweater; they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the researcher sees fit (…). [A]ll students of political science should recognize their own [metatheoretical] positions and be able to defend them. This means they need to understand the alternative positions on these fundamental questions.

Marsh (2010, p.212) goes a step further and explains how we can notice these features operating in the case of structure-agency and ideational-material issues, and that “positions on all these meta-theoretical issues are clearly related and (…) influenced by the particular author’s ontological and epistemological starting point”. In a favourable assessment of post-Cold War metatheoretical discussions in IR, Sorensen (1998, p.92) admits that “metatheoretical debate in itself tells us next to nothing about substance”. Despite this, “every discipline needs a metatheoretical inventory and house-cleaning from time to time, because it always produces a number of fresh insights” that might be hard to grasp initially and, therefore, may require metatheoretical clarification (p.100). Considering the role played by metatheory in that context, a positive diagnosis
follows:

The IR community has a reason to be pleased with the metatheoretical and the substantial debate triggered by the end of the Cold War. The metatheoretical tools have been sharpened. There is much more clarity about the ontological and the epistemological bases for the various theoretical approaches.

The point is that, as previously discussed, metatheoretical adjustments of philosophical positions and other parts of theoretical discourse are able to constrain and enable specific directions in IR theory. Therefore, a metatheoretical analysis of the interaction between the several distinct parts may lead to a better understanding of the approaches themselves at the level of IR theory.

Finally, metatheory provides clarification in connection to the elaboration and assessment of theories cutting across research programmes, including cross-disciplinary 'bridges'. Consider the arguments for eclecticism in IR theorising. Dissatisfied with the isolation of research programmes in the field, key scholars now call for more open-mindedness to rival theories, with a shift to problem-oriented scholarship, rather than research aiming to defend a certain 'paradigm' (Lake, 2011). 'Eclecticism' is portrayed as the main vehicle for overcoming disciplinary fragmentation: it is a way of theorising “that seeks to extricate, translate, and selectively integrate analytic elements (...) of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of substantive problems that have both scholarly and practical significance” (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p.10). Although those in favour of this view are critical of the 'crystallising' effects that metatheory has in the field (Sil & Katzenstein, 2011, pp.481-2), they openly acknowledge that the metatheoretical domain is inescapable, and that we might as well use it in order to foster an 'eclectic' attitude (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, pp.25-37).

We must understand the ontologies and the epistemological principles at the core of paradigms if we wish to combine some of their elements to make sense of a given problem (...). In spite of the different metatheoretical foundations associated with various paradigms, it is possible to explore empirical issues and problems through eclectic, recombinant modes of inquiry that extract, translate, and creatively redeploy theoretical elements drawn from contending traditions (Sil & Katzenstein, 2011, p.482).

'Analytic eclecticism' illustrates the potential contributions of metatheoretical analysis in enabling inter-theoretical collages in IR, which require close attention to the 'infrastructure' of research programmes in the discipline, a proper interpretation of
theory in its original setting, an argument on how to adapt it and a set of claims justifying the move.

**A tool for understanding theories in the social world**

Context is extremely relevant in our analysis of theories, and, as we have seen, the use of metathtory as a tool for understanding the intellectual setting of theory is conceivably a positive contribution to IR. Nevertheless, there is yet another way in which the relation between theories and their setting pose extremely relevant metatheoretical questions. In this specific case, theories are seen as emerging within a context that may include, but certainly involves more than, ideational elements (or at least fully articulated theoretical discourse). Theoretical perspectives “derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space” (Cox, 1981, p.128). Not only that: theories also have a certain degree of impact upon that broader context, so that although we may not always expect theoretical contributions in IR to be cited and employed by government officials and civil servants in international organisations, we can still say that theories are part of social reality. In different ways, metathtorical analysis of theories and their context try to balance both sides of the equation: settings in which theories emerge and settings in which theories play a role as part of social reality. The importance of such ‘bi-directional’ analysis is well summarised in Holst’s (1998, p.46) statement that “scholarship is a part of the world, but is also a world of its own”.

There are obviously several levels at which this may be the case: theories emerge, and have an impact upon, very limited scientific communities; yet theories may emerge, and have an impact upon, a whole society at a given period of time. Although there are many different ways of understanding the influence of the social world on theories and vice-versa, in the case of IR the task has generally been faced by ‘constitutive’ and ‘critical’ theorists coming from distinct backgrounds. Constitutive theories “reflect on the process of theorizing itself” (Burchill & Linklater, 2005, p.12). Metathtory may, then, be seen as a tool of constitutive social theories. Simply put, a theoretical study of theory itself would play, at least in part, the positive role of enabling researchers “to analyse the different forms of [theoretical] reflection about the nature and character of world politics and to stress that these forms of knowledge do not simply mirror the world, but also help to shape it” (p.18). A similar role for metathtory appears in critical theory, sometimes predicated on the assumption that “theory is
always *for* someone, and *for* some purpose” (Cox, 1981, p.128). According to Linklater (1996, p.279), one of its key proponents in IR, “critical theory invites observers to reflect upon the social construction and effects of knowledge and to consider how claims about neutrality can conceal the role knowledge plays in reproducing unsatisfactory social arrangements”. By underlining the context in which theory emerges and the way it shapes reality, critical theory employs metatheoretical discourse in connection to its project of bringing about emancipatory change in society (Cox, 1981, pp.129-30). In fact, metatheoretical discourse connected to this aim has been called a kind of “moral and political imperative in both understanding the nature of theory and theory’s relationship with the world” (Zalewski, 1996, p.345). In order to exemplify how constitutive and critical IR theories employ metatheoretical considerations as a key resource, let us briefly look at some well-known instances in critical realism, gender-related perspectives and poststructuralist approaches.\(^\text{43}\)

On the critical realist side, an example is Kurki’s reply to Monteiro and Ruby’s (2009a, 2009b) critique of the philosophy of science debates in IR. Against the complaint that metatheory distances IR from politics for the reason that it pertains to a discursive order which is distinct from political discourse, she states that “drawing any direct causal links between PoS [i.e., philosophy of science] positions and specific political views is impossible, yet there seems to be something to the claim that PoS positions can be politically charged” (Kurki, 2009, p.441).\(^\text{44}\) To be sure, she agrees that there might be “a tendency to engage in a curious pretence of apoliticality in PoS debates in IR” (p.442). However, the problem according to her is that, in Monteiro and Ruby’s case (following Gunnell 1998), “philosophical argumentation is viewed as distinctly philosophical, not political, in nature”, which leads to a misapprehension of the issue. For Kurki, “ignoring the politics of PoS runs the risk of misunderstanding why PoS debates matter in IR and what is at stake in them, why PoS positions are often strongly (rather than merely tentatively) held and, crucially, why having a plurality of PoS positions around might be a good thing” (p.441). Colin Wight, another critical realist, has a similar view. According to him, despite the fact that looking at philosophy of science (or, more generally, epistemology) will not yield insight on the key to

\(^{43}\) Metatheoretical analysis of theories as parts of the social world and as emerging from it must not be seen as monopolised by so-called ‘critical’ approaches, even in IR. This we may gather, for instance, in John Vasquez’s (1999) extensive analysis of the role played by power-politics perspectives in political practice from a mainstream perspective.

\(^{44}\) For details on the negative views of metatheory in the debate triggered by Monteiro and Ruby, see Chapter 3.
understanding the disciplinary configuration in IR (C. Wight, 2009), another kind of metatheoretical exercise certainly will; namely, what he calls “ontological investigations” (see Kurki, 2009, pp.443-4; C. Wight, 2006, p.2). And politics is a crucial part of it because it is “the terrain of competing ontologies. Politics is about competing visions of how the world is and how it should be. Every ontology is political”. This comes as a response to idea that metatheory takes IR far from the political issues: metatheory may itself be one among many political battlefields. In Kurki’s (2009, p.451) words, metatheory is actually “an area where political debate in IR can be, in important ways, grounded”. However, for critical realists, there is more to it. Besides being itself a locus of politics, metatheory may also address the nexus between theories and the social world in that the former are “implicated in, and possibly determinative of, the construction of political and social worlds” (Wight, 2006, p.2). There is, then, a clear attempt to understand the role played by politics in the construction of theories and the role played by theories in the construction of politics.

While critical realists are perhaps more specific about the social contexts in which theories emerge and have an influence, gender-related perspectives have had a considerable impact on IR by highlighting how gender constrains and enables avenues of theory and practice. Feminist scholars Rebecca Grant and Kathleen Newland (1991, p.1) note that “the experience of most women” is excluded from the theory and practice of international politics. This is not simply a matter of facilitating access of women to political leadership and to academic professorships, but also something that directly shapes IR theories as such. IR theory, according to them, has “been constructed by men working with mental models of human activity and society seen through a male eye and apprehended through a male sensibility”. As a result, “the component ideas of international relations are accordingly gendered, because women and men experience societies and their interactions differently”. For Grant and Newland (p.5), moreover, the point is not to merely demonstrate how women have their voice excluded through the politics of IR theorisation. Politics also operates a step further, when theory ‘boomerangs’ into its social context:

The exclusion of women’s experience from the conceptualization of international relations has had negative consequences both for the discipline and for male and female inhabitants of the real world (...). [T]his exclusion has resulted in an academic field excessively focused on conflict and anarchy, and a way of practising statecraft and formulating strategy that is excessively focused on competition and fear.
Some of the critical scholarship that places gender at the central focus of research provides more specific insight on the relation between scholarship and political activism:

[F]eminist scholarship is characterised by a particularly strong impulse to reflexivity. This is because feminist scholars (like other critical theorists) understand knowledge as an expression of power and as socially and historically produced. In addition, as argued above, they have a unique identification with women's struggles and the feminist movement, which means they are, in effect, part of what it is they are studying. These twin commitments impel feminist scholars to interrogate their own locations, theoretical commitments and political impacts and to make these explicit in the exposition of their research (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2007, p.287, emphasis added).

Although the term 'metatheory' is not explicitly employed, this passage makes the point that some degree of metatheorising is helpful in the 'practical' world. This is yet another example of a positive view of metatheory with reference to the relation between theory and political practice.

Poststructuralist approaches share in many different ways a central concern for discursive constructions. Although theoretical discourse in the technical sense is not necessarily their core object of analysis, there is a considerable amount of poststructuralist research which in passing speaks of the role played by theoretical concepts in the construction and reproduction of the social world. “Theories of international relations”, says Rob Walker (1993, p.6), “are more interesting as aspects of contemporary world politics that need to be explained than as explanations of contemporary world politics”. Der Derian (1989, pp.6-7) makes explicit the role of metatheory in ‘intertextual’ poststructuralist inquiry, which is supposed to provide a critical analysis of the context in which theories emerge and are reproduced:

International Relations requires an intertextual approach, in the sense of a critical inquiry into an area of thought in which there is no final arbiter of truth, where meaning is derived from an interrelationship of texts, and power is implicated by the problem of language and other signifying practices (…).

In this intertextual approach, there is a considerable measure of metatheory, of theorizing about the theories of international politics. This allows for a form of preanalysis that disturbs the complacency of received knowledge, its self-evident relation to events, and the “naturalness” of its language. Through interpretation, metatheory promotes the transfer of theory from one historical context to another.

Cynthia Weber (2009, p.xxi) adopts a similar position in her proposal for an “alternative way of doing critical IR theory”, which should “examine not only how one ‘truth’ replaces another ‘truth’ but also how ‘truths’ get constructed”. The argument is that IR
theories emerge in discursive contexts that also include ‘IR myths’ or common-sense views about how society operates and that the nexus between such ‘myths’ and IR theory actually enables IR theory to seem quite plausible in light of the narratives embedded in popular culture. In short, according to Weber (pp.1-7), IR theories emerge from common sense and return to it, once they manage to articulate ‘myths’. The role of critical IR would be to go beyond “circulating a particular way of making sense of the world”: it should be metatheoretically attentive to “making sense of that sense”, so as to open up space for alternative voices by depriving the myth-oriented theories of some of their “apparent truth” (p.8).

Weber’s approach to IR theory as both emerging from a discursive context and coming back to change it represents a shared pattern in poststructuralist scholarship (see Ashley, 1995; Bartelson, 1995). Defending a view of theory as 'everyday practice’, Zalewski (1996, p.352) emphasises that one of the key roles of theory about theory in IR is to question the closure which emerges from ignoring the context in which theories come from and to which they go back: “if one believes that theory is everyday practice then theorists are global actors and global actors are theorists”. This move should change (or at least shake) one’s analytical priorities and plays a political role:

International politics is what we make it to be, the contents of the ‘what’ and the group that is the ‘we’ are questions of vital theoretical and therefore political importance. We need to re-think the discipline in ways that will disturb the existing boundaries of both what we claim to be relevant in international politics and what we assume to be the legitimate ways of constructing knowledge about the world.

The point, according to Zalewski, goes beyond a readjustment of analysis. Hard thinking about where theories come from and how they operate in everyday practice is needed, lest there be “a retreat to the comfort of theories and understanding of theory which offers relatively immediate gratification, simplistic solutions to complex problems and reifies and reflects the interests of the already powerful”. Walker (1993, pp.ix-x) denotes a similar attitude when he speaks of his own work. A critical approach to the role of discourse in world politics, including theoretical discourse, will be driven “by a sense of the need for alternative forms of political practice”. Poststructuralist metatheoretical scholarship is “to confront the disciplinary mainstream with the limitation of its perspectives in order that IR scholars and practitioners (…) be more capable of dealing with a world in which, more than ever, reductionist and grand theories, centred on crude dichotomies, are both inappropriate and dangerous” (George,
1992, p.33). In short: contrary to the claim that metatheory distances scholarship from practice and that we should leave it aside and tackle ‘practical’ issues, poststructuralists portray metatheoretical argument as crucial to understanding political practice and to opening up of political alternatives to the current state of affairs.

It must be noted, however, that the potential points of entry for metatheory as accessory to the critical approaches illustrated above – critical realism, gender-related perspectives and poststructuralist scholarship – do not imply that these approaches are merely metatheoretical in themselves. None of them claim that theories are the only way in which social reality is constructed. Social theories are indeed socially produced artefacts and they do interact with their objects of analysis. However, only in a hypothetical view of a social world fully constituted by theories would it be feasible to affirm a total correspondence between social theory and metatheory. But, then, there is no such view in the literature (Freire, 2009, p.8). In fact, critical theory in IR does not claim monopoly for the part played by theories in the construction of political practice. Other ideas, like popular culture and political discourse, are key objects of analysis in general, beside IR theories. Therefore, to say, for example, that poststructuralism turns IR into an exaggeratedly self-contained discourse as if IR theory and metatheory were exactly the same thing is a misconception. In conclusion, on metatheory as a tool of social theory, let me mention Guzzini’s (2000, p.175) point in the following story:

In a keynote speech to an Association of Economists, the chairman criticized the discipline for the little impact it had on actual politics. His speech was met with outrage. The audience recalled numerous examples of policies influenced by the discipline’s thoughts or main protagonists. After listening to these examples, the chairman addressed the floor by asking how it could be then, that so little research has been done on this link, why the discipline was not reflecting on its eminently social role.

The ‘research’ supposed to deal with the ‘link’ between ‘theory’ and its ‘impact’ on ‘actual politics’, which “would have helped to avoid the embarrassed silence which followed”, is a particular type of metatheoretical inquiry – a tool employed to understand the impact of theoretical thought on the social world.

Discussion
Some of the critiques of metatheory in IR are clearly countered by the defences of metatheory seen in this chapter. First, the claim that metatheory is a hindrance to our understanding of society and that it is intrinsically unrelated to the lower discursive
order of 'theory' is challenged on two accounts. On the one hand, because theories talk
about the social world and also constitute it, an overlap in function between both
discursive layers may well be possible, as seen in the case of critical and constitutive
approaches. On the other hand, the examples of neorealism and constructivism illustrate
that metatheoretical research has a theoretically productive potential that may be
actualised, thus opening up conceptual 'space' for novel theoretical approaches. In any
case, the claim that there is a crystallised clear-cut segregation between theoretical and
metatheoretical discourses does not hold water (see also C. Wight, 2009, pp.29-33).
Besides, theory and metatheory must also interact when it comes to theory appraisal and
adjustment (C. Wight, 2002, pp.25-6). Theory may exist without metatheory, but
arguing for theory appraisal and theory adjustment requires metatheoretical discourse.
Therefore, this point cannot be used against the existence of metatheoretical activity in
IR. Secondly, the complaint that metatheory has fragmented IR is countered by the
claim that metatheory is actually the particular discursive domain in which theoretical
(re)integration is to happen. Earlier examples of theoretical synthesis notwithstanding
(Waever, 1996), the explicit defence of metatheory on this issue is, to a large extent,
recent. Although there has not yet been much deliberate interaction between
representatives of the negative and the positive claims on this point, one can anticipate
the reasoning that whether metatheory has led to more or less theoretical fragmentation
in the discipline depends on specific cases. It is not an a priori claim. Analytically,
however, this simply cannot be used to expel metatheory from IR, considering its
enablement of theoretical integration. By definition, making the case for a given
theoretical ‘collage’ and building the ‘bridges’ between the original setting of the
theoretical material to be used in an amendment and the purported destination will

A third way in which negative and positive views of metatheory in IR clash has
to do with the complexity of metatheoretical discourse. One objection is that metatheory
itself makes use of confusing language. In response, metatheoretical debates in IR have
also been appraised in a positive light, with the specific claim that they have clarified
issues related to ontology and epistemology and helped understand emerging
postpositivist IR theories. Again, we face a contingent claim. In the past, some have
even argued, in defence of metatheory, that a certain use of jargon is unavoidable and
even welcome as part of the process of specialisation and professionalisation of the field
(Lieber, 1973, p.147). Another objection related to the complexity of metatheory is that,
in the importation of ideas from sundry fields, metatheoretical research in IR has brought confusion by sharing imprecise readings of the original material that has been imported. This is readily recognised by IR metatheorists (C. Wight 2002, p.26), but, as Colin Wight (2009, p.35) says: “I do not agree with the claim that metatheory is to blame; and even if it is, only metatheory can be the answer”. This is because, as we have seen, the contestation of (mis)readings and the clarification of theoretical ‘collages’ are, intrinsically, instances of metatheoretical discourse. So, once more, metatheory can be both the problem and the answer, depending on the situation. Finally, metatheory has been contested as something that distances IR scholarship from political practice. To that, metatheorists have answered that not all metatheory will be close to political practice, but some inevitably will, as we see for example in the case of studies on the relation between scholarship and activism. In fact, the very negative claim against metatheory fits into this category of metatheoretical analysis, for it involves 'systematic discourse about theory', but connected to political action. Such critique of metatheory is, to say the least, a performative contradiction.

In fact, at this stage it should be clear that each claim against metatheory in IR (except perhaps for the statement that 'metatheory is boring') is an attempt to systematically judge the merits and uses of metatheoretical scholarship. As we can see (Table 4.1 below), the negative assessments of metatheory analysed in Chapter 3 may be Internal/Intellectual, Internal/Contextual, External/Intellectual and External/Contextual.

Table 4.1 – Negative claims against metatheory (MT) classified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
<th>CONTEXTUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orders of discourse (MT vs. theory)</td>
<td>Different practices and expertise (MT vs. theory about the 'world')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT leads to fragmentation</td>
<td>Complexity of MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT ‘bridges’ from other disciplines decontextualise the original material</td>
<td>Teaching/understanding MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT as mask for ideology and assumptions</td>
<td>Teaching/closure MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MT and disciplinary politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Different practices and expertise (MT vs. political practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication to general audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching/social emancipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social impact of MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MT and scholarship as vocation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.
Moreover, the claims in favour of metatheory addressed in this chapter also fit into the scheme (Table 4.2 below). In an intuitive way, they reflect my own typology of metatheorisation introduced in Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May lead to new theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Assemblage' and refinement of theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image of theoretical debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of theory (internal configuration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-theoretical collage (in the discipline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Deep layers' of discourse (ideology, philosophy) driving theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-theoretical collages (from external discipline or philosophy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

Is this merely a coincidence, or is there a more general and fixed reason for the correspondence between my general notion of metatheory and the actual IR cases studied here?

Such questions lead me to a final remark on why metatheory cannot, and will not, be excluded from the discipline of IR: metatheoretical discourse is a condition of possibility for well-articulated, systematic and scholarly relevant critique of metatheory. I started this thesis with a definition of 'metatheory' as 'theory of theory' and then discussed whether it would be desirable to employ the term 'theory' in a very strict sense, implying full axiomatisation and strict formalisation of a hypothetical-deductive system. Following this discussion, I opted for a similar, but less technical, definition of 'metatheory' that corresponds to 'systematic discourse about theory'. Two implications were derived. Metatheory is a kind of theory, or a subset thereof. In addition to, and following from this, metatheory can also be an object of metatheoretical inquiry. I now return to both implications. In the analysis of the negative and positive roles played by metatheory in the academic discipline of IR, it becomes clear that the arguments themselves fall into the category of 'systematic discourse' about a specific kind of
'theory', namely, metatheory. In other words, the claims analysed here are of a *metatheoretical* nature. After an examination of the main points, we realise, inductively, that they fit into my typology of metatheorising. I now strengthen the case for metatheory with an *a priori* argument.

*Metatheory cannot, and will not, be excluded from the discipline of IR with the use of logical argumentation:* Metatheoretical discourse is a condition of possibility for well-articulated, systematic and scholarly relevant critique of metatheory. A relevant critique of metatheory draws on a certain systematic perspective on metatheoretical discourse. Therefore, regardless of specifics, the systematic perspective employed in critique of metatheory is, by definition, of a metatheoretical quality. It is 'systematic discourse about (meta)theory'. In short: the best critiques of metatheory are inherently metatheoretical. The worst (such as “I don't like metatheory”) are not worth considering at this level. From this, it follows that, not only the 'discursive-order' argument, but any other possible 'strong' attempt to fully eliminate metatheory from an academic discipline is doomed to logical failure, because it incurs in performative contradiction. The very process of arguing systematically against metatheory relies upon it in order to function. *Metatheorising is a transcendental condition for a critique of metatheory.* Therefore, I concur with Hollis and Smith (1990, p.42) that metatheory, as a critical space for self-reflection of a discipline, “is common to all social sciences”. In fact, every discipline has an actual or potential metatheoretical 'discursive layer' in it. The problem with metatheory in IR is not that it exists as such. The problem is that it has always been around, potentially or actually, but, in some cases, our engagement with it arguably has had a poor record.

**Interlude**

This section concludes part two of the thesis. The first part examined the IR literature defining 'theory' and discovered a basic overlap but general dissonance and diversity of views on theory in the discipline. As we saw, issues of theory evaluation, intellectual history, purpose of theorising IR and others pertain to an intermediate 'discursive layer' in the field. They make reference, on the one hand, to empirical research and to the IR literature, but, on the other, they go beyond IR and speak to philosophy, as well as general social science. This intermediate layer, defined as 'metatheoretical', was then expanded in its implications and manyfold aspects. This was undertaken from a more analytical perspective. Part two, then, proceeded to a more inductive assessment of a
wide range of IR arguments against and in favour of metatheoretical research. The claims were assayed according to their internal coherence. Negative propositions against metatheory are often in contradiction with each other. Moreover, both sides of the debate have been compared and contrasted. The positive claims, generally speaking, respond in a sufficient way to the negative arguments. Upon scrutiny, the problems with metatheory that remain are contingent, but duly noted in the IR literature. There are two key arguments established in this second part of the thesis. First, negative and positive views of metatheory generally fit into the typology of metatheoretical claims provided in part one. Secondly, this is not a coincidence, but illustrates the basic nature of metatheory as 'systematic discourse about theories'. In this case, specific kinds of 'theories' – namely, 'theories of metatheories'. 
PART THREE
Chapter 5

Metatheory and International Political Theory: The Holy Roman Empire in Early Modern Thought

Introduction
This thesis so far has addressed the role of metatheory in the academic discipline of IR. Following an analysis of different notions of 'theory' in the field, I have argued that the dispute over the use of theories operates at the metatheoretical level. Metatheory is the discursive space that enables a systematic analysis of theories in scholarship. We may metatheorise from either Intellectual or Contextual points of entry, and each of them allows for a focus on the chosen discipline of analysis itself or bridges between the extra-disciplinary environment to that discipline. When employed in IR, metatheoretical research often leads to controversies about its own parameters. There are positive and negative views on how metatheory has shaped the discipline. Not surprisingly, these views – as far as they qualify as 'systematic' – are themselves metatheoretical in nature. It follows, therefore, that the self-reflection of IR on the role of metatheory guarantees at least a 'minimum space' for metatheoretical research in the discipline. Since by logical and conceptual necessity it cannot be completely eliminated from IR, we might as well address some of its problems so that we may employ it in a more beneficial way. This improvement, in turn, should be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

In the remaining chapters, I turn to concrete 'illustration cases' in an attempt to further exemplify the relevance of metatheory. This I do with reference to three issues cutting across multiple sub-fields of IR. The first is a historical conceptual 17th century debate on what the Holy Roman Empire was. It should be of particular interest to research communities in International Political Theory (IPT) and historical sociology. Secondly, in the next chapter I compare three IR theories accounting for the same empirical event, the Peace of Westphalia (1644-8), and its alleged role in shaping the
international system. The 'illustration case' raises questions about how far theoretical arguments can be driven by metatheatreal elements, and may speak to those working on the connections between theory and history in IR. Thirdly, in the final chapter I provide an analysis of a theoretical issue with reference to aspects of IR theory and International Political Economy (IPE). Four distinct approaches to hierarchy in world politics are examined in terms of how their argumentation is constrained and enabled by metatheoretical elements. I also apply an 'overarching' framework of interpretation to them, one that was designed to find traces of 'Eurocentrism' in international theory. I ask whether the framework succeeds in this extended application or whether it would require some sort of correction. With these three illustration cases, selected for their diversity in substance and setting, I hope to highlight several starting points for further metatheoretical analysis, all of them listed in the conclusion.

In this chapter, I argue that metatheoretical elements can shape theoretical inquiry in a pre-disciplinary configuration. Metatheory is not the privilege (or, for some, loss) of an institutionalised discipline. However, I would like to qualify this statement with the claim that the way in which metatheoretical 'drives' shape theory in such extradisciplinary context differs from the way it usually functions in a well-established disciplinary environment. For example, there is no general understanding between the authors that they are operating in a very specialised discipline and that 'philosophy' would be an addition to it. Here I look at three 17th century political theory texts – written long before the institutionalisation of an IR discipline – and compare and contrast them in terms of how they understood the Holy Roman Empire as a polity. I ascribe much of the difference in the theorisation of the same object to their distinct assumptions, presuppositions and explicit or implicit metatheoretical directives. I still look at the Empire in the next chapter. However, the focus of that chapter is on how a selection of contemporary IR theories address the transformation of the Empire and European world politics triggered by the Peace of Westphalia. Although some of the themes overlap between this and the next chapter, the latter aims at detecting the impact of metatheory in a well-formed disciplinary context. In both cases I verify that metatheoretical directives have a certain constraining and enabling effect in theorising a common object of analysis. However, it is also remarkable that this effect does not depend upon the pre-existence of a well-defined academic discipline of IR, as it also applies to my selection of 17th-century accounts of the Holy Roman Empire.

One of the main goals here is to to understand, compare and contrast the views
of three 17th century thinkers on the Holy Roman Empire – Johannes Althusius (1563-1638), Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694) and G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716). It will become clear that each of these theorists has not only a different conception of the Empire, but also a different way of theorising it. The initial goal, therefore, is to provide a detailed interpretation. Another goal in this section is to check whether metatheoretical discourse has any impact on theory in this 'weak' disciplinary context by looking at the discursive 'infrastructure' of these theories of the Holy Roman Empire. This exercise requires me to understand how these theories vary against the shared background of references to the same object of analysis (the Empire itself), some of the categories employed to classify it (and other polities) and some of the normative concepts shared at that time (e.g. the mainstream Early Modern notion of undived 'sovereignty' popularised by the work of 16th century absolutist thinkers like Thomas Hobbes and Jean Bodin). The main claim advanced here with reference to this second goal is that the three visions of the Empire differ not only in their own terms, but also due to variations in their 'infrastructure' of assumptions, 'bridges' between general philosophy and political theory, normative presuppositions, and so on. However, and perhaps exactly on account of the lack of a formalised IR disciplinary framework at that time, the explicit component of metatheoretical discourse is considerably 'thin'. For this reason, I look for implicit commitments made by these theorists to both intellectual and contextual requirements of how to theorise the Empire.

