

***Principles and Principals? The Possibilities for Theoretical  
Synthesis and Scientific Progress in the Study of International  
Organizations***

By

Michael Tierney  
College of William and Mary

and

Catherine Weaver  
University of Kansas

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International Organizations (IOs) influence the lives of human beings and the behavior of national governments now more than ever before. Since the choices of IOs (and the constraints they impose on state and non-state actors) are increasingly consequential, controversy surrounds IOs in the world today. For example, in 2002 and 2003 a fierce clash between members of the Security Council and the subsequent US war in Iraq produced a crisis of legitimacy for the United Nations. The UN's woes were exacerbated by the multi-billion dollar mis-management of the UN oil-for-food program and related accusations of vote-buying within the Security Council. These crises led Kofi Anan to propose organizational reforms and, more recently, they inspired members of the U.S. Congress to call for Anan's resignation. In September 2003, the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks in Cancun broke down when developing countries walked out in protest over the protectionist agricultural policies of West European states. Now that WTO rulings are binding, governments are less willing to ignore policies of their trading partners that violate the principles of the international trade regime. As a result of these and other episodes, member governments, private think tanks, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) spend increasing amounts of time and money monitoring the behavior of IOs, criticizing their policies, and debating their reform. The politics in and around IOs matter and thus require our attention.

Surprisingly, while actors in the real world of international politics are increasingly concerned about IOs, scholars have made limited progress explaining their behavior and their impact on actual outcomes. Distracted by meta-theoretical debates, IO scholars have inadvertently widened the gap between the study and the empirical reality of IOs over the past thirty years. Our extant state-centric theories that have dominated scholarly inquiry continue to conceive of international governmental institutions as little more than forums for interstate bargaining. The great debate of the 1980s and 1990s centered on whether these institutions "mattered" insofar as altering state preferences, enhancing credible commitments and providing information necessary to engender interstate cooperation under anarchy.<sup>1</sup> This narrow focus on institutions as structural constraints on state behavior is ironic given the increasing power of actual IOs as actors in their own right.

Recently, scholars have begun to conceive of IOs not merely as forums that shape interaction among self-regarding states, but relatively autonomous agents with the authority to set agendas and implement policy, regulate state behavior, and make legally binding decisions that impinge upon state sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> In a more provocative turn, sociologically-oriented scholars have explored the role of IO actors in shaping the normative and ideational setting of world politics in which states (and other actors) strategically engage IOs towards their own ends but also redefine identities and interests as a result of their interaction within an IO's institutionalized environment.<sup>3</sup> Hence, while it has been long in coming, IO scholars are developing new approaches that explore the

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<sup>1</sup> Gilpin 1981; Krasner 1983; Keohane 1984; Strange 1988; Stein 1990; Ruggie 1993; Baldwin 1993; Mearsheimer 1994; Keohane and Martin 1995; Martin and Simmons 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001; Pollack 2003; Hawkins et al 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Finnemore 1996; Risse-Kappen 1996; Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002; Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

understudied aspects of IO design, delegation, behavior and change that increasingly shape real world outcomes in international politics.

However, despite growing interest in IO design, delegation, behavior, and change, scholars frequently disagree on the key questions we should be asking about IOs and, more commonly, the theories and methods we should employ to study them. We worry that such meta-debates have distracted scholars from describing and explaining important empirical patterns and instead, often degenerate into spats over first-principles. Specifically, we refer here to the split among scholars along the so-called “rationalist-constructivist divide.”<sup>4</sup> In IO studies, this debate is rooted in a dispute over the ontological status of the IO (as arena, agent, or actor) and epistemological choices in how we study IOs. These apparent philosophical differences define the battleground for self-identified rationalist and constructivist scholars, which more often than not reveal themselves as straightforward disagreements over the kinds of questions that drive our research on IOs.<sup>5</sup> Despite all the ink that has been spilled on the rationalist-constructivist divide, we do not think there is likely to be a big payoff in terms of our understanding of IOs by continuing this debate. Instead, in this book we are interested in developing middle-range theories that enable the accumulation of knowledge about international politics in general and specific IOs in particular. Most of the authors self-consciously seek to integrate rationalist and constructivist insights in order to build richer models for our empirical inquiries. All the authors in this book address the utility of such efforts at synthesis.

We conceive of rationalism and constructivism as approaches or ‘orientations’ to explaining the social world that offer distinct causal and/or constitutive logics for behavior, outcomes, and meaning in international politics. We do so with numerous caveats. Foremost, we agree with Fearon and Wendt (2002) and Snidal (2002), among others, that rationalism and constructivism are not theories per se. Neither offers falsifiable predictions without the addition of some substantive assumptions about actor identities, motives, or structural constraints. Rather, as Adler (2002) suggests, both approaches provide “a metaphysical stance” within which substantive theories can be embedded. In practice, each approach encourages a focus on a different set of explanatory variables (typically material interests and constraints in the rationalist tradition and identity, ideas, and norms in constructivism) and a methodology (typically deductive and positivist versus inductive and interpretive) that are employed to construct

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<sup>4</sup> Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner 1998. Briefly, we define rationalism here as the study of goal-seeking behavior by utility-maximizing, self-regarding individual actors. Likewise, we understand constructivism as the investigation of the social and historical construction of identity, norms, and interests that define appropriate behavior of ‘other-regarding’ actors in a given material or normative context. In terms of epistemology, constructivism is contrasted to rationalism in its holistic approach, premised on the belief that “the effects of social structures cannot be reduced to independently existing agents and their interactions” (Carlsnaes 2002, 340). Alternatively, most, but not all, rationalist approaches start with micro-foundational assumptions that give pride of place to individual actors.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent example of such bloodletting, see the symposium in *International Studies Review* (Hellman 2003). A few of the contributions offer pragmatic exceptions (Moravcsik 2003), but most of the articles simply re-state first principles, wave their preferred flags while deriding the baddies on the other side of the divide (Kratochwil 2003; Smith 2003).

testable models or thick descriptions about specific issues in world politics. However, while these dichotomies are often emphasized in theoretical discussions about the core elements of rationalism and constructivism, they often dissolve when we observe the actual research practices of IO scholars. Rationalist approaches often rely upon non-material variables while “thin” constructivism (i.e., that branch of constructivism that accepts positivist social science) is quite cognizant of the causal influence of material factors.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, where self-identified rationalists open the question of preference formation and where constructivists incorporate notions of strategy and choice, the border between the two approaches becomes quite blurred. This is precisely where the possibilities for synthesis arise and where we hope to find explanatory leverage on the empirical puzzles addressed in the subsequent chapters.

Despite potential gains from trade, a conscious dialogue to uncover synergies between rationalism and constructivism is mostly absent from the major journals of international relations. More often than not theoretical straw men are erected and dispatched, and the walls between these two approaches are reinforced rather than removed.<sup>7</sup> As Mark Pollack (2001, 237) writes in his review of European integration theories, “...there is a real danger that the current line-up of rationalist and constructivist schools may devolve into a dialogue of the deaf, with rationalists dismissing constructivists as ‘soft’ and constructivists denouncing rationalists for their derisive commitment to parsimony and formal models.” Specifically, constructivists claim that rationalist approaches, including realist, liberal institutionalist, and principal-agent variants, omit the most important variables from their analysis or rely on implausible assumptions and a narrow “logic of consequences” that lead to thin caricatures of the socio-political life within and around IOs (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). Alternatively, rationalists assert that constructivist claims, which are frequently inductively derived and centered on the constitutive effects of norms, ideas and culture, are poorly specified and non-falsifiable (Moravcsik 1999; Dessler 2004). Often the result is that rationalists simply ignore constructivist research altogether, whereas constructivists are obliged to put on a long and bitter epistemological defense against rationalism that ultimately distracts them from fleshing out their own arguments.<sup>8</sup> Studies that actually attempt to test alternative hypotheses derived from constructivist and rationalist models with carefully selected cases are the rare exception.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Wendt 1999.

<sup>7</sup> This division in the study of IOs has been reinforced by a norm with the discipline that encourages scholars to defend their own theoretical islands and bash those of their intellectual opponents. As Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal explain, “Much IR research has implicitly endorsed an erroneous presumption that an argument can only be shown to be right by showing that an alternative argument is wrong.” Koremenos et al, 2001, 1052. Borrowing from sociologist Gerry Mackie, Lake refers to the associated paradigm wars in IR as “a convention trap.” Lake 2002, 148.

