Glossary of Theoretical Terms

Advocacy coalition framework

An approach from policy analysis that identifies (a) the significance of knowledge in the policy process and (b) the role of groups of like-minded activists united by common belief systems who seek to influence policy agendas.

Behaviouralism

A movement of great significance in post-war political science that sought to produce law-like generalizations about political life based upon sophisticated, often quantitative, research into individual and collective political behaviour. A major influence on both *neofunctionalism* and *transactionalism*.

Constructivism

Increasingly influential theoretical approach in contemporary International Relations. It begins from the premise that the world is social rather than material. Actors' interests and identities are not 'given'. Rather, they arise in situations of interaction and are thereby socially constructed. This means that stable patterns in international politics are the consequence of shared understandings among actors about their environment, their respective roles and so on.

Dependent variable

The phenomenon analysts are trying to explain. An issue of some confusion in EC/EU studies.

Domestic politics approach

A framework that retains the idea of states as central players in the integration process, but which – unlike *realist* International Relations – sees governmental preferences arising within processes of domestic politics. Governments remain the 'gatekeepers' between national politics and the EU system.

Epistemic communities

An approach to agenda setting, particularly in global politics, that places a premium on the role of expertise and knowledge more generally. Epistemic communities are transnational groups united by their shared beliefs and conceptions of scientific validity. They supply knowledge, usually about technical policy matters, and thereby help to frame the interests and preferences of policy actors (notably states).

Epistemology

The strategies through which a particular theory gathers knowledge and ensures that its reading of phenomena is superior to rival theories.

Federal functionalism

Another term for *neofunctionalism*.

Federalism

A theoretical project closely linked to the movement to create a 'United States of Europe'. Traditionally, federalists have been interested in the creation of constitutional settlements that define the relationships between several layers of authority (European, national and local). Some federalists took the view that this was a rational way to order human affairs (a) because different tasks could be accomplished best at different levels and (b) because a federal settlement would eradicate the rationale for war in Europe. More recently, federalist theory has become interested in (a) the processes through which federalist polities arise and (b) the extent to which the EU can be compared usefully to existing forms of federalism.

Functionalism

A theory proposing the radical transformation of international politics associated most notably with David Mitrany. Functionalists argue that the primary motivation of government should be the fulfilment of human needs. Unfortunately, the territorial nation-state is an irrational mechanism for this purpose, based as it is on the perpetuation of particular dogmas. The effective management of human need requires agencies geared specifically to individual tasks. The form that these agencies take will be dependent upon the function that they are required to perform. This means that functionalists espouse flexibility and are particularly reluctant to support large-scale schemes of regional integration.

Functional approach to institutions

A recent approach from International Relations that explores the reasons why states opt to create international institutions. It assumes that institutions arise because they fulfil certain collective interests among states such as the need to reduce transaction costs in international bargains.

Globalization

A term with many complex implications usually used to describe widespread and far-reaching social, economic and political change in the contemporary world. In particular, globalization describes the radical interpenetration of economies to the extent that states are no longer able to exercise meaningful authority over their territories.

Historical institutionalism

An approach that investigates the long-term implications of institutional choices made at a particular time. It assumes that actors are not perfectly knowledgeable about the consequences of their choices and suggests, therefore, that present behaviour is constrained by the locking into place of past choices.

Independent variables

Those factors that may provide explanations for phenomena under investigation.

Interdependence

A term used to describe the increasing array of interconnections in the international system, particularly between economies and societies. In International Relations, the idea has been used as the foundation for explaining the appearance of international institutions and regimes. These are often explained as the product of attempts by states to 'manage' interdependence.

Intergovernmentalism

An approach to integration that treats states, and national governments in particular, as the primary actors in the integration process. Various intergovernmentalist approaches have been developed in the literature and these claim to be

able to explain both periods of radical change in the EU (because of converging governmental preferences) and periods of inertia (due to diverging national interests). Intergovernmentalism is distinguishable from *realism* and *neorealism* because of its recognition of both the significance of institutionalization in international politics and the impact of processes of domestic politics upon governmental preferences.

Liberal–idealist International Relations

A view of international relations that is firmly optimistic about the prospects for human progress and the end of war. Liberals are keen to emphasize that the states system so beloved of *realism* is neither inevitable nor desirable. The construction of international institutions and the spread of commerce and human interaction across borders form the basis for the transcendence of the *Westphalian* order.

Liberal intergovernmentalism

A variant of intergovernmentalism developed in the work of Andrew Moravcsik. Demands for integration arise within processes of domestic politics whereas integration outcomes are supplied as consequence of intergovernmental negotiations. Supranational institutions are of limited importance to processes of integration.

Marxism

Large-scale theory of political economy and social change that tends to focus on changing patterns of production and economic relations more generally as the basis for explaining political forms. However, Marxism is not susceptible to easy definition and in many accounts the state and ideas are granted more autonomy. Nonetheless, most Marxist work is rooted in a critique of the inequities of capitalism and seeks to reveal the prospects for significant ruptures with the existing order of things.

