

## Chapter 4

## Theoretical Perspectives

The issue of intervention, Martin Wight wrote, 'raises questions of the utmost moral complexity: adherents of every political belief will regard intervention as justified under certain circumstances' (1979a, p.191). The flipside of Wight's observation, of course, is that what one group views as a just intervention another will consider profoundly unjust. Examining International Relations (IR) theory can help us understand why this is the case by enabling us to (broadly) categorize the differing perspectives and draw out those key beliefs that preclude certain individuals and groups from supporting particular interventions or intervention more generally.

Theory is ostensibly a means by which scholars can understand how and why the international system works as it does. Normatively, therefore, it is a politically neutral tool for enquiry and observation based on certain fundamental tenets (see Box 4.1). It is important to note, however, that this perspective on theory has been increasingly challenged in recent years. According to Robert Cox, 'There is no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space. When any theory so represents itself, it is more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective' (1996, p.87). Thus, while the theoretical perspectives examined here are not overtly ideological, with the exception of Marxism, and in the majority of cases are proffered as a neutral academic framework for understanding global affairs, this premise is keenly contested.

**Box 4.1 Shared theoretical characteristics of Carr's 'The Twenty Years Crisis' (2001) and Morgenthau's 'Politics Among Nations' (1954)**

- 1 Each developed a broad framework of analysis which distilled the essence of international politics from disparate events
- 2 Each sought to provide future analysts with the theoretical tools for understanding general patterns underlying seemingly unique episodes
- 3 Each reflected on the forms of political action which were most appropriate in a realm in which the struggle for power was pre-eminent.

Source: Burchill and Linklater (2005, p.1).

This chapter explores those theories of IR that have most to say about humanitarian intervention: realism, Marxism, liberalism, the English School, cosmopolitanism and post-structuralism. It is important to note that it is impossible to cover the key tenets of each of these theories or even their particular perspective on humanitarian intervention. This chapter seeks only to highlight broad trends and key perspectives, and provide an introduction to the basic presumptions which have led observers to reach certain conclusions about humanitarian intervention. The nuances and heterogeneity of each theory cannot be addressed adequately here, and the categorizations are necessarily broad.

### Realism

While we may identify 'statism, survival and self-help' as core beliefs of realism, this tradition has a long history and takes a number of forms (Coicaud and Wheeler, 2008, p.7). Nonetheless, accepting this heterogeneity it is clear that, as Alex Bellamy notes, 'The realist tradition opposes the norm of humanitarian intervention' (2003, p.10).

Realists argue that states do not act on the basis of moral concerns, such as human rights violations abroad, nor are international institutions significant influences on state behaviour (Mearsheimer, 1994). The classical realist perspective articulates a pessimistic view of human nature whereby egoistic passions incline men and women to evil (Boucher, 1998, p.93; Donnelly, 2002, p.86). Thomas Hobbes' widely endorsed rationale for a central authority or 'Leviathan' was that otherwise life would be 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' (1968, p.186). In the international system there is no overarching authority to impose order, thus Hobbes argued that 'because there is no Common Power in this world to punish injustice: mutual fear may keep [states] apart for a time, but upon every visible advantage they will invade one another' (Boucher, 1998, pp.145-6). States are trapped in a security dilemma and in a perennial state of tension and fear, and this, rather than the pursuit of international justice, determines their behaviour (Morgenthau, 1954; Wight, 1966b).

In contrast to classical realists, neo-realists put greater emphasis on the influence of international anarchy rather than human nature, claiming that this compels states to adopt a selfish disposition which curtails altruistic action, such as humanitarian intervention (Waltz, 1991, p.29). As the international structure is 'probably unchangeable', international politics is characterized by 'continuity, regularity and repetition' (Layne, 1994, p.11).

In assessing state behaviour realists are guided, Morgenthau claimed, by 'the concept of interest defined in terms of power' (1954, p.5). Power has historically been the primary catalyst for state action, and realism claims to be 'a recognition of the inevitabilities of power politics in an age of

sovereign states' (Herz, 1957, p.86). The struggle for power and the struggle for survival are seen as identical, and all other interests are secondary (Spykman, 1942, p.18). Realists assert that law and morality could play a role in the behaviour of states if the nature of the international system was such that states felt bound to a wider community. In the absence of this sense of community, states are compelled to act strategically, not morally, and aim at all time to maximize the national interest and protect their security (Morgenthau, 1951). Therefore, a concern for those suffering abroad does not motivate states to act unless there are national interests involved (see Chapter 8). This does not mean, however, that states should or do behave aggressively at all times, but rather that they aim to consolidate their position and seek equilibrium, or a balance of power (Waltz, 1981).

Hans Morgenthau argued that 'universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states' (1954, p.9), while neo-realists 'do not even bother with morality', disregarding it as an important factor in international relations (Donnelly, 2002, p.107). This rejection of morality clearly has significant implications for humanitarian intervention. Realism asserts that morality is not an absolute or universal code, as the Just War tradition suggests (see Chapter 2), and statesmen and women should maintain a situational, case-by-case approach (Rosenthal, 1995, p.xiv). In this respect international issues are dealt with according to prevailing exigencies rather than abstract moral codes (Niebuhr, 1932, p.174). Moral rhetoric is additionally held to invariably shroud more sectional aims, hence E. H. Carr's famous assertion, 'Theories of morality are ... the product of dominant nations or groups of nations' (2001, p.74). Thus it is of no surprise to realists that the currently most powerful group of states – the West – have been most vociferous in advocating human rights and humanitarian intervention (see Chapter 6). Those who claim to be undertaking humanitarian interventions are indicatively accused by Danilo Zolo of engaging in 'an inherently hegemonic and violent undertaking' (1997, p.15). Without an agreed international authority to sanction intervention independently, the question 'who decides?' remains outstanding, leading to subjective determinations on when to intervene derived from narrow considerations of national interest (see Chapter 7).

