egoistic self-interest. The symposium ends with a note on a crucially missing assumption, namely the role of emotions for the general understanding of rational (or perhaps: reasonable) behaviour.

Although the authors do surely not recoil from criticizing their particular targets, the symposium also shows the need to think and work together, if we wish to come to grips with so fundamental an issue.

Lamarckian with a vengeance: human nature and American international relations theory

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This essay considers three interrelated subjects: how the American social milieu effects American international relations (IR) theorizing, why realism has been singled out for criticism within this milieu, and how particular perspectives on human nature have served as the foundational bedrock for American social thinking. It argues that, even when incorporating Darwinian insights into their scholarship, American social scientists have subscribed to a Lamarckian perspective on human nature that reflects the American version of Enlightenment liberalism. This version combines a deep and progressive faith in individualism, capitalism, applied science and a moral national purpose derived from Protestantism. The American social scientific subscription to a Lamarckian perspective on human nature effects not only how realism is theorized in this milieu but also how American scholars see and do IR theory.

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Introduction

Does the social milieu have an impact on theorizing about international relations (IR)? Such concerns are what led the American discipline of political science, in which the study of IR is typically housed in an American university, to adopt Popperian scientific criteria for studying and theorizing political phenomenon (Ricci 1984). However, the overt subscription to this criterion has never managed to make sociology-of-knowledge questions go away, and resolving them involves more than simply doing positivism better. For one thing, positivism may be part of America's sociology-of-knowledge problem, not the solution to it (Crawford 2000; Smith 2000, 2002; Crawford and Jarvis 2001). For another thing, there is the sticky issue of America's present hegemonic status in the world which is, as Bishai (2004: 48) puts it, 'the proverbial elephant in the room of international politics.' While IR disciplines
elsewhere will have their own unique sociology-of-knowledge problems given their particular social milieu (Waever 1998; Jørgensen 2000; Schmidt 2002; Breitenbach and Wivel 2005), the social bias reflected in America’s IR theorizing may have relatively greater significance beyond its own borders. Theories produced in and reflective of the American social milieu are intimately linked to a world order that many IR scholars believe to be normatively problematic. Hence, America’s sociology-of-knowledge problem is already of considerable concern to non-American IR scholars, and it should be of greater concern to American IR scholars.

In this essay, I grapple with the sociology-of-knowledge problem in American IR scholarship, but I do not claim to occupy an objective position from which to analyze it. As Holden (2002: 260, 255) argues, it is important to ask, ‘who contextualizes the contextualizers,’ since critical projects are themselves part of intellectual history, and not a privileged vantage point from which IR’s disciplinary history can be written.’ In this sense, I have particular axes to grind not only as an American with left-leaning political biases but also as a neoclassical realist who believes that a greater degree of critical reflexivity on the part of American scholars might go a long way to revealing how our theories about world politics might reinforce its worst tendencies. Hence, I concur with Crawford (2000: 1–2) that ‘the only thing more remarkable than the persistent Anglo-American domination of the field is the apparently widespread willingness to ignore or downplay it,’ so that ‘it is seldom asked whether the mainstream conception of IR is itself a reflection of values, attitudes, and pre-dispositions forged in the cauldron of particular historical, cultural, and national experiences and circumstances.’ An analytical position that combines realism with elements of post-positivism does not provide unbiased purchase on delineating this cauldron of circumstances and its implications for IR theorizing. However, it does afford a way of re-reading disciplinary activity that diverges from standard mappings, and deviant readings are often useful for re-considering what we are taking for granted.

Human Nature and the Discipline of IR

The particular axe I wish to grind in this essay is the widespread disciplinary presumption that it is primarily realism’s social biases that are productive of the normatively suspect world in which we live. There is, as Sullivan (2005: 327, 336) has observed, a ‘cottage-industry of realist criticism’ in which ‘debates over realism seem endless’ and yet it survives ‘if for no other reason than to serve as a familiar target.’ This is not to say that realist IR theory has not done its share to justify and promote American hegemony, and a variety of concomitant global injustices, and that it has frequently done so with little apology. Yet, the same could also be said for many strands of liberal IR theory, some of which simply equate American hegemony with the global common or public good. So why has realism tended to incur more strident criticisms on this score? One answer, exemplified by Freyberg-Inan’s contribution to this symposium (2006), is that realist assumptions, whether they are about human nature, domestic institutions and preferences, or international structures, are wrong and hence the theories realism produces are wrong (also Lébow 1994). Since realism is also argued to have dominated disciplinary theorizing and foreign policy practice, it becomes logically possible to blame realism for the worst excesses of American IR behaviour and world order in general.

Whether or not realism actually does dominate in the American context is a subject to which I will return later. The seminal point to make here is that unjustifiable assumptions about human nature play a significant role not just in realism but in all IR theorizing. Such assumptions are unjustifiable because they are always based on selective observation of human behaviour, which is then amplified into a selective description of the world and how to study it. They are ubiquitous because, as Wendt (1999: 131) observed, ‘it is impossible to explain social action without making at least implicit assumptions about human nature, since, without it, it is hard to explain why our bodies move at all, let alone their direction or resistance to societal pressures.’ Taken together, these two points suggest ‘there is no single truth about politics that nature can or should reveal. But at some level the biology in humanity — and so political science — is undeniable’ (Dryzek and Schlosberg 1995: 126). Of course, this also contradicts the received disciplinary wisdom that human nature assumptions used to inform theoretical debates and that these were eventually rejected by the discipline as impractical, imprecise, and even dangerous foundations from which to theorize about IR.