Multi-level governance

A metaphor used to depict the mature stage of the EU polity. Authority is dispersed rather than concentrated and political action occurs at and between various levels of governance. The idea also implies that the number of significant actors within the EU polity has multiplied and, therefore, that state-centric conceptions of integration carry only limited explanatory power.

Neofunctionalism

Important and influential theory of regional integration first formulated in the light of the early experiences of the European Communities. Neofunctionalists maintain that political integration and the growth of authority at the supranational level occur as a long-term consequence of modest economic integration. Integration in one sector creates pressures for integration in related sectors, and so on. This process is called functional spillover. The success of integration initiatives draws self-interested groups of actors into the game (political spillover) and both forms of spillover are promoted by purposeful supranational institutions. The theory suffered significant criticism throughout the 1960s but has proved to be resilient and influential.

Neoliberal institutionalism

A school in International Relations that seeks to account for the growth of institutionalization in world politics without losing sight of the centrality of states and the operation of rational self-seeking action.

Neorealism

Sophisticated restatement of *realism* that explains the perpetuation of the states system with reference to the structural properties of 'anarchy' rather than the inherent characteristics of states.

New institutionalism

A broad movement in contemporary political science that seeks to reinstate and refine the study of institutions as important variables in political life.

Normative

An approach to theory that seeks to validate certain claims and to use reasoning to support them.

Ontology

The view held by a theory about the nature of the world.

Pluralism

An approach to political science that emphasizes groups as the core matter of politics. Pluralists depict society as composed of various interests that coalesce into groups to pursue political goals. Policy outcomes reflect the state's processing of group demands. A major influence upon *neofunctionalism*.

Policy-network analysis

An approach to policy-making that looks for the existence of relatively stable and closed communities of actors that effectively control policy-making in particular sectors. This shifts emphasis away from the study of formal decision-making procedures.

Rational choice institutionalism

An approach to institutions concerned with how actors use such venues to pursue their interests. Institutions may constrain actors' abilities to realize these interests, but they also reduce the risks of interaction by lowering transaction costs.

Realism

Hugely important theory of international politics that emphasizes the centrality of states and the prevailing condition of anarchy. States are self-interested to the extent that they value survival above all else, thereby ensuring the primacy of security as the main issue in international politics. Realists are (a) pessimistic about the capacity of international institutions to change these basic premises and (b) adamant that international and domestic politics are very different types of political arena.

Regime theory

A close relation of *neoliberal institutionalism* that explores the growth of issue-specific rules, norms and procedures that seem to influence the expectations of actors in international politics They are normally seen as providing guiding frameworks for joint problem-solving in international politics.

Regionalism

The tendency of geographically-proximate territories or states to engage in economic integration and to form free trade areas and (possibly) common markets.

Security community

A group of states amongst whom the prospect of war is eradicated. A situation achieved via processes described by *transactionalism*.

Sociological institutionalism

An approach to institutions emphasizing their capacity to socialize actors and thereby influence interests and identities.

Sociology of knowledge

A phrase suggesting that intellectual activity is a social process like any other, characterized by norms and rules that are likely to be specific to particular periods, environments and places. A sociology of knowledge approach requires that the broader intellectual and academic contexts of theories are identified.

Structure–agency debate

A key theoretical debate in the social sciences, raising important questions about the nature of social change and the capacities for human action. It explores the issue of how agents (individual and collective human actors) and structures (the various facets of the human environment) are related. Agent-centred theories give scope to the capacity of action to transform structures, whereas structuralists see agents largely bound by the imperatives of their environment. Others, notably structurationists, have argued that while structures constrain agents, they are nevertheless the product of human creativity. This means that structures and agents simultaneously enable and constrain each other. The latter position is a major premise of *constructivism*.

Supranationalism

The development of authoritative institutions of governance and networks of policy-making activity above the nation-state.

Technocracy

Government by expertise rather than by ideological precept. The view that the tasks of government had become largely managerial and technical was a significant influence on both *functionalism* and early *neofunctionalism*.

Transactionalism

A theory of change in international politics associated largely with Karl Deutsch. Sometimes called 'pluralism' or the 'communications' approach, transactionalism explores the development of multiple linkages between societies as the basis for integration. Integration is defined as a condition where war as a means of dispute settlement between states becomes obsolete. See also *security communities*.

Two-level games

A popular approach suggesting (a) that governments are faced with strategic dilemmas in both domestic politics and international negotiations and (b) that government actions at one level feed into the other level. Governmental preferences in international negotiations are determined by processes of domestic political bargaining. At the same time, the policy outputs of international negotiations feed back into domestic politics. An influence on *liberal intergovernmentalism*.

Westphalian

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) which ended the 'Thirty Years War' in Europe established the territorial nation-state as the dominant and preferred mode of political authority. In particular, the Treaty ensured that national monarchies were sovereign over their national territories and thus that the power of external bodies (notably the Church) over the internal affairs of kingdoms was seriously truncated. Therefore, a Westphalian view of the state describes a government with internal sovereignty over its own territory and an international system made up of these authoritative units and lacking serious authority above the nation-state.