

Correspondence

Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm?
(Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?)

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To the Editors (Peter D. Feaver writes):

In “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik craft a curiously rigid doctrine for realism and then puzzle over why the field is crowded with apostates.¹ The answer, I propose, is that the church of realism can be a bit more catholic than Legro and Moravcsik claim. Legro and Moravcsik have written out of the book of realism a crucial insight that informs most realist theories (at least implicitly) and have thereby inadvertently excommunicated too many of the faithful. But they are wrong in a productive way, and correcting their mistake points in the direction of a fruitful research agenda for scholars—realists and antirealists alike.

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1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55.

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Briefly, Legro and Moravcsik fail to understand that realist theories are as much about the *consequences* of behavior as about the *determinants* of behavior. Legro and Moravcsik can be forgiven for missing this, because most realist analyses jump to how the distribution of power causes some outcome and gloss over the prior question about the consequences for a state of ignoring the distribution of power. But the probability that “unrealistic” behavior will suffer adverse consequences is the key causal mechanism that makes the “realist” behavior predictable in the first place. Legro and Moravcsik are right that realists have been notoriously sloppy about specifying how this causal mechanism works, but sloppiness is no reason to jettison it altogether. Realist theories cannot work without it.

Realists expect that some states will act for all the reasons that Legro and Moravcsik wish to credit to the liberal, institutional, or epistemic alternative theories. Realists simply expect that those states that persist in doing so, provided that this leads them to act in a way contrary to power-dictated interests, will suffer for it. The acid test of most realist theories is not whether states conform to *realpolitik* principles but whether those states that do not conform are worse off than those that do.

This at least is why Thucydides, Hans Morgenthau, and others are still realists even though they clearly embrace what Legro and Moravcsik declare to be blasphemous claims for realists: (1) the possibility that domestic politics influences the way the state acts in international relations; and (2) the possibility that nonmaterial factors like cultural norms or international institutions shape outcomes of interstate behavior. Curiously, Legro and Moravcsik ignore how even those realists they endorse fail to hew to the dogma they have laid out for realism.

Thucydides assigned great explanatory weight to nonmaterial factors such as pride; how else could he explain the Melians’ disastrous decision to persist in resisting Athens? Likewise, Morgenthau saw his function as advising statesmen to learn and obey the rules of international power politics—rules that liberal democracies such as the United States were prone not to follow because public opinion shaped state policy, and the American psyche was prone to moralism. In other words, Morgenthau believed that state behavior was subject to domestic political determinants and that state preferences could be shaped by nonmaterial factors. By Legro and Moravcsik’s standards, Morgenthau was not a realist.

Even Kenneth Waltz, the paradigmatic Legro-Moravcsik orthodox realist, slips into the fold only through a casual reading of his use of the economic metaphor of the market. Waltz meets their test of realist orthodoxy (but only in *Theory of International Politics* and not, say, when he is theorizing about foreign policy in *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*) when he predicts systemic outcomes based on the assumption that states will act as if they were preservation maximizers. The “as if” assumption is warranted in economics because in relatively short order (and provided there is free competition) the market will punish (bankrupt) or select out (buy out) firms that do not pay attention to the bottom line. States, Waltz asserts, understand that the international system works the same way, and so we can jump right to predicting system outcomes as the net result of states conforming to systemic pressures.

What if a state does not conform to systemic pressures? Waltz’s answer points to the causal mechanism that drives his balance-of-power theory: The system will punish the state, and the state may even disappear. Waltz clearly expects relatively few states to

be so foolish, but he does not (cannot) rule it out. Waltz's first hypothesis, then, and the one tied closest to his theoretical core, is that the system will punish states that violate system constraints; his auxiliary hypothesis, which ironically is not grounded in his theoretical core, is that few states will do it. Yet there is no room for the first hypothesis in Legro and Moravcsik's church of realism.

Realism theorizes about the consequences of state action that realists expect will be (in some instances) domestically driven and ideationally shaped. The mark of a realist theory, then, is not whether it is expecting that states are acting according to the Legro-Moravcsik postulates, but rather whether it is expecting that states that *do not* act according to those postulates suffer in some way. Once scholars correct for Legro and Moravcsik's mistake, many of their alleged apostates can be welcomed back into the fold. Indeed, the realist field is crowded once more.

Crowded, but not triumphant, for three important tasks remain: (1) operationalizing "punishment" to admit more careful empirical tests of this key causal mechanism; (2) addressing the most important empirical challenge to realism, the democratic efficacy argument; and (3) resolving a lingering internal paradox within most realist theories.

Legro and Moravcsik (and other critics) are correct that realists have been sloppy in devising and conducting empirical tests, but the critics fail to identify the real problem: The key realist causal mechanism of "system constraints" or "system punishment" is undertheorized and has yet to be satisfactorily operationalized. Most realists are vague on how system constraining occurs. Is it through repeated interactions, through the spread of learning about "best practices," through war and defeat on the battlefield, or through some vague security version of the "hidden hand?" Do theorists model it by adding another branch to the game tree or by some other device? Because all social science is probabilistic we do not expect it to be automatic, but how systematic are system constraints, really?

Even where the theoretical grounds for systemic constraints would be obvious, say in the area of military defeat, it is no easy task to come up with a common coding. Everyone would agree that Hitler's Germany suffered "system punishment," and some might agree that the Soviet Union did in Afghanistan, as did the United States in Vietnam (recall that Morgenthau, the realist, was one of the earlier Vietnam War critics). But has the United States been "punished" for post-Cold War adventurism? It is hard to say because realists have yet to provide a clearly defined way of measuring punishment or system constraints. However it is operationalized, punishment will have to be more nuanced than the most draconian measure of the total disappearance of a particular nation-state. Surely Germany was "selected out" at least twice in the twentieth century, even though a Germany existed on maps throughout. Focusing on the fate of regimes (and maybe even leaders) strikes me as a fruitful place to start, although even here there are pitfalls to avoid; surely we cannot ask realist theories to pretend that we are unaware that regimes often come and go for nonrealist reasons.

At the same time, the coding of system punishment must be sensitive to the obvious danger of tautology in which unwise behavior is coded as unwise because it is manifestly unsuccessful, whereas successful outcomes are traced back to behaviors that are then coded as "wisely realist." It is here that I find a potentially fruitful intersection between my approach and the Legro-Moravcsik enterprise. They may have taken us further down the road to establishing a clearer set of criteria for determining whether

the behavior (not the theory) can be properly determined as realist or not. I would hesitate to declare a grand consilience between our approaches without further reflection, but at first glance it appears that one could use Legro-Moravcsik criteria to distinguish state behavior that accords with realist dictates and my criterion to determine whether the theory was realist (i.e., whether it conformed to the realist expectation that ignoring those dictates spells trouble for states).

Refining and adequately operationalizing these concepts, however, is only the beginning. Realism still must address a second challenge: how to account for the set of empirical anomalies identified by the so-called democratic efficacy school.² This literature purports to document ways in which democracies systematically outperform nondemocracies in the hurly-burly of international relations. Democracies appear to be more likely to prevail in war, more likely to prevail in crises, more reliable alliance partners, and so on. The jury is still out as to whether this literature has adequately controlled for the fact that since 1815 the two principal system actors—Great Britain and the United States—have been democracies. But if this literature withstands scrutiny, then realist theories have a problem. The seriousness of the problem depends on whether democracies are somehow better at responding to system constraints or whether democracies consistently flout system constraints but are not punished for it. The former would indicate that many realist theories are wrong about the way democratic institutions complicate the process of reading and responding to system constraints; the latter would indicate that the core causal mechanism of realism is wrong, period, at least for the temporal domain under study. What we may be witnessing is not the refutation of the realist paradigm but rather the gradual narrowing of the theoretical domain under which realist causal mechanisms are likely to function.³

Even if they meet the empirical challenge, realists must also address a third challenge, this one more of a theoretical puzzle. If realists expect some states to flout realist principles—indeed, expect democratic states to be prone to do so—and if the number of those states grows exceedingly large, is it not possible that at some point most states are not behaving according to system constraints? If that happens, what is left of the system to enforce the constraint? Can a universe of system-ignoring democracies literally invent a novel set of system constraints? Constructivists have no problem

2. The term is from Christopher Gelpi and Joseph M. Grieco, "Democracy, Crisis Escalation, and the Survival of Political Leaders," unpublished manuscript, Duke University, 1999. See also David Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 24–37; James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 577–592; Dan Reiter and Alan Stam, "Democracy, War Initiation, and Victory," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 377–390; and Ajin Choi, "Democracy, Alliances, and War Performance in Militarized International Conflicts, 1816–1992," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, forthcoming.

3. This latter point underscores a weakness in the Spanish Inquisition approach to theory development that Legro and Moravcsik appear to champion. Most likely, realist theories are not entirely right or entirely wrong. Rather, realist causal mechanisms are likely to obtain under certain scope conditions and unlikely to obtain when those scope conditions are not present. Those scope conditions may be more prevalent during some eras or in some geopolitical configurations than in others.

answering in the affirmative, but realists surely are inclined to answer in the negative. Realists, after all, do argue that some state goals (though not all, as Legro and Moravcsik appear to argue) are irreducibly conflictual. Part of the system constraint derives directly from this fact, and so realists expect it to be always operating, even if muted. Yet realists also expect some states to resist the system, and realists make no specific arguments about how many realistic states are needed to enforce the constraints. Realists, in brief, waffle on the issue, and critics are right to demand greater clarity.

