Integrating Economic and Sociological Approaches to International Relations?

A Classic Puzzle and the Logic of Synthesis

Tristan Volpe and Robert Adcock

tvolpe@gwu.edu; adcockr@gwu.edu

Department of Political Science
The George Washington University


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Abstract

Our paper is motivated by the rationalism / constructivism contrast in the International Relations (IR) field. By reinterpreting this contrast we seek to redirect reflection about theoretical synthesis in the field. Our argument has four steps. First, we introduce a broader intellectual setting for the rationalism / constructivism contrast by situating it as a contemporary iteration of the economic / sociological contrast classically articulated throughout the history of the modern social sciences. Second, we pragmatically give concrete content to each side of this contrast in relation to recent IR. Engagement with Weber and Parsons helps us to subdivide the economic side into parametric vs. strategic variants, and the sociological in terms of traditional vs. value-rational action. Third, we argue that synthesis of economic and sociological approaches is both viable and desirable in concrete studies of strategic interaction. Fourth, to conclude, we compare our argument to recent efforts to promote analytic eclecticism in political science.
Our paper is motivated by the rationalism / constructivism contrast in the contemporary International Relations (IR) field. By resituating this contrast we seek to redirect, perhaps even revitalize, reflection about theoretical synthesis in the field. Our argument has four steps. First, we introduce a broader intellectual setting for today’s rationalism / constructivism contrast by situating it as a recent iteration of the economic / sociological contrast classically rearticulated throughout the history of the modern social sciences. Second, we pragmatically ascribe concrete contemporary content to each side of this contrast in relation to IR scholarship. Engagement with Weber and Parsons helps us to elucidate economic approaches as subdivided between parametric and strategic variants, and sociological approaches as concerned with both traditional and value-rational action. Third, we ask if economic and sociological approaches in IR may be productively synthesized, and argue that synthesis is both logically viable and substantively desirable within concrete studies of strategic interaction, using as an example early work of Robert Jervis. Fourth, to conclude, we compare Parsons’ arguments about political science and the dual-core practice of economic-sociological synthesis we find in Jervis to the “analytic eclecticism” being promoted in political science today.

“Economic” and “Sociological” Approaches: A Historical Introduction

The contrast between economic and sociological approaches has been a recurring concern ever since Comte coined “sociology” in the 1830s to name the science with which he proposed to supplant the older field of political economy (Comte 1875: Bk VI; Hayek 1980). Comte saw this contrast in terms of a politically-charged philosophical divide: sociology expressed his “positive philosophy,” which sought to inspire and inform social reorganization in support of a “positive polity” of technocratic corporatism, whereas political economy perpetuated an older “negative
philosophy” able only to criticize. Such differences were, however, sidelined when John Stuart Mill introduced the economic / sociological contrast to English-language audiences in his 1843 *A System of Logic*. Mill’s (2006: Bk VI) treatment focused on differences in the way that political economy and Comtean sociology each ordered inductive and deductive reasoning. The economic / sociological contrast was thereby rearticulated by Mill as a fine-grained distinction in method.

The shift from Comte to Mill shows that, within a decade of its first use, the economic / sociological contrast had already acquired an adaptable content. It would receive another classic reformulation in Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (1978: Part 1) as interpreted, extended, and translated by Talcott Parsons (Parsons 1937; Weber 1947). For Weber, and after him Parsons, the distinguishing trait of economics was its theoretical focus on instrumentally rational action. But such action was only one of several analytically differentiable types of social action. From this Weberian starting point sociology could be unpacked in three ways: 1) as an encyclopedic theoretical endeavor seeking the most general analytical frameworks for social science, such as the typology of social action; 2) as a special field whose focus is identified residually vis-à-vis economics as non-instrumental social action; or 3) as a special field with a positively identified theoretical focus within non-instrumental social action. Parsons saw Weber as leaning toward the first approach, but advocated for the third. He proposed that sociological theory focus upon “the institutionalization of patterns of value-orientation in the social system” (Parsons 1951: 552).

Even as its content has been adapted the economic / sociological contrast has recurrently spurred the same classic puzzle: how do and should the two sides of the contrast relate? Answers have varied alongside the contrast’s content. Comte introduced the contrast in *competitive* terms.

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1 This is Parsons’ mature formulation of his proposed focus for sociological theory. It refines his views in *Structure of Social Action* (1937: 768) in light of his engagement with systems theory in *The Social System* (1951). Parsons was also very concerned with developing the theory of action as an overarching framework for the social sciences. But he came to see this as an endeavor best pursued, not by sociological theorists alone, but via interdisciplinary collaboration. See the various contributions in Parsons and Shils, eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action* (1951).
But it was not an equal competition: Comte set up one side—the economic—as outdated, and the other—the sociological—as the dawn of a new scientific era. When Mill reframed the contrast as a fine-grained distinction in method he also reformulated the relation between its two sides. Mill presented Comte’s sociology and the older field of political economy in *complementary* terms, suggesting that each was suited to different substantive topics. Finally, in Weber and Parsons, we find a third formulation that elucidates the character and contribution of *synthetic* work. Weber’s typology of social action was ideal-typical: he saw his types, while analytically differentiated, as interacting in diverse ways in concrete phenomena. Extending this perspective, Parsons (1937: 597-99, 757-75; 1951: Chap. XII) differentiated between “analytical” social sciences (including economics, and he argued, sociology)—which spotlight select elements of social action to focus theory development—and “synthetic” sciences—which apply more than one analytical theory in order to adequately interpret and explain concrete social phenomena.²

Parsons offered two views of where political science stands relative to his basic division of social scientific labor. He initially saw political science as akin to economics and sociology: like those fields its distinctive task was developing its own analytical theory, which in political science focused on “power relations and order in so far as it may be regarded as a solution of the struggle for power” (1937: 768). But Parsons later changed his mind as he came to conclude that political power is too diffuse a phenomenon to anchor its own analytical theory. In his later work he instead presented political science as an exemplar of synthetic science. Its task was, as such, applying theoretical arguments drawn from economics, sociology, or other analytical sciences to explain concrete phenomena, with the particular theories combined in any given explanation left open to vary flexibly across the diffuse phenomena of politics (1951: 551). The task of synthetic

² Parsons introduced this differentiation in *Structure of Social Action* (1937) as “analytical” vs. “historical” sciences, but switched in *The Social System* (1951) to the labels “analytical” vs. “synthetic.” This shift in labels accompanies his reclassification, which we discuss in the next paragraph, of political science from first to the second category.
science Parsons here prescribed for political science shares much with the practices today being promoted by Sil and Katzenstein (2010) as “analytic eclecticism.” They favor pragmatism as the philosophical stance best suited to analytic eclecticism, and it is in a pragmatic vein that we take up Weber and Parsons as our departure point in adapting the economic / sociological contrast to rethink the rationalism / constructivism contrast in contemporary IR.  

Our motivation to adopt Weber and Parsons as a departure point arises from two features of theoretical trends and turns in political science, and IR more specifically. First, the change in Parsons’ view of political science may be productively analogized to post-Waltzian trends in IR theory. The effort to articulate a unified analytical theory focused on power envisioned by early Parsons is exemplified with reference to international politics by Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). More recent IR theorists have, however, found Waltz’s theory underspecified and sought clarification via turning to rational-choice (a.k.a. economic) theory—a turn recently given integrated treatment in Glaser’s *Rational Theory of International Politics* (2010)—or to sociological theory, as in Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999). The IR trend toward what we could call “theories with adjectives” adds up, in effect, to a series of admissions that political scientists have, as Parsons concluded, to apply theoretical resources from elsewhere in the social sciences. His viewpoint had, moreover, further content that remains relevant today: it stressed the plurality of the theoretical resources to be applied, and their flexible combination in explaining concrete phenomena, rather than in efforts to articulate a unified theory of politics.