Realism is often singled out in this disciplinary story as an example. Its practitioners supposedly abandoned classical assumptions about human aggression, power-lust and fear for a sanitized structuralism that is, as Shimko (1992: 299) characterized it, ‘antisepic’t on the subject of human nature. Thus, Waltz’s neorealism signalled the end of human nature discussions within realism and the start of theorizing that was deemed more appropriate to scientific endeavours. Never mind that neorealism makes no sense unless we make some basic assumptions about human nature, or that we have offensive and defensive realists disagreeing over whether states are highly greedy or highly fearful. Ultimately, the realist project relies on assumptions about the inevitability of group conflict that only make sense if more foundational (but typically implicit) assumptions have been made about the sociability of the human species in general and what it means for world affairs. Human nature is always lurking behind the realist curtain, as Freyberg-Inan (2004, 2006) rigorously argues in this symposium and elsewhere, but, then again, it lurks
behind the curtains of all other IR theoretical perspectives on the disciplinary stage.

That human nature assumptions inform all IR theory perspectives is not just an abstract talking point. Stevenson and Haberman (1998: 4, 7) noted that ‘different conceptions of human nature lead to different views about what we ought to do and how we can do it,’ because they amount to world views that ‘claim not just intellectual assent but practical action.’ Different political, economic, and social systems are reflective and productive of particular beliefs about human nature. And if culpability for world practice is assigned on the basis of relative external power and influence, then it is worth pointing out that the human nature perspective to which the American social milieu subscribes is not realist but liberal in the broader Enlightenment sense of the word. That is, it reflects ‘the Enlightenment’s view of modern civilization as a realm of progressive diversification and its faith in commercial development, science, and representative government,’ as well as its ‘idea of progress, with its confidence in human powers and unidirectional sense of time’ (Ross 1991: 10, 8). A subscription to Enlightenment liberal ideals is certainly not unique to America; however, the United States (US) does produce its own peculiar version of it. If this social milieu is hegemonic as well as liberal in its ideological worldview, then it is relatively disingenuous to lay the culpability of unjust American and global practices primarily at IR realism’s doorstep.

Alternatively, I would like to suggest that at least one of the reasons why realism has been subjected to greater criticism within the American IR discipline is because it implicitly subscribes to assumptions about human nature that do not sit comfortably in this milieu. If liberalism, as a ‘deep political ontology’ is, as Waever (1998: 721) argued, ‘not one side of a divide,’ but ‘rather, it is the consensus inside America, then it operates as a pre-theory affecting the very way in which American IR scholars go about their business and the way they see and do IR theory. Pre-theories can be discussed in Smith’s terms, as the ‘common sense’ of intellectual and academic enterprises:

Once established as common sense, theories become incredibly powerful since they delineate not simply what can be known but also what it is sensible to talk about or suggest. Those who swim outside these safe waters risk more than simply the judgment that their theories are wrong; their entire ethical or moral stance may be ridiculed or seen as dangerous just because their theoretical assumptions are deemed unrealistic. Defining common sense is therefore the ultimate act of political power (Smith 1996: 13).

Defining analytical common sense also reflects the sociological characteristics of a particular milieu, and defining common sense is never normatively neutral.

Although there has always been considerable transnational fertilization within the social sciences, and sociology-of-knowledge issues are endemic to the very notion of a ‘social science’, they are also rigorous participants in the project of defining the common sense of their given milieus. It is no surprise, then, that the American social sciences exhibit the normative biases peculiar to the American experience; that is, they reflect ‘liberal values, practical bent, shallow historical vision, and technocratic confidence,’ and these attributes can be traced to a ‘national ideology of American exceptionalism, the idea that America occupies an exceptional place in history, based on her republican government and economic opportunity’ (Ross 1991: xiv). Similarly, Hoffmann (1977/1995: 219) observed that in the American context:

The very contrast between an ideology of progress through the deliberate application of reason to human concerns — an ideology which fuses faith in instrumental reasons and faith in moral reason — and a social reality in which the irrational often prevails both in the realm of values and in the choice of means, breeds a kind of inflation of social science establishments and pretensions (also Ricci 1984: Chapter 2).

This ideology of progress has had particular effects on and is continually reconstituted in and by the American social sciences. Because assumptions about human nature remain the implicit foundation of social scientific theorizing and serve as the ‘conceptual bedrock for socio-political discourse’ (Hawkins 1997: 22), it is worth considering how the subject of human nature has fared within this particular complex of sociological characteristics.