Critics should not, however, stir up needless religious wars as Legro and Moravcsik have done. They claim that realist theories must reject any explanation of state behavior that references domestic politics or ideational factors. On the contrary, realists understand that those factors shape state behavior. Where realists and nonrealists part company is in their differing expectations of the consequences of state action that derives from domestic politics or ideational factors. Understanding this points international relations scholars in the direction of a fruitful research agenda focused on answering questions about the theoretical purchase and empirical scope of realism's key causal mechanism: system constraint. Such a catechism, I hope, would appeal even to the most scrupulous of antirealist clerics.

—Peter D. Feaver
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To the Editors (Gunther Hellmann writes):

In their recent article, Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik¹ argue that “self-styled” realists have significantly contributed to the “degeneration” of the realist paradigm by pursuing a strategy of theoretical minimalism. As a result, “the malleable realist rubric now encompasses nearly the entire universe of international relations theory (including current liberal, epistemic, and institutional theories) and excludes only a few intellectual scarecrows (such as outright irrationality, widespread self-abnegating altruism, slavish commitment to ideology, complete harmony of state interests, or a world state)” (p. 7). Thus, with some laudable exceptions, everybody appears to be a realist these days—and nobody (pp. 18–19, 54). According to Legro and Moravcsik, minimalist realism leaves the study of international relations in a deplorable state because international relations as a science thrives on paradigmatic precision. In their view, scholars generally agree that (1) it is useful to distinguish among “basic theories”—alternatively called “first-order theories,” “paradigms,” “research programs,” or “schools”—because they “help in structuring [second-order] theoretical debates, guiding empirical research, and shaping both pedagogy and public discussion” (pp. 8, 9); (2) these basic theories are defined in terms of a set of fundamental “core” assumptions; and (3) the conceptual fruitfulness of a paradigm “depends on at least two related criteria, *coherence* and *distinctiveness*” (p. 9, emphasis in original).

1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55, at p. 8. All subsequent citations are given by page numbers in the text.

There are at least two ways to read and criticize Legro and Moravcsik's call for paradigmatic precision. First, from an "outsider's" perspective, their article can be read as an exercise in rhetoric, their own statements to the contrary (p. 7) notwithstanding. The thrust of their argument is the equivalent of an unfriendly takeover in the business world: The liberal/epistemicist bid involves defining and delimiting the "proper" borders of the territory that realists can rightly claim, thereby expanding the jurisdiction of liberal and epistemic rule. Paradigmatic battles such as these, however, tend to occur in an anarchic realm of science, where the knowledge dilemma assumes the role of the security dilemma in international relations: If realists could rightly claim more knowledge territory, paradigmatic liberals, epistemicists, institutionalists, and idealists are likely to perceive that there is less knowledge for them to claim. As a result, each side charges its opponents with lacking "coherence," "distinctiveness," and other sorts of epistemological ammunition. Sometimes the sides even engage in battle that predictably leaves all sides concerned worse off. For an outsider, therefore, it is difficult to understand why Joseph Grieco, Stephen Van Evera, and Stephen Walt should be doomed to adhere to the maximalist realism that Legro and Moravcsik prefer. To be sure, in operating on premises that expand the range of traditional realist assumptions, Grieco, Van Evera, and Walt have been moving into territory to which others have recently laid claim. But their "conceptual stretching" of realism (p. 55) appears to be no worse than the conceptual squeezing of minimalist idealism into maximalist liberalism and epistemicism. Just as some realists have "learned" to include variables that have traditionally been beyond their scope, so (some) idealists have learned to limit their claims in line with "rationalist" premises traditionally associated with realism.² Whether what both sides are doing is conceived of as scientific progress, as a mere progression of scientists' work, or as "theoretical degeneration" is a matter of scientific taste. In any case, all these scholars appear to have learned *something*.

Therefore, if Walt wants to call himself a "realist," whereas Legro and Moravcsik prefer to call themselves "epistemic" and "liberal" respectively, so be it. Because this is essentially a labeling exercise, not much harm can be done. To think otherwise, one must believe in both the possibility and the probability of establishing objective criteria for arriving at "unchanging sets" of paradigmatic core assumptions. Yet one does not have to point to much "evidence" beyond the history of international relations in general and its great debates in particular to grasp that this is an (empirically corroborated) illusion. Moreover, Moravcsik has himself given reasons why his version of liberalism had to be *invented* in the first place. From his perspective, "liberal IR theory" had traditionally consisted of "disparate views held by 'classical' liberal publicists" or had been defined "teleologically." Instead of such "second-best social science," Moravcsik proposed the development of "a general restatement of positive liberal IR theory."³

2. Legro and Moravcsik obviously stand in the idealist tradition even though they reject "idealism" as an insufficiently precise category for paradigmatic reformulation (see p. 54). Other scholars disagree, arguing that idealism may indeed be reconstructed as a "distinct paradigm." See Andreas Osiander, "Rereading Early Twentieth-Century IR Theory: Idealism Revisited," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (September 1998), pp. 409–432, at p. 412.

3. Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 514, 515.

At around the same time that the first versions of Moravcsik's paradigmatic reconstruction appeared, Arthur Stein had reconstructed the liberal tradition in an alternative (though far less "rigorously" paradigmatic) manner.⁴ Surprisingly or not, these two reconstructions of liberalism did not take note of each other. Thus there are neither "unchanging" nor intersubjectively agreed-upon sets of "liberal" (or realist) premises. There are only competing narratives of "traditions" as Alasdair MacIntyre defines them: "A tradition not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but is only recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings."⁵

Second, Legro and Moravcsik's call for paradigmatic rigor can also be criticized from an "insider's" perspective. Given that Legro and Moravcsik evade specifying their philosophy of science position, it remains unclear which scholars generally agree with their view that it is useful to distinguish between "first-order theories" (such as their realist, liberal, or epistemic paradigms) and "second-order theories."⁶ I, for example, would put myself outside that consensus, at least in the way that Legro and Moravcsik describe the relationship between these two types of theories. To be sure, the distinction between different *layers of belief* (broadly defined and here including both "first-order" and "second-order" theories) is not only widespread, but includes scholars who may disagree on fundamental epistemological questions. But it is far from obvious that the line has to be (or even can be) drawn in the way that Legro and Moravcsik suggest. Indeed, powerful arguments can be made that paradigmatic rigor is more of a hindrance than a help.

Legro and Moravcsik repeatedly suggest that "multiparadigmatic syntheses" are "desirable" and "even imperative." In their view, however, the "unavoidable first step . . . is to develop a set of well-constructed first-order theories" with "a rigorous underlying structure." Ignoring this necessity "only muddies the waters, encouraging ad hoc argumentation and obscuring the results of empirical tests" (p. 50). Yet was anybody ever a coherent "paradigmist" (i.e., a scholar adhering "firmly" [p. 18] to a fixed set of unchanging, coherent, and distinct paradigmatic core assumptions)? Although Legro and Moravcsik do not raise this question explicitly, their (more or less

4. See Arthur A. Stein, "Governments, Economic Interdependence, and International Cooperation," in Philip E. Tetlock, Jo L. Husbands, Robert Jervis, Paul C. Stern, and Charles Tilly, eds., *Behavior, Society, and International Conflict*, Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 241–324. The first version of Moravcsik's paper was "Liberalism and International Relations Theory," Working Paper No. 92–6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1992).

5. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," *Monist*, Vol. 60 (1977), p. 461. Regarding the invention of research programs as intellectual projects that start with "adumbration," see Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 132.

6. Some of the core concepts that Legro and Moravcsik use (e.g., "paradigm") are associated with Thomas S. Kuhn, whose position on science Legro and Moravcsik obviously do not share. See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Imre Lakatos, one of the most vocal critics of Kuhn in the 1960s, is another source referred to often. See Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," pp. 91–196. However, even though Legro and Moravcsik appear to sympathize with the philosophy of science espoused by the latter, they hesitate to identify themselves clearly as Lakatosians.

implicit) answer seems to be “yes.” Yet their list of these model paradigmaticists is short as far as realism is concerned, and shorter still for liberal, institutionalist, and epistemic paradigmaticists (cf. pp. 18–19, 10–12). Moreover, the list of real realists includes names that many scholars might have difficulty including on the same list of scholars who adhere firmly to the coherent and distinct set of realist core assumptions preferred by Legro and Moravcsik; Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin, Robert Keohane, and Robert Powell, just to mention four, do not show up together on many other lists of nondegenerating realists.⁷ This listing may appear even more odd when scholars who prefer to associate themselves with realism, such as Stephen Van Evera, are explicitly excluded and listed instead among both the liberal *and* the epistemic paradigmaticists (p. 34). Following Legro and Moravcsik, this may mean either that Van Evera holds incoherent views well beyond his minimalist realism or that liberalism and epistemicism are not as “distinct” as suggested.⁸ So Legro and Moravcsik appear to be saying that scholars such as Keohane and Van Evera *misperceive* how their beliefs *truly cohere*: Keohane calls himself a “neoliberal institutionalist,” but he is actually a realist in important respects; Van Evera considers himself a “realist,” when in fact he holds beliefs that clearly identify him as a liberal epistemicist.