Our second motivation for adopting Weber and Parsons as a departure point arises from conceptual legacies of the way the economic / sociological contrast entered political science, and

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3 In taking up Weber and Parsons as our departure point on pragmatic grounds we do not assume or imply that the content they gave to the economic / sociological contrast is somehow inherently superior to the earlier articulations of Comte and Mill. Rather we judge it better suited to our goal in this paper: revisiting and adapting this contrast in a manner that elucidates the logic of, and encourages the practice of, analytically eclectic explanations in the IR field.
IR in particular. This contrast became a notable part of political science debates during the 1970s rise of rational choice theory into the discipline’s mainstream. The rise was promoted at the time as a critical turn away from the prior trend of political scientists—perhaps most famously Gabriel Almond (1956, 1960)—who had engaged the systems theory and structural-functionalism of late Parsons. Both behavioral-era engagement with Parsons, and his later role as a straw man against which rational choice theory could articulate its claim to constitute scientific advance, together made him a major influence on, indeed a lead exemplar of, what some political scientists have taken “sociological” theory to be. The legacy of this association lives on. Consider, for example, Goddard and Nexon’s (2005) recovery of Parsons’ impact on IR systems theory, which they use to highlight underappreciated Parsonian moments in Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Based on their identification of such moments Goddard and Nexon stir controversy by labeling Waltz’s theory with the “sociological” label most commonly associated in IR today with constructivism. It is, however, far from obvious if the particular traits Waltz shares with Parsons can be productively used to label his theory “sociological.” To adjudicate this issue we revisit the initial content and later consequences of the past association of Parsons with sociological theory, and update that association pragmatically in light of more recent trends and turns in IR.

The most canonical political science articulation of the economic / sociological contrast is Brian Barry’s *Sociologists, Economists, and Democracy* (1970). Barry fleshed out the contrast in

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4 Rational choice theory first developed during the 1950s and 1960s but—with the exception of William Riker and the Rochester department he led—it had little resonance in political science more widely in these decades. On the interdisciplinary history of rational choice theory in these decades, see Amadae (2003).

5 The behavioral-era engagement with Parsons was not a full-fledged embrace. Behavioral political scientists, such as David Easton and Gabriel Almond, whose interest in systems theory has led them to be seen as Parsonian, sought a unified theory of politics based on an analytical conception of the “political system” as a relatively autonomous system. But, as we stressed, the later Parsons saw politics as too diffuse to ground such a theory and instead ascribed to political science a focus on applying analytical tools from other fields, such as the “social system,” to explain concrete outcomes. In the heyday of systems theory, the contrast between studying politics via the analytical lens of the “political system” vs. the “social system” was a key divide between political scientists and sociologists, but with the decline of this mode of theorizing the import of this divide has been all but lost to the retrospective gaze.
an accessible survey of how two theoretical approaches—the first “sociological” (with Parsons a key figure), and the second “economic” (equated with rational choice)—came into debate within the study of democracy. Barry’s book was subsequently credited by Ronald Rogowski (1978: 297) to be, more generally, the “most lucid” and “most influential statement of these opposed alternatives.” He objected only to Barry’s label “economic,” preferring the term “rationalist” that Keohane (1988) would later help to popularize in IR. By pioneering the application of economic theory to the study of firm production factors, electoral constituencies, and trade policy patterns, Rogowski (1987; 1989) would later become a progenitor the Open Economy Politics (OEP) approach to International Political Economy. Both Barry more broadly, and Rogowski more specifically for IR, helped spread what we might call a reverse-Comtean view of the relation between economic (a.k.a. rationalist) and sociological theories: it was an unequal competition, but with economic approaches now appearing as the scientific wave of the future.

When giving content to the two sides of their competitive contrast, Barry and Rogowski present a Mill-Weber/Parsons hybridization of methods and substantive theoretical foci. Barry introduces economic approaches as deducing general hypotheses from parsimonious axioms about the logic of individual rational choice (1970: 5). He introduces sociological approaches, by

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6 For a full articulation of the Open Economy Politics (OEP) approach and overview of its development see Lake (2009). As a proponent of this approach, Lake is unequivocal in celebrating economic theorizing as the motor of scientific advance, claiming: “OEP has arisen as an emergent paradigm in the field of IPE” primarily because it “emphasizes deductive rigor. Political scientists, especially, have benefited from powerful theories developed in economics” that facilitate “scientific accumulation” (2009: 230). The recent work of Christina Davis exemplifies how the OEP approach can specify causal mechanisms by which interstate negotiations overcome collective action barriers at the domestic level (2003: 38, 43). Yet as Oately (2010) points out in criticism, the OEP approach often ignores the international level of strategic interaction in generating propositions on domestic policy preferences.

7 It might be debated how fully Barry intended this framing in his original 1970 book. But he later helped secure primacy for competitive views of the economic / sociological contrast by savaging (Barry 1977a; 1977b) the early effort at theoretical synthesis made by Gabriel Almond and his co-authors in Crisis, Choice, and Change (1973). These later arguments of Barry were again well received in Rogowski’s arguments about rationalism (1983: 737).

8 We will quote from Barry, but parallel content is found in Rogowski (1978: 297-300). While we see Barry’s book as highly influential in political science, it does not alone deserve credit (or blame) for views in the discipline. The content of Barry’s economic / sociological contrast, and his competitive framing of their relation, only exemplifies a more widely found standpoint. We find that standpoint a little later in Rogowski under slightly different labels, but also a little earlier under the labels rational-choice models vs. functionalist/conformist theories in Harsanyi (1969).
contrast, as abandoning “the advantages of a simplified or schematic psychology” to replace the clear logic of rational utility maximization with underspecified claims about “the development and change of motives” on the level of “whole societies or even all societies” (1970: 6). Barry here takes the social holism of the later Parsons as a defining characteristic of a sociological approach. He hence presents sociological approaches as involving both a substantive theoretical focus on “motives,” presented in contrast to rational choice, and methodological holism, seen as relying on vague inductive claims in contrast to a tight deductive logic rooted in individualism.

We need not assess if Barry did justice to sociological studies of democracy to recognize that his presentation could not be generalized to sociological theory writ large. The lineage from Weber to early Parsons to late Parsons in itself testifies eloquently to the methodological variety of sociological theory. It encapsulates Weber’s methodological individualism, the early work of Parsons which foreshadows Anthony Giddens (1983) “structurational” interest in the recursive constitution of agents and structures, as well the often maligned social holism of later Parsons. Moreover, as we will see in our third section when discussing Robert Jervis’s (1970) work on strategic interaction, sociology of the 1950s-60s also encompassed other agendas potentially exciting for political scientists, not least Erving Goffman’s (1959; 1969) theoretically rich micro-level studies of interaction dynamics.