Certain realists advance a communitarian ethos, stressing the need to respect diversity and promote the equitable interaction of states as a means of preserving order and promoting peaceful coexistence (Chandler, 2004b, p.14). Hence the rights enjoyed by citizens within states are deemed an exclusively internal matter, and a plurality of intra-state human rights regimes is to be expected and respected. Anthony Coates describes this strain of realism as 'the morality of states'. He notes that 'because its main object is to safeguard the autonomy of states, it does so in a form that is too limited to accommodate humanitarian intervention' (Coates, 2006, p.68). Realism, therefore, suggests a clear distinction between the domestic and the

international, and the need for a consequent division between the disciplines of politics and IR (Wight, 1966a, p.18). Nonetheless while many modern realists have consciously avoided normative theorizing about domestic politics, many of the historical figures touted as realism's antecedents did in fact discuss these issues at length. Hobbes emphasized the state's duty to provide its citizens with the 'good life' (Jackson, 2006), while Machiavelli's extensive writings on republican constitutionalism have often been overshadowed by his more bellicose prescriptions (Brown, 2006, p.69).

The realist concern with order attributes great utility to the principles of sovereign equality and inviolability, as they limit the extent to which states behave according to subjective considerations of justice and rights (Lyons and Mastanduno 1995, p.8). The extent to which sovereignty is respected, however, derives from the distribution of power, and at any given time the existence of states, and the rights they enjoy, are functions of this prevailing distribution. Sovereignty is often not respected and is, as Stephen Krasner famously stated, 'organized hypocrisy' (1999; see Chapter 5).

The preference for order derived from the pursuit of national interest is described as 'rule consequentialism', whereby if all states limit themselves to specific national interests the community of states will benefit, as inherently disruptive interventionism will be reduced (Welsh, 2006, p.62). Humanitarian intervention necessarily disrupts order, as such action is not a strategic concern and is based on subjective moral judgements (Kissinger, 1992, p.5). Colin Gray argues that humanitarian intervention constitutes a policy which will inevitably antagonize the majority who have an interest in the status quo and ultimately catalyze a backlash against the intervening party by other states (2001). Intra-state conflicts, if left alone, will result in a victory for the powerful group, preserve the natural order derived from disparities in power, and 'enhance the peacemaking potential of war' (Luttwak, 1999, p.36). Thus NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 (see Chapter 11) is criticized as 'a perfect failure' by Michael Mandelbaum on the grounds that it caused instability in the Balkans and antagonized Russia and China (1999). This preference for strategic goals grounded in the national interest and cognizant of the reality of power echoes Carl Schmitt's critique of just wars. Schmitt argued that wars fought for political gain are invariably limited by the strategic goals of the protagonists while just wars, and humanitarian wars in particular, lead to total war because of their inherently expansive goals and moral fervour (1996, p.36).

Action taken to halt or prevent human suffering will create difficulties for the pursuit of a state's national interest, as there are inevitably occasions when, morally unpalatable as it may be, it is necessary to ally with states with dubious human rights records. To intervene in one state on the basis of human rights will expose the intervening state to the charge of hypocrisy, and it is prudent, therefore, to overlook issues such as human rights for the sake of the preservation of alliances (Bandow, 1999).

Realism, despite its expressed adherence to positivism, does have a normative dimension; states do have a moral duty, but it is to prioritize the welfare of their own citizens (Kennan, 1985, p.206; Wight, 1966b, p.128). Thus launching humanitarian interventions for the good of others is a dereliction of duty if the host state has no interests involved and is imperilled by such action (Bellamy, 2003, pp.9–10; see Chapter 8). Indeed, citizens are held to expect their state to act in the national interest and, as David Hendrickson notes with respect to the US intervention in Somalia in 1992, have demonstrated a pronounced unwillingness to accept military casualties when national interests are not involved (1997).

### Marxism/critical theory

The Marxist view of international relations is universalist, and events are explained and assessed according to a perceived struggle between the capitalist elite and the oppressed majority, though Marx himself wrote little specifically focused on international relations (Brown, 2006, p.54). Marx believed that colonialism was ultimately beneficial, certainly not because he endorsed the 'white man's burden' argument (see Chapter 3), but because this would accelerate the global transition to capitalism which was a necessary stage on the road to global communism (Marx, 2006). Prior to the outbreak of the First World War Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg and most notably Lenin began to develop a more critical theory of imperialism, which held that inter-capitalist competition was driving Western states to competitive colonialism which would eventually lead to world war.

Marxists broadly agree with the realist analysis of anarchy but argue that international systemic composition is a product of the conscious design of the dominant economic powers (Cox, 1986). Powerful states have colluded to create a core-periphery dichotomy, and while there is inter-state rivalry among the elite, this is largely negated by the common goal of proliferating capitalist hegemony (Wallerstein, 1974). Marxism, and critical theory more generally, rejects the idea of the international system constituting a set of 'pre-constituted social actors', and criticizes the realist and liberal perspectives for their ahistorical analysis of the international system and inability to foresee future change (Rupert, 2007, p.149). Critical theory, inspired by the Frankfurt School and the writings of Antonio Gramsci, emerged in the 1980s and challenges positivist approaches to IR, seeking instead to act as an emancipatory force (Linklater, 2006).