The Keohane and Van Evera examples show that coherence is not as clear-cut a concept as Legro and Moravcsik imply.⁹ It is thus self-defeating to ask for a “proper paradigmatic definition” (p. 47). Doing so only encourages the myth that paradigmaticism (i.e., the adherence to a rigorously defined set of coherent and distinct core assumptions of a paradigm) is possible and desirable. Many pre- and post-Lakatosian works in philosophy in general, and in the philosophy of science in particular, stress that such a call is unwise because much of the experience about the ways human beings (scholars included) operate linguistically and cognitively speaks against it. The best that all human beings can hope for is understanding based on an acknowledgment that there will always (and necessarily) be different ways of looking at things.¹⁰

7. There is one unspecified qualification as to the placement of Robert Keohane, who the authors say is “not a realist” in “other senses” except for the role that he attributes to hegemony in international economic institutions (p. 19). In an exchange of e-mails, Moravcsik stated that I am misconstruing their position in not sufficiently distinguishing between “people” and “arguments.” This may indeed be the case, even though I think that their presentation may justly be described as inviting such misperceptions (cf. pp. 18–45). Yet even if I grant this distinction, my main criticism applies: There is no independent paradigmatic agency that states authoritatively and intersubjectively what can properly be called a “realist” (or a “liberal”) “argument.”

8. Cf. also Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously,” in which Van Evera is listed once among “commercial liberals” (p. 530, n. 59) and once among “republican liberals” (p. 532, n. 69). Read in conjunction with Legro and Moravcsik’s *International Security* article, “Taking Preferences Seriously” provides further evidence of the difficulty of attaching “proper” labels to “coherent” and “distinct” paradigms. In the *International Organization* article, for instance, Moravcsik appears to put Legro in the “constructivist” camp (p. 539, n. 99). The *International Security* article, however, distinguishes between “epistemic theory” (which is where Legro would now apparently align himself) and a sort of “constructivism” (associated mainly with Alexander Wendt), which according to Legro and Moravcsik cannot be considered a “discrete international relations paradigm or theory” (p. 54, n. 134).

9. For a philosophical discussion of the concept of coherence, see Elijah Millgram, “Coherence: The Price of the Ticket,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (February 2000), pp. 82–93.

10. This view can be called “Wittgensteinian” or “pragmatist” (in the way Richard Rorty describes pragmatism). For an interpretation of Wittgenstein along these lines, see Judith Genova, *Wittgen-*

Moravcsik and Legro therefore are right in calling for “synthesis.” They are wrong, however, in considering the development of “first-order theories” an “unavoidable first step” in such an undertaking (p. 50). Their “first-order theories” cannot be “rigorously” separated from the underlying “world pictures” that Ludwig Wittgenstein says form “the *inherited background* against which [I] distinguish between true and false.”¹¹ But beliefs such as these world pictures are “foundations” different from Legro and Moravcsik’s “first-order theories.” They form “the rock bottom of my [Wittgenstein’s] convictions” because “one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house.”¹² This conception of mutual support of different layers of belief is at odds with a conception of science that hopes for “potentially falsifying theoretical counterclaims” (p. 12). Moreover, it is supported by the kind of science that Legro and Moravcsik seem to appreciate. Philip Tetlock, for instance, has recently “tested” cognitive theories about judgmental biases and errors among international relations experts. His results revealed that these experts are no different from nonexperts in their judgmental biases. They too “neutralize dissonant data and preserve confidence in their prior assessments by resorting to a complex battery of belief-system defenses that, epistemologically defensible or not, makes learning from history a slow process and defections from theoretical camps a rarity.”¹³

Paradigmatism therefore shows the wrong way if one is seriously interested in advancing understanding of international politics. This is not to say, however, that *paradigmatic pragmatism* may not be useful. Few (if any) scholars would deny that different “schools of thought” or “theoretical traditions” can be usefully distinguished in international relations. Yet what scholars tend to share, whether they call themselves “realists” or “liberals,” is not an “unchanging set” of identical core assumptions but what Wittgenstein calls “family resemblances”—characteristics that reveal they somehow belong together. But these characteristics do not allow for an analytical definition of what might constitute some “realist” or “liberal” essence in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. It merely implies that *individuality and similarity* can be thought of as useful surrogates for *generality and identity*.

In the criticism of others, there is of course the widespread practice that Richard Rorty has called “hermeneutics with polemical intent.”¹⁴ Yet the deconstructivist impulse alluded to here obviously is not what Legro and Moravcsik have in mind. Instead, their vocabulary (e.g., “nontrivial” and “explicit” [p. 7]; “unambiguous,” “rigorous,” and “consistently” [p. 9]; and “testing theories and hypotheses drawn from different

stein: A Way of Seeing (New York: Routledge, 1995). A succinct summary of Rorty’s pragmatist epistemology is provided in Rorty, “Non-Reductive Physicalism,” in Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 113–125.

11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), § 94 (emphasis added).

12. *Ibid.*, § 248.

13. Philip E. Tetlock, “Theory-Driven Reasoning about Plausible Pasts and Probable Futures in World Politics: Are We Prisoners of Our Preconceptions?” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1999), pp. 335–366, at p. 335.

14. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 365.

paradigms,” and “empirical progress or degeneration of a paradigm” [p. 10]) suggests that they consider themselves part of a larger scientific enterprise associated with Imre Lakatos’s “sophisticated falsificationism.” Paradigmatic pragmatism would bid good-bye to such falsificationist ambitions—be they “naïve” or “sophisticated”—because they divert too much intellectual energy from the enterprise of increasing our understanding. As Joseph Nye once said: “[Liberal theory] should not be seen as an antithesis to Realist analysis but as a supplement to it. International relations theory is unnecessarily impoverished by exclusivist claims and by forgetting its history. Both Realist and Liberal theories have something to offer. Our current predicament is too serious to ignore either.”¹⁵ We would do well to heed this advice with regard to all paradigmatic “isms.”

—*Gunther Hellmann*
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To the Editors (Randall L. Schweller writes):

In “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik attempt to discredit the realist credentials of virtually every living, self-styled realist under the age of fifty.¹ Defensive and neoclassical realists are charged with the crime of subsuming antirealist arguments in their midrange theories, thereby muddying the sacred and previously pristine realpolitik waters. In fact, recent realist research has been faithful to the paradigm’s core principles precisely because it has not advanced unicausal explanations of complex phenomena. In so doing, it has restored the theoretical richness of realism that was abandoned by structural realism. The moral of the story is (and I mean this in a purely professional, not personal, way): *Never let your enemies define you.*

Legro and Moravcsik mischaracterize realism as a paradigm based solely on the objective, material capabilities of states. To be sure, power and conflict are essential features of realism, as Legro and Moravcsik assert. Realists posit a world of constant competition among groups for scarce social and material resources.² This is not to suggest, however, that realists deny the possibility (indeed, existence) of international cooperation; politics, by definition, must contain elements of both common and conflicting interests, collaboration and discord. Rather the realm of international politics is characterized by persistent distributional conflicts that are “closely linked to power as both an instrument and a stake.”³ Consequently, the most basic realist proposition is that states must recognize and respond to shifts in their relative power; things often go terribly wrong when leaders ignore power realities.

15. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organization*, 2d ed. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), p. ix.

1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55. Further references appear in parentheses in the text.

2. See Randall L. Schweller and William C. Wohlforth, “Power Test: Evaluating Realism in Response to the End of the Cold War,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring 2000), pp. 69–73.

3. Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 44–45.

These realist premises, however, do not preclude the introduction of additional theoretical elements (e.g., variation in national goals, state mobilization capacity, domestic politics, and the offense-defense balance), provided that these auxiliary assumptions and causal factors are consistent with realism's core assumptions and microfoundations.⁴ Moreover, realism is not strictly a structural-systemic theory; it may be applied to any specified domain and conflict group.⁵

Legro and Moravcsik will have none of this, however. Their monocausal formulation of the paradigm would effectively prevent realists from saying anything (or anything worthwhile) about, for instance, international institutions, domestic politics, differences in the nature of hegemonic rules and regimes, ethnic conflict, variation in state interests and intentions, and perceptions of power. More important, none of these elements could be used in the construction of realist theories. Indeed, if Legro and Moravcsik had their way, realists would have to cede the entire subject of international cooperation to liberal, institutionalist, and epistemic theorists.⁶ Thus, although Legro and Moravcsik's formulation of realism may "facilitate more decisive tests among existing theories" (p. 46), realism as they have designed it would surely lose every one of them. Moreover, to embrace Legro and Moravcsik's "material capabilities" version of realism, one must dismiss the entire canon of realist theory prior to the appearance of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* and most realist research that has followed it.⁷

Of course, no one should be surprised that Legro and Moravcsik—who may be counted among realism's most vociferous detractors—would like to put realism in a theoretical straitjacket. Like foxes guarding the chicken coop, Legro and Moravcsik want us to believe that they are sincerely troubled by the current "ill health" of realism. Ironically, the true enemies of realism are, as they see it, not liberals, constructivists, or Marxists but rather theoretically confused and/or extremely devious contemporary realists, who have appropriated (outright stolen) other paradigms' core assumptions and have cleverly managed to trick everyone into believing that they are distinctly realist arguments. Is it possible that Legro and Moravcsik, the most unlikely of realist saviors, have come to praise and reinvigorate realism, not to bury it? One does not have to be a skeptical realist to dismiss this as a credible motive.