A problematic consequence of Barry’s elevating holism into a definitional characteristic of sociological theory is exemplified in IR in Robert Gilpin’s War and Change in World Politics (1981: ix-xiii). Gilpin opens his preface by discussing Barry’s analysis of “two of the foremost approaches to theorizing in contemporary social science: the sociological and economic.” He notes Barry’s method-based characterization of “the holistic approach of sociological theory,” but sidelines issues of substantive focus. Hence “norms and values” are noted only in passing as
an optional concern of sociological theory. With attention narrowed to holistic method, Gilpin can flag Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* as “indicative of the value of the sociological approach (or systems approach) to the theory of IR.” Seeing Waltz as a sociological theorist then enables Gilpin to take his own debt to systems theory to establish that *War and Change in World Politics* draws on the “sociological approach” as well the “economic approach” (1981: xiii).

Gilpin’s view of sociological theory might seem anomalous if it had not been revived in Goddard and Nexon (2005). Their labeling of Waltz as sociological similarly sidelines issues of substantive theoretical focus. The Parsonian moments they find in Waltz (1979) involve holistic systems theory and debts to structural-functionalism. In using these to label Waltz sociological they interpret this term in connection with the methods of Parsons’ later work, rather than his career-long substantive focus upon normative- and value-orientation and their place in social integration and institutionalization. While Waltz does mention “socialization” his attention to this process is far from sufficient to treat his theory as sociological in any substantive sense. If the term “sociological” is to be productively applied in IR theory discussions today it must, we insist, be extricated from its past, and by now outdated, definitional association with holism.

Extraction from the holism / individualism contrast is, moreover, a pragmatic imperative of equal importance for discussing “economic” approaches in contemporary IR. Conceiving of methodological individualism as foundational to economic (a.k.a. rationalist) approaches helped scholars in the 1970s position rational choice theory in competitive contrast with behavioral-era

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9 Waltz (1979: Chap 4) first introduces “socialization” and “competition” on equal terms as two processes through which the structure of the international system affects the behavior of states within it. But the competition process comes to dominate after Waltz introduces (1979: Chap 5) his famous micro-economic analogy between states and firms in an oligopolistic market. This analogy drives the substantive arguments of subsequent chapters (1979: Chap 6-8). The way that Waltz’s micro-economic analogy trumps his initial opening to socialization is, we believe, hard to square with a characterization of Waltz’s theory as substantively sociological.
theorizing that drew on holistic systems and structural-functional theory. But this conception had some very significant substantive implications for IR theory that Rogowski drew out explicitly:

> The premise of rational choice applies solely to individuals. Statements of the form, ‘The nation-state seeks always to maximize its power,’ are not rationalist, unless they are derived by strict logic from rationalist premises about individual behavior (1978: 300).

Rogowski here pitted rationalism defined in individualist terms against one potential formulation of realist IR theory. But a narrow equation of rationalism with individualism would also entail that neo-liberal IPE theories treating firms, unions, or other economic actors with rational choice theory are not properly rationalist unless they derive group-level proposition from “rationalist premises about individual behavior.” Thus according to Rogowski’s stance as stated here much of the strand of IPE Rogowski later helped establish would not count as rationalist. Indeed most work called rationalist in IR today, whether realist or neo-liberal, would not count. The fact that defining rationalism in narrowly individualist terms leads to conclusions so at odds with today’s IR presents, we believe, pragmatic grounds on which to reject that definition. We would instead suggest that the unitary rational actor assumption of contemporary economic approaches in IR has the same standing—it is an analytical simplifications to be judged pragmatically in light of the usefulness of the theories it helps construct—when applied at the state level of analysis or at the level of firms or unions, as when applied at the level of human individuals.10

In sum, philosophy of social science talk about methodological individualism and holism is best treated as tangential to the contrast between economic (a.k.a. rationalist) and sociological

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10 The philosophical language of “methodological individualism” vs. “holism” took shape in criticisms of attributing agential traits to society as a whole or to social classes. Confusion can arise if this language is unreflectively brought into political science with its longstanding concern with the full range of legal persons: not just human individuals, but also the state and other collective bodies legally constituted by the state as unitary agents with rights and duties under the law. These collectivities are constituted as agents, and moreover unitary agents, in a way neither societies nor classes are. It is philosophically underspecified what, if any, implications follow for the study of collective legal persons from arguments about ascribing agential traits to societies or classes. At least one of our authors (Adcock) would find the unitary rational actor assumption philosophically equally plausible in application to all legal persons, individual or collective, but implausible in application to society (local, national, or international) or social classes.
(a.k.a. constructivist) approaches in IR today. Invoking the phrases confuses the content of each side in this contrast. Moreover, needlessly stipulating that economic and sociological approaches use divergent methodologies raises unnecessary logical hurdles to the pursuit of explanations of concrete phenomena that would employ analytical resources from both sides of the contrast.

**Economic and Sociological Approaches: Adapting a Classic Contrast for Contemporary IR**

Having extracted the economic / sociological contrast from its outdated association with methodological individualism / holism, we now turn to the task of giving this classic contrast a more concrete content that can elucidate theoretical trends, turns, and entanglements in recent IR. Our starting point here is Weber’s famous typology of social action. After reminding readers of the typology and introducing how we relate it to the economic / sociological contrast, we devote subsections to refining our account of each side of this contrast, moving beyond our Weberian starting point via combined engagement with Parsons and examples from post-Waltz IR theory.

Weber famously classifies social action in terms of four ideal types (1978: 24-25):

1. **instrumentally rational (zweckrational)**, that is, determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’ for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends;
2. **value-rational (wertrational)**, that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success;
3. **affectual** (especially emotional), that is, determined by the actor’s specific affects and feeling states;
4. **traditional**, that is, determined by ingrained habituation

Weber stressed that this “classification of the modes of orientation of action” was “in no sense meant to exhaust the possibilities” (1978: 26). In starting from it we are, in turn, even less

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11 For Weber “action” refers to “the concrete phenomenon of human behavior” when, and only when, “the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior.” In turn, “action is ‘social’ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others.” See Weber (1978: 4) and Talcott Parson’s translation endnote 3 (pp. 57), regarding the specific German terms and their equivalents in English.
exhaustive. We deliberately put aside Weber’s affectual action type as a focus for psychological and social-psychological approaches, as distinct from either side of the economic / sociological contrast. Following Weber we take instrumentally rational action to be especially characteristic of “economic action” in “a ‘free’ market” while also believing that such action “is by no means confined to such cases” (1978: 30). This stance makes plausible the construction of economic theory via an analytical focus on instrumentally rational action. But it, at the same time, suggests potential to apply the resulting theories to phenomena beyond the “‘free’ market” realm, such as, in rationalist IR, security dynamics as well as international political economy. Finally, we take Weber’s remaining types, value-rational and traditional action, as the twin focus of sociological theory. Attending to both, while keeping the distinction between them analytically clear, is, we believe, essential to elucidate constructivist theorizing about norms and values.