<sup>8</sup> Lapid and Kratochwil 1996. This need to defend first principles against the rationalist mainstream also distracted the first generation of constructivists from testing their propositions empirically. Alternatively, Moravcsik (1999) argues that constructivists have failed to take rationalism seriously, treating alternative rationalist accounts of European integration (such as liberal inter-governmentalism) as ideal types or straw men in a manner that allows constructivists to overlook where previous theories have already put forth viable alternative explanations on the effects of ‘constructivist’ variables such as ideas and norms.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see Jupille et al. 2003.

Not surprisingly, as scholars primarily interested in describing and explaining politics within and around actual IOs, we find the rationalist-constructivist debate tiresome and distracting. We observe patterns and puzzles in the real world and seek to understand and explain them. However, no single rationalist or constructivist model appears to offer a complete (or even adequate) explanation for observed variation in our chosen cases. Thus, in an attempt to develop more satisfying explanations for social phenomena such as IO design, delegation, behavior, and change, we often find it necessary to accessorize our preferred model with numerous caveats and ad hoc amendments that may not be consistent with the hard core of our rationalist or constructivist paradigms. Such degenerative amendments lead to conceptual fuzziness that makes the accumulation of knowledge across the field of international organization almost impossible. Absent some clear means for linking rationalist and constructivist explanations, researchers are unable to achieve theoretical precision or empirical rigor beyond single case studies. Hence, a Lakatosian view of scientific progress suggests that we can have either coherent theories or a rich understanding of the particular empirical phenomena that we care about, but we are unlikely to have both.<sup>10</sup>

We are not alone in suggesting that the rationalist-constructivist debate is increasingly unproductive and that potential synergies lie dormant. Indeed, a number of prominent scholars have recently asserted that the divide has been overstated and that the two approaches are more compatible than previously imagined. For example, Fearon and Wendt (2002, 52) claim that, “Although there are some important differences between the two approaches, we argue that there are also substantial areas of agreement, and where genuine differences exist they are as often complementarities as contradictions.” From the rationalist camp, Duncan Snidal (2002, 74) proposes that “rational choice is a methodology incorporating general theoretical assumptions but that it is wide open in terms of specific substantive content;” leaving open the possibility that constructivist claims might fruitfully be embedded within a rationalist model of strategic interaction. In another recent essay, Wendt argues that a more complete theory of institutional design is likely only if rationalists resist the temptation to develop their models in isolation from constructivist alternatives. By integrating insights from constructivism, particularly with respect to identity and preferences, rationalist scholars can account for a greater proportion of the variance in their dependent variables and also offer explanations with greater “causal depth” (Wendt 2001, 1021, 1024-1029). The current lack of theoretical synthesis between different approaches is a major obstacle to the accumulation of knowledge in IR. As David Lake (2002, 140) explains, “We work on separate islands of theory... The failure to build bridges between these separate islands and to conceptualize adequately the relevant policy alternatives has hobbled inquiry.”<sup>11</sup> Optimism about synthesis at the level of ‘meta’ or ‘ology’ ought to encourage scholars to integrate the insights of alternative approaches into their own explanations. As Fearon and Wendt (2002, 52) argue, “the most interesting research is likely to be work that ignores zero-sum interpretations of their relationship and instead directly engages questions that cut across the rationalist/constructivist boundary as it is commonly understood.”

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<sup>10</sup> Vasquez 1997; Elman and Elman 2003; Schmidt 2002.

<sup>11</sup> For other recent assertions on the need for and efficacy of bridge building in IR, see Brecher and Harvey 2002; Starr 2002; Sterling-Folker 2000, 2003; and Schneider and Aspinwall 2001.

Despite these calls for bridge-building in the previously cited stock-taking essays, remarkably little progress has been made in actually constructing synthetic models that can be applied to empirical research. Thus, in addition to contributing to the substantive literature on IO design, delegation, behavior and change, this book explores the proposition that rationalist and constructivist approaches can be fruitfully synthesized. If successful, synthetic models promise to explain empirical phenomena more completely or deeply than either approach can perform in isolation. Further, the most successful synthetic models will not only explain the phenomena they set out to explain, but will also have some coherence and staying power so that they can explain other social facts. That a model with more explanatory variables than its theoretical ancestors can explain a greater percent of the variance in a specific case should surprise no one. However, if the same synthetic model can travel and continue to explain additional cases, then it will improve our understanding of international politics. The participants in this project were encouraged to strive for coherent and generalizable models that could both explain their cases of interest and, ideally, be generalizable.

We accept the challenge posed above to ‘cut across the rationalist/constructivist boundary’ and to explore the possibilities for synthesis. By design, this volume brings together self-identified rationalist and constructivist scholars who have committed themselves to two tasks: imagining what synthetic explanations might look like and then testing the plausibility of synthetic models through empirical research on international organizations. This volume does not presume that all the authors will reach the same rosy conclusions about theoretical synthesis, nor does it claim that synthesis is inherently good. Indeed, we expect some contributors to conclude that rationalist and constructivist approaches have remained distinct for good reasons and need to remain distinct for reasons of parsimony, theoretical coherence, or tractability. Further, some authors may find that amending a pre-existing theory does little to help explain the empirical phenomena under study. Whether we reach a consensus on the plausibility and desirability for bridging the rationalist-constructivist divide, we believe that a conscious effort toward this goal may be an important step toward progressive research on IOs.

In the next section of this chapter we provide a brief overview of the field of IO with an eye towards discerning the roots of the rationalist and constructivist divide within the current genre of IO research. Our purpose is to identify the divide and explore how elements of each approach might be combined to provide richer explanations for observed empirical patterns. Specifically, we focus on the theoretical and empirical questions that frame the case studies found in this book: the design of IOs, the delegation of authority and tasks to IOs, variations in IO autonomy, IO behavior, and the prospects for reform and change within IOs.

In part III of this chapter, we propose six specific models for rationalist-constructivist synthesis in the study of IOs. The papers in this volume reflect a variety of different choices about how to most usefully synthesize different approaches. However, prior to any discussion of the variants of synthesis, we focus attention on the empirical questions that motivate the authors of this book and the field more broadly.

## II. The Driving Questions

For the past 20 years scholars of IR and IO have been arguing about whether and how international institutions and/or international organizations matter in world politics.<sup>12</sup> We start from the premise that IOs do matter a great deal. Why else, for example, would states and other international actors continue to expend their finite resources to create, join and maintain IOs, especially when IOs do not always succeed in their delegated tasks? Why, if IOs are ‘epiphenomenal’ to outcomes in world politics (according to the logic of realist theory), do states and other actors fight bitterly over the rules that will govern IOs and the personnel hired to serve within IO bureaucracies? Why do organized interest groups from environmental NGOs to large commercial banks actively lobby IOs and why do millions of people all over the world protest the behavior and decisions made by IOs?<sup>13</sup> Why does the world’s hegemon seek the legitimation of a United Nations resolution to pursue its self interests? Why do the economic fate of individual countries and even the stability of world finance rest so heavily on the policy recommendations of the International Monetary Fund? Why are states willing to delegate and in some cases abdicate their sovereign authority in an effort to deepen the European Union? These questions answer themselves -- because the decisions of international organizations affect the decisions, behavior and even the identities of important international actors in world politics. IOs do matter.<sup>14</sup>

### *A. Design and Delegation of Authority to IOs*

Since scholars and practitioners conclude that IOs do increasingly matter in the real world, and that institutional form has an impact on political outcomes (Weaver and Rockman 1992), it should come as no surprise that there is a long and continuing tradition of seeking to explain their form or design (Koremenos et al. 2001). Why are IOs structured the way that they are?<sup>15</sup> What accounts for variation in membership patterns (Downs, Rocke and Barsboom 1996; Pevehouse 2002; Tierney 2003), institutional rules (Pollack 2002), and delegated tasks (Alter 2003; Tallberg 2000)? Further, why do states and non-state actors choose to delegate authority to and legalize norms within formal IOs when the alternative is to pursue their interests unilaterally or through bilateral or multilateral agreements (Abott and Snidal 2001; Goldstein et al 2001; Milner 2002; Thompson 2004; Hawkins et al 2004)?