To restore realism's lost paradigmatic distinctness and coherence, Legro and Moravcsik carve up international relations theory into four paradigms: realist, institutionalist, liberal, and epistemic.⁸ They then boldly lay out the core assumptions of each paradigm, which they use as unbending yardsticks of paradigmatic faithfulness. The veracity of their central claim that contemporary realism suffers from incoherent and contradictory expansion rests entirely on their specification of these core theoretical assumptions and

4. For an insightful discussion of neorealism's missing microfoundation, see Markus Fischer, "Machiavelli's Theory of Foreign Politics," in Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Roots of Realism* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 272–279.

5. See, for instance, Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 103–124.

6. Regarding international cooperation, Legro and Moravcsik write: "Explaining integrative aspects [of interstate bargaining] requires a nonrealist theory" (p. 15).

7. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

8. Marxism, widely considered one of the three pillars of international relations theory along with liberalism and realism, is no longer a paradigmatic landlord but instead a mere tenant.

elements and, more important, on their view of what is and is not consistent with these premises. Are their views on each paradigm's "hard core" so compelling that we can finally expect consensus to be reached within the discipline on these abstruse Lakatosian matters? I think not.

Consider their description of the liberal paradigm as "theories and explanations that stress the role of exogenous variation in underlying state preferences embedded in domestic and transnational state-society relations" (p. 10). Although novel, this conception bears little resemblance to the conventional view of international liberalism. Traditional liberal themes, such as Wilsonian collective security, international integration, the voice of reason, historical progress, universal ethics, and the importance of ideas and "right thinking" leaders, have been unceremoniously excised from the paradigm. This is no mere oversight. I have witnessed firsthand the rage of contemporary liberals when a realist utters the phrase "liberal idealism." This primitive liberal beast, we are told, has long been extinct. Liberals have evolved into "preference variation" theorists. Ideas and idealism are now the exclusive property of the epistemic paradigm. Likewise, international institutions of the kind that Woodrow Wilson and Cordell Hull championed and that contemporary liberal thinkers such as Robert Keohane explored (Does anyone remember neoliberal institutionalism?) are no longer elements of liberalism; they now belong to the institutionalists. It was all a case of mistaken identity. Or, perhaps, we are witnessing the theoretical equivalent of Wilsonian self-determination: Institutions and ideas have exited the liberal paradigm to stake out their own paradigmatic space. Whatever the case may be, I am unpersuaded by such semantic sleight of hand. Such recasted liberalism begs the question: Is anybody still a liberal (or willing to admit it)?

Whereas liberals are permitted to evolve into "preference" theorists, realists must not stray from their traditional and coherent "power" roots; and this is precisely the crime of neoclassical realists.⁹ Yet even a cursory reading of the extant realist literature shows that precisely the opposite is true. Consider the issue of the variation in state interests (preferences or goals), which Legro and Moravcsik believe I have smuggled into the realist paradigm. They insist that I have misread Hans Morgenthau's discussion of imperialist and status quo policies, which they claim refers to states' strategies and not to their interests or preferences. True, Morgenthau says that state interests are defined in terms of power (whatever that means); but he obviously does not believe that the interests, intentions, and goals of states remain fixed and uniform. On the various aims of states, he writes: "A nation whose foreign policy tends toward keeping power and not toward changing the distribution of power in its favor pursues a policy of the status quo. A nation whose foreign policy aims at acquiring more power than it actually has, through a reversal of existing power relations—whose foreign policy, in other words, seeks a favorable change in power status—pursues a policy of imperialism."¹⁰

9. Curiously, however, they conclude with a plea for "multiparadigmatic synthesis," which they trumpet as an improvement over "monocausal mania" and "unicausal paradigms." What is a contemporary realist to do? We are ridiculed either for incorporating distinct elements of other paradigms or, should we become reformed sinners, for embracing monocausal mania.

10. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 36–37.

Using almost identical language, I defined status quo states as “security maximizers (as opposed to power maximizers), whose goal is to preserve the resources they already control. . . . Revisionist states, by contrast, seek to undermine the established order for the purpose of increasing their power and prestige in the system; that is, they seek to increase, not just to maintain, their resources.” I also pointed out that “revisionist states need not be predatory powers; they may oppose the status quo for defensive reasons.” As for the sources of these preferences, I simply reiterated the arguments by Robert Gilpin and Morgenthau, model realists according to Legro and Moravcsik, that status quo powers “are usually states that won the last major-power war and created a new world order in accordance with their interests by redistributing territory and prestige.” In contrast, revisionist powers are typically those states that lost the last major-power war and/or have increased their power after the international order was established and the benefits were allocated.¹¹ Unlike Wilsonian liberals, I make no moral judgments about the two types of states: There are no good and bad states, only “haves” and “have nots.” There is absolutely no difference between Morgenthau’s discussion of status quo and imperialist policies and my discussion of status quo and revisionist states; Morgenthau refers to these different national goals as policies, whereas I call them “state interests.” This nonissue is the entire foundation of Legro and Moravcsik’s claim that I am not a realist.

By focusing on Morgenthau’s use of the terms “imperialist” and “status quo,” Legro and Moravcsik neglect to point out that Henry Kissinger also referred to revolutionary and status quo states; E.H. Carr distinguished satisfied from dissatisfied powers; Arnold Wolfers divided states into status quo and revisionist categories; and Raymond Aron saw eternal opposition between the forces of revision and conservation. Are we to believe that all these realists shared Morgenthau’s conceptualization of these terms as strategies and not interests (or goals) of states?¹²

There is a good reason why realists have traditionally distinguished between satisfied states that merely seek to keep their power and preserve the established order and dissatisfied states that desire to increase their power and change the status quo. The assumption that states seek power tells us little or nothing about state preferences, aims, interests, or motivations. Because power is useful for achieving any national goal, we cannot make accurate foreign policy predictions without specifying the purposes of power.¹³ Power can be used to threaten others, attack them, take things from them, and prevent them from doing things they would otherwise do (e.g., U.S. containment policy). Conversely, power can be used to make others more secure and to enable them to reach goals that they otherwise could not achieve (e.g., the Marshall Plan). Legro and Moravcsik insist that realists must ignore these differences in the aims of power. Adherence to this stricture, however, would render the concept of power virtually meaningless and entirely useless for constructing theories of foreign policy.¹⁴

11. Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 24–25.

12. For specific references, see *ibid.*, p. 215, n. 20.

13. This is not entirely the same as saying that we must specify the scope and domain of power, that is, power to do what with respect to whom? See David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 18–24.

14. In contrast, theories of international politics do not require specification of the purposes of power.

Although Legro and Moravcsik's arguments have some worth, they are largely unpersuasive and ultimately irrelevant. Even if everything they say is correct, and it surely is not, what is their point? If self-described realists are producing theoretically interesting and important research, does it matter what we label it? If contemporary realism is really repackaged liberalism, Marxism, and institutionalism, what has prevented members of these theoretical perspectives from generating similar works? Why have faux realists beaten them to the punch? Does anyone really care?

—Randall L. Schweller
Columbus, Ohio

To the Editors (Jeffrey W. Taliaferro writes):

Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik's article "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" seeks to contribute to ongoing debates over how international relations theorists should evaluate different research traditions and theories.¹ They contend that contemporary realism "now encompasses nearly the entire universe of international relations theory (including current liberal, epistemic, and institutionalist theories) and excludes only a few intellectual scarecrows (such as outright irrationality, widespread self-abnegating altruism, slavish commitment to ideology, complete harmony of state interests, or a world state)" (p. 7). Only a return to a narrow and rigorous formulation of realism, they argue, can reestablish the distinction between it and other paradigms. However, Legro and Moravcsik's analysis does not allow realism to "assume its rightful role in the study of world politics" (p. 55). Instead, it champions a return to what Stephen Van Evera calls "Type II" realism: a body of theory barren of testable hypotheses on the causes of war and the conditions for peace.² In addition, Legro and Moravcsik fundamentally misstate the role of elite perceptions and domestic constraints in *neoclassical realism*—a body of realist foreign policy theory.³

Drawing upon Imre Lakatos's methodology of scientific research programs (MSRPs), Legro and Moravcsik submit that a conceptually productive research program should have at least two related attributes.⁴ First, the research program's core assumptions should be logically coherent (p. 9). Second, the core assumptions must distinguish it

1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55. Subsequent references and citations from this article appear in parentheses in the text.

2. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 9–11.

3. For the distinction between theories of foreign policy and theories of international politics, see Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 14–18; and Colin Elman, "Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn 1996), pp. 12–17.

4. Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programs," in Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 131–132. See also Donald Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry: A Synthesis of Opposed Perspectives," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 1 (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 131–228.

from alternative programs. "Only in this way can we speak meaningfully of testing theories and hypotheses . . . against one another, or about the empirical progress or degeneration of a paradigm over time" (p. 10). Legro and Moravcsik divide the international relations literature into four "paradigms" or families of theories: realism, liberalism, institutionalism, and a so-called epistemic paradigm.⁵ The first three are "rationalist" because they assume fixed and exogenous preference formation and bounded rationality. The so-called epistemic paradigm is not rationalist because it stresses "exogenous variation in the shared beliefs that structure means-ends calculations and affect perceptions of the strategic environment" (p. 11).