“Economic” Approaches to IR: Parametric vs. Strategic Rationality

Economic approaches share a common theoretical focus upon instrumentally rational action. Both ends and expectations are central to the way that Weber defines this type of action. Elaborating on his definition’s phrase “rationally pursued and calculated ends,” Weber explains that this “involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends.” An instrumentally rational actor relates to “alternative and conflicting ends” as a set of “subjective wants” that can be arranged in “a scale,” and he orients “his action to this scale in such a way that they [his subjective wants] are satisfied as far as possible in order of urgency, as

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13 Here we part ways with Weber, who understood all four of his types of action to be “sociologically important types” (1978: 26) in a manner suggesting an encyclopedic view of sociology as articulating general analytical frameworks for social science.
formulated in the principle of ‘marginal utility’” (1978: 26). Weber here foreshadows the now familiar traits of standard rational choice theory: its emphasis on identifying not only the goals of actors, but the full set of strategies they choose among; and its assumption of a consistent scale of transitive preferences across all outcomes, with the calculation which such a scale enables of the relative costs and benefits of each strategy in terms of expected utility.\(^{14}\)

If the *ends* element of Weber’s conception of instrumental rationality highlights general traits of rational choice theory, its *expectations* element points toward a major distinction within economic approaches. Weber takes care to highlight in his definition that “expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings” may be “used as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’” (1978: 24). Parsons later elucidated this somewhat cryptic emphasis in terms of the “situation” in which an “actor” acts. The situation is “analyzable into two elements: those over which the actor has no control, that is which he cannot alter, or prevent from being altered” and “those over which he has such control,” where the “former may be termed the ‘conditions’ of action, the latter the ‘means’” (1937: 44). The differentiation between what actors can and cannot influence in their situation (a.k.a. environment)—and correspondingly what elements of their situation, including the behavior of other human beings, they take as “conditions” and what as “means”—underlies the distinction between *parametric* and *strategic* rationality as sub-types of

\(^{14}\) These are, of course, idealized assumptions and calculations rarely fully found in actual action. But this is exactly what we expect since Weber conceptualized instrumental rationality as an *ideal-type*. If some IR scholars—whether proponents or critics of rational choice theory—treat full-fledged instrumental rationality as a concrete type rather than an ideal type, the predictive, explanatory, or critical errors this leads to, are not due to Weber’s conception, or its fleshing out within the analytical framework of rational choice theory, but due to a failure to grasp the character of *analytical* theory. Recognizing the ideal-typicality of instrumental rationality also clarifies its standing relative to other proposed types of rationality, such as bounded rationality or prospect-theory. These types relax one or another aspect of the idealizations in Weber’s instrumental rationality to try to conceptualize types of rationality closer to common human reasoning. In other words, they aspire to construct concrete types. From a Weberian perspective such efforts produce hybrids combining aspects of instrumental rationality with aspects of other ideal types of action, such as traditional or affectual action. On bounded rationality, see Axelrod (1973), Simon (1985), and Tetlock (1999). On prospect theory, see Kahneman and Tversky (1979) and Kaheman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1991).
instrumentally rational action. This distinction offers, as we will show after explicating it, a key with which to grasp the transformation of economic approaches in IR theory of recent decades.

Analyses of *parametric rationality* focus on the way instrumentally rational actors make choices when they expect that their environment will not intentionally adapt to their actions. The environment can include other actors, but only if those actors are expected to choose their actions independently of the choice made by the actor we are analyzing. The classic microeconomics example is a firm in a perfectly competitive market deciding how much to produce. In this ideal-typical market the price of the commodity being produced is, for each firm, an element of their environment that is, in Weber and Parsons’ terms, a “condition” rather than a “means.” Firms do not expect their choice of production level to influence the price at which their output sells. Thus they take price as a fixed parameter in their decision-making. In this environment a firm chooses how much to produce as if it were, in effect, a Robinson Crusoe making independent decisions in a world of fixed parameters. Differential calculus can generate a clear and unique solution for the expected utility maximization problem of such a parametrically rational firm (Elster 1979: 117; Harsanyi 1986: 89). But this analysis is premised on the assumption that no firm in the market can control prices. If a firm could do so we would be analyzing a different market environment (such as an oligopolistic market) in which prices are a “means” not a “condition” for some firms. Then different assumptions and tools would be needed.\(^{15}\) The take-home for IR is that importing *maxima* and *minima* tools from parametric analyses of firm choices in microeconomic theory to state choices in international politics assumes that states are, for the issue at hand, in a decision environment in which it is plausible to treat the choices of other states as fixed parameters.

\(^{15}\) If the environment and decision variables “are under the conscious control of other entities which wish to maximize their utility or profit …We are confronted with a conceptually different situation [e.g. strategic] which cannot be treated in the conventional manner of differential calculus” (Morgenstern 1972: 1166).
Analyses of strategic rationality focus, by contrast, on the way instrumentally rational actors make choices if they expect that other rational actors in their environment could impact relevant decision variables. As opposed to the parametrically rational actor, the strategically rational actor must puzzle through the ramifications for their decisions of “the fact that the environment is made up of other actors, and that he is part of their environment, and that they know this, etc.” (Elster 1979: 18). Homeostatic and dynamic equilibrium analysis might be used here to provide a unique solution for what appears at first to involve an infinite regress (Schelling 1960: 86). But nonetheless, some strategic situations still fail to generate cooperative outcomes, and even simple games like Battle of the Sexes and Chicken generate multiple equilibria.\textsuperscript{16} In the third section of our paper we will highlight how this potential for indeterminacy opens up a door toward synthesis with sociological theory. Our concern for the rest of the current sub-section is, however, to explore how the distinction between parametric and strategic rationality elucidates the transformation of economic approaches within IR scholarship since the early 1980s.

Analyses of parametric and strategic rationality start from different assumptions about the decision environment of actors and use different tools to establish which choices instrumentally rational actors would make. Actors in international politics arguably rarely, if ever, make choices in decision environments in which, while there are other actors, their choices of these actors can be plausibly taken as fixed parameters. Yet, while the assumptions of parametric rationality are rarely approximated within international politics, approaches developed by economists assuming parametric rationality had a major role in IR during the early 1980s. Gilpin (1981) and Bueno de Mesquita (1981a; 1981b) deployed such economic approaches to advance, respectively, theories of systemic change and war initiation. Gilpin’s use of economic theory leaves undefined whether

\textsuperscript{16} Morrow (1994: 91-100) provides an accessible overview of the problems generated by non-zero sum games with multiple Nash equilibria, as well as the use of common conjectures and domination strategies to solve these coordination problems. See also Schelling (1960: 57) and Elster (1979: 119).
or how rational actors make choices in relation to expected reactions of other actors. Thus, the hypotheses he advances consider how states reason about costs and benefits of systemic change without incorporating reasoning about the impact of their actions on the reactions of other states (1981: 10-11). Gilpin thus could not attend, within his theory, to the impact of action-reaction dynamics, such as the security dilemma, on systemic change in international politics.

In a similar fashion, Bueno de Mesquita advanced a model of war initiation that depends largely on the utility function held by an actor combined with the actor’s calculated probability of success in war. Put simply, a state will not go to war if the expected utility of doing so is less than continuing current policy (1981a: 25-31). The calculation of expected utility here assumes a parametrically rational state. Yet it generates choices whose consequences depend upon counter-moves by the adversary. A parametric assumption prevents Bueno de Mesquita from analyzing a major class of negotiated settlements to war that involve strategic rationality. As Wagner noted in a critical review, any effort to bracket interaction “seems doomed to failure” (1984: 423).