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<sup>12</sup> For a thorough review, see Martin and Simmons 1998 and 2002.

<sup>13</sup> For research documenting these behaviors see Keck and Sikkink 1998; Fox and Brown 1998; Gould 2003; Broz and Hawes 2004.

<sup>14</sup> If IOs don’t matter, then most states, NGOs, and many private firms, banks, and individuals are behaving quite irrationally.

<sup>15</sup> In a recent special issue of IO the contributors address 5 specific features of IOs that are at least partially explained by the conscious decisions of member states: membership rules, scope, centralization, control and flexibility. See Koremenos et al 2001. For critiques and responses on the utility of this rationalist approach to institutional design see Wendt 2001; Duffield 2003; and Koremenos and Snidal 2003.

The theories most frequently employed to address these empirical questions emerge primarily from the rational institutionalist tradition. The central premise is familiar to international relations theory: goal-oriented, utility-maximizing actors (usually states) seek to create, structure and endow IOs with rules and decision-making procedures that best serve their strategic interests or functional imperatives. Realist approaches, to the extent that they extend beyond assertions that IOs are epiphenomenal (Mearsheimer 1995), examine how states seek to design IOs with rules and decision-making procedures that solidify their influence and “voice opportunities” (Grieco 1996; Schweller and Priess 1997; Mosser 2004). Likewise, rational, self-interested states may paradoxically agree to “strategic restraint” of their own power through binding membership rules in IOs if those rules (such as voting procedures) ‘lock in’ their relatively superior position and simultaneously bind other states to long-term commitments that constrain potential challengers (Ikenberry 2001).

Moving beyond the assumption that IOs simply reflect status quo power, functionalist, institutionalist, and regime theorists argued that rational, self-interested states create international institutions to reduce transaction costs of bargaining and provide information. These functions enable interstate cooperation under anarchy (Krasner 1983; Keohane 1984; Oye 1986; Martin 1992). Over time, scholars working within this rational institutionalist framework developed more sophisticated approaches to these questions. Building from Putnam’s influential two-level game metaphor, more attention was focused on explaining state interests and providing more nuanced answers to why states join or create IOs, why (beyond pure functionalist reasons) they would choose to delegate power to a supranational authority, and when and why domestic interests trump or are trumped by international institutions (Simmons 1995; Milner 1997; Moravcsik 2000; Drezner 2003). For example, in Andrew Moravcsik’s (1998) liberal intergovernmental theory of EU integration, decisions to delegate authority and tasks to EU institutions are modeled as a three-stage process. Ultimately, outcomes of major treaty negotiations result from: national preferences defined primarily in terms of economic imperatives, mediated through a process of interstate bargaining under conditions of asymmetric interdependence, and finally decisions to delegate that are driven by desires to lock in credible commitments. While constructivist variables, such as ideological sources of national preferences and the persuasive abilities of supranational entrepreneurs occasionally creep into the analysis of particular cases, these causes are ad hoc supplements to the rationalist account that Moravcsik offers.<sup>16</sup>

Principal-agent models represent the most recent innovation within the rationalist approach to IOs.<sup>17</sup> These models draw upon micro-economic theories of the firm in order to explain why states might delegate authority to IOs and how they attempt to structure the delegation contract in order to manage the risks and costs associated with delegation.

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, these constructivist variables are largely dismissed on the grounds that constructivist models fail to provide testable propositions, lacking a clear statements of “*which* ideas and discourses influence (or do not influence) *which* policies under *which* circumstances,” (Moravcsik 1999: 673, emphasis in original). The constructivists contributing to this book take this claim seriously and attempt to remedy this problem. See Hawkins and Joachim 2004 and Nielson, Tierney and Weaver 2004.

<sup>17</sup> For a lengthy review and discussion see Hawkins et al 2004.

Hence, these models have much in common with those focused on the rational design of institutions – after all, many of the institutional features created by member state principals are designed to monitor IO behavior and/or minimize agency losses. PA models have been used to analyze the effects of preference heterogeneity among multiple principals on principal attempts to redesign IO policies and institutions (Martin 2004; Lyne et al 2005), to analyze information asymmetries between principals and agents (Gould 2004; Pollack 2003; Cooley and Ron 2002), the length of delegation chains (Vaubel 2003; Broz and Hawes 2004), how varying substantive tasks influence the type of decision rules that are selected (Alter 2004), the efficacy of reform efforts by member states (Nielson and Tierney 2003; Gutner 2005), the domestic political incentives that drive delegation to IOs (Moravcsik 2000; Milner 2004) and the impact of third parties on the efficacy of delegation contracts (Gould 2004; Lake and McCubbins 2004).

While rationalist approaches have concentrated on questions of IO delegation and design, there is no logical reason why sociologically oriented theories could not be employed to answer these same questions. Recently constructivists and historical institutionalists have revealed both empirical and theoretical shortcomings in the rationalist approach to delegation and design. Many weaknesses stem from its state-centric tendencies (which are not inherent)<sup>18</sup> and materialist understanding of national preferences. Craig Parsons (2003), for example, provides a constructivist alternative to Moravcsik’s liberal intergovernmentalist model by exploring the constitutive effect of ideologies on national preferences and the interests of elite decision makers in EU negotiations. Kate McNamara’s (2002) discussion of Central Banks, Steve Weber’s (1994) analysis of the creation of the EBRD, and Wade Jacoby’s (2003) insights on NATO and the EU suggest the possibility that both states and IOs are emulating the normatively “appropriate” institutional designs of neighboring actors or a broader epistemic community. Alternatively, Dryzek (1999) explains how a norm of democratization has driven debates about the (re) design of institutions within the EU and the UN. Likewise, decisions to legalize norms within IOs (such as human rights) and the endow specific mandates (such as the promotion of democracy) “may hinge less on functionalist and interest-driven accounts and more on historically contingent narratives regarding the emergence of a particular legal understanding” (Goldstein, et al 2000: 393; see also Weber 1994 and Hawkins and Joachim in this volume).

In a subsequent chapter Alex Thompson makes a related (and explicitly synthetic) argument about why states might delegate the use of force to an IO, explaining the strategies employed in anticipation of the “legitimation effect” that multilateral action has on intended audiences. While these motivations are not necessarily incompatible with the rationalist core, they emerge from the sociological tradition that has since become tied to the constructivist agenda and explain much of the residual variance in purely rationalist accounts.

More provocatively, the sociological turn in IO studies has prompted scholars to ask not only why IOs are created, but *who* creates and empowers them. More often than

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<sup>18</sup> See Lake and Powell 1999.

not IOs are created by other IOs (Shanks et al 1994) and thus exhibit the features of the organizations that spawn them. Such a process is more akin to sociological processes of isomorphism than the choices implied by the rational design literature where security imperatives of great powers or system efficiency drives member states to create institutions. Many constructivist scholars explain how the IOs themselves take a proactive role in defining their core missions, taking on new tasks, and governing their own operations (Crane and Finkle 1981; Ascher 1983; Ness and Brechin 1988; Escoabr 1995; Finnemore 1996; Weaver 2003; Barnett and Finnemore 2004). After analyzing the creation of Interpol and its precursor, Liv Coleman and Michael Barnett ask “Where is the delegation?” *Who* actually makes critical decisions regarding the redesign of the structure and rules of an IO at key points during its institutional lifespan? For Barnett and Coleman a sufficient answer requires an appreciation of the internal culture and identity of the organization, as well as the preferences and power of member states. Weaver (2005) finds that the expansion or change of mandates (“mission creep”) is often driven by the IO itself, rather than its member states. If such patterns are typical of IOs, then PA theorists and other “rational” designers can certainly compliment their approaches with insights drawn from constructivist models.

### ***B. The Autonomy and Behavior of IOs***

The multifaceted roles that international organizations play in the world today have certainly helped to reinvigorate the study of IO delegation and design, but they also beg the related question of what explains IO behavior. Previously occupied with the effect of IOs on *state* behavior, the focus has now shifted towards IOs themselves. Recent approaches grounded in rationalist assumptions, in particular the principal-agent models noted above, recognize that IOs as agents evolve and often act in ways that appear to contradict their formal mandates and even the specific instructions of their state principals (Gould 2003; Nielson and Tierney 2003; Pollack 1997, 2003; Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, and Tierney 2004). On the flip side, hybrid and constructivist studies depict the autonomous life of international bureaucracies as well as the effect (and power) that IOs as actors have upon world politics through agenda-setting, discursive development, norm creation and diffusion (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995; McNeely 1995; Finnemore 1996; Abbot and Snidal 1998; Hamlet 2004; Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004).