In order to pursue these goals I focus mainly on one text by each of the writers – *Politica* (Althusius), *The Present State of Germany* (Pufendorf) and *De Suprematu Principum Germaniae* (Leibniz).\(^{45}\) The three works are prominent in many reviews of the historical literature on ideas of federalism in the Holy Roman Empire (Bazzoli, 1990; Eulau, 1941; Riley, 1976). Whenever there is need for further clarification, I cite additional passages from these authors and secondary literature, but the three texts above constitute the core of my analysis. Because I also search for implicit hints of directives about how each of these authors should theorise, I look at the conceptual background providing their respective platforms for writing about the Empire, as well as the contextual background that stimulated their writing in the first place.\(^ {46}\) Notice that I

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\(^{45}\) I have chosen contemporary translations for analysis Althusius (1995), Pufendorf (2007) and Leibniz (1984; 1988). The exception is Pufendorf's text, which is a hybrid of a 17th century translation and a contemporary correction. The reliability of these critical editions is discussed in my earlier paper focusing primarily on the exegetical aspect (Freire, 2011, pp.4-7). Whenever possible, I reference the section in the classical texts to facilitate verification in different editions.

\(^{46}\) This 'contextual background' is the setting directly relevant to my interpretation of the texts.
do not deal with 'context' based on a definitive statement of what the Empire 'really was', not least because in order to understand that polity we need first of all to understand how it was interpreted, theorised and classified by its contemporaries, which is part of what is at stake in my attempt to understand these texts in the first place.\textsuperscript{47} This is not so much a chapter on history or even 'history of ideas' (although it does help us interpret them), but rather a chapter illustrating the claim advanced in this thesis that metatheory does matter, among other things, by shaping theoretical discourse. In the specific instance of these three Early Modern texts, I suggest it also has an impact on IPT even before the emergence of the discipline of IR as we know it.

**The Empire as universal political association**

Althusius wrote about the Holy Roman Empire in the context of the so-called 'Dutch Revolt' against a centralising move by Spanish rule over the Dutch Provinces. Already by the middle of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, the issue of resistance to centralisation had acquired prominence in the local Reformed (i.e., Calvinist) opposition to the stimulus provided by the Spanish Crown for a more active Roman Catholic presence in the Provinces. Circulating in the format of 'resistance pamphlets', the political discourse of the 'Revolt' defended local liberties and ancient prerogatives against absolutist excesses, following the trend set in Reformed circles like France and Scotland (Grabill, 2006, pp.12-20; van Gelderen, 1993). John Calvin's *magnum opus* itself contained a full chapter on civil authority that argued in detail about the restrictive conditions under which local and organised resistance against tyranny could be legitimate (Calvin, 1585, Book IV, Chapter 20; see Stevenson Jr., 2004). The pamphlets of the 'Dutch Revolt' followed a similar line of reasoning. Althusius had a clear personal stake in the controversy. As a prominent member of the Reformed Church he was surely interested in the rationale for resisting in a legitimate way, without violating the normal requirements of obedience and public order as defined in the Reformed dogma.\textsuperscript{48} However, while the writer makes reference to the resistance against the Spanish Crown in his work, there are other aspects of the personal context that influenced his writing.\textsuperscript{49}

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47 But see Peter Wilson's excellent monographs (1999, 2008). Moreover, as will become clear in the next chapter about contemporary IR interpretations of the impact of Westphalia in changing the Empire and the European states-system, there is much disagreement on the 'facts' behind the issue even today.

48 Witte (2007, p.154) remarks that "Althusius's theory of resistance and revolt against tyrants was, in fact, textbook Calvinism".

49 The 'Dutch Revolt' is framed by Althusius as an exemplary instance of legitimate resistance by lower magistrates against tyrants (XVIII.83-4). Witte (2007, p.154) notes that a fully developed normative
(1603) spread Althusius' reputation as a legal scholar and he was eventually hired as the Syndic of the city of Emden with the task of leading the defence of its local liberties against several attempts of centralisation at the provincial level (Hueglin, 1999, pp.16-41). Also due to its proximity to the United Provinces and position in the Empire, Emden was a stimulating setting for the 1610 and the 1614 updated versions of *Politica*. By this time, Althusius could incorporate much of his professional background into the text (Carney, 1995, p.xii).

In *Politica* the Holy Roman Empire is simply an empirical illustration of the notion of 'universal public association' and its historical and legal development. The work draws on three points in order to link this conceptualisation to the Empire. First, it introduces the definition of politics as 'symbiosis'. Secondly, from normative implications of symbiosis and their predication on religious assumptions, Althusius derives a defence of societal plurality. This leads to the third point, the denial of any kind of absolute earthly sovereignty, considering the notion of a plurality of societal spheres relative to each other and to divine authority. This final point is a platform for a theory of sovereignty in the 'universal public association' illustrated by the Empire, a view emerging in clear contrast with the mainstream views of authority of that period.

The first step in the argument is the definition of 'politics' as symbiosis (or 'consosciation'). The whole book is an expansion of this concept, a procedure which can be noticed in the tree-like diagram elaborated by Althusius for both original editions of *Politica* (see Figure 5.1 below).50

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50 As I discuss later on, this is a clear indication of the influence of Petrus Ramus' philosophy.
Even a quick look at this diagram reveals that every additional concept and relation introduced in the argument – including that of the 'universal public association' illustrated by the Empire – is derived from the initial definition of politics as “the art of associating (consociandi) men for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them” (I.1). 'Symbiotics' is another name for politics. The metaphor, at the same time, presupposes no single individual can live in isolation and also affirms politics has to do with flourishing in cooperation of associated human beings.  

51 Life is 'cultivated' through distinct associations, which provide (or 'communicate') "whatever is useful and necessary for the harmonious exercise of social life" (I.2). Symbiosis is not an automatic phenomenon. It has to be sought – politics is an art that leads to the functioning of associations in such a way that they will properly 'communicate' these needs (I.6–31).  

52 Having defined politics in this way, Althusius proceeds to the next point. He assumes the divine origin of these needs and of the fact

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51 “God distributed his gifts unevenly among men. He did not give all things to one person, but some to one and some to others, so that you have need for my gifts, and I for yours. And so was born, as it were, the need for communicating necessary and useful things, which communication was not possible except in social and political life” (Althusius, I.26).

52 This is often implicit. For example, in his discussion of the role of 'lower magistrates' or 'ephors' as a 'check' on centralisation, as proper 'symbiosis' at the public association would require, Althusius (XVIII.123) denotes that in his view they are "most necessary for properly constituting a commonwealth", but recognises that some countries might not have this device available.
that they are distinct and irreducible to each other. From this diversity he derives the demand for a plurality of associations, each specialising in 'communicating' one need or irreducible sphere of needs (I.11-19).\footnote{The laws by which the communication of things, occupations, services, and actions is accomplished are those that distribute and assign advantages and responsibilities among the symbiotes according to the nature and necessities of each association. At times the communication regulated by these laws is more extensive, at other times more restricted, according as the nature of each association is seen to require, or as may be agreed upon and established among the members”. Here, Althusius (I.20-22) supports the argument with citations from St. Paul on the nature of cooperation in the church. He also mentions classical writers like Cicero and Plutarch on social interaction, and later on adds: “God therefore willed that each need the service and aid of others in order that friendship would bind all together, and no one would consider another to be valueless. For if each did not need the aid of others, what would society be? What would reverence and order be? What would reason and humanity be? Every one therefore needs the experience and contributions of others, and no one lives to himself alone” (I.26-7).}

Not only should they be 'specialised' in their sphere, these associations also have their own configuration of roles and internal authority, according to which we may list the following types: naturally founded associations (e.g. the family), civil associations (e.g. professional guilds, 'collegia') and public associations (e.g. cities, provinces and so on) (see Figure 5.1 above). This leads to the final point. It is remarkable that Althusius restricts each association to their own 'logic' of operation, level and scope of authority. For him, each of them has a God-given 'calling'. This is an argument for societal plurality under the assumption that no association has absolute authority over all issues and that all earthly authority is relative to God's sovereign providence.\footnote{In a passage on the rule of law, Althusius lists a number of 'relative' authorities giving 'direction' to their respective jurisdictions: “the navigator in a ship, the driver in a chariot, the director in a chorus, the commander in an army”, but the authority of “God” is over “the world” (X.8).} Moreover, limitation in scope is complemented by differentiation in level of authority. While strictly we should not speak of something like a family being a part of the State, we can indeed apply the notion of parts and wholes to associations of the same scope or issue (L. G. Freire, 2010; Ossewaarde, 2007, pp.113ff). We may say, for example, that there is a progression in size and level, from villages to cities and then to provinces (Althusius, IX.3). All of these public associations communicate 'public justice' and may well constitute several 'layers' of the final level, the 'universal public association' or 'realm' (Figure 5.2).
With these points in mind, Althusius shifts from abstract argumentation to its concrete application, illustrated with the Holy Roman Empire and other cases. He argues that, historically and legally speaking, the lower levels of the public association “existed prior” to the higher ones “and gave birth to them” (IX.3). Existing at the top level, the ‘universal public association’ is that in which “many cities and provinces oblige themselves to hold, organize, use, and defend, through their common energies and expenditures, the right of the realm (jus regni) in the mutual communication of things and services” (IX.1). That the Empire illustrates such ‘realm’ is clearly inferred, first, from the examples of lower-level public associations in Politica. The passage on 'cities' refers to German cities, whether 'free' or 'mixed'. Secondly, Althusius ascribes some cohesion to the Empire when he refers to “the German polity” as the higher level of public association to which these cities belong (VI.2-5). Finally, an Imperial oath of allegiance is extensively quoted as an illustration of a constitutional agreement setting forth the ‘fundamental law’ of the realm (XIX.39-49). The Emperor or “supreme magistrate”, in this example, is “he who, having been constituted according to the laws
of the universal association for its welfare and utility, administers its rights and commands compliance with them” (XIX.1). There is no doubt that the notion of 'realm' or 'universal public association' applies to the Holy Roman Empire. As a commentator says, it is the Empire that is depicted here in “a fairly accurate and practical model” (Hueglin, 1999, p.61).

This portrait of that polity also helps Althusius make his case for local liberties against higher-level political authorities. While maintaining the indivisibility of sovereignty – as most of his contemporaries would have it – he emphasises the bottom-up character of the Empire and all other 'realms' by taking issue with the absolutists and arguing it belongs to the “people, or the associated members of the realm”. And he adds: “all members joined together” (see IX.15-19). Who holds sovereignty, then? “The members of a realm”, he says, “are many cities, provinces and regions agreeing among themselves on a single body constituted by mutual union and communication” (IX.5). Thus, in the case of the Empire, sovereignty is an attribute not of the Emperor, but rather of the union of the several Imperial 'Provinces' which constitute the polity.55 Further driving the point home, Althusius denounces 'tyranny', that is, “the contrary of just and upright administration”, which, “violating both word and oath, begins to shake the foundations and unloosen the bonds of the associated body of the commonwealth” (XXXVIII.1; 3). This imbalance jeopardises 'symbiosis' and, therefore, should be resisted. The theory of resistance enriches Calvin's earlier argument in light of the Althusian notion of bottom-up federal authority (Murdock, 2004, p.73). Accordingly, resistance should be handled with order, under the leadership of lower-level magistrates with the support of the lower-level public associations.56 If need be, a 'Province' could secede from the 'realm' and even associate itself to another realm (XXXVIII.63-76). Following Althusius' death, with the rise of absolutism, his theory was soon forgotten, despite its prominence at that time (Grabill, 2006, pp.122-3). A generation later, it was Pufendorf's view of the Empire that gained notoriety.

The Empire as a monstrous political body

The Present State of Germany “was immediately recognized as a substantial critique of the empire”. There is not much information on the specific occasion of its writing. The text, originally published in 1667 under a pseudonym, “was accused of undermining the

55 This immediately contrasts with Bodin's absolutist view, popular at that time, as Althusius himself recognises (IX.20).
empire by attacking its unifying self-conception” (Seidler, 2007, p.xiii). Pufendorf was then a relatively unknown professor in Heidelberg. A couple of years before the first edition of the study, he had been assigned to defend the Palatinate in a political dispute beyond the local level, which “involved legal claims based on historical precedent, the relations of territorial sovereigns to one another and to the emperor, and appeals to external powers” (p.xii). Unsurprisingly, these elements also inform his discussion of the Empire, written in the condition of an analyst concerned with the lack of internal cohesion of what he saw as a moribund 'political body' at the mercy of external powers and internal rivalry.

Drawing on a historical review of the formation of the Empire, Pufendorf clarifies the origin of princely 'liberties' in Germany (I-V). Following this discussion, he proceeds to his attempt at classifying the polity in the most controversial chapter of the book (VI). The irregular character of the Empire defines it not as a democracy, aristocracy or monarchy – well-known categories of analysis at his time – but rather as a 'monstrosity' (see Schröder, 1999). The problem here is that “Moral Bodies” are analogous to “Natural Bodies” in that their “health and aptitude” derives from “the Harmony of their Parts and their Connexion or Union with one another”.57 Because “the German state contains something of Irregularity in it”, we should not expect to find this political 'body' in perfect 'health' (VI.1). The 'irregularity' does not refer so much to the individual parts of the Empire, which are clearly defined as monarchies, aristocracies and democracies. What makes the Empire a 'monstrosity', rather, is the fact that it does not fit into any of the three categories as a whole (Boucher, 2001). For example, those who refer to the Imperial Diet as a democratic forum not only wrongly conflate corporate (i.e. state) membership in the Diet with citizenship, but also forget that this would exclude many individuals who would otherwise qualify as citizens in any realm but are not members of the Diet.58 Moreover, the periodically assembled Diet itself is far from being a permanent Congress ruling the Empire, a fact that eliminates the possibility of classifying the polity as an aristocracy. Says Pufendorf (VI.5): “the Diet is not holden as a standing and perpetual Senate, which has the Sovereign Authority, and is

57 See David Boucher's (1998, pp.234ff) commentary for more on Pufendorf's view of the state as 'political body'.
58 “Now, if we could grant this, then the German Empire would be a Democrasie, whose only citizens are the Estates, who have every one of them a Right to debate and vote in the Diet, and the Emperor is the Prince or Head of the State. But [this] (...) would certainly be guilty of very great Absurdities: For, who can think that Freemen (and Gentlemen too) who have great Estates and Families of their own, and live in Kingdoms or Commonwealths, are not to be accounted Members of their Government, though they are admitted no share of the Government?” (Pufendorf, VI.3).
to direct all the publick Affairs of a State, ought to be; but has ever been call'd only upon special Causes”. The mere existence of this decision-making organ, therefore, does not necessarily turn the Empire into either a democracy or an aristocracy (see also Osiander, 1994).

At the time, some would say the Empire was an absolute monarchy based on theological speculation and questionable historical accounts of the link between the ancient Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. Both types of argument, says Pufendorf, “deserve rather to be hissed at than answered seriously” (VI.4).\(^5^9\) Another claim was that the Emperor's privileged ceremonial condition above that of other princes in the Empire would justify an absolutist reading of the institution. However, this asymmetry was also present in other non-absolutist places. Therefore, the privileged condition of the Emperor “gives him no more Absolute Authority over the Princes of Germany, than it gives to the State of Holland over the other Six [in the United Provinces]” for example (VI.6). If the Empire was no absolute monarchy, was it then a limited one? In critical dialogue with his contemporaries, Pufendorf notes that, although the Emperor has to respect the authority of the local princes, he is nevertheless not fully subjected to them, an idea he finds “absurd”, deriving from “Mistake” and “Fallacies” (VI.7). His opponents had argued that sovereignty in the Empire belongs to the states and not to the Emperor, and that he cannot act deliberately against the states. However, to that it is replied that the Emperor's accountability to the German princes emerges from mutual “Agreement” or “Covenant” of duties and rights, and not because they have more authority than the Emperor. Moreover, it is true that he cannot act without their consent, but they also cannot operate against the Emperor's will (VI.7). In short, the Empire was no limited monarchy either.

According to Pufendorf, the states “will obey the Emperor as far as he shall employ their Assistance and Treasures to the Publick Good, and as far as is expressed in the Laws; and that they will conduct themselves as agreeable and loyal fellow citizens toward the remaining members of the Empire” (VI.8). Regarding sovereignty and the states, and contrary to a monarchy in which no subject is comparable with the monarch, “none of the German Princes or States will acknowledg (*sic*), that the Dominions which are under them are more the Emperor's than they are theirs”. The Emperor, having no regular revenue, “is forced to live by his own Juice”. There is no proper Imperial army, “but every Prince and State disposeth of the Forces and Revenues in his own Territories,

\(^5^9\) More about this in the discussion section below.
as he or they think fit”. The princes were allowed to make their own alliances. They would not “hesitate to make war on, or treaties with other Estates or outsiders, without ever consulting the Emperor if he can trust to his own Forces, or those of his Allies” (VI.8). The Empire, therefore, was far from being a “Regular Kingdom”. It did not fit neatly into any of the widely accepted categories for classifying polities. “There is now nothing left for us to say”, concludes Pufendorf (VI.9), except that “Germany is an Irregular Body, and like some mis-shapen Monster, if, at least, it be measured by the common Rules of Politicks and Civil Prudence”.

If anything, the Empire tends toward a 'system of states'. In Pufendorf's work (e.g. 1675), this term, used interchangeably with 'confederate system' and 'association of states' (literally, a contractual 'society of states') applies to the Swiss Cantons and the United Provinces (see Roshchin, 2011), seen as an alliance or 'league' of states “in which one Prince or General of the League excels the rest of the Confederates, and is cloathed with symbols of royalty” (VI.9). A look at Pufendorf's (1710, p.511) later formulation on the concept of a 'system of states' should clarify the point:

When several States are, by some special Band (sic) so closely united, as that they seem to compose one Body, and yet retain each of them the Sovereign Command in their respective Dominions; these we term Systems of States (...). Of Systems properly so call'd, these Two kinds do especially fall under Notice. One, when two or more States are subject to one and the same King, the Other, when two or more States are link'd together in one Body by virtue of some League or Alliance.

A system, in Pufendorf's view, is not the same as an 'irregular body'. Neither is it a unitary 'body'. Since the Empire seemed to tend toward the second type of states-system, then it should function harmoniously as such for the sake of preserving its own existence. However, the Empire was not really a 'system of states'. It only had the potential of becoming one more easily than a unitary monarchy, if only states stopped to impose their wills on each other and balance against each other. It was still an 'irregular body'.

The problem was that the Empire as a body was “attack'd by furious Diseases”. On the one hand, the Emperor wanted to centralise it. On the other, the local princes demanded “perfect Liberty”. As a consequence of such lack of cohesion, their “foreign allies” had the unprecedented “ability to mould Germany to their own particular Interest and Wills” (VI.9). The internal distinctions between each type of sub-imperial political unit also displeased Pufendorf, “so that Germany cannot even be regarded as a well-
ordered system of confederates” (VII.8). As a prescription for reform, two things should be taken into account. First, Pufendorf did not believe in the existence of any concrete external threat to Germany, although the polity was certainly weakened in the multidirectional alliance-making between its members and foreign powers.60 Thus, secondly, it would only be a matter of rearranging the Empire into a system of states with the provision that the Emperor must not “aspire to Soveraignty” (sic) over the internal princes (VIII.4). As recent research on 17th century political rhetoric indicates, the Ottoman Empire was the main candidate to an external threat to Christendom (Almond, 2010, pp.1-5; 163; Wilson, 2008, pp.76ff). It would, therefore, make sense to undertake a more detained analysis of its relative strength and potential courses of action. Pufendorf studies military and geopolitical capabilities of the 'threat' but concludes that “there is no great reason for the Germans to fear them” (VII.4). Instead, the greater threat to the Empire is the irregularity or 'monstrosity' of the political 'body' itself. As we shall see, Leibniz begged to differ. He did not see any problems in that 'irregularity' and arranged much of the argument around the notion that the Emperor was a leader of Christendom against what he perceived as the great Ottoman 'threat'.

The Empire as a union and state

For Leibniz, the main immediate goal is “the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty in a way which would allow the minor German princes to be treated as sovereigns” (Riley's commentary; Leibniz, 1988, p.111). Employed by the Duke of Hanover as a kind of official historian, Leibniz had the daunting task of justifying the Duke's right of legation independently of the Emperor's representatives.61 Hanover's “primary problem”, writes a commentator, is that “Westphalia conferred sovereignty upon all those German rulers who had formerly been included in the Holy Roman Empire; however, it had not abolished the traditional, essentially feudal, structure of the Empire itself” (Knutsen, 1997, p.91). The challenge for several middle-sized states in the Empire was to obtain a right to diplomatic ties and representation while restraining the same access to even smaller political units. Having a 'ticket to foreign policy' was a very important aspect of Early Modern European statecraft, not least because the institution

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60 Notice, however, that a few decades later Pufendorf would express concern with the hegemonic rise of France, especially after the Edict of Nantes (1685). A similar negative perception of France as a potential threat was voiced by other German Protestant authors of the period (Saunders, 2010, pp.214-23).

61 The immediate goal was to secure representation in the peace negotiations in Nijmegen (Eulau, 1941, p.655).
of diplomacy was strongly predicated on ceremonial precedence and its more substantive implications (Black, 2010, pp.43-84; Roosen, 1980). In addition to this, another contextual element influencing Leibniz's writing was his political preference for a stronger role for the Emperor as “the secular arm of the universal Church” (Leibniz, 1998, p.111). The perception that Papal and Imperial authority and leadership had been undermined by the Peace of Westphalia was a clear concern (Knutsen, 1997, p.91). In fact, the philosopher took up ecumenic reconciliation between Catholics and Protestant as his personal project, with political implications (Kenny, 2006, III, p.71). It was Leibniz's (1988, p.112) belief that “one cannot refuse to Caesar some authority in a great part of Europe, and a species of primacy analogous to the ecclesiastical primacy”. This reflects “his constant emphasis on Christian unity in the face of the Ottoman threat” (Almond, 2010, p.7). Therefore, the case for the rights of local members of the Empire ought to be made in a careful manner, lest Imperial authority be challenged to an even greater extent.

In order to accommodate both goals, the argument goes to great lengths before defining the Holy Roman Empire as a sovereign state and, at the same time, a 'union' of sovereign 'regions' and other reasonably sized units with right to legislation. Key to this reasoning are, first, the differentiation between distinct political units and their juridical properties and, secondly, the introduction of a notion of sovereignty as a divisible category. The first type of political unit mentioned by Leibniz (p.114) is the 'state', “a fairly large gathering of men, begun in the hope of mutual defense against a large force, such as is usually feared, with the intention of living together, including the foundation of some administration of common affairs”. A 'city', in turn, “would seem to require cohabitation such that the citizens can easily assemble when the call goes out” and, therefore, is much smaller as a political unit. A 'dominion' is “an area of inhabited land served by a common administration” and a 'region' is more or less similar, only much larger in size. A 'province', finally, exists “when a region is part of another still larger dominion”. Size of territory, however, is not the only feature of differentiation between them. Although sovereignty also depends on territory, it is important to take into account the juridical qualification of this and other resources mobilised by a given polity.

Landeshoheit, or 'territorial hegemony', mentioned at the Peace of Westphalia (1648), entails, first, a 'jurisdiction', that is, “the right of deciding cases or of handling

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62 Thanks to Iain Hampsher-Monk for the 'ticket' metaphor.
down judgments, and of coercing obstinate private persons” (p.115). Secondly, it involves 'mild power of coercion', “being able, when necessary, to use force on stubborn people”. Finally, it means having the right to 'military might', “when it is in the power of the one holding this right to assemble a military force which is sufficient for keeping the whole dominion in its duty”. Territorial hegemony is “the highest right of coercing subjects” in this vein and encompasses “full discretion to command all other things”. A line is drawn, therefore, in terms of resources, between small polities with no 'diplomatic ticket' and those middle-sized units with a right to legation: “territorial hegemony”, being “the highest right of forcing or coercing”, is the kind of authority confirmed for units which exercise 'supremacy'. These are the “larger powers which can wage war, sustain it, survive somehow by their own power, make treaties, take part with authority in the affairs of other peoples”. Such right should be “honored by the other major powers (...) as brothers and persons of equal condition (although, perhaps, of lesser power by a considerable degree)” (pp.116-7). To sum up thus far: despite the fact that there are several different polities in the Empire, each with their own control over certain resources, we may still speak in a nuanced way about types of rights that each of these properties entail. Such is the method employed by Leibniz in order to argue that some of the middle-sized units, like Hanover, were allowed to make their foreign policy while the smaller ones were still excluded from the privilege.

What about the relation between these units and the Emperor? It is here that the creativity of the argument lies. Unlike what Althusius and Pufendorf assume, says Leibniz, sovereignty is divisible, and is shared by both Emperor and the polities of the Empire. “Several territories”, he argues, “can unite into one body, with the territorial hegemony of each preserved intact”, provided each region keeps their right of having soldiers, making foreign treaties and the right to arms and conscription (p.117). Since “the German princes can do all of these”, their union into one body does not imply local loss of sovereignty. Each 'region' retains 'supremacy'. The Holy Roman Empire is not a mere 'confederation' of sovereign states with no sovereignty of its own, but rather a 'union' and a 'state' itself:

A confederation is entered into by words alone and, if necessary, forces are joined. For a union, it is necessary that a certain administration be formed, with some power over the members; which power obtains as a matter of ordinary right, in matters of great moment, and those which concern the public welfare. Here I say exists a state (p.117).
In his assumption that sovereignty is divisible, Leibniz manages to defend, at the same time, the majesty of the Emperor, influenced by the thinker's desire to keep Christendom under a single political head, and to make the case for Hanover's right to legation and foreign policy-making (Freire, 2011, pp.21-2). By implication, he also engages in sharp criticism of the traditional view of sovereignty as an indivisible property.\textsuperscript{63} There are several cases, like the Swiss Cantons and the United Provinces, for example, in which empirical reality attests states in the form of 'unions'. Divided sovereignty is, in fact, the rule and not an exception, even in the most centralised states of that time, such as England, Spain and France (Leibniz, 1988, pp.118-9).

The notion of a union of states being more than Pufendorf's 'system of states' or the traditionally accepted category of a 'league' or 'alliance' was, according to a commentator, a major innovation in this contribution to the theories of federalism in the Empire (Riley, 1976, pp.21; 25).\textsuperscript{64} Although there are many additional implications to this view of the Empire as a union and a state (see Elazar, 1987, pp.8-10), it is clear that the move allows Leibniz (1988, p.111) to address some of his concerns with the 'bigger picture'. Arguing that the Emperor was not only sovereign in the full sense, but also “the born leader of Christians against the infidels”, he also assumes that Imperial sovereignty allows the leader to constrain “those turbulent men who, without regard to what is permitted and what is not, are disposed to sacrifice the blood of the innocent to their particular ambition” (p.112). Internal cohesion is particularly relevant for the sake of keeping Christendom protected from the external threat of the Ottoman Empire. Contrary to Pufendorf, Leibniz saw in the Ottomans a very powerful and disciplined polity capable of doing great damage to Germany. They were not only 'infidels', as he writes, but also “barbarians, who err in whichever direction you might choose” (p.120). The emphasis on sovereignty, right to control military resources and the statehood of the Empire as a union was Leibniz's plea for the suspension of the internal differences as a condition for resisting external attacks. Shortly after, the Holy Roman Empire would indeed suffer from prolonged hostile relations with the Ottomans.

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Hobbes' fallacy lies in this, that he thinks things which can entail inconvenience should not be borne at all – which is foreign to the nature of human affairs. I would not deny that, when the supreme power is divided, many dissensions can arise; even wars, if everyone holds stubbornly to their own opinion. But experience has shown that men usually hold to some middle road, so as not to commit everything to hazard by their obstinacy (…). In the German assemblies, too, not everything is transacted by majority vote, but some matters require unanimity, all of which cases would seem anarchy to Hobbes” (Leibniz, 1988, p.119).