A later wave of IR scholars working within the strategic rationality strand of economic analysis advanced critiques of these earlier models. Powell argued that the models of myopic oligopolies used by Gilpin lack clear counterparts in IR because states are neither blind nor parametric. Hence strategic rationality provides a more fruitful framework that can incorporate the shadow of the future, probability of risk calculations, and the security dilemma via a game theoretic model (1991). In the same analytic vein, Fearon (1992; 1995) and Wagner (1994; 2000) responded to Bueno de Mesquita by re-conceptualizing war in terms of a process of interactive negotiation. Since war is costly and its outcome uncertain, there ought to be some negotiated settlement that both sides prefer to fighting. The failure to either locate or agree upon the range involves strategic dynamics that cannot be derived from parametric models.
On a more positive side of the ledger, these scholars used the assumptions and tools of strategic rationality to articulate three substantive theoretical agendas: uncertainty, commitment, and bargaining. A state’s uncertainty over the preferences of an adversary shifts the emphasis in strategic interaction towards costly signals that send information about state type, and thereby reduce probabilistic doubt. A strategic environment may, however, also generate intractable commitment problems: even if states have compatible preferences and infer correct beliefs, they may be unable to settle upon an efficient (i.e. no war) outcome if, for structural reasons, they cannot trust each other to hold up the deal (Fearon 1995). Finally, bargaining over minimally acceptable agreements and among multiple equilibria brings power back into the rational choice framework (Moe 2005). Krasner (1991) and Gruber (2001) show that large powerful states can negotiate for longer, catalyze common conjectures, and shape the basic action choice-set.

In sum, an array of contributions to analyses of uncertainty, commitment, and bargaining among states heralded the apogee of economic analysis in the field of international relations. The evolution of this sophisticated research program since the 1980s was not an automatic byproduct of theorizing focused on instrumentally rational action. Rather, economic approaches within IR underwent a transformative break from parametric to strategic analyses, whether verbal or formal game theoretic, that established an internally coherent and cumulative strategic choice approach.

“Sociological” Approaches to IR: Disaggregating “the Logic of Appropriateness”

The concept of action was the foundation on which Weber proceeded to articulate, step-by-step, his framework of analytical categories in Part 1 of Economy and Society. In building on

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17 While the idea of costly signals stems from the synthetic economic / sociological work of Jervis (1970), discussed in the third section of this paper, important contemporary contributions best exemplified by Fearon (1994) and Kydd (2000/2007) use a strictly economic framework. On the key role probability calculations and uncertainty plays for the defensive strand of realist theory, see Brooks (1997).
Weber, Parsons advanced the theory of action as a common core of the social sciences (or, as he preferred to call them, the sciences of action). A basic building block of this theory as developed by Parsons in *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) is the “action frame of reference.” Particular analytical sciences of action—especially economics and sociology—can be compared in terms of the way that each takes different aspects of this common frame of reference as its focus for more specialized analytical labor. The action frame of reference thus offers us a standpoint from which to situate sociological approaches in IR and compare their focus to that of economic approaches.

Parsons’ action frame of reference seeks to articulate in a single conceptual scheme a set of “elements” found in all action. First, there are one or more *actors*; second, there are the *ends* of the actor/s; third, there is the *situation* in which they act. As noted earlier, this element can, in turn, be sub-divided into *means* and *conditions*. The contrast between parametric and strategic rationality that we used to elucidate the transformation of economic approaches in IR involves, if seen in light of Parsons’ conceptual scheme, relations between the *actor* and *situation* elements of the action frame of reference. When we turn our attention to sociological theory what is most important, however, is Parsons’ inclusion of one final element in the action frame of reference: *norms* toward which *actors* are oriented as they relate their *ends* to their *situation*. Normative orientation is, Parsons argues, “an independent, determinative selective factor” affecting what actions actors take, and as such, “essential to the concept of action.” Unless norms are included along with the other elements of the action frame of reference, it is, Parsons insists, “impossible to have a meaningful description of an act” (1937: 44-45, 732-33).

An emphasis on “norms” and the “normative” is, of course, common in constructivism in contemporary IR. But Parsons’ conception stands apart from most usage today. If IR scholars now tend to contrast attention to norms against the focus on instrumental rationality of economic
approaches, from the perspective of the action frame of reference such rationality is itself a normative orientation. For Parsons what norms do is to select “a certain mode of relationship” between the other elements of the action frame. In other words, they select how actors relate to their situation and ends. Hence, for example, actors oriented by the “norm of rationality” are directed to sub-divide their situation into means and conditions, to reason consequentially about how available means can serve their ends, and to act on these means in the way they expect will best advance their ends (1937: 44-45, 65). Instrumental rationality is the yet more specified mode of normative orientation that adds to the basic norm of rationality the further direction that actors think about their ends in the calculated manner we earlier explicated: i.e. in terms of a subjective utility scale. The Parsonian action frame of reference can hence elucidate the focus of economic theory without charging economic approaches with denying any directive significance to norms. From this perspective economic theory assumes instrumental rationality as a mode of normative orientation, and thereby focuses its intellectual labor on developing models and tools to analyze how actors directed by this norm would make choices.

The tight focus of economic theory leaves open, of course, a wide array of intellectual agendas for other sciences of action. Within analytical theory these would include, for example: 1) typologizing the various modes of normative orientation that can direct actors relative to their situation and ends; or 2) taking an orientation other than instrumental rationality as a focusing assumption and analyzing how actors directed by it should act. For scholars more interested in developing concrete explanations than analytical theory, the stress on norms in the Parsonian action frame of reference could suggest, for example: 1) explaining the spread or decline of a mode of normative orientation; or 2) explaining a change in recurring concrete patterns of action (a.k.a. institutions) in terms of how different modes of normative orientation interacted within
the chain of actions producing that change. Usage of the phrase “sociological” is more diffuse than “economic” because all such agendas, analytical and explanatory, are called “sociological.”

Within this array of agendas we believe a clear treatment of the first typological agenda is especially important, both because it in principle analytically facilitates each of the other agendas outlined, and because it is in practice especially pressing for elucidating constructivist arguments in contemporary IR. March and Olsen (1998) is probably the most influential work that has taken up this agenda in connection with recent IR. Focusing on “the basic logic of action” March and Olsen contrast two logics, the “logic of expected consequences” and “logic of appropriateness,” and identify the latter as the centerpiece of constructivist arguments. In their approach March and Olsen echo Weber and Parsons in multiple ways: they take action as their conceptual foundation, they stress that their contrast is analytical and its sides intermingle in concrete phenomena, and they suggest that political science focus on drawing together analytical logics within concrete explanations. While March and Olsen echo much of the approach of classic works in the theory of action, they display, however, little awareness that they are doing so. We find this problematic since their contrast between the logic of appropriateness and the logic of expected consequences is in effect, we would suggest, simply a reformulation for the classic Weberian contrast between traditional and rational action, but without Weber’s nuanced analytical sub-division of the latter in terms of his paired ideal-types of instrumentally rational and value-rational action.

March and Olsen’s arguments have been critically unpacked by Ole Sending (2002) who carefully documents their inability to accomplish the major task to which they have been put: to elucidate constructivist theory. He argues that while the logic of appropriateness can explicate the constructivist claim that norms are constitutive for actor identities, its ability to do so entails that it is logically inconsistent with the further constructivist claim that agents and structures are
mutually constitutive, and unable to clarify the constructivist claim that ideational change can lead to political change. In a footnote Sending (2002: 467-68) intriguingly laments that since March and Olsen do not consider the traditional/modern contrast, as articulated by Habermas extending Weber, they do not see that their “logic of appropriateness” restates what classic social theory understood to be the logic of traditional action. When looking beyond criticism, Sending suggests in his conclusion (2002: 461-62) that the way toward better elucidation of constructivist arguments would involve considering a third logic: the “logic of arguing” that he finds in Risse’s (2000) IR application of Habermas’s communicative rationality concept. We agree with Sending that a typology of action logics able to elucidate constructivist arguments needs three rather than two types, and that its third type should identify a mode of rationality distinct from the economic rationalism March and Olsen have in mind as they discuss “the logic of expected consequences.” But since Sending engages classic work in the theory of action only via the intermediation of Habermas, he fails to consider if this third type might be better found in Weber’s concept of value-rationality than Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality.