Simply put, scholars of IO are waking up to a reality long ago recognized by practitioners: that IOs, in part by design, exhibit varying degrees of autonomy and consequently possess their own preferences and bureaucratic cultures that are distinct from those of their member states. In part, this underlying autonomy is intentional. As rationalist theories suggest, states may endow IOs with considerable independence to in order to confer greater legitimacy to the IO’s (and thus their own) multilateral action (Hurd 1999; Coicaud and Heiskanen 2001; Thompson in this volume).<sup>19</sup> Other times autonomy is derived or captured as the IO accrues specialized knowledge and skills that translate not only into independence, but also authority and power (Barnett and

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<sup>19</sup> As UN Secretary General Kofi Anan recently explained, “The U.N. can be useful because it is seen as independent and impartial. If it ever came to be seen as a mere instrument or prolongation of U.S. foreign policy, it would be worthless to everyone.” (*Wall Street Journal* 2-22-05)

Finnemore 2004). Hence, none of us should be surprised when IOs exhibit degrees of autonomy that lead them to behave in ways incongruent with our understanding of principal state interests or bargaining outcomes. In fact, IOs like the World Bank and IMF are often referred to as actors in their own right, making decisions and exercising power and influence within their normative and material environments in ways that are inexplicable by strictly statist theories.<sup>20</sup>

As inferred above, we cannot begin to explain IO behavior without first establishing what degree of autonomy and influence the IO attains in its authorizing and task environment – a goal taken up by Cortell and Peterson in this volume in their comparative study of the WTO and the WHO. As one might expect, IOs that are delegated or attain higher degrees of autonomy and influence (agential independence) will tend to behave in ways that are not easily predicted by analyzing solely the power and preferences of their principal member states or formal IO design. This point was made long ago in a comparative study by Cox and Jacobson (1973),<sup>21</sup> and more recently fleshed out within contending rationalist and constructivist approaches. For example, borrowing insights from the study of American Congressional behavior, recent applications of principal-agent theory in IO seek to explain the conditions under which IOs gain autonomy, escape the control of their member states, and in turn affect substantive outcomes through the mechanisms of agenda control, information provision, and bargaining under conditions of asymmetric information (Tallberg, 2000; Pollack 2003; Martin 2004; and Gould 2003). More recently, constructivist works employing organizational analysis demonstrate how IOs develop bureaucratic cultures and attain and engender forms of power and authority over ideas, norms, and ideologies that enable them to proactively shape the environment in which they “live,” including the constitution of the identities and interests of the IO’s member states (Escobar 1995; McNeely 1995; Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

Previous scholarship premised on the notion that IOs are more or less creatures of their member states (realism and neoliberalism) ignore variations in autonomy and expect that IO behavior will be determined by the authority and the preferences of those same states. In the process, such work underplays or even ignore the internal characteristics of

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<sup>20</sup> For more complete discussion of this ontological shift and its implications for theorizing IO agency see Keohane and Martin 2003; Nielson and Tierney 2003; and Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Cox and Jacobson arguably provided the first real means of examining the nature of agency and the sources of autonomy and influence in IOs that has since been surprisingly overlooked in IO literature. In a comparative study of eight specialized agencies, the authors determined the level of autonomy and influence of IOs to be a function of their type (service or forum) and level of salience as determined by the member states’ foreign policy imperatives. Forum or ‘arena’ organizations, like the UN Security Council, tackle issues considered highly relevant to states’ security interests and thus gain little autonomy, possess weak bureaucracies, and thus exert little or no independent influence over collective organizational outcomes. Service organizations (such as the UN’s specialized agencies and the World Bank) are delegated mandates and goals of lower salience and engage in activities that requires the development of large, strong bureaucracies built upon the accumulation of extensive expertise, control over information, and coordination of complex groundwork. These functions enable these service organizations to derive considerable independence within their external environments that requires an investigation of their internal bureaucracies in order to explain organizational policies and practices. See also Legro 1997; Hadewych 1998; and Vaubel 1998.

the organization that may enable the IO to carve out sources of influence and autonomy over key areas of decision-making that are critical to understanding unanticipated aspects of IO behavior, as described in Barnett and Coleman's analysis of Interpol's decisions to recreate itself at critical junctures in its institutional history. Principal-agent theory provides some leverage on this problem by establishing the conditions under which IOs may escape principal control and "shirk" delegated responsibilities. Yet, most applications of PA theory assume that IOs are unified, rational actors whose preferences are exogenously determined and fixed.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while we gain insight into when and where IO behavior may deviate from principal interests – a critical contribution – without a corresponding theory of IO preferences we have no explanation for *why* IOs chose to follow such paths nor any explanation of the content of IO behavior.

Consider the alternative. Sociological arguments that overstate the independence of IOs<sup>23</sup> and identify rational incentive structures or normative cultures as the variables for understanding internal bureaucratic behavior often ignore the interactions between IOs and their external environment. While the detailed description of IO 'social life' may provide a more convincing explanation of IO agency and the preferences of staff members, a complete explanation of IO behavior requires that we take the preferences of external actors seriously. But without a full explanation of the IO's relationship to its external environment (particularly the degree of the IO's autonomy from principal influence), this social constructivist model is still unable to fully explain and predict the substance and direction of IO policy and practices. Under what conditions do external versus internal (bureaucratic cultural) factors matter in explaining organizational behavior (Hamlet 2004)? Given that both rationalist (principal-agent) and constructivist (bureaucratic actor) models seek to understand variations in autonomy and organizational behavior, yet focus on different – not competing – variables, we suspect a high potential for synthesis that has yet to be tested through empirical work.

### *C. IO Change*

If little consensus exists in explanations of IO behavior, the process of change in IOs is even less understood. In part, this follows from the absence of clarity regarding what we mean by organizational change. It appears to be a multidimensional question, encompassing attempts to explain the causes, direction, pace and outcome of IO change that may target reform of formal structures, rules, membership, mandates and scope of functions (a design and delegation question) to the more fundamental transformation of organizational discourses and practices (a behavioral question). This incites several questions. First, who or what catalyzes such formal or informal change of/in IOs and how is a consensus on the direction of change attained (if at all)? Is this fundamentally driven by principals in a response to changes in rational interests or shifting domestic/global

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<sup>22</sup> For an exception see Hug 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, constructivists seeking to explain the independent behavior of IO may tend to select on the dependent variable, choosing highly autonomous IOs as the subject of study and deriving conclusions from these cases that leads to a distorted picture about the general relationships between IOs and their principals in the world today.

norms (Schimmelfennig 2003)? Or do IOs, as bureaucratic actors, strategically initiate specific reforms in anticipation of challenges in their external environments? Second, what factors shape the prospect for achieving change (McCalla 1994; Adler 2000; Weaver and Leiteritz 2004; Barnett and Coleman in this volume)? In other words, what enables or constrains principals and/or IOs themselves from changing the formal and/or informal rules that drive organizational actions? Third, how do we explain the outcome of reform initiatives, particularly when the degree or content of change is far less than expected? More provocatively, how do we explain how and when formal institutional change in the design of IOs, explained in the first framework, does not result in informal (cultural) change in behavior targeted in the second framework?

These are extremely difficult questions that have not yet been adequately addressed in IR literature. The realist claim that IOs will change when state interests change is both analytically unsatisfying and empirically wrong,<sup>24</sup> even in cases where IOs exhibit very little autonomy.<sup>25</sup> Instead, we gather clues from neoliberal institutionalism's explanation of 'sunk costs' and historical institutionalism's analysis of path dependency to understand why IOs may not change in directions or at a pace consistent with expectations (Thelen and Steinmo 1992 and Pierson 1996). Staying largely within a state-centric framework, principal-agent theory furthers the rational choice approaches by examining how IOs may resist pressures for change by "shirking" responsibility and escaping the control of their member states (Martin 2002). Constructivists, in a deviation from state-centric approaches, alternatively examine how on one level the global normative environment may experience shocks changes in IOs results from external shocks and ideological crises in the global or regional normative environment (Risse and Wiener 1999) and, on a second level, how internal bureaucratic structures and cultures may shape how IOs engage in discursive and operational shifts. The result is a disparate range of approaches appearing to address quite different aspects of IO change that would lead us to dismiss the possibility of synthesis.

