

Manuela Spindler

International Relations

A Self-Study Guide to Theory



Barbara Budrich Publishers



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Preface

The book is written for *active* learners – those keen on cutting their own path through the complex and at times hardly comprehensible world of THEORY in International Relations. Learning and studying is an active process that requires a great deal of self-organization. To aid this process as much as possible, this book employs the didactical and methodical concept of *integrating teaching and self-study*. It will do so by offering a structured concept for learning about theories of International Relations, the application of which will be demonstrated in the book. The intention behind this concept is to enable students to subsequently apply the concept themselves when learning about theory and theories of International Relations. In an attempt to be as learner-oriented as possible, the book will offer advice and guidance on studying IR theory by integrating self-study instructions throughout the text. The book also requires readiness to look at phenomena from different perspectives, to critically question teaching and learning contents and to actively engage in critical debates and share knowledge. In order to meet these learning challenges adequately, readers should expect to set aside at least twice as much time for self-study as they will spend reading the book.

The criteria for structured learning about IR theory will be derived from an extensive discussion of the questions and problems of *philosophy of science* (Part 1 of the book). This is because the learning objective of the book is *NOT to learn about particular theories of IR* (such as Neo-Institutionalist or New Liberal Theory) as is the case in most of the textbooks on IR theories, but to learn about THEORY itself. Theory of IR refers to the *scientific study* of IR and covers all of the following subtopics: the role and status of theory in the academic discipline of IR; the understanding of IR as a science and what a “scientific” theory is; the different assumptions upon which theory

building in IR is based; the different types of theoretical constructions and models of explanations found at the heart of particular theories; and the different approaches taken on how theory and the practice of international relations are linked to each other.

The criteria for the structured learning process will be applied in Part 2 of the book during the presentation of five selected theories of International Relations. The concept is based on “learning through example” – that is, the five theories have been chosen because, when applying the criteria developed in Part 1 of the book, each single theory serves as an example for something deeply important to learn about THEORY of IR more generally. The presentation of those five theories will be based on the concept of a reference author. Each will be presented using the coherent body of theoretical work done by a single accepted representative of the theoretical strand and structured according to the criteria derived from Part 1. The concept of a reference author has also been successfully applied in a textbook introducing eighteen *theories* of IR (Schieder/Spindler 2010 and Schieder/Spindler 2013, forthcoming). Readers interested in learning more about particular theories of IR might find it helpful to read not only this book on THEORY but to also combine it with the textbook by Schieder/Spindler (2013) and other works that provide more specific introductions to the large number of individual IR theories. You will find the titles in the reference section at the end of the book.

In short, the focus of this book is not on the five theories themselves but rather on what they stand for in terms of philosophy of science. Most important are the insights that their analysis through the philosophical lenses can provide for our understanding of the role and function of theory more generally.

By the end of the book, the learning method should have enabled students to apply the philosophy of science criteria – the guide to a structured learning process – to *any* specific theory of their interest as well as to their own theoretical work. They should also be able to engage in a critical discussion on the topic of *International Relations as a science*.

The two parts of the book are divided into nine learning units altogether – four in Part 1 and five in Part 2. Each learning unit usually consists of three to seven learning steps, including a summary of key aspects, a range of review questions and, in general, two to four *self-study instructions* integrated into the text. At the end of each unit are recommendations for required and supplementary reading.

The book is written in a communicative style that aims to replicate “a conversation”. For the more auditory learners among you, an audio CD based on the book will be released soon.

In each unit, there will be several summaries in the text as well as key aspects listed at the end. However, when reading, please also be aware of and concentrate on the words and phrases in italic type and bold print that highlight particularly relevant issues and terms.

It is the very nature of the book to present “thought in progress”. In line with the learner-oriented concept introduced above, the book will not finish with a conclusion or any fixed “outcome”. As a result of the integrated self-study parts, your learning progress will be geared to your own individual pace and will depend greatly on how you linked and applied what you have learned to additional readings. Instead of providing a conclusion, the book will finish by formulating a range of questions on IR as a science that are meant to stimulate and invite you to actively engage in further discussion. For this purpose, the book is linked to a course on iversity (iversity.org) where you will find additional information and useful links as well as opportunities to share your knowledge and to engage in discussions in a range of working groups on different aspects of IR theory. For admission to the course, please send an email with a short statement about your interests to SpindlerIRTheory-Book@yahoo.de.