Let us try, albeit all too briefly, to sum up our case for a Back to the Future use of classic Weberian contrasts, paired with Parsons action frame of reference, to elucidate contemporary IR. Beginning from Parsons’ insight that all action, including economic action, involves a normative orientation, we would propose that, contra March and Olsen, a logic of selecting those actions “appropriate” to a role does not stand in any simple analytical contrast to the logic of selecting actions in light of “expected consequences.” Consider an IPE-relevant example. The venture capitalist occupies a social role in which it is appropriate to make investment choices in light of their expected consequences for the return on capital. The democratic politician, in turn, occupies a role in which it would be appropriate to fulminate against venture capitalists investing capital
overseas if the politician expects thereby to improve their chance of winning election. This is just an application of the constructivist argument that norms constitute identities using as examples roles that expect, or at least reward, an instrumentally rational normative orientation of action.

More analytically fashion we can use Parsons’ action frame of reference to distinguish normative orientations via the way that they direct an actors’ sense of appropriateness toward different elements of the action frame. A traditional orientation directs an actors’ sense of what is appropriate onto their situation. What is appropriate is to take actions that perpetuate venerated aspects of the situation. Actors may certainly themselves have ends at odds with these actions, but a traditional orientation directs that it would be inappropriate to pursue those ends. A rational orientation, by contrast, directs actors that it is appropriate to act to advance their ends. Rational actors as a result look on their situation in a different way than traditional actors. They use their expectations about what they can and cannot influence to sub-divide the situation into conditions and means, and they consider it appropriate to act on the means at their disposal in the manner whose expected consequence best advances their ends.

Rational action is, however, not all of a single type. Weber analytically sub-divides it in terms of a pair of ideal-types: instrumentally rational and value-rational action. Conscious choice of means to realize ends is indeed the common feature of all rational action. But Weber’s ideal-types of rational action diverge, as Parsons (1937: 643-44) carefully explicated, with regard to how actors relate to their ends, and to secondary consequences of pursuing those ends. As we have noted, an instrumentally rational actor takes “alternative and conflicting ends” as a series of “subjective wants” arranged on a scale that makes possible utility maximization. By contrast, the value rational actor considers such ends “in terms of a rational orientation to a system of values.” Such an orientation is based on a “self-conscious formulation” by the actor of “ultimate values”
governing their action. In its most ideal-typical form, value-rational orientation elevates one specific value “to the status of an absolute value.” When a value rational actor sees an end as embodying their absolute value they pursue it “unconditionally” (Weber 1978: 25-26).

The ideal-type of unconditional value-rational pursuit of an end that is ascribed absolute value encompasses clear logical entailments for beliefs and action. It implies an actor who finds it inappropriate to consider any secondary consequences of pursuing their end, but also perfectly appropriate to choose unconventional and even extreme means when these are expected to most effectively advance the end. A “pure value-rational orientation” is exemplified in “the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them required by duty, honor, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, personal loyalty, or the importance of some ‘cause’ no matter in what it consists” (Weber 1978: 25-26).

Two points of relevance to contemporary IR scholarship follow from a clear grasp of Weber’s concept of value-rational action. First, the concept can elucidate the action of figures in the constructivist role of Finnemore and Sikkink’s “norm entrepreneur” (1998), which is, as they and Sending (2002: 460) argue, hard to square with the “logic of appropriateness.” More broadly the contrast between traditional and value-rational normative orientations offers constructivism a differentiated theory of action that untangles the orientation of actors who endorse and extend existing concrete norms from the orientation of actors who challenge such norms in the pursuit of particular cause to which they ascribe high, or even absolute, value.¹⁸

Second, the concept of value-rational action can, at the same time, also untangle puzzles about how various strands of realism relate to a purported shared rationality postulate. Offensive realists posit that since the international system always has the latent possibility of conflict, states seek to maximize their power and must balance against aggression (Mearsheimer 1990; Waltz

¹⁸ On the absence of an explicit theory of action in early constructivism, see Checkel (1998).
1979: 101-112). But this proposition is not instrumentally rationalist. It is value rational since it ascribes absolute value to one end—power maximization. By contrast, defensive realism claims that states calculate the probability of aggression and then consider tradeoffs between other ends plausible within the realist paradigm—such as satisfying security and avoiding Pareto-inferior arms races. Thinking of multiple ends and trade-offs between them involves, of course, exactly the calculations about ends Weber identified as characteristic of instrumental rationality. In this sense, the symbiotic development of defensive realism and the strategic choice approach to IR theory appears as a byproduct of a shared focus on instrumental, rather than value, rationality.

Weber’s classic typology of action along with Parsons’ action frame of reference allows us to give concrete content to the economic / sociological contrast that elucidates major trends and entanglements in recent IR theory. The differentiation of a constructivist theory of agency into traditional and value-rational action, and the distinction between value-rational offensive realism and instrumentally rational defensive realism, provide analytical foundations on which it is possible to explore how “sociological” and “economic” approaches might be brought together in explaining concrete phenomena in world politics.

The Study of Strategic Interaction and the Practice of Dual-Core Synthesis

Given the initial foundation for synthesis established by Weber and Parsons, along with our reformulation of the economic / sociological contrast in IR, this section asks if approaches can be productively synthesized across this contrast. In three steps, we suggest that synthesis is

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19 Brooks (1997) also distinguishes between the assumed possibility of conflict that elevates power maximization to an absolute end (i.e. offensive ‘neorealism’) and the calculated probability of aggression characterizing the rational assessment of trade-offs (i.e defensive ‘post-classical realism’). However, he does not parse out this distinction in relation to theories of action. Insomuch as the underspecified ‘rationality assumption’ is viewed as a shared core of the realism research program, the failure to demarcate instrumental from value-rationality creates confusion among external critics (e.g. Keohane 1986; Ruggie 1998; Legro and Moravcsik 1999).

20 The commitment of defensive realism to instrumental rationality also creates nodes of convergence with neoliberal institutionalism not possible for offensive realism (Jervis 1999).
both logically viable and substantively desirable in concrete studies of strategic interaction. First we trace the strategic choice approach back to Thomas Schelling’s early work, and spotlight the trap door there toward traditional and value-rational normative orientations of action. Second, we examine the dual-core approach to synthesis practiced by Robert Jervis (1970), whereby central propositions deduced from both economic and sociological theory explain concrete situations of international deception and honesty. Finally, we critique a series of synthetic propositions to show that this dual-core practice generates value-added relative to a single core alternative.

Agent Accounts of Interaction

The modern strategic choice approach to IR theory represents the apex of the economic theory of agent interaction. Lake and Powell (1999) codified the wave of strategically rational scholarship described earlier around three analytical commitments. First, the focus is strategic interaction among two or more units. Second, the preferences and probabilistic beliefs of actors, along with the action choice-set and information contained in the environment, constitute the primary independent variables for theory construction. However, causal analysis must carefully distinguish between actors and their environment to avoid endogeneity.21 Third, much like our argument in the first section, the commitments and assumptions of the strategic choice approach can be applied at any level of analysis. As such, this approach deploys strategic rationality to specify actors and their environment, as well as the causal chains linking these core variables to outcomes in world politics.