The system of states is considered a means by which the global economy can flourish to the benefit of certain actors, and hence Marxist IR theory perceives the present legal status of sovereignty (see Chapter 5) as a

function of a top-down consolidation of hierarchy rather than a bottom-up evolutionary process (Rosenberg, 1994, p.14). The existing constellation of states is held to be a product of power and oppression, and a social order derived from the dominant class's desire, especially during the Industrial Revolution, to perpetuate its hegemony and domination of the means of production. Preserving sovereign inviolability is not, therefore, the goal of Marxists, as states are considered to be inimical to proletarian solidarity though Marxists do critique intervention as an exercise of power by the strong against the weak. The few genuinely progressive advances in contemporary international law are attributed to the influence of the Soviet Union's promotion of self-determination (Bowring, 2008, pp.10–11).

The Marxist explanation of the unwillingness of states to act morally is similar to that of realism though for different reasons. Humans are not inherently selfish or aggressive but become so because they are shaped by the prevailing societal conditions under capitalism, which engenders greed and selfishness (Boucher, 1998, p.360). This conditioning also occurs in the international system, and thus states behave in singularly self-interested ways so that capitalist exploitation can flourish (Lenin, 1964, pp.26–8). Marxism anticipates that states will be unconcerned about human suffering in other states and will use the pretext of sovereign inviolability to justify this position, but Marxism rejects relativism in favour of sub-state universalism.

The Marxist view differs fundamentally from that of realism in the sense that Marxism is premised on the need to achieve solidarity between the oppressed classes across states and a belief in progressive evolution towards international communism. For Marxists international politics is 'intra-class solidarities combined with inter-class war waged both across and within state borders' (Coicaud and Wheeler, 2008, p.10). While Marxists, like realists, consider normative perspectives on international affairs to be inherently partisan, they 'also rely upon an idealist commitment to human welfare that makes the determination of international progress an essential feature of both their scientific explanation and their plan for revolutionary liberation' (ibid.). What Marxist and realist views have in common, Janna Thompson notes, is 'the idea that conflict, injustice, threats of war are embedded in the very structure of relationships in the international world, and that so long as these relationships remain, the peaceful and just world . . . will be impossible to achieve' (1992, p.6).

Marxists argue that humanitarian justifications for intervention hide ulterior motives; for the Marxist, 'Morality is ideology, and thus represents the interests of a class' (Brown, 2002, p.228). Noam Chomsky, indicative of the Marxist approach, argues that the West's increased willingness to undertake 'humanitarian interventions' is part of an escalating Western unilateralism born out of the dramatic extension of Western

hegemony in the post-Cold War era. According to Chomsky, "The right of humanitarian intervention, if it exists, is premised on the good faith of those intervening, and that assumption is based not on their rhetoric but on their record" (1999, p.74). On the basis of what Chomsky sees as the West's history of oppression and violence, the moral argument is implausible.

Western interest in humanitarian intervention, it is claimed, stems from the fact that in the post-Cold War era the leaders of these states 'find themselves without effective economic policies to promote the social justice they claim to serve, but still need a virtuous cause to distinguish themselves from "the right"' (Johnstone, 2000, p.14). Mark Duffield argues 'the strategic complexities of liberal peace ... are part of an already existing system of networked global liberal governance' and thus the spread of liberalism is a means of increasing power (2006, p.258). The linkage between development and security is considered central to the rise in human security and its adoption by the major Western powers (see Chapter 6). Increasingly, however, Duffield and Nicholas Waddell argue, the discourse has shifted away from development towards 'a "harder" version of security which prioritizes homeland livelihood systems and infrastructures' with a view to providing the West with greater security from threats ostensibly emanating from the developing world (2006, p.3). Duffield argues that there has been a marked shift from the prioritization of geopolitics during the Cold War to biopolitics in the contemporary era. This manifests as a concern with the social conditions within the periphery and the 'circulatory terrain of human population'. This shift, Duffield argues, has led to the rehabilitation of 'liberal imperialism ... authored by effective states' (2005, p.144). Human rights have revolutionary potential, but this is denuded when the discourse of human rights is harnessed by the hegemonic powers and expressed in an individualistic as opposed to collective form (Bowring, 2008, p.126).

Marxist analyses of instances of Western intervention highlight this emphasis on power and capitalism. Western interest in humanitarian crises in the 1990s was described as a function of a quest for new markets and the consolidation of Western dominance, and thus driven by 'the American government and business classes, aided and abetted by their European elites' (Mandel, 2003, p.293). The overall aim of humanitarian intervention is 'to be able to punish and reward states that defy the contour of political/ideological order advantageous to the hegemonic state' (Chadda, 2003, p.321). According to Alex Callinicos, 'the real reason' for NATO's intervention in Kosovo was 'the strategic and economic interests of the US and the other Western powers' (2000, p.176), while Ellen Wood described the intervention as part of the 'new imperialism' whereby intervention is directed towards 'ensuring that the forces of the capitalist market prevail in every corner of the world (2000,

p.192). In a similar vein, the editorial committee of the Marxist journal *Capital and Class* declared with respect to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, 'Rather than being a humanitarian intervention, the invasion is a brutal act of imperialist aggression' (2003). James Tyner argues that the invasion had nothing to do with humanitarian concerns, but rather constituted a 'militant neoliberal capitalist imperative ... waged for material gain that - ultimately - would benefit only a select few corporate CEOs, financiers, and bankers' (2006, pp.32-3). Thus the motivation behind humanitarian intervention for Marxists is not human rights but rather the spread of capitalism and the consolidation of the core-periphery dichotomy (Mandani, 2009).