Yet we do believe synthesis in the study of IO change is not only possible, but may also be illuminating. This is particularly true when we seek to answer how IO structures and rules change (such as IO membership or mandates), and also how transformations in IO culture and, thus, behavior occurs. In this volume, Barnett and Coleman examine such synthesis in their study of the redesign of Interpol over several points in its institutional lifespan; arguing that critical decisions do not directly correspond with changing principal interests and demands, but must take into account where and when Interpol displays autonomous interests and behavior shaped by bureaucratic culture. In his study of the enlargement of NATO membership, Schimmelfennig primarily focuses on the rational decision of states, yet situates this decision within a regional social environment where states' interests are shaped by a collective identity and community ethos. Finally, in a study of change at the World Bank (in section three of this book), Nielson, Tierney and Weaver attempt to show how the rationalist tenets of principal-agent theory may be integrated with constructivist insights of sociological organizational theory to explain the

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<sup>24</sup> For an insightful realist take on this question, see Krasner 1979, who amends his realist hegemonic stability model with insights from historical institutionalism.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the false predictions made by realists regarding the fate of NATO after the Cold War. Gaddis 1992a,b; Mearsheimer 1989, 1994; and Wallander 2000.

process and outcomes of World Bank reform in the late 1990s. Principal-agent models focus on principal preferences, agent incentives, and information asymmetries. They argue that PA models over-predict change in response to member state demands, whereas organizational models that focus on bureaucratic culture under-predict transformation at IOs.

Now that we've laid out the driving questions, it appears that the rationalist-constructivist debate that rages in international relations theory is considerably less clear cut in the subfield of IO studies. While many scholars claim allegiance to one or the other approach or roughly position their chosen theory somewhere along the rationalist-constructivist spectrum, it is apparent that in most instances we are asking similar questions and often we even examine similar variables and employ compatible methodologies. Where differences arise is in the emphasis given to chosen explanatory factors (material versus ideational, interests versus identity, etc). In attempts to conform to the disciplinary norms of political science, IO scholars articulate their arguments in terms of three cornered fights that produce "clear winners." Yet, even as many IO scholars defend their chosen approach against their perceived competitors, they also acknowledge, explicitly or implicitly, that elements of their rationalist or constructivist challenger may inform a missing part of their story. In making such admissions, we recognize the potential benefits of explicitly synthesizing rationalist and constructivist elements in a manner that meets our agreed upon standards for theory building and testing. By adding independent variables to any empirical test, we almost certainly improve the depth of our explanation for those facts. However, the real test comes when we attempt to make these new models travel. If these new synthetic models that help us to explain our individual cases are theoretically coherent, then we can expect significant progress in study of IOs.

### **III. Some Blueprints for Synthesis**

While we are hopeful that an integrative spirit will enhance our understanding of international organizations, there are potential pitfalls in any effort to combine rationalism and constructivism. Ardent scholars from both sides will quite likely decry the effort as neglecting or violating the distinct ontologies and epistemologies of each approach.<sup>26</sup> Inevitably some will claim their compatriots are "selling out" constructivism's core precepts to the rationalist mainstream -- or alternatively, that rationalists are getting "soft." Nevertheless, in this project we explore the possibility that genuine empirical puzzles might serve as springboards to theoretical progress, rather than a quest for theoretical purity or a desire to declare a winner in the next great debate in IR. By admitting this, we take seriously a "problem-driven" approach to the study of

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<sup>26</sup> For example, see the results from the TRIP survey (Peterson and Tierney 2004) from late 2004 where only 37% of respondents thought that rationalism and constructivism could be "usefully synthesized to create a more complete theory of IR." A plurality (43%) thought that R&C were complementary explanations that explain different features of IR, while only 20% thought that these were best conceived as "alternative approaches to be tested against each other."

international organizations (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002).<sup>27</sup> We sketch how salient questions of IO design, delegation, behavior and change have been addressed by both rationalist and constructivist scholars, exploring where and when the boundaries have been blurred and where the potential and desirability for synthesis are most evident. This will undoubtedly draw criticism. We welcome such criticism and the dialogue it will engender in the hope that we can identify the conditions for progressive research frameworks – whether synthetic or not.

Our proposal for synthesis in the study of international organizations was inspired in part by Hemmer and Katzenstein's (2002) "eclectic theorizing" on the choice of regional institutions. Hemmer and Katzenstein compare institutional design choices in NATO and SEATO and they draw on a variety of theoretical traditions to explain each case. However, Hemmer and Katzenstein do not offer any generalizable set of propositions about how to combine the approaches drawn from their theoretical grab bag. Alternatively, Jupille, Caporaso, and Checkel's (2003) four strategies for "promoting greater synthesis" in the study of European integration offers a more focused approach that may offer useful lessons for scholars of international organization.<sup>28</sup> We seek to build upon the insights of Jupille et al as we specify different strategies for building and testing synthetic models of IO delegation, design, behavior and change. Specifically, we amend some of the strategies offered by Jupille et al and then discuss some alternative approaches to synthesis that have been advanced in the literature or employed by authors in the current project.

### *Synthesis or Steps Toward Synthesis?*

Area specialists in comparative politics and experts on particular organizations within IO studies have traditionally drawn from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives, even if only implicitly. This has meant employing a range of different independent variables from a large number of different theories in an ad hoc way in order to account for specific outcomes in a particular case. While this "laundry list" approach is not the optimal form of synthetic "model" building, it is attractive for students and scholars of IO who seek to explain individual cases.<sup>29</sup> If one's goal is to learn "everything there is to learn about the UN's role in Bosnia," then there are few limits to the number of causal variables one might employ to account for any specific outcome in that case. However, such lists of variables that are selected inductively within a particular case are not likely to fit together in a coherent model or tell us much about other IOs or other cases of intrastate violence. Few scholars have attempted to provide

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<sup>27</sup> However, unlike Hemmer and Katzenstein we attempt to elaborate specific blueprints for problem driven research that draw on multiple approaches to IO. Hemmer and Katzenstein offer few guidelines for problem driven research beyond the single case they seek to explain.

<sup>28</sup> Briefly explain each work here.

<sup>29</sup> If a scholar builds a model, then she leaves us with something even after the immediate case has been explained. The model has a comprehensible logic independent of the case we are examining. For example, both Waltz (1979) and Wendt (1997) articulate models whose logic can be explained without reference to *any* actual cases. If we merely list a finite number of prominent causal variables that differ from case to case, we are not model building. Instead, we are offering an ad hoc explanation for a single case.

coherent and generalizable synthetic models of international organization. Recall, our working definition of a synthetic model is one that combines separate elements from existing theories into a single coherent approach to some research question.

One very notable exception, from which we draw inspiration and borrow heavily, is the recently published special issue of *Comparative Political Studies*, edited by Jupille, Caparaso, and Checkel.<sup>30</sup> Although empirically focused on explaining the impact of EU institutions on the process of integration, the editors articulate four distinct strategies for “promoting greater synthesis” among competing schools of thought. We analyze each of these strategies below and add some additional categories for discussion. While Jupille et al seek to “identify several specific *models of dialogue* that might advance integration”<sup>31</sup> of EU studies, in this volume we seek to develop synthetic *models of IO design, delegation, behavior and change*. Hence, while some of the strategies endorsed by Jupille et al are also models for synthesis – and thus might be emulated in this volume, some are merely strategies for enhancing inter-paradigm dialogue. As we suggested previously, the purpose of the current project is not to celebrate bridge building or synthesis as an end in itself, but to understand the conditions under which synthesis will offer better explanations than we might realize by proceeding independently with our own favored theory.

### **(1) Dialogue**

While dialogue does not itself represent a form of synthesis, it is often discussed as if it does. For example, a recent ISA panel and follow up symposium published in *International Studies Review* contained numerous essays that conflated dialogue with synthesis. Even the title provokes this sentiment, “Are Dialogue and Synthesis Possible in International Relations?” Dialogue implies a conversation where both parties are actually listening to each other. However, while dialogue is not a form of synthesis, it may be a prerequisite for successful efforts at building synthetic models of IO design, delegation, behavior and change. To paraphrase a co-editor in the Jupille et al project, “If you really want people to build bridges between these different paradigms, then both sides have to know what the other river bank actually looks like.”<sup>32</sup> If rationalists don’t understand the logic of constructivist models, then the bridges we build will not rest on solid foundations. Dialogue with patient constructivists can help rationalists to understand the utility and weaknesses of potentially complimentary theories within the constructivist paradigm. The reverse is also true.