Legro and Moravcsik's typology has at least four problems. First, their charges against contemporary realism contradict their criteria for conceptually productive paradigms. On the one hand, Legro and Moravcsik fault Jack Snyder, Randall Schweller, Fareed Zakaria, and other contemporary realists for allegedly appealing to the intellectual history of realism to justify an examination of unit-level variables. They write: "Efforts to define realism by reference to intellectual history in general, and classical realism in particular, are deeply flawed. The coherence of theories is not defined by their intellectual history, but by their underlying assumptions and causal mechanisms" (p. 31). Yet Legro and Moravcsik base their entire critique of neoclassical realism on its supposed deviance from the realist canon represented by the writings of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz.

Second, Legro and Moravcsik err in claiming more coherence for their four paradigms than actually exists. Realism, institutionalism, liberalism, and the so-called epistemic paradigm do not meet Lakatos's criteria for coherent and distinct research programs. Scholars disagree about the hard core and the negative heuristic of various research programs. Even those sympathetic to Lakatos's MSRP disagree about the definition of novel predictions, the scope of the protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses, and what constitutes a degenerative or a progressive problem-shift.⁶ Consider, for example, the common notion that rationality is a core assumption of both classical realism and contemporary realism.

As others note, rationality is not a core assumption of classical realism.⁷ For example, Morgenthau's six principles of political realism adopt rational reconstruction from the viewpoint of statesmen to understand foreign policy. Nevertheless, Morgenthau defines

5. Legro and Moravcsik base their critique of realism on Lakatos's MSRP. Like other international relations theorists, however, they use the terms "paradigm" and "research program" interchangeably. Lakatos specifically *rejected* Thomas Kuhn's notion of dominant paradigms in favor of creating a different approach to appraising scientific theories. For concise discussions of how Lakatos's views contrast with Kuhn's, see Terrence Bell, "From Paradigms to Research Programs: Toward a Post-Kuhnian Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February 1976), pp. 151–177; and Paul Diesing, *How Does Social Science Work? Reflections on Practice* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), p. 34.

6. For a defense of Lakatos's MSRP and a criticism of its frequent misuse in the international relations literature, see Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, "Appraising Progress in International Relations Theory: How Not to Be Lakatos Intolerant," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, September 3–6, 1999.

7. Miles Kahler, "Rationality in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 919–941; and Ashley Tellis, "Political Realism: The Long March to Scientific Theory," in Benjamin Frankel, ed., *Roots of Realism* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 3–105.

power as a “psychological relation” between weak and strong actors flowing from “the expectation of benefits, the fear of disadvantage, [and] the respect or love for men or institutions.”⁸ Morgenthau categorically rejects the possibility of a deductive method of rational inquiry. Other classical realists share his ambivalence toward rationalism.⁹

Similarly, the microfoundations of neorealism are ambiguous. Waltz claims that his balance-of-power theory “requires no assumption of rationality,” and that international structure conditions state behavior through competition and socialization.¹⁰ Other neorealist theories do not assume uniformly conflictual and fixed state preferences over outcomes. Robert Gilpin’s hegemonic theory assumes that states are rational, but it does not assume that states are strict utility maximizers with a fixed and hierarchical set of preferences.¹¹ Robert Jervis’s conception of the security dilemma, while drawing heavily upon the prisoners’ dilemma and stag hunt, also posits an important role for elite misperceptions and miscalculation.¹² Instead of classifying realism as a “rationalist” research program, one might characterize the relationship between rational models and realism as follows: Different scholars embed realist assumptions in different theories of social action to generate testable hypotheses. Many realists borrow heavily from microeconomics and game theory, but others incorporate insights from social and cognitive psychology, organization theory, and history.

Third, Legro and Moravcsik’s four-part division of international relations theory ignores the often ambiguous dividing lines between particular research traditions. For example, they see neoliberal institutionalism as both distinct from and a theoretical competitor of liberalism (p. 10). This ignores the intellectual history of the field and the core liberal assumptions embedded in neoliberal institutionalism. Institutionalism is clearly a third-image variant of liberalism, despite valiant efforts by its proponents to portray it as a “modification” of neorealism or as occupying a middle ground between liberalism and realism.¹³ As Richard Little notes, “[Robert] Keohane’s claim that the neo-liberal institutionalists are simply refining and strengthening neo-realist thought

8. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 3d ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), p. 27.

9. Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 71. See also John Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 16; and Arnold Wolfers, “The Determinants of Foreign Policy,” in Wolfers, ed., *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), pp. 42–45.

10. Kenneth N. Waltz, “Reflections on *Theory of International Politics: A Response to My Critics*,” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 118; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 127.

11. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 18–25.

12. Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (October 1978), pp. 167–214, especially pp. 181–183; and Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997), pp. 171–201, at pp. 182–183.

13. See Robert O. Keohane, “The Demand for International Regimes,” *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 141–162; and Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), chap. 1. More recently, neoliberal institutionalists have gone to great lengths to distance this body of theory from both liberalism and realism. See Celeste A. Wallander, *Moral Friends, Best Enemies: German-Russian*

fails to acknowledge, however, just how far removed he is from the realist perspective. By assuming that [international] regimes can be treated as collective goods in which everyone has a stake, Keohane is working from an essentially liberal posture.”¹⁴

Finally, what Legro and Moravcsik term the “epistemic paradigm” is not really a coherent research program at all. Rather it is a residual category into which the authors place anything and everything that does not neatly fall into the other three paradigms. Standard operating procedures, group misperceptions, transnational networks, cultural theories, and various critical theories (constructivism, postmodernism, feminism, and neo-Marxism) do not share the same core assumptions. These theories posit different causal mechanisms and different units of analysis. They make widely divergent predictions.

Contemporary realism provides a set of baseline expectations about international politics from which analysts can examine unexpected outcomes. This distinguishes it from competing schools of international relations theory. Realist core assumptions tell scholars what to expect in broad terms: International outcomes will match the relative distribution of material resources. As Aaron Friedberg notes, however, “Structural considerations provide a useful point from which to begin analysis of international politics rather than a place at which to end it. Even if one acknowledges that structures exist and are important, there is still the question of how statesmen grasp their contours from the inside, so to speak, of whether, and if so how, they are able to determine where they stand in terms of relative national power at any given point in history.”¹⁵

Legro and Moravcsik fault neoclassical realists for positing an explicit role for elite perceptions of material capabilities. They assert, “While contemporary realists continue to speak of international ‘power,’ their midrange explanations of state behavior have subtly shifted the core emphasis from variation in objective power to variation in *beliefs and perceptions of power*” (pp. 34–35, emphasis in original). It is worth noting that elite perceptions and belief systems in neoclassical realism are intervening variables. Beliefs have no autonomous influence on states’ foreign policies, let alone on international outcomes. Rather elite perceptions serve as a conduit through which structural variables translate into foreign policy.¹⁶

Legro and Moravcsik downplay the methodological reasons for examining elite decisionmaking. Any theory of foreign policy, however, must specify the mechanism through which explanatory variables translate into policy. Often this involves a detailed examination of how leaders actually perceived the current distribution of power, as

Cooperation after the Cold War (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), chap. 2; Wallander, Helga Haftendorn, and Robert O. Keohane, “Introduction,” in Wallander, Haftendorn, and Keohane, eds., *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

14. Richard Little, “The Growing Relevance of Pluralism,” in Steve Smith, Kenneth Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, eds., *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 82.

15. Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 8.

16. Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998), pp. 151–154.

well as power trends. William Wohlforth's response to critics of realism's ability to explain the peaceful end of the Cold War is equally applicable here: "Critics of realism contrast a simplistic view of the relationship between [relative] decline and policy change against a nuanced and complex view of the relationship between their favored explanatory variable and policy change."¹⁷

In addition, Legro and Moravcsik fault the inclusion of domestic variables in several neoclassical realist theories. They claim that such theories "inevitably import consideration of exogenous variation in the societal and cultural sources of state preferences, thereby sacrificing both the coherence of realism and appropriating midrange theories of interstate conflict based on liberal assumptions" (p. 23). All variants of contemporary realism hold that structural variables—anarchy, the relative distribution of power, and power trends—are the primary determinants of foreign policy and international outcomes. Realists do not claim that domestic factors exert no influence whatsoever. Realists, however, do reject the notion that a state's domestic politics and ideology are the primary determinants of its foreign policy.

Legro and Moravcsik ask: "Is anybody still a realist?" According to their criteria, there are only a few "true" realists in the field. Scholars such as Van Evera, Wohlforth, Snyder, Zakaria, and Schweller are really liberals with an identity crisis. Has Legro and Moravcsik's evaluation of realism really advanced the dialogue between realists and proponents of other research traditions? No, it has not. Such broad-based external attacks on research traditions rarely stimulate dialogue. Critics of realism will always find fault with realist scholarship. As Gilpin observes, "No one loves a political realist."¹⁸

Does Legro and Moravcsik's reformulation of realism generate testable hypotheses on the causes of war and the conditions for peace? The answer is no. Any behavior short of unilateral and unrestrained belligerence would be inconsistent with this "reformulated" realism. Finally, will the authors' critique of contemporary realism and reformulation of its core assumptions stimulate innovative research? Again, the answer is no. How many younger scholars would want to work in such a narrow and barren research tradition? Legro and Moravcsik's article will no doubt be reprinted in various edited volumes and occupy a prominent place on graduate seminar syllabi for years to come. Nonetheless, let us be clear: Legro and Moravcsik do not seek to revitalize realism; they seek to discredit it.