### Liberalism

Liberalism holds that man is torn between an innate desire for freedom and a competing desire to live in a society. While man is certainly driven by the quest for personal gain (though not necessarily power), this trait is not inevitably detrimental to human interaction, and can in fact be a catalyst for better societal organization. Thus there is significant scope for contriving rules that benefit the entire society (Keohane and Nye, 1977).

This inherent preference for cooperation over conflict in the pursuit of individual liberty can be transferred to the international realm provided states share certain basic characteristics and hence recognize the utility of cooperation. Thus, in contrast to the realist, and indeed Marxist, analyses, liberalism believes that progressive international cooperation and formal processes of international authority can be developed under certain conditions (see Chapter 7). States that operate according to the principles of free trade will necessarily recognize the benefit of both peaceful interaction and the formal codification of rules to govern trade. Thus according to Immanuel Kant, international trade would lead to a rise in global prosperity especially amongst 'the peace-loving, productive sections of the population', and financial interdependence amongst states would 'make clear to all of them their fundamental community of interests' (Burchill, 2005, p.63). Additionally because democratic states are ruled by leaders elected by the people whose preference is for peace, the governments of democratic states are unlikely to be aggressive and 'wars become impossible' (Doyle, 1986, p.1151). This is the basis of the democratic peace theory which holds that democracies do not go to war against other democracies (Levy, 1989, p.88)

Liberalism holds that as the evolution of human society is characterized by progress the current international system is transitory; democracy will gradually spread and the quality of life will increase (Fukuyama, 1992; Howard, 2000, p.31). Unlike Marxists, of course, liberalism seeks to

proliferate the Western capitalist system on the grounds that liberal democracy is 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and 'the final form of human government' (Fukuyama, 1992, pp.xi-xii). The fact that there is a correlation between the best political system and the currently most powerful group of states is not a cause of concern for liberals in the way it is for realists and Marxists. Rather than a modern manifestation of the union of power and dominant moral norms, the post-Cold War coincidence between liberal democracy and power is what makes the current systemic configuration so potentially progressive. This desire to see the West spread liberal values has obvious implications for humanitarian intervention, as such action is considered part of the march of human progress and a means by which the global transition to liberal democracy can be facilitated.

Marshall Cohen's perspective is typical of the broad liberal approach to morality; 'It is entirely appropriate,' he argues, 'to judge both a nation and its statesmen's conduct by pertinent moral standards' (Cohen, 1984, p.300). While warning against excessive moralism, Cohen argues that states are duty bound to be concerned about the plight of people resident in other states (*ibid.*, p.324). Michael Walzer dismisses the realist belief that behaving amorally in international relations is excusable on the grounds that there is a systematic bias against such action, and notes:

If we had all become realists like the Athenian generals or Hobbists in a state of war, there would be an end alike to both morality and hypocrisy. We would simply tell one another brutally and directly, what we wanted to do or have done. But the truth is that one of the things most of us want even in war, is to act or to seem to act morally. (Walzer, 1992a, p.21)

Walzer seeks to bring order *and* justice back to international relations so that statesmen and women can no longer excuse amoral action by taking solace in the realist assertion that international society is irrevocably anarchical. He, like a number of 'institutional liberals', advocates codified international laws which give legal expression to moral norms (1992a, p.288; see Chapter 5 and Conclusion).

Although the state is considered a necessary guarantor of individual liberties, liberalism favours limiting the influence of the state in the 'private' affairs of citizens. Internationally this manifests as an underlying preference for laws and practices that privilege the individual over the state, but unlike cosmopolitanism, not to the extent that the state is fundamentally undermined. Indicatively Marc Weller states that the rise of human rights as an international issue has challenged the fictitious notion that states are international subjects, arguing, 'The state only exists to the extent that the people out of which it is composed have transferred to it the competence to exercise public powers on their behalf' (1999, p.24). The sharp distinction

between internal and international as advanced by realism is thus rejected although, as with the normative conception of the domestic system, there is a preference for state autonomy and international pluralism.

The liberal respect for pluralism, however, necessarily encourages the inside/outside distinction on one level, suggesting as it does tolerance for the difference inherent in other states and cultures. There are however limits to this tolerance, and the extension of this privilege to others is in key respects dependent on political and ideological symmetry. Thus, the liberal perspective is often characterized by what Gerry Simpson describes as 'Liberal anti-pluralism', which manifests an intolerance for different regimes and international institutions that do not reflect liberal values (2004, p.280). In this sense there is a clear unwillingness to accept that a state is entitled to inviolability by virtue of being a state; sovereignty is therefore 'conditional' (Gowan, 2003, p.51; see Chapter 6). Non-intervention is described by Fernando Tesón as 'a doctrine of the past' based on relativism and statism (2005a, p.358). Hence, in the post-Cold War era liberals have, somewhat paradoxically, been to the fore in advocating the subversion of the United Nations in cases where humanitarian intervention is deemed necessary, such as in Kosovo in 1999, because of the Security Council's dependence on the assent of non-democracies (see Chapter 7 and Conclusion).

Liberalism does not privilege order, and like Marxism is in fact predicated on the necessity of progressive change and in this sense 'inherently disorderly' (Freedman, 2005, p.101). Liberalism refutes the validity of realism's exclusive concern with order, arguing that 'order without a modicum of justice can only lead to disaster' (Hoffmann, 2003, p.24). The contemporary liberal perspective on intervention, often described as 'liberal internationalism', is at times bellicose and militaristic, stressing the imperative of intervention for the good of humanity (Cooper, 2004). This modern variant of 'disorderly' liberalism is, however, different from older forms. Walzer highlighted John Stuart Mill's classical liberal perspective on intervention and his belief that nations must achieve self-determination without external involvement. Mill did assert, however, that there were three cases when intervention may be permissible. The first is when a state clearly contains two or more separate communities and one is engaged in a struggle for independence. The second is when boundaries have already been crossed and the issue is counter-intervention, and the third, 'when the violation of human rights is so terrible that it makes talk of community or self-determination or "arduous struggle" seem cynical and irrelevant' (Walzer, 1992a, p.90). Mill did not, however, give a precise definition of a sufficiently terrible violation of human rights that would warrant intervention, thus leaving the issue open to discretion.