\textsuperscript{64} The single relevant theorist to anticipate it was Ludolph Hugo, who had also worked for Hanover.
Metatheory in international political theory

I turn now to my analysis of metatheoretical elements involved in the views formulated by Althusius, Pufendorf and Leibniz on the Holy Roman Empire. My typology of metatheoretical research, set forth in part one of the thesis, refers to Intellectual and Contextual research on theory. These two types of inquiry combine, in turn, with two domains. They may be Internal or External to a chosen academic discipline. Most part of the analysis below focuses on the Intellectual side and is, not surprisingly, based on considerations External to the field of IR. Such limitation on possible uses of the types of metatheory is explained in at least three ways. First, I have deliberately selected a case pre-dating the academic discipline of IR in order to assess the impact of metatheoretical elements on theoretical investigation. The expectation for this 'control-case' is that metatheory indeed matters, although the lack of a well-defined disciplinary context does make a difference. For one thing, there is no way to analyse the intra-disciplinary elements of either Intellectual or Contextual analyses. The remaining possibilities, therefore, are those of metatheory focusing on Intellectual and Contextual points outside the discipline of IR. Secondly, there is only so much one can do in terms of Contextual research in the case of the material selected for this chapter due to the limited quality of the information on the immediate occasions of writing.\textsuperscript{65} We are, thus, left with the Intellectual aspects which are external to IR as an institutionalised discipline. It is here that I concentrate the analysis. But, then, thirdly, this should suffice to illustrate the relevance of metatheoretical elements even in an ill-defined (or, rather, undefined) disciplinary context.

Before proceeding to the analysis of these three Early Modern theories of the Holy Roman Empire in terms of their intellectual elements, let me explore as far as possible the Contextual side of the study. At least two 'drives' exerted some influence on the parameters of these theories of the Empire. First, there were immediate Contextual elements with an impact on theorisation. Althusius makes a clear apology of the Dutch resistance to Spanish rule as a relevant specific instance of just war and resistance against tyrannical rule. His practice as Syndic in the Imperial city of Emden, as well as his use of local examples further corroborate the link between the immediate context of writing and the way the Althusian theory of the legitimate limits of the 'public association' is set forth. In fact, “he intended to achieve for Emden exactly what the

\textsuperscript{65} Obviously, specialised commentators are expected to arrive at a considerably detailed description of at least the \textit{wider} context of writing.
Dutch provinces had achieved”. His political theory was meant to be “a blueprint of political organization” (Hueglin, 1999, pp.36; 41). While Althusius was specifically interested in the dynamics of domestic resistance as a way of ensuring the harmony of ‘symbiosis’, Pufendorf and Leibniz wrote a generation later, and after the Thirty Years War. As a result, they were instead more concerned with the Empire and its fragmentation. The tone of Pufendorf's work is highly polemic, including the fact that it was initially published under the pseudonym 'Monzambano'. It is said that this move enabled him, “so far a relatively unknown professor whose fame stretched only to the local level”, to navigate “the waters between those defending the well-established absolutist centralism and those partisans of an accumulation of prerogatives in the hands of the estates” (Huesbe Llanos, 2009a, p.38). This helps account for why Pufendorf, disguised under a pseudonym, interrupts his argumentation on several occasions in order to contrast his view with alternative theories of the Empire that he strongly rejects. As seen before, in the case of Leibniz, he had clear directives from his employer that he should theorise the Empire in such a way as to ascribe to Hanover the right to legation in the Peace of Nijmegen (1678-9). He had also a 'grand design' for a unified Christendom against the Ottomans. According to several legal scholars of that time, the dissolution of the Empire (and not its permanence) would probably lead to peace and justice (Nijman, 2004, pp.20-33). Leibniz, opposing them, “seemed to be the only one who argued in favour of its continued existence” and even emphasised its status as a political body and international actor (p.43).

So much for the first Contextual point. The second point is wider and has to do with the authors' religious backgrounds, which arguably influenced not only their specific writing on the Empire but also their political theory as a whole. Religious background should be acknowledged as an extremely relevant feature to be considered in the analysis of ideas produced in the Holy Roman Empire of that time, given the sharp religious distinctions triggered by the Reformation and the wars of religion.

66 The main one being that of Bogislaw Chemnitz (1605-1678), whose work on the Empire was published right before the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia under the pseudonym Hippolitus a Lapide. Chemnitz was employed by the Swedish Crown, which had an interest in a weaker Empire. He defended the supremacy of the lower magistrates and princes over the Emperor (see Seidler's note in Pufendorf, 2007, p.169).

67 France would be a key player in the Conference and was refusing to recognise the right to legation of the smaller Imperial states. This also helps explain Leibniz's (1984) parallel text on the same subject, written at the same time, but in French and in a pamphletary format as a fictitious dialogue. In this parallel text, he argues: “Sovereign or potentate is he who is master of a territory powerful enough to become relevant in Europe, both in peace and in times of war, for treaties, arms and alliances” (freely translated from Frémont, 2003, p.234). For a commentary, see Frémont (1996, pp.164ff).
Althusius stands out as the only Reformed Christian (i.e., 'Calvinist') in the group. Emden was predominantly Reformed, but the Reformed faith was only officially recognised in the Empire decades later, in the Peace of Westphalia. The Reformed communities saw church discipline on doctrine (defined by their official confessional documents) and behaviour (also codified in the confessions) as the key to their identity (Wilson, 2008, pp.36-8). “Reformed Christians were kept in check by their local church consistories regarding both conduct and beliefs. If Althusius (who, later on, became himself a member of his local consistory) publicly practised or taught anything against the Reformed confession, he would be in trouble” (Freire, 2011, p.24). 68 Calvin himself, as well as the Reformed confessions emphasise civil obedience as a normal state of affairs in Christian life and allow a small, but important, exception for the case of 'tyranny'. This certainly matters here, for Althusius (e.g. XXXVIII.76) not only argues in detail about how damaging an expansion of power by the ruler of the 'universal association' is to society, but also emphasises that resistance to tyranny must be just, legitimate and organised under the leadership of 'lower magistrates'. Writing decades later as Lutheran humanists, Pufendorf and Leibniz seem to be more comfortable in their exploration of controversial ideas. Their theories have a more secular tone. However, both indicate the desire to see stronger political coordination in Christendom. Having worked in Heidelberg, another predominantly Reformed city, Pufendorf (2002) became more aware of details in Calvinist theology and tried to reconcile several points of tension between the Reformed and the Lutheran confessions. He argued for a unified Protestant church in the Empire comprising both Lutherans and Calvinists. 69 Leibniz provided “sharp criticism” (Zurbuchen, 2002, p.xvi) and adopted an even more 'ecumenical' stance, defending a unified Christian church and polity (see Dören, 1992, pp.205-10). He was a Lutheran “with Catholic sympathies”, rejecting “anti-Catholic” political theologies that were so popular in Protestant circles (Almond, 2010, p.11). Such 'drive' behind his theory of the Empire is ascribed to his “personal theological-political ideal of a reunified Republic of Christendom” more than anything else (Nijman, 2004, p.43). Thus, religious background is another relevant Contextual factor

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68 Althusius was successful keeping his theory within confessional limits. Murdock (2004, p.73) confirms the strictness of church discipline in Emden, and Witte (2007, pp.152; 199) registers 1617 as the date for the election of Althusius as a church elder, after several editions of Politica were widely available and their contents verified. Moreover, he was not required to stop writing, having published Dicaelogicae (1618), his theory of justice, during his position as an elder.

69 Zurbuchen (1998, pp.419-21), however, believes Pufendorf's Protestant inclinations and anti-Catholicism should not be overstated or become the controlling factor in the interpretation of his theory of the Empire.
shaping these theories.

Having dealt with the Contextual elements that may help us understand some of the features shaping theoretical argument, I turn now to a more detailed analysis of several ways in which these theories are Intellectually shaped by metatheoretical principles. These discursive mechanisms are either implicit or explicit. On the 'implicit' side I detect two types of metatheoretical 'impulse': the issue of 'parts and wholes' and the issue of 'how to theorise'. On the 'explicit' category I highlight the intellectual influences and authorities acknowledged by the authors themselves (and to whom they react in their works), as well as efforts of 'bridge-building' between their broader philosophical positions and the specific theories of the Holy Roman Empire.

On the first implicit element – the issue of parts and wholes – it is clear that each of the authors relies upon implicit assumptions on the nature of reality applied to their object of analysis. Pufendorf and Leibniz adopt a more individualistic approach than Althusius. They understand the Empire based on their view of the interacting parts. In fact, for Pufendorf, a key problem with the Empire as a political 'body' is that its parts often interact in a conflicting way. This prevents it from becoming a 'system of states'. Although the hope for a strongly centralised Empire is gone, Pufendorf still expects several of the problems to be corrected if only the contracting states begin to interact like a proper system. A system of states is not simply a set of interacting parts. The set itself may be either a 'monstrosity' or a 'system'. It is, rather, the quality of the interaction of the parts that affects what the Empire becomes as a whole. Leibniz, in turn, not only believes that some irregularity in the internal relations of a polity is empirically the norm (rather than exception), but also argues that the Empire is in itself a state, and more than just the sum of its parts. In his scheme, Germany is a union of territories, and not a mere confederation or 'system'. This idea that a union of states with a permanent administration constitutes more than a mere 'system of states' is a key element to later notions federal states. A more unique view is adopted by Althusius. He spends a great deal of time distinguishing between the inner qualities of each type of association. While we may speak of villages, cities and provinces in terms of a certain hierarchy of parts and wholes, we must not read a 'universal association' like the Empire as a set comprising every single association in its territory. Strictly speaking, professional guilds, churches and other associations which do not have a 'vocation' to promote public justice with the 'power of the sword' are wholes in themselves, distinguished according to their respective 'vocations'. For example, the (religiously
qualified) local congregation is a part of the 'Classis' and then 'Synod' of the 'Church', an association with similar qualification. It is not a part of the 'Empire' as a polity (L. G. Freire, 2010). In a mathematical figure of speech for each conception of the Empire, if Pufendorf's keyword is 'addition' of parts, the Leibnizian operation consists in 'integration' into a larger whole and the Althusian counterpart would be that of 'differentiation' of several wholes.

Not only are there concealed assumptions about the ontological relation between parts and wholes, there are also implicit principles on how to theorise. First, there seems to be a 'hidden' presupposition about what one should make of Jean Bodin's (1530-1596) notion of sovereignty as an indivisible property, a highly prestigious argument at that time. Althusius and Pufendorf show 'due respect' to Bodin's theory when they cite it, although their conclusions are considerably different to those of Bodin. Leibniz, in turn, is rather bold in his introduction of the notion of a relative view of sovereignty, rejecting the common use of Bodin's concept in Early Modern political theory and enabling new possible claims about federalism and divided sovereignty.

Secondly, in their 'way of theorising' the authors implicitly reflect metatheoretical directives provided by two 'schools of thought' of their time. Althusius was a follower of the rules of scholarship established by the French Reformed logician Petrus Ramus (1515-1572). The 'Ramist school' had a widespread reputation (Plett, 2004, pp.56-7) and its influence may be distinguished in Althusius by the schematic organisation of the arguments in categories, from the most general to the most particular. In fact, his book contains diagrams – another Ramist trait – indicating how each subject addressed in the theory is a branch of a more general tree, until we arrive at the most basic category, that of 'politics' itself (remember Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Thus, a common critique of his style has to do with this “rather tiresome methodological dichotomizing and hairsplitting” (Hueglin, 1999, p.19) which was, nevertheless, rather usual among other Reformed scholars. The other two writers were under the influence

70 I quote from the first English edition of the Logike, dating from 1574 (XV, pp.94-5). “The chiefe examples of the methode are found in artes and sciences: in the which although the rules be all generall, yet they are distinct by there degrees (sic): for every thing as it is more generall is first placed. The most generall therefore shalbe first placed: the next shall followe these which be immediately cõtained under the general, every one orderly unto the most specciall which shalbe last disposed. The definition therefore as most generall, shalbe first placed: next followeth the distribution, which yf it be manifold, and of divers sortes shalbe first divided into his integ rall partes, next into his formes and kindes”. For Ramus (pp.100-1), breaking these rules by “having some degrees of the order inverted” would “mutilate” the method and “deceive the auditor”, which is “preposterous and out of all good fashion and order”.

71 Another well-known example can be found in the writings of Puritan theologian William Perkins (1558-1602).
of a mathematical version of humanism, and this entails a series of implications for their 'way of theorising', not least following the more geometrico – the principle that an ethical system should be deduced from basic axioms imitating Euclidean geometry.72

The popularisation of this particular kind of secular and geometric humanism has been portrayed as a reaction to the political, religious and intellectual problems emerging from the 17th century crisis that culminated at the Thirty Years War (Toulmin, 1990, pp.70-2). Pufendorf's text is described as having “a strong philosophical subtext” in “the mutuality of theory and practice, a strong empiricism or realism, and opposition to scholastic categorization and argument” (Seidler, 2007, p.x). He employed a “hypothetical resolutive compositive method” (Boucher, 2001, p.564), in which propositions about the Empire are derived 'from below', from the nature of states, which, in turn, are derived from his argument on human nature (Eulau, 1941, pp.657-8).

As a commentator puts it, his thought follows a proposal to “regulate relations among men, things, persons, communities and their conditions and particularities according to mathematical principles” (Huesbe Llanos, 2009b, p.435). He “attempts to derive the conceptual construction” like an edifice of propositions derived from basic axioms (Huesbe Llanos, 2009a, p.35). A similar metatheoretical 'impulse' can be seen in Leibniz. His argument for the legitimacy of a strong and sovereign Empire is predicated, via a long chain of reasoning, on his notion of justice, later systematised in terms of his 'universal jurisprudence' (Nijman, 2004, p.37). The 'way of theorising' justice in his political thought posed a dilemma clearly influenced by the more geometrico. On the one hand:

Throughout his life Leibniz was tempted to assert that principles of justice, as 'eternal verities', had the same status as A = A or 2+2=4, and for an obvious reason: one of his great hopes was that of reducing all complex propositions to their simplest form, to primary and irreducible concepts whose predicates were clearly contained in their subjects (Riley, 1988, p.5).

However, on the other hand Leibniz was also worried that justice, which had to be promoted by true statecraft, if defined strictly in this mechanistic way, would allow little room for human agency. Therefore, despite trying to define it “simply in terms of harmony, or proportion, of rations as precise as any in mathematics” he also came to the conclusion that a dynamic aspect of “action” should be added to it (pp.4-5). If we look

72 Huesbe Llanos (2009, p.435) traces Pufendorf's choice back to his interaction with the ideas of mathematician Erhard Weigel (1625-1699), who “transposed the mathematical-demonstrative method to Moral Philosophy”.
at these implicit 'metatheoretical' principles such as the writers' dialogue with Bodin's theory and the 'schools of thought' that they adopted, we are further able to understand the nature of the diversity of these theories speaking of the same object.

The implicit metatheoretical elements driving these three views of the Holy Roman Empire in Early Modern political theory that I have selected for analysis have to do with underlying assumptions about parts and wholes and about how one should proceed in theoretical thought. Turning now to what is clearer in the texts themselves, a first point relates to the Intellectual influences shaping each respective argument. There is, for example, the role played by the biblical text. Citations abound in the work of Althusius, who not only employs them as authoritative sources and normative perfection (taken in context), but also as referring to historical illustrations of his own points.\textsuperscript{73} Pufendorf (VI.6) demonstrates great knowledge of the bible, but opts for not deriving much argumentation from that source. Instead, we can notice, for example, his negative use against contemporary monarchists who defended the idea, based on their interpretation of the Book of Daniel (7.1-28), that the Empire was strong enough to last until the end times.\textsuperscript{74} Biblical citations also have a low profile in Leibniz. However, unlike Althusius, and with Pufendorf, he highlights his spite for contemporary colleagues. He says that, among his peers, he “lacks the aid of good writers” (1988, p.114). Pufendorf, as well, denounces his peers for “the careless compilation of others' opinions as a 'new book'” (VI.1) and for rushing “to comment on public law with little or no knowledge of civil affairs” (VI.3). Lack of empirical or practical knowledge is also an objection raised by Leibniz against them, who “have only eyes for what is ancient” and whose experience “supposing they have any – does not go beyond the gates of the tribunals” (1988, p.113). This is important, because both him and Pufendorf avoid building an argument based on pre-established conclusions of deductive scholasticism, except where they find them relevant. Thus, for example, Leibniz (p.115) cites a dictum by Baldus de Ubaldis (1327-1400) on sovereignty.\textsuperscript{75} Some are puzzled by

\textsuperscript{73} In fact, the subtitle of his work is “Politics... illustrated with sacred and profane examples”. Sacred meaning 'taken from biblical narratives'. Althusius evaluates “the polity of the Jews” of the Old Testament as being as near perfection as it could possibly be, although he was controversial for defending the idea that different circumstances of his day would require distinct applications of the same Old Testament principles (Elazar, 1996, p.314).

\textsuperscript{74} Daniel's prophecy alludes to a kingdom that will last forever. Issue is taken against Dietrich Reinkringk (1590-1664) in particular, who had defended the idea that the Holy Roman Empire was the eternal continuation of the Roman Empire. But notice Pufendorf's mode of argumentation, laying more emphasis on historical information than biblical. He cites Hermann Conring's (1606-1681) thesis that the introduction of Roman law into the German Empire was fairly recent.

\textsuperscript{75} According to Leibniz (1988, p.115), Baldus “used to say that hegemony inhered in a territory as the mist to a swamp”.
Althusius' much friendlier reception of contemporary works and classic Roman Catholic scholasticism (McCoy & Baker, 1991, pp.53-5; Witte Jr., 2008, p.153). However, this is not necessarily to say that he himself subscribes to the scholastic method. Instead, his adhesion to the Ramist intellectual movement better accounts for his critical engagement with contemporary and past authors of a different persuasion. Following Ramus' (1574) advice, he cites them where they agree with him, in order to make the point that the thesis can be maintained even by those who start from distinct assumptions.76 In these traits, we can see yet another aspect of how the authors follow their respective 'schools of thought'.

Besides drawing on a clear dialogue with, and antithetical counterpoint to, several intellectual authorities, the theories of Althusius, Pufendorf and Leibniz were also formulated by bridging between their respective philosophical positions as a whole and specific political theory in this particular case. Again, the Ramist principles followed by Althusius were extremely relevant starting points. His discussion of the Empire is only an illustration of a general treatise on politics, where he tried to defend the subject as an independent discipline. A key rule of scholarship established by Ramus was that “each art or science has its own purpose” and that anything beyond a given field should be parsimoniously excluded from the investigation in that field (Carney, 1995, p.xvii). “Althusius fully endorsed this principle. In fact, it became the backbone of his contention that political science had to be established as a separate discipline” (Hueglin, 1999, p.74). Another rule requires one to place an argument immediately next to the category to which it belongs. Following this metatheoretical directive, Althusius finds in 'symbiosis' the most general starting point of political science. “The unique methodological contribution here (...) lies in an unprecedented determination of the political” (Hueglin, 1999, p.79). The author “was quite aware of this”, having reviewed and dismissed alternative starting points available at the time.77

Although this 'bridge' between philosophy and special theory in Althusius requires extra work on his intellectual background, in Pufendorf and Leibniz the 'bridge'

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76 In his theory of 'logic', Ramus (1574, XXII, p.66-68) has a prominent place for citations of “testimonie humaine”, including “famous sayenge” (sic) and “sayenge also of wyse men”. Says Ramus: “So Christie hymself, the Apostles, and Evangelistes do conferme their doctrine, by the laue of Moyses: the Phisicians, by the auctoritie of Hippocrates, Diosconides, Galen, and suche others: the lawyers, by Iustinian: and the mathematicians, by Euclides”. This is a clear Ramist trait, and an example of “only novelty” of Ramus' approach to logic compared to his contemporaries (Kenny, 2006, III, p.12).

77 Part of this decision also involved including private associations (families, for example) under 'political science', when they were sharply separated from the subject (Althusius, III.42).
is easier to identify. Pufendorf's 'monstrous' Empire is an instance of 'irregular polities', which in turn are degenerations of the 'civic body'. This thinker is well known for his definition of the personality of states as not merely a legal fiction, but rather “a real autonomous moral person with the capacity to will, deliberate and pursue purposes” (Boucher, 2001, p.567). Sovereignty is, in Pufendorf, “the soul that animates the person of the state” (p.569). The state, in turn, emerges in conformity to the law of nature: human beings promptly realise their natural impulse towards cooperation. They also require safety and enforcement, which is “best achieved when backed by the power of the state” (p.565). Therefore, an 'irregular polity' with a 'sick' soul ultimately prevents human beings of unfolding their full potential in cooperation. Pufendorf's critique of the 'monster', in short, is closely linked to his broader philosophical views (see also Huesbe Llanos, 2009, p.433).

Finally, we can notice a similar 'bridge' in Leibniz as well. In his hands, the notion of sovereignty, for example, suffered “an extreme downgrading” due to his philosophical “emphasis on charity, welfare, and reasonability” elsewhere (Riley, 1988, p.26). While he clearly acknowledges the relation between power and sovereignty, he also noted that power must go together with reason. This conjunction – as opposed to its separate parts – “is not only the foundation of beauty and justice, but of true statesmanship” (p.24). Indeed, “nothing” in his political theory “is more important than benevolence”, which he connects to 'justice'. For this reason, he urges wisdom and virtue from rulers, who should “devote all their efforts to the public welfare” (p.25). Moreover, his view of a state (and, by implication, a union of states like the 'Empire') was extremely individualistic. This is also a clear consequence of his philosophical assumptions, given that his metaphysics only allows for the reality of the individual (p.26). As a result, unlike Pufendorf, Leibniz did not ascribe 'legal personality' to the state (Griard, 2007). To sum up: another metatheoretical element that 'drives' and differentiates their theorising is the fact that, in these studies on the Holy Roman Empire, Althusius, Pufendorf and Leibniz bridge between their respective philosophical formulations and their specific use in political theory.

**Final remarks**

The main concern in this chapter was to provide the first illustration of a series on how metatheoretical elements may shape the study of world politics. For this initial analysis,
three Early Modern theories on the Holy Roman Empire have been selected, expounded and then compared. In harmony with the typology of metatheoretical research introduced in the previous chapters of this thesis, I have based the analysis on Contextual and Intellectual 'drives' behind the formulation of each of those theories. My analysis of the Contextual elements, accidentally constrained in depth by the quality of information on the immediate contexts, still yielded a number of points about the occasions of writing and the religious background of the writers. On the Intellectual side, I have noted implicit and explicit metatheoretical elements. The first implicit 'drive' identified was that of how each of the authors relied on ontological assumptions about wholes and parts and applied them in their theories. The second 'drive' had to do with the 'ways of theorising': their reaction to an implicit 'rule' of that time that Bodin's well-established concept of sovereignty should be followed, and the 'schools of thought' that shaped their theories. Generically speaking, these are views on 'how to do political theory'. Both implicit intellectual 'drives' help us account for why these theories speak in similar terms about the same object and yet are so different. This, however, was also complemented in this study by an analysis of two explicit intellectual 'drives' behind each theory. The first 'drive' clearly present in the texts is the quality of the interaction with classical and scholastic authors, including biblical material. Their respective views of intellectual authorities, in turn, may also be traced back to each author's subscription to a certain school of thought. The second 'drive' relates to the way in which the writers bridge between their general philosophical theories and their specific theories of the Holy Roman Empire.

The purpose here was to illustrate the relevance of metatheory with reference to a historical conceptual debate that pre-dated the establishment of an institutionalised academic discipline of IR. This initial example was specifically designed to address the concern that everything I have been claiming throughout this thesis is contingent upon the existence of a well-established academic discipline. In response to this possible objection, I have highlighted several ways in which contextual and intellectual 'drives' have shaped pre-disciplinary theories of world politics. The differentiation between theories focusing on the same object of study occurs, to a large extent, in function of these contextual and intellectual 'drives'. I must, however, clarify the nature of my response. First, I do not claim that the impact of such 'drives' has a similar nature as it would have in a disciplinary context. The fact, for example, that it is not possible to apply the distinction between metatheoretical analysis inside and outside the field,
stands out as a key missing element in a pre-disciplinary or non-disciplinary case. In order to further clarify this qualitative difference, I suggest in the next chapter that a comparison between contemporary IR theories of the transformation of the Holy Roman Empire and the European states-system could yield relevant results also with reference to the distinction between Intellectual and Contextual elements Internal and External to the field. The first qualification, then, is that although metatheory may still matter in the absence of a clear disciplinary context, we should not expect its impact to be of the same quality as that which occurs in an institutionalised discipline. Secondly, by Intellectual and Contextual 'drives' that shape theories in different ways, I do not mean a deterministic impulse, but rather a 'constraining and enabling' effect. The fact that Althusius was a Ramist shapes his discourse in a certain way, but another Ramist could have theorised the same Empire following the same metatheory and arriving at a different conclusion. This is sufficiently clear in this study when we notice differences between Pufendorf and Leibniz, both following the 'more geometrico', or same generic 'way of theorising'. Thus, the argument that metatheory shapes theory should not be confused with the stronger claim that metatheory determines theory.

Apart from completing the first illustration of roles played by metatheoretical elements with this case, a 'spillover' result emerges, which should particularly interest research communities in IPT and historical sociology. In pursuing the goal of highlighting roles played by metatheory in the historical conceptual debate selected for analysis in this chapter, my own procedure has made use of metatheory at another level. IPT scholars metatheorise in this way, when they study similar historical conceptual debates in light of the Contextual and Intellectual elements shaping the theories that they analyse. In my own scheme presented in part one of the thesis, this would be a hermeneutical and/or historical 'way of metatheorising'. Political sociologists, in turn, might be interested in how Early Modern ideas on world politics shaped the practice of world politics and could, therefore, benefit from a metatheoretical analysis of these ideas. In this case, however, the Contextual study would have to be reversed to cover the impact of theories on their setting, instead of what I have done in this study (i.e., context-to-theory). In my typology, this would be metatheory as a 'tool' of social theory, and could be employed in a critical way. There are two key conclusions here. One is that metatheory may indeed have an impact on theory even in a weak or non-existent disciplinary context. This impact is distinct from the influence it would have in an institutionalised discipline. We shall see several differences between one configuration
and the other in the next couple of chapters. The second conclusion is that this study of historical theories, being itself a metatheoretical study relevant to IPT scholars and political sociologists, illustrates at another level how metatheory can help their field in IR by shedding light on theories and their contexts.
Chapter 6

Metatheory and Theoretically-Oriented History in IR:
Narratives on the Peace of Westphalia

Introduction

The Peace of Westphalia (1644-8) is one of the most cited historical events in IR, often with reference to the role it allegedly played in shaping the current international system. The discipline subscribes to a traditional narrative that frames Westphalia as the 'big bang' of modern world politics. The 'classic' account, still found in textbooks, can be traced back to its initial stage of formation in close dialogue with international law. It basically involves the idea that the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück (1648) at the same time fragmented the Holy Roman Empire into a set of independent and autonomous states and undermined papal authority in Germany. The new standards of world politics laid down by the settlement allegedly prescribed a broader society based on the principles of non-intervention, secular international law and an anti-hegemonic balance of power. From Europe, these norms would, then, be imposed by the great powers on their colonies or otherwise absorbed by the periphery of the international system, thus leading to a global society based on universally shared norms of sovereign statehood – the world we have today (see Kayaoglu, 2010, pp.193-4). More recently, however, a revisionist body of literature has emerged in IR which challenges the assumption that this single event in history accounts for the constitution of modern world politics. Though it lacks theoretical uniformity, the new 'revisionism' shares on its diverse fronts the impulse to critique traditional historical claims on the role and relevance of Westphalia. Studies range from factual clarification (Carvalho et al., 2011; Krasner, 1993) and outright 'iconoclasm' (Beaulac, 2004; Osiander, 1994, 2001) to a qualification of the Westphalia narrative embedded in wider theoretical claims.

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79 For classical statements, see for example, the oft-cited paper by Gross (1948), Morgenthau's (1948, pp.161; 210) textbook and Herz' (1959) widely read study. For more recent works, see for example Watson's (1982, p.105) treatise on diplomacy and Held's (1995, p.21) use of the phrase 'Westphalian model'. Most of this literature is self-referential and advances claims sustained almost exclusively by secondary sources. For a recent overview of the classical narrative and its transmission, as well as new material found in recent textbooks, see Carvalho et al. (2011, pp.738-45) and Schmidt (2011).
(Havercroft, 2012; Strauman, 2008).