—Jeffrey W. Taliaferro
Medford, Massachusetts

To the Editors (William C. Wohlforth writes):

Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik have produced a learned rumination on contemporary international relations scholarship and the role of realism within it that warrants

17. William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 108–109.

18. Robert G. Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. 3–4.

discussion.¹ Their enterprise is so wide-ranging, however, that a full response would occupy too much space in this journal for a debate that is, in the final analysis, far from the immediate concerns of most readers. Although I am among those whose work they tar with the brush of “theoretical degeneration,” I shall confine myself to two comments.

First, Legro and Moravcsik face a contradiction between the twin purposes of their article: setting forth their particular vision for the field of international relations, and assessing a large body of scholarship. As a consequence, it is hard to see where the advocacy ends and the detached appraisal begins. They introduce a novel division of the field into four theoretical paradigms—realism, liberalism, “institutionalism,” and “epistemic theory”—that they simultaneously try to treat as “established” (p. 7). Established by whom? When? Their article is the first place I encountered “epistemism” as an independent and encompassing theoretical paradigm. The liberal paradigm they discuss appears to be liberalism as reformulated recently by Moravcsik.² And their rendering of realism would exclude most scholarly works currently viewed as exemplars of that intellectual school. For example, in *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz explicitly contradicts each of the three assumptions Legro and Moravcsik propose as definitively realist.³ He does not assume fixed, conflictual preferences (“the aims of states may be endlessly varied; they may range from the ambition to conquer the world to the desire merely to be left alone”). He explicitly asserts that his “theory requires no assumptions of rationality” because structure affects state behavior primarily through the processes of socialization and competition (Waltz’s is a structural theory, after all, not a theory of bargaining, as Legro and Moravcsik claim). And he does not equate power with material resources, making a point of including “political stability and competence” as basic elements in his definition of state capabilities.⁴

Legro and Moravcsik have recast the entire field of international relations, invented two paradigms, completely reformulated two others, either expelled Waltz’s theory from the realist corpus or else rewritten it, and rendered a stern judgment of “degeneration” on a large body of scholarship. This is ambitious, to put it mildly. It would be much easier to respond to their assessment of recent realist scholarship if they had offered some standard of appraisal other than their particular proposal for reorganizing the field. And it would be much easier to assess their proposed relabeling of paradigms if they had presented it separately and made the case for it on its merits. As it stands, the proposal is unclear on many matters, including: the status of theories that do not reduce world politics to “a bargaining problem” (p. 51); the role of any theory positing a relationship between systemic material structure and actors’ preferences and beliefs; and the place of any factor that is systemic and material but not a “resource” (e.g., technology).

1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55. Subsequent references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

2. Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 513–553.

3. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 118, 131.

To have been found to be “degenerating” in terms of this particular vision of our field is not especially troubling. But neither is it particularly enlightening, which brings me to my second comment. Legro and Moravcsik missed the essential research design and basic findings of my work on the distribution of power and the Cold War. They discuss as my “theoretical innovation” the assertion that “perceptions [of power] are exogenous variables” (p. 39). In fact, the work of mine they mention is concerned primarily with examining national net assessment as a process that causally connects changes in the distribution of capabilities with changed behavior. My research did not find that assessments of power were exogenous to the distribution of material capabilities. On the contrary, decisionmakers’ assessments appear to capture real power relationships far better than the crude measures commonly used by political scientists. Indeed, it is Legro and Moravcsik’s “two-step” approach to research that insists on a rigid divide between actors’ beliefs and the distribution of power. I never wrote that “objective power shifts . . . ‘can account neither for the Cold War nor its sudden end’” (p. 39). Instead I showed that standard *measures* of the distribution of capabilities are inaccurate indicators of both national assessments and our best estimate of the real power balance.

Legro and Moravcsik are right that the absence of good measures of power is a major problem for many realist theories. They might have added that comparable measurement problems confront theories of preferences or beliefs. Legro and Moravcsik write as if there is some well-established, generalizable, and predictive “epistemic” theory that can explain the national assessments and associated state behavior that I found in my research better than the admittedly weak realist theories I did employ. Had such work existed, and had I artfully subsumed it under a “realist” rubric, Legro and Moravcsik would have something to write about. But they mention no examples of such a theory, for the simple reason that no such theory existed when I researched the Cold War, and none exists now.

One can defend the necessity of debating the merits of real schools of international relations scholarship. It is hard to see what value would be added by a new debate over imaginary ones.

—William C. Wohlforth
Washington, D.C.

Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik Respond:

In “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” we examine some of the subtlest and most sophisticated scholarly works in contemporary international relations, each of which is explicitly presented by its author as an application of “realist” theory.¹ Our point is simple. The category of “realist” theory has been broadened to the point that it signifies little more than a generic commitment to rational state behavior in anarchy—that is, “minimal

1. Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp. 5–55.

realism.” Recent realist writings, whether concrete empirical studies or abstract paradigmatic restatements, jettison distinctive assumptions about power, capabilities, conflict, and sometimes even rationality. Nothing distinguishes the recent innovations in realist theory from the liberal studies of Michael Doyle and Bruce Russett, the institutionalist approaches of Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, or epistemic analyses by Iain Johnston and Peter Katzenstein. If we can no longer say what causal processes the realist paradigm excludes, we cannot say what it includes. In sum, realists confront a fundamental tension: Define realism broadly and one subsumes all rationalist theories; define it precisely and one excludes much recent scholarship. We conclude that the latter, a reformulation, is in order. To demonstrate that a more distinctive paradigmatic foundation is feasible, we set forth one potential set of core assumptions, though there have been and will be others. “Let the discussion begin,” so we thought.

The response has been puzzling. Defenders of realism are numerous, vocal, and uncompromising, yet none of the five rejoinders printed here—and none of many unpublished communications, including those connected with a round table at the 1998 annual conference of the American Political Science Association—directly challenges our central claim about the lack of theoretical limits on the concrete midrange explanations that recent realists advance. To be sure, there are myriad complaints about our narrow paradigmatic standard, our disrespect for intellectual history, and our faulty philosophy of science—not to mention our purported intradisciplinary imperialism. We shall consider these below.² Far more striking, however, is what is missing.

Readers might have expected, at a minimum, that a serious defense against our criticism would contain at least two critical points: (1) a demonstration that recent midrange empirical propositions advanced by self-styled realists do differ systematically from midrange causal claims based on other paradigms—for example, claims about the centrality of the democratic peace, the mixed motives generated by economic interdependence, the consequences of credible commitments to international institutions, and the systematic influence of collective beliefs; and (2) a proposal of alternative core realist assumptions that do unambiguously distinguish realist empirical arguments from the liberal, institutionalist, and epistemic alternatives. These two points seem the very least required of any successful defense of contemporary realism.

Yet our five respondents hardly touch on either issue. Instead, they quickly concede that theoretical innovation in contemporary realism rests on concrete causal mechanisms largely identical to those of liberal, institutionalist, and epistemic theories, and that doing so violates the core assumptions of our reformulation of realism—a reformulation to which they offer no alternative. Indeed, insofar as our critics comment (if only in passing) on these concrete matters, it is generally to support our position. Leaving aside minor quibbles and the instructive but idiosyncratic exception of Gunther Hellmann, all five largely agree that paradigms are defined in terms of core assumptions

2. Our core claim is not that the paradigmatic borders of realism are *slightly* misplaced, but rather that contemporary realism subsumes nearly all rationalist arguments about world politics. We therefore do not address complaints about the precise borders or definition of alternative paradigms. Discussion of the narrow definitional issues of the alternatives, however interesting to our critics and ourselves, does not affect the basic thrust of our argument.

and that the three assumptions we set forth—rationality, scarcity, and the causal importance of the distribution of material capabilities—are appropriate core assumptions of realism.³

With our central claim essentially unanswered, we are tempted to stop right here. Yet a puzzle remains. If defenders of recent realism accept the basic thrust of our concrete critique, why so much heat? Why do critics who question the need for coherence in the definition of theoretical paradigms so vociferously defend current usage of the word “realism”? What is really at stake in this debate, according to them?

The answer is extraordinary. Despite their claim to be concerned above all with concrete implications and practical research, our five critics mount a defense on the most abstract possible terrain, namely intellectual history and philosophy of science. All five critics—with the (only partial) exception of Peter Feaver—explicitly assert that *it does not matter* if theoretical paradigms are indistinct and incoherent. This leads them to pose two challenges to our critique of realism: (1) Isn't our paradigmatic reformulation of realism so narrow that it excludes nearly all international relations theorists, including noted “realists”? and (2) aren't paradigms just arbitrary labels without coherent intellectual foundations, and therefore exempt from conceptual criticism? If these questions are answered affirmatively, wouldn't it therefore be better to muddle through with incoherent but widely accepted paradigmatic labels, rather than to propose coherent and distinct, but necessarily more restrictive, core assumptions? After briefly responding to some important, if ultimately secondary, concerns advanced by Feaver, William Wohlforth, and Randall Schweller about our exegesis of specific realist works, we devote the bulk of our response to these underlying theoretical and philosophical issues.

DO WE MISSTATE SPECIFIC REALIST ARGUMENTS?