This preference for non-intervention, however, is less apparent in contemporary liberal theory. Interventionism was particularly championed in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse as the new systemic conditions

were seen as enabling greater Western intervention without threatening international war. The West, it is argued, has elevated itself to a new level of consciousness characterized by a rejection of violence and conquest and unencumbered by old-fashioned, legalistic notions of sovereignty (Cooper, 2002). The intervention in Kosovo (see Chapter 11), for example, was 'an action fought for principles . . . to enforce certain minimum values on a state unwilling or unable to accept them' (Cooper, 2004, p.59). Prior to the invasion of Iraq (see Chapter 12), Michael Ignatieff argued that the use of force by progressive liberal states was historically often progressive, noting that 'there are many peoples who owe their freedom to an exercise of American military power'. The choice facing the West in March 2003, Ignatieff claimed, was 'between containing and leaving a tyrant in place and the targeted use of force, which will kill people but free a nation from the tyrant's grip' (Ignatieff, 2003).

### The English School

The English School constitutes something of a mid-point between realism and liberalism. International politics is considered to be anarchical, and this forces states to behave in particular ways, but this systemic condition does not preclude the formation of an international society which adheres to mutable shared norms and laws. Hedley Bull notes that a plurality of sovereign states with a limited degree of interaction among them constitutes a system whereas a society is characterized by 'a degree of acceptance of common rules and institutions' (2002, p.225). These societal rules, usually termed norms, 'both constrain and enable actors', thereby limiting the decision-making autonomy of states (Wheeler, 2002, p.6). While these norms may not constitute laws presided over by a judicial system with the power of enforcement analogous to that in domestic systems, they determine a state's international status and its relationship with other states. Nicholas Wheeler argues that realist and Marxist perspectives overlook the extent to which 'the pursuit of international legitimization' binds state actions, noting, 'Even the great powers seek approval from their peers and domestic publics' (2006, p.32). States are not, therefore, conceived of as autonomous actors devoid of external restraint, although the extent to which the force of norms can influence state behaviour has limits. Nonetheless the English School makes both the empirical observation that norms do influence states to a significant extent, and the normative claim that states should be bound by these rules; Chris Brown indicatively asserts, 'if diversity entails that states have the right to mistreat their populations, then it is difficult to see why such diversity is to be valued' (1992, p.125).

Within the English School a division exists between the solidarist, or Grotian, view and the pluralists who are closer to de Vattel (Bellamy,

2005b, p.9). Pluralists stress the importance of the state, arguing that it provides for both order in the international sphere and, depending on the particular internal composition, justice and the protection of human rights domestically (Dunne, 1998, p.100). Individuals enjoy legal rights only to the extent that the state enables them to do so, through the provision of security and domestic legal structures, and thus states are of greater import than individuals. Thus the basic presumption of non-intervention should be maintained (Jackson, 2000).

Solidarists, however, argue that states, though clearly important, are instrumental – a means by which the individual's rights are upheld – and if this normative duty is not fulfilled, 'collective humanitarian intervention' is legitimate in response to 'extreme human suffering' (Wheeler, 1992, p.468). Solidarists argue that international regulation of a state's human rights record is both right and necessary, and a means by which the coherence of the society is upheld (Falk, 2005b). The solidarist view is based on the idea that an international society can coalesce around shared norms and values, and hence the violation of one of these norms – such as respect for human rights – is potentially legitimate grounds for intervention (Wheeler and Dunne, 1998, 2001). Alex Bellamy argues that while pluralists insist that intervention must only take place when the host state consents lest the fundamental rule of the international system be subverted, solidarists by contrast 'claim that the principle of consent is a circumscribed rule with important exceptions in times of massive human suffering' (Bellamy, 2003, p.5). The international society simply could not function if the norms governing intra-state human rights were routinely flouted, and thus intervention is not disruptive, rather it is an occasionally warranted means by which order is in fact restored.

Though Bull is essentially a pluralist, aspects of his work have been highlighted by solidarists to support their perspective. Bull argued that the rule of non-intervention prevailed because unilateral intervention threatened harmony and order within the society of states, although he additionally noted that when an intervention 'expresses the collective will of the society of states' it may not jeopardize international harmony (1984b, p.195). Given that Bull was writing during a period when the international system was arguably more fractured than it is today, it is possible that the contemporary systemic configuration and the greater integration apparent within the West means that this 'collective will of the society of states' may be stronger (Dunne, 1998). Solidarists argue that there is evidence that norms regarding humanitarian intervention have indeed changed; the many human rights treaties signed since 1945 and the emerging consensus that states cannot treat their citizens any way they please are held as examples of the ascendancy and increasingly binding power of international human rights norms (Bellamy, 2009b; Greenwood, 1993). The post-Cold War ascendancy of these norms is, therefore, indicative of the fluidity of norms

and the potential for a 'norm cascade' to force a shift in the prevailing normative rules influencing the behaviour of states (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 893). Governments within states might not naturally act morally in pursuing their foreign policy but through pressure exerted from below by the general public – 'the shaming power of humanitarian norms' – they may be compelled to do so (Wheeler, 2006, p.39). Solidarism does not suggest, however, that national interests play no role in the decision whether to intervene, and while humanitarian intervention is morally permissible under certain circumstances, it is not necessarily morally required once these circumstances arise (Wheeler, 2002, p.49).