Last but not least, I would like to give thanks to a range of people for their support of the book project. My first and special thanks goes to Alexandra Skinner (alexandraskinner.edit@gmail.com) for making the text a much more readable book through her careful and thoughtful language editing. Beyond that, I am indebted to the students of my IR Theory and Philosophy of Science classes at the University of Erfurt and the Brandt School of Public Policy as well as to the PhD candidates attending my courses on Macro-Theoretical Approaches to International Relations at the Graduate School of Global Politics at the Free University of Berlin for their test-reading of selected chapters of Part 2 of the book. Among the latter group, my special thanks goes to Jost Wübbecke for his detailed and helpful comments on Part 1 and to Daniel Cardoso, Philani Mthembu and Miguel Verde for their comments on Unit 9.

Responsibility for mistakes and misrepresentations is mine alone and I am happy to receive any comments and advice that will help to make this a better book.

Berlin, March 2013

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Part I: International Relations' Theory

1. History of theoretical thought on inter-state relations and the formation of “International Relations” as an academic discipline

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Introduction

Systematic and methodical reflections about international relations and therefore “theory” and “methods” are core criteria to be applied when discussing the “birth” of an academic discipline. However, tracing the formation of the discipline “International Relations” back in history is not an easy undertaking, as a great deal of controversy exists over the actual “birthday” of International Relations as an academic discipline.

This controversy has much to do with the status of “theory” within the discipline. Does an academic discipline start once there is historical evidence of theoretical reflections on the core subject? Do we need additional criteria to think of a new discipline, such as the existence of departments or some sort of “infrastructure” where theoretical reflection, research and academic teaching take place?

Academic discipline formation in the field of International Relations cannot be meaningfully discussed without some deeper knowledge of the history of political thought on interstate relations. Step 1 of this unit will introduce readers to the history of International Relations theory. This will not merely take the form of a descriptive account of the history of thought on interstate relations. Rather, the process of tracing back the history of ideas on international relations will be guided by the thesis that any theoretical reflections strongly depend on and are part of real-world (international) politics. The history of International Relations theory is closely tied to the history of the European states system. It is crucial for our understanding of IR theory to know when and why theoretical reflections on interstate relations emerged in history. Therefore, Step 1 will introduce a specific account of the history of IR theory. It will be complemented by a perspective on the discipline’s formation after World War I, or in other words, a focus on its *institutional* development with the first departments and chairs of International Relations and the new understanding of International Relations as a “science”, requiring a *scientific study of interstate relations*.

Step 2 will make a suggestion to students as to how to discuss the *core subject* of International Relations conceptually. Conclusions will be drawn for further discussions of the role and function of theory in International Relations.

These three aspects of the first learning unit – a basic understanding of the discipline’s development and its core subject, together with an initial understanding of how the core subject is studied – are essential preconditions for enlarging upon the scientific study of IR and scientific IR theory in the next step (Part 1, Unit 2).

Before we start to learn more about the academic discipline of International Relations, we have to reach a consensus on how to use the terminology at the core of our first learning unit (and throughout the book) in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

The term **International Relations** (IR as the abbreviation, in capital letters) refers to the *academic discipline*. Sometimes the discipline is called International Politics, International Studies, World Politics or Global Politics.

International relations or international politics (lower case) is the term used for the *core subject* of the academic discipline. That is, international relations/international politics are the “real world-processes” and thus the subject to study by IR as an academic discipline (or international politics, world politics or global politics, if you prefer). For the scholarship that analyzes those “real-world-processes” you will sometimes also find the abbreviation SIR in textbooks, that is, scholarship or the study of international relations.

Throughout the book, you will find the conventional term “International Relations” referring to the academic discipline. For the theory within this academic discipline (International Relations theory), the abbreviation “IR theory” is used.

Step 1:

International Relations from an historical perspective: Interstate theory and discipline formation

1.1 A social and political “need” for a theory of interstate relations

The thesis of a strong linkage between real-world (international) political relations and the systematic theoretical reflection on interstate relations will be at the heart of the specific account of the history of IR theory. It is derived from a central argument in the writings of Andreas Osiander (1994, 1996, 2008), a German political scientist and historian. He provides a “needs-oriented” view of International Relations theory that is worth discussing in more detail for the purpose of our first learning unit.

At the core of Osiander’s writing about the history of thought in International Relations lies the basic argument that political thought is always “needs-oriented”. It is the concerns that are of primary importance to society that cause a “need” for theoretical reflection (Osiander 1996: 43). *Interstate relations* (that is, relations between states, hence inter-state) became such a prima-

ry concern to society and therefore only “caused” a need for theoretical reflection as a result of the advent of two conditions in history. The first condition consists of the existence of a more or less stable *system of states* in which states interact. Without states and a state system there would be no reflection about interstate relations. *Second*, the system of states has to be “integrated”. The more a system of states becomes “integrated”, the more likely it is that theoretical reflection takes place (Osiander 1996: 43). This is basically a statement about the *social and political relevance of interstate relations*: once inter-state relations become highly relevant for societies, systematic theoretical reflection about those interstate relations will occur. The *social and political relevance* is the defining feature of what Osiander calls “interstate interdependence”. Only when the mutual economic and military dependency of states becomes socially and politically relevant, or in other words, when it affects the functioning or even the survival of the societies, will those interstate relations become the object of theoretical inquiry on a larger scale. The higher the level of interdependence and the more a state system is “integrated”, the more theoretical reflection there will be on interstate relations.