### Human Nature and American Liberalism

Social scientific thinking about human nature in the American context has been particularly influenced by Charles Darwin’s ideas about evolution and natural selection. Hofstadter (1955: 4–5) observed that Americans were both fascinated with and sympathetic to Darwinism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when modern American universities were developing, and Americans readily accepted the principles of natural selection. Hawkins (1997: 13) further noted that Darwinism served as an ‘omnipresent reality for the practitioners of the social sciences during this period,’ and it had lasting effects on American socio-political theory. Yet, Darwinism’s implications for human social activity have always been the subject of considerable debate because the specifics are not readily apparent. Hawkins (1997: 120, 8) argued that this analytical grey area allowed early American social thinkers to appropriate Darwinism for alternative ideological functions so that Darwin was ‘enlisted in the services of opposed political positions — militarism and
pacificism, capitalism and socialism, patriarchy and feminism, totalitarianism and anarchism.'

Other historical analysts of Darwinism in the American context have also observed this pattern. Hofstadter (1955: 201) noted that 'Darwinism had from the first this dual potentiality; intrinsically it was a neutral instrument, capable of supporting opposite ideologies.' Similarly, Degler (1991: 319) argued that 'many of the early twentieth-century social scientists were reformers rather than conservatives, yet many of them looked to biology in some fashion in seeking to explain human behavior.' Thus, Darwinism served the aims of American conservatives and reformers alike, yet operated within a context in which capitalism, science, democracy, and progress were already the common sense of the social milieu. Indeed, since 'the dogmas of the Enlightenment had been traditional ingredients of the American faith,' so that 'American social thought had been optimistic, confident of the special destiny of the country, humanitarian, democratic' (Hofstadter 1955: 65), these were the ideas for which Darwin was marshalled by American intellectuals.

One of the earliest incarnations of Darwinism in American social thought was Social Darwinism, which was intimately linked to laissez-faire capitalism and served as its ideological justification. The key phrase in Social Darwinism was the 'survival of the fittest,' a term coined not by Darwin but by his contemporary, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Spencer argued that social orders were subject to the same natural processes as biological evolution and that the pressures of subsistence had a beneficial effect on the human race, by selecting only the best from each generation for survival and hence stimulating human advancement in skill, intelligence, technological innovation, and self-control. This justified a conservative political agenda in which 'the sole function of the state is negative — to insure that such freedom is not curbed' (Hofstadter 1955: 39), and this led Spencer to oppose not only poor laws but also state-sponsored education and oversight of housing, medical, and sanitary conditions. Spencer's influence and popularity were greater in the US than in England, in part because 'Spencer's philosophy was admirably suited to the American scene' (Hofstadter 1955: 31).

For one thing, Social Darwinism reflected the social and economic hierarchy that industrialism was producing in late 19th century America. Hofstadter (1955: 44) noted that, 'successful business entrepreneurs apparently accepted almost by instinct the Darwinian terminology which seemed to portray the conditions of their existence.' Spencer's version of Darwin's natural selection also allowed American society to rationalize this image as a progressive development in itself (Hofstadter 1955: 201). Social and economic competition were argued to be advancing human capability and this helped sustain a prevailing belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority that could be invoked as a justification for external imperialism (Hawkins 1997: 172). Social Darwinism also provided a powerful counter-argument to socialism since it 'suggested that all attempts to reform social processes were efforts to remedy the irremediable, that they interfered with the wisdom of nature, that they could lead only to degeneration' (Hofstadter 1955: 7). Hence, socialism could be cast as radically injudicious. This was no small matter in the American social milieu. Ross (1991: 26) noted that because 'American exceptionalism implied a particular kind of political economy as well as a particular kind of historical stance,' it engendered a belief that 'America, unlike Europe, would forestall the mass poverty and class conflict that modernity appeared to be creating in Britain.'

The poverty and social upheavals induced by industrialism and laissez-faire capitalism threatened to undermine this vision, and Social Darwinism offered one means of reconciling it without having to adopt radical social reforms. The opponents of Social Darwinism shared this faith in capitalist political economy as well. Represented by social thinkers such as Lester Ward, William James, and John Dewey, the Pragmatists were disturbed by late 19th century social upheavals and argued alternatively for the necessity of state intervention. Yet 'for the most part, academic ties to capitalism and respectable opinion set the boundary of acceptable social science doctrine to the right of socialism' (Ross 1991: 139). Hence, the Pragmatists sought not a repudiation of capitalism but 'a compromise between the harsh individualism of the competitive order and the possible dangers of socialism' (Hofstadter 1955: 106).

The Pragmatists also shared with Social Darwinists the assumption that natural selection had profound implications for social activity and that what transformed the social order was the changing character of individuals (Hofstadter 1955: 108). Yet, they disagreed over the essential attributes of Darwinism and the political program implied by it. While Social Darwinists focused on Darwinism's competitive elements, Pragmatists focused on its environmental attributes. The latter suggested to Pragmatists that human beings could adapt to changing social environments and so they 'attempted to wrest Darwinism from the social Darwinists by showing that its psychological and social consequences could be read in totally different terms from those assumed by the more conservative thinkers who had preceded them in the field' (Degler 1991: 6; also Hofstadter 1955: 125). Rather than suggest a social order premised on individual struggle, then, Darwinism was re-read by Pragmatists as the basis for a social order premised on individual cohesion.