The pluralist perspective, by contrast, argues that even within an international society states remain the rightful authority on, and guarantor of, human rights. Thus while norms and indeed laws on human rights and intervention exist, they are subjectively interpreted and invariably applied in practice only by powerful states (Bellamy, 2003, p.3). According to Robert Jackson:

The ethics of human rights have to be fitted into the pluralist framework of international society and cannot sidestep that framework. That is the only operational context within which human beings can be defended in contemporary world politics. Human rights and humanitarianism have no actuality outside that pluralist framework. Solidarism is clearly subordinate to pluralism. (2000, p.289)

Similarly Bull argued that the international society implied by the discourse of universal human rights 'exists only as an ideal, and we court great dangers if we allow ourselves to proceed as if it were a political and social framework already in place' (1984a, p.13). Bull was sceptical of the power of norms and the existence of an international society generally, and argued that if such a society exists it enjoys 'only a precarious foothold' (2002, p.248). Bull stressed that it was untenable to claim that sovereignty can be enjoyed without qualification, but argued that promoting ostensibly 'universal human rights' in a context in which there is no consensus over their meaning or the mechanisms for their enforcement 'carries the danger that it will be subversive of coexistence among states, on which the whole fabric of world order in our times depends'. States that declare themselves to be acting in the common interest for the benefit of all humanity are thus 'a menace to international order, and thus to effective action in that field' (1984a, pp.12–13). This privileging of order over justice in the specific case of humanitarian intervention leads pluralists to espouse what at times appear to be cold-hearted prescriptions. In discussing the crisis in the Balkans, Jackson wrote, 'In my view, the stability of international society, especially the unity of the great powers, is more important, indeed far more important, than minority rights and humanitarian protections in

Yugoslavia or any other country – if we have to choose between the two' (2000, p.291).

While this may appear morally unconscionable it is important to remember that this preference is born from a normative conviction that stability is itself a significant moral good, as it prevents war and destruction. Yet, the prevailing systemic composition has clearly altered, and in the post-Cold War era there is an emerging acceptance amongst pluralists that, at the very least, action taken by the Security Council in response to intra-state humanitarian tragedy now has a strong degree of legitimacy and reflects a limited consensus on humanitarian intervention (Bellamy, 2003, p.12).

Solidarists welcomed NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, with Bellamy asserting that it highlighted 'the extent to which international values and interests have begun to come together during the 1990s' (2002, p.214). While this intervention appeared to affirm the solidarist conception, the 2003 invasion of Iraq highlighted the extent to which the ascendancy of the norm of humanitarian intervention facilitated the abuse of humanitarian rhetoric, and arguably the accuracy of the pluralist concern that intervention was inherently destabilizing and likely to be abused by the powerful (Thakur and Sidhu, 2006; Job, 2006).

### Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism believes in a progressive evolution towards a universal order based on common morality. It constitutes a 'break with the assumption of territorially-based political entities' and explicitly disavows statist conceptions of international politics in favour of an agenda predicated on 'the existence of a human community with certain shared rights and obligations' (Kaldor, 1999, pp.115, 147). Catherine Lu argues that realists have overlooked the 'transformative potential' that exists when the barriers between states diminish in importance and the distinction between international and domestic politics is removed (2006, p.50). This merging of the internal and the external has ostensibly accelerated in the contemporary era as states, albeit primarily Western states, have increasingly developed mutually dependent relationships, pooled their sovereignty and contrived new norms on the use of force for humanitarian purposes (Kaldor, 2003, p.17; Levy, Young and Zürn, 1995). Cosmopolitanism asserts that the maintenance of an internal/external distinction is no longer tenable because of the effects of globalization and the general internationalization of post-Cold War inter-state relations (Hayden, 2005, p.91; Held, 2004, p.189; Keane, 2003, pp.4–8). States are no longer the dominant force in the international system and are increasingly constrained by domestic publics, global civil society and transnational organizations such as the European Union (Brown, 2006, p.3; Sørensen, 2001). The international system is

therefore considered to be evolving towards a radical new alignment characterized by the diminution of the centrality of the state, increased interdependence, respect for human rights, and perhaps most ambitiously, mechanisms of global governance involving international military capabilities (Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 2005, p.140).

The cosmopolitan perspective seeks to increase intervention by fashioning a system whereby states are interdependent and the tenets of sovereignty are significantly altered to reflect a preference for human rights. The statist system has encouraged the singular pursuit of national interests and the privileging of order over justice. This has created a world plagued by instability, violence and 'the callous indifference towards the interests of persons beyond (and perhaps even within) the borders of each state' (Hayden, 2005, p.70). Cosmopolitanism argues that the international system of states has created false divisions in the international community and allowed relativist claims of morality to thrive. Given that humanity is not singularly motivated by self-interest, as realists suggest, the projection of this negative (and flawed) diagnosis of motivations onto the international system overlooks the capacity of individuals, and hence states, to act in defence of others (Janzekovic, 2006, p.26). There is, therefore, a need to fundamentally reorganise the international system so as to reflect the underlying universal morality which is humanity's true nature (Küng, 1991, pp.xv-xvi).