Theoretical reflection on interstate relations therefore took place *historically* on a larger scale once such an “integrated” system of states with the defining feature of interstate interdependence came into being. This change did not occur before the industrial revolution, and Osiander convincingly develops a line of argument that traces the development of political thought on interstate relations back in history up to that “threshold”, beyond which theory formation occurred on a larger scale. With the advent of industrialization, the mutual dependence of states became so significant to the state and to society as a whole that a real “need” developed for a theory of interstate relations. More precisely, the *history of the European states system* can be discussed as a history of rising levels of interdependence, with interstate relations becoming more and more relevant to societies. It is this history that brought about theories of international relations.

It is worthwhile to take the argument further by briefly discussing the historical developments behind it in more detail, starting with antiquity (the states system of city-states in ancient Greece and of the large-scale Roman empire), and moving through the European Middle Ages with the feudal state, the Italian states system, eighteenth century Europe and the nineteenth century with its industrialization, nationalism and increasingly integrated world economy. The next sections will draw on Osiander 1996. Please note that the text written by Osiander will be part of the required reading. It will give you the chance to explore the line of argument in depth after reading the introductory text contained in this unit.

Greek Antiquity

In antiquity, states were integrated into federations of city states or into large-scale empires.

The *Greek states system* of ancient Greece (500-100 BC) was a *system of city states* (such as Athens or Sparta; the city-state was also referred to as *polis*). According to Osiander, this system was not stable enough, economic exchange between the states was not relevant enough, and wars – despite their destruction of city-states – did not threaten the existence of Greek society as a whole. Osiander argues that there was thus no need for a theory of interstate relations. For this reason, and in contrast to many textbooks, he denies that *Thucydides* (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, written around 431 BC) is the “father” of a theory of interstate relations (Osiander 1996: 46, on Thucydides and IR theory see Doyle 1990). Osiander reasons that he does not see any large scale theoretical writing on interstate relations of the Greek city states in that time and thus considers the single text to be a pragmatic text in the context of a particular historical moment (a similar argument is developed by Czempiel 1965).

With regard to the Roman Empire (200 BC- AD 500), the large-scale *empire* is seen as the dominant form of social organization of the states system at this time. In the context of imperial expansion in particular, no stable interstate relations existed. Here again, cross-border relations held only a limited significance for the Roman Empire. There was therefore no need to reflect upon interstate relations on a large scale.

The European Middle Ages

The *empire* remained the dominant pattern of political organization in Christian Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, with the successor of the Roman Empire in Europe being the Medieval (Roman Catholic) empire, known as Christendom, based at Rome in Western Europe and, in Eastern Europe and the near East, the Byzantine (Orthodox) empire with Constantinople at the center. These empires composed the two parts of the *European medieval Christian world* (500-1500).

Within the empires, the *medieval European state* existed with its central feature, the feudal tenure system. This decentralized system had a high regard for power, was economically particular and locally organized, and had no central control of large territories. The emperor and the monarchs were political decision makers who entrusted power to vassals. Power and authority were organized on both a religious and a political basis by the Pope and the Emperor respectively. The medieval state was organized through personal

ties. Through the medieval tenure system, power was distributed to a number of hierarchically organized actors. The authority and capacity to engage in wars was not monopolized by the state. Consequently, there could be no thoughts of autonomous independent political units in the European Middle Ages, a prerequisite for a theory of interstate relations. With regard to external relations, the Middle Ages were an era of empire with relations between those empires only at the margins (Osiander 1996: 47).

The Modern Age

In the early modern age came the first attempts to formulate a theory of interstate relations, based on the experience of the *Italian system of states*. The writings of Niccolò Machiavelli (*Il Principe*, 1513 and the *Discorsi*, about 1518) discussed the internal and external dimension of the state's ability to cope with threats, indicating a strong awareness of the importance of foreign relations of states for society. However, according to Osiander (1996: 48), this was still a *theory of the state* which only featured some reflections on foreign relations.

Please note that you will read a short text, the "Recommendations for the Prince" by Machiavelli, as part of the required reading at the end of this introductory unit. It will give you an impression of the quality and style of this early writing on interstate relations.