In addition, both Social Darwinists and Pragmatists believed that evolution was, as Degler (1991: 13) put it, 'actually another word for progress.' What was progressive about Spencer's argument was its notion that, while the struggle for existence had been the driving force of social order, conflict would eventually lose its utility and disappear as human nature evolved (Hofstadter
1955: 42). The type of individual required of an industrial society was 'peaceful, independent, kindly, and honest' and so American Social Darwinists could argue that, 'the emergence of a new human nature hastens the trend from egoism to altruism which will solve all ethical problems' (Hofstadter 1955: 42–43). In order to make this argument, Spencer relied on the ideas of the French philosopher Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, who had proposed that evolution's selection mechanism was the inheritance of acquired characteristics. That is, 'evolutionary change occurred as a consequence of an organism's effort to improve its situation in its habitat' and the 'behaviour patterns of parents could be inherited by their offspring' (Degler 1991: 20).

For Social Darwinists, the inheritance of acquired characteristics suggested that mental characteristics could be cumulative and so 'over several generations the ideal man would finally be developed' (Hofstadter 1955: 39). Alternatively for Pragmatists, who also relied on Lamarckian ideas of evolution, the ability of the current generation to purposefully adapt to its environment held out the promise that human beings could control social evolution. That both Social Darwinists and their opponents found Lamarckianism appealing is not unusual given the state of genetic understanding in the late 19th century. Even Darwin accepted that the inheritance of acquired characteristics might be relevant to social evolution (Degler 1991: 21). However, Darwinism and Lamarckianism were still very different. According to Hawkins (1997: 43), Lamarckian evolution had its roots in 18th century conceptions of nature as a system of harmony and perfectibility and it must be considered 'a world view in its own right in which change takes place from below as inferior organisms strive to adapt, improve, and progress.' While Darwinian evolution resulted from the selective consequences of struggle, Lamarckian evolution depended not on struggle but individual effort.

Social Darwinists and Pragmatists both subscribed to Lamarckian evolution but incorporated different attributes in their arguments. The former argued for the acceptance of contemporary environmental constraints as being necessary for producing the acquired characteristics of future social order. The latter argued for manipulating contemporary environmental constraints so that acquired characteristics could be realized now. Although these perspectives represented opposing political positions, they both reflected the liberal, progressive qualities of the American social milieu. That is, both were 'modelled on the natural rather than the historical sciences and imbedded in the classical ideology of liberal individualism,' both invited 'us to look through history to a presumably natural process beneath,' and both imagined 'the social world is composed of individual behaviours responding to natural stimuli, and the capitalist market and modern urban society are understood, in effect, as part of nature' (Ross 1991: xiii). This, as Ross (ibid.) points out, would also tend 'toward quantitative and technocratic manipulation of nature and an idealized liberal vision of American society.'

Indeed, America's early social scientists already shared a profound faith in the ability of science to solve all social and political problems and to 'yield practical applications that could bring progress' (Hoffmann 1977/2001: 32). European social thinkers aspired to science as well, but Hoffmann (1977/2001: 33) observed, 'what is specifically American is the scope of these beliefs, or the depth of this faith,' which amounts to a 'fascinating sort of national ideology.' In Ralf Dahrendorf's words, the American social milieu might be defined as one of 'Applied Enlightenment,' in which the application of science allows for the achievement of progressively better ends. That American Social Darwinists and Pragmatists would, despite their stark differences, be attracted to Lamarckian evolution and find in it a cause for optimism is unsurprising. Nor is it surprising that despite the conservative agenda of Social Darwinism, it was, in fact, 'overwhelmingly liberal when due consideration is given to the differing national connotations of this term' (Hawkins 1997: 147), as its proponents saw themselves as defenders of the 'true' liberalism. Darwinism's deployment for alternative ideological positions fell within a relatively narrow band of American common sense.

It was, however, the dependence on Lamarck that proved problematic to both positions when by the early 20th century Mendelian genetics had proven that the inheritance of acquired characteristics played no role in the process of natural selection. Degler (1991: 24) argued that this had the effect of strengthening racism since at the time race was assumed to be a biological difference, and the new genetics suggested that the manipulation of the environment could not change biological behaviour. It also encouraged the development of the Eugenics movement, which sought social reform to prevent national and racial decline by advocating the state's proactive intervention to control the reproduction of the mentally unfit and criminally inclined. Although Eugenics was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon, Americans and their social scientists were particularly enthusiastic supporters. By 1930, 30 American states had passed laws allowing for the sterilization of individuals in public institutions who were designated as unfit to reproduce. The popularity of the movement began to wane in the 1930s, although sterilizations continued in some states until the 1970s (Degler 1991: 151).

Eugenics was different from its analytical predecessors in that it placed priority on collective social needs instead of individualism. Yet, it also combined elements of its analytical predecessors into a new formulation that continued to share their progressive spirit and faith in science. As with Social Darwinism, it viewed particular human practices as pathologies that worked against the laws of nature, but in keeping with Pragmatism it viewed the pathologies as correctable with state intervention (Hawkins 1997: 247). It was
reformist in spirit and sought to do through collective social action what nature alone could not, which was ‘improve society through the application of the latest scientific knowledge’ (Degler 1991: 42). In this it reflected America’s ongoing faith in scientific applications, as if science were a sort of ‘masterkey’ for solving social ills (Hoffmann 1977/1995: 219; also Cochran 2001).