In this chapter I analyse three well-known texts on Westphalia. Adam Watson's *Evolution of International Society* presupposes the classic story and incorporates it into an English School comparative study of the operation and modification of several international orders in history. Aware of how IR has challenged this traditional account, Daniel Philpott attempts to retain some role for Westphalia in his *Revolutions in Sovereignty*. Philpott's 'soft constructivism' portrays the event as the closest we can get to an all-encompassing 'revolution' leading to the implementation of many of our contemporary principles in political practice. In his view the 'conventional wisdom' on Westphalia can still be maintained. Benno Teschke, on the other hand, draws on a contrasting theory that asserts the primacy of material relations. He sharply criticises what he calls *The Myth of 1648*, defending instead the notion that, if it led to any changes at all, Westphalia would be a marker for the consolidation of a pre-modern dynastic states-system, not a modern international society. In my analysis of these three key IR studies on Westphalia, I advance two claims. The first is that such distinct accounts of the same event relying upon the use of different theoretical approaches are shaped by distinct metatheoretical 'drives'. For example, the assumptions indicate why the relation between theory and history in IR cannot be addressed in pure 'factual' terms alone. The second claim is that, besides shaping historical-empirical research on the role of Westphalia, metatheory also plays a role in our study of these narratives (including my own), and can help address a number of issues pertaining to the theory-history complex in IR scholarship. For most part of this chapter, though, I look in depth at each of the selected studies and their metatheoretical assumptions. Following that, I address the second concern more briefly, and in light of some of the IR literature critical of the traditional story on Westphalia.

**Westphalia, legitimate authority and anti-hegemony**

Watson's approach draws on earlier English School theorising in Martin Wight's (1977) *Systems of States* and in Hedley Bull's (1977) influential book, *The Anarchical Society*. It also incorporates some of the ideas introduced in a volume edited by Bull and Watson (1984) on *The Expansion of International Society*. The aim is to compare several states-systems in history, asking whether (and how) they have influenced our contemporary system (Watson, 1992, p.1). Simply put, a system operates when political units are “sufficiently involved with one another” (p.13). According to Watson (1990, p.104),
order and authority in states-systems can be understood in terms of “a notional spectrum between absolute independence and absolute empire”, where both extremities are ideal-typical, or “theoretical absolutes”, and “do not occur in practice”. Fully independent states are the ultimate authority defining domestic and external policy. Even though, ideally, they would be guided by individual calculation, practical pressure and constraints of systemic interaction eventually lead them to consider the system as a whole (Watson, 1982, pp.1; 45). They may decide that hegemonic authority is beneficial in the sense of providing a framework for a smoother operation of the system. Hegemony exists when a political unit (or a group of powers) leaves others internally independent but has some control over inter-unit relations and the operation of the system (1992, pp.14-15). Dominion, in turn, involves imperial control over both external and domestic affairs of other units to an extent, although they also retain some of their autonomy. The last category – empire – is “direct administration of different communities from an imperial centre” (1990, p.105). All international systems are organised in terms of these patterns of hierarchy.

Understanding how such arrangements operate and change in each system is important because it helps us compare and contrast historical cases. Unlike Wight's earlier framework (see Watson, 2008, pp.79-80), which assumed a clear-cut distinction between regular and suzerain systems, Watson's (1992, p.15) spectrum allows for a wider range of relations of authority and subordination in world politics. Suzerainty, “a vaguer concept”, is only one among these other markers on the spectrum, and involves “overlordship” that can be formally agreed upon by others in the system or merely by “acquiescence”. Moreover, he also stipulates that international systems tend to a hegemonic organising principle on the spectrum (1990, pp.105-6). He portrays the spectrum as “an arc, with its midpoint at the bottom of the pendulum's swing, somewhere between hegemony and dominion”. This is, of course, a metaphor for describing “the tension between the desire for order”, more easily attained via hegemonic authority, “and the desire for independence”, which contests excessive accumulation of prerogatives by hegemonic powers. If we pay close attention to the way the pendulum swings in each historical case, we may obtain a more dynamic conception of the operation of international systems. But patterns of order and change in hierarchy are just one side of the theory. The other side is reflected in Watson's concern for the role of community and culture in international order. Shared values, rules, custom and other elements are normally integrating forces in a system. By being part of a
community, political units will tend to operate within the same core institutions and parameters, going beyond arrangements of convenience in merely procedural matters (1992, pp.16-17). Moreover, there are interplays between community and ordering principles. For example, when a powerful external actor enters into a sustained pattern of hegemonic interaction in the system, the cultural clash between the hegemon and the others considerably affects the system as a whole. Another example is the role played by shared cultural norms and practices constituting what counts as a legitimate relation of authority in the system.80

Watson's theoretical framework becomes clearer as he proceeds with the empirical comparative analysis of states-systems. Following a series of studies of world politics in the ancient world, he raises “provisional theoretical deductions”. For example, systemic involvement in “a web of economic and strategic interests and pressures” leads to the development of “some set of rules and conventions” regardless of a shared cultural background (1992, p.120). If, on the other hand, there is such background, then we should expect it to deeply affect the institutional outlook of the system, as well as its movement across the spectrum of authority, thus pushing shared rules beyond a merely procedural status, in order to include “shared values and aspirations” (pp.121-2). Systemic stability, especially when an hegemon manages the system, involves more than a “balance of material advantage”. It also requires some level of agreement on the legitimacy of the pattern of organisation (pp.130-2, see note 6).81 Preparing the way for his discussion of Westphalia, Watson (pp.138-50) establishes Europe's cultural coherence by looking at norms and institutions in medieval Christendom. However, these “were not devised to manage the pressures of a system”, for rule and interaction was “too diffused” and “too local”, thus preventing us from defining that community as an international system (see Watson, 1992, p.151 note 6). It was rather the impact of renaissance humanism on political culture and practice – and its diffusion from Italy to the rest of Europe – that turned it into a system of states (Watson, 1992, pp.152-68). Its position on the spectrum was close to 'multiple independences', and there were evidences of an emerging balance-of-power rationale.

However, the de facto power exerted by European absolutist rulers still required

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80 “The rules and institutions and the accepted practices of a society of substantially independent states need legitimate authority to ensure habitual compliance” (Watson, 1992, p.17).
81 Summarising some of his preliminary conclusions, Watson postulates: “Legitimacy pulled the management of a society of states or communities towards the point along the spectrum where the communities concerned felt most comfortable. In so far as it influenced the way a society was managed, it was usually a force for stability and continuity” (1992, p.130).
stability and legitimacy. To complicate things further, argues Watson (1992, pp.169-76), the Protestant Reformation divided Europe into two religious factions, each with their respective political project. Loyal to Roman Catholicism, the Habsburg Emperor attempted hegemonic rise. Protestant politics, which were not originally “directed against hegemony in the states system”, became “anti-hegemonial because of the commitment of the Habsburgs to the Catholic side”. In Germany, many local princes combined feudal customary law with Lutheran aspirations to resistance. The 16th century witnessed violent wars of religion in the Holy Roman Empire, until the Peace of Augsburg (1555) placed the power to determine official religion in the hands of local princes. Catholic France, however, joined the anti-hegemonic side against the Emperor, thus stressing the desire for a balance of power pulling the system towards the 'multiple hegemonies' end of the spectrum. This pattern, however, still reflected no 'grand systemic design' and, therefore, no “consciously anti-hegemonial international society” (p.178-81). New wars of religiously-based alliances emerged, in particular the Thirty Years War. Indeed, it was the Peace of Westphalia that put this pattern to an end and provided systemic legitimacy to anti-hegemony as new organising principle, turning it into the “constituent legitimacy of the European society of states”. Moreover, the settlement “legitimised and standardized” the Renaissance practice of independent and sovereign statecraft, previously adopted on an ad hoc basis (pp.195-6). The systemic pattern was reconfigured from rigid leagues and alliances to anti-hegemonic legitimacy. For the next few centuries, common diplomatic practice in Europe would involve, like Westphalia, 'congresses' of representatives of several polities after major wars and frequent shifts in the formation of alliances.82

The Evolution of International Society heavily relies upon ideas advanced by the British Committee on the Theory of International Relations, the early English School's main forum of discussion. Watson himself was a key figure in the Committee and worked closely with Martin Wight, Herbert Butterfield and Hedley Bull in the development of a unique view of the link between history and international theory (Dunne, 1998). One of the metatheoretical principles of the Committee was that “theory is a product of practice” and that the history of practice should be employed to develop theory. The group drew on the assumption that in order to understand the contemporary world we need “some sense of how international societies developed and operated in the

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82 On post-Westphalian congresses of great powers following an English School perspective, see Clark (1989).
past” (Buzan & Little, 2009, pp.ix; xii). The main source of these principles for the Committee, in turn, was the work developed by 19th century scholar A. H. L. Heeren (1760-1842). Watson develops his formulation in dialogue with the research output of the Committee under the inspiration of Heeren's historiography and conceptual framework.\(^3\) On other sources, Watson is eclectic and avoids too much theoretical discussion, IR texts included. Although Watson adds his own contribution to the framework of the English School, most of the metatheoretical drive of the work can be traced back to the principles advanced by his colleagues in the Committee. We may speak of at least two sets of directives in this regard. First, there are points referring to the nature of historical inquiry and its relation with international theory. Secondly, there are elements of a view of the nature of social interaction and its historical formation in terms of order and change at the international level.

On the first set of metatheoretical directives – Watson's view of the relation between theory and history – we can identify at least three points. To begin with, there is the issue of historical parallels and comparison. Providing a comparative and historical analysis of states-systems in the past with a view to how they helped shape our current world is, in fact, the key aim of The Evolution of International Society. This concern is specifically visible in the discussion on Westphalia. Notice, for example, how Watson (1992, p.196) concludes his evaluation of the role played by smaller polities emerging from the fragmentation of the Holy Roman Empire:

More than a hundred small principalities (...) were invited to the negotiating table and acquired a sacrosanct quality of sovereignty (...). They all participated independently in the diplomatic dialogue (...). The concept of independence for a similar multitude of small states in our present international society, formed from the fragmentation of empires, and their presence at the permanent congress of the United Nations, has evolved from the Westphalian settlement and bears an inherited resemblance to it.

The teleological and comparative character of this passage is clear in the historical parallel drawn between the Westphalian order and the post-colonial order established in the 20th century. This illustrates the first point pertinent to the relation between theory and history in the work.

Secondly, by building analysis based on historical parallels, Watson (1992, p.1) indicates the inductive and empirical character of his intellectual enterprise,

\(^3\) In Watson's work, Heeren's name is mentioned several times not only in connection to 19th century Great Power politics, but also to the theoretical notion of a 'states-system': “Bull and I were impressed by Heeren (...)” (Watson, 1992, p.7).
although research will always require a theoretical approach. Despite the comparative inclination, the author is careful enough to require, first, a contextualised understanding. States-systems need to be analysed “in their own individuality and on their own merits” before we compare them. When we look at Europe before Westphalia, for example, we must look at its “unique and individual nature”, for “only in that way can a historian understand it and perceive its original features” (p.135). However, we should bear in mind that Watson is – and, before him, so were Butterfield and Wight – unimpressed with merely descriptive empirical study (Buzan & Little, 2009, pp.xxii-xxiii). For one thing, information needs to be organised and employed within a framework. Thus, we are advised to “limit our attention to those aspects which concern the relationship between different communities, and which have contributed to our present principles and practices” when we research the complex array of factors in the European trajectory between the Middle Ages and Westphalia (Watson, 1992, p.138). For another, beyond the particularities of each historical states-system, we need general categories that will allow us to compare them. Watson's constant reference to legitimacy and the spectrum between empire and multiple independences is a clear indication of this. Most of the systemic change ascribed to Westphalia in The Evolution of International Society is that the settlement crystallised a type of dynamic alternation between legitimate multiple independences and illegitimate attempts at hegemony on the spectrum.

In connection to this, the third point on the relation between theory and history has to do with how this relation occurs in concrete terms with reference to the early English School. Watson derives most of his framework of analysis from Wight's (1977, pp.21-45) directives on how to study historical states-systems in a comparative fashion, including the suggestion to interpret European history as a succession of hegemonies – not multiple independences as mainstream IR theory would have it. Wight suggests that comparing relations of authority and legitimacy across states-systems may be particularly fruitful for a theory of the states-system. He also takes Heeren's (1834) classical view of a 'system of states' as the starting point, emphasising the role that shared ideas and cultural values can play in international order.84 It has been argued that this framework was introduced by Heeren as a counterpoint to the supposedly 'atheoretical' and descriptive history practised by some of his contemporaries – the kind of history rejected by the English School (Buzan & Little, 2009, p.xxiv). As we have

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84 Needless to say, Heeren's 'romantic' (organic) approach does not share such cultural elements with the Early Modern (contractual) conception of 'states-system', such as the ones analysed in the previous chapter.
seen, most of Watson's narrative about Westphalia revolves around relations of authority and legitimacy, but, under the influence of Heeren and Wight, the cultural and ideational side is also present. For example, he provides a lengthy account of the clash between the medieval framework of Christendom and the new humanistic ideas on statecraft first introduced by Italian Renaissance. The point is that Westphalia gave more strength and legitimacy to *de facto* humanistic practices and marked the end of the political application of the medieval worldview. The latter, in turn, had already been weakened by the fragmentation of Christendom in an internal revolution (or 'stasis') in any case – a struggle that culminated in the Thirty Years War. By proceeding in this way, Watson incorporates some of the early English school directives on how to study history, as well as some of the influence of Heeren's historiography, which stressed precisely the need for a theoretical framework of analysis.

In addition to the claims on the nature of historical inquiry applied to the formulation of international analysis, we may also highlight some of the deeper assumptions behind Watson's view of order and change in international society. Most of the argument is phrased in terms of a kinematic analogy of a pendulum swinging across a continuous spectrum of categories of relations of authority and legitimacy.\(^85\) This is a highly dynamic view of social interaction – a snapshot of international society will reveal a certain position on the spectrum, but a proper historical approach will account also for the way the pendulum moves. Another device that stresses this dynamic view is the metaphorical notion of 'tightening' and 'loosening', which Watson (1992, pp.16-17) employs with reference to the cohesion of a given international society. It has to be said, though, that while the pendular movement has a clearly illustrative character, this latter figure of speech assumes the reality of social cohesion as a key element to political order. On the spectrum of authority and legitimacy, we are reminded that while useful, some of the categories of analysis should not be employed in too rigid a manner. They are ideal types, “no more than broad categorizations which cover a considerable range of distinct individual phenomena” (p.13). On the other hand, the theme of expanding values, norms, rules and institutions from the 'core' of international society to its periphery is, perhaps, the closest we get to identifying this implicit assumption. The 'tightening' and 'loosening' political order is thus understood according to a dynamic view and seems to rely upon the notion that there is indeed a social mechanism of

\(^{85}\) “A useful metaphor for a theory of systems is the pendulum. Imagine our spectrum laid out in the form of an arc, with its midpoint at the bottom of the pendulum's swing, somewhere between hegemony and dominion” (Watson, 1992, p.17).
cohesion in operation.

This leaves room for considerations on the kind of social ontology to which Watson subscribes. Given the prominent role played by cultural elements and ideas in this mechanism of cohesion, a radically materialistic outlook is out of question. However, it has to be said that the approach developed in *The Evolution of International Society* is more sensitive to certain material aspects than most of the early English School texts. Reflections on military advantage, as well as territorial and economic elements are not entirely absent. The aftermath of Westphalia is portrayed as a major shift in the balance of power as a result of the Thirty Years War, new modes of taxation and redistribution of jurisdictions (Watson, 1992, pp.195-202). In addition to this, Watson (pp.214-227) also looks at the dynamics of colonialism and what it represented for the overall pendular movement in the spectrum of authority. Nevertheless, in his view, material features, albeit relevant, are not sufficient to account for the operation of international society. The ideas and values behind the core institutions and processes are still the main focus of attention. In the language of social philosophy, the assemblage of international order is 'territorialised' or 'deterritorialised' in terms of both material and 'expressive' factors (see DeLanda, 2006).

**Westphalia as the constitutional order of a modern system**

Daniel Philpott's soft constructivism emphasises qualitative change in international society via change in the 'constitutions' of world politics. A constitutional blueprint in this sense is defined as “a set of norms, mutually agreed upon by polities who are members of the society, that define the holders of authority and their prerogatives” (Philpott, 2001, p.12). They are called “foundational” for being “authors of orders, denoting the polities who carry on war and business, and the contours of their powers” (Philpott, 1999, p.567). This 'constitutive grammar' operates via 'three faces' of authority. The first face stipulates legitimate membership for polities in international society. The second face determines the rules for attaining membership, drawing a line between members and non-members and prescribing principles for dealing with outsiders. The third face defines the prerogatives of members, their authority and possibility of legitimate action at the international level (Philpott, 1996, pp.39-40; see 2001, pp.15-21). We may thus compare different international societies based on what they look like in terms of the constellation of the three faces. “All constitutions contain all three faces; every constitution's depiction of them is its unique signature” (Philpott,
2001, p.15). Change in world order is explained in terms of 'revolutions in sovereignty', meaning “a major change in at least one of the three faces of authority” (p.29). These are key categories to keep in mind when looking at the historical formation of international society. The rest of the theory tries to elucidate the mechanism whereby these revolutions emerge and, in turn, substantially alter the general pattern of world politics when they spread across the system.

Philpott's account of constitutional revolutions depends on a broader theory relating 'ideas' to social change. This 'framework of ideas' is supposed to explain two sides of a 'chain of events' in such moments of transition. Ideas that deeply contest the status quo will emerge and become influential. They will initially re-shape individual identities, and also those of “wide social swaths”, in a process of mass conversion and “diffusion”. In both creation and diffusion of ideas, a certain degree of self-reflection on, instrumentalisation of, and socialisation into, the new ideas will occur. This is the earlier stage of a revolution. Several external 'circumstances' (historical, institutional or social) operate as mechanisms at this point, constraining and enabling this process (Philpott, 2001, pp.46-54). The second stage involves social empowerment of ideas. In the political scene, this means “the ability of believers in ideas to alter the costs and benefits facing those who are in a position to promote or hinder the policies that the ideas demand” (p.58). In order to have an impact in the constitution and change of world order, new converts have to 'lobby' (as it were) the ruling groups of a polity, so that in turn it may act on such demands in interaction with other polities at the international level. It is this kind of interaction that eventually leads to constitutional change. The process may be interpreted in a 'rational-choice' fashion, in terms of converts altering costs and benefits for the ruling elites. Thus we ought to look in detail at 'couriers of ideas' in order to analyse how change happens. Key players like the general public, “networks of committed believers” and groups in government are the main couriers, but institutions as such, and even regular international and transnational interaction may play the role (pp.57-70). Because revolutions in the constitutional rules of world politics account for clear-cut historical change, the application of these categories on conversion and social power of ideas to how they altered the three faces of authority in concrete cases is a key procedure endorsed by this approach.

The impact of Westphalia in world politics, according to the theory, can be assessed, first of all, by an account of how exactly identity change is related to new interests, or demands for a new order of sovereign states. Philpott (2000, p.206) sees in
the Protestant Reformation “a crucial spring of our state system” and “the root of modern international relations”, due to its close connection to the generalised conversion process that triggered the chain of events leading to Westphalia. Theologians of the Reformation like Martin Luther and John Calvin theorised a relation of separate interaction between the institutional church and the civil magistrate, drawing a line between political and ecclesiastical authority (pp.222-4). These principles were later on incorporated in the official creeds and confessions of the Protestant churches and, when applied in practice, undermined the political authority of Rome and strengthened the independence of local princes (see VanDrunen, 2010). There is a strong correlation between the depth and reach of conversion to Protestantism following a ‘Reformation crisis' and the demands for a new international order going through the wars of religion of the 16th and 17th century.

In the four chief polities (or region of polities, in the case of Germany) that fought for Westphalia in the Thirty Years' War – Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and France – an interest in a system of sovereign states arose within a generation of its Reformation crisis. Though not integrally involved in the armed conflict for Westphalia, England, Denmark, and Transylvania, too, experienced a Reformation crisis and supported the anti-imperial powers diplomatically. Important, too, is the fact that none of the Catholic polities, the Catholic German principalities, Spain, Italy, or Poland, developed any interest at all in a system of sovereign states. They remained allies with the empire (Philpott, 2000, pp.224-6).

In the phase of conversion, ideas were diffused from their theological 'entrepreneurs' to the general public via sermons, catechetical teaching and pamphlets. Princes and other political leaders also developed a strong focus on Protestantism and its political implications. The new form of religion (and several practices derived from it) would often be stipulated by the recently converted leaders (Philpott, 2001, pp.104-22). Dissent was not just a matter of ideas anymore – it became a practical issue.

Philpott (2000, p.228) theorises the social power of Protestant views by explaining three distinct “causal pathways” with reference to couriers of ideas. Each pathway summarises specific forms of struggle between the old order and the new worldview in each main actor that subsequently fought in the Thirty Years' War and held a stake in Westphalia. “Reformation from below”, illustrated by the case of most Protestant polities in the Holy Roman Empire, had a popular, bottom-up, character based on “social power exercised through defiant religious practices, threats of rebellion, politics within cities and principalities, rulers asserting the power of their position, and broad participation in the armed forces” as volunteers against Imperial and
Papal domination (Philpott, 2000, p.232). The “politique solution”, in turn, argued for
the secularisation of political rule and an interest in internal unity and external
independence, or a system of sovereign states predicated on the public role of statecraft.
This was the case, for example, in France, where the Reformation led to a long period of
civil war until a restricted degree of toleration was secured (at least temporarily) for the
Protestant minorities. The political compromise was reflected also in its anti-imperial
foreign policy based on raison d'état, a principle also reflected in France's demands in
Westphalia (Philpott, 2001, pp.129-34). Finally, “Reformation from above” as
illustrated by the case of Sweden traces the main impulse for social change to the
monarchs of that time, who did their best to reform the country in a top-down fashion.
Sweden's struggle for sovereign statehood, connected to a preference in Westphalia for a
new order of independent states, was historically attached to the deep personal devotion
of the monarch and his perceived duty to protect the Protestant polities in the Empire
(pp.134-6). All three 'causal pathways' are connected to a change in the 'incentive
structure' stimulating relevant actors, and defended against the counterfactual alternative
that these actors would have sought a new states-system regardless of the new religious
ideas.

Based on this account of conversion to new political views favouring
Westphalian order followed by an explanation of the social empowerment of the new
ideas, Philpott (2001, pp.30; 32-3) proceeds to a discussion of constitutional change.
1648 is described as “the origin of modern international relations” and “the most
significant revolution in sovereignty to date” because it established the constitutional
legitimacy of a system of sovereign states, revising the three faces of authority.
Westphalia “made sovereign statehood a norm”, changing the first face by undermining
the hierarchy between Pope, Emperor on the one hand and local princes of German
polities on the other. It also changed the second face by clarifying what it takes to be a
member of international society (Philpott, 1999, pp.581-2). The third face, in turn, was
addressed in terms of a clarification of the diplomatic prerogatives of the German
princes in the treaties, such as non-intervention (Philpott, 1996, pp.42-3). These in the
long run were crystallised in terms of the principles of non-intervention. There are,
however, a few caveats here. The claim, thus, is not one of ‘journalistic' change
overnight, like a headline on a newspaper catching the reader's attention to the novelty
of the story. A system was not created out of thin air. Rather, Westphalia “consolidated
three hundred years of evolution toward such a system. In history, perfect fissures are
rare, but as historical faults go, Westphalia is about as clean as they come”. The new
colstitution originally operated in the European states-system and was restricted to
Christendom. Some practices and institutions of the Holy Roman Empire still remained
in use, despite its decline. Finally, some traits of the Westphalian system (even the
political theorisation of sovereignty itself) already existed before the settlement. Despite
all caveats, the traditional narrative on Westphalia and its significance as a marker of
systemic change is maintained.

Philpott's narrative implies a number of metatheoretical principles on the relation
between theory and history in IR, the nature of order and change in social reality and
also some critical dialogue with rival IR explanations. On history in IR, he clearly
defends a kind of narrative “whose events and landmarks are changes in constitutional
authority” (Philpott, 2001, p.43). For this reason, empirical data related to Westphalia is
selected on the basis of relevance to the explanation of constitutional change. In fact,
Philpott deliberately re-defines 'Westphalia' in a more flexible way, so that it may
include the Peace of Münster signed in the same year between representatives of the
Spanish monarchy and of the United Provinces, ending the long war of the 'Dutch
revolt' (p.31). Moreover, when the text of the Peace of Westphalia can be shown to have
been ignored by some of the relevant actors, he is willing to relativise the relevance of
the immediate outcome of the negotiations and the need to “look beyond the mere text
of a treaty” (pp.22-23). Thus, we are left under the impression that history amounts to a
series of 'case studies' which provide evidence to test a pre-conceived theoretical
framework. Data, then, are fit into this theoretical straightjacket.

In addition to this, Philpott's narrative technique is also subsumed to a tense
confrontation between a couple of contradictory 'directions'. On the one hand, the claim
that Westphalia inaugurates modernity in world politics is highlighted in bombastic
terms (e.g. Philpott, 2000, pp.206-12; 2001, pp.8; 30). On the other hand, what he
finds as evidence in the settlement itself makes him qualify the main thesis and seek
supportive evidence elsewhere (Philpott, 1996, p.45). On occasion, he will even
relativise chronology and factual accuracy, perhaps relying too much on secondary
sources reinforcing the “conventional wisdom” that he wants to update and defend
(Philpott, 2000, p.208). For example, he correctly points out that the Peace of Augsburg
(1555) gave German princes the power to regulate religious matters in their territories

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86 Philpott (2000, p.209) admits that “consummate fissures in history are rare”, but declares that
“Westphalia is as clean as historical faults come”, declaring “modernity's victory after Westphalia”.

but did not put an end to the internal unrest in the Empire. However, he conceives this as a step to 1648, after which “princes' sovereignty” over religion became “accepted and respected and practiced” (Philpott, 1999, pp.576-80). The problem is that, far from reinforcing the Augsburg principle of *cuius regio eius religio*, Westphalia settled the return of the religious 'map' to a 'Normal Year', regardless of the local prince's religion in each territory. It worked for that time precisely because it rolled back some of the Augsburg stipulations (Strauman, 2008, pp.178-83).

Not only are there implicit metatheoretical principles on the role of historical research in IR scholarship, there are also statements on the nature of the social world. As we can gather from his exposition, Philpott's account of the 'framework of ideas' puts more weight on agency than structure. Although the narrative focuses on the agency-side of identity change, in a quasi-individualist fashion, on occasion there are allusions to the existence of social and material structures. “Even if structures do not awe us, we still surmise that ideas do not arise out of nowhere, but always come out of some set of circumstances”. In fact, besides being present in the 'origin', it is also in the 'diffusion' of ideas leading to Westphalia and then a new system: “the identities and interests of states are shaped through their social environment” (Philpott, 2001, pp.50; 53). “The Reformation was not Westphalia's sole cause; long-term material trends contributed, too” (2000, p.206). Circumstances and environment are neither purely material nor purely ideational. Material structuralism “cannot be ignored” but it is not sufficient for a full account. Key for international theory is the explanation of how interests of polities change according to new identities, although “interests may be shaped by ideal or material forces” (2001, pp.47-8). In either case, the assumption is that this kind of social theory demands a “reflective conception” of human beings, rather than what Philpott (pp.51-2) perceives to be a more deterministic view advanced by “structural theories”. However, this conception is followed only to a certain extent, for in the description of the 'social power' of ideas, the cost-benefit analogy with rational-choice theory is made under the assumption that new identities have already taken form. Hence the sharp distinction in the Westphalia narrative between 'conversion' to new ideas and their 'empowerment'. Identifying such presuppositions makes it easier to understand the framework of social change on which the theory draws.