The form and content of such dialogue implies more than simply a nod of recognition to alternative explanations. Instead, one engages in dialogue when you take your interlocutors seriously. For social scientists this means actually reading the work of scholars outside one’s own paradigm, talking to the enemy at meetings, not misrepresenting the internal logic of alternative theories and carefully drawing

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<sup>30</sup> Jupille, Caparaso, and Checkel 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Jupille et al 2003, 9. Later in the essay Jupille et al refer to “modes of theoretical conversation.” (see p. 19).

<sup>32</sup> Comment from Jeff Checkel at ISA meeting. Portland Oregon. March 2003.

hypotheses consistent with the logic of these competitors. While these steps do not guarantee any grand synthesis, they are likely a critical precursor to any serious effort at synthesis.

## **(2) *Competitive Theory Testing (CTT)***

As Jupille et al suggest, serious and well-structured competitive tests can indeed encourage inter-paradigmatic dialogue and understanding.<sup>33</sup> Further, many research methods text books highlight the value of competitive theory testing for establishing knowledge claims – not just against the null hypothesis but against the next best alternative explanation.<sup>34</sup> But while such a research strategy may be a useful precursor to synthesis, each theory is treated on its own terms and hypotheses are drawn without reference to the logic of the alternative theory. The “winner” of such a test is the theory with the biggest coefficients and smallest standard errors. Thus, the focus is on determining the independent effects of each causal variable, without any attempt to synthesize the logics into a coherent model. The CTT approach may cause authors and readers to take alternative explanations more seriously, be more confident in the utility of a specific theory, or it may even help to establish the conditions under which different theories are most persuasive; but we get no theoretical value added in this approach from combining or integrating the insights of the two theories, though we may explain more of the variance in the dependent variable. Hence, because the alternative logics are not speaking to each other, we see little “synthetic” about this particular research strategy.

## **(3) *Domain of Application (DOA)***

This strategy suggests a division of labor between different theoretical approaches. Here one attempts to specify the scope conditions of two or more theories – to identify the “respective turfs and home domains of each theory.”<sup>35</sup> Such specification could be a precursor to a synthetic model, but traditionally in the IR literature it has not been. For example, Charles Lipson famously suggested that security and economic issue areas in international relations were roughly coincident with the domains in which realist and liberal theory would apply respectively.<sup>36</sup> At first glance the possibility for synthesis here seems rather limited since we continue to treat each model as analytically distinct. Realism explains security affairs while liberalism explains economic affairs. Or, in the study of IOs, constructivism explains identities and interests of actors while rationalism explains their choices and interactions (KKK 1998). While there is certainly some value

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, in practice such tests are not always competitive. Often the author’s preferred model is more fully developed and the hypotheses drawn from the caricatured alternative are weak competitors at best. For example, see the Pollack article from the same special issue of *CPS* where no reader is surprised to find that PA theory explains the outcome and the constructivist alternative is found wanting. Pollack 2003. For a good example of competitive theory testing that puts five different theories “to the test,” see Bennett and Leggold 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell and Stanley 1963; Van Evera 1997; Lakatos refers to such competitive tests as a “three-cornered fight” between one’s theory, the null hypothesis and some theoretical competitor. Lakatos 1970.

<sup>35</sup> Jupille et al 2003, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Since the potential costs and risks of unilateral cooperation were so high in the security issue area, states would be less willing to cooperate. Lipson 1984. For similar arguments see Jervis 1983; Grieco 1988.

in understanding the empirical questions to which specific theories ought to apply, the two theories are not actually integrated.

However, as Adam Smith explained long ago, when two actors can further specialize and divide the labor in a *joint production process*, then certain complementarities exist, and thus, both actors could gain through trade.<sup>37</sup> To push the analogy a bit further, this process of defining domains of application could inspire deeper synthesis by revealing complementarities within theories that were previously assumed to be irreconcilable. If two different theories seek to account for the same dependent variable, but employ distinct independent variables, then we can at least see the potential for some “additive theory that is more comprehensive than the separate theories.”<sup>38</sup> For example, the work of Stein, Powell, and Snidal succeeded in merging the insights of neo-realism and neo-liberalism under a broader model of strategic interaction by tweaking a few parameters that were not at the core of either theory.<sup>39</sup> Together, these three authors demonstrated that a similar level of cooperation between states could be deduced starting with either liberal or realist assumptions. This synthesis between neo-realist and neo-liberal theory basically ended a heated (and fruitless) debate about the assumption of relative or absolute gains and encouraged both liberal and realist scholars to turn their attention to empirical questions, rather than faith statements about first principles. Arguably, this integrative move would not have been possible, or at least would have been less likely, if not for the previous efforts by Lipson to specify “domains of application” for each of these theories.

As the previous example suggests, this strategy is likely to be most fruitful when both theories are attempting to explain the same type of dependent variable (such as level of cooperation, degree of institutionalization, or the amount of organizational autonomy possessed by an IO) and when they appeal to distinct explanatory variables.<sup>40</sup> It may also be quite fruitful if our goal is to expand the scope of our empirical research and problematize our explanatory variables that we take as given when our theory is operationalized independently. For example, David Lake suggests a similar approach to building bridges between “islands of theory” when he explains how institutionalists might respond to the common realist claim that in IR institutions don’t have an independent effect on behavior because they are themselves a product of the strategic interaction in which states are enmeshed. “The way out of the endogeneity trap is not by searching for the independent effects of institutions, but by demonstrating how deeply embedded they are in the social structure of world politics.”<sup>41</sup> Such a move provides an

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<sup>37</sup> Smith 1776.

<sup>38</sup> Jupille et al 2003. Note, that unlike Jupille et al we believe that additional steps must be taken before we can be said to be engaging in synthetic model building. Specifying a division of labor by itself, which is all the DOA strategy does, still leaves you with two distinct models, though it may allow you to understand your empirical questions more deeply...and that is a good thing. It’s just not synthetic.

<sup>39</sup> Stein 1992; Snidal 1991; Powell 1991. As we argue below, such efforts come close to the synthetic model of “subsumption” that is discussed below.

<sup>40</sup> For purposes of research design it would also be cleaner if the explanatory variables in the two alternative theories were not causally related, since that would make it difficult to sort out the causal processes that lead to change in the value of the dependent variable.

<sup>41</sup> Lake 2002, 145.

obvious justification for constructivists and historical institutionalists who claim a comparative advantage in this type of analysis. It also suggests that rational institutionalists may be dependent upon the type of work traditionally done by constructivists in order to justify their basic research questions. That sounds like a complementary division of labor, much as Adam Smith might define it. Such a finding would increase the mutual relevance of constructivist and rationalist work on international institutions. To conclude, this division of labor offers a greater appreciation for the big picture in our empirical area of research even if the approaches are not actually merged in any coherent way. As we argue below, DOA may be a useful precursor to actual synthesis.

#### **(4) Sequencing**

A close cousin, and plausible bridge between theories identified in the DOA strategy, is sequencing. This strategy for synthesizing insights from different theories employs a multi-step model.<sup>42</sup> Rather than attempting to explain the same dependent variable, as in the DOA strategy or the CTT strategy, sequencing implies that theory X will be used to explain or specify a causal variable that will subsequently be employed by theory Y to explain the ultimate dependent variable under study. This strategy is likely to be useful for scholars interested in explaining a causal chain. For example, assume, as many assert, that constructivism's "home turf" is the explanation of actor's interests and identities, while rationalism is best suited to explain bargaining outcomes between actors with fixed preferences.<sup>43</sup> Since the predicted outcome in the rationalist model is dependent upon the preferences of the relevant actors, then in any application of the rationalist model, a good empirical fit between predictions and results will be driven by the accuracy of the value assigned to the actor's preferences. Knowing that this is the alleged comparative advantage of constructivist theory, one potentially fruitful move would be to plug these (more accurately specified) preferences into a game theoretic or PA model as fixed parameters in a bargaining game between states or between states and an IO. The value added is the accuracy and the specificity of the preferences used as inputs. In this scenario, both approaches are dependent upon the work done by the other theory to complete the explanation of the outcome (for example, the apparent deviant behavior of IOs or their resistance to externally-imposed reforms).