What replaced the enthusiasm for Eugenics among social scientists and reformers was a return to Lamarckian social evolution with a vengeance. Studies conducted by the anthropologist, Franz Boas, in the early 20th century challenged the notion that physical and mental differences between human groupings were due to race as a biological category. Instead, Boas found evidence that physical differences resulted from differing social settings, histories, and cultures. This was, as Degler (1991: 62–3) put it, ‘the sword that cut asunder evolution’s Gordian knot in which nurture was tightly tied to nature. It also constructed a single human nature in place of one divided by biology into superior and inferior peoples.’ By the 1930s, the shift in American social scientific thinking from biologically derived to culturally derived explanations of human social activity was well underway. Subsequent generations of social scientists entirely rejected the role of biology in shaping human behaviour so that culture became ‘the primary if not the sole source of the differential behaviour of human beings’ (Degler 1991: viii).

Part of the reason why cultural explanations triumphed lies in the convincing scientific evidence that Boas and other sociologists amassed for the causal role of the social environment. Yet, Degler (1991: 187) cautioned us that the answer is not entirely due to a better scientific explanation that was conclusively or unambiguously proven at the time; ‘rather we see essentially the substitution of one unproved (though strongly held) assumption for another.’ Certainly global events conspired against Eugenics specifically and biology’s role in social scientific thinking more generally. The Great Depression demonstrated that poverty was not caused by inherited intelligence (Degler 1991: 202), Americans associated Germany’s World War I military policy with biological militarism (Hofstadter 1955: 196) and the extensive programme of Eugenics utilized by Nazi Germany shocked and horrified. However, the cultural explanation also triumphed in the American social sciences because it corresponded to the social milieu so well.

American social thinkers were predisposed to social reform and, as we have seen, had even put Darwinism to progressive ends, so ‘the natural tendency of their world-view was to prefer an environmental or cultural explanation’ (Degler 1991: 192). As long as Lamarck appeared to offer a scientifically viable mechanism of selection, American social scientists could reconcile their progressivism with evolutionary arguments. This progressivism had always been connected to a moral vision of America’s national worth and exceptional purpose. Ross (1991: 22–3) noted that, ‘when national independence was won, fervent Protestants identified the American Republic with the advent of the millennial period that would usher in the final salvation of mankind and the end of history. American progress would be the unfolding of the millennial seed rather than a process of historical change.’ And once established, she observed, ‘the tie between republic and divine providence … set up tensions that reinforced the fusion’ (Ross, 1991: 24). From its inception, American liberalism was marked by this tendency to universalize and proselytize its own values since it considered itself a nation sanctioned by God. These tendencies had powerful effects on the American social sciences and are manifest in Hoffmann’s ideology of progress. As he observed:

The voices of gloom or skepticism that lament the differences between the natural world and the social world have never been very potent in America. Precisely because the social world is one of conflict, precisely because national history had entailed civil and foreign wars, the quest for certainty, the desire to find a sure way of avoiding flashpoints and traumas, was even more burning in the realm of the social sciences (Hoffmann 1977/1995: 219).

The evolutionary implications for human nature were embraced by American social scientists to the extent that they fit with this ideology of progress. Even Social Darwinists took the more fatalistic implications of human heredity and converted them into an optimistic vision for the nation’s future. It was the belief that the nation’s socio-political future could be controlled on the basis of scientific discovery that linked Eugenics to the American social milieu. On the other hand, those elements of evolutionary theory that suggested predetermined or immutable factors, over which neither the individual nor society had any control, did not fit comfortably.

Boas and other sociologists supplied an alternative explanation to human social activity that was a better fit with the progressive impulses of American socio-political thinkers. If the social environment were the primary cause for social differences, then it could be channelled and controlled. Hence, culturally based explanations confirmed what American social scientists were already predisposed to hear. ‘Environmentalism or culture had enormous appeal,’ as Degler (1991: 86) pointed out, because the ‘social improvement could be carried out much faster than under even the Lamarckian dispensation.’ By the late 1940s, the analytical link between biology and culture had been definitively severed in favour of the latter. Human nature was no longer a standard subject of conversation among American social scientists who had, according to the political scientist Wahlke (1979: 24–25), adopted a tabula rasa approach to human nature that seemed ‘to believe that one’s genes do not begin to develop until after birth — and then only as the result of the impact of environmental forces upon them.’
The argument that culture is the primary cause of individual and social differences is a scientifically progressive position. It is also an ideological position. That is, 'the argument that biology is not relevant for our present situation is ... itself based on some pre-theory of how the world fits together' (Falger 1994: 118). As Ross (1991: 471) pointed out, 'however much the social sciences deny the normative character of their presumably scientific theories, such theories necessarily construct worldviews, and most often they are propagated as worldviews.' America's belief in its own exceptionalism, which is grounded by a faith in liberal individualism, capitalist-markets, scientific control, and a nationalist moral vision derived from Protestantism, had shaped how its social scientists viewed and explained human nature and behaviour from the beginning. 'There was nothing in Darwinism that inevitably made it an apology for competition or force,' Hofstadter (1955: 201, 129) noted, and it was embraced by America's social scientists 'in search of a philosophy that would acknowledge active human effort in the bettering of life.' It was also subsequently rejected for the same reason, when an alternative theory developed that better reflected the common sense of the social milieu. It did so because it could link science and progress without having to deal with the messy implications (at least for a liberal progressive society wedded to science) of biological determinism. Thus, 'science and liberal ideology have interacted to enforce political and ahistorical constraints on social thinking' in the American context (Ross 1991: xxi).