Both Schweller and Wohlforth take exception to our reading of their own work, and of realism more broadly. Each argues that his work meets our standard of realism, because any change in interests (Schweller) or perceptions (Wohlforth) is—contrary to our claim in the article—simply a reflection of underlying shifts in the distribution of power. Schweller asserts that he, like Hans Morgenthau, makes status quo or revisionist interests endogenous to power shifts, notably victory and defeat in war. Yet this is difficult to square with Schweller's broad claim that “the most important determinant of alignment decisions is the compatibility of political goals, not imbalances of power

3. Peter Feaver stresses “the distribution of power.” Randall Schweller notes that “realists posit a world of constant competition among groups for scarce social and material resources.” William Wohlforth agrees that realist work “causally connects changes in the distribution of capabilities with changed behavior.” Jeffrey Taliaferro affirms that “all variants of contemporary realism hold that structural variables—anarchy, the relative distribution of power, and power trends—are the primary determinants of foreign policy and international outcomes.” Gunther Hellmann observes that there is substantial agreement on the premises of realism. One point of apparent disagreement is that some of our critics believe that an assumption of conflicting interests somehow prevents realism from discussing cooperation. Not so, as we discuss in “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” pp. 15–16.

or threat.”⁴ Schweller’s focus on interests and power would not be innovative unless interests were somehow independent of power. As we suggest in the article, moreover, Schweller neither proposes a consistent theoretical link between the outcome of war and state interests, nor consistently treats variation in state interests as a function of power.⁵ Wohlforth maintains that his work is realist because it is “concerned primarily with examining national net assessment as a process that causally connects changes in the distribution of capabilities with changed behavior.” He simply seeks to add that subjective assessments of top decisionmakers are better measures of “real power” than “the crude measures commonly used by political scientists.”⁶ True enough as far as it goes, but this claim raises a deeper and more critical paradigmatic question: What drives variation in decisionmaker perceptions? The reasons uncovered by Wohlforth’s admirably detailed and precise research, we argue, have less to do with a shift in material capabilities than in a number of other exogenous, essentially perceptual factors. Still, in both cases readers must be the final judges. If the variation in perceptions and interests documented by Schweller and Wohlforth is indeed driven overwhelmingly by variation in the distribution of power, rather than by exogenous variation in intervening domestic politics, collective beliefs, or institutions, these two scholars should be exempted from our criticism. The force of our general argument would not thereby be blunted.⁷

Feaver’s criticism is more fundamental. He maintains that we misrepresent realism by focusing on the determinants, rather than on the consequences, of state behavior.⁸

4. Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 22.

5. In Schweller’s analysis (*ibid.*, pp. 23, 32, 35, 37, 94), victors became revisionist (Japan and Italy) or indifferent (United States); losers worked within the system (Weimar Germany) or opposed it (Hungary and the Soviet Union). State interests seem to vary for a variety of reasons such as dissatisfaction with institutional arrangements (Italy and Japan), the emergence of new leaders in domestic politics (Weimar vs. Hitler’s Germany) and/or the implementation of an entrenched conflictual worldview (Hitler as the heir to Bismarck and Wilhelm), and idiosyncratic collective understandings such as believing that victory (and status quo maintenance) was in fact a mistake (United States). There is no clear causal relation between power and interests, let alone an explicitly realist one. In his letter Schweller remains ambiguous: “revisionist states need not be predatory powers; they may oppose the status quo for defensive reasons.”

6. William C. Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Preferences during the Cold War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 10: “For statesmen, accurate assessments of power are impossible. For scholars, accurate assessments practically mean a correct rendering of the perceptions that inform decisions. Of course, real material balances are related to these perceptions, but we do not know how closely.” This logic also raises the question of how one would ever know that perceptions reflect power if power can never be accurately measured—except by inferring backward from outcomes.

7. It remains curiously contradictory, however, for Schweller and Wohlforth to insist that their arguments are consistent with our conception of realism, because they both go on to assert that our reformulation is so narrow that no interesting theory could possibly stay within its bounds.

8. This is not precisely correct. We point out that realism has much to say about the outcomes of bargaining. We simply point out that the anticipation of these outcomes should, according to realists, be the primary determinant of state behavior.

Feaver concedes (more readily than we would) that realist theories of state behavior are unpersuasive, because states act for a wide variety of reasons. Still, he insists, realists assert that if a state fails to act in an appropriate “realist” manner, the international “system” will punish it. Feaver notes that there are empirical and theoretical problems with this argument: We know that states do not consistently balance and, in part for this reason, the system does not always punish states. Still, this “consequentialist” conception of realism, Feaver concludes, is (or ought to be) shared by all realists, and provides a potentially fruitful research agenda for the future.

We agree that a research program about variation in the force of systemic constraints is an attractive one, and we applaud Feaver’s positive suggestions in this direction, but we believe that clarification of what is at stake theoretically requires that realists limit their paradigmatic claims. As Feaver suggests, “consequentialist” realism requires a formulation like the one we put forward—a “baseline” realist theory of behavior—to help us calculate whether states are responding “appropriately” to external circumstances and should be punished by the system if they are not. For punishment to be consistently imposed, moreover, most statesmen must share this view most of the time.⁹ They must think like realists—realists, that is, in our narrower “baseline” sense. Yet “consequentialist” realism also leaves unexplained, Feaver concedes, why some states choose initially to transgress “realist” norms—the primary focus of the recent realist writings we criticize. Jack Snyder’s Hobbesian theory of imperialism, Stephen Van Evera’s domestic explanation of aggression, Schweller’s “balance of interests,” and similar theoretical innovations say little about why the system responds in a certain way—the core of Feaver’s “realist” theory. The *theoretically innovative* part of their analysis concerns instead divergences from “baseline” state behavior, which involve domestic coalitions, international institutions, and collective beliefs. The clearest and most useful way conceptualize such work is to say that realism predicts balancing behavior and system punishment, and therefore the absence of these behaviors creates anomalies that must be explained by other theories. Ultimately, therefore, Feaver’s attractive research agenda is not an extension of realist theory, because regimes in his view can be punished or not punished for a variety of reasons both realist and nonrealist. Instead Feaver’s agenda creates an attractive opportunity for synthetic research involving a number of clearly defined paradigms.

We turn now to the two more fundamental theoretical and philosophical issues: the narrowness of our reformulation and our lack of fidelity to the intellectual tradition of realism.

IS OUR REFORMULATION OF REALISM SO NARROW AS TO BE MEANINGLESS?

All five critics complain that our reformulation of realist theory is restrictive.¹⁰ The basis for this objection, we have seen, is not that we misstate core realist assumptions. Instead

9. Realist theory also needs to explain why other states choose to use their capabilities to punish “bad states” in some instances but not others—that is, whether states balance. This is a critical question to which our formulation of realism offers clear predictions, whereas Feaver’s reformulation does not.

10. The critics exaggerate. Our formulation in no way blocks realism from illuminating a variety of topics (e.g., international institutions, ethnic conflict, state interests, and perceptions), as Schwel-

it is that realists should not be expected to conform consistently to paradigmatic assumptions. This must be true, our critics maintain, because our definition seems to exclude many arguments by many scholars often thought to be “realists.” Hellmann poses the challenge baldly: “Was anybody ever a coherent ‘paradigmatiser’ (i.e., a scholar adhering ‘firmly’ to a fixed set of unchanging, coherent, and distinct paradigmatic core assumptions)?”

Our critics are correct that few international relations theorists advance arguments drawn from only one paradigm, but this response misunderstands both our argument and the proper role of intellectual history in social science. On the first point, let us be clear: We do not criticize realists for combining causal factors drawn from disparate paradigms, as our critics suggest. Quite the opposite, we are advocates (and, in our empirical work, practitioners) of theoretical synthesis. We criticize realists for labeling the resulting synthesis as a progressive confirmation or extension of realist theory rather than as a demonstration of its limitations or as an evaluation of the relative weight of two theories.

There is a deeper issue here, which realists ignore at their peril. In our view, it is not individual theorists who are “realist” or “nonrealist”; instead individual arguments are “realist” or “nonrealist.”¹¹ Neither we nor any other proponent of theoretical coherence should be asked to demonstrate that leading theorists have been “pure” realists or anything else. The critical exegetical issue is instead whether leading theorists consistently distinguish—or, more precisely, *can* coherently distinguish—realist and nonrealist arguments. Of those whom our critics cite as leading examples of “hybrid” theory, nearly all—E.H. Carr, Raymond Aron, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Jervis, Robert Gilpin, and Robert Keohane—*distinguish explicitly between realist and nonrealist strands in their own thought*. Only a minority—Henry Kissinger, for example—consistently fails to do so.¹² Our argument is that contemporary realists fall increasingly into the latter category.

Still, each of the five critics asks: Shouldn’t scholars reject outright any reformulation—and therefore any critique—that seems to be so at odds with the received intellectual history of “realism”? This raises a more fundamental question: Should scholars employ intellectual history, rather than adherence to core assumptions, as the measure of paradigmatic fidelity? We now turn to this issue.

WHY NOT TREAT PARADIGMS AS ARBITRARY LABELS FOR INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS?

Despite a strong attachment to the “realist” label and acceptance of the conception of paradigms based on core assumptions (Hellmann again excepted), all five of our critics hint that paradigms are just arbitrary labels without coherent intellectual foundations, and should therefore be exempt from criticism. Wouldn’t it be better, our critics suggest,

ler contends, nor does it limit realism to “any behavior short of unilateral and unrestrained belligerence” as Taliaferro maintains. For detailed examples, see Legro and Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” pp. 15–16, 52–53.

11. We plead guilty to muddying the waters by taking rhetorical advantage of references to individuals—for example, “Is *Anybody* Still a Realist?”