The historical development in the modern age can be summarized as a general process towards the formation of the centralist territorial sovereign state. It is a process of centralizing and consolidating power within the state. This development makes the distinction between the domestic and the interstate sphere increasingly clear: there is "inside" and "outside" the state. A general agreement exists that this modern state is a "product" of the Thirty Years War (1618-48) and the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the war and established the principle of the sovereign state. From the middle of the 17th century onwards, the modern state was considered the only legitimate political system in Europe, composed of a separate (state) territory, (state) governments and (state) citizens. The centralist state's monopoly on legitimate violence is thus the outcome of a historical process in early modern Europe, a process of the consolidation of sovereign territorial states with a monopoly on the means of warfare.

From a theoretical perspective, this process has been reflected in attempts in *political theory* to politically legitimize the new central powers. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) provided the starting point. In his writing, he drew an analogy of relations among "sovereigns" to relations among individuals prior to the establishment of society. He called this condition a "state of war"

and considered it to be the core problem of politics. The idea that the basic condition of the interstate system is a “state of war” became influential for International Relations theory at a later stage (Realism). Please note that a short text fragment of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* is part of the required reading, allowing you to form an impression of those early thoughts on the nature of the interstate system. However, in addition to political theory, there have been other important contributions which have helped develop the idea of “sovereignty” as a concept of international law. Examples include Hugo Grotius’ *Mare Liberum* (1609), discussing the sea as “international waters”.

From the mid-17th century through the 18th and 19th centuries, the history of the European states system is not only a history of the central sovereign state (inside) but also a history of intensifying interstate relations (outside the state). An increasing exchange of ideas and diplomatic contacts between the European states were preconditions for establishing the post-Napoleonic European *balance of power system* at the Congress of Vienna (1815), agreed upon by the great powers (the Concert of Europe). The balance of power system lasted more or less for most of the period 1815-1914.

“Inside” the modern state, relationships between state and society obtained a new quality in the 19th century with the advent of nationalism and the nation state. The rise of nationalism was part of the process of centralizing and consolidating the power of the state. Economic relations within societies became increasingly integrated (national economies), as did the external economic relations. Economic theory of the 18th and 19th century, such as Adam Smith’s *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) and David Ricardo’s *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), reflected theoretically on the gains in welfare through an international division of labor and the integration of national markets. Increasing integration of the national economies through an intensification of trade, transport and communication, along with interdependence in the sphere of national security, became central features of the European states system.

A mutual dependence in issues of economic and security meant that external relations of the state also became increasingly relevant for societies. The danger of interstate war was perceived as a threat to the existence and well-being of national societies and thus became a central concern for those societies.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the *international peace movement* is a product of the 19th century and emerged along with industrialization. *Peace Societies* appeared immediately after the Napoleonic Wars in England and the US (1815-1816). Members called themselves “friends of peace” (Cooper 1984: 76). These early peace societies are the first examples of private citizen

groups formed in order to lobby and influence foreign policy. The American and the British Peace Societies were soon followed by the Parisian and the Genevan Peace Societies. The 1860s saw a significant increase in new peace societies in Europe (Cooper 1984: 91). Together these societies formed an international peace movement, setting up a headquarters in Berne after 1891 (the Bureau International de la Paix) to coordinate the movements in more than 20 nations until 1914. Peace movements are “associations of private citizens, usually drawn from several social classes, who form societies that work to influence or protect against expansionist foreign and military policies” (Cooper 1984: 75). They proved to be influential not least through their support of the *The Hague Peace Conferences* 1899 and 1907, which produced the important *Hague Conventions* and the *Geneva Protocol*. Foundations such as the US’s Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the World Peace Foundation, both founded in 1910, were powerful actors that contributed to the establishment of International Relations as an academic discipline after World War I (this will be discussed in the next part of this unit).

In regard to theory, the concerns of society have been reflected in books such as Norman Angell’s *The Great Illusion* (1910). The core thesis of his writing is about the “illusion” of what can be reached by war. The integration of the European states’ economies instead increased to a level that made war between them entirely futile.

In 1914 came the end of a century of “organized peace societies” with their hopes for rational European leaders who would recognize the need to regulate international anarchy through the creation of international institutions for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. The experience of World War I demonstrated the *extreme significance* of interstate relations for societies. The conclusion was reached that, from then on, war and peace should not be left to politicians and diplomats; rather, a systematic study of the causes of war and the conditions for peace was seen as a real “necessity” for helping politics to build peace.