**Human Nature and IR Theorizing Revisited**

How exactly have these elements played out in the discipline? That they have played out in the discipline should be apparent. As Breitenbach and Wivel (2005: 415) note, 'a country's historically institutionalized political culture is reflected in the particular construction of that country's IR discipline,' or as Lowi (1992: 1) observed, 'every regime tends to produce a politics consonant with itself; therefore every regime tends to produce a political science consonant with itself.' The most commonly observed feature of American IR theorizing is, of course, its subscription to positivism, which it derives, in the immediate context of the American university system, from its affiliations with the political science discipline. The American university culture that developed in the late 19th century was purposefully oriented toward the sciences, whose products were believed to be indispensible to the nation's continued and progressive well-being, as Ricci (1984: Chapter 2) amply documented. The budding scientists of the social and political world dealt with the sociology-of-knowledge problem by eventually trying to conform to Popper's criteria and, in so doing, sought to become good 'behaviourists' by avoiding what could not be measured or falsified.

Foundational to American behaviouralism was an implicit pre-theory grounded in culturally based explanations and licensed by a faith in our ability to control our social environments. As Wendt (1999: 320) observed, 'social scientists are overwhelmingly Lamarckian in their outlook (neorealists excepted), including many who have developed evolutionary models of their subjects.' Yet, this Lamarckian pre-theory is implicit since assumptions about human nature are ultimately normative judgments about why and how the world works as it does. These could not fit the behavioural vision of science in which 'theorizing, even about politics, is not to be confused with metaphysical speculation in terms of abstractions hopelessly removed from empirical observation and control' (Lasswell and Kaplan 1952: x). Hence, the human nature assumptions that are foundational to American liberalism are subterranean in the political scholarship it produces. Most scholars are not even aware that the absence of biology from social explanation does not reflect a 'fact' of existence, but an ideological belief that is productive of the American liberal social milieu.

This does not mean there have not been more recent flirtations with Darwinism in political science. In the 1960s, biopolitics emerged as a subfield recognized by the American Political Science Association and it subsequently developed its own professional organization and journals. Biopolitics explored the relationship between evolutionary biology and politics, with an eye to explaining human behaviours that are universal across cultures. Some of its more notable proponents have included Somit (1976, 1997), Masters (1976, 1983), Corning (1971), and Thayer (2000). Yet in their recent review of this subfield, Somit and Peterson (1999: 40) lament its inability to influence mainstream political analysis, because 'the great majority of political scientists patently remain committed to the long-dominant "political behavior is learned behavior" paradigm.' That most American political scientists and IR scholars know little of this subfield, and associate the term 'biopolitics' with the work of Michel Foucault instead, underscores how few analytical in-roads it has made into the discipline.

There is other work in IR that, although it has not situated itself explicitly within the context of the biopolitics, does explore the relationship between biology and the environment and raises the issue of human nature as a result. There is a vast literature on cognitive psychology in the study of foreign policy analysis (Young and Schaffer 1998; Hudson 2005: 10–13). There is work on rationality and emotions, as represented in the contribution to this symposium by Mercer (2006). There is work in the feminist literature, of which Goldstein's *War and Gender* (2001) is but one example discussed below (also see Peterson and Runyan 1999; Ember and Ember 2004). There is work by constructivists who have discussed human nature as it relates to the social construction of identity (Onuf 1989: 96–101; Wendt 1999: 130–3). Yet, even in situations where
the nature–nurture dichotomy is being openly confronted, the emphasis is frequently on opportunities for change, while biology is often seen to be working as a type of possibility whose attributes are supportive of particular, normative ends.

Goldstein’s (2001: 191) comprehensive exploration of the biological relationship between social gender roles and war-making, for example, repeatedly emphasizes not ‘that humans are naturally any particular way, but that what is “natural” for humans apparently covers a broad array of possible social arrangements and behaviors.’ Although Goldstein is not particularly optimistic that the socially constructed nature of gender roles can be easily overcome, his argument does open ‘a space for alternative (less war-driven) gender identities to develop’ because ‘the war system is not set in stone, nor driven by any simple formula’ (2001: 413). Elsewhere, Goldstein (1987: 42, my emphasis) argued, ‘biology does not mandate war. The power to choose war or peace is our own,’ and ‘real genetics ... argues not for nepotistic altruism and war but for humanistic altruism and peace.’ In making such arguments, Goldstein joins a long line of American social thinkers who have utilized biology for particular ideological purposes that are constitutive of America’s progressive, scientific brand of liberalism.