On the nature of change, there is a number of scattered points in the approach. Philpott's attempt to reconcile the 'conventional wisdom' on Westphalia with his own research findings translates into further tension at this level. On the one hand, his view
of change accommodates to the 'conventional wisdom' that Westphalia suddenly altered the structure of world politics as its “founding moment” (Philpott, 2000, p.244). On the other, a list of caveats about the nature of the evolution of international society is provided. Westphalia was “not an instant metamorphosis”. Change spread across the system from Europe to other places “gradually” (Philpott, 2000, pp.209; 213). Another tension on this issue has to do with Philpott's view of 'cause'. He often describes ideas and structures as 'mechanisms' which constrain and enable certain outcomes. Ideas are also seen as constitutive mechanisms with reference to identities in 'conversion' (Philpott, 2001, pp.26; 46; 70). Ultimately, however, the historical narrative on Westphalia follows a more traditional 'sequential' pattern, a 'billiard-ball collision' or 'domino effect' view of causation.

Iconoclastic propositions challenge the legitimacy of an existing international order, a contradiction that erupts in the volcano – the wars, the riots, the protests, the politics – that then brings in the new order. This, through a typical chain of events. The ideas convert hearers; these converts amass their ranks; they then demand new international orders; they protest and lobby and rebel to bring about these orders; there emerges a social dissonance between the iconoclasm and the existing order; a new order results (Philpott, 2001, p.4, emphasis added).

One event leads to another, until social change is explained and connected to the peace settlement of 1648. By following this conception of causation often recommended by the mainstream IR canon, Philpott makes a further move that allows him to travel between (constitutive) constructivism and (sequential) mainstream theory.87

Finally, also connected to Philpott's critical dialogue with other approaches is the defence of his view against possible defeaters of his thesis. In order to test the alternative claim that ideas did not lead to those changes in Westphalia, he provides a set of metatheoretical directives on counterfactuals. A valid claim in this vein designs “an alternative world where the alleged cause is extracted yet other events and conditions remain intact”. Another condition is “contenability”, or “a theory of how, in this plausible alternative world, the remaining events and conditions might have brought about the same result”. Philpott finds such a world in which systemic change occurs apart form ideas in “structural materialist accounts”. While they meet this metatheoretical “standard of plausibility”, the actual test involves a more refined process (2001, pp.70-72). After each claim about 'conversion' to new ideas and their 'social power', a hard materialist account and an intermediate account are also tested.

87 Contrast with Teschke's view of causation, analysed below.
against Philpott's own soft constructivism. For this reason, he insists in finding evidence that is also acceptable to these alternative approaches, speaking in terms of strength of 'correlations' and test of alternative hypothesis - “No Reformation, no Westphalia” (Philpott, 2001, pp.55-7; 58-67; 98-104). This helps us understand why more time is spent with the analysis of the behavioural implications of the new ideas than with a content analysis of the ideas themselves (compare Philpott, 2001, pp.104-110 against most of the book).

**Westphalia as consolidation of a pre-modern order**

Despite its title, Benno Teschke's *The Myth of 1648* emphasises primarily medieval and early modern world politics rather than the Westphalian settlement itself. The 'myth' to which it refers is the classic story portraying “1648 as the origin of modern international relations”. It is widespread in IR, IPT and IPE, whose students “are united in invoking the Westphalian states-system as the benchmark for measuring the present-day structure of world politics” (Teschke, 2003, pp.1-2). This narrative “has given the discipline of IR a sense of theoretical direction, thematic unity, and historical legitimacy”. Teschke (2003, p.3), in turn, would argue that “1648, far from signalling a breakthrough to modern inter-state relations, was the culmination of the epoch of absolutist state formation; it marked the recognition and regulation of the international – or, to be more precise, inter-dynastic – relations of absolutist, dynastic polities”. The rationale for looking at longer periods of time before and after Westphalia in order to assess the role 1648 played (if any) in terms of social change has to do with some of the author's theoretical and metatheoretical choices. Written under the influence of Marxist historical sociology, *The Myth of 1648* highlights the processual development of relations of production, use of coercive power and control over land and 'class struggle'. Along the way, the book makes a number of metatheoretical points in connection with the general IR literature on Westphalia and the relation between theory and history.

Key to Teschke's (2003, p.7) argument is what he calls a 'theory of social property relations'. Such theory has a clear materialist basis as a 'generative structure' which constrains and enables the reproduction and transformations of the system. The explanation emphasises practices “whose construction, destruction, and reconstruction mediates humanity's metabolism with nature, while centrally implicating politics and geopolitics: social property relations”. The kernel of this approach stipulates that “the constitution, operation, and transformation of geopolitical orders are predicated on the
changing identities of their constitutive units”, which, in turn, are defined by configurations of social property relations. Geopolitical orders are “time-bound balances of social forces” expressed in terms of institutions that stipulate “class-specific, and therefore antagonistic, rules of reproduction” (p.7). When this wider framework is applied to world politics, the operation of each particular system in history must be seen as a function of the prevailing property relations in its units (Teschke, 1998, p.326). In each type of system “a definitive set of property relations generates specific geopolitical authority relations governing and setting the limits to inter-actor rationalities” (Teschke, 2003, pp.46-7). This is what Teschke (p.117) calls a 'generative structure' – the element that “explains institutional and behavioural differences”. Despite this, there is no deterministic or 'closed' connection between property regimes and class-related strategies of reproduction (pp.69-70). For one thing, change would not be possible, but we know that in a “general crisis” the system is very likely to be contested at the deeper level. That is, we see a 'transformative logic' accounting for qualitative change and systemic shift. Another reason to avoid determinism is that we need to acknowledge the lack of uniformity across units even within the same system, what Teschke (2006a, p.333) calls “socially uneven and geopolitically combined real development of the regionally differentiated course of history”. When we study the broader level of analysis of world politics, we come to the realisation that “the developmental potential of regionally differentiated sets of property regimes generates inter-regional unevenness”.

This leads to “international pressures that spark socio-political crises in 'backward' polities, while the political and geopolitical responses to internationally induced crises react back on the international scene” (Teschke, 2006b, p.534). At any rate, both reproduction and contestation emerge as “active and conscious processes” within the given constraints of the social structure (Teschke, 2003, p.7; see p.79).

From this perspective, then, modern world politics would be intrinsically connected to a major transformation of the economic structure in its mode of production. The Marxist argument on the crucial changes brought about by the transition from feudalism to capitalism is well-known. Teschke (2003, pp.146; 218; see 249-68), however, wants to account for the historical formation of our states-system highlighting the differentiated way in which the shift occurred. Modern international relations have at least two elements which were absent in the medieval world, namely, an “inside/outside demarcation” and an internal distinction “between the political and the economic” emerging within a capitalist economy. Feudal geopolitical order gave
way to certain institutions and patterns of class conflict between lords and peasants. Lordship involved military coercion and appropriation, hence the lack of differentiation between the political and the economic aspects (see Teschke, 1998, pp.338-52). As for the absence of a clear-cut distinction between polities, “since individual lords could simultaneously hold land in different kingdoms (...), feudal territoriality remained heterogeneous, shifting and unbounded” (2006a, p.535-6). If we look at the historical details of the transition, contrary to most IR theories, we should come to the conclusion that Westphalia does not mark the transition in any of these key elements. Much of the rise of the “political pluriverse” of the states-system was “the result of a long history of class conflicts over the sources of income that began in the tenth and intensified in the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries” (2003, p.265). As for the sharp differentiation between the economic and political aspects, we need to look at the emergence of capitalism after Westphalia, beginning with England and then spreading across the system (2006a, pp.539-40). Both transitions, therefore, were not triggered by the settlement of 1648. In light of the theory of social property relations, Westphalia was clearly not the starting point of modern international relations.

In light of this approach, it is possible to locate a transition period – or, rather, a system on its own – between the medieval and the modern world. Even with the emergence of a system of several (imperfectly) centralised states, European political practice still reflected the order constituted by a pre-modern generative structure of property relations based on dynastic and personal principles (Teschke, 2002, p.6). Contrary to the usual narrative, the Westphalian settlement reinforced an absolutist and early modern type of sovereignty which “did not entail a separation of public and private, of politics and economics, since sovereignty was personalized by the king as patrimonial property” (2003, p.219). Practices of internal coercion and taxation, government, territoriality, as well as inter-state conflict, reflected this dynamic character of the states-system even after Westphalia. Particularly relevant to the operation of this system were dynastic marriage policies for the purposes of accumulation, or institutions of diplomatic precedence according to rank and nobility of the monarch. Disputes and wars of succession connected to issues of inheritance were widespread. Balance-of-power policies followed a peculiar pattern of small-state elimination. In such features we see much continuity within the early modern system, before and after Westphalia (pp.220-239). If anything, Westphalia was “the culmination of the epoch of absolutist state formation; it marked the recognition and regulation of the international – or, to be
more precise, inter-dynastic – relations of absolutist, dynastic polities” (p.3).

This framework of social property relations is predicated on a series of metatheoretical points on how theoretically informed historical enquiry should be developed in IR. In passing, we also read about a series of principles that may be adopted in this process of applying dialectic materialism to the study of the formation of states-systems. On the general relation between theory and history we find, first, a denial of the possibility of an overarching and timeless logic and direction in historical formation. “Any encounter between IR as a social science and history will have to start from the assumption that there is no universal covering law that explains international conduct across the centuries, as there is no one general explanatory theory of history”. Yet, this should not lead us to “intellectual abdication to contingency”. Although history is “not teleological”, we may still make sense of it by hindsight (Teschke, 2003, p.7). When it comes to the IR discourse on Westphalia, the use of 1648 even as a helpful historical marker based on timeless and universal explanations poses a problem and requires critical reaction.

A line of tacit acceptance runs through the literature, passed down unexamined from IR generation to IR generation. Dates cannot lie, and the more distant the dates, the less the willingness to uncover their social content, context, and significance. But periodization is no innocent exercise, no mere pedagogical and heuristic device to plant markers in the uncharted flow of history. It entails assumptions about the duration and identity of specific epochs and geopolitical orders, as it implicates IR theories with respect to the adequacy of criteria adduced to theorize the continuity or discontinuity of international orders (Teschke, 2003, p.2, emphasis added).

This is not merely a neutral, intellectual, matter of idiosyncrasy. There are deeper political and ideological implications behind worldview discourses of continuity and change in world politics. Such narratives are also instruments that crystallise the status quo and constrain emancipatory transformation.

International Relations is a social science. As a social science, it does not stand outside the daily reproduction of structures of domination and exploitation (…). The subsumption of international behaviour under one general covering law claiming objectivity is as theoretically impoverished as it is intellectually debilitating. Politically, it is dangerous and all too often complicit with the aggressive policies of the hegemonic state. In some versions, it is scandalous (pp.273-4, original emphasis).

Awareness of historical singularity and the unpredictable character of historical change is, therefore, required in the critical study of systemic transformations.

This leads to the second point on theory and history. The Myth of 1648 is
permeated by critical interaction with alternative IR theories and how they (mis)use historical evidence. Despite the recent trend to assess the issue of systemic transformations with reference to “history as a surer guide to theory-building”, Teschke's (2003, pp.2-6) verdict is that “the relative paucity of IR contributions to a historical sociology of international relations requires mobilizing non-IR literatures on general historical development”. For this reason, he advocates building bridges between historical sociology, Marxist political economy, Geopolitics and IR (Teschke, 2006a). As for IR theory, besides the claim that some of the mainstream approaches have a shallow view of the possibilities of deep historical transformation, there is also an empirical critique of their incomplete interpretation of the Westphalian system. Realism, for example, with its “naturalized great power rivalries” and “universalized balance of power”, cannot account for the peculiar forms of ‘dynastic balancing’ found in the early modern states-system. Constructivism, in turn, ignores the “property-related social sources of identity-formation” and ignores the “extra-normative conditions” of that international society (2002, p.36). This empirical confrontation is metatheoretically informed, as it relates to Teschke's (e.g. 2003, pp.14-16; 42-45) portrait of realism and neoliberalism as historically impoverished reifications of social structure, as well as constructivism's ontological assumptions about the primacy of ideational elements, opposing the author's materialist starting-point.

Besides these negative points on theory and history raised against rival approaches, there are also positive metatheoretical elements. First, there is a deliberate attempt to indicate the compatibility between the theory of social property relations and materialist dialectics. Despite the rejection of universal and ahistorical generalities, the link between general Marxist social theory and the analysis of the operation and transformation of states-systems in world politics requires considerable width (Teschke, 1998, p.326). Particular states-systems must be theorised according to their peculiarities, but the metatheoretical 'backbone' connecting dialectical materialism to IR theory remains. Teschke portrays Geopolitics as the intermediate space required to build this bridge. He criticises classical geopolitical discourse with considerations on its political agenda, but finds useful elements in its emphasis on material space in connection to political power. Marxist alternatives are then analysed and found wanting in their original form (2006a, pp.329-33). Following his explicit metatheoretical analysis of the infrastructure of both research programmes in Geopolitics, he opens up space for the approach developed in The Myth of 1648, “a theory of IR based on
dialectical meta-theoretical premises” (1998, p.354). Contrary to rival approaches in IR and IPE, this enables the author to portray continuity before and after Westphalia and to distinguish a separate early modern dynastic system before the emergence of capitalism at a later stage.

In addition to this, the framework behind the theory of social property relations is made explicit in metatheoretical terms. Deconstructing the 'myth of 1648' is not simply a matter of empirical accuracy or ideological challenge, but also a call for new ways of theorising. The starting point is to adopt a comparative approach, since we need to single out differences across states-systems in each historical period. Moreover, we are also called to examine the deep causes of structural variations – what Teschke calls “causal inquiry”. This is actualised in terms of an account of social change in function of crises enabled by contradictory strategies of reproduction advanced by competing classes. Because of the way he puts this principle in use, it is safe to conclude that this look at structural causation is a counterpoint to the prevailing 'billiard-ball' or 'chain of events' view of causal inquiry in IR. 88 Another point here is the deliberate attempt to “identify and theorize the major agents and processes of systemic geopolitical transformations”, a principle followed with consistency and clarity throughout his work (Teschke, 2003, pp.4-6). After looking at agency and structure in the dynastic states-system, these elements are in turn linked to specific processes (2002, pp.9-30). The moves finally enable a short exegesis of the Westphalian settlement of 1648 in light of the historical context. It comes as no surprise that the most relevant clauses of the treaties of Münster and Osnabrück are 'demystified' only in brief, for the ideas contained therein are derivative from the dynastic geopolitical order that the settlement was designed to confirm. Teschke (2003, pp.238-46) is following metatheoretical principles which affirm the precedence of material relations and only then moves on to the analysis of rules, norms and ideas as a function of these relations.

**Discussion**

It is quite clear that the narratives provided by Watson, Philpott and Teschke on the historical role played by the Peace of Westphalia in shaping the early modern states-system are intrinsically connected to their respective theoretical frameworks. As discussed, these theories and the stories told about 1648 which they enable, regardless

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88 I have already referred to differing conceptions of causation in Philpott's case. Another comparison between both approaches to causation can be found in this thesis (Chapter 1).
of their level of sophistication, are shaped to a large extent by metatheoretical views on a number of issues. In Table 6.1 (below) I have summarised the main points of comparison and contrast along theoretical, historical and metatheoretical lines. Disposing these elements side by side helps deal with the discrepancy between these accounts of Westphalia. Like much of the IR literature on Westphalia, the three authors make an effort to go beyond description and to provide a theoretically informed perspective on the event. The differences are not merely a matter of factual inaccuracy or discrepancy (though on occasion this may well be the case), but mainly a function of this choice, since the evidence is selectively reported according to a selection of relevant data in light of what the theory dictates (see 'Account'). These theoretical arguments and their applications to the case, however, assume different ways of bridging between philosophical issues of ontology, the nature of 'social order' and 'change' and the nature of historical formation and how it should be studied ('History in IR'). In the texts analysed here, the theories are also shaped by critical metatheoretical interaction with rival approaches ('Dialogue and critique'), although this is less the case for Watson's text.

Table 6.1 – Three IR accounts of the Peace of Westphalia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory (i.e. theoretical and conceptual framework)</th>
<th>Teschke</th>
<th>Philpott</th>
<th>Watson</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processes in world politics depend on identity of units in states-system. Identity understood as structure of social property relations. Processes understood as dialectical tension between classes.</td>
<td>Processes in world politics depend on constitution of international society. Constitution understood as rules, norms and institutions.</td>
<td>Processes in world politics depend on relations of authority and notions of legitimacy. These relations are constrained and enabled by shared cultural elements and degree of interaction.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account (i.e. application of theory to the case of Westphalia)</th>
<th>Teschke</th>
<th>Philpott</th>
<th>Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westphalia formalised a pre-modern, dynastic, states-system already in operation. It did not alter the fundamental nature of world politics. The modern states-system was, instead, triggered by capitalism later. The emergence of both dynastic and modern societies was geographically uneven.</td>
<td>Westphalia was a revolution in the constitution of international society. It set forth the parameters of modern world politics. It defined its fundamental principle of sovereignty, its prerogatives and membership criteria. Another defining moment was decolonisation after World War Two.</td>
<td>Westphalia formalised an international society of sovereign states based on anti-hegemony. Westphalian practices and institutions are embryonic of contemporary world politics, but went through incremental change over the centuries. They expanded from 'core' powers to colonies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The metatheoretical elements discussed in the works of Watson, Philpott and Teschke also reflect the typology of metatheoretical discourse I have been adopting so far. The points contained in Table 6.1 can be transposed to Table 6.2 (below), represented by letters in the intellectual/contextual and internal/external spectra.

**Table 6.2 – Selected theory-history discussions in the typology of metatheory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
<th>INTELLECTUAL</th>
<th>CONTEXTUAL</th>
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Source: Own elaboration.

The theme of using historical data with reference to IR theory (letter A) is Internal to the discipline and related to Contextual factors (empirical evidence). Dialogue with other IR
theories, whether critical or not, falls similarly into the Internal category, but its focus falls more into the Intellectual side (letter B). The bridge between a broader view of historical development, how we should study it and IR theory is more to the centre (letter C). The metatheoretical discourse dealing with these issues is itself intellectually focused, for its main function is to apply a more general philosophy of history (C, external) to IR theory (C, internal). The origin of this bridge (philosophy of history) is External to the discipline of IR, whereas the destination (IR theory) obviously lies within the disciplinary scope. The other bridge we can see here is that of metatheoretical discourse on the nature of social order and the nature of social change. These two separate elements in Table 6.1 are joined in Table 6.2, represented by letter D also on the Intellectual side. The bridge is between social philosophy (D, especially ontology), External to the discipline, and IR theory (D,). These are the points on which all of the authors have something to say. Individually, there are also a few elements that we could add to the table. Watson and Philpott both make statements on early modern political theory and how it had an impact on statecraft and international dynamics (see WP). This kind of argument relies on the study of theory (in this case, political thought) as a tool of the study of international society. Hence, it has an Intellectual focus (but external to the discipline, since it did not exist) moving towards the Contextual side (social interaction). The same applies to Teschke's critique of 'ahistorical' IR theory for emphasising lack of change and, hence, preventing political emancipation today by implication (see T). The difference, of course, is that he has in mind the impact of current IR (Internal) discourses on Westphalia in the current system. We see, therefore, that the literature analysed here further illustrates some of the general contributions of metatheory outlined by my typology.

Watson, Philpott and Teschke imply metatheoretical assumptions shaping their scholarship. Sometimes they are even clear about them. At any rate, their main goal is to study historical world politics empirically in light of their theoretical approaches. My exposition of the metatheoretical 'drive' behind their narratives, however, reflects a slightly different set of concerns – most of them matched by the recent critical literature on Westphalia narratives in IR. The question raised by such contributions is, what is at stake in these claims about 1648? Unsurprising (but perhaps not stressed enough so far) is the extent of engagement with metatheory emanating from these works (see Table 6.3).
Table 6.3 – Roles of the metatheoretical study of discourses on Westphalia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL</th>
<th>CONTEXTUAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$R ; ; Q$</td>
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<td>$P_1 ; P_2$</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$S_1 ; S_2$</td>
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</table>

Source: Own elaboration.

Similar to Teschke’s critique, the literature questioning the traditional narrative on Westphalia makes three key metatheoretical points. First, there is the issue of rigorous scholarship when it comes to an understanding of large-scale change in the history of international relations. This is Internal, being specific to IR research and mostly Intellectual, although the empirical reference drives it toward the Contextual side (letter $P$). Secondly, there is a protest against turning ‘Westphalia’ the historical event into a yardstick or ideal-type to measure any occurrence of systemic change today. Similarly, this is an Internal and Intellectual metatheoretical statement, but approaching a Contextual element, as it refers to current social change (letter $Q$). Finally, the traditional discourse on 1648 has been accused of producing deleterious practical implications, both in IR scholarship and political practice outside academia. The accusation is against IR research and, therefore, Internal, but the impact is Intellectual in the case of its constraints on further IR research (letter $R$), and ‘contextual’ when it comes to political practice (letter $S$).

The first complaint, the denunciation of the fact that sloppy historical scholarship has constrained and enabled specific moves in IR theory, is notorious, for example, in the critiques of John Gerard Ruggie (1998, pp.131-98) and Stephen Krasner (1993) against the mainstream of the discipline. For both, a more factually accurate reading of Westphalia would disconfirm the impression of ‘normalcy’ of our international system projected back to early modern Europe. Unmasking this assumption, in turn, leads to a demand for significant theoretical readjustment in the mainstream. Speaking less about re-theorisation and more about the use of history by IR scholarship in general, others have also stressed the effects of poor scholarship in the discipline. Stéphane Beaulac (2004, p.198), for one, concludes that the “orthodoxy according to which 1648 can be credited for the birth of the modern state system is unsupported by historical facts, and is hence a myth”. Jonathan Haavere (2012,
p.121), for another, briefly summarises the mainstream narrative and then remarks that “anyone who has taken and introductory history course will realize that in practice history is not so neat”. To critics' despair, the contributions of the revisionist literature on Westphalia “have barely been incorporated” and “the mainstream of the discipline has failed to enter into any kind of dialogue” with them, reinforcing the narrative's mythical character (Carvalho et al., 2011, p.736). In other words, IR's credibility is questioned due to its poor treatment of historical evidence and, importantly, the philosophy of history it seems to assume. Moreover, since Westphalia is a pivotal case used in support of a number of theoretical formulations, the rigour of IR theory is also questioned by implication.

Emerging from this critique is a further point, connected to the issue of large-scale change. On several occasions, the 'orthodoxy' about 1648 is taken for granted and promoted to the status of a 'shorthand' expression for general political phenomena (e.g. 'sovereignty') in the term 'Westphalian'. This, in turn, is employed as a 'rule' against which contemporary world politics is checked in order to assess the degree of deviation of changes we can see today from the Westphalian 'norm'. Westphalia, in this case, is turned into an all-encompassing “construct in its own right” (S. Schmidt, 2011, p.602). Measuring current world politics and its effects against such yardstick “becomes problematic when the baseline for comparison is itself problematic”, especially considering that “its use as a starting point for investigations of change may lead scholars to exaggerate the magnitude of recent developments” or to assume a “linear progression from some Westphalian configuration toward some 'post-Westphalian' state of affairs” (S. Schmidt, 2011, pp.617-18). Far from being a merely neutral construct, 1648 is also evoked when current changes are addressed also from a normative perspective. “To the extent that the historical example is adduced as a model for some sort of institutional arrangement either to be emulated or to be dropped, a lot hinges on the historical claims made about the Peace of Westphalia” (Strauman, 2008, p.174). At stake here is the fact that “this slanted history becomes a perspective and an interpretative technique that distorts our understanding of contemporary issues” (Kayaoglu, 2010, p.196). In short: a key criticism emerging from current metatheoretical discussion on IR theorising of Westphalia is that it has been extrapolated to interpret current events and transformation in a deeply contested way.

The fact, however, is that discourses of change and continuity in global politics can have a highly significant practical import. A final metatheoretical critique of the
traditional IR narrative is that it favours certain principles and excludes others. In scholarship as such, this is intensified by the conservative attitude of keeping the 'conventional wisdom' on 1648 in the textbooks, sometimes with a caveat indicating the existence of alternative views without incorporating them. As a result, “the myths of yesteryear are perpetuated in the minds of generations of students as they in turn embark upon their journeys into the world of IR” (Carvalho et al., 2011, p.736). Such perpetuation often has a constraining effect on the possibilities of discourse within the discipline:

[These historical insights (...) represent radically different perspectives or 'takes' on the discipline that necessarily confront the normalised and settled subject matter. The myths have had a tremendous function in disciplining our thinking about fundamental issues in international politics, 'normalising' it as common sense and providing the parameters or outer boundaries within which the disciplinary field is contained or homesteaded (Carvalho et al., 2011, p.756).]

Besides, the discursive and practical 'closure' enabled by the uncritical assimilation of the traditional view on 1648 extends to the extra-academic realm. As Rob Walker (2006, pp.56-9; 65-9) suggests, when it comes to political practice, the naturalisation of this 'truth-regime' has a conservative bias, in that it crystallises the status quo (the 'Westphalian system') and discourages its confrontation by alternative discourses. The “myth”, says Beaulac (2004, p.186; see pp.211-212), “has carried extraordinary power within the shared consciousness of society, including international society, and continues to impact discourses on contemporary issues on the international plane”. For example, the assumption that 1648 satisfactorily settled the issue of 'difference' in

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89 The main critique is that the traditional narrative reflects a Eurocentric view of the expansion of international society. There are a few additional points which are more specific. Take Edward Keene's (2002, pp.22-29; 38) critique as an illustration. Describing the English School approach to international society in connection to the settlement of 1648 (including Watson's narrative), he calls our attention to its intellectual ancestry in Heeren and other 19th-century conservative historians. They were motivated by the agenda of normalising an 'anti-hegemonic' view of the states-system against Napoleonic revisionism. According to Keene (2002, pp.38-39), “we have an historical narrative of the development of political and legal order in the modern world that is blinkered in its outlook, not by any real consideration of what is significant to us today, but rather in accordance with the needs of nineteenth-century reactionaries”. Adding to this, Kayaoglu (2010, pp.197-204) shows that our current view of political and legal order also reflects the rise of legal positivism of that time. Having dismissed natural law theory, 19th-century international jurists portrayed Westphalia as the constitutional beginning of a society of states based on positive law. Assuming the classical story on 1648 means reproducing this view on the foundation of international law. In sum, an uncritical absorption of the mainstream narrative brings some political 'baggage' with it, and shapes the discipline in function of this background. “Often without realizing it, the numerous scholars today who use concepts like the 'Westphalian system' (...) are therefore committing themselves to a peculiarly narrow and twisted perspective on order in modern world politics” (Keene, 2002, p.38).

90 The point is made with reference to quotes from documents written in the context of the International Criminal Court.
domestic and international politics is a disincentive to think about new solutions 'outside the Westphalian box'. "The problem is magnified where our celebration of modernity continues to blind us to the inadequacy of the guidance bequeathed to us by Westphalia" (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2004, p.43). Whether we agree or not with the diagnosis is beside the point. The relevance of the metatheoretical analysis of IR discourses on the Peace of Westphalia has been defended by these contributions in wider terms than mere 'scholarship about scholarship'.

Final remarks
The case of IR scholarship on systemic change connected to Westphalia is a very appropriate illustration of the way metatheoretical 'drives' operate with reference to the intersection between history, IR theory and social theory. Watson's English School approach reinforces the 'classic' view of the discipline on Westphalia as a 'paradigm shift' in the states-system. The focus lies specifically on issues of legitimacy and authority. Europe's adoption of early modern, humanistic, political principles of statecraft and subsequent pattern of anti-hegemonic alliance formation are key evidences supporting the argument. Philpott's 'soft constructivism' understands 1648, first, as a revolution in sovereignty and the constitutional ideas in international society. Secondly, it explains large-scale change in terms of how couriers of new ideas altered the cost-benefit structure leading to an empowerment of their demands for a 'Westphalian' system. Aware of the criticism against traditional views, he provides a more nuanced (and somewhat contradictory) view of change. It was gradual, but at the same time we are left under the impression that something suddenly happened in Westphalia. Teschke, on the other hand, dismisses the predominant account as historically inaccurate, theoretically flawed and politically harmful. His view is that, if anything, Westphalia consolidated a pre-modern dialectic order of social property relations, one based on dynasticism. The argument is predominantly based on material considerations. Key to modernity was the rise of capitalism, which happened much later.