Summary

The history of International Relations theory is part of a double process:

(1) A *historical process* of centralization and consolidation of power. The transformation of political organization from the medieval to the modern state is based on centralization, the construction of the independent territorial state (*inside* the state) and an international states system of consolidated, unified and centralized sovereign territorial states (*outside* the state). The core function of the central, sovereign state is the provision of core values such as

security, welfare, freedom. In this historical process, the significance of external relations to society is growing. This gain in significance occurs because of increasingly integrated national economies and the resulting rise in mutual dependence between national economies.

(2) The development of the states system in Europe, the process of intensifying interstate relations, and the growth of worldwide communication, trade, and transportation go hand in hand with a systematic reflection in the fields of philosophy, political theory and international law. In terms of the *history of thought*, the historical process is at the same time a *history of state theory* (or Political theory) *and interstate theory* (later International Relations theory). In this process, state theory (or political theory) increasingly starts to reflect on *interstate* relations, theoretically “mirroring” the historical process of a rising significance of interstate relations. In fact, theoretical reflection – the historical evolution of inter-state, later inter-national theory – is *part* of these historical processes of the formation and development of the European state system. We will come back to this argument and discuss it in more detail in Unit 3. Before we do so, however, let us first take a look at the discipline’s formation.

1.2. The “birth” of the discipline in 1919: Institutionalization and International Relations as “science”

In the first part of Step 1, we discussed a perspective that suggests seeing the history of international relations theory as closely tied to the real-world processes of the historical evolution of the European states system. In this reading, the history of IR theory starts in the mid-17th century. Political thought on interstate relations before World War I made important contributions to theory building within International Relations as an academic discipline. Concepts such as the *balance of power* (an important concept in political theory for a stable European system since the 18th century), the idea of the “*anarchy*” of the international system (derived from Hobbes’s *state of war*), and Kant’s philosophical thinking and writing on the conditions for a *foedus pacificum* (league of peace) in his *Perpetual Peace* (1789) – which became influential in the political construction of the League of Nations in 1919 and, later, for that of the United Nations – proved to be building blocks for theory formation once IR had been established as an academic discipline. This establishment did not occur before 1919, and it is the objective of this part of the first chapter to discuss the “birth” of IR as an *academic discipline*. This discussion is a highly relevant for the purposes of the book, as the birth of IR

as an academic discipline is not only a consequence of World War I and hence an expression of its previously mentioned extreme existential significance to societies, but also indicates a change in the “quality” and status of theory in International Relations.

The birth of the discipline will be discussed with regard to two interrelated aspects: International Relations as *science* and its *institutionalization*. For didactical reasons, the next section will discuss the latter aspect, the institutionalization of IR as an academic discipline, first.

Institutionalization of IR as an academic discipline

Many textbooks on International Relations provide the discipline with a “birthday”: May 30, 1919. They choose this date because International Relations as an academic discipline is understood as the “child” of the *Paris Peace Conference of 1919*. There the British and American delegations agreed upon the establishment of *institutes and university departments for the scientific study of international relations*. The agreement was born out of a desire to immediately work and reflect on the processes of the Paris Peace Conference, at which the international order after the Great War had been negotiated. The initiative was put into practice through the founding of the *British Institute of International Affairs* (July 1920, later *Royal Institute of International Affairs*) and the *American Institute of International Affairs* (later merged with the Council on Foreign Relations).

One result of World War I was the feeling of an urgent need for a scientific inquiry to explain inter-state conflict and state rivalry. The first chair of International Politics was established in Great Britain (at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth) in 1919. There was support from the League of Nations and private organizations such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to establish additional chairs of International Relations, for example in 1925 in Paris and 1927 in Berlin. Enthusiasm in Great Britain, the US and France remained high over the following years and, by 1926, 40 American universities and colleges were offering introductory courses to International Relations (Czempiel 1965: 277, quoting Wright 1927: 396-397). However, early systematic work had already been done before. According to Czempiel (1965: 272), the first systematic political science book was published in 1916 by A.J. Grant (*An introduction to the study of international relations*, London), written at the request of the British Council for the Study of International Relations. In the US, courses on World Politics existed as early as 1913 and courses on International Relations by 1916, at the University of Indiana and Stanford University respectively (Osiander 1996, quoting Kirk 1947: 2-5).

From this institutionalist perspective, International Relations as an academic discipline started with the first departments and chairs of International Relations. This development strongly emphasized the institutional aspects of “organizing” a discipline by providing the infrastructural underpinnings for research and teaching.

International Relations as science

With regard to the “quality” of early theory, the information presented above has already indicated that political thought before the establishment of IR as an academic discipline had never consisted of more than political concepts developed to give advice for conducting politics against the background of short-term problems. The ideas have been pragmatic solutions in the historical context of their writing. What they lack, however, is the *quality of a systematic and methodical approach to theory building* (Czempiel 1965: 271).