Proponents of cosmopolitanism prioritize 'human security' (see Chapter 6) and articulate a trans-state vision of international relations where the individual's rights trump those of the state and thus order and stability amongst states is a secondary concern (Falk, 1995; Kaul, 1995). Andrew Linklater identified the aim of human-centred advocacy as 'Transcending state sovereignty', which he considered 'essential to promoting narratives of increasing cosmopolitanism' (1998, p.109). Humanitarian intervention is therefore conceptualized as 'an act directed towards upholding the non-intervention norm of civil society, which protects an area of freedom for individuals' (Frost, 2001, p.51). Human rights violations are 'legitimate concerns of individual men and women everywhere, communities in all parts of the world, and the society of states as a whole' (Lu, 2006, p.112). Rather than viewing intra-state conflicts as a potential threat that needs to be contained, cosmopolitanism 'would seek to understand the underlying reasons behind human rights conflicts and apply positive measures to solve them' (Archibugi, 2003, p.11).

In addition to this normative defence of humanitarian intervention, trends in the contemporary era have added a practical rationale for increased trans-state humanitarianism. Globalization has undermined state autonomy and fused political, social and cultural interdependence, and therefore humanitarian crises within one state will not be confined to that state. This key supposition mirrors the cosmopolitan maxim proposed in the 18th century by Kant, who held that if the suffering of people abroad

were tolerated it would threaten international peace and security because of 'the interconnectedness of the parts that form the whole' (Jackson, 2006, p.30). In stark contrast to realism, therefore, cosmopolitanism argues that increased humanitarian intervention, 'will make for a more peaceful world' (Janzekovic, 2006, p.190).

As the United Nations constitutes 'the creature of an unreconstructed system of sovereign nation states' which promotes 'state interest and militarised power', cosmopolitanism has generally called for an adherence to ostensibly less politicized natural law when dealing with intra-state humanitarian crises (Woodhouse and Ramsbotham, 2005, p.141). Many have compiled lists of criteria that states *should* adhere to for their interventions to be deemed legitimate (see Chapter 2). This attempt to constrain intervention is predicated on the assumption that democracies will intervene only with the endorsement of their domestic populace and global civil society, who can ensure compliance with the criteria (Buchanan and Keohane, 2004, p.19). The emergence of global civil society poses a 'transformative challenge to the customary role of states' (Falk, 1995, p.206) and has, cosmopolitanism holds, transformed the international system to the extent that it no longer makes sense to theorize about a world of self-contained states evolving according to the principle of non-intervention (Farer, 2003, p.146). These groups coordinate international activism which constitutes a 'pervasive, significant, positive influence on the policies of the states' (Hensel, 2004, p.ix). Through the mobilization of NGOs global civil society had become 'a source of constant pressures on the state system' (Shaw, 1994, p.24) and as a consequence of this pressure 'policy makers are more likely to act ... in the interests of the human community' (Kaldor, 2003, p.102). The preference for moral norms is not shared by all cosmopolitanists, however, with Fred Dallmayr arguing that while these norms are progressive they require legal expression and a clear means of consistent and impartial enforcement to be truly effective (2003, p.434).

NATO's intervention in Kosovo was heralded by many cosmopolitanists (Fuller, 1999; Janzekovic, 2006), and though many were highly critical of the lack of coercive military intervention in Darfur (see Chapter 13), the West's engagement with the crisis has been identified as an improvement on the record in Rwanda and a function of international pressure by NGOs (Mayroz, 2008). The United States and United Kingdom's attempts to secure a Security Council resolution prior to the invasion of Iraq is also cited as evidence of the power of international mass movements (Cortright, 2006, p.75).

### Post-structuralism

The post-structuralist approach, in so far as a coherent approach exists (Devetak, 2009, p. 183), sees the discipline of IR as part of a wider



movement in social thought and seeks to 'unsettle established categories and disconcert the reader' (Brown and Ainley, 2005, p.53). Thus post-structuralist IR scholars have stressed the necessity of an interdisciplinary methodology (Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989).

The theory derives much of its inspiration from Michel Foucault, who argued that power and knowledge are intimately linked, with one implying the other. Using the example of the prison system Foucault suggested that a generic set of assumptions, derived from particular societal power relations, can be identified as underpinning all aspects of society (1991). A dominant discourse or a 'regime of truth' is held to impose critical limits upon our ability to think politically about particular problems faced (Foucault, 1980: p.131). Post-structuralist analyses, therefore, interrogate discourse on a particular theme to highlight the inherent assumptions which perpetuate a particular dominant belief (Malmvig, 2001, p.251). Challenging the prevailing discourse and especially those ideas and institutions presented as axiomatic, Jean Elshtain argues, implies 'a recognition of the ways in which received doctrines ... may lull our critical faculties to sleep, blinding us to the possibilities that lie within our reach' (1992, p.276).

Post-structuralists seek to identify how the primacy of the sovereign state has been maintained by a discourse which overlooks the true evolution of the state and presents state sovereignty as a pre-existing neutral reality (Edkins and Pin-Fat, 1998). Rather than seeing violence as something states are forced to employ in exceptional circumstances by virtue of the international structure or human nature, post-structuralism argues that violence created the state and is central to the system of states. Therefore the periodic eruption of violence between or within states enables states to constitute themselves and is a means by which the state system is perpetuated (Klein, 1994). Attempts to limit violence that advocate the maintenance of the basic system of states, such as the dominant discourse of humanitarian intervention whereby states 'solve' problems in other states, are therefore futile (Campbell, 1994, p.456).