Of course, scholars might just as easily reverse the order in which they employ various models. Simon Hug, working solely within a rationalist PA framework has attempted to endogenize the specification of actor preferences rather than assuming them.<sup>44</sup> Lyne, Nielson and Tierney (2003) adopt a similar "revealed preferences" approach to explain changing patterns of social lending by multilateral development banks over the past 25 years. Alternatively, Thomas Risse suggests a constructivist model of discursive (argumentative) interaction among "rational" actors in a specified social setting that offers very different expectations about outcomes than those we might

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<sup>42</sup> The clearest statement can be found in the "cooperation two-step." Legro 1996. But the sequencing strategy described here can accommodate more intricate dances as well.

<sup>43</sup> Ruggie 1998; Adler 1997; Katzenstein, Keohane, Krasner 1998; and Aspinwall and Schneider 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Hug 2003.

expect from rationalist theories.<sup>45</sup> By challenging the conventional “home turf advantage” of constructivism and rationalism, Hug, LNT, and Risse suggest that the “two-step” might be reversed. This opens the possibility for a very different division of labor among rationalists and constructivists. In fact, Schimmelfennig has recently reversed the conventional sequence proposed by Legro to construct a synthetic model of international organizations. He fuses a rationalist approach to state preferences and strategic action with an interaction model that is informed by a constructivist inspired “sense of community ethos” in order to explain the politics around EU enlargement and NATO expansion.<sup>46</sup>

### **(5) Subsumption**

When physicists mention a “grand synthesis” or a “unified field theory” they have something quite specific in mind – subsuming the empirical domain of two or more theories under the rubric of a single unified theory. The creation of a more unified theory often results from progress made in two or more distinct theoretical traditions.<sup>47</sup> In fact, in the absence of parallel progress, scientists might not even recognize the need for synthesis. An individual theory needs to be able to explain something in the real world that we care about before other scientists are going to bother trying to understand its logic and empirical implications. Arguably, the empirical progress made by constructivists in the late 1990s caused (some) rationalists to engage their work and seek to explain the facts that were revealed and highlighted in constructivist analysis. Similarly, while constructivists are interested in some empirical questions that are rarely addressed by rationalists, constructivists are also quite interested in the core set of empirical questions that have been the subject of rationalist inquiry for years: Why does war occur? Why do states cooperate or not? How are IOs designed? How and why do IOs change? So, there is significant agreement on what types of questions are worthy of explanation. Hence, we should not be surprised by the current interest in synthesis – and the possibility of subsumption.

A theory has been subsumed when it can be logically derived from an alternative theory or its insights can be explained as a special case of a more comprehensive theory. Subsumption is the clearest example of scientific progress that one can imagine since after one or more theories have been subsumed, we can then understand a range of previously unrelated phenomena with a single theory.<sup>48</sup> If scholars are primarily motivated by solving empirical puzzles and understanding the politics in and around IOs, then subsumption of a constructivist theory by a rationalist one (or vice versa) will be an appealing prospect. On the other hand, if scholars are committed to pushing a particular paradigm or normative agenda as an end in itself, then the idea of subsumption is likely to appear quite threatening.

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<sup>45</sup> Risse 2000.

<sup>46</sup> The original analysis of EU enlargement appeared in the *CPS* Special issue. The current effort to generalize this approach to NATO expansion appears in this volume. Schimmelfennig 2003, 2003a.

<sup>47</sup> For example, the current Holy Grail for physicists is a synthetic model that unifies the insights of quantum physics and relativity theory. Weinberg 1994.

<sup>48</sup> From William of Occam through Lakatos, all philosophers of science consider this one important measure of scientific progress.

A number of examples from the history of science illustrate the integrative process of subsumption. Newton's "cosmological synthesis" drew heavily upon the work of Galileo, Copernicus and Kepler. Newton's single gravitational law could explain all the observable motion of objects on earth **and** in the heavens.<sup>49</sup> Prior to Newton's synthetic achievement, the motion of planets, comets, and other heavenly bodies were explained by Kepler's laws that worked for distant objects. However, the motion of objects on earth was still explained by Aristotelian mechanics. The synthesis subsumed both types of phenomena under a single unified logic – Newton's law of gravitation –  $1/d^2$ . Of course Newton's own theory was subsequently subsumed as a special case of Einstein's theory of relativity, since Einstein could explain the behavior of planets and falling apples just as well as Newton's theory, plus then unobserved behavior of matter at the sub-atomic level and in the vicinity of black holes! All physicists agree that these efforts at subsumption were successful and progressive.

Jupille et al reveal a skeptical view of subsumption as a synthetic strategy when they argue, "Subsumption, by contrast, is clearly hegemonic in result if not in aspiration. More powerful theories absorb less powerful ones, perhaps even by criteria established by the more powerful theories, and then, gallingly, (re)produce these "weaker" theories as derived special cases." Perhaps this view of the most fundamental synthetic strategy explains why Jupille et al end up advocating models of inter-paradigmatic dialogue rather than fully synthetic models of EU integration. If we follow the logic of Jupille et al, then modern physicists ought to continue seeking to build bridges to some (non-existent) group of Newtonian physicists. And these Newtonians ought to be actively engaging the theoretical and empirical work of Copernicans or Aristotelians at the 2004 Meeting of the International Association of Theoretical Physics. This would surely be pluralism for the sake of pluralism. The goal ought to be scientific progress, not the proliferation of "isms" for their own sake. If subsumption is good enough for Newton and Einstein, then in principle it ought to be good enough for us as well.<sup>50</sup> Physicists actively pursue a single theory that can explain phenomena at the sub-atomic level, the terrestrial level and at the edges of black holes. While we are not likely to see a move in IR theory that would parallel Einstein subsuming Newton, we ought not rule it out on political grounds. The reason we shouldn't expect to see a unified field theory in IR any time soon has to do with the fact that almost all our theories are badly underdetermined. While imperializing

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<sup>49</sup> In Newton's own words, "Every particle of matter attracts every other particle with a force varying directly as the product of their masses and inversely to the square of the distance between them."

<sup>50</sup> Consider the most egregious version of imperialism that science fictionists can imagine – The Borg. This hybrid robot-humanoid species appears in numerous Star Trek episodes rampaging through the galaxy in an attempt to "assimilate" other species. Rather than vaporizing them, the Borg integrate all the elements of defeated species – culture, memories, technology, organizational innovations – into their own civilization, and they do so by force! Resistance is futile. But this is not only a fictional world, it is a political one. Social scientists do not face coercive threats from their colleagues and, if they are scientists, they actually share the goals of their colleagues – understanding the social world that we all study. The reason that the Borg are so scary is that they seek to assimilate independent civilizations that are valued as ends in themselves. Scientific theories are not valued by us as ends in themselves, they are valued to the degree that they allow us to understand things like IO behavior and change. Unless our very identities are somehow infused with the labels "principal-agent scholar" or "sociological institutionalist," then we have much less to fear from any imperializing synthetic project than Captain Picard does.

scholars sometimes claim that their preferred theory can subsume various rivals, the logical and empirical demonstration of these efforts typically fall way short. Hence, we don't need to denigrate subsumption as a synthetic strategy in order to enjoy the benefits of theoretical pluralism. If we adhere to the standard scientific rules for substantiating knowledge claims, then imperialistic pretenders will be revealed when they overstate their case for subsumption.