Now, coming out of the bitter experience of the Great War, the task of the newly established discipline was to *systematically* discover the causes of war and conditions for peace in inter-state relations. *Peace and war* among nations were the fundamental problems to be studied in International Relations.

After the Great War, the criterion of *science as a systematic reflection using specific methods* was applied to International Relations. This fact indicated a new quality of theoretical reflection. In this early understanding, systematic theory and method differentiate “science” from other paths to knowledge. Since that point, a systematic, generalized study of international relations has been considered an important criterion for thinking of the academic discipline of IR as *science*. In this regard, the birth of IR as an academic discipline marked the beginning of a qualitative change in approach: academics gradually began to concern itself with the systematic, methodical study of IR and hence with a new quality and status of theory. As you can easily imagine, the self-understanding of an academic discipline claiming to be *scientific* involves the search for a shared, common understanding of “science”. We will learn that the understanding of IR as a science and of scientific theories draws on a European tradition of philosophical thought about science that extends back to ancient Greece. From around the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, such reflections became the core domain of what is now called “philosophy of science” – an academic discipline that is part of philosophy. The development of IR as an academic discipline after 1919, especially since the 1950s, is closely linked to the philosophy of science discussion.

The history of IR theory and the academic discipline is thus not only bound to the historical evolution of the (European) state system (as discussed in Step 1 of this unit) but also to the historical development of ideas about what scientific

study in general, and of international relations in particular, implies. We will elaborate on this connection in detail in the next learning unit.

In addition, another consequence of the Great War was a strong connection between the early scientific inquiry into the nature of inter-state relations and the postwar *practice* of international politics. The League of Nations was the practical political attempt to build peaceful interstate relations based on an international organization. It went hand in hand with the new studies on *war and peace* in inter-state relations. Broadly speaking, war and peace were the first subjects of the newly established discipline to be studied in a systematic, methodical way. On a practical level, these studies aimed for the first time to reach general conclusions on the causes of war and on what must be done for politics to build a lasting peace in interstate relations.

To “organize” an academic discipline therefore also means finding some agreement on the core subject studied by the newly created academic discipline. We will discuss the core subject of the new scientific study of international relations in the next step in more detail. Please note that for systematic and didactical reasons and in line with the purpose of the book, the aspect of “science” with its new quality and status of theory and method will be discussed in the second and third learning unit of part 1.

Step 2:

The core subject of International Relations and International Relations theory

2.1. The modern sovereign state and international relations in the modern states system

From what has been said in Chapter 1, we know that states and states systems are social/political organizations, tied to social/political practice and therefore subject to transformation and change over time. *States and systems of states are historical.*

Any abstract statement about the state or the states system as the core subject of the academic discipline of IR therefore has to specify exactly *which state and states system* is at the core.

Our historical analysis has shown that there is *a history of international systems with different states systems at different times*. These include the system of city-states in ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, the Empire of Alexander the Great, the political order of the European Mid-

dle Ages with the feudal state, and the European system of states during the 17th century. Climbing the ladder of abstraction, we could think of “types” of states and states systems. The “type” of each states system depends on the “type” of state and the nature of interstate relations.

Historically, it has been shown that the system of states, based on the sovereign territorial state, is a “product” of 17th century Europe. Many textbooks use the term *Westphalian order* because the basic principles of this European states system (central state power and state sovereignty) were the subject matter of the negotiations that led to the “Peace of Westphalia” (1648), ending the Thirty Year’s War in the Holy Roman Empire. The relations of European states became subject to international law and diplomatic practices. Initially *European*, this system of states expanded *globally* in the centuries that followed.

It is the *Westphalian order of sovereign nation states* (or the *modern* state and modern states system) that is at the core of the academic discipline of International Relations. The origins of the Westphalian state and the Westphalian states system date back to 1648. However, looking more closely at the “type” of state and states system, it can be determined that the sovereign state and the system of sovereign states are still being discussed as the core of IR as an academic discipline. More precisely, the *dynamics* and *change* of the sovereign state and the states system constitute the core of our discipline.

You might already be familiar with the academic (and public!) discussions about the “retreat of the state” in the face of the process of globalization and a diminishing role of the “welfare state”. Both public and academic debates are being conducted on the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe and hence the EU as a state-like system, on the problems caused by “failed states” (such as Somalia or Sudan) for contemporary international politics, and on the tension between the principle of state sovereignty and the UN’s Responsibility to Protect through military or humanitarian interventions. You can easily see that in one way or another, the sovereign, centralized state (Westphalian type) is still the main point of reference in those discussions.

With regard to the states system and given the perceived diminishing role of the state, we now find ourselves in the middle of debates as to whether the Westphalian model of the state and states system is still the adequate “type” of state and states system to be placed at the core of IR.