Conversely, realism as an explanation for IR was a recent analytical addition to American social science and was introduced primarily by German émigrés escaping the horrors of World War II (Guzzini 1998). In its classical form, realism made fatalistic reference to negative aspects of human nature, as Freyberg-Inan (2004) has argued, and typically traced international processes such as war to biological pre-dispositions and limitations (Falger 1994: 119–21, 1997). Given that by the 1940s culturally based explanations predominated in the American academy, this neo-Darwinism ‘did not mesh well with the innate liberalism of most American intellectuals’ (Shimko 1992: 282), as it came into analytical conflict with America’s Lamarckian pre-theory of human nature. Even as American scholars and foreign policy-makers were putting realist balance-of-power politics into practice during the Cold War, realist human nature assumptions did not sit well with America’s image of itself as a country where the progressive application of science could triumph over humankind’s more bestial tendencies. The particular Darwinian aspects to which classical realism subscribed were not common sense in this milieu, and as Little (1996: 74) has noted, ‘the doctrine of realism’ remains ‘antipathetic’ to most Americans who are predisposed to believe in progress.’

This may explain why realism generated considerable ire in the American context. In their lack of faith over human perfectibility and control, classical realists were challenging an unacknowledged pre-theory. International events throughout the 20th century continued to provide fertile grounds for gloom and scepticism and so realism was not so easy to dismiss as an approach to global affairs. But as Shimko (1992: 283) noted, ‘theoretical perspectives, particularly in the social sciences, thrive not merely because of their scientific superiority, but also because they are consonant with a society’s prevailing values and beliefs.’ The incentives for realists to swim against the progressive mainstream were few indeed, while the rewards for accommodating it were far greater, and in any case subsequent generations of American realist scholars were themselves products of that milieu.

In formulating neorealism, for example, Waltz (1979) shed any overt commitment to human nature as an ultimate cause, shifted the analytical focus to environmental factors, adopted the rationality assumption, patterned realist theorizing after neoclassical economics and strove to create a scientific theory of realism. Some of these elements existed in alternative strands of classical realism already, but it was their combination that was quintessentially American. Thus overtime realism took on many of the ideological attributes of its new political culture. This allowed realism to be utilized as a justification for American hegemony in the 20th century, which was, in turn, believed to be both a cause and a consequence of America’s own liberal exceptionalism. Bishai (2004: 51, original emphasis) notes that in the American version of liberalism, ‘might does not make right, might is right (because it is in the hands of the good),’ and as a result it veers ‘towards a dangerously heady merger of liberal moralism and realist method — a muscular politics of morality in which the ends (and the actors) are so obviously good that they justify any means.’ Realism was conscripted to provide the might, but the right was always derived from liberal ideology.

While European realism had been premised on the ‘tragic nature of human interaction and the impossibility of fully rational decisions,’ shedding these commitments has meant, according to Wever (1998: 720–21), that ‘many contemporary Anglo-American realists are difficult to decipher exactly because their methodological and political approach is based on liberalism.’ This is a point that Hall’s contribution to this symposium (2006) also underscores. Whether realism’s alternative human nature assumptions were ever really abandoned is debatable, but at the very least they were submerged in a social milieu that had clearly been inhospitable to them. If, as Crawford (2000: 89) has observed, ‘international relations theories, like the subjects they undertake to study, are always culturally situated,’ then realism became no less so in the American context.

As for liberal IR theory, its indigenous variants such as Wilsonian idealism meshed relatively well with liberal IR theories imported from Europe. If realism had its most influential proponent in the German émigré, Hans Morgenthau, liberalism’s equivalent was Ernst Haas, who also immigrated to the US from Europe. As Jarvis (2001: 373) points out, it was Haas who introduced European theories of functionalism and neo-functionalism to American political scientists and these theories have continued to exert
considerable influence on American liberal IR theory (e.g. Keohane and Nye 1971, 1977; Rosenau 1980; Adler and Crawford 1991). Functionalism met with relatively greater acceptance in the American context because it was indebted to David Mitrany, who not only relied on Lamarck to develop his theory of functionalism but also applied its language almost verbatim to political activity such as the American New Deal (Sewell 1966: 68–69). Thus, unlike realism, strands of liberal IR theorizing imported from Europe were more in keeping with the ideological expectations of the American social milieu.

This liberal functionalism, and its commitment to a Lamarckian pre-theory of human nature, has influenced the work of constructivist scholars such as Wendt, Ruggie and Finnemore (Sterling-Folker 2000). In Wendt’s (1992: 406–7) version of constructivism, for example, human interests and identities do not exist independently of intersubjective practices, and ‘changing the practices will change the intersubjective knowledge that constitutes the system.’ The pre-theory of human nature to which Wendtian constructivism subscribes is explicitly Lamarckian, and although Wendt insists elsewhere that constructivists go too far in dismissing material and biological effects (1999: 57, 72), he still chooses to argue that ‘biology matters relatively little’ and that human ‘interests are mostly a function of their ideas, not their genes’ (1999: 132–33). This allows Wendt (1994) to make the liberal functionalist argument that if nation-states were to engage in more cooperative social practices, such as capitalist–market interdependence or democracy, realism’s more unpleasant version of social reality might be unmade. With this recognition, humankind’s mastery over its own social destiny appears to be complete, and Wendt’s form of constructivism provides an almost culminating statement of America’s ideology of progress.