As I have indicated, there is factual disagreement (even on what the term 'Westphalia' means), theoretical tension but also metatheoretical differences between these authors. Not only that, some of the nuances in each narrative can be ascribed to the metatheoretical infrastructure of the arguments. In their own way, the three contributions make reference to principles behind the use of historical evidence in IR
scholarship, an implicit bridge between social philosophy and IR theory of order/change, and critical interaction with alternative views in the discipline. On top of these shared issues, there are particular metatheoretical points in each work that I have stressed in my exposition. Having identified these elements with an in-depth analysis, I then proceeded to their classification in terms of the typology introduced earlier in this thesis. The results of my analysis fit neatly into the typology. In an additional procedure, I have also interpreted some of the recent IR literature claims to be the role of addressing discourses on Westphalia in metatheoretical terms. There are critical concerns about the quality of historical scholarship in the discipline, the use of the classical view of Westphalia as a framework for interpreting current events and the impact of this 'orthodoxy' on IR research and political practice. Those remarks were also classified in terms of my typology. Their availability adds to my argument on the role of metatheory – this time, with a specific reference to the study of theories on Westphalia and social change.

As in the previous chapter, I confirm once again that, across three different approaches to the same object, there is indeed a remarkable impact of metatheoretical elements on research. Implicit as it may be, metatheory plays a relevant role in 'driving' these three accounts of Westphalia to distinct positions. Notice, once again, that this is no deterministic relation. Metatheoretical discourse operates here as a constraining and enabling mechanism with an impact on the way systemic order, change and Westphalia are theorised and described. Unlike in the previous chapter, though, the texts selected for analysis belong to a well-formed discipline of IR. In this case, two differences emerge. First, there is a clearer line between 'internal' or disciplinary discourse and 'external' contributions of other disciplines. Watson, Philpott and Teschke show awareness of the need to build intellectual 'bridges' between history, social theory and IR and make an effort to 'connect the dots'. Secondly, at least in Philpott and Teschke the 'classic' disciplinary view of Westphalia is a background element, and so is the existence of self-identified rival IR theories that demand dialogue and critical response.

So far, I have tested my notions on the relation between metatheory and research in two concrete cases. The first case, presented in the previous chapter, establishes the metatheoretical influence on pre-disciplinary investigation. The case of IR theories on Westphalia, analysed in this chapter, does the same for disciplinary accounts. In each of these cases, I have offered an in-depth interpretation of core texts in each approach, elucidated implicit metatheoretical claims and discussed the role metatheory plays not
only in the cases themselves, but also in the disciplinary literature analysing the Westphalia narratives. Most theories assume a transition from 'hierarchy' to 'anarchy' actualised in 1648 and assume a generally anarchical configuration of the modern states-system. Alternative views bring up the notion of 'hierarchy' and apply it to the contemporary system. In the next and final chapter, I provide not only an interpretation of a variety of theories in IR and IPE on 'hierarchy' in the international system, but also apply an overarching metatheoretical framework to them, which purports to underline some of the 'Eurocentric' normative directives behind each approach. Chapter 5 offered a study of theory and metatheory connected to a conceptual-normative debate in IPT. The present chapter contrasted IR theories in their interpretation of the impact of a historical event. The next will focus on a theoretical issue that has been attaining prominence in our discipline and in the field of IPE.
Chapter 7

Metatheory and a Theoretical Notion:
Hierarchy in World Politics

Introduction
The centrality of the Peace of Westphalia in IR narratives about systemic change has to
do, among other things, with the affinity shared by key theories on the postulation of the
anarchical character of the international system. Unlike domestic political systems, so it
goes, world politics is characterised by the absence of an overarching authority capable
of imposing itself over the parts. State-centrism, another theoretical assumption
dominating the field, reinforces IR's focus on anarchy. According to this theoretical
assumption, states are the main actors of world politics and, at the inter-state level, order
and stability can only be provided in a sub-optimal way considering the distinction
between 'domestic' and 'international' political interaction. The more historically-minded
IR theorist will, of course, point out as a caveat that this has only been the case since the
'system' changed from 'hierarchical' to an international 'anarchy'. In the discipline, the
Westphalia narrative has little to do with the constitutional law of the Holy Roman
Empire. Instead, it is a shared 'pool of facts' that enable the statement, from many
theoretical perspectives, that our modern system began with the transformation of
Europe from a 'hierarchical' society under imperial authority into an 'anarchical' system
of sovereign states. In the previous chapter, we have seen that not all theories agree with
this narrative, although most relevant approaches do. Part of what accounts for their
distinct treatment of this 'pool of facts' has to do with different metatheoretical 'drives'
constraining and enabling certain types of arguments. In this chapter, we move our
analysis of metatheoretical mechanisms away from the historical and empirical type of
research on Westphalia to the general conceptual issue of what 'hierarchy' means.

John Hobson's (2012) fresh work on the interpretation of Eurocentric views of
'hierarchy' in international thought will be eventually applied as an overarching
framework of metatheoretical critique, but most of the chapter provides an 'internal',
different sort of critical evaluation. It is asked, for each approach analysed here, whether
their theories of 'hierarchy' are consistent with the metatheoretical principles advocated by the authors themselves. The structural-instrumentalist view of neorealism, while focused on international anarchy, has something to say about 'hierarchy' and 'weaker states' and, besides, has been considerably influential in the formation of IR theorising on hierarchy. For this reason, I provide a brief discussion of this research programme with reference to asymmetry of states. An approach that is currently prominent in the field is the study of hierarchy, via empiricist theory, as a dyadic relation between a dominant country and its subordinates. Despite belonging to the mainstream, it differs from neorealism in many respects. While these two theories are well-known in IR and International Political Economy (IPE), the other two frameworks selected for analysis are not in the textbooks, but are by no means less worthy of due consideration. The first alternative approach is a normative theory of hierarchy influenced by both realist and liberal political philosophies. It is written from the perspective of the 'weaker states' and challenges mainstream 'state-centrism' in a number of ways. Importantly, this 'peripheral realist' approach presents itself in close dialogue with some of the IR and IPE literature, including a 'mercantilist' view of the wealth-power nexus. The second alternative approach, a deductivist theory of political economy, avoids any dialogue with the IR literature, although it employs international historical sociology to illustrate some of the historical points. This latter view defies 'mercantilism' and subscribes to 'liberalism' on the issue of the wealth-power nexus. Each of the four research programmes, therefore, has a distinctive metatheoretical 'drive'. Each of them are initially tried with the purpose to verify whether their substantive claims are consistent with their self-declared metatheoretical principles.

The next section presents a brief overview of the context behind the approaches selected for analysis here. Most theorists emphasising hierarchy at the international level engage in some sort of critical evaluation of neorealism, so this research programme is briefly examined first. After that, a discussion of mainstream theorising on dyadic hierarchy is provided, followed by an analysis of peripheral realism and, subsequently, the deductive theory in political economy. For an overarching metatheoretical evaluation, Hobson's framework is considered in its original application to neorealism, and then extended to the remaining empiricist, normative and deductivist theories. I ask, in passing, whether Hobson's own approach could be challenged based on this extension of its application. After that, I discuss some of the findings in this chapter about the role played by metatheory at several different levels. This will close
the third part of the thesis and the illustration cases, preparing us for the final conclusion.

A note on the context of the hierarchy literature
IR theory has historically inherited a liberal focus on the sovereign equality or 'freedom' of states, displaying what Buzan and Little (2000, p.440) have called 'anarchophilia', or “the disposition to assume” that anarchy at the international level is not only “natural”, but also “a desirable thing”. Kenneth Waltz's neorealist research programme, according to the author himself, begins with the 'theoretical fiat' that separates 'domestic' from 'international' political systems as a simplifying assumption (Waltz, 1990). Inter-state relations are perennially 'anarchical', contrasting with the 'hierarchical' organisation of domestic societies under the centralised authority of a government. Anarchy, in his view, “accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia” (Waltz, 1979, p.66). Since much IR theory has emerged either from liberal political views (e.g. Bull, 1977), incremental improvement upon Waltz's neorealism (e.g. Keohane & Nye, 1977), or critical dialogue whilst keeping an 'anarchophile' outlook (but see Wendt, 1992), much talk of 'hierarchy' has been pushed to the background of the discipline.

Recent trends in IR and IPE bring the notion of 'hierarchy' back to the theoretical scene. This is the case at both theoretical and metatheoretical levels. At the theoretical level as we have seen in the previous chapter, Adam Watson and other key figures in the English School such as Martin Wight had already broken up with the predominant view that the international system is perennially anarchical. Instead, they theorised its functioning, development and change in terms of typical categories of authority and legitimacy allowing for variation in the symmetry of relations between the units. In IPE, dependency theory (see Cardoso, 2007) and some of the approaches inspired by neo-Marxist analysis (e.g. Wallerstein, 2004) postulated a differentiation between 'core' and 'semi/peripheral' states, ascribing to them distinct roles in the world economy, according to structural constraints and unit-level features. Moreover, the 'hegemonic stability' thesis was developed, allowing for a greater contribution of dominant states as providers of 'public goods' (such as order itself) in world politics (Gilpin, 1987, p.86). However, especially in IR theory, 'anarchophile' formulations advanced by neorealism, liberalism and constructivism still prevailed for most part of the time, often combined with Eurocentric and state-centric biases (Buzan & Little, 2000, pp.20-1). Other approaches
are analysed below. Alternative views, such as Carlos Escudé's 'realism of weak states',
premised on 'hierarchy' from a 'peripheral' and 'anti-statist' perspective, were never that
influential in mainstream debates. Despite this, hierarchy-based approaches have been
gaining voice in the discipline (Kang, 2004). New historical case studies, for example,
challenge or qualify the assumption of sovereign equality embedded in balance-of-
power models (Kaufman, Little, & Wohlfforth, 2007; Wohlfforth et al., 2007). David
Lake's contribution to the debate emphasises bilateral hierarchical arrangements of
defence and trade between the US and its subordinate allies. There are also political-
economical theories which speak of international and hierarchical relations but do not
pursue any explicit dialogue with the IR literature. Such is the case of Hans-Hermann
Hoppe's passages on the rise and decline of hegemonic liberal states.

At the metatheoretical level, the recovery of hierarchical notions is also a recent
trend. In the past, the dichotomy between domestic 'hierarchy' and international
'anarchy' has been analysed from a disciplinary-historical perspective, focusing
primarily on political theory. Some of the arguments predicate the distinction in terms of
similarities between domestic and international political interaction and advance a
normative agenda based on the inferred absence, at the inter-state level, of mechanisms
that provide domestic order. Others, instead, assume a qualitative distinction between
domestic and international societies, leading to normative views that do not necessarily
require a supra-national 'hierarchy' to provide order and stability (Suganami, 1989).
Recently, critics of colonialism in international practice and thought have undertaken
research on the implicit Eurocentric assumptions in theories of world politics. In the
case of the English School, for example (Clark, 1989, 2009), acknowledging the reality
of hierarchy is said to be only the beginning of a critical approach from a postcolonial
perspective. The assumption of hierarchy is quickly turned into legitimation in its
understanding as an 'institution' that promotes order in international society (Keene,
2002). Normatively speaking, the political consequences of such legitimation of
hierarchical orders could be, and have been, catastrophic (Linklater, 2010). John
Hobson's study of Eurocentric assumptions in international theory derives from this
context. One of the main findings in his analysis of theoretical material developed both
before and within the discipline of IR is that, at least implicitly, hierarchy and
'differentiated sovereignty' have been a constant (not an exception) in international
thought. After a critical discussion of whether Waltz, Lake, Hoppe and Escudé are
coherent with their own metatheoretical views, I evaluate Hobson's metatheoretical
treatment of hierarchy in IR theories. I briefly recall his objections to Waltz and extend the application of the framework to the new cases of Lake, Hoppe and Escudé.

**Hierarchy and weaker states in neorealism**

Neorealism, originally developed in Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*, is among the most influential research programmes in the discipline (Maliniak et al., 2011). In my analysis, therefore, I shall only emphasise those elements which are immediately relevant to this chapter.91 Waltz's 'instrumentalist' view of theories has already been expounded in this thesis (see part one), but there are additional metatheoretical arguments worth mentioning. For him, a theory “isolates one realm” so that it may “deal with it intellectually” (Waltz, 1990, p.26). In his view, 'systemic' or 'structural' theorising in IR (following his own neorealist approach) manages to abstract the realm of the 'international', separating it from 'domestic' politics. This simplifying move enables, in an instrumentalist fashion, the theoretical study of international politics (p.29). Systemic theories “conceive of causes operating at the international level”, in contrast with 'reductionist' theories, which “concentrate on causes at the individual or national level”. In this latter type of study “the whole is understood by knowing the attributes and the interactions of its parts” (Waltz, 1979, p.18). Systemic theories explain processes by postulating an 'intervening' force between “interacting units” and the outcomes of their actions (p.79). Reductionist views, in turn, are criticised by the author for not abstracting the realm of international politics. As a consequence, they keep including *ad hoc* unit-level auxiliary hypotheses to account for unexpected behaviour (pp.29-35). The critique of *ad hoc* strategies is substantiated with a partial subscription to the 'methodology of scientific research programmes' of Imre Lakatos (see also Waltz, 2008, Chapters 6-7). For Waltz, therefore, systemic theorising is the way to proceed.

A system, according to the neorealist research programme, is “a set of interacting units”, including a “systems-level component” of “structure”, which enables us to isolate the international realm as a whole more than just the sum of parts (1979, p.40). According to Waltz (1986, p.343), “structures shape and shove”, operating as a “constraining and disposing force”, enabling us to “explain and predict continuity within a system” in a non-deterministic way (1979, p.69). We may define a 'structure' in

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91 I have elsewhere provided a thorough exposition and critique of Waltz's *Theory* in light of his later writings and the philosophy of science to which he subscribes (L. G. Freire, 2006a; 2006b). Metatheoretical studies on certain aspects of his work are widely available (e.g. Joseph, 2010; Keohane, 1986; McCourt, 2009; Sampson, 2002; Schweller, 1997; Vasquez, 1997).
terms of three elements: its 'ordering principle', the degree of 'functional differentiation' between the units in the system and the 'distribution of capabilities' across them. As we have seen, internationally, the 'ordering principle' is perennial anarchy. Because of the 'self-help' behaviour ensuing from the lack of a central authority capable of imposing itself over the parts, the relevant actors interact in a low degree of 'functional differentiation': they do not specialise, but need to operate independently and provide for themselves (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.30-2). This means that the two elements of the structure tend to remain unchanged. What is left to explain systemic difference between structures (and, consequently, patterns of interaction and stability) is the 'distribution of capabilities' (1979, pp.100-101). Waltz's Theory is known for the prediction that a 'bipolar' distribution is more stable and lasting than a 'multipolar' one. The internal logic of the original framework is consistent with Waltz's metatheoretical requirements of a systemic approach, as well as the metatheoretical criteria employed by the author to criticise his reductionist opponents (see Diniz, 2007, pp.117-24).

'Hierarchy', in neorealism, is sharply distinguished from 'anarchy'. It applies primarily to situations internal to the states. It is in domestic, not international politics, that “units – institutions and agencies – stand vis-à-vis each other in relations of super- and subordination”. By implication, in this setting “political actors are formally differentiated according to the degrees of their authority, and their distinct functions are specified” (Waltz, 1979, p.81). The international system, conversely, follows a different logic.

Whatever elements of authority emerge internationally are barely once removed from the capability that provides the foundation for the appearance of those elements. Authority quickly reduces to a particular expression of capability. In the absence of agents with system-wide authority, formal relations of super- and subordination fail to develop (p.88).

In the absence of a world government, states counterbalance the rise of a great power by forming alliances to contain it. Structure will “reward some kinds of behavior” which are compatible with its constraints (p.92), such as, for example, 'balancing' rather than 'bandwagoning', or joining the weaker side to stabilise the distribution of capabilities against a rising hegemon (p.126).92 Other versions of neorealism will go much further in their exploration of the alliance-making practices available to great powers, but the

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92 Balancing, or joining the weaker coalition, makes sense because after the distribution of capabilities has been balanced, the balancing state will have to face potential rivals in its own coalition. The weaker they are in this 'second round', the better.
structural claim remains at the general level (Mearsheimer, 2010). In the neorealist approach, therefore, there is a clear-cut distinction between anarchy (international politics) and hierarchy (the domestic system). The structural elements derived from this distinction press states to avoid relying on any other unit. They tend to become very similar, and to prioritise survival as their highest goal.

But are states not different in any way? Of course they are. Waltz's (1979, pp.72-3; 93-6) point is that the theory accounts for Great Power behaviour at the systemic level, focusing on the most important states rather than each and every one of them:

It would be as ridiculous to construct a theory of international politics based on Malaysia and Costa Rica as it would be to construct an economic theory of oligopolistic competition based on the minor firms in a sector of an economy. The acts of all the states and of all the firms in a system are affected much more by the acts and the interactions of the major ones than of the minor ones.

Granted, if we isolate weaker states from Great Power intervention, then they will become the relevant units in their own system. But in this case the same theoretical principles would apply. The choice to exclude weaker states as a focus of the theory is that they would not add much to a systemic and 'parsimonious' explanation. In a multipolar world, we only need to look at the Great Powers. In a bipolar world, the two superpowers. This reasoning is definitely consistent with Waltz's self-imposed metatheoretical requirement of a systemic framework.

However, in order to extend the explanatory power of his balance-of-power thesis that structure will reward states that balance against a rising hegemon, the author introduces the notion of 'secondary states' and the example of the Peloponnesian War, when small units joined Sparta (weaker coalition leader), not Athens (stronger power). The logic is the same: “Secondary states, if they are free to choose, flock to the weaker side” (Waltz, 1979, p.127). We know that, nevertheless, at least in the case of Melos, that decision to balance, rather than 'bandwagon', jeopardised its survival as a political unit (Bragnall, 2004, p.35). This unnecessary ad hoc account of 'secondary states' that, in this case, fails even as an illustration is perhaps better understood in light of Waltz's (1993) later move to incorporate smaller states into the framework in order to make predictions after the Cold War. One would expect a theory of 'unipolarity', since one of the two only relevant superpowers had disintegrated (Krauthammer, 1990; Wohlfforth, 1999). Instead, he argues that the US was also declining because of the 'balancing' behaviour of other states in the West. Thus, the asymmetry between the only
superpower and rising powers like Germany and Japan is downplayed (see also Layne, 1993 in the same context). Besides, Waltz's evaluation of these countries as rising powers breaks down their 'capabilities' in terms of 'sectors', emphasising economic and technological strength at the unit level, rather than providing a relational 'distributive' comparison between them and the US at the systemic level. Finally, the author also implies that there is a certain probability that the US will be a more 'benevolent' hegemon, balanced more slowly because of its lenience and reluctance to intervene, which is another unit-level feature added to the post-Cold War prediction (Waltz, 1993, pp.77-9).93 One could do better than add such ad hoc auxiliary hypotheses to account for the end of the 'most stable' arrangement of bipolarity only a decade or so after Waltz's Theory had been published (see also Mearsheimer, 1990). In neorealism, smaller states are either completely excluded, or partly included by the backdoor. This careless operation, facilitated by the instrumentally drawn sharp dichotomy between hierarchy/anarchy corresponding to domestic/international orders, has left many dissatisfied in the field. The asymmetry in the relations between the US and subordinate states after the Cold War is key to the 'dyadic' approach, one of the most relevant subsequent alternative views of hierarchy – in this case, still a mainstream formulation.

Mainstream theorising and dyadic hierarchy
Lake begins his study on International Hierarchy with the claim that the concept in IR is “alien, denied, and excluded” because the most common “assumption” in the field is that of an international anarchy (2009, p.ix). The contention is that, while the system is anarchical, we can look at how groups of states within the system interact and still identify hierarchical patterns, where some states “willingly subordinate themselves to another, but typically only for something in return”. Hierarchy in this sense means “the extent of the authority exercised by the ruler over the ruled” and, most relevantly, in economic and military terms. Authority involves “legitimacy” rather than sheer “coercion” (Lake, 2009, pp.7-9; 17-19). Lake's study examines both sides of a dyadic relation of hierarchy in abstract, and applies the theoretical insights, via measurement indicators, to empirical cases of bilateral relations between the US and its subordinates (see also Lake, 1996 for different illustrations). A number of propositions may be

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93 Elsewhere, Waltz (1988) does a better job in connecting unit-level variables to the study of “foreign policy” rather than “international politics”, and subsequently differentiating both types of theory. Nevertheless, I maintain that their conflation is unhelpful in the other texts, because Waltz's declared intention of parsimony and simplicity, condemning unit-level theories for their use of additional hypothesis when empirical evidence seems to contradict the predictions.
inferred from the nature of hierarchical authority, such as its variation in degree depending on the case, its reliance on consent and the problems of enforcement by, and self-restraint of, the ruler (Lake, 2007, pp.56-61). The main point is that the hegemon provides to its subordinates some degree of “political order” that is worth the relative loss of autonomy. The terms of this exchange are constantly negotiated, and the implication is that “sovereignty is divided” and varies in degree and issue-area across the system (Lake, 2009, pp.20-30; 51-2). Contrary to Waltz's neorealist approach, dyadic hierarchy implies a different behaviour from self-help, resulting from a higher degree of specialisation, since the hegemon in this model provides some of the protection, predictability and stability (pp.161-4).

From the introduction of such concepts as 'authority', 'legitimacy', 'sovereignty' and 'political order', we expect a philosophical discussion, or a 'normative theory' in the sense described in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Or, perhaps a 'social theory' interpreting how 'intersubjective consent' creates hierarchical order between groups of states, including 'rules' and 'norms' of legitimacy, which 'constrain and enable' international interaction. Instead, the discussion is merely footnoted with political theory and developed as mainstream empirical theory (but see Lake, 2010). Lake is more interested in measuring these things in terms of external behaviour and material cost/benefit analysis (2007, pp.61-77). He wants to test hypotheses against rival theories, but only those approaches which would allow for the same kind of evidence. Maybe this is the reason why he ignores much of the English School work on hierarchy, already available for a long time in the discipline (e.g. Bull & Watson, 1984; Watson, 1992; Wight, 1977). Instead, he opts for dialogue with theories like the 'hegemonic stability' thesis and Waltz's neorealism. An important disagreement with the 'hegemonic stability' model is that, for Lake, 'order' is not a global public good, for it can be (and is) provided in an exclusionary way. This means that the hierarchical relation needs not be systemic, but rather restricted to the ruler and its subordinates with the same effect of stability (Lake, 2009, pp.35; 60). With reference to neorealism, the point of contention is not only substantive (i.e. questioning the universality of self-help behaviour and functional similarity in the system), but also metatheoretical. From a Waltzian perspective, Lake's theory would qualify as 'reductionist' for focusing on units and their relations, rather than taking the general system as a starting-point.

The author's preference for a mainstream empirical-theoretical approach seems to be at odds with some of his self-declared metatheoretical principles. The construction
of the framework and predictions is allegedly “premised on a critical realist approach to theory and measurement”. Critical realism is defined as “a postpositivist approach to science that presumes an independent reality exists but our knowledge of it will always be imperfect” (Lake, 2009, p.63; see note 1). The criteria for theory test, however, is provided, first, as merely replacing “one flawed theory by a less-flawed theory” and then with reference to the not-so-realist philosophy of science of Imre Lakatos (Lake, 2009, pp.xii; 65). But a third approach to theory, defended in the introduction, is the one more consistently followed in the study. It explicitly echoes Waltz's instrumentalist (and anti-realist!) view:

All theories are based on sets of simplifying assumptions that help render a complex reality more easily understood. Assumptions are judged by the explanatory power of the theories they generate (...). But it is important to recognize that these are not empirical descriptions of reality, but merely assumptions that we can accept or reject on their explanatory power (Lake, 2009, pp.3-4).

Even next to where 'critical realism' is declared to be the metatheoretical guidance behind the study, a mainstream/instrumentalist defence of operationalisation is assumed. “Constructs without empirical indicators”, says Lake (p.92), “are of little practical use and ultimately cannot be shown to be more useful in explaining real world politics than the alternatives”. Operationalised variables, in his view, help us explain by checking whether statistical correlations are strong enough to postulate something like a 'law' (Frieden & Lake, 2005, pp.137-8). This is far from the alleged 'realist' position. For philosophical realists, scientific explanation is made not as regression analysis, but in terms of uncovering an underlying mechanism (Bunge, 2004). While proper 'critical realists' would not take issue with empirical research per se, this odd mixture of instrumentalism, empiricism and the anti-realist stance on theoretical assumptions makes one wonder whether Lake is merely paying lip service to 'postpositivist critical realism' to avoid the negative labels associated to mainstream 'positivist' theorising.

Elsewhere, Lake (2011) criticises philosophical and theoretical 'isms' for artificially crystallising metatheoretical and cross-theoretical boundaries. In an attempt to stimulate 'analytic eclecticism', he compares strict adhesion to 'isms' to some sort of religious persecution of 'heretics'. Perhaps this strange blend of 'isms' is simply his own attempt to be eclectic. Perhaps we should understand his theory of hierarchy based on substance, and not the contradictory character of its metatheoretical 'drive'. Fair enough, but in this case, for the sake of clarity, I would have preferred him to simply reinforce
his *de facto* adhesion to mainstream theorising by declaring adhesion not to 'eclecticism', but to the 'sect' that actually *preaches* what he *does* – instrumentalist empiricism. The reason is simply (but importantly) that adopting a position that is actually 'closed' under the guise of 'openness' can be more detrimental to a pluralist and 'eclectic' agenda, erasing real alternatives to the mainstream, than the coexistence of multiple approaches (Nau, 2011).

Nevertheless, there is a number of ways in which Lake's metatheoretical commitments (especially the ones he actually follows) influence substantive research. Take, for example, the obsession with rejecting non-mainstream theorising when he proposes indicators “based on observable behaviors rather than institutions or intersubjective understandings” (Lake, 2009, p.67). In case one asks why the theory is “insufficiently social”, he replies that an “epistemological bet” on the study of “strategic interactions” was made, and that ultimately “authority rests on the largely material exchange of order for compliance and legitimacy”. For this reason, he denies the relevance of “ideas and norms” (p.xi). This is quite peculiar, given the connection between 'authority' and 'legitimacy' (based on the ideational notion of consent), and the definition of 'order' as “the protection of persons, property, and promises” - echoing Hedley Bull's (1977) norm-based approach (Lake, 2009, p.29). The 'epistemological bet' is based not on the research question as such, but on pre-conceived metatheoretical standards of what makes good research. The question about hierarchy in world politics, authority, legitimacy, consent, etc. is asked, but the answer given is in terms of correlations between factors like “presence of military forces from dominant state, A, on the territory of the subordinate state, B” or “number of independent alliances possessed by B, the potentially subordinate state” (pp.68-9). The research is further restrained by this impulse in the selection of cases. The US in its bilateral relations is the sole 'dominant state' being studied because “similar data on these indicators are not available for other countries” (p.68). If pressed about the selection of these indicators, Lake responds that “there is no reason to prefer one (...) over the others. Without being able to observe the inherently unobservable, we cannot know which of these indicators is capturing more (or less) of the construct of hierarchy” (pp.71-6). One wonders what could have happened if he had chosen to actually follow 'critical realism' (designed to deal precisely with this type of problem) as a metatheoretical framework, integrating empirical evidence to a more 'social' kind of theorising. Despite Lake's current popularity in the discipline as a theorist of hierarchy, some of the insights on the topic,
as well as criticisms of Waltz, have been in circulation for many years. This is particularly the case for the not-so-known approach of 'peripheral realism'.