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21 Seen from the perspective of Parsons’ this approach is tightly focused in the manner characteristic of economic approaches: the assumption of instrumental rationality as the normative orientation of actors both focuses analytical attention onto the other three elements of the action frame of reference, and conceptualizes the content and relations of these elements in a particular way: actors are conceptualized to pursue ends understood as subjective preferences, to see their situation (environment) in terms of (information about) conditions and (an action choice-set of) means, and to select from the available means the action expected (probabilistically believed) to best advance their ends.
Despite its firm foundation in the strategic variant of instrumental rationality, recent exemplary work has generated curious similarities with sociological constructivism. Glaser’s *Rational Theory of International Politics* adopts the strategic choice approach to unify the often-disparate rationalist variables of state motivational type, material capabilities, and information variables into a single explanatory framework (2010). Yet Glaser at the same time highlights a striking parallel with constructivism: both emphasize the type of interaction absent from earlier parametric strands of IR theory (2010: 151). For Wendt’s constructivism, dramaturgical behavior exhibited in state interaction can exacerbate or mitigate security threats by changing interests (1992; 1999). While Glaser, by contrast, conceptualizes preferences as static, he emphasizes how interaction often causes a defender state to revise information on an adversary’s motives based on costly signaling (2010: 170). Thus, Wendt and Glaser posit that states make decisions on the basis of probabilistic beliefs shaped by the interactive process of global politics.

The shared emphasis on the study of interaction suggests that we follow the lineage of the strategic choice approach to its genesis to delineate alternative pathways and possible practices of synthesis. While Glaser (2010) represents the theoretical culmination of one such avenue for strategic rationality, this lineage stems back five decades to Schelling’s prescient articulation of strategic interdependence in *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960), defined as “a behavior situation in which each player’s best choice of action depends on the action he expects the other to take, which he knows depends, in turn, on the other’s expectations of his own.” Schelling further qualifies this concept at the root of strategic rationality to construct a more specified analytic framework. Foremost, use of a standard rational actor model entails studying interdependent choice in game theoretic terms to derive equilibria.

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22 For the classic conceptualization of strategic rationality, see Schelling (1960: 86). This paper returns often to implications stemming from Schelling’s notion of strategic interdependence.
Despite the seemingly restrictive nature of strategic rationality, Schelling’s framework intentionally incorporates a logical ‘trap-door’ that can link both variants of sociological action – traditional and value-rational – to the solution of instrumentally rational coordination games. While these elements fall outside the parameters of standard game theory, Schelling posits that the key to solving a coordination problem in real life “may depend on imagination more than on logic; it may depend on analogy, precedent, accidental arrangement, symmetry, aesthetic or geometric configuration, casuistic reasoning, and who the parties are and what they know about each other” (1960: 57). This establishes an early precedent for common conjectures of game play (Morrow 1994: 91) and opens up the decisions of players to influences from their external environment and normative constraint structure. The progenitor of strategic choice thereby left open links to sociological action analytically compatible with the division of labor entailed by the Parsonian action frame of reference.

Practicing Dual-Core Synthesis: The Example of Jervis

In an effort to uncover practices of synthesis as applied to concrete political phenomena, we now turn to an extended analysis of Robert Jervis’s *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970), which moves through Schelling’s trap-door to join instrumentally rational strategic interdependence with value-rational and traditional orientations of action in explaining state behavior. Jervis addresses a perennial question of power in world politics: How can a state induce a rival to comply while avoiding costly-armed conflict? In particular, the manuscript aims to categorize communication strategies states use to influence adversarial conduct through the

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23 Schelling’s proposition also leaves open the possibility that individual psychological or effectual elements are important to strategic interaction. In line with our definition of the sociological approach in section two, these ‘effectual’ variables are not considered in the subsequent logics of synthesis.
production of “images.” Yet because states can “project images on the cheap,” Jervis’ analysis focuses on the question of “why rational actors should believe what others say,” and the impact of the social environment on such behavioral inferences (1970: 15). However, the rationalist tone of the focusing question of The Logic of Images belies an explicit effort to develop accounts of international deception that draw both from Schelling’s framework of strategic interdependence and from the sociologist Erving Goffman.

Although Jervis finds a first economic core for his account within Schelling’s strategic rationality, his concern with the phenomena of interactive communication also leads him to a second core that emphasizes shared normative orientations towards action and value-rationality. Erving Goffman advances a nascent sociological parallel to Schelling’s later concept of strategic rationality. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959) draws on the Parsonian action frame of reference to analyze reciprocal interaction between individuals as the locus through which performance activity can tangibly influence social information. A decade later in Strategic Interaction, Goffman “isolates the analytic framework implied in the game perspective,” to take into account constraining and enabling social values that “diffusely influence how the opponent plays” (1969: 85, 95). Goffman points out that “although the issue of commitment is of central importance in the analysis of game strategies, the empirical study of strategic interaction must proceed beyond this point…For the sociologist, these normative limitations on pure gaming – limitations which ideal games themselves help to point out – *may be the matter of chief interest*” (1969: 113-14, emp. add). The explanatory locus thereby shifts towards how social interactions transform words into credible commitments, as in everyday practices of oath rituals and wedding ceremonies (125-136). Goffman’s approach to strategic interaction hence employs sociological

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24 An image constitutes the entire behavioral profile of state A sent to recipient state B. Thus, communication between states involves both verbal messages and important nonverbal acts that provide cues about the image or behavioral profile of the other.
theory of action to study how normative orientations imbue verbal acts with the ability to alter the objective situation of players in a game.

The Logic of Images therefore adopts a dual-core approach to synthesis, whereby central analytic assumptions and substantive propositions are drawn from economic and sociological theory. In two-steps, Jervis expands the sparse “states as unitary rational actors” economic assumption to emphasize the subjective impact of traditional norms of interaction and value-rationality on actor choices. First, Jervis expands the assumption of strategic interdependence to encompass reciprocal interaction and the concept of performance activity. Since both Schelling and Goffman focus on how agents influence others’ expectations, this merger is sound. Second, Jervis draws core substantive arguments from Schelling and Goffman on credible threats, costly choices, and underlying social mechanisms to establish the blended proposition that both actions and words are subject to risk, cost, ambiguity, and deception. As a consequence, Jervis focuses on concrete signals transmitted between states that nonetheless need to be reciprocally endowed with meaning by both sender and receiver.25

The Value-Added of Synthetic Propositions

Jervis uses the dual-core approach to make several prescient contributions on deception, ambiguity, uncertainty, and nuclear deterrence that are precursors to contemporary rationalist and constructivist thought in IR theory.

Considering multiple types of action allows Jervis to integrate a broad set of explanatory logics for dishonesty in world politics. By definition, a signal can be used with guile to convey false information. If false signals were always deployed, then other states would ignore such talk as worthless banter. Yet since states do pay attention to signals, Jervis posits “there must be some

25 Jervis defines signals as statements or actions established by “tacit or explicit understandings among the actors … [that] can be thought of as promissory notes. They do not contain inherent credibility” (1970: 18).
restraints on lying, some pressures that tend to make actors issue accurate signals.” In low-stake situations where actors share common values and “feel bonds of loyalty to their counterparts,” normative restraints on appropriate behavior curb deceit (1970: 70). Even when actors do not follow normative restraints, they may refrain from lying to maintain a credible communication system that would be jeopardized by systematic dishonesty (1970: 71-73). Finally, a state may act in a purely instrumental fashion to generate a reputation for honesty in order to achieve goals where signaling commitments without indices is crucial to the success of an outcome (1970: 78). These three propositions could only be derived from a framework that integrates state action in rational pursuit of strategic objectives and in adherence to internalized norms.