12. We believe that Kissinger’s concern with legitimacy and common values are only tangentially connected with realism, as reviewers of his most recent book have noted at length.

to muddle through with somewhat incoherent but widely accepted labels rather than to adopt a coherent and distinct set of assumptions? Wohlforth makes the point lucidly: Scholars, he asserts, should debate about “real” schools of international relations theory (i.e., schools that scholars currently recognize) rather than “imaginary” schools (i.e., schools that scholars like us reconstruct on the basis of core assumptions). Intellectual practice is, to this extent, its own justification. Schweller asserts that all we have done is to artificially expand the liberal, institutionalist, and epistemic paradigms—even, both he and Wohlforth charge, conjure them up out of thin air—and cut back the realist paradigm accordingly. Hellmann advances a philosophically more sophisticated variant of this argument. Paradigms, he argues, are no more than transient collective agreements among scholars that cannot be judged by any objective standards. Disparate individual worldviews and cognitive biases inherently prevent any deeper agreement on an independent measure of “coherence” or “distinctiveness.” Only naïve positivists could believe otherwise. For these reasons, all five critics conclude, our strict standard of a paradigm defined by core assumptions is more of a hindrance than a help.

We disagree, for three major reasons. First, intellectual history is a poor standard against which to judge paradigmatic consistency. We shall not belabor this point here, because we defend it at length in the article, and our critics do not address our arguments. Paradigms, we maintained, must be coherent to be useful, while appeals to traditional authorities insulate traditional authorities from criticism and thereby perpetuate internal contradictions within traditions.¹³

Second, reliance on the authority of intellectual history creates contradictions. Every one of the scholars we criticize in the article, and all but Hellmann among our present interlocutors, accept that core assumptions to the proper means to define a paradigm. Yet our critics want to have their cake and eat it, too. Realism, they maintain, is based on a coherent set of core assumptions, yet the realist tradition often legitimately diverts from those assumptions. This evades an inescapable choice: Either contradictions must be resolved in favor of coherence, as we recommend, or realists must somehow justify their use of social scientific concepts and language—paradigms, assumptions, theory testing, and so on. Anything less perpetuates confusion.

Alone among our five critics, Hellmann grasps the full import of our criticism, yet he boldly opts for tradition over coherence. One can (and inevitably must) work with indistinct, incoherent paradigms, he argues, but to do so one must abandon the twin illusions that paradigms are logically related to their core assumptions and that empirical propositions derived from paradigms can be objectively confirmed or disconfirmed. This relativistic (or, as he prefers, “pragmatist”) position, while not our own, is at least coherent and defensible—in contrast to a position that simultaneously invokes the need for coherent assumptions and the authority of an incoherent tradition. Yet Hellmann demonstrates the departure from a conventional understanding of social science theory required if our criticism is to be answered without a fundamental reformulation of

13. Accordingly all but the most relativist philosophies of science treat a theoretical paradigm as an *ex post* reconstruction (as does Imre Lakatos) rather than a subjectively apprehended intellectual tradition.

realist theory. Yet even Hellmann, as we are about to see, balks at consistently maintaining such a skeptical position.

Third, heavy reliance on intellectual history leaves our critics without a viable means of structuring academic debates. Consider the two positive alternatives they propose.

The first is offered by Schweller and Jeffrey Taliaferro. If an explanation is partially realist, both recommend, we should term any extension of it (whether constructed of baseline realist elements or not) a progressive improvement in realist theory. Specifically, Schweller argues that “realist” explanations may subsume unlimited “theoretical elements (e.g., variation in national goals, state mobilization capacity, domestic politics, and the offense-defense balance), provided that these auxiliary assumptions and causal factors are consistent with realism’s core assumptions and microfoundations.” Taliaferro proposes that nonrealist factors can influence state behavior within realist theory up to the point where “a state’s domestic politics and ideology” become the “primary determinants of its foreign policy.”

Is Schweller’s and Taliaferro’s alternative a more helpful way to structure theoretical debates than ours? We think not, for at least three reasons. First, their criteria are overtly biased. Why should all explanations that contain elements of realist theory be automatically designated “realist,” rather than liberal, institutionalist, or epistemic?¹⁴ Second, their criteria encourage the use of imprecise theoretical language. Where a number of disparate factors combine to explain an outcome, it is more helpful to report that “both realist and liberal factors explain some of the variation” (or perhaps that “realist factors seem to best explain this aspect, whereas institutionalist factors seem to best explain that aspect”), as we propose, rather than reporting that “realism has been improved and confirmed,” as Schweller and Taliaferro propose. Third, their criteria still exclude from the realist canon most of the works we examined in our article. Walt’s analysis of the Cold War, Joseph Grieco’s analysis of Economic and Monetary Union, Snyder’s analysis of imperialism, Van Evera’s analysis of aggression, and, not least, Schweller’s analysis of the interwar “balance of interest” all give preponderant causal weight to domestic, ideational, and institutional factors inconsistent with realist core assumptions.¹⁵

Even Hellmann’s seemingly relativistic philosophy of science, the second positive alternative to our proposal, cannot long evade the central dilemma of contemporary realism. Hellmann recommends that we renounce our faith in the objective content of paradigms, yet even he ultimately rejects his own counsel. He offers instead a new way forward, termed “paradigmatic pragmatism,” based on supposedly uncontroversial categories: “Few (if any) scholars would deny that different ‘schools of thought’ or ‘theoretical traditions’ can be usefully distinguished in international relations . . . (based on) ‘family resemblances’—characteristics that reveal that they somehow belong to-

14. For an elaboration of this critique, see Andrew Moravcsik, “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics,” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), p. 542.

15. By mentioning other paradigms, we mean only to note that there are large bodies of explanation—for example, arguments about the democratic peace, transnational interdependence, international institutions, and collective beliefs—that are plausibly viewed (to judge from their cohesive core assumptions) as coherent theoretical alternatives to realism.

gether." So paradigms, initially rejected by Hellmann (as sets of coherent assumptions) on fundamental philosophical grounds, turn out to be helpful after all (in the form of intellectual traditions) and are "somehow," despite individual worldviews and cognitive biases, intersubjectively distinguishable. And, as we hope to have shown, the result is neither coherent nor uncontroversial. Admirable philosophical sophistication cannot avoid the familiar pitfall: ambiguous, ill-defined categories dictated solely by intellectual tradition.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

We close with a reminder of why paradigmatic coherence matters. Our critics incorrectly believe that the primary stake in this debate is the future of realism.¹⁶ Yet our article makes clear, and we reiterate here, that we do not seek to "bury realism." Arguments about power, scarcity, and capabilities, whatever scholars choose to label them, are indispensable to a proper understanding of world politics. The more profound underlying issue is not the viability of the realist paradigm, but the viability of *all paradigms* based on "isms"—liberal, institutionalist, epistemic, or constructivist theory, and whatever else. There is, after all, another alternative to our proposal, namely, to dispense with such paradigmatic labels altogether—a view with which Wohlforth and Schweller flirt. Many contemporary international relations theorists prefer to speak of rationalist versus sociological approaches. Others dispense with all broader theoretical labels. Still others seek to reformulate international relations theory in terms of formal game theory. This, like Hellmann's initial rejection of coherent paradigms, is a respectable position. But why do those who hold it so virulently defend the term "realism"? What is puzzling among our critics is the simultaneous defense of the realist rubric and rejection of any clear standard of paradigmatic coherence. In defending current usage of the term "realism," despite its manifest incoherence, our critics ignore the growing threat to the language of paradigms itself.

We are ultimately agnostics concerning optimal divisions among theoretical positions in international relations theory.¹⁷ Yet an informed choice surely depends in part on whether more (if still not perfectly) coherent and distinct paradigms can be formulated, and whether they can then be synthesized in an empirically useful way. Accordingly, we have started by challenging theorists, including ourselves, to formulate such paradigms. None of these demands is specific to realism, but realist theories will play an essential role in any paradigmatic debate.¹⁸ To return full circle to our initial point, any

16. This is clear from our critics' speculations about our motives. Taliaferro warns: "Let us be clear: Legro and Moravcsik do not seek to revitalize realism; they seek to discredit it." Schweller adds: "Like foxes guarding the chicken coop, Legro and Moravcsik want us to believe that they are sincerely troubled by the current 'ill health' of realism." This sort of outright speculation about motives is neither relevant to scholarly debate nor, as it happens, correct.

17. We are heartened, however, to detect some signs of convergence that may make the choice less urgent. Recent writings by leading rational choice theorists, for example, offer a similar distinction between preferences and strategies, and multistage synthesis involving preference formation, interstate bargaining, and institutional construction, as suggested by our model. Cf. David Lake and Robert Powell, eds., *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

18. For our criticisms of the overextension of other paradigms, see Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously," 536–541; and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Something Rotten in the State of Denmark?"

discussion of what realism can and cannot do necessarily must rest on a clear formulation of what realism is and what it is not—a task our five respondents have essentially avoided. The most useful step might therefore be for realists to accept the two challenges that opened this essay: Provide a defensible set of core realist assumptions, and explain precisely which midrange hypotheses they include and exclude. Wouldn't anyone see this as desirable? Shouldn't everyone care?

—Jeffrey W. Legro
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—Andrew Moravcsik
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Constructivism and European Integration," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Special Issue 2000, "The Social Construction of Europe," pp. 661–684.