Some scholars argue that the global system of states we live in can, for example, be better categorized as a networked world society. That is, questions and problems involving the dynamics and change of the system of sovereign states are very much at the center of International Relations. This argument is certainly easy to follow against the background of the fundamental historicity and therefore transformability of “the state”.

Following the argument above, *theorizing about the state* thus also means theorizing about the “end” or better transformation of the (Westphalian) state, its transformative processes, the rise and growing importance of other “social organizations” such as private actors, NGOs or international organizations besides the state. *Theorizing about the states system* also includes asking the following questions: is it still the Westphalian “states system” that we live in; that is, are interstate relations among sovereign states still the most relevant relations that make up the system? Could the system be better characterized as a world society? Even in this context, these two main modes of theorizing (about the state and the state system) still remain at the core of IR theory.

The modern state and the modern states system also still serve as the main point of reference for academic work in the field of IR as well as in practical international politics, for example in the UN. Theoretically, even theories trying to go “beyond the state” usually take the state as a starting point or refer to it. We will learn about those different approaches in the particular theories of IR covered by Part 2 of the book.

For the moment we can therefore conclude that, for *more than three centuries* (!), the categories of the (Westphalian) state and the Westphalian states system have formed the core of inter-state theory. They also became the core of the newly established discipline of IR after the Great War. Even now, in the 21st century, a look at IR textbooks will demonstrate the strong persistence of the (Westphalian) state and the state system as the core subject of the academic discipline of IR. Bringing to mind the time periods of the transitions of earlier forms of state and state systems, this should not come as a surprise, even though we are not used to thinking in such lengthy periods of time.

For our further discussions of the core subject in the next step, please remember the central functions of the modern state for society, which resulted from the historical process of centralizing power: to protect society against external and internal threats (*security*) and to ensure material *welfare* and *freedom*. These values are of high social and political relevance for the societies within the modern state. A threat to a state’s physical (territorial) existence, material welfare and/or independence/sovereignty is therefore a matter of major concern.

State politics will provide a useful starting point for learning more about the state and the states system as the core subject of IR.

2.2. Politics “inside” the modern state: the allocation of values for society as the core function of the state

The state is usually perceived as the almost natural *political* organization of separate societal communities (*inside* the state). According to the American political scientist David Easton, “a political system can be designated as those interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society” (Easton 1965: 21). This is an old, albeit still influential definition of the function of a political system and the nature of “politics”: the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Values are distributed by “interactions” and the fact that interactions allocate or reallocate values (or are directed towards influencing value allocation) gives them a political nature. Easton summarizes this definition as follows: “My point is, in summary, that the property of a social act that informs it with a political aspect is the act’s relation to the authoritative allocation of values for a society.” (Easton 1965: 134). *Legitimate political authority* plays a central role in this definition of politics: it refers to state authority, the monopoly of power in the hands of government and a hierarchical order with a central command over military and legal forces (army, police). Dominance and subordination are the defining features of social relations between the actors of a political system.

This is the *internal aspect* of the state: a state as national government with state authority.

Distributive or re-distributive policies based on welfare programs or taxation laws provide one example that demonstrates what we mean by an “authoritative allocation of values for a society” through a political system. Another is environmental legislation that “allocates” the value of, for instance, clean water to society and therefore decides on the degree of healthy living conditions.

If this is the “nature” of politics, then “(t)he study of politics is the study of authoritative allocation of values for a society” by the academic discipline of Political Science (Easton 1953: 967). What, then, is the study of international politics in the academic discipline of International Relations?

2.3. Politics “outside” the modern state: the politics of international relations

As you have learned, the political organization as independent states and the recognition of a state as sovereign by other states is the “external dimension” of the state. Interstate relations therefore belong to the external aspect of state politics.

Remember that we have defined politics as those “interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society” (Easton 1965: 21). A transfer of this understanding of (national) politics to the context of interstate relations, however, is not a simple undertaking. This difficulty is due to the fact that, in contrast to state-society-relations (inside the state), international relations (outside the state) are *not hierarchically organized*. There is no centralization or monopoly of power in the international system. Additionally, no “world government” exists to authoritatively set the norms and rules for the conduct of international relations and enforce compliance or to sanction deviant behavior. This “type” of social organization found at the level of the international system is usually called “anarchy”: *the politics of international relations is understood as politics under the condition of “anarchy”*.