The discourse of 'intervention', as much as it is often represented as a violation of sovereignty, presupposes the existence of sovereignty and therefore helps to reaffirm the idea (Edkins, 2003, p.255; Malmvig, 2001, p.252; Weber, 1995, pp.1-29). Rob Walker argues that despite the often divisive nature of the debate on humanitarian intervention, the dominant opposing positions take the state for granted. The state is conceived as worthy, albeit for differing reasons, and therefore debates about humanitarian intervention since the 1990s have not addressed the real problem – state sovereignty (Walker, 2003, p.280). Humanitarian activism of the sort espoused by global civil society (see Chapter 6) requires the assent of states to undertake interventions, be they military or not, 'and thus rather than challenging state power these actors act as an instrument and rationality of statecraft' (Campbell, 1998b, p.519).

Helle Malmvig argues that the manner in which the discourse of intervention is framed involves a strategy whereby egregious humanitarian violations are portrayed in a way so that 'they constitute the need to do something as evident' and 'work as justifications in and of themselves' (2001, p.257). The popular portrayal of humanitarian crises lacks political analysis and facilitates the idea that the solution can be found in externally coordinated administrative, as opposed to political, action (Edkins, 2000). While these strategies do not necessarily compel intervention they can be used to frame the debate according to 'zero-sum logic' where actors are presented with an exceptional choice between action and inaction, humanitarian intervention or passivity (Malmvig, 2001, p.267). Likewise Jenny Edkins suggests that the discourse presupposes a distinction between 'we' and 'they' which narrows the debate to a focus on 'whether and how "we" should help "them"' (2003, p. 255). While the rhetoric of humanitarian intervention implies a need to 'do something' and 'get involved', David Keen argues that the idea of external involvement occurring only *after* a disaster has erupted is false (2001, p.19). Likewise Anne Orford asserts that the debate about the merits of intervention in Yugoslavia in the 1990s obscured the extent to which the international community 'had itself contributed to the humanitarian crises that had emerged' (2003, p.13).

The discourse of humanitarian intervention reproduces power asymmetries; the West is portrayed as the powerful saviour while the 'other' is cast as the needy victim inhabiting a chaotic distant world (Orford, 2003, pp.83-5). Victims of humanitarian tragedy live in 'an official faraway place' which is 'morally distinct' to the West (O'Tuathail, 1996, p.171). David Campbell, argues that the framing of the international response to the conflict in Bosnia created a conceptual division between 'them' and 'us' whereby the 'other' is represented as lacking the traits that characterize the hegemon and thus the decay in the periphery affirms the good life in the core (1998a). The fate of the 'rescued' other, Patricia Owens claims, is portrayed in a way that 'conform[s] to (usually liberal) sentimental fantasy norms about the "American way of life"'. This discourse means that national myths and the pervading sense of moral benevolence 'appeared upheld and invigorated via representations of these "foreigners"' (Owens, 2004, p.287). Likewise David Kennedy sees the project of the new humanitarians as inspired more by the sense of purpose and self-worth it inspires in the actor than the actual good it does for the 'victim' (2006, p.87). Thus the liberal notion of spreading the good life is in fact a means by which the 'other' is further mystified and the homeland is venerated.

As much as humanitarian intervention suggests a merging of national and international, Orford argues that the discourse serves to reassure the international community that there is a differentiated other, and to locate

this other 'somewhere else, outside' (Orford, 2003, p.124). The appropriation of human rights by Western states, it is claimed, has facilitated the image of a barbarous hinterland and a civilized core, and resulted in human rights becoming a means by which the legitimacy of the present order has in fact been bolstered (Douzinas, 2000, p. 129–41). The discourse of humanitarian intervention has therefore stripped human rights of their revolutionary potential.

## Conclusion

Explaining the new concern with humanitarian intervention in the post-Cold War era is of significant concern for theorists of IR, and it is clear that consensus is manifestly lacking. By the latter half of the 1990s all major Western states articulated a commitment to 'ethical foreign policies' which seemed to contradict the realist focus on power and the national interest, and appeared to constitute the death knell for realism (Zakaria, 1992). Some have argued that the popular conception of realism purportedly vanquished by recent events is a truncated version of the theory which overlooks its many normative dimensions (Bain, 2006; Molloy, 2006; Williams, 2007). Liberals, cosmopolitanists and solidarists suggest, albeit in differing ways, that this change in foreign policy priorities was the result of humanitarian advocacy whereby academics, human rights organisations and NGOs successfully convinced Western powers to include moral considerations in their foreign relations. Realists, Marxists and post-structuralists by contrast, view the discourse as essentially a rhetorical facade designed to obscure the true power-political motivations.

The utility of examining IR theory when studying humanitarian intervention stems from the capacity of theory to provide a framework for understanding the motivations driving states to behave in certain ways. Whether theory comprises prescriptions as to how states should act, or objective explanations of how states *actually* act is a source of contention. It is increasingly argued that the theorist cannot be seen as an entirely dispassionate observer of international events, and thus all theory is, to some extent, subjective and partisan (Edkins, 2005b, p. 68). This idea that the theorist's personal bias inevitably influences their theoretical beliefs echoes Cox's famous claim, 'Theory is always for someone and for some purpose' (1981, p.128). An individual's view on this perspective on theory necessarily influences their opinion on the utility of theory. Nonetheless, a comprehensive understanding of humanitarian intervention must involve some engagement with theory regardless of the perspective on the accuracy and utility of the various theories here described.

## Questions

- What is the function of IR theory?
- Can IR theory ever be truly objective?
- Outline and assess the perspectives of realism, Marxism, liberalism, the English School, cosmopolitanism and post-structuralism on the following issues; the role of morality in international relations; the place of human rights; the relationship between order and justice.

## Further reading

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### Marxism and critical theory

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### Cosmopolitanism

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### Post-structuralism

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## Part II

# Controversies