State interpretation of signals and ambiguity under anarchic conditions illuminates the duality between shared normative orientations and strategic rationality. Signal interpretation requires an actor to first decode the content of the message, and then venture a probabilistic calculation of future intent (Jervis 1970: 24). Jervis tethers Schelling to Goffman, and advances the counter intuitive proposition that signal ambiguity at both these steps may actually “provide flexibility and protection by reducing the danger of damage to an actor’s reputation when he undertakes probes and initiatives” (1970: 123). According to Schelling, cooperation between two wary players is easier when the costs for unilateral defection are decreased by “the ability to break up one large transaction into a number of smaller ones, each one dependent on the successful completion of the preceding ones.”26 This allows trust to be built up slowly between two players in a low-stakes, iterated Tit-for-Tat style game.

However, Jervis points out that Schelling’s logic leaves undefined crucial elements of diplomatic signaling, such as what exactly each party is cooperating over, knowledge of each other, and whether “the first steps have actually been taken” (1970: 125). Jervis fills this lacuna

with Goffman’s social theory. Individuals who lack information on each other’s motivations and status can protect themselves by admitting “views or status to another a little at a time … By phrasing each step in the admission in an ambiguous way, the individual is in a position to halt the procedure by dropping his front at the point where he gets no confirmation from the other, and at this point he can act as if his last disclosure were not an overture at all.” Jervis hence builds on a rationalist core to establish a precursor to Wendt’s dramaturgical view of Ego and Alter constituting each other’s interests and identities. Yet where Wendt problematically assumes that Ego and Alter are making genuine efforts to express their true motivations and views, Jervis allows that such an interactive performance may be riddled with deception and uncertainty.

Jervis also posits that the efficacy of nuclear deterrence as a strategy “depends not so much on the objective situation as on the actors’ doctrines and beliefs about others’ doctrines” (1970: 231, emp. added). The presence of deterrent norms between two nuclear weapons states is necessary but not sufficient for the logic of the strategy to hold. Jervis demonstrates that a shared normative framework may undermine Schelling’s infamous strategy of nuclear brinkmanship, where the defender moves onto a steep slope towards the chasm of war, so that they “may fall in spite of his own best efforts to save himself, dragging his adversary with him” (1960: 200). Jervis counters that these threats may be “robbed of significance if they are openly accepted as means of exerting limited pressure” (1970: 238). In Weberian terms, if both actors give the end of deterrence an unconditional value their shared value-rational orientation might produce a suboptimal outcome relative to the operation of instrumental rationality at the core of nuclear brinksmanship. Therefore, “[Schelling] should be modified by a realization that the contours of the slope are not completely objective. They are affected not only by the forces of nature but also

by the way each participant thinks about them, and the way each thinks the others think about them” (1970: 242). As such, actual situations of nuclear deterrence signaling might involve a variety of normative orientations towards action, with certain combinations producing deviations from the optimal course plotted by instrumentally rational strategic games.

These four substantive contributions from *The Logic of Images* suggest a counterfactual: if Jervis did not practice a dual-core approach, then he would be unable to improve on Schelling and Goffman to advance a more adequate account of international deception. The propositions generated via synthesis could not be readily discerned from a purely economic or sociological approach. Since the scholarship that followed Jervis separated his synthetic approach back into economic-instrumentally-rationalist and sociological-constructivist frameworks for research on communication and signaling, the demonstration of value-added relative to a pure approach is a *sine qua non* condition of IR work using synthesis to explain these concrete phenomena.

Conclusion

To conclude we critically locate our arguments in light of the contemporary discussion of analytic eclecticism. Sil and Katzenstein define as analytically eclectic any scholarship:

*that seeks to extricate, translate and selectively integrate elemental components -- concepts, causal logics, observations and interpretations -- of theories or narratives that have been developed within separate paradigms but that address related aspects of problems that have both scholarly and practical import* (2010a: 7, emphasis original)

This definition easily encompasses the dual-core synthetic practice of Jervis (1970) we have used to exemplify the kind of work we seek to facilitate with our adaptation of the classic economic /

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29 The literature from both sides dealing with arguments developed by Jervis is large. For a sample from rationalism and constructivism, see Adler and Barnett (1996), Fearon (1994), and Sartori (2002). Walt (1999) lambasts rational choice work on costly signaling because "the basic idea is virtually identical to Robert Jervis's distinction between 'signals' and 'indices,' which he laid out more than twenty-five years ago," while Powell (1999) contends that Fearon (1994) breaks original ground beyond the arguments established by Jervis.
sociological contrast. But analytic eclecticism is not all encompassing. Sil and Katzenstein “categorically reject the idea of a unified theoretical synthesis” because it “requires something very rare and extraordinary: a marked departure from the core ontological and epistemological assumptions associated with contending research traditions, followed by a convergence upon a new, unified set of assumptions that would bound and guide research into all kinds of substantive issues and problems” (2010a: 13; see also 2010b: 415). Similarly, we have noted how Parsons came to reject the idea of a unified analytical theory of political science, and instead encouraged the field to focus upon giving concrete explanations by integrating core components from more than one of the analytical theories developed elsewhere in social science.

While it excludes unified theory projects in political science, Sil and Katzenstein’s rubric of analytic eclecticism includes a very wide range of options and scholarly examples. It ranges from domestic political economy perspectives on nuclear weapons acquisition (Solingen 2007), to firmly constructivist analyses of military intervention and international legitimacy (Finnemore 2003; Hurd 2007), as well as a single-core rationalist framework that incorporates sociological elements only residually (Schimmelfennig 2000). But not all of these frameworks are equally eclectic, and some will explain the concrete political phenomena they address better than others. Insomuch as variation in this ability may follow from scholars’ choices about the degree, and in what way, to be eclectic, some more specification seems warranted.

To specify it is necessary to focus attention on certain types of differences. The pragmatic foundation of analytic eclecticism appears to suggest focusing upon the tangibly problematic. Sil and Katzenstein’s “attention on processes that cut across levels of analysis and across the divide presumed to exist between material and ideational factors” (2010a: 16) is, by this standard, more distracting than focusing since neither issue regularly presents difficult obstacles in the practice
of world politics. Moving between levels of analysis is common practice in IR, and as such, does not warrant being singled out for veneration as “eclectic.” For example, the rationalist framework of the Open Economy Politics approach often aggregates domestic interests to explain strategic dynamics at the international level (e.g. Davis 2003).

By contrast, the divide between economic and sociological theories of action has been a puzzling and persistent obstacle only rarely crossed in practice. This is evident in the fact that most of the IR scholars celebrated as eclectic by Sil and Katzenstein choose a single explanatory core from one side of the economic / sociological divide, and attend to the other side as, at best, an auxiliary for mopping up unexplained residuals. Our unpacking of the dual-core practice of Jervis (1970) spotlights, by contrast, both a distinct variant of analytic eclecticism and its success in overcoming an obstacle—the economic / sociological divide—sufficiently problematic as to have been rarely overcome in more recent IR literature on state-state interaction. In treating this example we posed a counterfactual question ignored by Sil and Katzenstein, but one we think eclectic scholarship should be able to address if it is to be promoted. If a given eclectic study had instead relied on a “pure” approach, could it generate the same value-added?

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30 We see the material / ideational divide like the individualism / holism divide as a philosophical distraction that obscures parallels in practice between the rationalist strategic choice approach and sociological constructivism.