**Normative theory and hierarchy in peripheral realism**

In spite of the title, Escudé's *Foreign Policy Theory in Menem's Argentina* purports to introduce a mid-range explanatory and normative theory that applies to 'weaker states' in general. His 'peripheral realism' takes at face value the principle suggested by the Athenians to the Melians, that “the weak suffer what they must” (Thucydides 1903, V.22, trans. R. Crawley). From this claim, he derives directives of political prudence in peripheral statecraft. *Foreign Policy Theory* “looks at the interstate system from the perspective not of the powerful but of the powerless”, while refuting alleged “fallacies” in mainstream theory “that are more noticeable from the viewpoint of the periphery but that nevertheless affect the logical structures of mainstream international relations theories” (Escudé, 1997, pp.4-5). It is therefore clear, from the beginning, that the theory presupposes a hierarchical arrangement between the 'powerful' and the 'powerless'. Hierarchy, for Escudé, manifests itself in both *de facto* and *de jure* terms. An example is the veto power for some of the great powers in the UN Security Council. “States are not formally equal; admittedly, they are even less equal on an informal basis, but it is an untruth to say that none is entitled to command and none is required to obey” (p.8). Rather than lament or oppose such hierarchical constellation from a peripheral perspective, the author takes it as his starting point and challenges, instead, 'eccentric' foreign policy that resists or ignores hierarchy. Adventures in the periphery, he claims, are unaffordable. This is particularly so if we break down the 'black box' of the state-as-unitary-actor, defying a key assumption of mainstream IR theorising: when a small state attempts to behave like a Great Power, its government may benefit from militaristic nationalism, but the population suffers the consequences of international sanctions.

In fact, the questionable character of this 'state-centric' assumption is a central metatheoretical point reiterated by Escudé in every step of the argument. 'Scientific' theories at the core of the discipline are denounced for ignoring the normative presuppositions that they smuggle into supposedly 'neutral' explanations of power politics. The most notable issue is that “mainstream international relations theory unintentionally takes sides with the state rather than with the citizen”. Instead, Escudé defends a clear adhesion to 'political liberalism'. In his definition, the doctrine “regards the individual human person's rights and interests as the foremost priority of the state's
activities and endeavors. It establishes the rights of the individual and interests of the
citizen as the sole justification for the existence of the state” (1997, p.14). Peripheral
foreign policy that confronts the hegemonic states risks the welfare of the citizens by
exposing them to economic sanctions and other forms of punishment. It is mainly the
ruling elites who benefit from this type of policy. Interestingly, the author does not
extend 'liberalism' to the economic realm. Instead, he agrees with the 'mercantilist'
interpretation of the wealth-power nexus and argues that the effects of mercantilist state-
centrism designed to benefit the ruling elites can generate “spillover” into citizen
welfare as an unintended consequence. This would be a “benign” kind of “state-centric
rationality”, despite falling short of an ideal “citizen-centric” policy standard. The worse
kind of state-centric logic is what we find in states “which are obsessed with
power/security and which threaten to impoverish the population”, such as Argentina
during the Condor II missile programme in cooperation with Iraq (p.17). Being realistic
in the periphery, therefore, often means ignoring some of mainstream realism's advice.

These are the normative elements behind the author's main point of
metatheoretical contention against the mainstream. Let me further expound the
contention itself. Critical of the instrumentalist assumption that states are unitary actors
and of the metaphysical claim that 'states are people too' (Luoma-aho, 2009; Wendt,
2004), Escudé denounces such claims as an “anthropomorphic fallacy” or “fiction of the
group-person”, leading to “a tendency to think of state policy as if it were equivalent to
an individual's decisions”, and a political inclination to see the state as an end in itself,
rather than being an instrument to defend “the rights and welfare of its individual
citizens” (1997, pp.23-4). Anthropomorphism in this sense hinders our understanding of
how foreign policy works and whom it benefits. This sort of argument is often the
province of those known as 'critical theorists', drawing on the notion of a 'state-society
complex' with distributive effects (Ashley, 1981; Cox, 1981; Linklater, 1982). However,
if Escudé is right, a critical approach can also be employed by political liberals and shift
the conversation into a more individualistic discourse that breaks down the state into
different groups and structures. As a liberal criticising the distributive effects of the
relation between ruling elites and the rest of the population, Escudé's (1997, pp.36-
7) dialogue with 'critical theory' appears to be more consistent with the principles of
political liberalism than state-centric 'liberals' and 'neoliberals' in mainstream IR (but
see van de Haar, 2009, pp.125-50 for alternative interpretations of liberalism in IPE). In
fact, a convocation is issued to “theorists”, who are called to uncover and denounce the
discursive “mechanism” whereby 'anthropomorphic' principles (e.g. nationalism, militarism) are used to mobilise popular loyalty in support of grandiose and risky foreign policy in peripheral states (Escudé, 1997, p.45). Thus, even at the metatheoretical level, a political critique can be raised against the social consequences of applying mainstream state-centric theory in statecraft, and as a 'drive' to theorise IR and IPE in different ways from a normative perspective.

Anthropomorphic 'fallacies' are “an eloquent proof of the fact that philosophical assumptions are of necessity built into the very logic of international relations theory” (Escudé, 1997, p.46), but there are additional aspects of metatheory explored by the author. These relate, first, to his view of what makes statecraft 'rational' (in dialogue with Morgenthau) and, secondly, the role played by 'structure' (in dialogue with Waltz). In terms of rationality, Escudé follows Morgenthau's (1948, p.3) classical realist advice that we follow the “forces inherent in human nature” instead of working against them. In its peripheral formulation, however, realism attempts to further clarify the means and ends of statecraft in a 'citizen-centric' fashion, rejecting the earlier approach's state-centrism. This is “a theory-building tactic” that yields a certain “normative ideal type of foreign policy” based on a conception of rationality according to which “the ultimate ends must be moral, or good, and they must above all serve the people” (Escudé, 1997, pp.82-4). For this reason, Escudé defines his own approach as a political theory aggregating explanation and prescription. He is sceptical of its ability to fulfill expectations constructed for mainstream empirical theorising. Instead, he sides with Morgenthau's own conception of theory in relation to prudence and statecraft (1997, p.101).

The other metatheoretical issue has to do with the notion of 'structure' in interaction with the neorealist research programme. Structuralism in Waltz's conception has “very limited usefulness”, being merely a “clever artifice” that requires correction in order to account for the peripheral situation (Escudé, 1997, p.68). The “only significant sense” in which it can be useful “is in the insight it provides with respect to the identity of the likely winners in interstate competition”. A 'likely winner' in the periphery is “a state that minds its own business, concentrates its attention on trade and development, and abides by the rules of the game set by the great powers”. But, then, this means that a key structural feature that 'drops out' of Waltz's formulation needs to be recovered: “the attributes of states” (pp.68-9). And, if we look closely, we come to the realisation that yet another feature, namely, the 'organising principle' theorised by Waltz, also requires
alteration in the case of peripheral states, to accommodate “an incipient and imperfect hierarchy” (p.78). This comes as no surprise, since Waltz's original approach aimed solely at an understanding of Great Power politics (Resende-Santos, 2007, pp.13ff). Following Morgenthau, the preference of ‘peripheral realism' is for a normative theory. Unlike the classical realist, the focus of policy lies on the citizens, not the state itself. Following Waltz, understanding 'structure' can be profitable, but unlike Waltz a peripheral realist also needs to look at the unit-level.

What, then, are the substantive arguments and prescriptions of peripheral realism? The core of the programme derives form a reformulation of structural constraints and mechanisms that reproduce them:

[T]he structure of the interstate system is better characterized by the concept of an incipient and imperfect hierarchy than by the anarchy postulated by realist theorists. This incipient hierarchy, in turn, is enforced by sanction-linkages that are not always effective but that make it costly for weak states to challenge the strong, especially when evaluating costs from a citizen-centric perspective (Escudé, 1997, p.48).

Studying structure from the perspective of unit-level features implies the acknowledgement of a certain “functional” differentiation “between great powers and weaker states”, but this is said to be a matter “of degree along the continuum that empirically exists”. Because of the differentiation, economic issues become a crucial tool of dominant states, which “are in a position to link crucial economic issues to desirable political attitudes on the part of the weaker states” (Escudé, 1997, p.59). The functional differentiation requires us to divide states into “three types” - great powers (“states that command”) and weaker states (“states that obey” and “rebel states”). The hierarchical arrangements are not necessarily dyadic, unlike Lake's formulation. One can identify this asymmetry across the whole system. Within each different category, of course, the relations are more symmetrical, all things being equal. Differing from Waltz, Escudé (p.64) ascribes a potentially “destabilizing role” to 'rebel states'. They are “equivalent of outlaws or mafias in domestic societies”. Rebellious states are punished by this hierarchical and functionally differentiated structure. Citizens suffer much more from these punishments than the ruling elites. Obedient states, on the other hand, often reap short- and long-term benefits of cooperation and compliance which translate, as far as possible, into peace and well-being of the citizens. Great powers can afford the luxury of adventurous military exploits, but weaker states should treat “development” as priority and be more aware of “the mercantilistic link between power and wealth”
Being obedient pays off in the periphery. Breaking down the 'black box' of the state-as-unitary-actor, the author advises against “four basic pursuits”. First, a peripheral state must “abstain from interstate power politics and devote itself to local economic development”. Secondly, it should avoid “costly” idealism and only go after “good causes abroad” if there are no risks and costs involved. Thirdly, this type of state “should abstain from risky confrontations with great powers when they engage in policies that are detrimental to universal good causes but that do not affect the peripheral government's material interests”. Finally, a peripheral state willing to obey the great powers and reap the benefits of peripheral realism “should abstain from unproductive political confrontations” with them (Escudé, 1997, pp.87-9). These principles, I say, truly satisfy the metatheoretical requirements stipulated, after Morgenthau, of the application of a consequentialist ethics to the formulation of foreign policy (see p.132).\footnote{If there is any question of that, see Molloy's (2008, pp.91-6) discussion of Morgenthau's \textit{dictum} that “political ethics judges action by its political consequences” (cited and discussed on p.95).} Moreover, they derive from the metatheoretical avoidance of the 'anthropomorphic fallacy', since a line is clearly drawn between these policies and what would otherwise be a power-politics pattern of interstate behaviour (see also Escudé, 2010). Finally, they are not only consistent with, but also enabled by, Escudé’s critical reformulation of Waltz's conception of 'structure', the third metatheoretical principle at stake (1997, pp.133-6). For all its consistency, though, peripheral realism ultimately fails to designate concrete criteria for testing the theory. One could infer, from the notions employed by Escudé to judge the perverse effects of mainstream IR approaches in Argentina and other weaker states, that the social consequences of policy derived from peripheral realism would be part of the test. Very well. Escudé's peripheral realism informed, in fact, the foreign policy of so-called 'carnal relations' with the US during the administration of President Carlos Menem (Santoro, 2008, pp.5-21). The central normative point of peripheral realism has to do with citizen welfare and economic development. Menem's domestic and foreign policies are commonly blamed for the economic and political disaster that ensued few years later (Cervo, 2008, pp.76-82). Escudé's (2009, esp. Conclusion) reply is that he never endorsed economic 'neoliberalism', but rather a 'mercantilist' policy. This he writes as an \textit{ad hoc} additional hypothesis to the theory already in circulation before the Menem regime. Whether Menem's economic liberalisations were indeed the cause of the disaster would demand,
of course, an economic study on its own. Escudé's reply, however, is by no means straightforward. There are those who, like Hans-Hermann Hoppe, would blame Menem for too much statism, not liberalism. The attempt to justify Hoppe's peculiar antimercantilist view of the wealth-power nexus is our next case.

**Deductive theory, time-preferences, wealth and power**

A series of highly controversial essays in Hans-Hermann Hoppe's *Democracy – The God that Failed* pioneer the application of 'Austrian' political economy to the theoretical comparison between democracy, monarchy and market-anarchism. In passing, they briefly deal with cycles of international hegemony and decline from an economic perspective. As far as I understand, this is the first time Hoppe's views on world politics are compared to key IR texts on hierarchy in a metatheoretical study. Hoppe's normative inclinations, consistent with the ethical perspective advanced by leading Austrian School economist Murray Rothbard (1998), favour anarchism or 'natural order' over 'monarchy', and the latter over 'democracy'. The key value is to rule out any initiation of aggression, the state being by definition a major initiator of aggression. Hoppe's (1999) defence of market-anarchism includes the claim that even protection services would be sold, rather than financed via taxation (an instance of aggression). In Hoppe's view, surprisingly, monarchy is inherently less exploitative and violent than democracy.⁹⁵ Proving the point is not only a way of challenging the democratic hegemonic project that legitimates the *status quo*, but also to explain the desirability of less exploitation and aggression beyond the ethical aspect (Hoppe, 1990).⁹⁶ A political system organised along these lines would lead to more productivity, prosperity and even higher cultural or 'civilisational' standards. In Hoppe's conception, there is a positive relation between 'degree of civilisation' and the diffusion of the 'non-aggression principle' in any given society. A line, then, is clearly drawn between exploitative/uncivilised systems and their free/civilised counterparts (see Hoppe, 2001, p.7 where the distinction is employed at the personal level). There are scattered references to international politics and cycles of hegemony and imperialism in the international system. This is where we find an implicit theory of hierarchy.

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⁹⁵ Hoppe means ideal types of 'democracy' as publicly-owned government and 'monarchy' as privately-owned government. In his definition, the logic and structure of post-19th century monarchies is closer to the 'democracy' type, especially after 1914.

⁹⁶ Challenging what is perceived as the ideology legitimating the status quo (institutionalised initiation of aggression via state power) is a key way to pursue change, since Hoppe rejects violent populist revolutionism (see Hoppe, 2001, pp.90-4).
The Austrian School research programme that has been more inclined to extend the School's framework beyond economics is *praxeological* (Rothbard, 2001, p.65). In this tradition, praxeology is a metatheoretical approach that favours analytical and deductive thinking and rejects the mainstream empiricist conception of social theory (see Dolan, 1976). Its cornerstone is the fact of human action, regarded as the fundamental starting-point for every social theory (and not only economics). Human action in this technical sense is “purposeful behavior” (Mises, 1996, p.11) or, in other words, “an actor's purposeful pursuit of valued ends with scarce means” (Hoppe, 2001, p.xvii). This is regarded as a solid starting-point by virtue of being true *a priori*: if we want to prove there is no such a thing as human action, we will be engaging in purposeful behaviour, thus making the attempt self-referentially inconsistent (Callahan, 2004, p.29). Praxeology as a metatheory involves assuming the 'action axiom' and building up an edifice of theorems deduced from this starting-point (Hoppe, 2007, pp.7-83). This is the metatheoretical 'drive' behind Hoppe's efforts. Contrary to mainstream theorising, conclusions obtained this way “can be illustrated by historical data, but historical data can neither establish nor refute them” (Hoppe, 2001, p.xviii). In fact, says Hoppe (p.xvi), “someone who wanted to 'test' these propositions” should be regarded as “confused”, for deductive social theory “trumps and corrects experience”, and not the other way around. Praxeology, therefore, is “everything a good positivist claims one cannot and shall not be: interdisciplinary, theoretically oriented, and dealing with both positive-empirical and normative questions” (p.xxiv). How exactly does this apply to the notion of hierarchy in the international system? Before we get to that point, it is necessary to follow the 'deductive chain'.

The first step in the argument is the definition of 'time preference' as a phenomenon permeating all human action. Since the point of acting is to pursue 'valued ends' given scarcity of 'means', and since 'time' affects both the action itself and the “duration of serviceability” of those means, then we may postulate that “present or earlier goods are, and must invariably be, valued more highly than future or later ones”. By implication, delaying one's consumption of a present or earlier good is only likely to

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97 Alternative research programmes in the Austrian tradition are the 'spontaneous order' approach of F. A. Hayek and the 'hermeneutical' approach of Ludwig Lachmann.

98 There are other approaches that claim to be praxeological, but in different senses. The philosophy of György Lukács, the strategic thought of Tadeusz Kotarbinski and the international theory of Raymond Aron employ the term, but by far (judging by volume of publications) the most known consistent use as a school of thought is that of the 'Austrian Economics' of Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard.
happen if there is a perceived incentive to do so, such as for example a future 'premium' for present savings. Low time-preference rates contribute to capital accumulation, increase in productivity, and enjoyment of more 'scarce means' at the end of the process of production. High time-preference rates do the opposite: “Like a child”, one tends to opt for “instant or minimally delayed gratification” (Hoppe, 2001, pp.1-5). Institutional factors contributing to lowering the overall time-preference rate include a stable monetary system (no inflation), property rights and so on. The “process of civilization” emerging from this overall decrease in time-preference rates is proportional to the lowering of 'interference' with voluntary exchange and appropriation from nature. Any kind of recurrent violence – but mainly government institutionalised initiation of aggression via taxation – leads people to a more 'present-oriented' pattern of behaviour and represents “a tendency toward decivilization” (pp.10-15).

The second step of the argument stipulates that not all types of government systems affect time-preference rates equally. There is a qualitative distinction between the way 'monarchy' (privately owned government) and 'democracy' (publicly-owned government) affect these rates, on at least two accounts:

(1) A private government owner will tend to have a systematically longer planning horizon, i.e., his degree of time preference will be lower, and accordingly, his degree of economic exploitation will tend to be less than that of a government caretaker; and (2), subject to a higher degree of exploitation the nongovernmental public will also be comparatively more present-oriented under a system of publicly-owned government than under a regime of private government ownership (Hoppe, 2001, p.46).

Because of the way this affects a ruler's longer-term expectations, there is, structurally speaking, much more incentive for a low time-preference rate when a country's government is 'privately owned' (as in pre-1789 Europe) than 'publicly owned' (as in contemporary democracies in the West). Hoppe employs a good number of key secondary sources in international historical sociology to illustrate the point, looking at 'indicators' of governmental exploitation (e.g. taxes, government employment, inflation rates, public debt, legislation/regulation) and 'indicators' of “present-orientedness” (e.g. high interest rates, low contributions to charity, crime rates). Such 'domestic' indicators illustrate the revisionist conclusion that “the historic transition from monarchy to democracy represents not progress but civilizational decline” (pp.50-69).99 I say 'illustrate', because Hoppe himself has already asserted that the theory can only be

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99 The author makes reference, for example, to the works of Martin van Creveld, Fernand Braudel and Charles Tilly.
'tested', or 'verified/refuted' in terms of its internal consistency. While not immediately linked to my exposition, the general principle established in this step of the argument is essential to the conclusion. The principle consists in connecting economic liberty to prosperity and 'civilisation' via time-preference rates.

The next step of the argument, or the 'IPE' portion, comprises a number of scattered passages which I now connect in order to 'distil' the theory of hegemony cycles embedded in them. From the violent nature of the state as a 'legitimised monopolist of expropriation' in a given territory, we can infer its tendency to domestically expand and centralise (given lack of serious internal competition). We can, moreover, infer that different states will compete for more control over territory and populations, engaging in external expansion as well (pp.22-3). The degree of 'economic liberty' determines not only the 'degree of civilisation' in a certain country, but also by implication the amount of resources a government has available to pursue further centralisation and expansion. The logic of expansion often leads to a paradoxical cycle of hegemonies. This is also a step-by-step 'praxeological' argument.

The international aspect of the expansionist drive of states involves, of course, competitive elimination. The move is from systemic fragmentation, in which it is relatively easy for an exploited population to 'vote with their feet' (thus constraining domestic incentives for government to exploit even more), to systemic concentration (Hoppe, 2001, p.107). As Alexander Wendt (2003) once observed (but for different reasons), there is a long-term tendency to centralisation and decrease in the number of states in the system. Ultimately crucial for whether a state will expand or eventually disappear is the “relative amount of economic resources” available to it (Hoppe, 2001, p.111). But, then, the 'freer' the state, the more 'prosperous' it is:

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100 This expansionist drive and, more importantly, the means whereby it occurs, also depends on whether a country is 'privately owned' or not. Democracies tend to be much more destructive when they go to war, while the constraints on adventurous dynasties are legion. Here, again, the distinction is not a matter of degree, since the “decivilizing forces” in a monarchial state are “insufficiently strong to overcome the fundamental, countervailing tendency toward falling time-preference rates and ever-expanding ranges of private provisions”. In publicly-owned governments, conversely, “the decivilizing effects of government can be expected to grow strong enough to actually halt the civilizing process, or even to alter its direction and bring about an opposite tendency toward decivilization”. In Hoppe's somewhat prejudiced metaphors, “a progressive infantilization and brutalization of social life” via “capital consumption” and short-sighted “horizons and provisions” (Hoppe, 2001, pp.33-40). Besides the decision to go to war, the mode of warfare is also influenced by 'regime type'. Thus, in the transition from 'monarchy' to 'democracy' we can observe a “change from limited warfare to total war” (Hoppe, 2001, pp.69; see 256). In light of what we may deduce from the incentive structures in each type of government, monarchies are overall less violent, exploitative and more civilised and self-restrained than democracies. This is as close as we can get to a Monarchic Peace Theory.
Other things being equal, the lower the tax and regulation burden imposed by a government on its domestic economy (…), the larger the amount of domestically produced wealth on which it can draw in its conflicts with neighbouring competitors (…). States which tax and regulate their domestic economies little – liberal states – tend to defeat and expand their territories at the expense of non-liberal ones (Hoppe, 2001, p.112).

The first paradox in this cycle of hegemony, therefore, is that states on top of the hierarchy, which are the most internationally aggressive states (such as colonialist powers), are domestically the most 'liberal' ones in the system. This, however, is also their Achilles' heel, and another paradox:

[T]he further the process of more liberal governments defeating less liberal ones proceeds – i.e., the larger the territories, the fewer and more distant the remaining competitors, and thus the more costly international migration – the lower a government's incentive to continue in its domestic liberalism will be. As one approaches the limit of a One World state, all possibilities of voting with one's feet against a government disappear (p.112; see also 231).

Karl Polanyi's (1944, p.140) argument that 'liberal' states need a great projection of state power to 'make markets work' is an ironic statement well-known in IPE. Hoppe's praxeological theory of international hierarchy puts Polanyi's logic upside down. Market-liberalism in fact works so well that governments decide to use its resulting prosperity to expand and eliminate external competition. When the state grows, though, the incentive-structure that would keep it restrained and 'liberal' also changes, so in the long run it tends to become centralised, exploitative, driving time-preference rates up and productivity down. As a result of 'killing the goose that lays golden eggs', the hegemon eventually declines.

Hoppe's constant reminder that the theory is purely deductive and therefore not open to 'empirical test' often jeopardises the persuasiveness of the argument to those too attached to mainstream theorising. The fact that he omits links in the 'deductive chain', considered unproblematic (having been previously established by other Austrian School economists like Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard) also weakens the argument from a rhetorical perspective, particularly in the case of those who are unaware, or dismissive of, the approach. Despite this, Hoppe still opts for a way of theorising that is consistent, as far as possible, with the principles of praxeological metatheory. The 'test' for the theory is to find logical fallacies in the argument. If we assume this point of view, then a helpful exercise for an 'Austrian' scholar would be to include an appendix
after each study containing a formalisation of the argument in predicate calculus. The use of analytical philosophy would be an essential tool for the 'Austrian' economist, yet to date no well-known attempt has been made to formalise economic praxeology in this sense, let alone Hoppe's view of the hegemonic cycle. Besides, even in the absence of further specification for theory test, we can still ask, for example, whether economic liberty is indeed the main cause of international hegemony, for an equally deductive claim could be made that would incorporate 'technology' or some other unrelated possible cause. This sort of critique is more reasonable than some of the 'external' claims often made that praxeological reasoning is pseudo-scientific because it does not bow to empiricist standards stipulated by the mainstream (e.g. Bunge, 1999, pp.325-8). Like Escudé, Hoppe denounces the exploitative interests of the ruling elites and draws a line between governments and citizens. Unlike Escudé's account, Hoppe's view of the relation between wealth and power challenges by implication the mercantilist assumptions of realism.

**Eurocentrism and hierarchy in international thought**

In his study of 'Eurocentric' assumptions in international theory, Hobson interprets a wide selection of texts over a long time-span (1760-2010). The main critical conclusion is that “what we encounter in the vast majority of international theory is the provincial or parochial normative purpose of *defending and celebrating the ideal of the West in world politics*” (Hobson, 2012, p.344, original emphasis). This is enabled by Eurocentric narratives operating in different ways depending on the text. In any case, their way of shaping international theory (and particularly the IR discipline) leads it “not so much to explain international politics in an objective, positivist and universalist manner” but, rather, to “parochially celebrate and defend or promote the West as the proactive subject of, and as the highest or ideal normative referent in, world politics”. IR theory, therefore, functions as “a vehicle, or repository” of “Eurocentric metanarratives” (pp.1-2). Hobson's study synthesises several manners in which this occurs, always looking for evidence in key historical and contemporary works. 'Eurocentrism' has four basic variants, depending on whether it manifests itself as an 'institutionalist' argument or a 'scientific racist' claim, combined with a 'pro-imperialist' or an 'anti-imperialist' stance. Paternalist Eurocentrism is an imperialist form of institutionalist claim. Offensive Eurocentrism is, at the same time, racist and imperialist. Anti-paternalist Eurocentrism is institutionalist and against imperialism. Defensive
Eurocentrism combines an anti-imperialist stance with scientific racism (pp.3-8). There are also variations in the presentation of Eurocentrism. Before 1945 international theory was overtly Eurocentric, with the West “imbued with purely virtuous and/or progressive properties that in turn lead it to pioneer all that is progressive in world politics”. During the Cold War, it employed “sanitized terms” like 'modern/traditional', 'core/periphery' rather than 'civilisation/barbarism' – a covert or “subliminal” type of presentation. A more overt approach has been recovered since the end of the Cold War, although “critical IR theory”, in the “back-seat” of the discipline, kept traces of Eurocentrism in the covert format (pp.9-10). Based on this classification, we should expect the theories analysed in this chapter to fit into the post-1945 categories.

Crucial for our understanding of the Eurocentric character of IR theory is the fact that, at least implicitly, it is embedded in assumptions about hierarchical relations between different groups of states. International theory conceptualises sovereignty in the anarchical system only as a derivation of an underlying worldview which has hierarchy in the centre, based on a presupposed “standard of civilization”. For all its disguise under the rhetoric of ‘sovereign equality under anarchy’, IR theory is predicated “on the unequal field of global/civilizational hierarchy and gradated sovereignties”. This can be translated in practice as either formal or informal hierarchy. Formal requirements make non-Western sovereignty conditional upon meeting the 'civilisational standards', whereas in the informal case its self-determination is maintained, but with an incentive to “assimilate or culturally convert to Western civilizational norms” (Hobson, 2012, p.19). In both cases, reflection on unequal sovereignty results from a transposition, into the international level, of the 'line' drawn between the civilised and the uncivilised via domestic analysis of institutions, culture and/or race. Regardless of the theoretical approach, those units deemed to be domestically 'civilised' are accepted in IR scholarship as more capable of international political agency than those which are not (pp.334ff).

Before we apply Hobson's metatheoretical analysis, a critical comment on its main shortcoming is in order. He purports to uncover the Eurocentric normative bias of international theory, which is often implicit, and to draw a darker picture of the discipline of IR. This is paramount, first, because otherwise “we will continue (…) to reproduce this discourse of power through our own writings”, but also because “international theory is inherently politically performative” (Hobson, 2012, p.16). However, Hobson admittedly selects for analysis texts which will corroborate and
illustrate his claims, and acknowledges there are contemporary non-Eurocentric exceptions, which he prefers to leave aside (p.331). Moreover, he also does not consider non-Eurocentric texts written before the institutionalisation of an IR discipline, perhaps in non-European contexts. If international theory is politically performative, and if seeing our discipline without discerning its Eurocentric bias further reproduces it, then surely metatheory is also politically performative, and the portrait of IR as a large set of 'Eurocentric discourses' would further marginalise non-Eurocentric perspectives. If there ever was any chance of highlighting non-Eurocentric discourses as part of the conversation, Hobson had it, but decided to merely assert, in the conclusion, the “need to work out how a non-Eurocentric foundation for IR theory might be reconstructed” (p.344). While I expect this type of research to be the next step in an already long list of metatheoretical studies on 'non-Western IR', I am unaware of any other study extending Hobson's approach to alternative material such as 'peripheral realism'.