The anarchy in the international system has traditionally been presented as the first and foremost defining feature of international politics. The difference between “hierarchy” and “anarchy” as forms of social organization is what differentiates international politics from domestic politics. However, despite this fundamental difference, our definition of “politics” provides a useful starting point to better grasp the core subject of IR. If this definition is correct, there must be other sources of “authority” in international relations. These sources will be shown in the following paragraphs through a discussion of the elements of our definition of national (state) politics as applied to international politics in more detail.

First, international relations are *interactions* in the same sense as there are interactions within the state: international relations are simply *social relations* between *social actors*, comparable to social relations between social actors within the state. What differentiates them is that international relations are perceived as social relations *crossing (state) borders*.

International relations as transborder relations exist between different types of *social actors*: state, non-state, individual and collective actors such as social groups or organizations. *International relations are transborder interactions between state and non-state actors*.

The defining feature of social actors is the *purpose or intention* of their action and interaction. Now remember the definition by David Easton “...that the property of a social act that informs it with a political aspect is the act’s relation to the authoritative allocation of values for a society”. That is, the allocation or re-allocation of values is the *political relevance* or the *political purpose* of those social relations.

More concisely, within the complex field of transborder relations, it is the “political” relevance that differentiates international relations from other “international relations” such as tourism, correspondence, family relations or

private contacts. There have been attempts to introduce the term “international political relations” (Czempiel 1965: 282) but they have not succeeded.

Politically relevant social interactions allocate or re-allocate basic values for society; human needs such as security and welfare, freedom, and order are core values for a (national) society. The same is true for international relations. Transborder relations are equally politically relevant for society: conflict, war, cooperation, intergovernmental relations on a bilateral or multilateral basis, and economic relations such as trade relations or traditional diplomacy are all of concern to societies because they affect basic values. You are already familiar with this argument of the social and political relevance of inter-state relations from the first chapter in this unit.

War and military conflicts are international relations that in essence affect the value of *security*. Security is certainly the most fundamental value of international relations: the protection of the physical existence of a political community of citizens against external threat. Basically, security involves all issue areas related to the use or threat of force.

Cooperation in trade relations or other economic issue areas are international relations that affect the basic value of *welfare*. Welfare refers to all issues related to economic growth and material well-being. The production of goods and services and the coordination of economic relations, the welfare gains from market integration and political rules that govern a global or regional market and the distribution of welfare gains from economic integration or poverty are all issues relevant to society.

The international coordination of environmental protection is important for the value of clean air and water and therefore for society’s natural health and living conditions (*environment*).

With regard to the value of *freedom*, society is concerned with the freedom and rights of the individual not only “inside the state” but also “outside” the state. Therefore, international rules for human rights influence the allocation of the value “freedom”.

These are just a few examples of international relations affecting values important to society, given with the intention of demonstrating the applicability of our definition of politics to international relations despite some fundamental differences.

Finally, international relations, the politically purposeful actions and interactions of state and non-state actors, *constitute and create the structures of the international system* over time. For the moment, the states system is still perceived as a system of sovereign territorial states with a central political authority inside the states, but not outside them.

2.4. Summary and conclusion

The study of international relations is the study of transborder interactions of different types of actors. The defining features of these interactions are their social and political relevance. Politically relevant interactions are those through which values are allocated or re-allocated or whose purpose is to influence value allocation through international politics.

Scholars consider an *authoritative* allocation of values under conditions of anarchy impossible as long as “authority” is reserved for the state, with a central monopoly of power governing a hierarchically organized political community (inside the state).

In contrast to the study of politics, the study of international relations (international politics) asks questions and provides answers about politics “outside” the state. International politics, or politics “outside the state”, is usually understood as politics under conditions of anarchy. The question of “sources of authority” in an anarchical system forms one of the core problems of IR.

While a great deal of agreement exists on what constitutes the core problem of international politics, there are different ways to theoretically and methodically reflect on this core problem. *Different theories of International Relations will provide different perspectives* on the core problem of politics under the condition of anarchy or even question the concept of anarchy itself. We can briefly illustrate this fact by asking some questions derived from our definition of the core subject of International Relations as an academic discipline:

What is the “nature” of the international system? As an example, in neorealist theory, anarchy is the nature of the international system. Neoinstitutionalists agree, but point to interdependent relationships between states in the international system that offer good opportunities to establish stable patterns of inter-state cooperation. That is, they see chances to “regulate” anarchy. In contrast, neorealism perceives only minimal chances for cooperation, while the condition of anarchy prevents any long lasting international collaboration.

Who are the most relevant actors in international relations and what are the driving forces of their actions and interactions? We will learn that there are theories that consider states or, in some cases, simply the most powerful states as the only relevant actors, while other perspectives point to the influence of non-state actors on outcomes of international politics. These could be private actors such as transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace or human rights networks, or international organizations such as the UN. What are these actors’ driving forces? Do they be-