That this ideology is liberal, and not realist, suggests that either realism does not dominate the American IR discipline, as so many scholars are apt to claim, or that if it does dominate it does so in service of a liberal ideology. Realist IR has participated in the project of liberal hegemony and is not blameless in this regard. But within the discipline of IR, realist theory is also the imagined ideological hegemon against which a progressively minded American social science must constantly re-affirm its own identity and boundaries as an equally imagined Don Quixote, even as it enjoys the ontological status of common sense and pre-theory in the discipline. The irony of American liberalism is, as Bishai (2004: 52) observes, that it ‘must attack difference in order to preserve its universal liberal identity,’ or as Piccone and Ulmen (2002: 3) put it, ‘whenever otherness appears, it must either be persuaded back into full sameness or else summarily liquidated as evil.’ The extent to which this inhibits dispassionate discussions in American IR theorizing of alternative human nature assumptions, and analytical enterprises that refuse or cannot conform, should by now be relatively obvious.

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Notes
1 In fact, it is probably representative of Holden’s point that US scholars have found the continental European philosophy of value as they address post-Vietnam cultural and academic upheavals (2002: 266, 269).
2 See, for example, Keohane’s After Hegemony (1984: 257), which justifies the dominant economic regimes created by the US by arguing that ‘the reality of self-interest’ must be taken into account and that a ‘closer approximation to the ideals of cosmopolitan morality is therefore more likely to be promoted by modifying current international regimes than by abandoning them and attempting to start over.’
3 See Mercer (1995, 2006) and Hall (2006) for discussions that make these assumptions explicit.
4 Hofstadter (1955: 163–7) argued that Eugenics was just another form of conservative Social Darwinism that differed only in that state action was central to its assumptions. Hawkins and Degler both disagree with this assessment. Hawkins (1997: 6) noted that it was possible to be a Social Darwinist but not necessarily an Eugeniciast, while Degler (1991: 167) argued that Eugenics was not a conservative movement.
5 He did so by challenging the utility of the cephalic index, which was the ratio of the length to the width of the human head and was used extensively in the 19th century to classify human types or races. Boss measured several thousand immigrants over an extended period of time and found that head shapes changed after being in the US, thus demonstrating that the social environment had an impact on physical characteristics (Degler 1991: 63).
6 This notion also continues to serve as an element of social glue for the ongoing construction of American social identity. Court decisions designed to protect religious freedom notwithstanding, most American children start each school day with a chanting of the American pledge of allegiance that is read over the school’s loudspeakers. Facing the classroom’s ubiquitous American flag, and placing their right hands over their hearts, they confirm that the United States of America has remained ‘one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.’
7 Deudney (1996: 129) cast an even wider cultural net: ‘for the last two and a half millennia, the Western tradition has centered its energies on exploring the political side of human identity which neglecting the animal side.’
8 Other constructivists concur. While Onuf (1989: 40, 46, 96–101) openly grappled with biology, and Adler (1997: 330, original emphasis) argued that constructivism could serve as a sort of middle ground for IR theorist ‘in understanding how the material, subjective and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality,’ most constructivists still argue that biology plays a secondary, indeterminant role in human social activity (Onuf 1989: 46 is unequivocal in making this choice).

References


Rational paranoia and enlightened machismo: the strange psychological foundations of realism

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This article focuses critically on realism as an International Relations (IR) theory (family). It argues that realist theories share a particular view of human nature and that this view of human nature is flawed in several important respects. I begin by discussing the quality of human nature assumptions in realism and the way they are employed. The following section then argues that, in addition to its gloomy assumptions concerning the motives for human (and state) action, realism relies strongly on an assumption of rationality. This move splits descriptive from prescriptive realism and renders the paradigm both internally inconsistent and compatible in important respects with its rival paradigm of liberalist. I then turn to a critique of the neo-realist approach in particular, showing that and why in spite of claims to the contrary it cannot escape the foregoing critique. In conclusion, it emerges that the status of realism in the field of IR theory would likely sustain serious damage from a systematic examination of the nature and use of its claims about human nature. The paradigm is, in short, infused with a paradoxical psychological determinism that will not stand up to scrutiny.

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**Introduction**

Theoretical approaches that explicitly draw on first-image foundations have been marginalized in the discipline of International Relations (IR). This does not, of course, mean that mainstream IR theories have left behind all ideas about what human beings are like and what that means for international affairs. On the contrary, as is also argued by Jennifer Sterling-Folker (2006) in this symposium, such ideas have become more entrenched as they have become less explicit. It is indeed time to revisit and bring to light the psychological foundations of IR theorizing, as they may well be empirically uninformed and/or have sinister consequences.

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**About the Author**

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