We may start with Hobson's own analysis of neorealism, a research programme denounced for its “residual paternalism” due to Waltz's conjecture that US hegemony has a 'benevolent' character (Hobson, 2012, p.187). Here Hobson may have a point, especially if Waltz's conjecture is read against the context of the post-Cold War literature on the so-called 'unipolar moment' (e.g. Krauthammer, 1990). However, the criticism applies to an ad-hoc auxiliary hypothesis, not to the bulk of the theory. Issue may also be taken against Hobson's (2012, p.204) interpretation of systemic change and functional similarity in Theory of International Politics. It is said that “Waltz denies that structural international change is possible”, when in fact he allows for large-scale change, but narrows it down to an alteration in the distribution of capabilities across the system, making the 'ordering principle' and the 'functional differentiation' of units drop out of the equation.101 Furthermore, in the commentator's understanding, neorealism is “supposed to apply to all states, regardless of their cultural foundations, or identity, whether they be Eastern or Western” (original emphasis). This is only half true, because cultural factors are indeed denied salience in the theory, but Waltz makes it clear that neorealism is an explanation of the way relevant political units operate internationally. Therefore, the 'universality' of the theory applies only to relevant states in similar conditions.

While these claims are unpersuasive in Hobson's reading of neorealism, the

101 Obviously, Waltz's 'exogenous' account of change may be, and has been, criticised from many different angles. But this only reiterates the point that there is such account in the first place (Ashley, 1984; L. G. Freire, 2006b; Wendt, 1992).
remaining critiques are more pertinent. He correctly points out that Waltz's 'theoretical fiat' isolating the international realm “discards the possibility that hierarchy of any sort can exist in the international system”. As a result, this simplification, sharply distinguishing between anarchy and hierarchy, “occludes the possibility of revealing various hierarchical international political formations”, thereby 'sanitising' colonialism and other deleterious practices from the account. Eurocentrism, here, would be an interpretation of such asymmetrical relations via a Western liberal framework that assumes the formal sovereign equality of states. Another point of Eurocentrism is “Waltz's denial of Eastern agency”, such as for example the unwillingness to admit that even with the disproportion between US/USSR and the rest in the Cold War, Vietnam and Afghanistan still thwarted the plans of the superpowers (Hobson, 2012, pp.204-9). Hobson's application of his framework to neorealism in order to detect traces of 'Eurocentrism' is only a partial success. Maybe his rush to critique before establishing a close reading of the text is a defect inherent to general metatheoretical-historical studies covering large samples and a longer time-span. A suggested refinement to the approach would be to 'dig deeper' into individual texts and pay more attention to details. For example, it has been suggested that another source of Eurocentric bias is the fact that Waltz draws his concept of structure from the classical anthropology of Napel and Evans-Pritchard, uncritically transposing the original delineation of 'civilised' and 'traditional' societies into the international realm (Sampson, 2002).

It is surprising that Hobson's study did not consider Lake's 'dyadic' theory as one of the samples. The model is one of the few to place hierarchy at the centre of IR theory, besides being increasingly popular in the recent IR and IPE literature. Lake's formulation attempts to provide a 'neutral' cost-benefit analysis of dyadic hierarchical arrangements from both points of view of dominant and subordinate states. Nevertheless, it often slips out normative statements like “With great power comes great responsibility”; “the right to punish noncompliance ultimately rests upon the collective acceptance or legitimacy of the ruler's right to rule”; or “the key problem in any hierarchy is limiting abuses of authority by the ruler” (Lake, 2009, pp.8; 18; 20). From Hobson's critical perspective, this sort of statement typically assumes a Western-liberal political narrative, but naturalises it under the guise of 'scientific neutrality', on the one hand, and 'consent of the ruled' on the other. In Hobson's story, accounts of unequal sovereignty are to be expected in theories with this kind of bias. Lake's theory not only postulates unequal sovereignty, but also intrinsically connects it to international
hierarchy. “All sovereignty is divided, more or less. Hierarchy is simply the counterpart to this variable sovereignty” (Lake, 2009, p.51). Hobson's identification of a new form of Eurocentric Paternalism which, after the Cold War, adopts an overt defence of Western (especially US) interventionism in world politics, can be matched to Lake's central claim. Says Hobson (2012, p.257):

The Western-liberal wing of mainstream international theory relies on a paternalist Eurocentrism that sings the world into existence with the idiom that 'things can only get better', and that through paternalist interventionism the East can be culturally converted along Western civilizational lines in order to make the world a better place for all peoples.

And here is Lake's portrayal of the ideal hierarchical arrangement that would effectively work according to his theoretical predictions:

Both dominant and subordinate states have to be better off in hierarchic than in strictly anarchic relations for the contract to be fulfilled. Subordinates must yield some portion of their sovereignty and accept their status as legitimate, appropriate, and perhaps even necessary. In return, they receive a political order that allows them to escape in part the state of nature that is international anarchy. Dominant states, in turn, get to set the rules of their international orders in ways that benefit not only others, but also themselves. Yet, at the same time, they must bear the governance costs of producing those orders, disciplining subordinates, and credibly committing not to misuse they (sic) authority they earn (2009, p.93).

Notice Hobson's elements here: paternalism that 'sings the hierarchical world order into existence', with the effect of a considerable improvement. The 'cultural conversion' is, however, only implicit, in the idea of a Western-liberal 'contract' including the acceptance of hegemonic 'legitimacy' escaping from the 'state of nature' of anarchy (very similar to the liberal narrative for the domestic social contract). Besides, indicators of 'Eurocentrism' are also present (i.e. passive subordinates, active hegemons): subordinates “must yield” and “accept” hegemons, and “receive” order. Dominant states “set the rules” and make order. They are also active when they heroically “bear the governance costs” and commit to use well the “authority” that they “earn”. Extending Hobson's account to Lake's dyadic theory further corroborates the narrative. This, however, is to be expected, given Lake's theoretical and academic influences.

Peripheral realism, on the other hand, seems to be a more difficult case. This other perspective assumes hierarchy, even in the formal sense, as a given, and disputes any attempts to 'unrealistically challenge' this structure. Moreover, the policy implications of this approach are very similar to those defended by Lake, and both could
be politically criticised for being exaggeratedly supportive of the status quo. However, peripheral realism is written from the perspective of statecraft in weaker states, even 'non-Western' states in Hobson's sense. Escudé denounces "the ethnocentric quality of the international relations theory coined in the United States and elsewhere in the Anglo-American world", but specifically targets those in "misguided Third World governments" who "misread" this type of theory "without a critical examination of whether the assumptions of these theories are adaptable to local circumstances" (1997, pp.5-6). That is to say, it is precisely its 'non-Western' character that makes room for peripheral realism to modify classical and structural realist approaches of Morgenthau and Waltz and to make them work for weaker states. It is precisely the assumption of hierarchy and inequality, challenging (not corroborating) mainstream forms of realism, that enables it to theorise foreign policy deemed to be better suited for a 'non-Western' situation (see Tickner, 2003a, 2003b, 2008). For Hobson, an easy way out would be to blame the influence of 'Western' IR theory on Escudé's thinking, but this would not do justice to his deliberate rejection of it on account of its 'Western-centric' features. Another solution would be to label peripheral realism 'Eurocentric' because of its 'Western-liberal' assumptions on the centrality of citizen welfare. However, this argument alone would not do. For it is a central claim of the theory that 'Western IR', being state-centric, merely pays lip service to these Western-liberal principles, while peripheral realism is truly politically liberal. A better way to deal with Escudé's case from Hobson's perspective would be to analyse peripheral realism's tripartite hierarchical arrangement between 'states that command', 'states that obey' and 'rebel states'. Here we find a reproduction of claims about 'standards of civilisation' which are in Hobson's conception at the core of a typical 'Eurocentric' approach (see also Walker, 2006). Escudé has to challenge Waltz's 'parsimonious' assumption that weaker states are irrelevant at the systemic level. In contrast, it is argued that rebel states do indeed disturb the system. The claim is not anymore that 'rebel states' are illiberal and their governments jeopardise their citizens. Instead, these less 'civilised' states are labelled as 'troublemakers' and are 'tamed' by the Great Powers via sanctions and interventions in order to stabilise world politics. Extended to the odd case of peripheral realism, therefore, Hobson's narrative seems to apply, although the analysis holds only after an examination of Escudé's theory in its own terms.

The application to Hoppe's praxeological political economy is more straightforward, since the author himself freely employs Eurocentric terminology and
the distinction between 'civilisation' and 'barbarism'. The twist here, though, is that Hoppe as an individualist-anarchist denies any legitimacy to the state. Moreover, the theory postulates an inverse relation between the degree of 'statism' and the degree of 'civilisation'. For this reason, any institutional Eurocentrism (according to Hobson's conceptualisation) must be of the non-statist sort – very different from most theories interpreted in Hobson's study. In Hoppe's work there is, indeed, a deliberate attempt to vindicate libertarian individualist market-anarchism as a more 'civilised' way of life. This is intrinsically linked to the relation between relatively lower time-preferences within such institutional framework, on the one hand, and indicators of 'prosperity' on the other. The standards of economic and cultural behaviour associated to the 'ethics of capitalism' described as 'civilised' are emphatically based on a Eurocentric narrative about the historical formation of a 'prosperous West' enabled by such virtues. The author, however, denounces the growing centralisation and external expansion of 'prosperous' states enabled by a 'liberal' wealth-power nexus. In fact, ideally local communities and even individuals should consider delegitimising state coercion and support secessionist causes everywhere (Hoppe, 2001, pp.107-19; 267-92). The policy, of course, is a denial of the Western hegemonic discourse of 'Liberal' democracy. With this caveat, we may consider this theory an institutionalist, but anti-imperialist, Eurocentric approach in Hobson's scheme.

Final remarks: levels of metatheoretical analysis
Metatheory operates in this chapter in a number of different ways, and this series of final remarks purports to clarify them. We moved from the historical debate on the role of Westphalia as an IR narrative of 'hierarchy' to 'anarchy' transition to a theoretical debate of what 'hierarchy' means. In the field, the concept of hierarchy denotes some sort of asymmetry in the international system. It is actualised in distinct manners by each of the theoretical approaches analysed here. These theories, in turn, are 'driven' in different ways by metatheoretical principles. In terms of a metatheoretical framework designed to understand hierarchy, Hobson's critique of Eurocentric assumptions in IR and IPE theory provides a set of tools. Drawing on this formulation, it is possible to interpret some of the normative elements behind each of the theories selected for our analysis.

Neorealism is, at the same time, 'instrumentalist' and 'structuralist'. Structure is postulated as a way of creatively distinguishing the international realm of investigation
from domestic political systems. Hierarchy characterises domestic politics and anarchy describes international political interaction. Most explanations and predictions in the theory follow from this combination of instrumentalist simplification and systemic theorising. Other claims are made with reference to post-Cold War hegemony and balance-of-power. These claims do not follow the same metatheoretical standards stipulated by neorealism as a research programme. The mainstream empiricist approach to the study of dyadic hierarchy is presented as critical realism and in tension with 'positivism'. Upon scrutiny, its empiricist character has been uncovered, and we may correctly locate it closer to 'positivism' than to critical realism. Hierarchy means a relation of authority and consent between, respectively, a dominant state and a subordinate state. Both neorealism and the dyadic approach are state-centric, but the former makes a point of 'systemic' theorising, while the latter incorporates a number of 'reductionist' (i.e. unit-level) variables. Both are Eurocentric and 'paternalist' in Hobson's understanding, but Hobson's interpretation of neorealism may be questioned in a more detailed reading.

The other two theories of hierarchy are less focused on the state or, rather, negatively focused on the state. 'Peripheral realism' metatheoretically critiques the normative and logical problems in the 'anthropomorphic fallacy' of the state-as-unitary-actor model assumed by mainstream IR theorising. It places hierarchy at the core of the framework in order to provide advice on foreign policy for a 'weaker state'. 'Rebellious states' are denounced due to the fact that their risky confrontations of the Great Powers lead to sanctions and, consequently, harm to the population they are supposed to protect. 'States that obey' are portrayed as the model of successful and prudent foreign policy in the periphery. Peripheral realism fails to devise clear evaluation criteria of its own, so we have to derive a political critique from its dealings with mainstream theories. Since the main criterion has to do with the consequences of using such theories, if we find questionable outcomes related to the use of peripheral realism, then there is reason to mistrust it.

Another view of hierarchy rejecting state-centrism is the theory of cycles of hegemony and decline implicit in 'praxeological' deductivist political economy. In this view, hierarchy begins at the individual level, and inter-state asymmetry is only a derivation from it. The theory connects 'civilised' low time-preference rates of individuals to 'prosperity'. The aggregation of these rates are encouraged by a high degree of economic freedom in a country. A 'liberal' country manages to amass
sufficient wealth to become more centralised, exploitative, and imperialistic. Thus it makes sense to assume an international asymmetry in power and command, especially of the colonialist sort. However, these expansionist and centralising moves, in the end, increase the aggregate time-preference rates and the same country declines. This view of the hegemonic cycle is the culmination of a 'deductive chain'. The praxeological rejection of 'empirical testing', and affirmation of an 'internal test of coherence', leads us to ask why no effort is made to formalise the claims in order to facilitate logical testing. Like peripheral realism, this approach requires a refinement in the metatheoretical criteria for theory evaluation. But if we employ Hobson's framework, we can see that peripheral realism is 'covert' in its Eurocentric character, while praxeological political economy, at least in this instance, is 'overt' in its adoption of categories like civilisation/barbarism.

This chapter highlights the operation of metatheory as a constraining and enabling conceptual 'mechanism' in a number of ways. The first level is 'immanent' to the approaches selected for analysis. Because each of the main authors state their own metatheoretical views, the initial step is to clarify their influence on the theorisation of hierarchy. Here we see different 'drives' behind each approach – instrumentalist and systemic (neorealism), empiricist (dyadic hierarchy), normative (peripheral realism) and deductivist (praxeology). This accounts to a great extent for the particularities in each of the 'ways of theorising' adopted. An additional step is to evaluate the internal consistency of the relation between metatheoretical preferences and the theoretical claims in each case. Neorealism and dyadic hierarchy are not fully consistent with their metatheoretical claims. Peripheral realism and praxeology require further specification on theory evaluation, but would also, at first sight, appear to fall short of their own standards. The first level, therefore, is 'immanent' to each approach. It is, moreover, an Internal/Intellectual exercise in which metatheory as clarification (hermeneutical) and metatheory as mechanism of evaluation (evaluative) and/or refinement (corrective) are at stake. The second level cuts across the approaches. It consists in the use, by each of the authors, of their own metatheoretical standards against opposing views of hierarchy in the field. Speaking from a 'systemic' perspective, neorealism dismisses 'reductionist' theory as not parsimonious enough. Mainstream empiricism in the dyadic approach refuses to take into account 'ideational' or 'normative' views of hierarchy because they are not operationised or measurable. Peripheral realism, in its citizen-centric and 'non-Western' normative perspective, provides a critique of the 'anthropomorphic fallacy' in
mainstream IR theorising. Here, not only Internal/Intellectual elements are at stake, but also Internal/Contextual (theory/evidence, theory/politics) and External/Intellectual (philosophy/theory). Metatheorising as critique and as theoretical evaluation are the main occurrences.

The third and the fourth levels have to do with the introduction of Hobson's overarching framework employed to spot 'Eurocentric' narratives and normative commitments in international thought. On the one hand, this metatheoretical framework operates as an External/Intellectual (philosophy/theory, theory outside IR/theory in IR) and Internal/Contextual (theory-in-society) mechanism of clarification, disciplinary history and critique. These three ways of metatheorising are highlighted and declared by the author himself. The study is, on the other hand, an analysis motivated by the harmful impact of 'Eurocentric' theory on political practice (critical), an account of the formation of IR that stresses this aspect, often absent from traditional accounts like the 'Great Debates' narrative (historical) and, finally, an interpretation (hermeneutical) of more than two centuries of international thought with special reference to IR and IPE theory (Hobson, 2012, pp.1-30). The interpretation uncovers the inner Eurocentric normative narratives 'driving' theorisation. Most of IR theory is said to be based on implicit views of hierarchy rather than anarchy. This is the third level. The fourth and final level at which metatheory operates in this chapter is that of my own evaluation of Hobson's framework. In this sense, it is a metatheoretical analysis of Hobson's metatheoretical approach. It is a meta-metatheoretical discussion, mostly of the Internal/Intellectual variety. I test Hobson's claims against neorealism and find some of them wanting (evaluative metatheorising). I also point out how they could be improved (corrective metatheorising). An indication is left that the author's views should be extended to 'non-Western' theories, lest it reify a 'Eurocentric' IR discipline (critical metatheorising of the Internal/Contextual sort). In extending Hobson's analysis to peripheral realism, I claim it still applies to this difficult case of 'non-Western Eurocentrism' (corrective metatheorising), and so it does to praxeological political economy. It is this meta-metatheoretical analysis that concludes the illustrations of the general claims advanced in this thesis. We move now to a summary of my contributions and the general conclusions.
Conclusion

The present thesis may now be concluded. After the problematisation and conceptualisation undertaken in the first part, the thorough examination of IR views on the matter in part two and the 'illustration cases' in the final part, two types of final remarks are in order. The first addresses the original contributions of this study, both primary and secondary, exploring avenues for further research. The second type of final remarks highlights the answers provided to the issue at hand and suggests criteria to test my claims.

A summary of the primary contribution

This study has investigated the role of metatheoretical scholarship in the academic discipline of IR. Unlike the literature on the topic in our discipline, which treats the issue only in passing, its main original contribution is the treatment of the topic in general terms, formulating a qualified defence of metatheorising. First, the thesis provides an extensive conceptualisation of 'metatheory' as 'systematic discourse about theory'. By expanding on this definition, I have explored a considerable number of implications and illustrated each of them with reference not only to IR, but also to parallel disciplines. Metatheory operates as a 'bridging' mechanism, constraining and enabling theoretical claims in many different ways. It often comprises an intermediate 'discursive layer' between one type of theoretical material and other types, within a given discipline. Secondly, the thesis also makes a thorough examination of IR views on metatheoretical research, weighing arguments both in favour and against it. A key finding is that, even from the perspective of each position, some of the arguments contradict each other. Moreover, most of the objections to metatheorising in our discipline are not of the 'strong' kind. Instead, contingent claims are made about negative effects of (too much) metatheory in IR. Such arguments must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Thirdly, my study shows the impossibility of establishing a strong argument for the complete eradication of metatheory in a given discipline and, by extension, in IR. In order to make a radical claim against metatheory, one has to engage in metatheoretical argumentation and, therefore, the exercise is self-referentially
inconsistent. Since we cannot fully remove metatheory from IR, a better way to proceed is to look at some of the problems in this discursive layer aiming to improve the quality of metatheoretical scholarship. This defence of metatheory, advanced in parts one and two of the thesis, should not be taken as an immunisation of metatheorising. Some of the accounts of the negative roles played by this discursive layer in the field are, indeed, pertinent to the discussion and should be taken seriously. My defence, then, is a qualified one: we cannot get rid of metatheory, but it can and should be improved.

**Secondary contributions**

Part three of the thesis illustrates and further develops some of the general claims with the use of concrete 'cases' speaking to the areas of International Political Theory (IPT), History of International Relations and International Political Economy (IPE). Here I also claim originality, albeit in more localised terms. The first illustration case, studying political theories of the Holy Roman Empire written in the 17th century, examines the metatheoretical 'drives' behind each of the three key formulations. It may be seen from the perspective of IR as a contribution to the 'history of ideas' in the field. The notion of a 'states-system', refined as an attempt to define the Empire in that discussion, was subsequently reframed by 19th century historians and later absorbed by English School theorists. The English School connection is clear, but it needs refinement. Whether it accounts for the origin of mainstream IR conceptions of the 'international system' also remains to be seen. This is an avenue for further research which I have helped to establish. The second illustration case addresses a number of theoretical interpretations of the impact of the Peace of Westphalia on the formation of the Early Modern international system. The theories differ not only in their reading of Westphalia, or substantive theoretical claims, but also in the metatheoretical 'drives' behind them. Particularly relevant in this case is the relation between theory and history presupposed by each approach. The argument that different IR theories would, and do, provide distinct interpretations of the same event is almost trivial. However, the way in which I explore this fact opens up a wide range of research issues to the IR scholar. On the first part of the thesis, I have alluded to peculiar readings of Thomas Kuhn's 'paradigmatism', with the mainstream version attempting to 'normalise' IR as a 'science' and move on from heavy theorising to puzzle-solving empirical research. A common postpositivist reading of Kuhn tends to ignore this 'imperial bid' for 'normal science' and highlights the distinction between 'paradigms', leading to the postulation of 'incommensurability'
between them. My own comparison between different theories of order and change in world politics applied to the case of Westphalia is a modest starting point for those interested in further understanding this 'battlefield' for competing conceptions of how to do research in historical and empirical IR. Are we comparing different views of the same object? Is there a partial overlap at least? Or are these theories speaking of 'different worlds' in an incommensurable way? A metatheory in favour or against 'incommensurability' would have to be specified, and the application could draw upon some of the findings contained in my illustration case.

Taken together, the chapter on 17th century theories of the Holy Roman Empire and the study on order, change and Westphalia also suggest a possible line of inquiry to the historically-minded researcher. One could assume – as many do – that part of what happened in the reconstitution of the Empire via Westphalia and later developments derives from the social construction of Europe, federalism, international society, and so on. Under this assumption, a theoretical framework could be designed (or borrowed) to account for the impact of political thought on political institutions and practices. This would facilitate the connection between the 17th century theories and the theoretically-informed history of order and change in Early Modern international society, bearing in mind the question of how political thinkers of that time interpreted the Empire and the changes they witnessed in its development. This type of 'constitutive' study would, therefore, be able to draw on my findings, but the focus here has been limited to the metatheoretical configuration of the debates on the Empire (in IPT) and Westphalia (in IR theory and history). In this sense, I have provided a more localised original contribution in my comparison-and-contrast interpretation of the 17th century theories and in its presentation to an IR audience.

The third illustration also connects to the other cases, but in a less direct way. When they assess the impact of Westphalia, theories of order and change in the international system often allude to notions of hierarchy (before Westphalia) and anarchy of sovereign states (after Westphalia). While the historical accuracy of these claims can be, and has, been challenged on many accounts (including some of the points raised by the approaches analysed in this thesis), the concepts of hierarchy and anarchy also require further examination. I have compared and contrasted a number of theories of international hierarchy. In the process, I have examined their coherence with metatheoretical principles advocated by their authors themselves. This 'immanent' critical procedure was complemented by an 'overarching' interpretation provided by a
recent study on the 'Eurocentric' character of international theory. The case further illustrates some claims advanced in this thesis about metatheory as a constraining and enabling 'mechanism', but also takes a step further and critically examines the overarching framework of interpretation itself. I have deliberately selected a theory already addressed by the framework, and found its reading of that theory wanting. From this very punctual discussion, it becomes clear that 'detailed reading' techniques can be a way of improving the quality of metatheoretical research in IR: metatheory deals with theoretical texts, so in-depth interpretation is recommended as a preliminary procedure. Besides critiquing this 'overarching framework' in the final chapter, I have attempted to expand its application to other theories of hierarchy, including a mainstream approach previously unaccounted for (dyadic hierarchy), a 'non-Western' theory (peripheral realism) and a theory assembled from scattered arguments in a branch of political economy (praxeology). The specific original contributions here are, first, the evaluation of the overarching framework of interpretation of 'Eurocentrism' in international theory, together with its expanded application to novel cases; and, secondly, my inclusion of peripheral realism and introduction of the praxeological view of the 'hegemonic cycle' to the IR and IPE audience.

Questions, answers and evaluation
Taken together, the primary and the secondary contributions of this thesis make it possible to answer the questions raised in the very beginning. What is the role of metatheorising? How does it operate in IR? In what ways does metatheory shape theoretical research in our discipline? The general answer, obtained in part one, is that metatheory operates, on the one hand, in function of the subject-matter addressed in metatheoretical discourse and, on the other, in different modes of inquiry. Subject-matter may be divided according to a combination of the focus of metatheory (Internal or External to the discipline) and the 'point of entry' into theory (whether Intellectual or Contextual). From the possible combinations, we obtain Internal/Intellectual, Internal/Contextual, External/Intellectual and External/Contextual metatheorising. This is the subject-matter side. When it comes to modes of metatheoretical inquiry, at least four key 'ways of metatheorising' can be identified: hermeneutical, evaluative, corrective, critical and historical. In this scheme, respectively, metatheory interprets theory, judges it according to certain standards, refines it, provides a social critique of theory and accounts for its historical formation. In short: metatheory is a discursive
'mechanism' that constrains and enables certain types of scholarship. The first part of the thesis unpacks and briefly illustrates each of these points. With comparison and contrast of a number of theoretical approaches on different issues, the third part highlights, in greater detail, the workings of metatheory as a discursive mechanism in IR. This is the general answer to the question.

The literature on metatheory in our discipline also indicates particular answers to the question, which I have collected, organised and examined in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. IR scholars critical of (too much) metatheorising have raised points against it. Some of these arguments are cast in terms of intrinsic features of metatheory, a strong type of claim that purports to eliminate it from the field. Alternatively, weaker and contingent claims are made. These involve the complexity that metatheorising brings to IR, problems related to the communication of metatheoretical knowledge (especially to students and non-specialists) and the politics of metatheory (either disciplinary or general). There are also those who favour metatheoretical research, although they certainly do not assume the state of the art could not in any way be improved. For this group of scholars, metatheory may lead, and in the past has led, to better theory. It also helps us understand the discipline in a systematic way. In addition to this, metatheory clarifies and interprets theoretical material. Finally, this type of research may be employed as a framework to critically understand the role of theory in the social world (and the impact of the social world on theorising). I have initially taken all these claims at face value, but then cross-referenced them and detected contradictions in the group against metatheory. I have also contrasted positive and negative claims and pointed out that many of the positive claims adequately respond to the negative arguments. The main point derived from such moves, though, was my refutation of the 'strong' claim for the elimination of metatheory from IR. For all the merits of the contingent negative views of metatheorising, which should be weighed case-by-case, ultimately the bid against metatheory in IR fails to establish the strong claim.

The third part of the thesis answers the questions in a more narrow way. The general point expressed in part one is that metatheory constrains and enables certain intellectual procedures. Part two detects an intuitive notion of the general point in IR perceptions about the role of metatheory in the discipline. Part three takes a step further and illustrates how this operates in a number of different cases. The in-depth analyses of theoretical texts dealing with IPT, theoretically-informed History of IR, IR theory and IPE not only addressed how metatheory functions as a 'mechanism' in these concrete
cases. They also presented themselves as examples of metatheoretical research, further indicating what metatheory can do for us. In this thesis, therefore, answers to the questions raised are provided at the following levels: conceptual, inductive, illustrative and exemplary.

The conceptual answers are analytical in character, and should be judged according to their internal coherence. For instance, instead of asking whether my definition of 'metatheory' is 'wrong', one should attempt to demonstrate that the analytical claims do not follow from the starting point. The inductive claims, in turn, have been raised with basis on an examination of the relevant literature in IR, and should accordingly be evaluated with reference to that literature. However, if my contribution organising all those scattered passages on metatheory is deemed useful, I will consider the inductive claims successful enough. Another type of answer provided to the research questions here is illustrative: it refers to my attempt to uncover the mechanism of metatheorising in my 'illustration cases'. My analysis at this level should be compared and contrasted to the material selected for each case. It is indeed the case that texts are open to interpretation, but I have sought to justify each step of my claims with exhaustive reference to the sources and some of their commentators. These references are open to criticism, but they have been provided. Finally, the exemplary answer to the research question is performative, and emerges as an implication of the very procedure of arguing this thesis. The study as a whole, and the third part in particular, may be regarded as an illustration in itself of what metatheory can do for us. It may be negatively viewed as not complex enough from a philosophical perspective, but I see that rather as a virtue. If the procedures in this thesis help us better understand how metatheorising works, I would declare it successful also from an exemplary perspective.

Final remark
As far as I can tell, the arguments contained in this thesis are clear and balanced enough in their circumscription of roles for metatheoretical research in the academic discipline of International Relations. The claim here is not that all scholars should metatheorise. The claim, rather, is that, if they are engaged in 'systematic discourse about theory', then in fact they are engaged in metatheoretical argumentation. This includes any strong attempts to eliminate metatheory from the discipline via 'systematic discourse about metatheory', and for this reason I have maintained that it would be logically impossible
to fully eradicate metatheorising from IR. Even though negative views of this type of research may have a point in contingent terms, metatheory will remain part of IR as an academic discipline. If not all IR theorists are metatheorists, those who are would do well in pursuing a better understanding and execution of their research specialisation.
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