## **Beyond the Two Step...and the Waltz**

### ***(6) Ideational Structures and Dynamic Sequences***

So far we have assumed that sequencing is restricted to some variant of the “two step model.” However, some of the earliest constructivist critiques of rationalist IR theory imply the possibility for an iterative sequencing model that would be more dynamic than those discussed above. Recall that in many rationalist models we assume that actors attempt to maximize their own utility within some set of specified environmental constraints. The external constraints vary between different substantive theories, but can include formal institutions, the distribution of power, the structure of a market, geographic structures, or the nature of military technology in a given system. When these external constraints are very strong, then we observe patterned behavior and equilibrium outcomes – or structure induced equilibria.<sup>51</sup> Ken Waltz's structural realist theory provides an archetypical example. Anarchy and variation in the distribution of power induces states to engage in (certain types) of balancing behavior and ensures that specific systemic outcomes were more or less likely.<sup>52</sup>

Now, recall the discussion of the “agent-structure problem” and the constructivist (or pick your favorite *nom de guerre*) critique of Waltz's theory from the 1980s.<sup>53</sup> According to these critics, Waltz had a thin and static conception of international structure. First, Waltz's conception of structure could not accommodate a range of material and ideational factors at the systemic level that arguably had a major impact on the cost/benefit calculations of international actors (both states and other actors). Second, the conscious and unconscious behavior of actors within the international system actually constituted and/or caused changes within those systemic variables that were subsequently constraining state behavior and thus determining equilibrium outcomes within the system.

Two possibilities follow for scholars interested in building synthetic models of IO design, behavior and change. **First**, if rationalists require a structure that will do the

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<sup>51</sup> Morrow 1994, 138-145. This reminds us of a recent article by Bernstein, Lebow, Stein and Weber (2000), entitled “God Gave Physics the Easy Problems”.

<sup>52</sup> Waltz, 1979.

<sup>53</sup> Ruggie 1986; Wendt 1987; Dessler 1989. The title of Ruggie's article, “Toward a Neo-Realist Synthesis” is instructive on this point since each of these critics argues that by expanding the Waltzian ontology (and including variables that are highlighted by other theories) we might create a synthetic model that would be preferred to the stark neo-realist precursor.

causal work and thus constrain the choices of actors and outcomes within organizations, then this structure might as easily be ideational as material. Of course, in the real world of international organizations many different material and ideational structures are likely to shape the cost/benefit calculus of state leaders, delegates to IOs, leaders of IOs, and staff members working within IO bureaucracies. However, the research strategy of rationalists who have defined structural variables in material terms has been to isolate a specific structural variable and employ strategic choice logic in order to solve for equilibrium. We might just as easily employ the same rationalist logic but ask how ideational structures shape actor behavior and organizational outcomes.<sup>54</sup> This strategy seems consistent with the previously mentioned suggestions of Snidal.<sup>55</sup> The biggest difference between this model of synthesis and the Legro two-step, follows from the fact that constructivist logic is not being used to specify actor preferences, but instead to specify the structural constraints that shape actor cost benefit calculus. One could presumably start with either rationalist or constructivist preferences of the actors being modeled.

The **second** possibility is analytically more similar to the two step model, except the steps are repeated in a dynamic process. If, as Dessler and Wendt suggest, structural constraints in the real world are shaped by the behavior of actors in the system (and we find this to be entirely plausible), then it is reasonable to expect any model that fails to account for this dynamic process will predict less accurately than we might like. Scholars in both rationalist and constructivist traditions frequently create models that assume a dynamic relationship between agents and structures (either because actors choose to create or alter formal institutions<sup>56</sup> or because their behavior reinforces or changes organizational ideas and norms).<sup>57</sup> So, if agents influence structures and structures constrain agents, then social scientists interested in identifying and measuring the causal impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable are confronted with a serious modeling problem – stuff is moving on both sides of the equation simultaneously! In order to realize all the benefits of a comparative static test, while still capturing the interactive nature of the agent-structure relationship, we may need to specify a sequence of tests over time. One could either select an arbitrary period of time (month, year, decade) in which to recode the value of structural constraints and agent behavior,<sup>58</sup> or one's theory could identify major events that represent likely moments for structural change (wars, crises, economic depressions, scientific breakthroughs, or intergovernmental conferences within the EU).<sup>59</sup> Such modeling decisions allow

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<sup>54</sup> While some constructivists do specify ideational constraints in this way, few have attempted to explore the potential benefits of an amended rationalist model of interaction. Meyer 1994; Boli and Thomas 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Barnett 1998.

<sup>55</sup> Snidal 2002.

<sup>56</sup> Koremenos et al 2001; Nielson and Tierney 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Finnemore 1996.

<sup>58</sup> For an early effort along these lines see Kegley and Raymond 1990, who attempt to test empirically the effect of systemic norms on the probability that a state would abide by its alliance commitments. They recoded the ideational constraint every year for the entire period under study.

<sup>59</sup> For exemplars see Gilpin 1983; Brecher 1989; Gourevitch 1986; Haas 1993; and Moravcsik 1998. Note, we do not address the possibility of simultaneous estimation. Agents may cause structure, and structure may cause agents, but as long as there are also some independent causes of both agents and structure (and these might be specialized by either rationalism, constructivism or both), then one could model their effects

researchers to measure empirically the impact of structural change on agent behavior by using conventional scientific procedures. While some constructivists, such as Ruggie and Kratochwil,<sup>60</sup> claim that constructivist ontology is not compatible with a positivist epistemology, all the contributors to this volume employ the standard array of shared scientific standards to judge the utility of constructivist (and synthetic) models.<sup>61</sup>

#### **IV. The Structure of the Book**

As outlined in the previous sections contributors to this volume address three inter-related issues that are most salient in the current scholarly debate about IOs: (1) the design of IO structures along with associated patterns of delegated authority and derived power; (2) the determinants of IO behavior; and (3) the causes and processes of IO change, including both institutional reform and change in organizational norms. By selecting these three issues as the focus of their research, the contributors to this volume assume that IOs matter in IR – IOs either influence state behavior or they directly influence outcomes in the world as agents in their own right.

The main contributions of the book will be found in eight substantive chapters that cover a broad range of international organizations. Authors attempt to construct synthetic models, draw hypotheses, and then conduct empirical tests of these synthetic models. While the distinctions between design, delegation, behavior and change are sometimes difficult to draw in practice, at least two empirical papers address each of the three substantive questions. Some papers address multiple questions.

Employing multiple cases across a wide range of IO types, these chapters explore whether allegedly incompatible approaches can be reconciled or combined in order to explain more of the observed variance in selected dependent variables. Thus, the first step of each paper is to elaborate and/or empirically test existing approaches on their own terms. The second, and more important step, explores where and when the weaknesses of extant theories may be strengthened through synthesis with alternative approaches. If the value-added of synthesis is minimal (and some authors conclude that it is in their chapters), then contributors offer explanations for why a single approach might be preferred under some conditions or in some cases.

The contributors employ a broad array of IR theories including, but not limited to, realism, institutionalism, theories of domestic politics, cognitive psychology, organizational theory, and various applications of constructivism. However, every author addresses the growing divide between rationalist and constructivist approaches and makes a conscious effort to show how synthesizing across this divide might help us to understand

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simultaneously on each other and on a given dependent variable. This requires careful attention to model specification, but provided the number of observations is large enough, it might provide some leverage on dynamic causal phenomena.

<sup>60</sup> Ruggie and Kratochwil 1986.

<sup>61</sup> For clear statements on the “modern constructivist” commitment to social scientific standards see Finnemore and Sikkink 2001 and Wendt 1998.

(or not) the politics in and around international organizations. Individual authors sometimes find that in the end, their specific question is not best addressed through synthesis and that a more traditional approach provides a more rigorous and satisfactory explanation for the empirical pattern under study. The working hypothesis suggests that synthetic approaches are superior to traditional explanations of IO design, delegation, behavior and change.<sup>62</sup> As in any good social inquiry, we are ready to be proven wrong.

These substantive chapters and their attempts at synthesis were initially discussed during a workshop in Budapest Hungary in the summer of 2003. The same participants met to discuss revised papers in Washington DC in February 2004 and sub-set were presented at an ISA panel in March 2005. Senior scholars, Duncan Snidal and David Dessler, have followed these discussions and read these papers from the start. Hence, it is appropriate that the concluding chapters of this book are brief analytic papers by Snidal and Dessler that assess the contributions in this volume and discuss recent progress in the broader literature. These chapters critically assess the goals and the accomplishments of the substantive chapters in this book, evaluating when and whether the efforts at synthesis have been fruitful. They conclude with a discussion on the future direction for research on international organizations and IR theory more generally.

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<sup>62</sup> We do not provide explicit criteria for judging "superiority" in this paper. Some standards to consider at this early stage: empirical fit, internal coherence of the model, generality, power, scope, and whether the model generates observable implications that are testable and could be proven false.

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